

World Council of Churches  
Justice, Peace and Creation

# A Caring Economy

A Feminist Contribution to  
Alternatives to Globalisation  
Addressing People and Earth (AGAPE)

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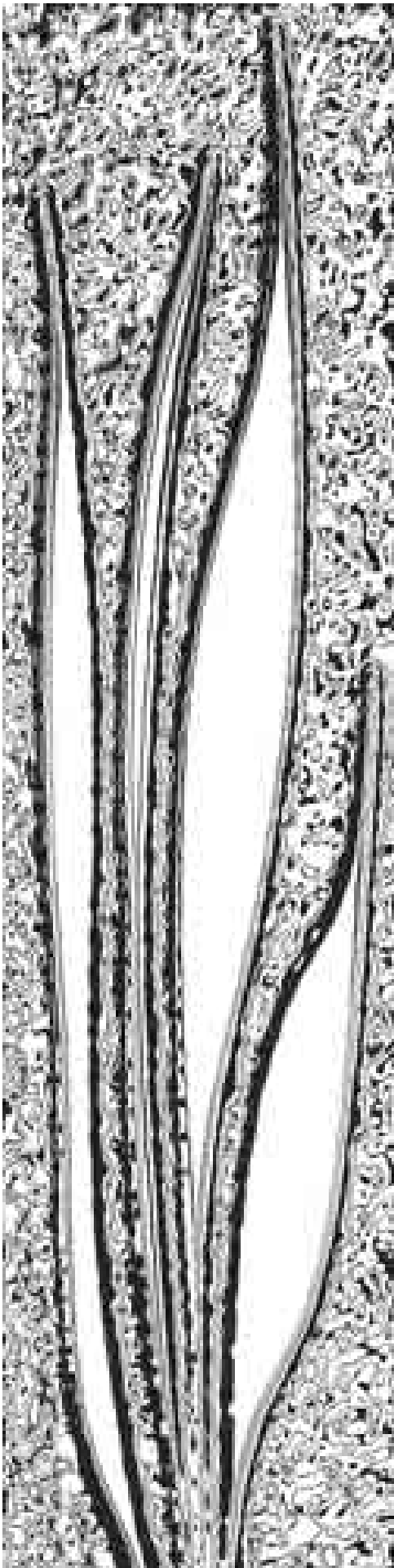
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## Preface

The World Council of Churches (WCC) has focused on the issue of economic justice for women for nearly 30 years now. It began with the setting up of a Women and Rural Development Fund to support survival initiatives of rural and urban poor women. When the Ecumenical Decade of the Churches in Solidarity with Women (1988-1998) was launched by the WCC, economic justice emerged as one of the overarching foci of the Decade. It was this that propelled WCC's participation in the United Nations (UN) Conference in Beijing in 1995 and the workshop offered there by the WCC on women and globalisation.

As a rejoinder to the UN's Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action (BPDA), the WCC put women and globalisation on its agenda. The BPDA emphasised the need for deeper analyses of the effects of globalisation, which has created new and insidious forms of poverty and inequality. The WCC has attempted to point out that economic growth as proposed by the neo-liberal development paradigm has only worsened the condition of women. Poverty has a feminine face – research and studies have shown that economic globalisation does not affect women and men in the same way. Because of differences in economic roles and long-standing imbalances in social status, women – whether in developed or in developing countries – have a more negative experience with globalisation in comparison with the rest of society. Overall, globalisation processes have been associated with the feminisation of labour, migration, and even survival. The economic policies advocated by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank (WB) and the stabilising and austerity measures taken, have only worsened the situation halting and even erasing some of the gains made in social welfare benefits such as health care, education, nutrition and even income levels of women. Structural adjustment policies are largely formulated without any consideration of imbalance of power in a patriarchal world order, which often leads to the exclusion



of women from the benefits of development, and which also attempts to silence women's strategies of resistance.

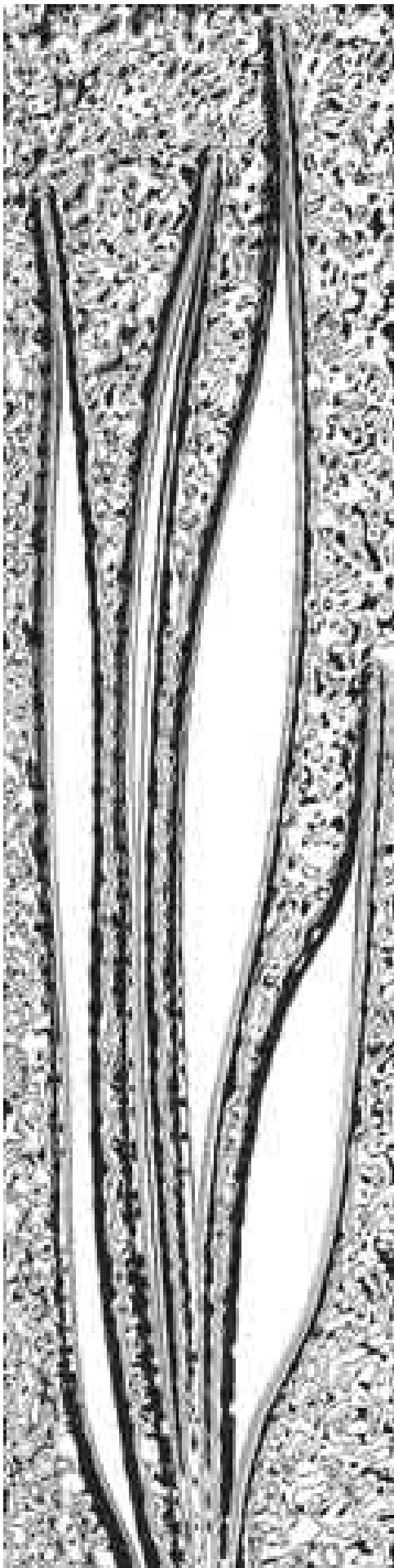
Yet women are not just victims. Women have historically adjusted to deprivation and demonstrated an extraordinary capacity for dealing with day-to-day problems of exclusion and poverty in imaginative, yet practical ways. A feminist ethic would enrich the discourse on – if not provide the ethical underpinnings for – alternatives to economic globalisation.

In view of the foregoing, it was recognised that it is critical that women's experiences and perspectives are put to bear on WCC's ongoing debate on economic globalisation. Moreover, to effect real and much-needed reforms in the global trading and financial system, it is essential for women around the world – from different regions as well as from the academe, church and grassroots movements – to organise themselves and to network for joint awareness-building, study and advocacy. While a number of international feminist networks have made significant headway in research and advocacy on how globalisation processes are impacting on women, there remains a gap in terms of ecumenical and churches' lack of concerted response and in terms of reaching out to more grassroots women who are the primary victims of globalisation. This booklet attempts to provide a feminist contribution to the WCC's work on Alternatives to Globalisation Addressing People and Earth (AGAPE) in preparation for the next Assembly of the WCC to be held in Porto Alegre, Brazil in 2006.

The Justice, Peace and Creation Team is grateful for the efforts put into this work by Athena Peralta, who works as a Consultant to the process from Manila, Philippines. This booklet is a reflection of the voices of women that Athena has gathered together in a process of consultation. It also marks her commitment to see that women's contributions to the WCC's processes on AGAPE are listened to, and listened to well!

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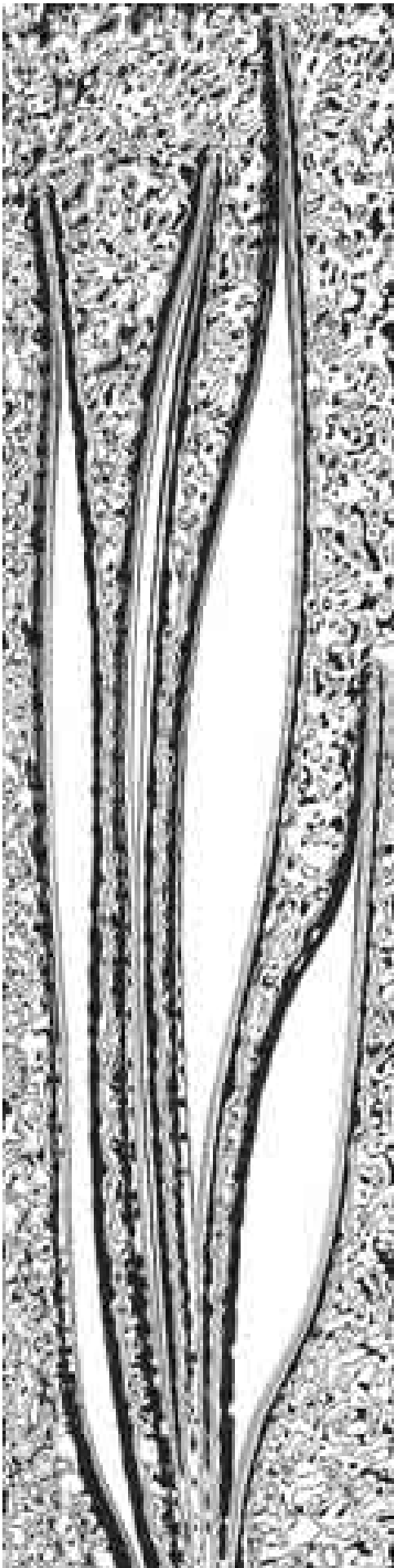
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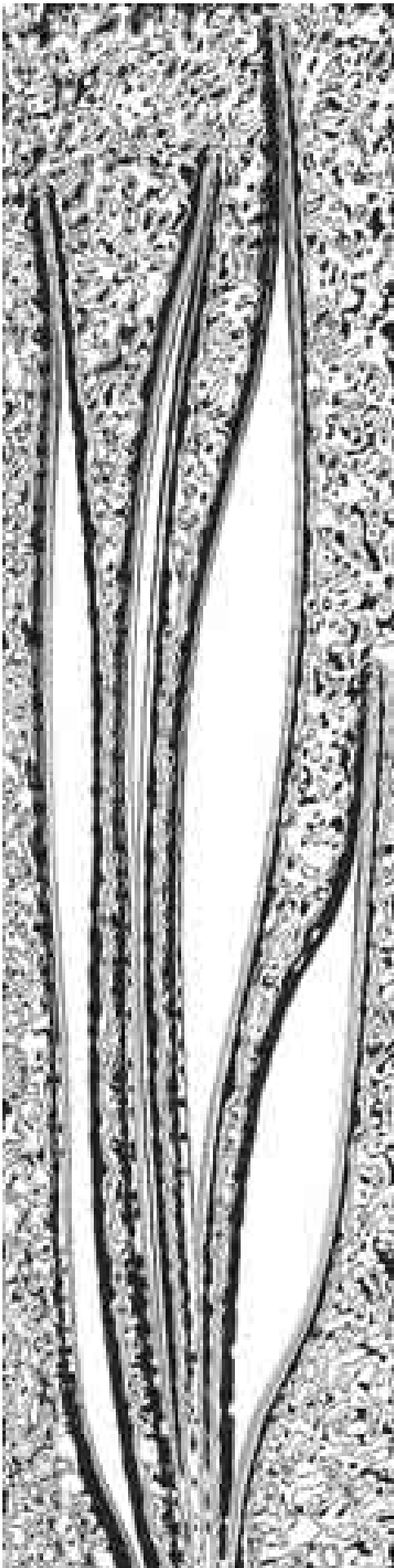
## Glossary of Acronyms

AGAPE	Alternatives to Globalisation Addressing People and Earth
BOP	balance of payments
ESCR	economic, social and cultural rights
EPZs	export processing zones
EU	European Union
FDI	foreign direct investment
GATs	General Agreement on Trade in Services
GDP	gross domestic product
HIPC	Heavily Indebted Poor Country
IFIs	international financial institutions
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ILO	International Labour Organisation
MNCs	multinational corporations
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
SAPs	structural adjustment programmes
UN	United Nations
US	United States (of America)
WB	World Bank
WCC	World Council of Churches
WTO	World Trade Organisation









## 1. Introduction

**“When I think of people practicing solidarity, I think of people with hearts that are tender, warm, caring, passionate, strong, brave; of people who hearten each other in the face of heartbreaking realities; of many hearts beating with the heart of the universe. ‘Heart’ is a good symbol for some of the distinctive contributions that feminist ethics brings to an ethic for just and sustainable community: emotion, relationality and care. Stout hearts, clear eyes, open ears, dirty hands – all are essential for our common task”.**

- Pamela Brubaker (2002:118)

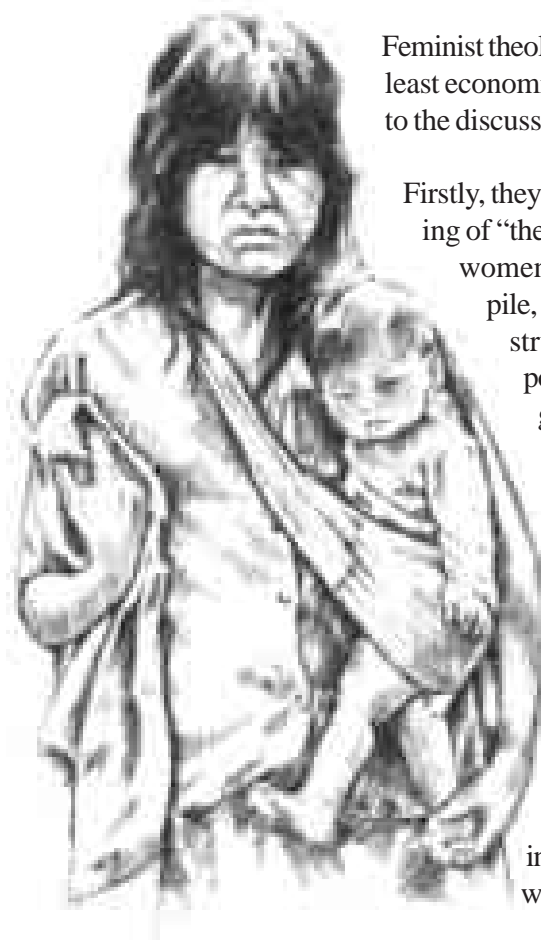
**I**n engaging World Council of Churches’ (WCC) member churches, church-related organisations and individual Christians with the controversial issue of economic globalisation, this paper challenges its readers to wear pro-poor and feminist lens.

At the minimum, this paper aims to invite comments and provoke a deeper interrogation of the phenomenon of economic globalisation by churches and church-related organisations working on faith and economy concerns. We attempt this by providing a comprehensive overview of the ongoing debates as well as critical handles to examine a contentious and multi-faceted subject. At most, this paper aims to convince as well offer signposts for churches to intentionally account for women’s experiences in any re-



flection on alternatives to economic globalisation not only for women's sake, but, more importantly, for the transformation of the currently unjust and unsustainable global economy into a caring economy. While this paper is designed to appeal to economists and church people working for economic justice, we hope that readers without a background in economics will also find it readable, useful and provocative.

Why do we as churches care about what happens in the global economy? "God's preferential option for the poor" is the theological affirmation that has been the guiding force for efforts by churches and the ecumenical community to respond to the challenges posed by economic globalisation. Part 2 of this paper sketches the "big economic picture" by briefly reviewing the workings and impacts of the global economy from the perspective of developing countries and poor people. Among others, we find that the restructuring wrought by economic globalisation processes has often taken place to the disadvantage of developing countries and even at the expense of the lives of the poor within these countries.



Feminist theologians and social scientists, not least economists, have added two questions to the discussions on the subject.

Firstly, they have qualified the understanding of "the poor" by pointing out that it is women who are at the bottom of the pile, bearing the brunt of the costs of structural adjustment and other policies associated with economic globalisation. In part 3, we examine the experiences of women in developing country contexts with these processes. A scan of the extensive and cutting edge literature on the subject reveals that the liberalisation of trade and finance has dissimilar impacts on women and men because of socially constructed economic roles that are rooted in continuing imbalances between women and men.



However, far from being solely victims and objects of the development agenda, it is argued that women's unique perspectives on the global economy have enriched the groundwork for defining alternatives to economic globalisation and have therefore much to contribute to WCC's vision of building just and sustainable communities. Part 4 of this paper demonstrates how churches and women are working to re-shape economic globalisation. We highlight the points of convergence and areas for mutual beneficial exchange between WCC's ongoing work on faith and economy and the emerging feminist economics paradigm. This leads us to the second theological affirmation from women that is the under girding for an economy of caring.

Feminists, both theologians and economists, have lifted up the ethic of care based on "women's relational sense of self" (Gilligan, 1982; Gilligan et al, 1988; Noddings, 1984; and Grey, 2003). In other words, when women acknowledge their interdependence as caring individuals, they assert their identity on their own terms. For women, political engagement for transformation is a natural corollary to the ethic of care. Moreover, women often describe the life-giving earth as mother, and claim motherhood as a life-giving quality that women feel honoured to embody as they engage in political action for a healed earth (Gnanadason, 2005). Thus, women have often been at the forefront of community struggles for basic needs such as water, food, land, livelihood, education and health services. These struggles are essentially struggles for life.

If economic systems and policies are to be just and sustainable, feminist theologians and economists believe that these must place paramount value on caring and provisioning for human life. This paper further argues that it is perhaps in advocating for such a transformation in policy- and decision-making circles and in society at large that ecumenical churches in solidarity with women have a critical role to play.

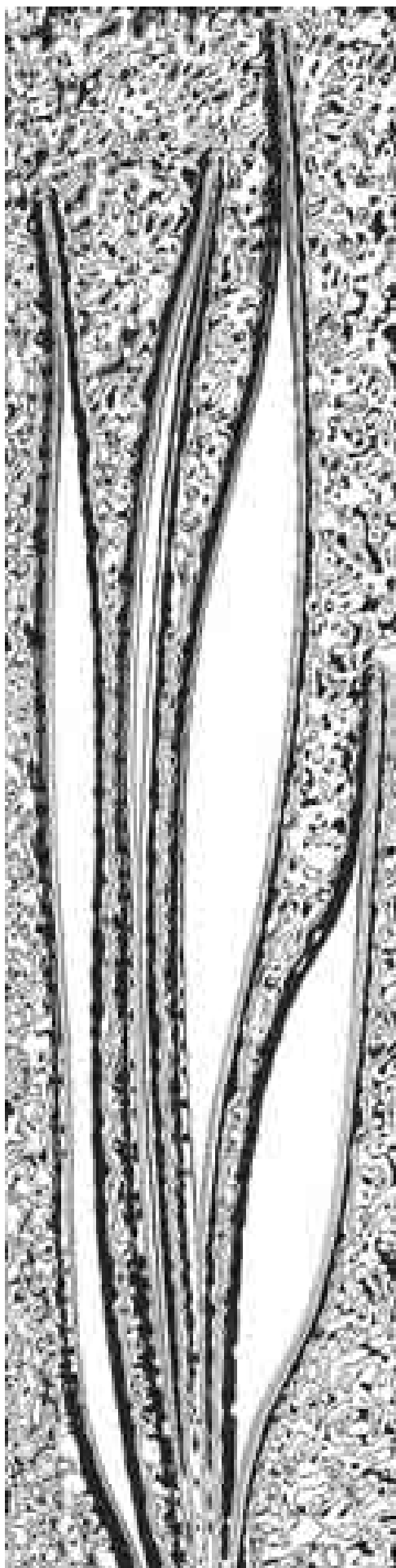




## 2. The Big Economic Picture

### 2.1 Economic globalisation

**M**illions of people around the world are being profoundly affected by economic globalisation. This phenomenon is characterised by the rapid integration of trade, finance and investment and the internationalisation of production, resulting in the restructuring of national and global economies. To illustrate: global trade in goods today constitutes 43 percent of the world's gross domestic product (GDP) from 33 percent in 1990, while international financial flows have expanded exponentially by more than 180 percent from 1990 and currently amount to around 30 percent of global GDP (WB, 2005).



There is little dispute over the fact that economic globalisation with its emphasis on competition and profit has created tremendous wealth for some people in some parts of the world. *The mounting controversy surrounding economic globalisation centres on its effects on equity between developing and developed countries as well as within these countries, ecological sustainability and equality between women and men.* As WCC (2002) puts it, justice and sustainability are at the heart of the matter. Economic globalisation, at core, constitutes a deeply moral and ethical issue.

Critics from within the ecumenical and secular world have long recognised that economic globalisation is an institutional expression of a mainstream development paradigm (or ideology!) known as neo-liberalism (Dickinson, 1998; WCC, 2002). That is: economic globalisation is not simply a value-neutral, technology-driven, historical process; it is also a neo-liberal political and economic project (Koshy, 2003).

## 2.2 Neo-liberalism and its major proponents

**The neo-liberal development paradigm.** In its present form, economic globalisation is motivated by the neo-liberal development paradigm, which sees a diminishing role for governments and places the utmost importance on markets to allocate resources efficiently. According to this view, unfettered markets, import liberalisation, the promotion of exports and liberalisation of capital flows would bring about heightened competition, increased efficiency and faster economic growth – roughly in that order.

Hypothetically, growth would allow developing countries to catch-up with developed countries. Growth would trickle down to the poor, thereby closing the gap between the poor and rich within countries. And growth would even promote equality between women and men (see Dollar and Gatti, 1999).

**Economic policies.** Policy prescriptions emanating from the neo-liberal doctrine typically include trade and financial liberalisation (the removal of tariffs and other barriers to the free flow of goods, services and capital between countries), deregulation (the withdrawal of the state from controlling economic transactions) and privatisation (the transfer of ownership and management of public companies to private hands). These core policies, aimed at efficiency and growth, are promoted primarily by the World Trade



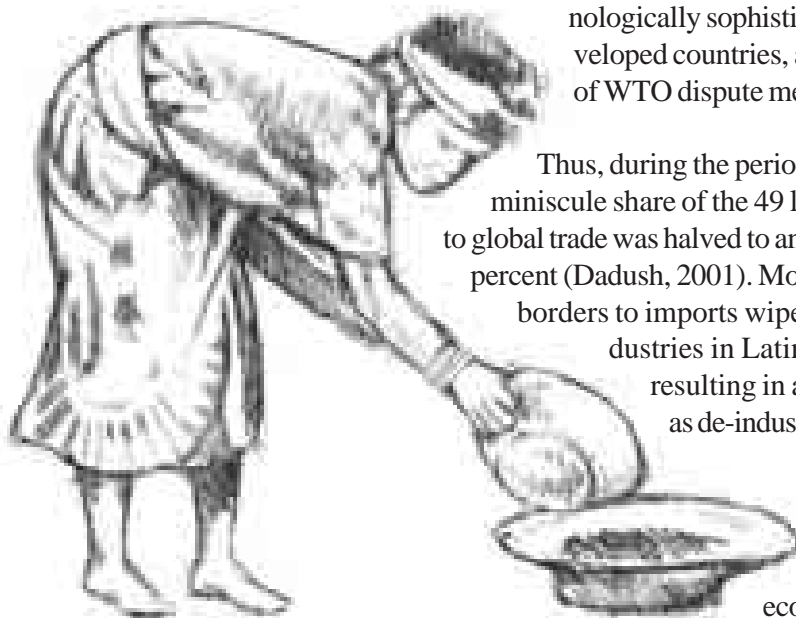
Organisation (WTO) and international financial institutions (IFIs), such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank (WB), through multilateral trading rules and conditionality for loan disbursements. As such, these economic institutions have played a significant role in shaping the macroeconomic policy environment in developing countries.

**WTO.** As the successor to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, the WTO is mandated to enforce multilateral agreements and rules aimed at accelerating trade liberalisation. WTO agreements have come under intense scrutiny from faith-based and other civil society organisations for several reasons.

First, such agreements and rules are often skewed in favour of developed countries due to the flawed premise that all countries are starting out on the same footing and will therefore benefit equally from the same trade rules. As economists of alternative schools of thought (e.g. Gunnar Myrdal, Raul Prebisch) have long pointed out, initial conditions matter. Developing countries continue to face historical structural imbalances – a legacy of colonialism – such as declining prices for their commodities (including manufactured exports) in the world market so that they have to export more and more to pay for their usual bill of imports. Many developing countries do not have the technology, capital, know-how and other resources to take advantage of open markets, to compete against technologically sophisticated and capital-rich developed countries, and to make effective use of WTO dispute mechanisms.

Thus, during the period 1980-2000, the already miniscule share of the 49 least developed countries to global trade was halved to an even more miniscule 0.4 percent (Dadush, 2001). Moreover, the opening up of borders to imports wiped out basic domestic industries in Latin America and in Africa, resulting in a phenomenon described as de-industrialisation (Pieper, 1998).

In East Asia, trade indeed played a significant role in bolstering economic growth. But more than enough studies have concluded that countries like South Ko-



rea and, more recently, China had regulated trade and pursued gradual liberalisation only after a period of extensive protection (Milanovic, 2002a; WB, 1993).

Second, in spite of their pro-free trade rhetoric, powerful countries such as the United States and members of the European Union flout WTO rules by heavily subsidising and protecting their agriculture and textile industries, among others, from developing country exports. According to OECD (2004) estimates, domestic support given by OECD countries to their agricultural sectors was equivalent to US\$235 billion in 2003 alone.

Third, the WTO is increasingly impinging on basic and socio-culturally critical areas such as intellectual property rights as well as water, health and education services. Many church-based, women's and indigenous organisations and movements believe that these should not be commodified, negotiated or traded at all.

Fourth, WTO rules and agreements have real teeth. These are legally enforceable under the quasi-judicial dispute settlement board, binding national governments down to municipalities. In comparison, significant international agreements brokered by the United Nations (UN) system (e.g. the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and multilateral environmental agreements like the Kyoto Protocol on Climate Change) have less enforceability.

**IMF and WB.** The IFIs, on the other hand, require indebted developing countries to pursue a standard set of economic measures with the objective of achieving low inflation, balanced budgets and stable exchange rates as conditionalities for releasing loans, debt relief and bail-outs in times of crisis. These so-called stabilisation packages and





structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) have been imposed on many developing countries from Argentina to Zimbabwe since the debt crisis of the 1980s. While SAPs have been generally successful in solving the debt problem for the IFIs by ensuring the unremitting flow of debt payments, these often induced painful recessions at huge social cost – especially to women – and have had dubious impacts on the long-run economic sustainability of the borrowing countries (Beneria, 1999a). Notwithstanding sustained involvement and provision of structural adjustment loans by the IMF and WB, African GDP per capita barely moved in the last twenty years and, for 24 African countries, GDP per capita actually fell below levels in 1975 (Milanovic, 2002a).

In response to a mounting critique of the handling of the debt problem, not least from the church-based sector, the IFIs launched the Heavily Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) initiative in 1996 and the HIPC II initiative in 1999 to write off debt that was for the most part uncollectible anyway and to integrate the objective of poverty reduction into SAPs. The IMF and WB also initiated the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) approach in 1999, which aims for a more participatory and country-driven process of policy outcomes.

In spite of these positive adjustments, the core policy recommendations contained in the HIPC and PRSP initiatives (e.g. tight monetary policy) continue to be closed for discussion and remain essentially neo-liberal (BWP, 2003). Thus, the WCC (2000) concludes that these initiatives are simply “new wine in old wineskins”.

Until very recently, the IFIs have also pushed for financial liberalisation in developing countries even though financial and capital markets are known to be extremely volatile. Recent studies have concluded that the easing of controls on financial and capital markets was an important reason behind the 1997 Asian crisis, which threw millions of people into poverty, as well as other financial crises in recent years (Singh and Zammit, 2000; Singh, 2002; Stiglitz, 2002). Developing countries are more vulnerable to crises resulting from currency turmoil for a number of reasons, not least because they are often debtors to begin with.

**MNCs.** Multinational corporations (MNCs) are also increasingly powerful actors in the neo-liberal project. Some 60 giant MNCs run by a handful of developed countries dominate the world economy; and there is growing concern that MNCs are undermining the capacity of states and international institutions such as UN-related agencies to promote social welfare



(Dickinson, 1998; Kolodner, 1994). Many MNCs have located their factories in Asia and Latin America, lured by a bottomless supply of cheap (primarily female) labour and by “attractive” conditions such as permissive labour and environmental laws and tax-free industrial zones. MNCs are considered an important source of foreign direct investment (FDI).

Since the eighties, FDI has been actively courted by capital-poor developing countries in a highly competitive environment, thereby encouraging a “race to the bottom” that often ends in the exploitation of factory workers and environmental degradation. While the conventional view sees FDI as serving as a positive stimulus for employment creation and technology transfer, there continues to be an interesting debate on its purported benefits (Singh, 2002).

Overall, the WCC together with many other civil society organisations and movements are calling for fundamental transformations to make the WTO, IMF, WB and MNCs more democratic and accountable for their policies and actions which have had and continue to have tremendous impacts on people’s, especially women’s, lives.





### **2.3 Market failures and “blinkers” in neoclassical economics**

Underpinning the neo-liberal development paradigm is orthodox neoclassical economic theory with its impressive armoury of mathematical models and equations that are intended to predict economic behaviour and phenomena. The sophisticated maths behind neoclassical economics appear to lend scientific soundness to neo-liberal prescriptions and has contributed to the dogmatic status that neo-liberalism has achieved today in most academic and policy-making circles such that critical voices are often dismissed as “non-scientific”.

However, what is often forgotten in neoclassical economic theory is the simple acknowledgement that markets can and have failed. Moreover, the orthodox economics espoused by the WTO, IMF and WB is replete with



“blinkers” that often result in reductionist, inaccurate analyses of the workings of the economy and, therefore, development policies that eventually enrich a few and harm the majority (Corner, 1996). Some of these “blinkers” are pointed out here.

**Market failures and fundamentalism.** Orthodox economic thought does concede that market failures can occur, such as in areas where externalities (unaccounted effects of economic decisions such as pollution) and natural monopolies (industries in which the market can support only one firm at the most efficient size of operation) exist (Cowen, 2002; Stiglitz, 2002). Externalities and monopolistic conditions are present in many economic sectors, especially in basic utilities such as the provision of water. In these situations where markets cannot be relied upon to allocate resources efficiently, the public sector could play an important regulatory role. However, *an almost fundamentalist approach to neoclassical economics in the last 20 years has tended to promote the rigid view that free markets can resolve all economic problems.* This, unfortunately, is not often the case.

**Unrealistic assumptions.** Though mathematically neat, *neoclassical economic theory, including free trade theory, is based on a set of key assumptions that are highly restrictive and unrealistic (e.g. the existence of perfectly competitive markets and perfect information)* (Dunkley, 1997; Durano, 1999; Stiglitz, 2002). For Adam Smith’s infamous “invisible hand” to result in efficient outcomes that would make everyone better off, an entire set of ideal conditions – which certainly do not exist in a developing country context! – needs to be satisfied.

Not surprisingly, alternative theories that relax these assumptions and consider less than ideal conditions arrive at the conclusion that unregulated trade and financial flows often lead to less than ideal outcomes for developing countries (see Krugman, 1979 and 1981; Singh, 2002). Regrettably, however, today’s students of economics are rarely introduced to alternative economic thought.

**Exclusion of non-market goods and services.** Perhaps most dangerous of all, neoclassical economics focuses exclusively on goods and services that can be exchanged in the market for a profit or be “monetised”. It factors out non-marketable goods and services such as those provided by women’s care and subsistence work as well as environmental services, rendering such work statistically invisible and worthless. Yet these activities, which ensure the reproduction and maintenance of the labour force,



are essential to the healthy functioning of any economy, and make use of scarce economic resources, including women's time and energy. In short, these activities are "economic", too!

A major implication of excluding non-market activities is that non-market impacts are effectively ignored in conventional economic analyses. More concretely, *what is typically considered economically "efficient" may actually represent a transfer of costs from the market to the household and ecological realms such that women's work and the environment are effectively subsidising economic production* (Elson, 1991; Shiva, 1995).

**What is typically considered economically "efficient" may actually represent a transfer of costs from the market to the household and ecological realms such that women's work and the environment are effectively subsidising economic production (Elson, 1991; Shiva, 1995).**

Furthermore, neoclassical economic analysis is geared towards the present, overlooking costs to future generations. Eventually, the costs that are shifted to the non-market sphere may feedback negatively on the economy as a whole in the medium- and long-run in terms of losses in labour productivity and environmental problems, among others.

**Lack of analysis of power.** Neoclassical economic analyses typically take the economic structure (the factors of production) as well as the economic order (the institutional and organisational framework where economic activities take place) as given and unchanging (de Gaay Fortman, 2002). One consequence is that *the issue of power, for instance in economic, military, political and technological terms, and how it can influence economic outcomes are not given due consideration in economic analyses*. And yet studies reveal that power dynamics between developing and developed countries, poor and rich, and also between women and men influence economic outcomes.

**Neglect of different socio-cultural contexts.** Finally, *the significance of values and attitudes, social conventions, behavioural norms and cultural mores – which may and have changed over time - to economic policy tends to be underestimated, if not completely ignored, by neo-classical economics*. According to Lorraine Corner (1996), this, in effect, presupposes an implicit Western context of the economy. Yet research demonstrates, for instance, that economic choices are affected by laws and cus-



toms that inhibit women's independent control of money and resources as well ownership of property.

Because of these “blinkers”, mainstream economic theory and rhetoric in favour of economic globalisation does not, on balance, seem to tie in with the actual life experiences of many people, particularly women, in the developing world.

## 2.4 What is the real economic picture?

With the debatable exception of the East Asian experience, cutting edge research would indicate that policies associated with economic globalisation have many times failed to deliver on grandiose promises of being an engine for rapid economic growth, convergence between developing and developed countries and between the poor and rich within countries, and equality between women and men. When we look at the performance of the global economy in the last two decades, the following features stand out.

**Slower growth and regresses in human development.** *Global socio-economic progress has actually diminished in the last 20 years of heightened economic globalisation.* A study by the Centre for Economic Policy Research (Weisbrot et al, 2002) reveals that GDP growth and human development achievements (e.g. in life expectancy) slowed down and even deteriorated for many countries, but especially for the poorest countries, during the period 1980-2000 as compared to 1960-1980. (See Box 1) The latter is a period associated with protective economic policy. In short, economic globalisation may be failing even on its own terms and criteria.

**Small gains (if any) in poverty reduction.** *Income poverty is deepening in many regions in the world.* The WB (2002) reports that the proportion of poor people living on less than one US dollar a day declined from 32 percent in 1990 to 25 percent in 1999, and that in the same period the



### Box 1. The Scorecard on Economic Globalisation

✠ Growth – All groups of countries experienced an across-the-board decline in economic growth in the period 1980-2000 as compared to 1960-1980. The group of poorest countries actually experienced a reduction of 0.5 percent per year in GDP growth in 1980-2000 from an annual growth rate of 1.9 percent in 1960-1980.

✠ Life expectancy – With the exception of the highest-performing group, progress in life expectancy was reduced in all groups of countries during the period of globalisation. *The slowdown in improvement in life expectancy was more evident for women than for men.*

✠ Infant and child mortality – Progress in reducing infant mortality slowed down in 1980-2000 compared to 1960-1980 with the middle and worst performing groups experiencing the biggest decline.

✠ Education and literacy – The rate of growth of primary, secondary and tertiary enrolment and public spending on education saw less growth for most groups of countries in 1980-2000 from 1960-1980.

Note: The study divides countries into five groups according to what level they had achieved per indicator by the start of each period.

Source: Weisbrot et al, 2002.

number of people living below the poverty line decreased from 1.3 billion to 1.1 billion. However, as Jan Vandemoortele (2002) points out, these aggregate figures hide the fact that the proportion of income-poor people in Sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa and Middle East, and Latin America and the Caribbean barely budged; and that the number of poor people in these regions actually rose by around seven million per year from 1990 to 1999. The fall in global income poverty incidence may be traced primarily to two of the largest countries in the world, China and India. Even then, controversies remain as to the actual extent of poverty reduction in these countries and in the world as a whole in view of the inherent limitations of income poverty lines in measuring global poverty.

**Growing inequality.** *Income inequality is worsening both between and within countries.* A pioneering study by a WB economist (Milanovic, 2002b), which uses global household survey data, indicates a clear upward move-



ment in global inequality during the period 1988-1993. The global *Gini* coefficient, a popular measure of inequality, is estimated at 66 percent, which is equivalent to a situation where 66 percent of the world's population has zero income while the remaining 33 percent enjoy all of the world's income. Notably, the global *Gini* coefficient of 66 percent is higher than in any single country such as Brazil and South Africa, which are among the most inequitable countries in the world. The eighties and nineties also witnessed increasing disparity between the poor and rich within developing countries (van der Hoeven, 2000) and also within developed countries (Burniaux et al, 1998, in Lindert and Williamson, 2001).

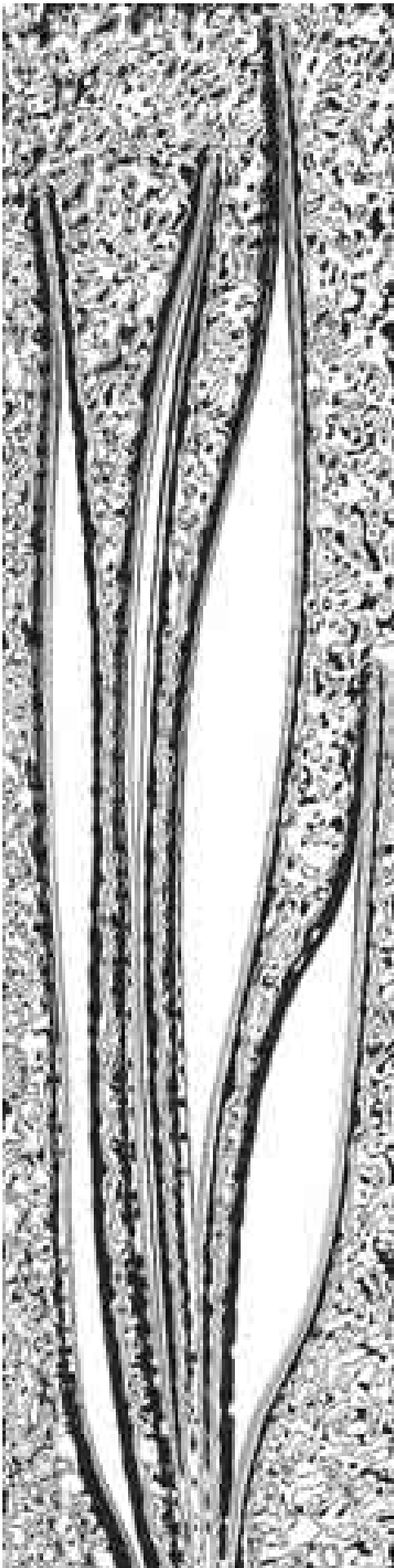
These findings on growth, poverty and inequality are further supported by recent empirical research on trade and financial liberalisation that highlight the disconnection between orthodox neoclassical economic theory and actual outcomes. Dani Rodrik's and Francisco Rodriguez' (1999) study casts doubt on the supposed link between trade liberalisation policies and economic growth. An increasing body of work concludes that financial liberalisation has done more harm than good with respect to developing countries (Singh, 2002; Stiglitz, 2002). A WTO study (Ben-David et al, 1999) also finds little evidence of convergence between countries. The study does observe that trade appears to have played a significant role in those countries that are converging (i.e. European and East Asian countries). However, the exclusion of poor countries from the analysis due to data constraints biases this conclusion. Branko Milanovic (2002b) links increased trade openness with decreased income for the poor and middle-income groups in developing countries. Finally, other studies (Berik et al, 2002; Seguino, 2000) associate trade openness and other globalisation processes with increasing disparities between women and men.

## 2.5 Summary

Part 2 of this paper has provided an overview of economic globalisation, the neo-liberal development ideology that motivates it including the weaknesses of its theoretical underpinnings, its main proponents, its associated economic policies and its detrimental impacts on equity. Against this backdrop, the next part of the paper focuses on women's experiences with economic globalisation. We will see that women have been disproportionately affected by the forces of the global economy.







## 3. Women in the Big Economic Picture

### 3.1 Why the need for feminist lens?

**E**conomic policies, institutions and systems do not impact on women and men in the same way as commonly perceived. That is, they do not function in a vacuum and cannot be de-linked from the socio-cultural context in which they are operating. The economy therefore makes use of, reinforces and sometimes transforms relations between women and men (Sparr, 2002). At the same time, disparities between women and men have an influence on economic outcomes.

A useful starting point for understanding the dissimilar experiences of women and men with economic globalisation



processes is the sexual division of labour in society. Women are generally assigned multiple (and simultaneous) economic roles that are largely uncompensated. (See Box 2) Meanwhile, men are more often concentrated in the production of goods and services that can be sold in the market. These socially constructed economic roles are undergirded by long-standing imbalances in relations between women and men. Vis-à-vis men, women do not have equal access to – as well as ownership and control of – public and private resources (e.g. land, credit). Moreover, women do not possess the same level of decision-making power as men whether at the micro level (e.g. households), meso level (e.g. churches, firms), macro level (e.g. national governments) and global level (e.g. WTO, IFIs).

### **Box 2. Women's Multiple Economic Roles**

✠ **Market production** – (Under)paid work for the production of goods and services intended for the market, whether formal or informal

✠ **Subsistence production** – Unpaid work of producing goods for home use (e.g. food, clothing, pottery) which in principle can be marketed but are not marketed

✠ **Care work** – Unpaid work of looking after a household (e.g. cooking, cleaning, raising of children and looking after other family members, friends and neighbours) that is vital for maintaining and reproducing the labour force and keeping the social fabric together

✠ **Voluntary community work** – Unpaid work in church-based and secular civic associations

Source: Elson, 1991.

Where women are able to secure paid work, they are generally underpaid relative to men given the same job and qualifications. In the developing world, women, on average, receive only 70 percent of men's wages and only a fifth of the wage disparity can be explained by differences in education and work experience (WB, 2001). Women also continue to face discrimination in job markets as they are often segregated into "feminine" or



low-skill and low-paid career tracks (e.g. secretarial jobs). They are also largely represented in the informal sector.

Studies show that women on average spend around 66 percent of their time on non-market care or social reproductive work compared to only 24 percent for men (UNIFEM, 2000). Of course, men could in principle, do care and community work. However, these tasks are perceived by society to be mainly in the realm of women's responsibility. Thus, while women often give care work willingly, it is also extracted by social pressure or even by physical violence. *As influential social institutions, churches have played a not-so-insignificant part in propagating the myth that caring for the household and ensuring the quality of family and community life are more women's than men's duty.*

**As influential social institutions, churches have played a not-so-insignificant part in propagating the myth that caring for the household and ensuring the quality of family and community life are more women's than men's duty.**

Because women's input in the care economy is non-marketable, their efforts remain largely unvalued, unrecognised and unpaid by the current economic system that values work according to its worth in the market. The care economy's monetary value, based on opportunity costs of women's time, is estimated to range from 6 percent to 55 percent of countries' GDPs (Bruyn-Hundt, 1996). Yet care work is glaringly omitted in most – if not all – countries' GDPs. While the UN system of national accounts should in principle include production in households, this has not been implemented due to technical problems in measuring the value of non-market work with its characteristics of multiplicity and simultaneity, a dearth of political will and the pernicious notion that women's work at home is not work because it does not bring in income. Ironically, as Marilyn Waring (1988) observes, the manufacture of life-destroy-

ing nuclear weapons and arms are very much counted in the GDPs of countries. For feminist economists, this raises a very important question: *what does society consider productive and valuable?*

For all of the above-mentioned reasons, women, especially those in developing countries, tend to have a weaker ability to generate income on a regular basis as compared to men. In short, women are more vulnerable to poverty than men. Furthermore, the lack of economic means often translates to lack of power in the political arena (and vice-versa) such that women's marginalisation tends to perpetuate itself in a vicious cycle.



Box 3 contains some basic figures on women and economy that serve to remind us that a tremendous amount of work remains to be done in terms of achieving equality between women and men in the socio-economic sphere.

### **Box 3. Women and Economy at a Glimpse**

- ✘ 60-70 percent of the world's poor are women
- ✘ 66 percent of the world's illiterates are women
- ✘ Women provide 70 percent of the unpaid time spent in caring for family members
- ✘ Women's unpaid work is estimated at US\$ 11 trillion per year – a third of global GDP valued at US\$ 33 trillion
- ✘ Women own 1 percent of the land in the world
- ✘ Women hold 14 percent of managerial jobs

Source: UNDP, 1995; UN, 1999; and UNIFEM, 2000.

## **3.2 Economic globalisation and the experiences of women in developing countries**

We come to one of the main questions that this paper seeks to shed light on: *has economic globalisation improved women's situation or, contrarily, has it aggravated inequality between women and men?* In this section, we attempt to summarise the lively debate in the literature. But before we do so, we raise several caveats to facilitate a deeper appraisal of the issue.

Drawing from the previous section, it is clear that impacts of globalisation processes have to be considered in light of women's multiple economic roles, not merely in terms of paid work. It is also important to remember that women (and men for that matter) are not a homogenous group. Class, race and other social hierarchies cut across relations between women and men; and the extent to which women will benefit or not from globalisation processes will depend on these and other related factors (e.g. level of edu-



ation). For reasons given in the introduction, this paper is particularly concerned with the experiences of poor women in developing countries. Finally, while we will be primarily examining the differentiated effects of globalisation on women and men, it is helpful to note that unequal relations between women and men – in and by itself – have also been a driving force in the evolution of the international economy (i.e. there is a two-way interaction at work) (Joekes, 1999).

Researches and testimonies would indicate that *while economic globalisation processes have indeed opened up employment opportunities and brought about related benefits for many women, the very same processes have maintained existing inequities and may have even diminished the potential and capacity of poor women in the developing world to develop and maintain equal and reciprocal relationships with men and the rest of the community*. In the succeeding paragraphs, we take a closer look at women's experiences with stabilisation policies, trade and financial liberalisation as well as economic migration.

### **3.2.1 A feminist critique of stabilisation and structural adjustment policies**

SAPs, imposed by the IMF and WB on borrowing developing countries as preconditions for granting loans, have been subjects of intense feminist critique since the late eighties. The stabilisation component of SAPs involves short-term austerity or belt-tightening policies to restore the balance of payments (BOP) of countries. These policies typically include: devaluation of the domestic currency; privatisation of public-owned firms; streamlining of civil bureaucracies; removal of government subsidies; and, cuts in governments' budgets allocations for social spending. On the other hand, the structural adjustment component (which will be discussed in

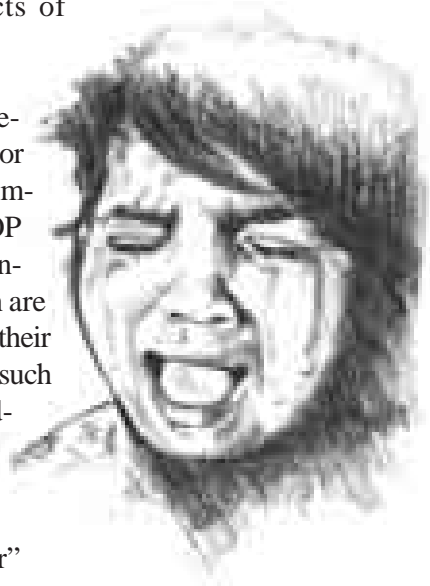


more detail in the next section) covers long-term measures to make the economy more efficient such as: trade liberalisation; export promotion; easing of rules regulating foreign direct investment; and financial liberalisation.

IMF and WB policy conditionalities usually entail many difficulties that are not distributed equally: the poor and women in particular have been disproportionately affected. Foreign debt payments eat up large portions of national budgets of developing countries, leaving over little resources for education, health and other social services. These cutbacks in human capital investments could have negative feedback effects on productivity. Studies on the extent to which debt payments have affected poor peoples' and women's access to social services are underway through analyses of national budgets using gendered lens.

ECEJ (2000: 16) observes that, in contrast to the foreign debt owed by developing countries to international financial institutions and developed countries, *IFIs owe an increasing "debt to women" in developing countries. This is because it is women who are carrying the bulk of the costs of the fiscal debt.* Some of the documented impacts of stabilisation policies on women are highlighted below.

**Food insecurity.** Currency devaluation has been implemented in many developing countries as part of the more or less standard SAP package to make exports cheaper and imports more expensive, thereby improving a country's BOP position. However, its immediate effect is inflation or an increase in the prices of goods and services. Since women are usually responsible for the overall nutritional well-being of their families, including purchasing staple household food items such as maize and rice, inflation can have an instantaneous adverse effect on their capacity to feed their children. Moreover, studies have shown that when food and other basic necessities become scarce, women and girl-children often have to sacrifice in order for the "male breadwinner" and boy-children to maintain their usual food intake (Harris, 1989, in Corner, 1996).



**Female job losses in the public sector.** Civil bureaucracies, where there are usually fewer discrepancies between women's and men's wages and working conditions, have also been downsized with the objective of making government more efficient. But because government offices tend to employ more women than men, particularly in the lower rungs, streamlin-





ing measures have affected women public employees more than men (SAPRIN, 2002). Many of the laid-off government workers, including highly educated teachers, have little choice but to join the ranks of small-scale service providers in the informal sector as a survival strategy.

**Heavier domestic workloads for women.** Public utilities have also been privatised to raise government revenues and purportedly to improve the delivery of these services. In many cases, this has led to an increase in the prices of basic utilities such as water and electricity. When this happens, it is women, due to their traditional domestic functions, who take on the additional pressure on time, labour and capacities to source cheaper alternatives. In El Salvador, after electricity was privatised, women reported a 20-30 percent increase in hours spent on domestic work to gather firewood as a substitute energy source for heating and cooking (the stripping of forests then contributed to environmental degradation) and to earn additional income in order to afford higher electricity rates (SAPRIN, 2002).

**Higher school dropout rates and continuing inaccessibility of education for girls.** To help close government budget deficits and recover costs, allocations for public education have been trimmed and user fees for educational facilities introduced. However, user fees have been found to reduce demand for services among the poor and to aggravate disparities between women and men (Vandemoortele, 2002). Families that cannot afford to pay tuition pull out their children from schools. However, more girls than boys tend to drop out of classes because of a socio-cultural preference to educate boy-children. In Uganda, for instance, boys are favoured over girls when parents are unable to meet the expenses of sending all their

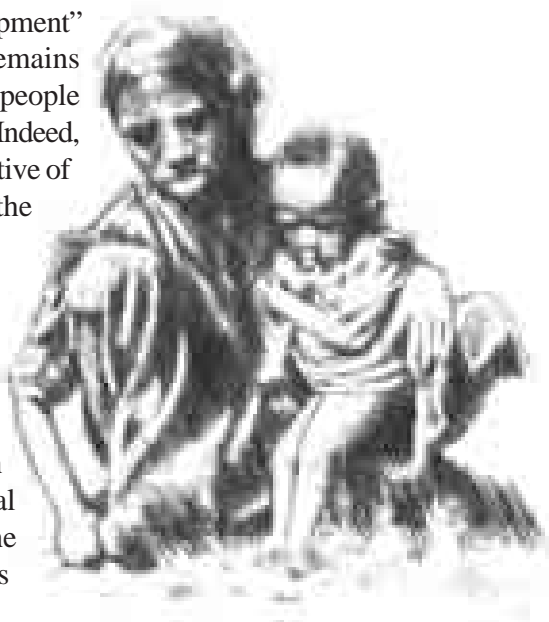


children to school; and access to higher levels of education has remained very limited for girls (SAPRIN, 2002). As poor education is a primary factor constraining women from improving their socio-economic situation, the higher dropout rates for girls serve to perpetuate the vicious cycle of poverty confronting many women in developing countries.

**Deterioration in maternal and child health.** Government spending on health has also been a target for cutbacks in an effort to balance the budget. But it is women more than men who assume the responsibility of providing informal health care with the dismantling of subsidised public health care systems. Women's own health is put at risk as mothers choose to forego medical treatment for difficult births. Following the introduction of user fees in public hospitals in Zimbabwe, the maternal mortality rate almost doubled from 90 per 100,000 live births in 1990 to 168 per 100,000 in 1993 (McGowan, 1995).

The IMF and WB rationalise that all of these painful costs are short-term in nature and will eventually help the economies to attain expansion and stability. The record would show that some "SAPped" countries, particularly in Asia and Latin America, were able to achieve balanced budgets and return to positive growth in the medium-term (Beneria, 1999a). However, the experience of a considerable number of economies that have studiously followed IFI prescriptions, but have fallen into crises again and again (e.g. the Philippines in 1990 and 1998, Mexico in 1994 and, most recently and glaringly, Argentina in 2001), casts deep doubts on the long-run effectiveness of SAPs. It has been contended that "SAPped" countries have moved from a debt crisis to a "crisis of development" (ECLAC, 1996, in Beneria, 1999a: 5). The fact remains that foreign debt continues to be a huge burden for people in developing countries, most especially for women. Indeed, it is argued that stabilisation policies with the objective of improving efficiency essentially shifted costs to the social reproductive sphere.

While SAPs continue to be implemented through the PRSP approach and other programmes of the IMF and WB, they are also reinforced by the trade rules of the WTO. Stabilisation policies, which have reduced public sector involvement in the provision of services, are further strengthened by the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) under the auspices of the WTO. The GATS essentially opens





up services such as, but not limited to, education, health and water, to provision on a competitive and commercial basis by foreign as well as domestic private actors. As women's experiences with SAPs have shown, privatisation of services has implications on quality and access, especially of poor women, as well as place additional constraints on women's time and energy. More broadly, liberalising trade is both a key conditionality for accessing IMF and WB loans and a core objective of WTO agreements.

### **3.2.2 Trade liberalisation and FDI: examining the terms and conditions of women's employment**

The proponents of economic globalisation contend that the elimination of tariffs and other barriers to the free flow of goods and services, the adoption of an outward-looking export-based growth strategy and attracting foreign direct investments (FDI) under SAPs and WTO rules have not only promoted growth, but have actually benefited women in developing countries in terms of expanding women's paid employment and income, leading to a closure of the gender wage difference and improving women's overall socio-economic status vis-à-vis men (see Dollar and Gatti, 1999). Box 4 presents the pertinent questions that we should be asking.

#### **Box 4. Study Questions on the Impacts of Trade Liberalisation and FDI on Women in Developing Countries**

- ☒ Are trade liberalisation and FDI resulting in an expansion in women's paid employment and an increase in women's incomes?
- ☒ Do paid employment and higher income automatically enhance women's autonomy and well-being?
- ☒ Under what conditions is the growth in employment and/or income taking place?
- ☒ What types of jobs are being made available to women?
- ☒ Are all women benefiting equally?
- ☒ Are gains in job expansion and income sustainable or do they subside over time?



Trade liberalisation and FDI have been associated with greater participation of women in paid work – termed “feminisation of labour” – and, therefore, an increase in income for women who were previously involved primarily in unpaid activities. Beginning in the seventies, females have been the preferred workforce in labour-intensive export-oriented industries in multinational manufacturing firms and in some service activities especially in Asia and Latin America (Braunstein, 2000; Çađatay, 2001; Joeques, 2000; Seguino, 2000). Elissa Braunstein (2002) summarises the reasons for this preference: female labour is cheaper; women possess supposedly “nimble fingers”; they are docile and less inclined to worker unrest; they are more suited to repetitive work; they are reliable and easily trained. Notwithstanding the lack of supporting data, it may be assumed that the expansion in women’s employment may have had some equalising effects between women and men in terms of income.

Employment opportunities, whether or not generated by trade and FDI, have the potential for improving women’s autonomy and social well-being. According to Joeques (1999), women holding paid jobs have generally reported higher self-esteem, a wider range of social options and greater bargaining power within the household. The more stable the job and the higher the pay, the greater the sense of well-being. By providing a venue for organisation, women’s involvement in paid work could also act as an initial step towards self-empowerment, which, in turn, is crucial in building more equitable relations between women and men (Chambers, 2000).

**It is therefore extremely important to examine the so-called “terms and conditions” behind the “feminisation of labour” and to check whether the purported gains have been sustainable.**

At the same time, however, trade and FDI-related employment have also served to disguise, maintain and even aggravate gender inequalities. It is germane to point out that the “feminisation of labour” has another meaning: the deterioration of real wages and labour conditions for *both* women and men such that labour conditions *in general* are increasingly resembling those conditions that typically characterise jobs assigned to women (Standing, 1989). *It is therefore extremely important to examine the so-called “terms and conditions” behind the “feminisation of labour” and to check whether the purported gains have been sustainable.* Some of the findings of studies that set out exactly to address these research needs are summarised in the succeeding paragraphs.



**Continuing sex segregation in the labour market.** Employment opportunities for women opened up by trade and FDI have largely been in labour-intensive, “footloose” export industries (e.g. textiles and garments production and computer chip assembly) where there is limited space for bargaining for wage increases and non-wage benefits as well as limited opportunity for skills upgrading and development (Seguino, 2002). On the other hand, men’s jobs tend to be concentrated in capital-intensive, largely non-tradable industries, where higher wage costs can be passed on to consumers. Likewise, within export processing zones (EPZs), women tend to occupy the production-line jobs while men are often in technical, supervisory and management positions, and corner all training (Hertz, 2002).

**Continuing underpayment of female labour and wage inequalities.**

Due in part to work segregation, the expansion in women’s participation in manufacturing industries has not been automatically accompanied by a narrowing of wage gaps between women and men. On the contrary, it is fairly well known that the newly industrialising countries of East Asia achieved phenomenal growth rates in part by hiring more women, whose labour costs are substantially lower than men, in their export sectors. This allowed East Asian firms to sell their products cheaply and achieve competitiveness in the world market. Increased trade liberalisation has therefore been associated with greater gender disparities in wages in countries such as Taiwan and South Korea (Berik et al, 2002; Seguino, 2000). While an earlier WB study (Tzannatos, 1998) found some evidence of trade liberalisation-led convergence between women’s and men’s wages for a group of countries, this did not correspond to improvements in women’s educational attainment and productivity. Moreover, it is unclear whether the purported narrowing of wage differences resulted from a steady decline in male wages, which is an unfavourable outcome, rather than an increase in female wages (Elson, 1999).

**Livelihood losses in agriculture and erosion of food sovereignty.**

Though there are more job opportunities for female workers in export manufacturing and services industries, jobs are also being shed elsewhere as a result of import liberalisation. Hence, any growth in women’s employment in manufacturing should be weighed against livelihood losses in non-export manufacturing industries and other crucial sectors of the economy, particularly agriculture. In many African and Asian countries, the influx of cheaper and often heavily-subsidised imported food products from the United States and European Union combined with land conversion for export purposes have eroded domestic agricultural production – where women play a significant role in ploughing, planting, tilling and harvesting. This has led to



massive displacement, significant losses in livelihood, and an erosion of food sovereignty (Madonsela, 2002, Xiaoyin et al 2004). Many women are also engaged in micro-scale, informal businesses which often cannot compete with low-priced imports, leading to closures (UNIFEM, 2000).

**Exclusion of low-skilled women who are often the poorest.** Even though trade openness may bring about an overall, net expansion in employment, this often masks a situation wherein it is the relatively skilled young women with at least secondary education who are able to secure jobs; whereas low-skilled women with hardly any formal education completely lose out on job gains (Çađatay, 2001). It is important to note that low-skilled women represent the poorest of the poor.

**Unsustainable gains in employment.** In recent years the export sector's capacity to create employment has tapered off except in a few developing countries (e.g. China). Within this picture, the latest evidence suggests that female workers' mobilisation in export industries may be a temporary, short-lived phenomenon (Ghiara, 1999; Hyoung, 2003; Joekes, 2000). As countries move on to the production of more technologically-sophisticated and skill-intensive products, such as high-end computer parts and automobiles, women are gradually squeezed out of the production force in favour of men due in part to gender-stereotyping and women's skill limitations. In Malaysia, for instance, women's share in the EPZ workforce dropped sharply from 75 percent in 1985 to 54 percent in 1990 (Joekes, 2000). In Mexico, the share of women in the export sector showed a marked decrease in just over three years from 45 percent in 1991 to 35 percent in 1993 (Ghiara, 1999).

**Hazardous working conditions.** At least initially, the bulk of trade and FDI-related employment creation for women has been inside EPZs, also known as *maquiladoras* in Latin America. Hundreds of EPZs have been established around the globe where many "horror stories" about working conditions have been documented. These include: 12-17 hour work shifts; extremely strict supervision; lack of clean water and proper toilets; poor if not completely absent occupational health and safety measures; congested dormitories; etcetera (BRIDGE, 2000; Brubaker, 2001; Seguino, 2002). In recent years, working conditions in EPZs have improved, if marginally. But, ironically, this has coincided with the de-feminisation of the workforce (Joekes, 1999).

**Erosion of labour rights.** In EPZs and elsewhere, workers are actively discouraged from organising themselves. This is another reason why there



has been little improvement in wages and working conditions of women working in export industries. In the *maquiladoras* in El Salvador, labour laws protecting women, such as those outlining special conditions for pregnant women, were annulled (SAPRIN, 2002). Outside of EPZs, traditional male-dominated trade unions usually fail to take women workers' issues, such as maternity benefits, into account due to "male breadwinner bias". To make matters worse, women workers are also concentrated in sectors such as services that present special challenges for collective organisation. Moreover, with increasing informalisation of their work, women are increasingly outside the protection of labour standards and laws.

**Informalisation and job insecurity.** There has been an increasing trend towards the casualisation of women workers in export industries as formal work is subcontracted or outsourced to the informal sector in an effort by both local and multinational firms to further cut down on production costs under pressure of international competition (Braunstein, 2002; Joekes, 2000). The garments industry is an obvious case in point where outsourcing is



rampant and women doing home-based work effectively subsidise firm production costs. While it is difficult to come by accurate statistics, it is estimated, for instance, that 30 to 60 percent of women workers in the garments sector in various Asian and Latin American countries are home-based (Chen et al, 1999). This is worrisome in that women are increasingly finding themselves in irregular work that lack long-term prospects, provide minimal (if any) non-wage benefits such as health insurance, and offer little protection in terms of labour standards. Even in formal work, the turnover rate is high as both domestic firms and MNCs quickly dispense with young women with little training upon marriage and pregnancy (BRIDGE, 2000).

**Lack of control over earnings.** While many women have become wage earners as a result of trade liberalisation and FDI, they do not necessarily have control over their wages. Sainsbury (1997) finds that in Asian countries, young women working in EPZs are socially obligated to surrender their earnings to either their parents or husbands. These transfers are sometimes used to perpetuate biases against women such as supporting the advanced schooling of brothers. Meanwhile, in African countries such as Kenya, it has been observed that men continue to control earnings from cash crops even though rural women often provide the labour to produce these crops (Madonsela, 2002).

**Increasing care-giving workload and “time poverty”.** At the end of the day, after a hard day’s toil in factories and farms, the responsibility of looking after the household still falls squarely and heavily on women’s shoulders. Research indicates that women’s unpaid subsistence production and care work for their households have not diminished with increased engagement in paid work (UNDP, 1999). In short, women’s overall workload has increased with their participation in the paid labour force because husbands and other male members of the household have not met them halfway by sharing in



**“Advocates tend to take a better than nothing approach to export-processing jobs...[Critics, on the other hand]...are unsatisfied with this relativist approach and prefer to evaluate export-processing jobs in terms of absolute standards of human fulfilment and well-being” (Tiano, 1994, in Ver Beek, 2001: 1554).**

domestic chores. This has led to the feminisation of what is increasingly termed “time poverty”.

**Increasing violence against women.** Finally, as women step out of traditional roles to earn a living, they are often subject to physical and psychological violence. Female workers in EPZs and other factory environs report of experiencing sexual harassment from plant supervisors. Moreover, because of their socially-constructed role as care-givers, women often act as “shock-absorbers” or “buffers”, easing the worries and tensions of husbands and other family members who are overworked or who have lost their jobs because of structural adjustment. Anecdotal evidence points to rising rates of domestic violence in some countries.

In spite of these systematic inequalities that have accompanied trade liberalisation and FDI, many economists and policymakers believe that exploitative jobs for women are better than no jobs at all. Overall, the crux of the debate is whether employment generated by trade and FDI improve women’s

lives absolutely or relatively. Susan Tiano (1994 in Ver Beek, 2001: 1554) summarises it succinctly:

“Advocates tend to take a better than nothing approach to export-processing jobs...[Critics, on the other hand]...are unsatisfied with this relativist approach and prefer to evaluate export-processing jobs in terms of absolute standards of human fulfilment and well-being”.

Taking the “better than nothing” approach constrains us from probing deeper into the roots of – and seeking more long-lasting solutions to – the pervasive problem of exploitation of women’s underpaid market-oriented labour and unpaid caring labour. As Noreena Hertz (2002) reminds us, it is imperative to understand the underlying reasons as to why women are taking on employment under harsh conditions and the context within which these so-called decisions are being made.

It is evident that women in developing countries are accepting these jobs because their set of options is very limited. Coming from situations of eco-



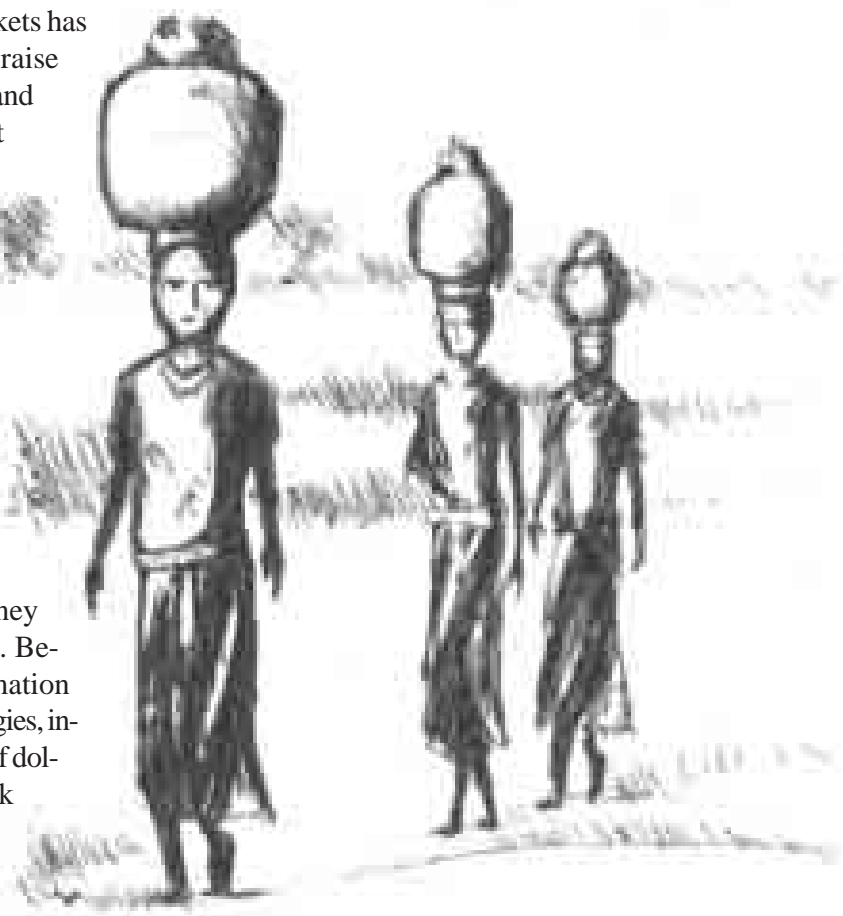


conomic destitution and vulnerability, they lack bargaining power. Many of these women, therefore, are faced with a choice between exploitation and survival: which could hardly be called a choice at all.

Women are also accepting these jobs in the context of a macroeconomic environment shaped by SAPs that have had negative repercussions on their access to education and health services, wiped out alternative sources of livelihood especially in rural areas and placed additional care burdens on their shoulders. All of these have placed strong limits on access to and availability of more rewarding employment opportunities for women.

### **3.2.3 Financial liberalisation, crises and microfinance: women carry the burden**

The easing of controls on financial flows is another important aspect of economic globalisation. The liberalisation of financial and capital markets has been prescribed by IFIs to raise more funds for investment and bring about a more efficient distribution of finance. With the lifting of capital controls, portfolio investments in developing countries – which were insignificant until the 1980s – increased rapidly, amounting to US\$ 51.1 billion in the period 1990-1996 (Singh and Zammit, 2000). However, unlike FDI, portfolio investment consists of short-term speculative money seeking the highest returns. Because of advances in information and communication technologies, investors can take out billions of dollars from countries in a blink of an eye on a rumour that a country's macro fundamentals are weak; and if





many investors follow suit, the rumour becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy as the economy collapses. Studies (e.g. Singh, 2002; Singh and Zammit, 2000) have linked financial liberalisation to heightened instability and recurring financial crises such as the one in Asia in 1997.

What are its impacts on women? As women's experiences with SAPs have indicated, the burden of coping with financial crises and the corresponding losses in livelihood, increase in prices of goods and services, etcetera, has disproportionately fallen on women's shoulders. Through additional time and labour, women are expected to provide the substitutes for the goods that families can no longer afford to buy and for public services that are no longer extended (Ozler, 1999, in Singh and Zammit, 2000; van Staveren, 2000). In short, women are underwriting the risks of an increasingly volatile financial system.

In the aftermath of the 1997 Asian Crisis, which threw millions of people into poverty almost overnight, studies reveal that the amount of work (both paid and unpaid) undertaken by women increased in the case of Indonesia and the Philippines because women were willing to accept odd, low-paying jobs and work additional hours to support the family (Frankenberg et al, 1999; Lim, 2000). Meanwhile, in the case of South Korea, more women than men lost their jobs as female employment plunged by 7.1 percent compared to 3.8 percent for men between 1997 and 1998 (Lee and Rhee, 1999). Women were the first to be fired by Korean companies because of the traditional view that they are merely secondary breadwinners.

Reforms aimed at financial liberalisation may have made capital funds more readily available. However, women continue to lack access to these funds because they have limited financial collateral (e.g. land) and are not perceived to be worthy creditors by conventional banks even though the record would show that, on average, female borrowers have a higher repayment rate than male borrowers (Richards et al, 2001). To address this flaw in the credit market, development agencies have implemented microfinance schemes targeted specifically at low-income women in developing countries. The results have been mixed. While in some cases micro credit projects have been successful in improving women's income levels and overall well-being, it is clear that women continue to face numerous disadvantages vis-à-vis men in terms of infrastructural support (e.g. literacy, business training, childcare services), access to markets, and actual control of income (UNIFEM, 2000). Such projects have rarely benefited the poorest women. Moreover, small-scale businesses financed by micro credit are very much subject to fluctuations in the macro economy and global market. Because



of systemic trade and financial problems faced by developing countries, the gains have often been tenuous, sometimes leaving poor women even deeper in debt.

### **3.2.4 Feminisation of forced economic migration, labour export and trafficking**

As economic globalisation processes create both push and pull factors that force and attract women into employment in EPZs, it also pushes and pulls people in developing countries to resort to migration as an important coping mechanism to escape from poverty. Economic migration is a phenomenon that is progressively acquiring a feminine face. Around 49 percent of all international migrants are women – up from 46 percent in the sixties (UN, 2005). For developing countries, this figure is likely to be much higher. The Philippines, for instance, is a major exporter of migrant labour with between 8 and 11 million Filipinos working outside their country; and it is estimated that 60-70 percent of Filipino migrant workers are women (UN, 2005).

In general, women displaced from farms and collapsed domestic industries because of SAPs and trade liberalisation have been forced to seek greener fields by migrating to foreign lands where they are vulnerable to abuse and harsh treatment at the hands of their recruiters and employers. Many become victims of sex trafficking. At the same time, heightened North-South inequality, as manifested in better living and employment conditions and the so-called “care deficit” (where domestic needs are unmet as women take on demanding, high-pay jobs) in developed countries, serve as pull factors for migrants (Brubaker, 2003).

Majority of women migrant workers are nurses, domestic helpers, and sex-workers, reflecting an in-



tensification and extension of women's perceived care-giving role in the employment opportunities that are available outside of their countries.

The short-term benefits of remittances from migrant workers on their families' household incomes and their countries' BOPs are relatively well recorded. Indeed some developing country governments have been deliberately cultivating labour export policies in order to bring in much-needed convertible currency to help service their foreign debts. However, the long-term impacts of income transfers and the migration of family members on the well-being of households, communities and the macro economy, such as dependency on external support and possible social disintegration, have been less rigorously studied.

It should also be noted that as barriers to the movement of goods and capitals between borders are being removed through neo-liberal economic policies, global labour mobility is being increasingly suppressed by governments in developed countries. Thus, women in poverty-stricken environs are increasingly finding it more and more difficult to migrate to developing countries as a survival strategy for themselves and their families.

### **3.2.5 Inequality between women and men as inefficient**

Finally, it is helpful to keep in mind (especially when dealing with economists!) that not only are globalisation-heightened imbalances between women and men socially and economically unjust, these also make for bad economics.

Feminist economists have pointed out that existing inequalities can be an obstacle to the efficient allocation of resources (Beneria, 1999a). Even the WB (in its web site) acknowledges that this is one of the factors that hampered the successful implementation of SAPs. In Sub-Saharan Africa, for instance, farmers were not able to respond to policy incentives because of constraints resulting from the traditional sexual division of labour.

In the long run, inequalities between women and men, which effectively serve as disincentives to invest in human capital, may impact negatively on the productivity of female workers and, therefore, on economic growth itself (van Staveren, 2002). David Dollar and Roberta Gatti (1999) empirically show that gender differentials in education and health outcomes result in slower growth and lower income. Meanwhile, Geske Dijkstra (2000) develops an index measuring gender inequality and finds a strong and sig-



nificant positive statistical relationship between gender inequality and economic underdevelopment.

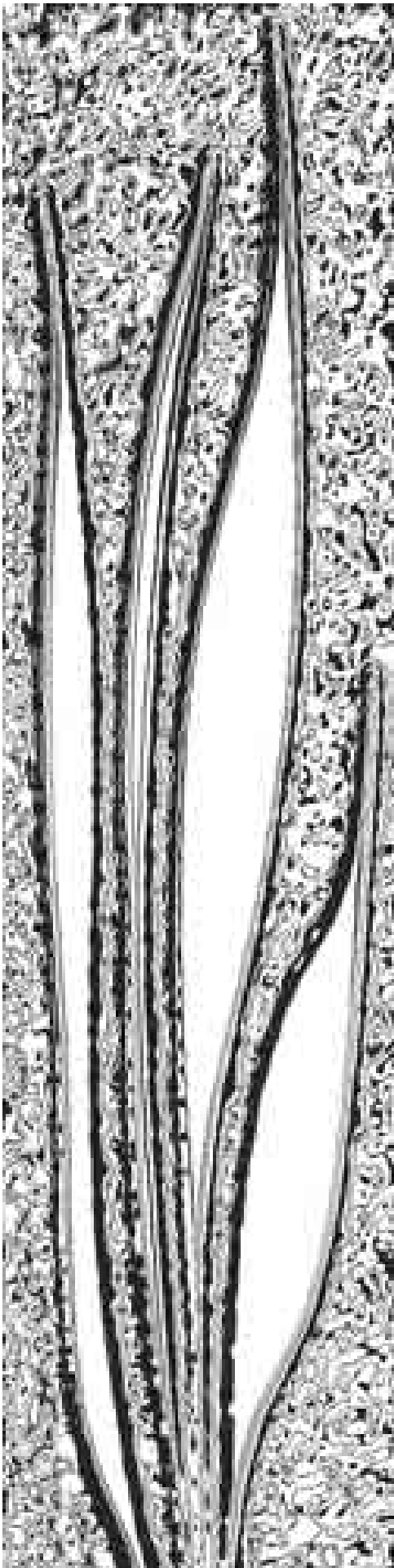
Feminist economists have also shown that promoting equality between women and men by strengthening women's control over income and economic resources could result in efficiency gains for the economy as a whole. It has been observed across a wide spectrum of countries and societies that women as compared to men tend to spend a larger portion of their income on items that improve human capabilities (e.g. healthcare) than on personal consumption goods (Haddad et al, 1997).

### 3.3 Summary

Part 3 of this paper has shown that women's experiences with economic globalisation are complex, sometimes contradictory and oftentimes fraught with difficulties and basic problems of survival. Economic globalisation processes intensify the devaluation of non-marketable care and subsistence labour done mostly by women even as the dismantling of government-provided social services increases women's burden of unremunerated care work. At the same time, to ensure the survival of their families, women are often left with little choice but to enter into the market economy as providers of care services outside their countries or as workers in EPZs, giant commercial farms and the informal sector, where they continue to face glaring inequalities in terms of pay and work conditions, among others. As Maria Floro (2002) points out, in an era of globalisation, it is the market economy that defines how provisioning for human life is done, opening its doors to women when it has need for cheap market labour and slamming the doors on them, even exploiting their social reproductive labour, in times of contraction.

Women's unique economic experiences, however, allow them to see the economy in a different light and propose creative alternatives to neo-liberal economic globalisation. In the next part of the paper, we work with a simplified framework for transformation and attempt to bring out some of the ways through which churches and women are working towards a paradigm shift. We also highlight, if roughly, interesting parallels between WCC's work on ethics and economy and the emerging feminist critical economics paradigm, both of which have a lot to contribute to the current discussions on transforming economic globalisation.





## 4. Churches and Women Transforming Economic Globalisation

### 4.1 A simplified framework

**T**he previous part of this paper has shown that the current global economic system, which is oppressive to many women and men, has to be changed. Reflecting the urgency of the situation, the last two decades has witnessed the emergence of civil society organisations and networks – not least church-based and feminist movements – conducting on-the-ground research, awareness building campaigns, grassroots mobilisation, global and local networking and political advocacy around a wide range of economic reforms that are expected to have redistributive if not transformative impacts. (See Box 5)



### **Box 5. A Sample of Civil Society-proposed Economic Reforms**

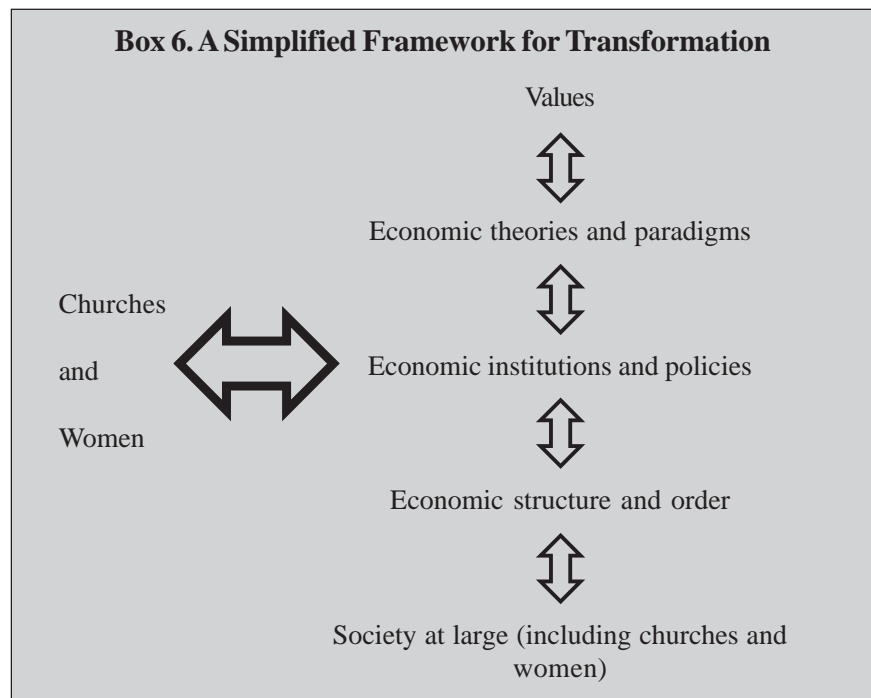
- ✠ Genuine democratisation of the decision-making structures and processes, if not complete restructuring, of the WTO, IMF, WB and other economic policy-making institutions
- ✠ Strengthening of the UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and environmental treaties over trade and investment agreements
- ✠ Cancellation of external debt of developing countries incurred under odious and illegitimate circumstances
- ✠ Creation and implementation of financial transaction taxes or similar mechanisms to regulate short-term financial flows
- ✠ Mainstreaming of gender-aware analyses in economic policy-making, including trade and financial policies and agreements
- ✠ Implementation of just trade rules and agreements, including the removal of export subsidies in developed countries and the implementation of preferential treatment for developing countries
- ✠ Elimination of user fees; and accessible and affordable provision of life-sustaining social services (e.g. education, health, housing and water)
- ✠ Promotion and implementation of core international labour standards developed by the ILO
- ✠ Implementation of measures to ensure corporate accountability and responsibility

Many of these critical economic reforms being proposed by church-based organisations, women's movements and civil society at large build on the understanding that a rethinking of values and paradigms pertaining to the global economy is paramount. Insofar as economic policies are influenced by economic theory, it is clear that the neo-liberal development paradigm and underlying neoclassical economic theory and philosophy have to be re-evaluated in order to make the current global economic system and economic policies more just, sustainable and caring. That is, effecting a change



in the theoretical economics behind the neo-liberal paradigm and especially the values that underpin it is, in the long run, one of the most critical of all strategies to reshape economic globalisation. Admittedly, this strategy poses considerable difficulties since it requires a long process of gestation, threatens the interests of the political and economic status quo, as well as questions well-entrenched beliefs that are not only held familiar, but deemed rational.

We start with a simplified framework indicating a dynamic and interactive relationship between values, the global economic system and society. (See Box 6) On the one hand, it is admitted that modern societal ethics and values have been influenced by market-oriented economics and its predilection towards self-interest, consumerism and moneymaking. On the other hand, values that serve as counterweights to market values can transform economic theories and paradigms, economic policies and the global workings of the economy to make it serve life for all and affirm human dignity. It is perhaps in questioning and re-orienting the values undergirding economics where churches in partnership with women have the foremost distinct contribution to make in transforming economic globalisation.





## 4.2 A just, sustainable and caring global economic system

Ecumenical churches and women's movements, including feminist economists, have already made significant headway in laying the groundwork for a paradigm shift in the global economic system. In reconsidering the orthodox economics behind the neo-liberal paradigm and exploring new approaches, faith-based and feminist perspectives do not claim to have already produced comprehensive blueprints. Rather, they have put forward key pillars or signposts to help frame a new vision not only of just, participatory and sustainable communities, but also *caring* communities.

The WCC together with women's organisations involved in research and advocacy on economic issues (e.g. African Women's Economic Policy Network, International Gender and Trade Network, etcetera) have long been working to advance life-centred economics and to ensure that more and more people, especially women, get on board the critical discourse on economic globalisation and macroeconomic policymaking not only to effect much needed reforms, but also to change "the terms of discussion" itself.





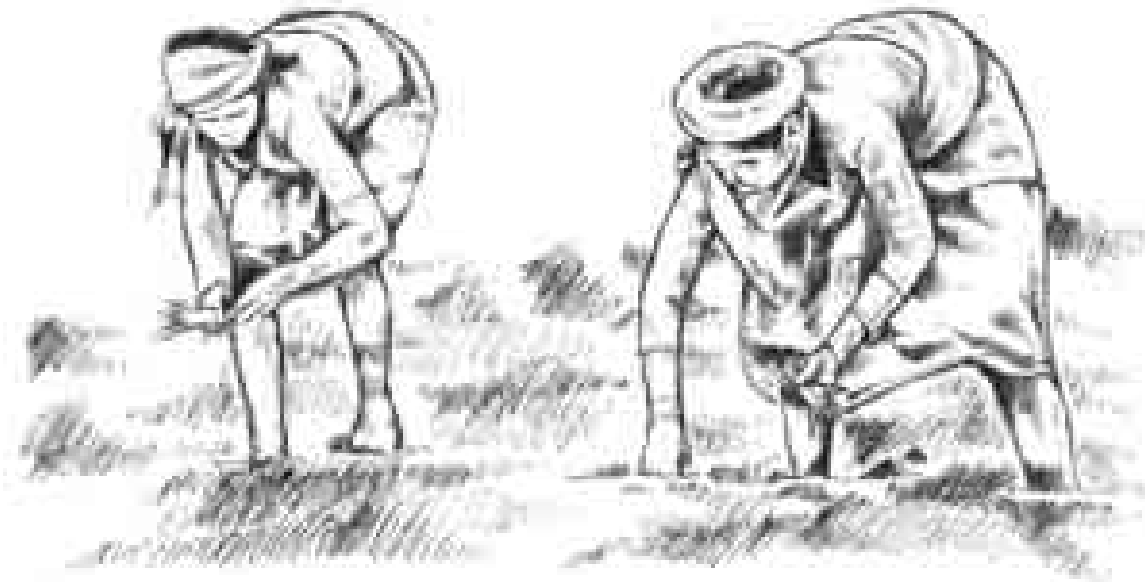
While this paper is not the place to review the tremendous amount of work that has gone into these efforts (as that would be an ambitious undertaking), we attempt to do two things in the succeeding paragraphs.

First, we (rather crudely) highlight several commonalities underlying WCC's continuing work on faith and economy and the emerging feminist critical economics paradigm, both of which essentially challenge the neo-liberal development paradigm promoted by the WTO and IFIs. These commonalities come together in the vision of a caring economy. In doing this exercise, it also becomes possible to have a quick grasp of the extent to which WCC's work on faith and economy has paid attention to women's perspectives. From part 3, we know that it is crucial that any ecumenical reflection on economic globalisation be informed by and respond to women's experiences and realities.

Second, as we identify the parallelisms between church-based and feminist perspectives of the economy, we draw attention to concrete examples of how these common signposts translate into actual programmes and activities in which churches and women are working towards change.

#### **4.2.1 Convergences**

A feminist view of the economy has something significant to contribute to the ecumenical discourse seeking to promote alternatives to economic



globalisation (and vice versa). Indeed there is already plenty of common ground to build on.

**Economics as a matter of faith and values.** As a common starting point, both Christian teaching and feminist critical economics believe that ethics is *not* an abstract or philosophical concern that has no place in a “neutral”, “hard” or “mathematical science” such as economics, as many mainstream economists would have us believe. On the contrary, they contend that economic decisions involve value judgements all the time. As such, both churches and feminist economists are demanding for economic models that are rooted in moral frameworks that affirm life and human dignity.

Churches have always been interested in economy and development matters – an interest that is grounded on the Christian conviction in the sacredness of all creation and caring for life. Therefore, if people are being denied their basic needs such as food and water due to policies related to economic globalisation, this is much more than just an economic issue for Christians, but a violation of God’s justice. The 1937 World Conference on Church, Community and State, a forerunner of the WCC, reminds us:

“Individual acts of charity within a given system may mitigate its injustices and increase its justice. But they do not absolve the Christian from seeking the best possible institutional arrangement and social structure for the ordering of social life” (WCC, 1992: 6).

The WCC has been advocating for *just, participatory and sustainable communities* rather than economic development per se. Just, participatory and sustainable communities imply the nurturing of equitable relationships between peoples regardless of sex, class, race and ethnicity and also between people and the environment. Furthermore, the WCC is promoting a “global economy in the service of life” for all instead of a global economy in the pursuit of profit.

Feminist economists (e.g. Folbre, 1998: 166), too, are talking about “getting the norms right” instead of “getting the prices right”. They are disputing the consumerist and money-based value system embedded in globalisation processes that is reflected in the commodification of life forms and the relentless drive for the expansion of GDPs. They are beginning to raise some very fundamental questions about economics: “*what is value and what is valuable to society?*” (Beneria, 1999b: 16). Equity, the removal of discrimination based on sex, race and class, and the realisation of human rights, especially economic, social and cultural rights or ESCR, are therefore key



concerns of the feminist economics paradigm. Increasingly, feminist economists and women's organisations are using the language of human rights, particularly ESCR, "to serve as the set of fundamental values governing the human condition; a tool for critical consciousness-raising about power structures; and a path to empowerment for much of humanity" (Williams, 1998: 1).

From a faith-oriented perspective, the overall well-being and dignity of the poor – whether they have enough to eat, are able to send their children to school, can afford medicines, etcetera – should be the foremost gauge of economic success rather than individual utility maximisation, firm profit maximisation and GDP growth. Likewise, for feminist economics, the starting point is the provisioning for human life rather than the efficient allocation of resources (Floro, 2002). Both churches and feminist economists are in agreement that human well-being and fulfilment go beyond money-metric measures of consumption and income.

It is in this ethical vein that many church-based and feminist movements have been tirelessly calling for the cancellation of illegitimate debts of de-

veloping countries (e.g. the Jubilee 2000 campaign) as well as changes in unjust trade rules and agreements that have been found to be harmful to the poor and women in particular.

#### **Oikonomia and the care economy.**

Ecumenical churches and feminist economists have a broader, richer definition of "economy" and "economics" that does not make a hierarchical distinction between the care or subsistence economy and the market economy. Not incidentally, these words are rooted in the Greek word "*oikos*", referring to the household and its daily operations, and "*oikoumene*" or the household of God.



The WCC (1992: 5) sees economics as one way of “considering large complexes of social and community realities, including personal relationships and expectations, the loyalties and senses of priority that govern the processes of production, distribution and consumption”. It has stated that economic globalisation is promoting a competing vision of *oikoumene*, that is, a globalised *oikoumene* of exploitation in contrast with the *oikoumene* of faith and solidarity that motivates and energises the ecumenical movement.

In feminist economics, the foremost methodological principle in economic analyses is based on the understanding that unpaid caring or social reproductive labour – which is essentially about the maintenance of human life outside of the market – is a vital part of any economic system. That is, the economy is much bigger than the production, distribution and consumption of goods and services that can be sold in markets. As indicated in previous parts of this paper, women’s negative experiences with economic globalisation are very much rooted in the material and moral devaluation and exploitation of women’s reproductive and domestic labour (Brubaker, 2003). As one of the measures to address this problem, feminist economists have been advocating for, among others, the inclusion and visibility of the care economy in all national income accounts and factoring care work in economic models and analyses.

**“Although such work is unpaid, it is nonetheless a crucial ingredient in the economy because it holds the social fabric of society and forms the base for many activities in the economic realm” (WCC, 1992: 25).**

The WCC has been one of the first international institutions to pick up this main concern of feminist economists. The differing roles of women and men and women’s unrecognised and unremunerated social reproduction had been clearly identified by the WCC’s Advisory Group on Economic Matters as one of main issues in the world economy that needs to be urgently addressed. The study document on *Christian Faith and the World Economy Today* validates the importance of care work:

“Although such work is unpaid, it is nonetheless a crucial ingredient in the economy because it holds the social fabric of society and forms the base for many activities in the economic realm” (WCC, 1992: 25).

However, it has to be admitted that while the WCC has been strongly espousing a vision of just, participatory and sustainable communities, it has yet



to explicitly advocate for caring communities that take social reproduction into consideration. Moreover, a difficult tension remains within and among churches between affirming care, household and community work as an important component of the economy and further reinforcing women's traditionally assigned role as care-givers. Churches usually have no difficulty in emphasising the importance of social reproduction, which, in public perception, is often placed in the moral rather than economic sphere. At the same time, they have also helped to perpetuate the belief that women, more than men, have the primary responsibility for maintaining the standard of family life (Riley, 1988). Yet care work should be made open to both women and men so that men, too, can share in the fulfilment and learn from the practical responsibilities of tending to the family and community. Churches therefore have to take a more proactive stance in challenging socio-economic roles that are oppressive not only to many women, but also to many men who are missing out on the enriching experience of care work.

According importance to the care economy also implies prioritising basic needs, such as water, which are inextricably tied up with the daily care work assigned to women. Basic needs make life possible and constitute economic, social and cultural rights that the WCC and feminist economists believe should not be subjected to free market pricing mechanisms. From this perspective, feminist economists have pushed for, among others, policies that promote food sovereignty and land rights for women as well as greater investment in social services to ease women's workloads. In South Africa, Bolivia and other countries, women are often at the frontline of community struggles focused on access to clean drinking water, the provision of adequate housing and land redistribution. Desai (2002) observes that these struggles are driven by peoples' need to survive and desire to live decently.

**Community, cooperation, and relationality.** In their work, the WCC and feminist economists have criticised, from both normative and empirical standpoints, specific principles undergirding the neo-liberal paradigm, particularly the underlying assumption of individualism, selfishness and competition that supposedly drive the economic behaviour of individuals, firms and nations.

The concept of community – sustained by a life-affirming relationship with God and with one another – is a fundamental one to ecumenical churches. Thus, the WCC (2001:10-11) believes that new economic paradigms should provide a “vision of a global community whose interdependence is not reduced to markets and trade”. Moreover, it should “acknowledge a common



destiny as co-inhabitants of the one earth for which we all share a responsibility and from which we should all equally benefit”.

Along these lines, church-based movements are spearheading the development of an “economy of communion” or “solidarity economy” that promotes a culture of sharing and caring. Two innovative yet practical examples are worth mentioning. The Global Women’s Project of the Church of the Brethren in the United States funds women’s projects in developing countries using contributions from women from all walks of life. These contributions are raised by encouraging women to self-impose “luxury taxes” on some of their purchases or to forego these purchases all together (Brubaker, 2003). In Hong Kong, the St. John’s Settlement promotes the exchange of coupons denominated in time rather than money between community members such that one hour of treatment by a doctor, for instance, is equally valued as one hour of housecleaning by a migrant domestic helper (Wu, 2004). These are perhaps small, but nonetheless exciting and concrete, ways of rejecting the dictates of the market and transforming relationships within communities.

In the feminist view of the economy, interdependent human actors connected by an intricate web of relationships, rather than the isolated individual, are at the centre of economic analyses. The paradigm recognises that cooperation rather than competition may often generate the best possible combination of resources; and that collective enterprise is likely to reap greater benefit than individual effort. Perhaps at risk of overromanticising motherhood, some feminist economists point to mothers’ unpaid domestic work as hardly fitting into the neoclassical model of rational



**“Our only hope for a transformed and whole/holy humanity lies in the ability of our creative imaginations and political wills to develop a world structured on the mutuality of all human persons, women and men together...Such structures will recognise, celebrate and enhance both the equality and distinctiveness of being a human being, woman and man alike” (Riley, 1988: 8).**

self-interest. There are nonetheless many other examples from various countries and societies of women (and men) coming together to support and protect their communities and the environment. In India, women in Mararikulam in the state of Kerala organised themselves into locally owned cooperatives producing ecologically friendly products to lift themselves and their communities out of poverty (Franke, 2003). In Peru and Chile, women set up communal kitchens to feed the hungry during periods of economic downturn (UN, 1999). In Columbia, women’s groups got together to engage in organic vegetable farming in unoccupied city lands to enable them to provide cheap but nutritious meals for their communities (Ortega, 2004)

As Lourdes Beneria (1999b: 17) points out, it is when we analyse care work that we begin to “question how far economic rationality is the norm and the extent to which models of human behaviour are based on...altruism, empathy, collective responsibility and solidarity”. She further emphasises the need to construct new economic models that are not based primarily on the selfish, profit-oriented motives of the so-called rational economic man, but on the values of solidarity, reciprocity, relationality and mutuality.

Maria Riley (1988: 8) argues beautifully and convincingly:

“Our only hope for a transformed and whole/holy humanity lies in the ability of our creative imaginations and political wills to develop a world structured on the mutuality of all human persons, women and men together...Such structures will recognise, celebrate and enhance both the equality and distinctiveness of being a human being, woman and man alike”.

**The economy as a realm of power and women’s political engagement and participation in economic policy- and decision-making.** The WCC and the feminist economics discipline comprehend that the economy is a realm of power. Globalisation processes exacerbate economic problems by promoting economic interdependence in the context of tremendous





disparities in power between developing and developed countries, between the poor and rich within countries and between women and men. It is also understood that economic power is closely linked to political power, technological power, military power, and so on. According to the WCC (1992: 6), “what Adam Smith called the invisible hand has to be made visible, and power relationships have to be revealed”. The essentials of faith call Christians to accord priority to those who are adversely treated by the economic “powers-that-be” and to be in solidarity with the powerless. In its encounters with powerful economic institutions such as the IMF and WB, the WCC has consistently tried to ensure spaces for ordinary people who are directly affected by the policies of the IFIs – women among them – to tell their stories. The WCC is also currently studying the theological undergirding of power, including economic power.

Likewise, feminist economists have always understood that power relations are a driving force in the economy, from the global level down to the household level, where ownership and control of economic resources are often in the hands of “rich, white men”. They recognise that the historical subordination of women may be traced to structures that concentrate power in the hands of a few and perpetuate inequities in economic and other dimensions of life that interact with each other.

Hence, feminist economists and movements are strongly advocating for the democratisation of political and economic decision-making structures and processes so that women can actively participate in defining and implementing economic policies that have a bearing on their lives and the lives of their communities. At the global level, this is exemplified by the critical engagement of organisations and networks such as the African Women’s Economic Policy Network, World March of Women, Women’s Eyes on the World Bank, and International Gender and Trade Network with the IFIs and the WTO. These women’s networks closely monitor the workings of the IMF, WB and WTO and advocate for crucial reforms in the structures and processes as well as the policy directives and rules of these economic institutions.





At the national and local levels, feminist economists and women's organisations such as the Tanzania Gender Networking Programme are leading initiatives to promote democratisation such as through social dialogues, economic literacy programmes and pro-poor and gender-sensitive budgets, which are slowly gaining acceptance in some mainstream circles. Numerous women's groups such as the women in Phiri and Orange Farm in South Africa, the *Sindicato de Amas de Casa de Santa Fe* or Housewives Trade Union of Santa Fe in Argentina and the Ecumenical Women's Forum in the Philippines are at the forefront of non-violent community protests around fee increases charged by utilities companies and regressive taxation policies.

**Contextuality of economic systems and policies.** Lastly, the WCC and feminist economists have stressed the dangers of universalising the contextual when it comes to economic systems and policies. The WCC (1992) does not try to translate basic convictions of Christian faith into universally valid and applicable political and economic models for societies. It believes that economic systems and policies must respect differences in historical, social and cultural conditions.

For feminist economists, the contextuality of women's experiences, as intersected by class, race, ethnicity, etcetera, is key to developing deeper, more comprehensive economic analyses and corresponding economic policies. Many women's organisations and networks are conducting research on the impacts of trade and financial policies on women based on this premise.

Overall, these points of convergence in principles between the ongoing ecumenical reflection on faith and economy and the feminist economics paradigm are perhaps best encapsulated in a vision of a caring economy, which was articulated by a group of feminist theologians, economists and activists during the international consultation organised by the WCC entitled "Towards a Caring Economy: Women Transforming Economic Globalisation" from 10-12 February 2003 in Geneva, Switzerland. (See Box 7)



### Box 7. What is a Caring Economy?

- ✘ A caring economy has at its core, the values of **equity** and **justice**. Yet, **caring goes beyond equity and justice**. In various languages, caring connotes, among others, being **present** and **attentive, opening one's eyes to others' needs, worrying about others**, etcetera.
- ✘ A caring economy ensures the provision of **basic needs** for all, women and men.
- ✘ It also recognises and values the essential contribution of **social reproduction** – without which there would be no functioning economy to speak of – and not only economic production.
- ✘ The economic criterion of **efficiency is redefined** in a caring economy. What is efficient is considered in light of social costs and benefits.
- ✘ In this economy, **caring and care work are made visible, (re)valued, (re)affirmed, (re)produced and (re)distributed equitably** by both women and men.
- ✘ “*Oikonomia*” is a wider and broader concept of understanding the caring economy. It is a way of **organising life as a whole** and comprises all the activities that keep daily life functioning. A caring economy is about **communities experiencing life together**, of **relationships, mutuality and reciprocity**, and not about individual satisfaction and competition.
- ✘ Because the caring economy is organised to **serve life for all peoples**, the **participation of all peoples** in defining, planning and making a caring economy work is crucial.
- ✘ It is an economy where **all human rights** – including **women's economic, social and cultural rights** – are upheld and protected.
- ✘ A caring economy moves away from values of accumulation and profit to values of **redistribution** and **reparation**.
- ✘ **Plurality** and **contextuality** are celebrated in a caring economy instead of universality.
- ✘ In a caring economy, **power is not linked to markets**.
- ✘ It includes **caring for the earth** for future generations.
- ✘ It implies a move from free trade to **just and responsible trade**.



## 4.2.2 The WCC's Programme on Women's Concerns in the Globalisation Process

It is in recognition of these myriad pressing concerns and in line with the 1995 UN Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action that the WCC launched the women and globalisation programme. The WCC believes that enabling real reforms as well as paradigmatic changes in the global economy requires establishing and strengthening structures of solidarity among and between women from different regions, churches, the academe and grassroots movements. It also calls for concerted advocacy by churches and women at the international level.

Since the 1998 WCC Assembly in Harare, Zimbabwe, ecumenical churches have been engaged in a reflection on economic globalisation. The programme on women and globalisation aims to ensure that women's voices are put to bear on the ongoing ecumenical discourse on Alternatives to Globalisation Addressing People and Earth or AGAPE process; and to build a global network of churchwomen, in solidarity with feminist economists and activists, who are actively engaged in a critical and transformative debate on economic globalisation (the specific objectives of the programme are listed in Box 8).

### Box 8. Objectives of WCC's Women and Globalisation Programme

- ✠ Provide a space for women's experiences and perspectives on economic globalisation to be heard in the broader arena
- ✠ Create awareness on issues of women and globalisation especially among churches
- ✠ Harvest women's creative and practical survival strategies and alternatives to globalisation
- ✠ Build a global network of churchwomen in solidarity with feminist economists and women working for economic justice in their communities
- ✠ Advocate for an economically and socially just, sustainable and caring trading and financial system that upholds the value of life and human rights, including women's economic, social and cultural rights



From 27-29 August 2004, the WCC organised a Southern women's international consultation entitled "Women's Voices on AGAPE" in Antipolo City, Philippines. Together, churchwomen, feminist economists and activists identified signposts for developing just, sustainable and caring trade and financial policies, as a feminist contribution to the AGAPE process. This paper draws much inspiration from the engaging discussions in this and in other international conferences and seminars organised by the WCC with the objective of providing spaces for women to speak out on economic issues that concern them and their communities.

### 4.3 Summary

Perhaps the most distinct contribution of the feminist economics perspective to the ecumenical and also to the broader civil society debate on alternatives to economic globalisation lies in bringing a stronger focus on socio-economic relationships between women and men, the care economy and its linkages to the traditional market economy. Feminist economists and ethi-



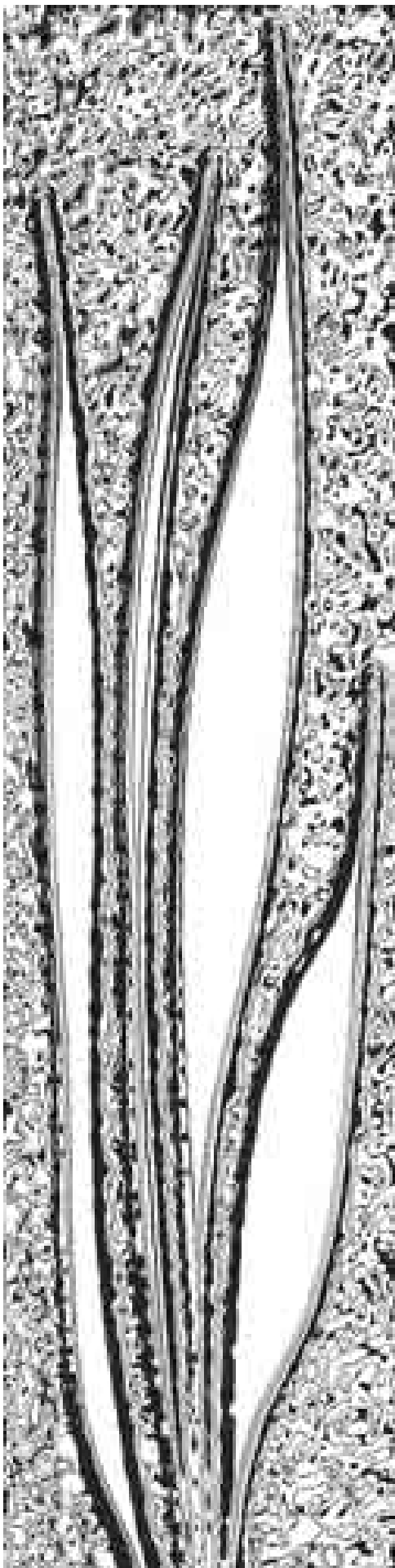
cists believe that if economic systems and economic policies are to result in equitable, participatory and sustainable outcomes for women, men, communities and the environment, then these systems and policies must necessarily ascribe greater material and moral value to social reproduction, which must be made open to both women and men. This view stands in stark contrast to the currently obsessive mainstream focus on income-generating market production – an arena that continues to be dominated by men.

There is no doubt that churches have a pivotal role to play in influencing such a critical value change in policymaking circles and in public perception. Yet at the same time we must recognise that churches, just like other social institutions, are products of particular histories and, hence, may be constructed in such a way that they systematically disadvantage certain groups of people. In other words, churches, too, can and have helped to engender disparities between women and men. Be that as it may, churches must always fall back on the fundamentals of Christian faith that emphasise love for neighbour, justice and caring for life and creation above all.

There continues to be a pernicious notion that the care economy is simply a concern for women alone. It is important to recognise that the consideration and prioritisation of social reproduction in economic theories down to economic policies would necessitate some of the more urgent reforms that church-based and other civil society organisations and movements have long been agitating for, such as the prioritisation of social spending over other arguably life-destroying expenditures (e.g. defence bills and debt payments) in government budgets and the strengthening of the UN covenant on ESCR over trade and investment agreements. These reforms are grounded on the principle that, in any economic system, the provisioning for human life must take precedence over efficiency and growth considerations. Therefore, achieving socio-economic justice for women will not only reap benefits for women, but will also have transformative impacts on entire communities. The next part of the paper concludes.







## 5. Conclusion: Towards a Caring Economy

**W**omen, who comprise roughly half of humanity, bear a disproportionate burden of the negative effects of neo-liberal economic policies associated with economic globalisation. These policies have exploited women's undervalued market labour and unvalued reproductive labour in the name of efficiency and growth, even though it is becoming increasingly clear that the global economy has not been able to achieve sustained growth rates, substantial poverty reduction and convergence between and within countries in the last two decades of heightened globalisation.

While women are probably the single most affected group of people, their voices are barely heard in economic policy- and decision-making circles. Indeed, economics, both in



theory and in practice, continues to be the most male-dominated of disciplines (Floro, 2002). It is therefore extremely important that ecumenical reflections on alternatives to economic globalisation be shaped by, and respond to, women's realities. What is created through the process of accounting for women's experiences is not just a new vision for women, but also a new vision for women and men. Ultimately, proposing strategies that consider women's experiences will have transformative implications for whole communities (ECEJ, 2000).

The WCC and feminist critical economists understand that nothing less than a fundamental transformation of political and economic systems is necessary if we are to address the root causes of poverty and inequality in our world today. Ecumenical churches and feminist organisations and networks concerned with economic issues have criticised and challenged the neo-liberal economic paradigm pushed by the WTO and the IFIs that prioritises growth over equity. At the same time, they have also begun to lay the groundwork for a paradigm shift. What is interesting is that there are clear parallels between WCC's continuing work on faith and economy and the still-evolving feminist economics discipline. Both perspectives promote an ethical, life-centred economics. Both see care work as an integral part of the economy as a whole, though it is granted that the WCC needs to be





more explicit in espousing this view. Both share the same fundamental values of community, cooperation, solidarity, and relationality. Both view the economy as a realm of power and recognise the contextuality of socio-economic experiences.

In moving towards just, sustainable and *caring* global economic systems, churches and women working together are powerful agents for change. Thus, this paper argues that it would be useful and fulfilling to further explore constructive synergies between the work on faith and economy and feminist economics, and to continue to nurture and strengthen existing networks of church people, feminist economists and women's organisations and movements.

This paper has emphasised that achieving equity between women and men in paid work, and valuing and redistributing care work are intrinsic to the ecumenical vision of building just and sustainable communities. However, the major challenge for churches and feminist movements is not only to make the care economy visible and valuable, but also, and more importantly, to make justice, sustainability and caring for life the starting point for economic theory and practice. Churches and feminist economists believe that life-affirming values must be the driving force behind economic systems. Needless to say, such a transformation entails not only a change in mindsets, but also a change of heart, not least among the political and economic powers in the world today.





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