



SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY FROM A GENDER PERSPECTIVE

14 ISSUES TO TACKLE

At the major UN conferences of the nineties, the governments committed themselves to sustainable development, to combating poverty and environmental degradation and to respecting human rights and women's rights. In 1992, the central message of the Rio de Janeiro Agenda 21 was the concept of sustainability. Development can only be 'future compatible' if it embraces ecological, social and economic issues. But the message from Rio has also been that sustainability without a qualified participation of women, i.e. participation also in decision making, will not work. The 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing identified a dual track strategy to this end: empowerment on the one hand and gender mainstreaming, the systematic integration of a gender perspective in all institutions and policy areas, on the other.

In 1991, women from all over the world drew up their own agenda for the 21st century at the "World Women's Congress for a Healthy Planet" in Miami. The cornerstones of this agenda - a new code of environmental ethics, preserving biological and cultural diversity, justice between the North and the South, gender equity and justice, demilitarisation - have remained highly topical. In fact, if anything, globalisation over the past decade made them even more relevant. In spite of a number of successes scored on individual issues, the necessary process of reorienting and restructuring in terms of ecology and economics in the wake of the Rio Conference has yet to commence. Conventions that are binding in accordance with international law ranging from the conservation of biodiversity to the protection of social and ecological labour standards have still not been implemented.

In Johannesburg in August 2002, a new "World Summit for Sustainable Development" is to pinpoint the sustainability strategies for the future. On the way to Johannesburg, civil society groups world-wide will be appraising progress made in terms of sustainability and the credibility of governments and other players in society. The agenda for Johannesburg is still negotiable. With the issues mentioned in the following, the German NGO Women's Forum and the Working Group 'Women in the Forum Environment & Development want to outline topics that are central to the Johannesburg Conference from a gender perspective. They wish to position themselves and to identify the need and scope for action at various political levels.

One of their central concerns is to integrate social, economic and ecological issues and to bridge the existing fragmentation in sectors and political competencies. In the same way as the local, national and global level for action, the political micro, mezzo and macro level should be linked. The general framework for discourse is the economic globalisation, i.e. liberalization, privatization, commercialization and patenting of resources. The unpaid care work of women and the precautionary principle are systematically taken as points of reference in the argumentative discourse. Their demands are based on the understanding that the social and ecological crisis which will be debated in Johannesburg represents a problem of society which needs to be dealt with by societal changes.

1) Globalisation and sustainability

With economic liberalisation, the globalisation process has increased the predominance of economics since the Rio Conference. Growth, efficiency and profit-maximizing have been turned into guiding principles of development and elevated the market and commodity logic to the su-

preme rationality. The World Trade Organization (WTO) is creating a regime of order and rules for neo-liberal globalisation that gives priority to free trade rather than social rights and ecological rules. This is why WTO agreements are threatening environmental protection rules and ecological alternatives. They are counteracting social security and redistribution mechanisms. In this way, globalisation has increased social disparities and created new antagonisms between countries and within societies, between the rich and the poor, between a wealth of commodities and the destruction of nature.

Sustainability requires that the dogmas of commodification and marketing be scaled down and that the over-exploitation of natural and human resources as well as over-production and over-consumption be reduced. Economic growth and profit maximization have to be subordinated to sustainability, environmental protection and social justice. Liberalisation is not a suitable tool to this end. A re-regulation of the financial markets and trade (e.g. taxation on currency transactions to limit speculation and on kerosine), of labour and resource markets according to social and ecological standards is called for. Prices have to reflect the truth by integrating ecological and social costs. The convention proposed by NGOs on the accountability of transnational corporations has to be forwarded. Fair trade, "ethical" investments, socially and ecologically "clean" or resource-saving production patterns and companies oriented on equity ought to enjoy support e.g. through fiscal policies.

2) Peace, non-violence, human and women's rights

Peace is the most fundamental prerequisite for sustainability. The globalisation process over the last few years has been accompanied by an increasing degree of militarisation, a growth in legal and illegal arms trade and the internal and external rearmament of state enforcement systems. Armed conflicts and wars about power and resources destroy futures, human lives and the environment. Military force is not an appropriate means of combating terrorism and leaves its causes untouched.

However, peace also means freedom from violence against women, from violations of human rights and racism. Peace means respecting local and national sovereignty and respecting cultural and biological diversity. The future can only be based upon a culture of peace in all relations in society and vis-à-vis nature that all societal actors, above all including children and youths, have to learn, as well as a democratisation from below.

Sustainability requires addressing the social, economic and power-political causes of conflicts, violence and terror. Getting rid of inequalities and promoting democracy among countries, social classes, ethnic groups and gender is conflict prevention and the structural securing of peace. War must not be a means of politics. Instead, military expenditure has to be cut back, with funds emerging from this process being reallocated to non-violent forms of conflict resolution. Women are to participate democratically in negotiations and decision on peace, livelihood, and resources. Concepts of feminist research on peace and conflict as well as those from anti-violence programmes are to be integrated, while gender-specific causes of flight and migration are to be recognised, and support of female refugees and asylum seekers has to be increased.

3) Concepts of economy, care work and gender relations

Women are the Sisyphean workers for the future. Their looking after children, sick and elderly people, maintaining social relations, their work in food and health provision, cleaning and waste management secures the viability of societies and generates social capital. This care work represents an interface between social, economic and ecological aspects.

However, the present neo-classical concept of the economy focuses on the market and paid work. The work in the care economy is kept invisible, regarded as not productive and only paid for poorly or not at all. Since increases in productivity are hardly possible in this area, care and

services at a personal level are slipping into a crisis. The double burden women have to endure by paid work and care work remains their private problem, confronting many of them with a double scarcity: a lack of income and a lack of time.

Economic statistics have to adequately account for unpaid and paid labour, as has already been called for at the World Conference on Women in Beijing. Women need an infrastructure oriented by its social use and by care work as well as public institutions making provisions to secure livelihoods. Moreover, the fiscal and social systems have to treat women as independent economic subjects who have a right of their own to claim social support rather than as dependants of a man.

4) Securing survival without social exclusion and poverty

Globalisation is resulting in a growing integration of women into the market for paid work, but it is also creating new forms of economic and social exclusion. While skilled women find employment at middle levels, the majority of women in the global markets only get insecure, low-paid, flexible jobs. More women are migrating to the towns, export production zones or abroad to seek employment, or they are even trafficked into low-paid jobs or prostitution. Women and children are the jokers in the global underbidding competition. As prototypes of part-time and supply-workers, homeworkers and tele-workers, women provide the flexibilisation pool for the labour markets and above all work in precarious and insecure employment markets devoid of rights and social and ecological minimum standards. They are precisely the ones who have to bear the brunt of deregulation, and they are the majority of the working poor.

Women in the so-called informal sector need legal recognition and social security as well as opportunities to gain qualifications and to get organised. The feminisation of poverty has to be countered by checking in advance what the gender-relevant effects of austerity measures and structural adjustment programmes will be as well as a gender compatibility assessment of employment, flexibilisation and liberalisation measures. The ILO conventions on industrial health and safety standards, social security and ecological safety, on equal status of men and women and of migrant workers are to be boosted. Private companies, and above all transnational corporations, are to be made socially and ecologically responsible via re-regulation and codes of conduct. Self-determined, ecologically and socially integrative forms of economy at regional and local level that are beyond the capitalist world market economy have to supported.

5) Securing livelihoods and biodiversity by resource and gender justice

Sustainable and careful use is a method of preserving natural resources. Access to land, water, forests and biodiversity and control of these resources are the most important preconditions for securing the livelihoods of the majority of the population in the countries of the South. Most women in the South regard securing their social, natural and cultural livelihood as the central aspect to survival. While women hold considerable responsibility for the use of resources, they enjoy only little control of them. Privatisation of commons and public goods as well as patenting seeds and intellectual property deprives women of their resources, the cycles of local economies are disrupted and women's indigenous knowledge is devalued.

The privatisation of public utilities and infrastructure as well as basic public services, from garbage collection to water supply, creates new social disparities in access to resources and leads to more work in the care economy.

Resource and gender justice have to be linked with poverty eradication and environmental protection. Women need land rights, rights of access to forests and biodiversity, recognition of their indigenous knowledge and a right to information and further education. Conserving biodiversity and protection against bio-piracy by agro- and pharmaceutical corporations are pro-active ways of securing livelihoods. Access to clean water is a human right, and water has to remain a public good. No privatisation of public utilities!

6) Food sovereignty and health

Health provides the foundations for sustainability, and it depends to the utmost degree on the environment and social conditions. Just like food, it is one of the core responsibilities of women.

BSE has highlighted the life-threatening cul-de-sac of industrialised agriculture. Agro-poisons, the application of hormones and genetic engineering pose unacceptable health and environmental hazards. The pollution and over-fishing of the seas, rivers and lakes as well as aquacultures maintained with high levels of chemicals lead to further food insecurity. At the same time, highly subsidised imports from the industrialised countries are torpedoing smallholder agriculture and their markets in Southern countries.

A new direction in agriculture oriented on food and ecological security as well as regional cycles is in the interest of women as those who are responsible for food and health. Both the majority of women consumers and women smallholders reject green genetic engineering. In the countries of the South, the right to one's own seed and the use of indigenous know-how is of utmost importance to the women farmers and their role in the local economies. However, the WTO agreement on trade related aspects of intellectual property rights (TRIPs) promotes the patenting of indigenous knowledge, seeds and genetically modified organisms by transnational corporations in the agro- and pharmaceutical industries. People in the South are to pay for their medicinal plants, which they themselves have bred as cultivated plants, after the pharmaceutical corporations from the North have had their use patented or have genetically modified them. The issue of patents for drugs as final products is resulting in expensive monopolies and is excluding more and more people from the basic right to health.

The export subsidies of the industrialised countries for agricultural products are to be cancelled, and their markets are to be opened to products from countries in the South. Non-tariff trade obstacles must not undermine initiatives to open the markets of the industrialised countries. Exceptions from free trade and TRIPS rules are to be introduced in the WTO that guarantee food sovereignty in the countries of the South. The precautionary principle, e.g. protection from health hazards, has to be established in WTO agreements. The supply of affordable drugs to the poorer countries has to be ensured with licences. Ecological farming is to be promoted by a change in the agricultural policies. Forests, bodies of water and soils are to be protected against commercial over-exploitation. No to patenting of living organisms! No to genetically modified food!

7) Sustainability in urban, regional and traffic planning

Urban, regional and traffic planning treats care work as if it were an unlimited resource. It is not aimed at accessibility of locations which are, at the same time, compatible with environmental and social needs, the qualities of public areas, freedom to move in spite of structural male violence or meeting housing requirements and the provision of decentralised infrastructure for everyday life. Instead, they create the compulsion to motorise, subject public areas to car traffic, necessitate an additional labour and back-up transport and hamper quality standards in supplies. The requirements of women resulting from their needs of coping with day-to-day life and their work in two economic areas are ignored just as much as rural areas and the urban periphery.

Urban, regional and traffic planning which aims at avoiding traffic, as well as infrastructure and transport policies oriented on everyday life in society are a public responsibility. Binding minimum standards are required to prevent the privatisation of public transport from putting a strain on social conditions and the environment in the long run. Generating traffic at the expense of private households, e.g. through problematic entrepreneurial locational policies, has to be reduced by using regulatory policy instruments along the lines of the preventive and polluter principle. The myths about transport technology and high-speed transport are to

be exposed. Impact and compatibility studies aimed at reducing gender discrimination as well as gender budgets are to be introduced for all means of transport.

8) Gender mainstreaming in climate protection

Since Rio, climate protection has been right at the top of the international agenda for the environment. However, in the industrialised countries, it is turning into a plaything for power interests, serving above all as an instrument to identify loopholes in the agreements. Instead of haggling for percentages in CO₂ reduction and instead of a mere sectoral perspective, more fundamental changes to existing economic structures and patterns of consumption are required. Accordingly, primary entry point in the industrialised countries would be the reduction of energy consumption in various fields of application (mobility, housing, production).

North-South equity has been receiving more and more attention in the international debate on climate protection, while inequalities at national level, including gender discrimination, have so far remained ignored. One reason for this is that, throughout the world, women are extremely under-represented in the field of energy and climate protection. Like in all technology-oriented areas, there is a lack of gender-related data, analyses and research. However, what has been clearly established is the lower level of acceptance among women of high-risk technologies such as the use of nuclear power in comparison to men. In addition, the energy sector is characterised by a strong segregation. On the one side, there is the highly-valued (male-dominated) area of technical potentials to economise, and on the other, there is economising by behavioural patterns which tends to be valued less, but often results in an increasing workload for women.

A gender-disaggregated data basis in the area of climate change has to be compiled regarding causes and responsibilities on the one hand, and the consequences and solution strategies on the other. Gender research in the area of climate protection, especially energy, is to be promoted, and insights already available on the gender-specific impact of, and preferences in, climate protection and energy concepts are to be systematically integrated into the international negotiations. However, much more fundamentally, a restructuring of production, consumer patterns and lifestyles among the consume oriented middle classes worldwide, but above all in the countries of the North, has finally to be initiated: nothing more and nothing less than what the industrialised countries already committed themselves to in Rio.

9) The Local Agenda 21 and gender issues

Over the past few years, the participation of women in the Local Agenda processes has been growing. Today, there are hardly any communities that can afford to neglect the “women’s issue”. However, women are subordinated to the category of “social issues”, and this is also the category they assign themselves to, which leaves the “hard” issues to men. Instead, the Local Agenda should really be a prime example of gender mainstreaming, of integrating a gender perspective into all political measures, processes and decisions. But this is not what is happening. On the contrary, it is (almost) exclusively women who are dealing with gender issues, while everyone else is carrying on with business as usual.

The integration of gender issues into all thematic areas of the Local Agenda 21 must not depend solely on the goodwill of individuals but has to be specifically targeted. A political signal is needed. At the same time, networking and the exchange of experience among women active in the Agenda processes need to be promoted. Regional and national centres have to be created at which contents and structures can be discussed.

10) Redistribution of social and environmental responsibility

As a consequence of the restructuring processes taking place in the context of neo-liberal globalisation governments are increasingly withdrawing from their genuine social responsibilities. Public services are being privatised and either handed over to the market, or responsibility for them is passed on to the private households, which above all means to the women. There is a

trend towards feminising social responsibility – ranging from bringing up of children to the care of Aids patients and looking after the elderly – as well as environmental responsibility – from sorting of waste (e.g. in Germany) to planting tree saplings in the countries of the South. Women function as airbags for the world-wide cutback in government social services. At the same time, the gender-specific division of labour among men and women is hardly changing.

Concrete political measures have to be taken to counter the feminisation of social and ecological responsibility. Along the lines of social and environmental justice as well as the polluter principle, a compensation for costs and efforts has to be made among the various players in society, but also among nations at international policy level. There must be no separation of “efficiency for the men” from “sufficiency for the women”.

11) Sustainability policy as structural policy

So far, environmental, development and gender policy goals have not been integrated institutionally. The responsibility for environmental projects run by women is usually referred to the Equal Rights Offices. In sectoral development programmes in the South women have been mobilised as a cheap protection and cleaning gang without sectoral development being redesigned to meet environmental and gender requirements. Environmental protection is reduced to technological and eco-efficiency approaches, and end-of-pipe strategies. So far, social security concepts and women’s programmes have mainly been annexed to macro-economic programmes to cushion the impact of economic crises and impoverishment.

Policies for social and ecological sustainability have to be structural policies at all political levels and need to be established as cross-sectoral tasks. Sustainability strategies have to be integrated into macro-economic structures, international political programmes and concepts to eradicate poverty right from the start. Environmental protection, social justice and the dismantling of gender hierarchies have to be linked up already at the macro-level in terms of systematic institutional and content wise integration. Instead of imposing a universal concept of economic stabilisation and growth, country and region specific requirements and diverse contexts ought to be decisive for development and sustainability strategies.

12) Concepts of nature and gender relations

Feminist scientists criticise the relation between humankind and nature being based on a logic of domination and exploitation that shapes both the understanding of nature and the relation between society and nature as well as the natural and engineering sciences. This is precisely the causal element of today’s global environmental crisis.

In the concepts of sustainability developed so far, these relationships with nature are hardly addressed, insights from a gender perspective are ignored, and, by and large, a blockade prevents the adoption of feminist approaches.

Knowledge based on experience and research about the links between the concept of nature, the social and economic order and gender relations have to be integrated both into science and at political level. This is a precondition for sustainability policy to achieve a breakthrough with regard to social and gender discrimination and the destructive way in which nature and the environment are treated.

13) Gender impact assessment and gender budgets as precautionary instruments

Agenda 21 of Rio and the Platform for Action of the 4th World Conference on Women demand that the impact of environment and development policy measures on women and men be assessed. The Gender Impact Assessment instrument was developed to identify potential effects of political decisions and strategies on gender relations. However, with regard to environmental policy and sustainability research, methods of establishing their impact on women and assess-

ing gender-relevant effects have so far hardly been tested or applied. This also applies to the Gender Budget instrument, which is aimed at breaking down revenue and expenditure of government, local authority and institutional budgets in terms of how they relate to gender and analysing their potential to boost or weaken gender hierarchies.

Gender Impact Assessment has to be applied with binding effect both in the development of sets of legal and political guidelines and in environmental and development research. Gender Budgeting should also be introduced at various levels as an instrument to establish transparency and support analysis and planning. Both instruments can operate preventively and contribute to restructuring politics and research on the environment, development and sustainability with a view to deconstructing gender hierarchies.

14) Women's empowerment and gender mainstreaming

Sustainable development cannot be achieved without the empowerment of women, in particular their participation in planning and decision making. This insight was gained at the UN Conferences in Rio de Janeiro and Beijing. There is still a "glass ceiling" for women in all environment and development related sectors. While they are active on a day-to-day basis at grassroots level, the more the level of action includes technical, scientific or political elements, the more it is dominated by men.

Empowerment of women implies two aspects: on the one hand, participating in decision-making and planning processes and getting a share of the power to make decisions within political, economic and scientific institutions. On the other, scope for networking and co-operation enabling a gender-sensitive discourse on sustainability and the adoption of an autonomous position.

Gender mainstreaming has to be established everywhere, both in terms of institutions and contents. The independent quest of women for gender equitable strategies for sustainability has to be reliably secured by financial and institutional resources. Networking of civil society at national and international level is indispensable in this context. This is why network projects on "global structural policy from a gender perspective" and "gender equity and environmental sustainability" have to be set up and financed at federal level.

NRO-Frauenforum
Moserstr.10
70182 Stuttgart
www.nro-frauenforum.de

AG Frauen im Forum Umwelt & Entwicklung
Am Michaelshof 8-10
53177 Bonn
www.forumue.de

February 2002