

## The Economic man needs an Economic Woman - Transforming economic structures



*By Ewa Larsson, president of the organization Green Women in Sweden, social scientist, teacher in the Rudolf Steiner tradition, earlier a member of the Swedish Parliament, Full Professional Member of the Green Economics Institute of Oxford.*

***At the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, a common Platform for Action was adopted. The main chapter of the Platform was divided into twelve sections outlining different strategies. One such strategy concerned Women and the environment; another was Women and the economy. Green Women Sweden wants to connect the women's movement with male power over the economic structures and decision making.***

The section on women and the environment highlights the central role of women as bearers of life and providers for their families. The section on the economy described the unpaid work of women as a labor that no country in the world could do without. These two aspects are completely intertwined, since women normally do not get paid to give birth to children or to assume responsibility for their upbringing. In Africa, for example, women produce eighty percent of the food but own only one percent of the land. Moreover, women are presently being evicted from their land by landowners who wish to launch large scale production of food and agro fuels aimed at export markets.

A key problem is that neither the underlying causes nor the consequences of the current economic ideas are paid much attention. Today, speculative flows take place on a greedy, unbridled market, where human rights apply only to those with economic power. What is more, these rights are not tied to any obligations.

- We argue that the current economic structures must be transformed.
- We work to shift the UN focus from women as victims to women as active participants.
- We maintain that gender inequality is one of the causes of climate change.
- We consider gender budgeting and gender quotas to be useful tools.
- We suggest an economic model that can be used to evaluate social development.
- We claim that corporate boards should be held accountable for their actions.

**Despite the fact that the contemporary economic calculations are outdated,** we continue along old lines. A car accident followed by an emergency rescue operation still leaves a positive mark on the GDP. An accident creates work, since a new car must be produced or an old car repaired, while injured persons need healthcare. Whether the car trip was necessary in the first place is not considered, nor are the carbon dioxide emissions. The destruction of potential agricultural land through road constructions is similarly unaccounted for, as is the suffering and possible work impairment resulting from the accident. The knowledge acquired by the injured parties through education and life experiences is also left out of the economic calculation. The same goes for their parents' investments and effort in bringing up their children. As the following example shows, these deficiencies can be remedied through a transformed budgeting process. If some consumers (i.e. women) request a more extended network of public transports in order to avoid car trips, this is made visible in a gender budget, where investments are compared to actual, gender specific demand. Such changes in behavior may have positive health effects by encouraging people to walk or go by bicycle more often, which in turn improves the environment by reducing carbon dioxide emissions.

**Through gender budgeting,** it becomes possible to attribute economic value to transformations of this kind. A lifestyle that improves health and does not impair the environment should be rewarded. A number of interesting options could be contemplated in this regard, not all of them necessarily involving money.

*We suggest a holistic economic model to evaluate human development, social development and environment impact for a living planet.*

**For centuries, economic theory has been developed by men, for men.** Aggregate values and processes such as investments, production and consumption have generally not been analyzed in terms of individuals and individual choices; thus, they have been perceived as non gender. The study of the economy in society as a whole – macroeconomics – has generally been considered a gender neutral field, with “the economic man” as the norm. In the 1930's, John Maynard Keynes explained how this male prototype made informed decisions based on full knowledge of the existing alternatives. In case of a sudden imbalance between supply and demand, the state should intervene to solve the problem. Our economic system basically still rests on the same assumption. In the transformative process required by the holistic approach, this perspective must be complemented with a notion of the “economic woman”.

The economist Hazel Henderson introduced a broader perspective on the human being and her available choices in her book *Building a Win-Win World* (1996). Henderson presented an economic model in the shape of a cake. The large piecrust at the bottom is Mother Earth, the basic condition of all forms of life. Then there is a thick layer of unpaid work and a heavy coat of affective labor and services. Trade, industry and banks represent a minor part of the cake, while the icing on top consists of monetary transactions. The icing is unimaginable without the base, this holistic perspective is still lacking. It was only a few years ago, when Al Gore presented his views on the state of the world (in a traditional, patriarchal, Anglo-Saxon way), that environmental issues were squarely put on the political agenda. But the totality, i.e. the interrelations of the economy, the environment and gender equality, is still not understood and communicated as a single and needed context.

It's time to breaking down the old mental obstacles in order to have a gender equal and sustainable development based on a holistic way of thinking.

# Humans – A Resource

For me, the human being is central. The sectoral divisions of society with its nurturing and draining activities are interwoven and related to the wellbeing of several generations.

The Bruntland commission set the objective in 1987 by defining sustainable development:

**"Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs"**

- Who then defines the needs of the present and determines what the needs of future generations are?

**In the optimal growth scenario**, humans and nature are generally considered objects to be used on the market. Industrial production gets very close to the individual through advertising and the media – and affects conditions for life. Tailor made advertisements via the personality design of Google and a constant advertising column for all those who interact on Facebook are accepted as something normal. Unclear structures and lack of rules for how the industrial society produces the goods that are consumed, the origin of the goods or its components, possible child labor, emissions into land and water, safe working conditions and wages, lack of possibilities to join labor organizations – all benefit short term thinking and irresponsibility. Uncertainty about who benefits from what and who are the winners and losers in the end seem to be accepted or only marginally requested. Consumption in itself seems to be the essential. *Countries measure GDP with each other through internationally sanctioned entities, whose is the largest?* In spite of all the awareness of the fact that welfare and long term environmental effects are not included among the factors of GDP, the measurement continues to be used. Most people today know that traffic accidents, nuclear plants accidents, floods, etc. still result in a plus in the traditional GDP measurement. The requirement voiced by Green movements to mark products with countries of origin and contents are met by marginal changes of declarations of content.

**In the socially fair scenario**, the democratic participation of the individual is considered a key function in relation to development. Here is a contradiction in comparison with the free market basic assumption, where humans and nature are merely production inputs. They can be seen as values of partial functions. But democratic interactive participation also requires responsibility in order to become sustainable. Underlying assumptions are gender inequality and non equal opportunities, which persist but which are not accounted for alongside the mantra of increased growth as the great solution to all problems. In the short run, (undefined) growth can solve problems through increased consumption, but in the long run create societal problems in the form of environmental destruction, increased wage differences and individual problems such as work related injuries. Both social barriers and environmental damages have increased since 1987, when measurable sustainability objectives were introduced globally. Women's movements and the environmental movements have increasingly voiced their demands for change.

**Green economists in Europe emphasize** investments in green jobs. The examples are primarily expansions of public transportation systems and energy efficient housing. The answers to increased demand of energy are technical development, energy efficiency and investments in renewable energy. *But a green transformation in the production line does not reduce income differences and poverty automatically, just because it is green.* To formulate economics strategies for a green development without suggesting rules of the game for an equal and fair practical implementation is not sustainable. **The patriarchal structures as such**, in which we all operate and where opposites are emphasized, are not clearly analyzed in the green economy or within green parties.

**Women's movements** primarily work with demanding the woman's right to her own body, sexual and reproductive health. Of those more than one billion women living in extreme poverty, we find more than 700 million in the countryside. Of the 925 million people living in constant hunger, 60 percent are women. We also know that women perform two thirds of all labor in the world, but their earnings are only ten percent of the world's income and own only one percent of the world's assets. That is our starting-point when we demand immediate transformation of economic structures. *We demand that equality and justice carry the same weight as environmental considerations when new rules for trade and exchange of services are formulated.* It is absolutely astonishing that those who are responsible for the wrecked capitalism still have not understood that **women and men must develop and decide about the world and our future together.**

The organization **Green Women** presents an economic model based on different ingredients about how to live a good life. In this model, *knowledge about equality is integrated in the general education. Possibilities for self realization based on basic needs are considered the pillars of a sustainable economy.* These principles relate to human development through a good life and enable a respectful interaction between individuals, animals and nature in general. The individual is the central starting-point and an interactive player. With the human being in the center, human growth becomes an objective.

**The ingredients are:**

- *Controlling your own options*
- *Taking responsibility and being aware of consequences of your actions, that your actions lead to environmental balance*
- *Being able to develop competence that lead to hope and belief in the future*
- *Having choices that coincide with your visions*
- *Having spiritual freedom and cultural integrity*
- *Being socially respected*
- *Having possibilities of political and civil participation*
- *Understanding your relationship with and dependence of all and everything*
- *Having possibilities of a good health, security and safety*
- *Having the possibilities of personal satisfaction*
- *Being able to participate in production*
- *Having the freedom of trade and exchange of services with others.*

It is thus fundamental that the human is "maximized" and seen above the material.

Today's society considers increased personal consumption a prerequisite for economic and societal growth. *When the human is free from her role as a consumer, completely new objectives and visions appear as possibilities.*

**Traditional politic parties** want to govern a society which accepts maximization of profits at all levels of society, based on an old, outdated and unsustainable economic theory, in turn based on a reality that never existed. This is not possible, which is realized by more and more people. Some of those who make money on today's production of goods and organized trade feel threatened by and are afraid of losing their control and their markets. Simultaneously others hurry to reorganize their production to become more climate friendly, envisaging increased market shares and profits. *But the basic prerequisites for the common rules of the game require an extended responsibility.* Otherwise there will be nothing left for future generations and their needs.

**Transition** takes place through work and green jobs takes on a new meaning for a sustainable economy when the social dimension is given the same value as the economic and ecological dimensions. *An equal and just holistic perspective of goods and labor can lead to making green jobs as jobs for all.* The interaction between individuals in the society becomes essential. *I call that a green feminist economic development, sustainable today and sustainable for future generations.*

Thus, **the basic economic structures** need to be reformed, transformed. Women leave smaller ecological footprints than men. Women have a more sustainable life style not only because they are the poorest and own the least, but because they perform all the unpaid labor that a society cannot live without. *Women are the role models in the transition towards a sustainable society.* Women must be able to an active part in the work on their own terms; affirmative action as gender quotas is a tool for rapid implementation of this principle. Another tool is gender budgeting which shows how and what is benefitted by the budget; the direction becomes clear. All the different parameters mentioned above should be considered when money is to be distributed. One example is: does the investment have an impact on social respect? The consequences are evident for those who work and for the environment. Who work and who benefit from the investment in the short and long run? It is really self-evident things that will make it more fun to work, produce and trade. The role of being a consumer will change when the value of every product means added values for others in the whole production chains. In matter of fact the attitude to life will change and both the humans and the earth will be rehabilitated.

## **I state that gender equality is a precondition for sustainably development**

This platform for the discussion is that the current economic structures must be transformed in an equal and sustainably way. We asked the question if gender inequality could be one of the causes of climate change. Together we discuss how we could shift the UN focus on women from victims to gender equal participants in the transforming process?

Tree main points for the table:

1. Gender inequality is one of the causes of climate change and the UN focus has to shift from women as victims to women as active participants in all measures and activities to reach a sustainable future. Women have to be in the discussion.
2. The current economic structures should be transformed into a more holistic model taking into account the ecological base and social development. Gender equality is a precondition for sustainability.
3. There is a need for political commitment. Gender budgeting and gender quotas should be considered to be useful tools and has to be implemented.

Other remarks:

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**We have to promote women controlling their own bodies.** This is very important in order to prevent governments to control the population in a top down way. More than 200 million women do not want to get pregnant but lack access to effective contraceptive methods. Women must have the

right and be able to decide for themselves whether and when to have children. This would also grant better access to education and employment, which in turn would strengthen their economic and social possibilities to run for posts in elections. When women are allowed to fully partake in the economic development of a country, this is to the advantage of the entire transformation needed to combat the climate change.

**There are increasing number of obstacles** to women's right to education and sexual and reproductive health. One such obstacle is religious fundamentalism. In some countries, fundamentalist movements want to enforce Islamic Sharia law, abolish education for women and force women have children at a young age. In Poland, where the church was separated from the state already in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, legal amendments are underway to curb women's right to abortion even further. In parts of India, women are deemed inferior; women are even treated like commercial goods that must obey their husbands and are not allowed freedom of movement in society. In Saudi Arabia, women are not allowed to show any parts of their bodies in public. In Sweden, there are illiterate immigrant women who are secluded in their own homes in the name of honor.

**There would be fewer corruptions** with more women in power positions in the whole world. Reports from Rwanda, the country with the most gender equal parliament in the world, says that women follow the laws and do what they have said that they should do. Is that a fairy-tale? True is that Swedish men behave better and produce higher quality in gender equal working places.

**Human is the recourse.**

At the workshop a report will be presented including this material and some more. We will put it on our webpage the week before Rio+20 translated in to English and Spanish. Ewa Larsson, the author.  
[www.gronakvinnor.se](http://www.gronakvinnor.se)