

ROUNDTABLE:

The economic man needs an economic woman - transforming economic structures

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At the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, a Platform for Action was adopted. The Platform was divided into twelve sections outlining different strategies. One 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. In Africa, for example, women produce eighty percent of the food but own only one percent of the land. 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.

Despite the fact that the contemporary economic calculations are outdated, we continue along old lines.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 is not considered, nor are the carbon dioxide emissions. 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. 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. 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. But the totality, i.e. the interrelations of the economy, the environment and gender equality, is still not communicated as a single and needed context.

Green Women Sweden is working on breaking down the old mental obstacles in order to have a gender equal and sustainable development based on a holistic way of thinking and for political decision-making based on real values. Outlines of this program will be detailed further in a paper to be presented at the conference in Rio+20.

Panelists:

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Eva Hallstrom