



World Social Forum 2009

Women and the Right to Livelihoods

**Our Land, Our Water, Our
Forests, Our Livelihoods**



Photo from Trust and Community Outreach and Education, South Africa

PWESCR, in collaboration with a host of other organisations working on women and livelihoods as part of the Gender Equality Coalition of the Human Dignity and Human rights Caucus, organised a series of events recently at the World Social Forum (WSF), January 2009. This report provides an overview of the events and will feed into a planning meeting on the next phase for work on this issue in early March 2009.



A. Women's Right to Livelihoods: Addressing Development and Displacement

PWESCR, in collaboration with Habitat International Coalition (HIC), organised this lively event, with input on diverse issues of livelihoods and the ways in which development and displacement have violated women's rights to livelihoods. Participants ranged between 80- 100 throughout the session and many responded positively, expressing interest in joining the collective on Women and the Right to Livelihoods.



*Priiti Darooka,
PWESCR*

Priiti Darooka, Executive Director of PWESCR, introduced the session, detailing various issues connected to livelihoods and women.

She considered, "As collectively we start talking about livelihoods to be recognised as a human right, we need to get a more inclusive understanding of what we mean by livelihoods: issues connected with land, water, forest, right to food, food security, income security and so on. So the first step in building up this network is building up a common understanding of what we mean by women's right to livelihoods."

A number of experienced activists and practitioners then spoke on their insights on different interconnected aspects of livelihoods as a human right for women. A broad picture of women and the right to livelihoods emerged from the discussion, closely connected to the right to a dignified life. Speakers captured the essence in different ways, whether in terms of self-sufficiency, the means of production or life itself, but Lanh (Vietnam) captured it powerfully in her opening, *“Livelihood is every human right. This concept is in our heart, it is a culture, it is land and it is the environment. It is the basics of our human existence.”*

What is clear is that Livelihoods for Women is not a new issue, it is about issues women have been mobilising around for decades - land, water, forests, indigenous peoples' rights, climate change, displacement etc. However there is a pressing need for focus on livelihoods as a right in the context of the deepening crisis of capitalism and its dramatic impact on livelihood related rights for women around the world. Viewing the different aspects as part of a greater issue and addressing them in a more holistic way has tremendous power. For example, Gigi Francisco highlighted, *the link between women's economic empowerment and food security is women's livelihoods.*” The elements speakers focused on can be grouped into three areas:

- (1) The right to food, agriculture, food security and food sovereignty**, which begins and ends with the right to life. It covers a range of concerns from: food security; struggles to use local, organic products and regain control of seeds; loss of work; massive displacement of the indigenous; agrarian reform and State withdrawal from agriculture; destruction caused by the agro-business of the rural economy and environment; and the invisible role of women as workers in agriculture.
- (2) Natural resources: Land, Water and Forests**
Displacement, land, water, forest and environmental issues are central to this theme. In particular speakers highlighted the loss of resources, such as land to monocultures, the impact of destruction of forests, the privatisation of natural resources and the abuse of natural resources by multinational corporations (*MNCs*), particularly in the presence of State alignment with *MNCs*.
- (3) Education, skills, work, markets and credits**
This covers issues of productive resources & access to resources, crossing concerns in the labour markets and markets for selling goods. Discrimination in and conditions of work in all sectors is central as is women's role in social reproduction, in particular recognition of work, generating employment, employment security and equal wages. The invisibility of women in work and persistent images of women as supporters rather than actors in work are also important. Finally trade liberalisation and agro-business ventures, as well as the use of market mechanisms to solve environmental problems, in particular new markets in biodiversity and carbon were also highlighted as key issues.

Issues concerning trade liberalisation, MNCs and migration cut across all three areas. In the discussion however, it was clear that all aspects concerning women and livelihoods overlap significantly and are deeply inter-related. This also made evident the importance of finding a comprehensive response based on a common and holistic analysis.

Further detail of the speakers' input follows.

1. Sônia Costa

Sônia Costa, Director President of FIAN Brazil and human rights lawyer, explored issues connected with land eviction from a livelihoods perspective. She highlighted the contrast between law and reality: with solid constitutional recognition and non-discriminatory legislation on the one hand, and widespread discrimination in practice concerning women and children on the other. Sônia confirmed that women are more concerned about issues of livelihood and vital conditions of life. By way of illustration, she discussed the fight for agrarian reform in Brazil and success in achieving the right to land for women. In particular however, she drew attention to macro issues of violence through this struggle and its consequences, which impact women (who stay behind) the most.



Panel

Sônia Costa

She discussed recent government attention on providing access to resources for implementation projects of agriculture and other means of livelihood. In this however, there remain persistent issues related to low level of means of production and difficulty of access, also linked to payment of interests. What is missing, Sônia argued, is more and stronger public policies and a sense that the government can assure us dignified livelihoods and access to the means of production to our women. Concerning women and their family livelihood, an issue that must be redressed is women being seen as a helper rather than a protagonist, despite the significant work they actually do. Trade matters are also seen as the responsibility of men as is managing resources. In the urban context, women have more experience and education than men, especially over the last decade with higher female access to university, but this is not always a logical consequence of equality and work market. The reality is that women earn 35% less than men. Sônia cited these as areas for redress in women's right to livelihoods.

Environmental destruction, and in particular agrofuels cause other kinds of violations, particularly to the poor, leading to much displacement and direct consequences to women, including prostitution. Displacement for water, particularly through hydroelectric dams was also highlighted. Sonia discussed a recent FIAN study on agrofuels, which showed the dynamics of women's marginalisation by society and their insertion in the informal economy. Migration of men to work in other regions also leaves women suffering the hardest consequences by being left alone. Finally, Sônia felt that redress strategies should focus on structural and inclusive public policies.

2. Ana Filipini

Ana Filipini from the World Rainforest Movement (Uruguay) shared her experiences and insights concerning natural resources, displacement and women's livelihoods. This theme she exclaimed: *"is invisible – invisible as women are in this world. We work hard, we speak out. But we don't get heard. It looks like we are invisible for men and women, for all society, that we don't even work. Our men and women are using their land, their water, the forests, everywhere in the world. People need to start realising why they are losing their resources, their land – to monocultures in particular. This invisibility happens because of all governments from all countries have decided to have the same policies as the companies - for themselves."*

Ana explained how big business companies have been making huge money on human cost for more than 500 years, taking our money, forest, water and land. These companies failed to recognise the people on the land, instead killing them, sexually violating women and using and keeping the land for themselves. Now, such traditional owners must ask the federal government for small tracts of this land for themselves. She shared some stories from women on their experiences of the forest:

- Argereiro women in Paraguay: "We know the forests. We use what the forests offer. We protect the forests. We are ushers and guardians of the forests. We care about them."
- Women in Thailand: "The forests are very important to us, it is from the forests that we gather our fruit, water, and food basically. We also have animals and birds."
- Argentinean women: "It is from the forest that we have fire, medical plants and herbs. It is also from the forest that we are able to develop good agriculture."
- Ayelli women from Cameroon: "We love the forest because it is fresh there. We are not scared by the forest and we have lots of fun over there. I don't know if you noticed that the kids here they have lots of fun in the forest and water. I would like to join them sometimes."
- Cambodian women – "we have so many funny things to do in the forest."

Stories were also shared by the Mapucho women from Chile on consequences of plantations, a worldwide phenomenon: "We don't have any more water since the plantation was installed. We don't have any more water to drink or to wash our clothes; there are no more fruit and vegetables any more. We are so afraid of the man of the big business companies, we women, we don't have work any more and the work they give us

is so hard.” In closing, Ana stressed: “What is important now is a decision to stand up in order to achieve livelihood. We have the right to livelihoods and we have to unite. We have to create and strengthen networks of women, of men, of all those who are interested in defending the basic right of livelihood.”



Gigi Francisco

Ana Filipino

Rukmini Rao

3. Tran Thi Lanh

Tran Thi Lanh of the Social Policy Ecology Research Institute (Vietnam) continued the discussion, drawing on her work with mining MNCs. She felt strongly that “Livelihood is every human right. This concept is in our heart, it is a culture, it is land and it is the environment. It is the basics of our human existence.” She denounced the fact that our current existence benefits only very few individuals – the capitalists of oil, hydroenergy, mining and plantations. This 1% capitalist population own 80% of the earth’s natural resources. Speaking on behalf of the Mekong countries, she condemned the hydropower companies owning the largest dams in the region who are destroying the fish, native birds and wild life, and depriving women from using their intellectual knowledge and capacity. “They are stealing resources from 30 million people: a million hectares of forest and land – it disappears.” The MNCs are avoiding taxes and making profit off nature and people, entrenching their own power and ensuring that poor people are further excluded.

Lanh advocated for priority focus on the Amazon and Mekong regions, the Middle East and Central America to stop the capitalist advance before it is too late. To do this she called for maximising power of the local and international media and the internet as well as tapping into local languages and local customary law for solutions. She felt a need to move from UN focus to build local movements and actions to rise against MNC power.

4. Rukmini Rao

Rukmini Rao of Gramya Resource Center for Women¹ (India) centred discussion on the right to life, which she saw at the core of women and livelihoods. She noted the desperation of starving farmers, committing suicide in massive numbers in India because of rising debt. Rukmini shared a number of consequences of industrialised agriculture, such as loss of work, dumping of western foods and use of industrial chemicals and pesticides rather than organic manure.

She shared some innovative ways that women are carving out livelihoods for themselves despite the challenges. She detailed how very poor Dalit women in India have made livelihoods possible for themselves, growing food that *they* want to grow, demonstrating that they can maintain food sovereignty. Specifically, she said, “Poor women have demonstrated that biodiversity is life. With some help from outside, they have improved their soil. Instead of getting external inputs, they use their own manure, they keep control of their own seeds, and keep control of the markets. This provides an alternative to MNCs, which sell us our own water, our own potatoes, our own clothes which women weave at home. In this way, women can create employment for themselves. In industrialised societies like the UK, 100 acres of land is farmed by one man and one machine. Our women, from countries of the Global South, generate 100 days of work over this land, securing enough money and food to feed their families.”

Rukmini also discussed dumping in the Global South as a consequence of global trade. She decried the \$US 80 billion profit of North American farmers in 2008 and the \$US 1 billion a day government subsidy they received, while the Indian demand for government farmer subsidies goes unheard. Rukmini claimed, “They should not give money for pesticides and chemical fertilisers: that money has to come to women to grow their own manure, to dig their own wells, to have their own water and to manage their own seeds. Instead of going to the supermarket to buy food crops, women have generated work for themselves by this action and strengthening their cooperatives.” She urged that we must take control of our resources. To empower the movement for women’s right to livelihoods, Rukmini called for stronger campaigns to force our governments to support our people. At the international level, she also sought the dismantling of the WTO.

Rukmini finally spoke of the mass displacement of indigenous people, being only 8% of the countries’ population, but 50% of the people displaced. When people are threatened with displacement, our demand is land for land. Here she highlighted the success of campaigns in India, which led to legislation that allows indigenous people to farm in forest areas that they owned traditionally. Rukmini concluded in a plea for greater attention to traditional knowledge to take us forward: *“There is tremendous knowledge and women and men are holding this knowledge. We have to learn from them and we have to find a way of continuing to conserve and preserve the forest. Women have said no to plantations, we want to grow our own trees, our own medicinal plants and our own fodder. Women’s ideology now is not only to care for me and my family, it is also to care*

¹ And Board Member of Deccan Development Society; Core Committee Member of Sangat and South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication.

for the animals around us and for all of nature. So women's right to livelihood, it really means the right to life for all."

5. Gigi Francisco

As last speaker, Gigi Francisco of DAWN (Philippines) considered the macro forces that impact all issues raised by speakers, and in particular the international trade regime and the struggle against trade liberalisation. She said that the right to livelihood is not a new issue, with women raising it for a long time in relation to other issues and struggles. Gigi reaffirmed that, "the link between women's economic empowerment and food security is women's livelihoods. Women's livelihoods were also central to the struggle of peasant farmers over the right to land and the struggle of indigenous peoples over ancestral domains. However a particular campaign on women's right to livelihood as a human right may be understood in the context of an explosion of claims for rights unleashed by the deepening crisis of capitalism."

It has been established without doubt that trade liberalisation in agriculture poses threats to peoples livelihoods and food security. The shift to export oriented crops plus the entry of cheap foods is redefining the system of farming in rural areas. This raises more problems for the sustainability of women's livelihoods and food security in the community. Gigi also insisted that women's livelihoods is very much about women's work. Women's work in the agriculture sector is both found in production and social production (care of the family). One cannot separate the two because production, such as women's farming activities, is simply seen as an extension of their housework or taken for granted as support for men's incomes. However, there are two human beings active in production everywhere in society and women hold the sole knowledge of many sustainable production practices that we can learn from.



Putting it into the larger context, Gigi explained that "to understand women's livelihoods, we need to situate our analysis in the triangular relationship among (1) land rights systems, (2) rural labour markets; and (3) intra-family production and consumption

systems. This is not a new proposition but has never been taken up seriously by our analysis for alternatives. In this light, access to credit through micro credit for women for livelihoods begins to fall seriously short of demands for a right to livelihoods for women. Micro finance is necessary but supports only a small part and can weaken women's position if not situated within a larger analysis of the rural system. This framework also raises questions about government programmes that support farmer control contra farming that links specific communities to the supply chain of MNCs. This is also very limiting and can lead to a strengthening of dominant MNC: it will defeat our real struggle for women's livelihoods, food security and economic empowerment of all people. Gigi suggested that "instead we need to situate our analysis and campaign on women's right to livelihood in the context of the larger struggle against the free trade regime in particular to link the rights of women to livelihoods with the emerging force of global resistance against dominant agro-business corporations that are destroying women's livelihoods, destroying our rural economies and homogenising our production around the supply chain which give them more profit but make people more hungry."

Discussion

In discussion, participants raised various other issues and shared some of their experiences concerning women and livelihoods. Ronnie Hall (Global Forest Coalition and Friends of the Earth) raised the new problem concerning the use of market mechanisms to solve environmental problems, in particular new markets in biodiversity and carbon. The consequences of this for women are less land, less rights to land and less capital. With their increased dependence than men on forests for food and medicines, privatisation of these and sale to markets will deprive women of access and no means to now buy these commodities they need. She discussed a further problem involving the sudden interest of men in sustainable forest resource management, taking over roles of women when large amounts of money are suddenly involved or embedded in these processes. Such projects are very difficult to participate in, requiring money to invest, technical capacity, legal know how and a good understanding of whatever language is used. Women must be empowered with this knowledge to effectively participate.

In moving the debate to possible solutions, Priiti questioned what role can the State play in guaranteeing the human right to livelihoods? What would we like the government to do to protect livelihoods. Ana Filipino argued that the role of the State in community support is essential. The problem we have now is that the State is supporting companies and not people. Major companies have many possibilities for facilities that none of us have and now they find themselves in crisis. What does the Brazilian government do, for example in the Aracruz case – is give US\$ two billion of the people's money to save the Aracruz company. We have never got any support from any governmental level. Governments must cut company privileges immediately, stop giving companies land without requiring land payment and taxes: they must stop offering privileges to MNCs and start offering them to the people. Ana also felt the United Nations (*UN*) should be taken to account: the UN is complicit in what is happening: "I would call them criminals. I dare to call them criminals because they keep doing more and more business using people. But, this is another story." On the other side, she also felt that we need to build and use more effectively initiatives like cooperatives and the solidarity economy.

Rukmini also offered some suggestions. She focused more on strategies required by the people to pressure the government to respond in ways that meet these demands and that little real change will happen until that pressure is there: “peoples’ organisations and movements must force our governments to act, we need our lobbies pressuring governments in our states, in the EU, everywhere.” She added, we have demanded and now are getting support for organic agriculture. *“The crisis is an opportunity for us and we must seize it.”* The government has set aside money for peasant farmers. Yet this will be used by big companies. They will grow vegetables and export them. What the government can do is stop giving land to MNCs: we must insist on only market mechanisms for companies to buy land. In India we also demand land for all landless agricultural families - instead of setting up export zones, land must be used for people.” But, she confirmed that it is a very long struggle. In India it has only been when people are willing to lose their life that the government has stopped giving land to companies (such as withdrawal of Tata company). Only when the people’s struggle is very strong and includes fierce lobbying with the government will change come. Finally, she suggested that we need social security- only if people are healthy can they have a livelihood.

Sonia referred to the obligations of the State, at an individual and collective level to respect and protect the economic social and cultural rights of its people: it must not allow any kind of violation of its citizens’ rights and give legitimacy to the current laws. Both the national and international legal systems should be used and any gaps in the law remedied to protect human rights as a whole. She cited large corporate areas concerning major Dam projects where there is no respect for human rights: “the fact that the Brazilian government supports international groups for three decades without paying any tax which are at the same time making huge profit is unconscionable. This at the same time that small farmers, who produce most food available in country, don’t receive any kind of financial support and suffer many human rights violations because of these financial and business factors. Sonia shared that another aspect of this also concerns the forcible displacement of people from the land where these dams are today, displacement of people who were using the land for food production to big cities. This has consequences on food security and food sovereignty.

In closing, what needs to happen? As a Brazilian woman shared, *“This is a very important issue for us all. Your struggle is no different to the one that we are facing as Brazilian women. We women here we join you and all of us united together, we need to merge our struggles.”*



WSF March 28 January 09

B. Women's Right to Livelihoods: Building a Collective Agenda

This event provided a space for participants to exchange and dialogue on issues core to women and livelihoods and to develop a collective strategy to work at various levels to strengthen efforts for change. The proposals put forward will drive the new Global Network on Women and the Right to Livelihoods.

Across the three areas of focus in livelihoods, impact of trade liberalisation, privatisation and the rise of MNC power were prominent issues raised, particularly in their impact on food security, displacement, right to work and sustainability of natural resource issues. Also central were structural gender concerns that impact women, such as invisibility and exclusion from decision-making processes, work related wage discrimination, invisibility of women's work including being overburdened and violence, lack of access to credit, markets and land ownership, and exclusion from education and capacity development. Groups stressed the need for recognition of women's close relationship with land and forests, and their wealth of traditional knowledge central for health and natural resource management.

Diverse strategies were discussed, exploring national, regional and international possibilities. All groups called for more and better networks at all levels for organising, capacity building, strategising and mobilisation - as critical to any change. The message is loud and clear: we need to unite, to strengthen our own capacities, to refine joint strategies and to engage with political structures to press governments to fulfill their responsibilities to their people rather than fill their pockets with Multi-National Corporations (MNCs). This must happen collectively at the national and global level, targeting states, relevant UN bodies and global financial structures (WTO and World Bank). We need to develop and advocate for sustainable alternative development models, with women at the centre, and engage with United Nations structures to better represent women's struggles for livelihoods.

Priiti Darooka (PWESCR) introduced the session with a brief overview of issues emerging from the dialogue the previous day in the event, *Women's Right to Livelihoods: Addressing Development and Displacement*. Working groups were created around the three common areas that emerged from that session.

- (1) Right to Food: Agriculture, food security and food sovereignty
- (2) Natural resources: Land, water and forests
- (3) Education, skills, work (labour markets), markets and credit

Beside the larger critical concerns of feminization of poverty, cross-cutting issues for all groups to consider were also noted:

- Migration due to loss of livelihoods and for livelihood, including both women migrating and men migrating and leaving women behind
- Trade liberalisation as a threat to livelihoods (exploring issues like MNCs, extractive industries, international financial institutions, privatisation and government alliance with MNCs rather than its people).

Questions for Working Groups

- (a) What are the problems, concerns and issues around this theme, how are they being redressed? Where are the gaps?; and
- (b) What could be a collective agenda to strengthen efforts for change? What can we do to advance the struggles at the national, regional and international level?

The groups spent most of the time in group discussion, coming back to plenary only to share an overview of their discussion. The groups reported as follows.

1. Right to Food: Agriculture, Food Security and Food Sovereignty and Women's Right to Livelihoods

The group discussed a range of concerns around women and food security and food sovereignty. This focused on lack of support to women after displacement, lack of women's legal rights to land; very small farms with little income; lack of credit; no support from the Government; and corporate farming for cash crops such as Soya depriving communities of food security. Finally they highlighted that women are losing control over seeds and loss of biodiversity is leading to loss of food. Issues discussed concerning work involved: low wages for women; no access to markets for women; the invisibility of women's work and lack of land leading to denied access to credit; lack of skills in mining communities post closure; marginalization of women due to technology and export crops; and shrimp cultivation leading to sickness for women. In terms of decision-making and valuing women, of central concern was that women do not have control over decisions and women's knowledge is getting lost.



The group also discussed an array of possible strategies to redress these concerns. At the **national** level, these were as follows.

- (a) Government must take its obligations more seriously and must invest in agriculture.
 - Government investment in women farmers and women's cooperatives, If money goes to men, they are more interested in commercial agriculture;
 - Improve soil fertility in farming areas;
 - Focus on local production and consumption;
 - STOP supporting MNCs to grab land from the poor. Currently, foreign companies in India for example do not buy land, but rather get government support to clear land of people and access it in the name of development;
 - Stop investing in WAR and invest in farming food.
- (b) Right to land: All women farmers must have independent rights to their own land.
- (c) Right to participate in decision-making that affects them.
 - Government must promote and support women's cooperatives;
 - Women must be empowered with responsibility for food management, to better ensure food sustainability.
- (d) Access to credit.
 - Women are currently too often denied access to credit, based on amongst other reasons, their lack of land ownership. Credit must be delinked from land ownership.
- (e) Education and skill-building on sustainable agriculture.
 - Women must be given skills to manage soil, to keep control over soil and to manage their own agriculture. This is particularly in Latin America where women are displaced and new generations don't have the skills to farm
- (f) Right to work.
 - support new cash incomes for women.
 - Improve women's access to markets. Women have no access to markets: they plant crops, grow food and process food for it only to be taken by men to the market. This means that income is in the hands of men.

At a **regional** level, the group discussed that a regional food bank is under discussion in South Asia. This would mean that for countries which are producing more food, rather than dumping it, they would forward it to food banks for emergency aid to go where it is most needed.

The group agreed that **internationally** the Global Network on Women and the Right to Livelihoods should participate in international discussions to ensure that the issue of agriculture is taken out of the WTO. It must push MNCs to set up norms to enhance food security. The Network should also lobby with the UN to set up an expert committee or an individual independent expert to review women's ESC rights and right to livelihoods. The FAO and other relevant international institutes should also be mandated to support women farmers, including through research and training women farmers on sustainable agriculture (not chemical agriculture). The FAO now supports farmers, however the group argued that its interventions do little to make women less vulnerable.

2. Natural Resources and Women's Right to Livelihoods

The group highlighted the cross cutting issue of grabbing of land and resources in the name of industrialisation and corporatisation as a central concern globally and even more so in the Global South. They pressed for organisation at the local and global level and the development of stronger networks to fight the MNCs. They also centred solutions in the right to natural resources for women - Empowering women to assert this right advances the struggle for natural resources as well as women's equality and realisation of other rights given women's close inter-relationship with the land, water and forests. They have power in their natural resources, so when they lose their land, their nature and their forest, they also lose their power.



At a **national** level, taking Brazil as an example, they advocated for a programme, *Brazilian women's empowerment in natural resources management*, which would empower women based on their own knowledge. Steps include to:

- (a) Develop strong women's organisations at the local level, ensuring understanding of the values around and relationship between women and nature.
- (b) Build institutions in natural resources management.
- (c) Engage in political concerns and push for policies to achieve resource management.

The same steps were suggested for the Mekong countries in Asia, where the local women's organisations or "natural resources associations" would in particular channel women's very rich experience, wisdom and knowledge, particularly in herbal medicines, and would take care of community health and handicraft textiles. They would also then build active institutions to lobby governments at the local and national level on land and forest issues.²

In terms of **regional** action, they felt that capacity building and awareness raising was most important in the Amazon region, where women do not know how to protect their land and nature, now being lost through hydro-power. Exchange learning with senior NGOs and CBOs would then be a next step. The group advised women to get in touch with organisations like Amnesty international and AMB – the Brazilian Women's Alliance and work together with them for change. [contact: www.articulacaodemulheres.org.br]. Networks

² To pursue this idea for Mekong countries, contact – www.mekong.dmp.org; speri@speri.org; tthanh@speri.org – Vietnamese organisation working in Mekong countries]

for learning should be cultivated and finally the groups could contact landless organisations in Brazil and the Amazon more broadly.

The role, they argued, for the **Global** Network is to develop capacity to fight against the large development programme which is destroying nature. It should advocate for a different development model that would ensure sustainability of natural resources, one that offers opportunities for women at the local level and takes more advantage of the fact that women are directly and deeply involved in natural resources. In particular, this would also for example need to provide alternatives for the use of rivers: today pollution is destroying our wildlife, our oceans and us. Finally they recommended exchanges as a tool for learning and solidarity at all levels.

3. **Education, work, markets and credit and Women's Livelihoods**

This Working Group discussed women's position in the labour market, and goods and services market, as well as the skills and resources women can access to enable market participation. The group stressed issues of concern about the use of **micro credit** to access resources where a cash economy is entering the rural economy. Generally women focused micro-credit programmes look only at money, and so they do and can not result in ensuring and protecting women's rights. Micro-credit schemes are given without understanding women's needs, without real economic education and without a plan. We need to ensure that women's rights are the focus of micro-credit. Women's voice was also an important issue highlighted here - which in the micro credit sector and financial decision-making structures is invisible and those concerns women do express are not adhered to. The group referred to major advantages to companies to mobilise credit at very low interest rates over a long period that women bear the cost of. Women face 36% interest rates on small loans: being punished and held accountable for others' loans and brought into a vicious cycle of debt and poverty.

The group reported much activity in the area of **women's work**. Women are entering work in traditional areas of land, forest, the agricultural sector and the informal sector, in both paid and unpaid forms. However, they get the least capacity building, have the least mobility and the least voice in the market. Trade liberalisation is creating competition for local products and displacement of national markets, while privatisation is leading to a drastic increase in informal labour and shamefully decreased wages, with no safety nets such as social security benefits nor other facilities provided for women.

Further, women are the most violated and at the receiving end of discrimination. Violence is perpetuated in every sphere of work and women are discriminated as workers and unable to negotiate their rights. Gender discrimination places blame on women or mothers who have several responsibilities and little state support. There are further globalisation trends towards larger forms of violence targeting women for their nurturing, reproductive and productive roles that have sustained their communities, for example, concerning MNCs in collusion with governments. The group also stressed the need to focus on state accountability: it is the state itself that denies women the right to social security. In **situations of conflict**, women are targeted and discriminated against. There is a false belief that the state will protect. These conflicts then become not only about livelihood, but life itself.

In the **education** sector, the nature of education itself must be changed. Currently education is more about how women can remain in reinforced stereotypes, far from the empowering education needed. While the education sector claims to be free and accessible for women across the world, from Nigeria to India, educational institutions are run primarily by men, with women only voiceless in the lowest cadres, and continue to promote aggressive masculinity, making women and men conform to a certain role. Education must be transformed to empower women to deal with leadership and negotiate rights within larger development debates. We need to reclaim for ourselves an educational process that strengthens us in communities in markets and in governance.

In all themes covered, women are also **absent in decision-making bodies**, they are absent in political governance, in institutions of the market and in institutions determining global trade agendas. As a result community and women's issues are not addressed.

The strategies the group advocated centred on:

National

- Education: there should be free children's education and adult education as well as specific capacity building within women's groups in urban and rural areas to enable them to take action to claim their rights and specifically access credit and the markets. The group also called for political education of the oppressed, who often don't know they are oppressed, and public education.
- Women working more within their homes to fight against patriarchy with their family and husbands. In communities, they must fight the cultural-social tradition that women are the property of men. This should be supported by media campaigns against patriarchy
- More outreach to women living in particularly vulnerable situations, such as the displaced and migrants, to deal with discrimination in community, family and the state.
- Advocate for legislation, in particular concerning economic rights for women, such as reform of inheritance laws in India. Also examine our own policies and practices at the local and national level concerning how various legislative initiatives affect women.
- To counter further invisibility of women as workers with rights, organise women into unions to pursue their demands and lobby for better legislation. For example, in Pakistan the first union in the history of trade unions in Pakistan - The home based workers union, has just been created, which is now struggling for recognition of their work for registration of social security cards.

Regional and International

- Build stronger global networks for women's groups to unite, ensure women's voices are heard and fight collectively to hold governments accountable.
- Advocate with MNCs and banks developing micro-credit programmes for a women's strategy within each one based on women's rights.
- Strengthen efforts to hold the World Bank accountable



C. Launch of the Global Network on Women and the Right to Livelihoods

Finally, the Global Network on Women and the Right to Livelihoods was launched on the last evening of the Forum. This was an exciting moment, and the culmination of many months of discussion and engagement by an increasing number of individuals and organisations. However this took place in awareness of the reality of the depth of the struggles that threaten women's livelihoods around the world. So it was also a grounding moment, which recognised the need for solidarity and joint strategies, working from the local to the global level and making women's right to livelihoods visible and alive within the debates and action on the current global crises. John Samuels of Action Aid International underscored the importance strengthening women's movements across issues of globalisation and their impact on women, reclaiming their essential human rights. In support of the collective on Women and the Right to Livelihoods, he proclaimed that the time has come to restore a new language, a new imagination, a new politics and a new economy to the world. But the polity and politics can not come from those used to domination, extraction and the power. A new politics can only happen when half of mankind can unleash their energy to transform the world.

Priiti Darooka and Sunila Singh, (PWESCR), Rukmini Rao, Soma P, Mamata Dash, (India), on behalf of those that have spearheaded the process, shared how the coalition has evolved, from various meetings and skype conferences with an increasing number of women and organisations over the previous months. They stressed the urgency for collective action. This urgency was reflected by the fact of livelihoods as a global priority for women living in poverty and the increasing desperation of their situation in the increasing crisis of neo-liberal capitalism. Lourdess from Via Campesina, Brazil, reinforced the pressure of the fight against the capitalist market, not just against market products but also natural resources and the development of land. She urged, "*We must fight for the fact that women are not products, they are not part of the markets: they cannot be sold. Women must be visible – and they must be at the forefront of change.*" Specifically she called for space for women to participate in decision-making in organisations and structures more broadly and strategies that target the domination of multi-national corporations.

Another pressing drive behind the collective is the need to develop effective strategies. Those behind the initiative shared, we realise that we need a more integrated understanding of core issues affecting women's livelihoods as related to their human rights, and we need to work at all levels and touch all issues to move forward in each of our struggles: we need to work together! PWESCR added that despite the magnitude and urgency of the situation globally, there is little awareness of this issue and the right to livelihoods is not recognised as a human right. This is a gap in human rights which leaves the conditions necessary to support, sustain and advance the lives of women and their families with dignity unprotected and unsupported.

So from this basis, PWESCR shared that the collective will work together to dialogue with and engage various groups and social movements including indigenous, Dalits, minority groups, land rights, environment, anti poverty, trade, housing, agriculture, worker's rights etc on women's livelihoods. Of great imperative is reaching out and ensuring those voices that need to be a part of the collective are there. As Valerie Traore from Dignity International (Burkina Faso) reminded us, women within our networks are not necessarily present in all levels of battle at the forefront. We need to acknowledge our privilege to be here and to connect with each other. We need to make sure in this network we are not just speaking amongst our selves and reach out to those that most need to be included.

The Collective will aim to:

- (a) Foster a collective voice to articulate the severity of the situation faced by women.
- (b) Develop a common understanding of the right to livelihoods
- (c) Work to have the right recognised as existing in international law and
- (d) Develop a strategy to advance women's livelihoods in reality around the world.

In terms of priorities, the dialogue and the strategy sessions at the WSF on women and the right to livelihoods were a strong starting point, as was the input of many men and women over the days of the World Social Forum committing themselves to the coalition and sharing their experiences and insights. The call for experiences, stories and insights on Women and Livelihoods continues (see below! Annex 1). PWESCR is processing these and organising them to share, and to help in developing common analysis and provide conceptual clarity on the issue. This is the first step for us then to develop a collaborative action plan. PWESCR encouraged everyone to share contact details to continue the discussion online and in smaller groups to develop an agenda and means of working together.

PWESCR highlighted the potential of the moment, where the decision has been made to come together, to build joint strategies to strengthen our movement for change. But now the real work must begin to identify what the coalition will look like, how it will function, to identify its priorities, to reach out to women all over the world and to take action for change. The collective appreciates the need for new thinking and imagination, moving beyond our current frameworks, politics and means of operation to really reach out to women affected and to work collectively to realise the right to livelihood for women. The

call is out, let us work together to make change happen: Livelihoods for Women Worldwide.



Annex 1 – CALL TO ACTION!

Collective Sharing and Learning

In order to develop an inclusive concept of the right to livelihoods from a gender perspective, we are compiling a collection on woman's stories from around the world on livelihoods. This compilation will help in collectively developing a common analysis and providing conceptual clarity. It will then provide the basis for the Network to develop an action plan for a collective advocacy campaign. We invite you to join the Network and to participate now by sharing your thoughts on issues of livelihoods. In particular, we request your specific input in this first stage on the following.

- **Compilation of Stories:** Please send us your stories, or stories of communities you work with or are associated with. Your submissions can come in any form – as testimonies, photographs, videos, press clippings, articles, poems, legal cases, etc.
- **Send your views:**
 1. What does the right to livelihood mean to you and to women you work with? How would you define it? What are its various components?
 2. How do issues of livelihoods affect women? Why is the right to livelihoods important to women? Or why should it be important to them?
 3. What are the challenges women in your country and communities face regarding livelihoods?
 4. What are some of the strategies being used by women to address these challenges? What are the success stories?
 5. Does the Constitution of your country guarantee livelihood protection? Are there any policies or laws to protect livelihoods? How effective are they for women?

6. Where are the gaps? What do you think needs to happen to fill these gaps at the international level, regional level, and/or national level?

You can send your contributions to livelihood@pwescr.org. No material submitted will be reproduced without consent and acknowledgement of the contributor.

Be part of the Network - Join over 125 organizations or individuals!

Send an email to livelihood@pwescr.org. You can join individually or as an organization.

- Your Name
- Organization name
- Country
- Contact Details (Address, email and phone number)
- Your work on livelihood: