



UNRISD

United Nations Research Institute for Social Development

Beyond the Business Case

*A Community Economies Approach to Gender,
Development and Social Economy*

*Suzanne Bergeron
University of Michigan Dearborn
United States*

*Stephen Healy
Worcester State University
United States*

Draft paper prepared for the UNRISD Conference

Potential and Limits of Social and Solidarity Economy

6–8 May 2013, Geneva, Switzerland

The United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) is an autonomous research institute within the UN system that undertakes multidisciplinary research and policy analysis on the social dimensions of contemporary development issues. Through our work we aim to ensure that social equity, inclusion and justice are central to development thinking, policy and practice.

UNRISD ▪ Palais des Nations ▪ 1211 Geneva 10 ▪ Switzerland
info@unrisd.org ▪ www.unrisd.org

Copyright © United Nations Research Institute for Social Development

This is not a formal UNRISD publication. The responsibility for opinions expressed in signed studies rests solely with their author(s), and availability on the UNRISD website (www.unrisd.org) does not constitute an endorsement by UNRISD of the opinions expressed in them. No publication or distribution of these papers is permitted without the prior authorization of the author(s), except for personal use.

Beyond the Business Case: A Community Economies Approach to Gender, Development and Social Economy

Suzanne Bergeron
University of Michigan Dearborn, USA

Stephen Healy
Worcester State University, USA

Abstract

This paper makes a case for reconfiguring current gender and development initiatives that rest on the business case for investing in women as “smart economics” toward non-capitalist practices and ideals associated with the social and solidarity economy. Drawing upon the Community Economies approach of “taking back the economy,” we identify the limitations and possibilities for appropriating toward alternative ends the ideals of care, cooperation and interdependence invoked in business-case gender policy frameworks. While cognizant of the potential for cooptation of projects of social economy given the neoliberal economization of social relations that characterizes the business case for gender equity in development, we also locate space to imagine some innovative forms of social economy that can emerge within development’s own fragmented discourses and practices. Finally, we offer some suggestions for connecting gender and development to a politics of ethical transformation toward non-capitalist subjectivities that engages gender with a social and solidarity economy framework.

Introduction

Over the past decade or so, attention to gender has moved from the margins to the center of development rhetoric and practice. With this shift, many of those issues once viewed as “outside” of development – such as non-capitalist production and unpaid non-market transactions - are now foregrounded as resources for fostering economic and social progress. So, too, are attitudes once determined as “non-economic” such as care, cooperation and interdependence. In this sense, the gender turn in development can be viewed as a project of potential transformation toward social and solidarity economy (SSE) ends, where space for economic justice, non-market production and social subjectivities of care, cooperation and interdependence is recognized, negotiated and expanded.¹

But while the inclusion of gender and economic difference marks an important shift in thinking, it has not been matched by an attempt to imagine economic development in new ways. This is true of institutional approaches at the World Bank and elsewhere, which largely reduce issues of gender and economic difference, including insights about household labor and women’s caring and cooperative motivations, to a “business case” for investing in women as “smart economics,” aimed at capturing market efficiencies and growth. But it is also true of left and feminist critics, who by and large dismiss this attention to gender and difference as “business as usual” in which progressive efforts to bring attention to non-market and care economies are subsumed to a logic of neoliberal capitalism that determines the course of development.

While we are sympathetic to critical feminist concerns about how progressive ideals can be steered toward neoliberal ends in global development – in fact one of us has written on this topic for a decade – we are also left thinking that the way these concerns are currently framed limit feminist and left interventions. It seems to us that critical voices have granted too much power to global capitalism such that even these emerging possibilities for imagining economy otherwise are viewed as being subsumed within a neoliberal project. Further, we worry that the guiding narratives used to represent the (im)possibility for transformation also participate in *performing* that world by portraying alternatives as weak and destined for defeat. This further limits space to build on the expressed intentions of progressive frameworks in order to foster economic difference produced within an ethical dynamic of development.

This paper represents our attempt to move beyond the business case discourse that haunts contemporary gender and development. Our project involves re-reading the inclusion of non-capitalist processes and alternative subjectivities into development in ways that might open space for social transformation toward both gender equity and SSE ends. By

¹ for a discussion of these concepts as central within many of the competing meanings of SSE, see Ash Amin, *The Social Economy*, particularly essays 1, 5 and 7.

re-reading for difference, we hope to expand the terrain of development to include unpaid household and community production -as well as values and subjectivities that revolve around justice, care and cooperation – as irreducible to capitalism. We also hope to contribute to a political project of building upon and transforming the expressed intensions of gender and development to foster ethical dynamics, a goal which we believe are shared by a wide range of feminist and SSE activists and scholars.

Our work draws heavily upon new understandings of economic difference developed by J.K. Gibson-Graham and the Community Economics Collective (which one of us has been a member of for thirteen years) to “take back” the economy.² This work highlights the importance of alternative, non-capitalist economic practices that are otherwise devalued and marginalized in both mainstream and critical discourses, and disrupts the presumptive dominance of capitalism. A further insight of this work is that with a recognition of economic difference comes the possibility of a different political economy of development--one that involves a process of ethical negotiation around shared concerns within the “community economy.”

Our re-reading of gender and development initiatives for difference and ethical negotiation also connects to the diversity of economic practices and subjectivities brought into being by social movements associated w/ social and solidarity economies. Finally, it attempts to engage with some current projects of rethinking development itself. By highlighting the fragmented and partial nature of capitalism, we create space for acknowledging the contingency of neoliberal projects that emerge from development institutions such as the World Bank. This may help to imagine and bring about forms of social and solidarity economy that can emerge within development’s own polyvalent discourses and practices (Ferguson 2010).

The “business case” for gender and development: social justice or business as usual?

While issues related to women and gender have been included in development since the 1980s, they have become more central within international development policy and aid during the last ten years.³ The focus of gender and development has also shifted significantly during this time. Where past practices were often structured by a “common sense” of the inevitability of global marketization that was forged around the Washington Consensus - paying little or no attention to equity considerations, power dynamics, caring labor, local and participatory economic practices and so forth - a new agenda has emerged that supports many of the alternatives associated with gender equity and social/solidarity economies called for by progressives. Now, gender and development policies take care work into account, value participatory approaches and associative values,

²For more information, see <http://www.communityeconomies.org>.

³ Some examples include the adoption of Women’s Empowerment Principles by UN Global Compact in 2009, the creation of UN Women in 2011, the World Bank’s choice of gender equality as the theme of its 2012 *World Development Report*, the Girl Effect Campaign of the Nike Foundation, and *10,000 women* advocacy campaign of Goldman Sachs corporation.

support microcredit and local development, and claim to take poverty seriously.

Of particular note in this shift, for us, is the placement of activities and motivations formerly viewed as “outside” the economy as now crucial to economic success. In the past, activities associated with social reproduction such as caring labor, subsistence production, voluntary efforts, and community work had been invisibilized (Bakker and Gill 2003). Now new projects of gender and development are now addressing this variety of economic practices associated with social reproduction directly (Bedford 2009). In addition to recognizing non-market production such as work in households and voluntary activities, development policy now values motivations and ethics not usually associated with the market, such as care and cooperation. With regard to care, development texts increasingly offer stories about “rational economic women” (Rankin 2001) whose combination of altruism, cooperation and efficiency make them ideal clients of development. Women are targeted for development projects because in their presumed role as carers they are more likely to use their income to better their children’s and communities’ well being (World Bank 2001, World Bank 2012). For example, women migrants are said to send a higher percentage of their remittances home to their families than men because of their caring nature (United Nations 2009, 74), and with these assumptions in mind countries like the Philippines have specifically targeted women as the ideal migrant workers from the perspective of the home country (Parrenas 2008). Policies that value an ethic of care have even been extended to men to foster caring motivations toward their children and partners to get them to share more care work in their households (Bedford 2009). The cooperative proclivities of women are seen as related to their ethic of care as “working in partnership tends to be more of a female attitude, experience and asset” (Picciotto 1998, 1). Women’s greater cooperative attitudes are now valued as a form of social capital that allows them to engage in collective, and what we might even refer to as “solidarity economy,” practices such as microcredit lending circles. Thus current gender and development policy is not as fixated on capitalist markets or individualistic rationality as in past frameworks. It includes a recognition of those non-capitalist practices and motivations such as unpaid household and community work, care, and collective allegiances that had previously been imagined as un-economic.

Ideologically and rhetorically, these recent gender and development initiatives are tied together by what is broadly referred to as the “business case” for gender equality.⁴ The business case approach sees gender equity as instrumentally valuable for achieving economic goals. To offer one prominent example, the World Bank’s 2012 *World Development Report* begins with the assertion that “gender equality is a core development objective in its own right. It is also smart economics.” The business case now extends to a wide array of conversations about gender equity in development, including labor, credit, land, and even gender-based violence. For example the managing

⁴ See for instance the World Bank’s *World Development Report; Gender Equality and Development* (2012) and its *Gender Equality as Smart Economics* (2006), Goldman Sachs *Womenomics: The Time is Now* (2010), International Labour Organization’s *Women in Labour Markets* (2010), the Nike Girl Effect Campaign <http://nikeinc.com/pages/the-girl-effect>.

director of the World Bank recently stated that the only way to really get the problem of violence against women on the policy map was to show it causes GDP loss (Antsey 2013).

This marks a significant shift in thinking from previous decades when the social goals associated with gender equity were viewed as unrelated to, or at odds with, efficiency goals of economic growth and productivity. While the “smart economics” approach focuses largely on integrating women into wage-labor, it also recognizes forms of economic difference, including non-market production and an ethic of care. For example, business case discourse tends to view women as a particularly *good* investment because their ethic of care makes them more likely to use their income to improve the wellbeing of their children and their families. As the 2012 *World Development Report: Gender Equality and Development* states, “(g)reater control over household resources by women leads to more investment in children’s human capital, with dynamic positive effects on economic growth” (World Bank 2012, 5). Investing in altruistic women, then, is seen as contributing to the development of human capital in not only themselves, but in their children through improved nutrition, better health, and higher rates of educational attainment (ibid.). Further, attention has been placed on recognizing the economic contributions of non-capitalist activities. For example, policies now aim to make households more egalitarian in order to reduce the inequity of women’s care burdens, with the belief that these efforts will improve the wellbeing of family members and also yield economic efficiencies (Bedford 2009). This attention to the household as a locus of gender struggle and a sphere of production marks an extraordinary shift from past practices.

Yet despite the expanded space for tackling gender equity in development, and acknowledgement that policies must be carried out in a broadened economic terrain that extends beyond the market, these recent changes have not engendered much optimism on the part of left and feminist observers. For many, the business case for gender equity is better understood as “business as usual:” a reformed project of neoliberalism which is wrapped in a rhetoric of gender equity, care, community and the like that makes it all the more insidious. This shape shifting neoliberalism is an effort to increase the “penetration of capital into new spaces and social relations” (Roberts 2008, 535). The language of gender equity, participation and microcredit, care etc. is an attempt to gain legitimacy

预览已结束，完整报告链接和二维码如下：

https://www.yunbaogao.cn/report/index/report?reportId=5_20944

