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Sexual Division of Labor: what transformative policies

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The theme of the conference

"Sexual Division of Labor: what transformative policies", focusing on women's unpaid work and the imperative of the redistribution of the responsibilities of care between the family, the State and the market

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**The Contribution of Women from the Lowest Income Groups to the Economy:
How Time-Use Studies can Enable an Accurate Valuation**

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To enable women to free themselves from traditional burdens such as stereotyped sexual division of labour and care burdens, and also to engage ourselves in a feminist perspective on valuation, I want to suggest three things:

Firstly, that we focus our attention on women from the lowest income and no-income decile families or individuals, i.e. on poor women.

Secondly, replacing our quest to integrate unpaid work into macroeconomic frameworks with integrating unrecognized work of all types into the same.

Thirdly, that we carry the learning we receive from analyzing the burdens, the undervaluation of women's work and the inequality they address due to the stereotyping of roles, **to a critique of macro-economic reasoning, beyond the minimalist goal of gender equality.**

It is my belief that by limiting the outcome and advocacy of our gendered analysis to 'gender equality', we miss a bigger opportunity – that of using our research and findings for macro-economic reasoning to make larger changes that will give women real relief from these burdens.

I would like to locate this within the context of continents of the South, i.e. Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, and Asia and the Pacific, looking at the patterns of work and deprivation that women in these regions experience. While there are sharp differences in the political economies of these regions, it must be recognized that after the economic shocks of 2008-2009, a new world order has emerged¹ -- global economic power has shifted from the North to the South. Even now, the effects still remain due to neo-liberal economic policies in America and Europe.

As feminists of the South, we need to shift our approach to public policy: we must move away from old economic theories such as the trickle-down theory with policies that focus on GDP growth and surplus before addressing poverty eradication, towards new **inclusive** theories and strategies of economic growth. These policies should take poor women as the engines of growth, as the beginning of public policy and macroeconomic reasoning. They should not be limited to gender equality in sharing of work, but expanded into public investment in social infrastructure and gendering national budgets.

Then our strategies, priorities and valuation of the critical needs of our fellow citizens, especially women, will likely undergo a sea change: from advocacy for the recognition of the care

¹ Jain, Devaki. "The New World Reorder – An Opportunity to Build Feminist Political Economy/Ideas." Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the International Association for Feminist Economics (IAFFE), June 24-26 2011: Hangzhou, China

economy, it will move to advocacy for the recognition of women's critical role in **generating growth** in the economy. We should be arguing for **another economics**, one in which care is also embedded, as it is a phenomenon that affects women across class and cultural divides. We should be asking whether the woman in the lowest economic situation can redefine economic reasoning.²

I want to argue that the perspective with which we examine valuation (whether of paid work, unpaid work, care work, non-market work, sexual division of labour) needs to be from the location and space of the poorest of women in our countries or continents.

Women, especially from the poorest households, are the most neglected but most valuable contributors to the growth of the economy.³ Time-use studies⁴ provide the evidence for this hypothesis, as well as provide support to these pillars of the society and economy. This is examined at a later stage of the paper.

Some countries of the South (such as in Latin America) are less deeply drowned in deprivation and have fewer really poor people. For example, Argentina, Uruguay and Chile all have some form of social security. However, Latin America is not a homogenous region and other countries, especially in Central America, have fewer or weaker social policies.⁵ In countries of South Asia and Africa, the nature of poverty is grim as there is no form of social insurance at all, creating new issues and problems.⁶

I discuss below some aspects of this issue:

The most recent regional Human Development Report of Latin America and the Caribbean notes that the "growing involvement of women in paid work has not been accompanied by an equivalent upswing in the participation of men in unpaid domestic tasks... Moreover, the fact that no monetary valuation is attached to unpaid domestic work makes it difficult to calculate the economic contribution of those (mostly women) who carry out this kind of work."⁷ The report goes on to say that these irregularities in work distribution and calculation have "adverse effects on gender equality and women's empowerment, and they also decrease the visibility and the weight their interests should have in public policies... It will be very difficult to bring about any real improvement in social equality as long until a more profound cultural transformation has been achieved."⁸

² Jain, Devaki. "What is Wrong with Economics? Can the Aam Aurat Redefine Economic Reasoning?" Durgabai Deshmukh Memorial Lecture, 15 July 2011, Council for Social Development: New Delhi

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Jain, Devaki. "Valuing Work: Time as a Measure" in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXXI, No. 43, 26 October 1996

⁵ Ribe, Robalino and Walker. "Achieving Effective Social Protection for All in Latin America and the Caribbean: From Right to Reality." Washington D.C., 2010: World Bank

⁶ Dabir, Neela and Athale, Naina. *From Street to Hope: Faith-Based and Secular Programs in Los Angeles, Mumbai and Nairobi for Street-living Children*. June 2011: SAGE Publications

⁷ UNDP Regional Human Development Report for Latin America and the Caribbean. *Acting on the Future, Breaking the Intergenerational Transmission of Inequality*. New York, 2010: UNDP. Page 33.

⁸ *Ibid.* 34

This goal of gender equality and women's empowerment is language that we have adopted from international mandates, especially those of the UN. The UN, being a world body, chooses issues and emphases that can be as universal as possible. For example, care work and violence against women are universally experienced whether the women are in a rich country or a poor country. However, making this into a global agenda has closed our eyes to differentiating our priorities from the conditions of difference. Furthermore, these goals are not attainable without major changes to the macro economy and the pressures from outside.

The debate should go beyond measurement of care work and its sharing, into the measurement of women's contribution even to the SNA type of productive work, their location in the economies and how that location's identification as well as circumstances can give value and visibility to that contribution, and also transform the way we think of development offers, development policy, and engines of growth. It would alter the very measures of progress. Are the GDP and GNP useful measures?⁹ Does the HDI offer a satisfactory substitute? Are tools of valuation appropriate or have we other tools?¹⁰ For example, if we measure work by time, then women in the developing countries come out on top as the most valuable people, as they spend more hours on everything than men.¹¹ So should time and not money or monetized value be the measure of value?

However, this is not the only issue of valuation; there is another type of distortion, this time coming from the language and the vocabulary used to describe economic phenomena from the early industrialized countries of the North. In a lecture on feminism in India, I pointed out the usefulness of changing nomenclature for policy and analysis. To illustrate, if the home is called 'workplace' as indeed it is for the majority of women in the global South, then work at home would be recognized as work which can come under labour laws. Home-based workers are now recognized for labour welfare protection as a result of our advocacy. "Formal/informal" and "organized/unorganized" – these are names given to economic spaces and forms of work, and they are misnomers if seen from Africa or Asia. I call this the **oppression of vocabulary**. The so-called informal sector is very formal, but it is controlled in different ways from the factory floor. Similarly, the unorganized sector is extremely organized but in different ways. Most of these forms are exploitative and unless named and understood correctly, they cannot be dealt with.

Women, especially those from the poorest households, are the most neglected but most valuable contributors to the growth of the economy. This phenomenon of contribution to the economy from the most vulnerable persons, is now on the increase as production is dispersed not just in one factory with the theory of economies of scale, but dispersed in a digitally-

⁹ Henderson, Hazel. *Building a Win-Win World: Life Beyond Global Economic Warfare*. 1996: Berrett-Koehler; Henderson, Hazel. *Creating Alternative Futures*. 1978: Berkeley Books; Eisler, Riane. *The Real Wealth of Nations: Creating a Caring Economics*. 2008: Berrett-Koehler

¹⁰ Jain, D. and Elson, D. *Harvesting Feminist Knowledge For Public Policy*. October 2011: Sage Publications

¹¹ UNDP Regional HDR for Latin America and the Caribbean.

connected world, moving where where labour is cheapest – and we know that the cheapest of all cheap labour is women’s labour.¹²

I illustrate my argument by referring to several time-use studies that I conducted, as Director of the Institute of Social Studies Trust¹³ from 1974-1986.

In the mainstream economic data collections and policy formulation spaces in India, women were considered **secondary bread winners** (with males being the primary ones) and as needing social welfare, especially maternity care and child services. Across the main economic sectors like Agriculture or Industry, they were not identified as principal contributors and thereby did not receive credit or technical services nor even protection from occupational hazards. Further, according to national statistics [NSSO] their all-India work participation rate was 31% compared to the men which was as 64%.

This did not seem accurate to me. I saw her, woman, everywhere, working away in the fields, on the roads, in the markets.

In 1975, I undertook a time use study in 6 villages in India.¹⁴

The results revealed strong variations across class, caste and culture, not just economic zones, in the work life of women and children.

Table: Work Participation Rate By Land Class And Sex In The Survey Villages

¹² Jhabvala, Renana. “Poor Women Organizing for Economic Justice.” *Harvesting Feminist Knowledge for Public Policy*. Ed. Jain and Elson, 2011: Sage Publications

¹³ www.isst-india.org

¹⁴ Jain, Devaki. “Valuing Women – Signals from the Ground.” Paper presented at the University of Maryland, June 2001; Jain, Devaki. “The Household Trap. Report on A Field Survey of Female Activity Patterns.” *Tyranny of the Household Investigative Essays on Women’s Work*. Eds, Devaki Jain, Nirmala Banerjee, Shakti Books, 1985, New Delhi; Jain, D. and Chand, M. “Report On A Time Allocation Study --- Its Methodological Implications” prepared for a technical seminar on *Women’s Work and Employment*, ISST, 9-11 April 1982; Jain, Devaki. “Valuing Work: Time as a Measure.” *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXXI, No. 43, Oct 25, 1996.

This was a shock and came as a wake-up call to data collectors and employment planners. Women from landless households had a formal labour force participation rate of 74% which was higher than their men. So I challenged the perception that women were supplementary bread winners which is the way the formal statistical system sees women. The “aam aurat” (common women) were actually the main support, i.e. the primary breadwinners for their households.

Operated land in Bighas	Males	Females
1. Rajasthan (October 1976)		
Landless	67	74
01-2	69	47
2-5	67	67
5-10	68	58
10-15	67	54
15-20	51	52
20	64	52

I had collected the data not only across land classes, but also of children above 5 years [the detailed methodology which was observation and recording every half hour in every household six times over the year] showed the strong differences between boys and girls in access to leisure or education. Naini and Khartoum are eleven-year old girls in landless households, one in Bharatpur district of Rajasthan and the other in Bhirbum district of West Bengal. Their daily schedule is as follows: get up at 5 A.M., clean the house, bring water, fire the stove, clean outside, help mother with preparing lunch, clean the utensils, go to the field to help with weeding, fetch water, and so on until bedtime, totaling 14-16 hours of work per day. Their brothers go to school or play in the yard. This is a typical situation across villages in India.

Since I had designed the study in collaboration with the national statistical system, I was able to present my findings to a national conference on the value of small qualitative surveys to the larger national data collection systems, changing their perception and some part of the methodology for women’s inclusion in the work force.

We later carried the findings forward to show that women had a self-perception of ‘not doing anything’ when in fact they may have been weeding, cutting grass, and any number of other activities. And why were we keen to show that they were formally economically active without taking note of the 3 Cs – Cooking, Childcare and Cleaning? We wanted skills development, tools to improve their productivity and ease the strains, occupational hazard protection, apart from identification in the occupational tables which would entitle them to wages, and also enable the state to be aware of displacement.

Gandhi, who venerated St. Francis of Assisi, or the Little Brother of the Poor, had an idiom for the poorest of the poor – “the last woman.” For data-collecting economists from India such as

ourselves, what seemed crucial was to reveal that *she*, this ‘last woman’ was an economic agent contributing to the national economy. She is not a dependent only seeking social welfare services.

For women in the lowest rungs of the economy, livelihood earning is perhaps more crucial than sharing domestic work or measuring and giving visibility to their contribution to the care economy. The primary concern is for a meal, food for herself and her children. In very poor households, if the woman has a means of livelihood, even as a sex worker or garbage picker or domestic worker, the man plays the role of house mother.

In the 1980s, the UNDP and other agencies were promoting smokeless stoves in rural India to help curb the health problems and wastage caused by smoke from wood fire stoves. Activist Aruna Roy surveyed households in villages to persuade women to start using the smokeless stoves. She was startled and moved when the women told her that smoke coming out of a house in the village was an indication of *izzat* (honour) because it meant that they had food to cook.

This is indeed a reflection of Mandela’s famous words: “Let there be work, bread, water and salt for all.” The critical question for these women is not about measuring care work or removing sex stereotyping of roles, but simply about income, which is life.

An Illustration from India:¹⁵ How feminists can carry forward the profile and articulation of the poorest women into macro-economic policy of the States’ choice of focus with not just gender sensitive budgeting but actual design of capital investments in large projects.

The National Planning Commission of India formed a Working Group of Feminist Economists (WGFE) to gender the Eleventh Five-Year Plan (2007-2012). The members included scholars who had worked in the field as well as data experts on different sectors of the economy. The WGFE had a concrete impact as a tool to engender the Eleventh Plan in several sectors of policy-making. Their inputs were directly introduced into the 2007-2012 Plan. A few illustrations of change are laid out below:

Agriculture:

Recognizing that women are increasingly the main cultivators, the WGFE enhanced women’s access to land and infrastructure, advocated for skills training for women in farm technology maintenance and stressed the need for a group approach to support women farmers.

¹⁵ India. Planning Commission. *Engendering Public Policy: A Report on the Work of the Working Group of Feminist Economists during the Preparation of the Eleventh Five-Year Plan 2007-2012*. May 2010, New Delhi: Government of India

These elements were all taken into consideration by the Planning Commission as the Plan recognized “that 85% of farmers who are small and marginal are increasingly women and who find it difficult to access the inputs...”¹⁶ and that “with the share of female workforce in agriculture increasing, and increased incidence of female-headed households [...] women’s names should be recorded as cultivators in revenue records [...] the gender bias in institutions for information, credit, inputs, marketing should be corrected by gender-sensitizing the existing infrastructure providers; women’s co-operatives and other forms of group effort should be promoted [...]”¹⁷

Employment

The WGFE called attention to women’s contribution to and their conditions of employment in the unorganized non-agricultural sectors of industry and services, noting that 53% of all women non-agricultural workers are home-based in low or unpaid and irregular employment and have less access to skills training.

The Eleventh Plan underlined “the importance of target shares for women beneficiaries in the programs for ‘Skill Development initiatives’, ‘New Initiatives at Social Security’, implementation of regulations [...] and for guarding against sexual harassment at the work place.”¹⁸ It also promoted inclusive growth for regions and social groups with “at least 30% female beneficiaries in all schemes. A women’s credit fund will be set up, women-friendly technologies with the appropriate training will be provided.”¹⁹

Poverty Alleviation and Micro-Finance

The WGFE criticized the household approach, which refers to the approach where benefits reach men as the “head of the household”. It therefore advised to give more attention to the governance domain and to draw the links between macroeconomic policies, schemes, delivery and local self-government, highlighting that women are using local self-government.

These and other recommendations were included in the Eleventh Plan as follows: “Training programs for women would be redesigned to include technology, management and micro-credit and to promote rise of women entrepreneurs. R&D institutions will be encouraged to develop women-friendly technologies for post-harvest handling and proceeding, especially for drudgery reduction and providing ease of operation. Most importantly, provision of utilities, basic amenities, and crèches for women staff workers will be made mandatory in the infrastructure projects.”²⁰

¹⁶ India. Planning Commission. *Eleventh Five Year Plan 2007-2012*. Volume 3, Chapter 1: Agriculture. Para 1.14

¹⁷ *Ibid.* Para 1.148

¹⁸ *Ibid.* Para 4.46

¹⁹ *Ibid.* Para 5.67

²⁰ *Ibid.* Para 1.56

Thus, it may be more beneficial to the larger majority of poor women if we are able to use our gender lens to illustrate failure in valuation as well as pointing to the value and thereby design the kind of policies that will enable both women and the nation.