

Gender equality and women's economic empowerment: sustaining commitment in recessionary times

Naila Kabeer,
Institute of Development Studies,
UK (OECD-DAC GenderNet
Workshop on impact of
food/financial crisis on women,
Paris , 10th June 2009)



A sign of the time.....

-  *The Dow Jones Industrial dipped below 7000 on the 3rd March from 14,000 just a few months ago. As Dorothy from the Wizard of Oz said, "we're not in Kansas anymore"-- and we may never return*
-  (Lawrence Haddad, IDS Director to colleagues 3rd March).



We are living through an extraordinary period:

The food and fuel crisis that hit a number of developing countries in 2007-2008 has been overtaken by a global financial crisis of such magnitude that it threatens long term period of recession.



Only the latest in a series of financial crises that have accompanied globalisation

IMF research has identified 124 systemic banking crises in different countries of the world over the period 1970 and 2007 (Laeven and Valencia, 2008).

But it is but different from the rest.

It was not brought on by an external shock but by the internal workings of the global financial system itself.

It began in the most powerful country in the world and it is hurting some of its wealthiest citizens.



But they will survive.....

Much harder times lie in store for the countless lesser known women and men who are losing their jobs, their homes and their hopes for the future.

For poor women and men in the developing world, the pain began much earlier.

Sharp increases in food and fuel in recent years are wiping out years of progress on poverty reduction and the MDGs



- 
- So is talk about gender equality and women's empowerment an irrelevance in the face of the unprecedented scale of the current crises?
 - Is it something that we should save for the time when we find our way back to 'Kansas'?

The answer is a resounding NO

- First of all, we should not be trying to go back to 'Kansas' at all. This is an historic, once-in-a-life time opportunity to find our way to a fairer, greener, kinder and gentler place than 'Kansas' ever was
- And secondly, the values that underpin our vision of women's empowerment are precisely the values we need to help us on our way



These values are:

-  - a concern with the bread-and-butter - sometime life-and-death issues - which make up the daily struggle for survival for women everywhere
-  - respect for individual dignity, human rights and social justice
-  - recognition of the inter-dependencies that make up human society
-  - the central importance of human beings and human capabilities, including women's own, in shaping visions of change
-  - the need for more balanced approaches to growth which increase human well being without destroying the planet



Gender equality and women's economic empowerment matter because...

- Economic activity is a key route into the public domain for many women, particularly low income women
- Struggles around livelihood resources have been the most frequent basis for women's collective action
- Promoting women's economic capabilities therefore provides an important means to bring their values bear on processes of social change



Economic empowerment provides an entry point into other forms of empowerment

- It also addresses the causes underlying the gender-specific impact of crisis
- Five priority areas of intervention
- Five cross-cutting issues



Building women's human capital and capabilities: life-long learning essential under any system of production

- Post primary education
- Science, technology and engineering (the foundations of the knowledge economy)
- Agricultural extension
- Vocational training
- Adult informal education



Redistributing reproductive work loads:

- Labour saving/drudgery reducing technologies and infrastructure
- Affordable and reliable care services
- Promoting fatherhood and care as a core aspect of masculinity



Equalising property rights

- CEDAW and the legal structure of equality in rights to land and housing
- Building the capacity to claim rights and negotiate conflict
- In the meanwhile...additional supportive resources:
- Rural women need access to technology, infrastructure, credit, inputs, extension services
- Urban women need security of residence, basic utilities, access to markets



From micro-credit to inclusive financial systems

- From credit to savings, insurance, remittance management
- Integrating financial systems
- Mainstreaming gender within the financial systems (feminizing capitalism?)



Gender-aware social protection for a globalised world

- De-coupling provision from work status: citizen-based social protection
- Building labour standards from the bottom up (from the weak to the strong)
- Corporate responsibility for workers rights
- Towards a global social floor for a globally integrated economy



Cross-cutting issues

- Collective action for ensuring women's voice and influence
- Research and information to track change
- Financing gender equality
- A larger role for the state but within a framework of good governance and an active civil society
- Revisiting the macro-economic framework

