

Turning the global economic crisis into opportunity- Women's Ideas
Wednesday 4 March 2009, from 1.15 to 2.45 pm in Conference Room 7
Undp at CSW 2009

***Using the turbulence to the advantage of
the less privileged***

Devaki Jain
Development Economist and member of the former South Commission
India

Colleagues on the panel and colleagues in the hall,

I would like to thank the govts of India, Norway and Denmark, and the gender team of the UNDP , with a special I thank you to my ambassador to the UN, Mr Nirupam Sen , for giving us – namely those who fight , argue for women's rights , and work for the inclusion of their ideas , - an opportunity to hammer out some high level ideas/advisories to the big deal spaces, the G 20 meetings, the Stiglitz commn , the Sarkozy commn . That to me is mainstreaming .

It is my learning while working on the book, related to the intellectual history of the United Nations wrst to women's engagement with it, that the UN is a market place for ideas , it can generate foster and disseminate ideas , rather than **do devt**

To cope with the time limitation I propose to plunge straight into my arguments and proposals

First , there is now enough evidence – I have been reading work done by un agencies scholars devt institutes , - to show that women are particularly predominant not only in the tradables, but also at the margins of the economies , with intermittent entries into the labour market , which not only makes them the most vulnerable in such situations, but literally assaults their bodies .

This evidence is being followed up , by many of us with suggestions that those who are designing the new financial regimes and funds, need to reserve and enhance funding fo r women and further invest in the social sector ., not cut down due to fiscal constraints .

Second as I see it the there is a grid lock taking place at the highest level of policy making, inward looking economic policy is seen as economic nationalism, by the London economist, an abuse. Reducing gross consumerism is seen as lowering the engine of demand; , concentrating on broad based state led employment policies such as infrastructure etc is seen as neglecting the big boys, - and political navigation for our leaders, between these contending ideas , especially in democracies such as India and the USA, is a challenge and I fear the big boys will win and they will float like corks out of this turbulence

Hence our work and our breaking through this impasse with strong proposals which can be seen as economically sound arguments is crucial . We have to be that third voice

I would argue that our voice will have greater impact on the big spaces and our sisters if we \

1. reveal the fault lines that lie beneath the current responses, to the shock. One of fault lines is the location of the engines of growth- currently in export or trade led growth , and a neglect of agriculture . We need to relocate the engines of growth in environmentally sound agriculture for food security, in the large economic spaces managed by the poor , in the small enterprises .women predominate in these sectors so they will receive direct benefits and at the same time the macro economy will be mended , changed from its dangerous path .
2. reveal that there are very strong differences between the north and the south in eg the responses or panic ,[I don't call it crisis but shock .].Many countries such as India , Brazil Chile just to mention a few while feeling the impact do not have that despair that we see in the USA and EU countries .Many have strong domestic markets or regional arrangements . India for example only has 12 % of its GDP from trade .. however smaller countries would have a larger impact and it is here that regional and south south arrangements can heal

In the South often there are two parallel economies, – in the 60s this was called the Brazilian model , the underdogs bought and sold to each other ,a circular self sustaining economy and the elites had their economy, also circular

so we can suggest /my proposals

1.that we move attention from salvaging the stock markets , bailing out industries like the motor industry which is environmentally hazardous to using these spaces , - spaces of the less privileged , fuelling them with credit, organised marketing even if circular and build up skills and rights to assets.

Support t the traditional market places with land , infrastructure etc as we do for tech parks . Remember the Liberian economy? It survived for a long time on these markets..during a visit to the National bank of Liberia in 1999 , the Chairman said the bank had only one employee and that was himself...the money and the credit was out there on the streets !

Another aspect of the south, is that there is no unemployment benefit , and when we lose jobs the fall is deadly literally There is now recognition that during the intensity of liberalization pressures, the dismantling labour laws and unions, in the name of competition, basically riding on cheapening labour,has led to the very serious outcomes of retrenchment . Being retrenched is deadly .

2 so we can propose a revival of labour legislation, revive and lead the union movement Remember all women in the lower end of the economy are workers, of one kind or another , workers, tillers in agriculture, workers in construction, in artisanry and so on . So by identifying them and paying attention to worker orgns and the labour market , not only the capital market the punishing effect of the crisis can be mitigated .

3 WE can introduce the language of security , into our proposals .Security of my deposit, of my home, of my livelihood , my land or my fuel source .This can lead to bringing in the language of human rights.. the right to individual economic security We can propose that our aim should be to land securities, on the ground,- food, water wage apart from political and social security

Last week the H C for HR , Judge Navaneetham Pillai called a meeting of the HR council in Geneva to discuss the crisis ..this was on the request of 23 countries , and it would interest you to know that they were all south countries .. posed . *I quote from her opening statement*

International responses to the economic downturn should be undertaken an a way t that serves the interestof human rights ..to this effect regenerating the flow of productive rather than speculative credit is of paramount importance

Private actors including financial institutions have a responsibility to ensure that their operarions do not violate human rights

Recession might give rise to xenophobic passions discriminatory practices and even attacks agains migrant workers and families

She has shown the way .

4 We need to strengthen the interdependence of supply and demand in lower and lower spaces, areas regions , similar product consortiums of the south, regional buying and selling ... any no of ways of decongesting the wires of economic power , which through over load sent shocks across the world ,

Through such decongestion of trade of financial services of banking networks we can safeguard the interests of the majority

5 Each of our countries and our regions have such inner strength which was overwhelmed by the over the top attachment to the global financial engine, and the play on stocks, ;... it is we women who can recall those strengths foster the home economy without losing out on growth and also find regional associations to keep the doors open amongst similar countries and similar products

I believe that we have strapped or trapped ourselves in ideas such as mainstreaming gender, gender equality , mdg goal achievement – sometimes it appears to me that we are fiddling while rome burns , since there is such vicious immiserisation of sections of the poor , our attention , I believe should be to the causes of that , and not only to our selves .our collective effort should be to correct the causes. From asking for more funds for women, we have to move to giving advice on global ideas and policies drawn from our wisdom and ground reality experiences

6. Therefore my last submission , is that we should demand or set up a womens commission on revitalizing the global and local economies..We have to give ours elves Agency, which means that the womens commission will draft our take on the crisis and draw attention on where we are located , and what we can do ... We need to highlight where women are located in the economy how we are the growth agents , as such are the engines of progress , the justice brigade We should not be satisfied by having gender pockets in the other commissions, like stiglitz or sarkozy ..

To follow this consultation and harvest and move forward we need our own think tank ,, some of us have started one in partnership with undp , called the Casablanca group , web site www.casablanca_dream.net I have brought a few pull outs of our group and our quest .

This can be expanded, regional consultations held ..here is an idea for the women focused agencies here at the UN or may for the NAM group .to mobilise womens intelligence to break thru the Gordian knot

. I hope in your responses you will support such a mechanism , and that we will mobilize our strength, draw on the potential of the spaces occupied by the less privileged , develop new ideas on the engines of growth and turn this crisis into an opportunity for the less privileged .