

**DISCUSSION OF
"THE DOHA DEVELOPMENT ROUND, GENDER AND SOCIAL
REPRODUCTION"**

by Brigitte Young & Hella Hoppe

Dialogue on Globalization, No. 7/July 2003

Friedrich Ebert Stiftung

Geneva, 3 November 2003

The authors have convincingly shown the harmfulness for women of the WTO policies, be it the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), the Agreement on Agriculture (AoA), the Agreement on Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS), and the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects (TRIMS). All these policies are formulated as gender-neutral, but are in fact gender-blind by design.

There are several reasons for this gender-blindness:

- A narrow understanding of the economy, which excludes the care economy and ignores the symbiotic relationship between production and reproduction,
- Ignorance about existing gender inequalities in access to and control over resources like land, capital, and information, the gender-differences in the division of labour, and the unequal valuation of women's and men's labour, which are exacerbated through the neo-liberal free trade agenda,
- Indifference towards poor people's well-being and the vital importance of food, water, and health, which are especially threatened by the WTO agreements. Those life-oriented basic needs are still women's domain given the care responsibilities and socialisation outcomes.

These points of critique from a gender perspective are added to the well-known critique about the lack of democracy, transparency and accountability in the ongoing WTO negotiations, and to the critique about

the power imbalance between North and South.¹ The gender focus of the critique about the WTO is thus not only a critique of governance, but also a critique of the assumed and propagated link between trade and development.

In my comments I shall not add evidence to the argument of harmfulness of the WTO regulations, rather I prefer to comment on chapter 7) *Engender the WTO*.

Here, the authors recommend an equal representation of women in WTO decision-making bodies, the implementation of gender impact assessments, and also the identification of beneficial impacts of trade increase for women.² By such a gender mainstreaming strategy the **inclusion** of women as political actors and the attention towards aspects of **human security** is demanded.

I shall address the following questions:

1. What do we understand by gender mainstreaming?
2. What should be the principles of gender mainstreaming?
3. Is gender-mainstreaming of the WTO desirable?

Gender mainstreaming can be seen from two perspectives: an instrumental perspective and a transformational perspective. Including women (which women?) into decision-making procedures by, as some have demanded, opening a Gender Desk inside the WTO would imply 1) an accord with the WTO as a body of regulating trade, 2) acceptance of

¹ B. Neuhold, Digging for gold in the snake-pit. Doomed negotiations at the 5th Ministerial in Cancun, WIDE, 2003

There are already several proposals for a reform of the WTO as a global economic governance system, which we find described in Walden Bello's book *Deglobalization* (2002) like the instalment of an economic security council, the Meltzer Commission proposal, the 'back to the Bretton Woods system' school, and George Soros' alternative system. Those proposals deal partly with a more democratic control system, partly with a new ethic, but none abandons the belief that a unitary global principle should regulate trade.

² These recommendations are taken from WEDO.

its mandate, structure, and procedures, and 3) a belief in free trade as having the potential to become fair trade, and 4) trust in an ethic of gender equality as a new moral principle of the WTO. Sceptics of this inclusionary view would fear co-optation, instrumentalisation, and the promotion of an alibi-function of women. One also may ask whether the expertise and patience required to inform oneself about the content of the present 24.000 pages that have already been written is a task that is manageable, not to speak to follow-up the ongoing negotiations and interests of the 184 member states.

<i>ASPECTS OF GENDER MAINSTREAMING</i>	<i>INSTRUMENTAL</i>	<i>TRANSFORMATORY</i>
FOCUS	Function	Structure
OBJECTIVE	Equality	Empowerment
VIEW	Technocratic	Emancipatory
SOCIAL RELATIONS	Consensus	Conflict

Source: author

A transformatory understanding of gender mainstreaming would not believe in an inclusive agenda, but would ask fundamental questions regarding the wisdom and the rightfulness of the existence of the WTO, its underlying paradigm of neoliberalism, and its imbalance regarding North/South interests.

The arguments against the WTO and the methodology to challenge its principles, procedures and results are derived from the Human Rights articles of the United Nations. Human Rights give feminists and other social movements a measurement of success and failure. HR are

universalistic, they give space to women's rights which are well formulated in the CEDAW and the Beijing Platform of Action. In addition, the UNDP concept of Human Security with its economic, social, political, environmental and cultural dimensions allows to assess impacts and provides visions what quality of life and sustainable development should be. The Human Security approach is especially useful as it focuses on the local situation and dynamics of the state-market interactions.

One can raise even more fundamental questions about the transformation of the WTO system, which are formulated by some feminist economists (J.K. Gibson-Graham, J. Cameron³) who challenge the "add-in" approach⁴ of liberal feminists and are developing a holistic view about the economy. Such view leaves the "capitalocentrism" of economic theory (commodities, markets, wage labor, private accumulation as central features of capitalism) and considers trade in commodities as only one form of market exchange. Instead, the authors investigate and promote a) alternative markets (local trading systems, alternative currencies, barter) and b) non-market exchanges (household flows, gifts, indigenous exchange).

We find here a different paradigm: not the universality and one-dimensionality of the neo-liberal free market principle, supported by macro-economic theory, but the diversity of community economy, attention to the local, and a deconstruction⁵ of the neo-liberal understanding of the economy, which looks into the diversity of micro-economies.⁶

³ J.K. Gibson-Graham & J. Cameron, *Feminizing the economy: Metaphors, strategies, politics*, *Gender, Place and Culture*, 10(2) 2003: 145-157

⁴ „Adding in“ means adding a calculation of women's labour time in reproductive activities into labour accounting.

⁵ Bello, W. *De globalization. Ideas for a New World Economy*, Zed Books: London-New York, 2002

⁶ Diversity we also can find in the attempts to change the WTO system: on the institutional level by persuasion of politicians, outside the conference halls on the street by mass protests, and on the very local level, e.g. by the campaign for GATS-free zones, which opposes the privatisation of public services.

With a new theory of the economy, which is not believing in the hidden hand of the market as the invisible actor, also a new morality is implied. Not the morale of increasing profit for profit's sake, but of generosity, sharing, of a social and environmental ethics.

At a first glance, the proposed form of gender mainstreaming by Young & Hoppe is more of the instrumental than of the transformatory version, due to the focus on equal representation, assessment, and the identification of benefits through trade. At a second glance, including women as political actors would open up spaces for linking with epistemological critics of the neo-liberal paradigm, and with protagonists of the "globalo-critic" women's movement. If a political actor is committed to the vision of human security and to transformation of injustice, not just inequality, then such gender mainstreaming can become transformatory. Otherwise, adding gender equality into a system that is principally creating and manifesting gender inequalities, seems to be an illusionary, unrealistic project.

On a personal note, I have severe doubts whether gender mainstreaming of WTO is a worthwhile strategy – to become another gladiator⁷ in the WTO colosseum, who has to obey to the rules of the struggle is in my opinion not what feminists want. The hyper-masculine model of trade needs to be broken down for an alternative of a Human Rights motivated economy that brings dignity and well-being for all.

Brigitte Holzner
Chair WIDE
Institute of Social Studies
The Hague

⁷ J. Ziegler, *Die neuen Herrscher der Welt und ihre globalen Widersacher*, Bertelsmann, Muenchen, 2002