

July 17-18, 2017
Boston, Massachusetts
USA

What Kind of Growth? Economies that Work for Women in Post-War Settings

A “Feminist Roadmap for Sustainable Peace” Workshop

Organized by

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Coming out of conflict represents a key moment to contemplate economic transformation.

Anne Marie Goetz

By seeing the economy differently, we open ourselves up to DOING the economy differently.

Maliha Safri

If we map post-war needs on the one hand, and the goals of mainstream post-war economic recovery prescriptions on the other, it becomes painfully obvious that the current economic policies of the IFIs are failing huge numbers of people - and failing to create the conditions that would enable peace to be sustained

Carol Cohn

Introduction

On July 17 & 18, 2017, Carol Cohn (Consortium on Gender, Security and Human Rights) and Claire Duncanson (University of Edinburgh) convened a workshop entitled, "What Kind of Growth? Economies that Work for Women in Post-War Settings." Its focus was post-war economic reconstruction and its gendered impacts. The aims were to:

- delineate the gendered economic challenges that post-war contexts generate;
- outline the gendered impacts of current approaches to post-war reconstruction;
- consider the extent to which feminist alternatives to neoclassical economic models offer the potential for generating solutions.

The workshop is part of a larger project to create a "Feminist Roadmap for Sustainable Peace." The Feminist Roadmap project starts from the perception that no matter how gender-equitable and progressive a peace agreement might be, there are many predictable post-war international political-economic processes and dynamics that can essentially cement or deepen the structural inequalities, marginalization, exclusion, and lack of prospects that pre-existed and contributed to the armed conflict – or can even create new ones. Therefore, their effects must be carefully analyzed, and peacemaking and peacebuilding processes must, with foresight, take these into account if the end goal is gender-equitable, sustainable peace.

This workshop focused on the specific contribution that feminist economics might bring to the analysis – both in diagnosing the problems of currently dominant models of post-war economic development and in generating alternatives. It thus brought together for two days of intense dialogue and knowledge sharing a range of feminist researchers whose paths otherwise rarely cross: feminist political economists who focus on alternatives to neoclassical economic models of growth and feminist researchers who are concerned with the challenges of building gender-equitable, sustainable peace. The participants were: Suzanne Bergeron, Carol Cohn, Claire Duncanson, Kade Finnoff, Anne Marie Goetz, Dyan Mazurana, Smita Ramnarain, Maliha Safri, and Ghazal Zulfiqar. (For biographical information, see page 19.)

Origins of the Workshop Agenda

In the past two decades, feminist international relations (IR) researchers have focused on a broad range of questions related to gender, war and peacebuilding; they have explored the gendered impacts of war, as well as the gender dimensions of post-war practices such as disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programs, security sector reform, and transitional justice mechanisms. Yet, while showing that current post-war reconstruction efforts largely continue to deepen – rather than ameliorate – gendered structural inequalities, feminist IR researchers, with a few exceptions, have given little attention to what an alternative post-war reconstruction strategy might look like.

At the same time, there has been a flourishing of feminist economic research on alternatives to what might be thought of as “economic business as usual.” These analyses have emerged in response to waves of financial crisis and austerity, climate change, and global crises of social reproduction. They draw upon human rights and a feminist ethics of care and sustainability to challenge the market-centered logic of the mainstream.

While this feminist economic scholarship has addressed a wide range of sites and practices, it has heretofore paid little attention to war-torn societies, which face distinct challenges including decimated physical and social infrastructure, a despoiled physical environment, collapse of state institutions, and entrenched illicit war economies – all of which have particularly detrimental consequences for women and other marginalized groups. These are contexts, then, in which economic growth would seem a fundamental requirement. Yet standard prescriptions for economic growth have only served to deepen pre-existing inequalities and create new ones, thereby undermining the prospects for gender-equitable and sustainable peace.

The question of what kind of economic growth could work to support gender equality in post-war contexts is an issue of urgent theoretical and practical importance. Can feminist economic work that questions the market-based growth logic of neoclassical economics, and which foregrounds addressing inequalities and environmental limits, address the specific challenges of post-war contexts? These are the questions the workshop was designed to explore

The Workshop Sessions

I. What are the core economic needs and challenges specific to countries emerging from armed conflict and how are they gendered?

In answering the central question of the first workshop session, participants drew on their knowledge of conflict-affected areas to generate a list of the key economic challenges, and to discuss how they are gendered. They aimed to generate a “view from below,” that is, how the economic challenges appear to those most affected and marginalized by war. In this they were motivated by the feminist insight that starting from women’s everyday lives might capture things that are overlooked if one starts from the standpoint of the state or the global economy. The complexity and scale of the challenges, and their profoundly gendered nature, quickly became apparent.

Many of those present started by highlighting challenges around securing basic needs. During war, resources will likely have been destroyed and/or looted, farming and distribution of food will have been disrupted, and land may have been grabbed, polluted or mined. As women are the ones often assigned responsibility for sustaining families, these challenges add to their workloads and undermine their access to food and water. Theft, too, is a major factor, whether it is at the household and community level, or the plunder of resources at the national level.

“...because it’s often the female-headed households or households who are older, or wounded, they get targeted for theft. Even though they are not wealthier, they are just fair game.” - Dyan Mazurana

“Very often you focus intensely on social violence, but you miss the other sorts of violence that are going on, such as structural and domestic violence, which both increase in post-conflict contexts.” - Smita Ramnarain

Livelihoods emerged as a key challenge of post-war contexts. War will have destroyed many people’s access to resources, assets and land required for secure livelihoods. And employment post-war is often variously absent, degraded, depleted, or precarious. This lack of employment opportunities affects both men and women, but in different ways. For men, for example, the stress of lack of income may be compounded by a shaken sense of masculinity if they cannot live up to the role of “breadwinner.” Women, on the other hand, if

they have taken on paid work in place of men who are fighting, are often pushed out of work, sometimes violently, at war's end, when recently demobilised male soldiers, IDPs and refugees are all looking for work. Women also may have been drawn into unsafe livelihoods around prostitution and sexual slavery, or scavenging in toxic dumps. Women may have taken on these activities at the same time as continuing to provide the bulk of caring labour and subsistence food production. Thus, workshop participants pointed out, it is crucial to conceptualize "work" beyond the bounds of paid labor – a point which emerged often throughout the two days.

From livelihoods, participants moved on to discussing war-time destruction of infrastructure, and the urgency of employing gender analysis when making decisions about how to rebuild it. A basic point was that physical infrastructure needs to address women's needs; this might mean, for example, more attention to rural roads facilitating access to local markets than superhighways connecting capitals to ports. But social infrastructure and the need for services that respond to the many gendered harms of war dominated the discussion, because of the very many challenges to consider. Among them, the need to: create a health service which could respond to the impacts of war, including war-specific and sometimes gender-specific wounds (such as amputations, traumatic fistula, effects of chemical weapons, psychological trauma), which need specific kinds of medical care; construct an education sector which could reach those who had been deprived access to education through the war (adults as well as children), as well as overcoming likely pre-existing gender gaps in access and quality; and build a justice sector which could effectively address war-crimes, including gender-based violence, with all the resources this demands.

"In post-conflict settings, you need the best possible versions of social services, and they must be attentive to existing and newly created inequalities. More investment is required to ensure this." - Claire Duncanson

It became clear over the discussion that there is a pattern whereby war has destroyed the services on which people rely at the same time that people are in need of a particularly enhanced level – including attention to gender – of provision. Speaking to the scale of the challenge, Dyan Mazurana pointed to recent research in Northern Uganda in which it was found that one in every three families had a member who was war-wounded. Absent a health care system that could treat their injuries, the wounded instead became chronically disabled, unable to work, and in need of huge amounts of care from at least one other member of the household. Thus, a second household member's labor is then lost from the household's income generation capacity. As Dyan put it, "these kinds of chronic injuries just continually pull the household under, so one of the things to think about when reconstructing the health system would be to focus on the kind of injuries, the kind of health effects that the war has caused... and as common sense as that sounds, it doesn't occur."

Other economic challenges families face in the aftermath of war, often overlooked, are the very sizable expenses of marriages and funerals. And sending children to school, even where education is nominally free, tends to be a challenge due to hidden fees. When families lack economic resources, it is often girls who are pulled out of school first. But perhaps counter-intuitively, girls can also suffer when families seem to be recovering economically, as families may pull girls out of school to help with a good harvest, to trade, or to make up for the lost labor at home.

The session concluded with a discussion of some of the macro-level economic challenges facing post-war states: in particular, the intertwined challenges of raising sufficient revenue to pay for the enhanced level of services required in post-war states, and of transforming the “war economy,” characterized by criminality, corruption and capture of resources, which does not simply fade away with the signing of a peace agreement. Questions abound. To what extent does the need for revenue necessitate a commitment to full-employment policies? Are full-employment policies the solution feminists wish to advocate for, or would doing so risk further privileging the productive economy over the reproductive? Moreover, given the lack of decent work opportunities in post-war contexts, will people, perhaps especially women, be incorporated into the labor market on adverse terms?

“Many of the post-war economies that we studied are reliant on the exploitation of the labor of the poorest people, and often women; and big multinational corporations teamed up with the military, teamed up with elite leaders who have connections, will have control over the fishing industries and tobacco industries... and who does the processing of the fish? Who rolls the bidis? It’s women. It’s poor women.” - Dyan Mazurana

II. The limits of neoliberal post-war reconstruction policy

In this session, participants brought a gender-analytic lens to the key mechanisms used to govern post-conflict reconstruction planning, such as Post-Conflict Needs Assessments (PCNAs) and Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), and key actors who are involved, such as various organs of the United Nations (UN), the International Financial Institutions (IFIs), and key donor states.

Participants noted that economic planning is commonly aimed at resuscitating markets and developing the private sector in order to encourage economic growth (measured by GDP), and that these strategies have highly gendered impacts. There was intense discussion of the extent and significance of shifts in the IFIs' approach to post-war countries over the post-Cold War era, but agreement that they still tend to: see rebuilding the financial capacity of the state and developing a "responsible" macroeconomic framework as key priorities; define these goals in particular neoliberal ways; and see these processes as non-gendered, non-political, technical exercises. The ultimate aim remains integrating the post-war state into the global economy. This can play out differently depending on whether the post-war state is predominantly agriculture based, as in many post-war countries in the Global South, or relatively industrialized, such as in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo and Iraq.

Participants discussed how the post-war economies in the Global South are often designed around the export of natural resources (e.g., minerals, fossil fuels or crops), where the major investment is in large-scale physical infrastructure projects which can facilitate extraction and export, and the private sector is encouraged to invest and extract through various tax incentives. These tax incentives, in turn, often mean that much of the profit to be made from the resources leaves the post-war country. Kade Finnoff noted that the prioritisation of one or two resources in their raw state for export is rarely a successful strategy for prosperity. Moreover, large scale, often foreign acquisition of land for extractive industries or agribusiness can dispossess rural people of their land and access to food, and, due to historical gendered patterns of land use, women are disproportionately affected. The assumption of the IFIs is that the foreign investment will lead to jobs, but participants noted, drawing from examples in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Colombia, this promise seldom materializes, and to the small extent it does, it rarely benefits women. The idea of "jobless recovery," described in detail in recent reports from the Sustainable Livelihoods Consortium, really effectively captures what goes on in many post-war contexts.

"Logging in DRC, diamond mining in Sierra Leone, timber and palm oil in Liberia, oil in Nigeria.... The aim is economic growth in terms of GDP, but that doesn't say much about whether there are decent livelihoods, or any redistribution of wealth, it doesn't say much about equality and prosperity" - Claire Duncanson

“Jobless recovery” also characterizes the situation post-war in relatively industrialized economies such as Bosnia-Herzegovina and Iraq, where primacy is afforded to the privatization of state or collectively owned enterprises and to the shrinking of the public sector. In Iraq, for example, the sell-off of oil was privileged above the DDR of combatants, employment policies more generally, and meeting basic needs. The rationale is the familiar neoliberal claim that privatization will bring about greater efficiency, generating new investment, expanding output and bringing about rising productivity and employment. The reality, however, in patterns which both are profoundly unjust and risk a return to war, is that the privatized resources are more often than not captured by belligerent or criminal groups, who were the main beneficiaries of gendered war economies. Meanwhile, women suffer disproportionately from efforts to shrink the public sector, as they rely on services such as health and education in their role as carers, and they often rely on the public sector for employment.

Discussing DDR in more depth, participants noted that DDR programs continue to steer men and women into gender stereotypical jobs, which can trap women in lower earnings. Participants also noted, more generally, the problems of a “project logic” approach to women’s economic empowerment as part of peacebuilding. Microcredit schemes and entrepreneurship programmes still predominate, despite evidence that they are as likely to trap women in poverty as to empower them. “We’ll give you a measly amount of credit, which we’ll then hound you for, and if you can do it, great and if not...,” in Dyan Mazurana’s words. Such programmes, moreover, increasingly tend to include courses in “financial literacy.” The message is, as Ghazal Zulfiqar put it, “if only women could understand finance and get involved, ‘lean in,’ then the problem would be solved.” These approaches put all the responsibility on individuals, when the source of women’s marginalization lies elsewhere.

Related to problems around the “project logic” of women’s economic empowerment, participants discussed the democratic deficit in the economic elements of peacebuilding – particularly the exclusion of women. Kade Finnoff raised the increasing role that public-private partnerships play in economic recovery. The private capture of publicly-owned assets is a common outcome, one which generates benefits only for certain members of communities. Tracking the funds of different initiatives, be they public-private partnerships or IFI interventions, remains a challenge that many of the participants have confronted. Work needs to be done conducting accurate needs assessments and evaluating who within post-war societies truly benefits from different models of economic reconstruction policies.

Wrapping up this session, participants turned to non-traditional donors, and considered the under-researched but increasingly important role of the BRICS, China in particular, and the gendered impacts of their approach to economic reconstruction in post-war contexts. Drawing from evidence in Sri Lanka, the Philippines and Myanmar, Anne Marie Goetz first highlighted the continuities between China and traditional donors, such as their emphasis on investing in physical infrastructure and their focus on export-oriented growth. She then turned to the differences between them, which were not encouraging: even less of a

commitment to providing jobs to local people and to women; even less of a commitment to land rights; more extreme militarisation and mass violence, including gender-based violence, to clear land and facilitate extraction; even less transparency; and little commitment to multilateralism. Anne Marie emphasized the importance of looking beyond the traditional donor community and focusing attention on the gendered impacts of non-traditional donors, given the increased role they are playing in post-war contexts.

III. Alternatives to neoliberalism? Feminist economic imaginings

Suzanne Bergeron framed this session by highlighting several key feminist approaches to the economy that offer different goals and value systems than neoclassical growth-oriented models. “Right now, policies that guide post-war reconstruction are more or less straight out of the neoliberal playbook of cutting services and welfare, privatization, export promotion, and so forth.” In contrast, “critical feminist political economy frameworks...offer a range of alternative aims and goals that they see as central: women’s empowerment, economic and social rights, fostering care and provisioning over profits, and/or enacting diverse and more cooperative economic practices.” These frameworks include:

- An agency and empowerment approach, in which the goal of economics is not growth defined by GDP but enabling people to live out their capabilities. The aim for women specifically is their empowerment, understood as women’s ability to define their own goals and act upon them for social change.
- A human rights approach, which examines the gendered impacts of economic policy on social and economic rights. It aims to develop fiscal policy which would ensure that everyone’s – including women’s – social and economic rights are met, through attention to providing decent work, health, education, and social welfare.
- A social reproduction approach, which seeks to make informal and unpaid care work visible and valuable, and highlights the ways in which a lack of attention to this important aspect of the economy can increase the exploitation and precarity of women’s lives.
- Feminist household analysis, which makes visible the various forms of production, distribution, and gendered power dynamics within households, as well as the implications of policy on a diversity of household forms, such as single-headed households.
- Feminist sustainability and de-growth approaches, which recognize the imperative to meet the needs of all within the limited resources of the planet, and question the concept of growth as universally beneficial for women and societies in general. The goal of economics should be human prosperity, not growth. Some versions advocate de-growth, on the basis that all growth contributes to capitalism, colonialism, and climate change; others focus more on redefining growth.

Maliha Safri used the concepts visibility and invisibility introduced by Suzanne as her point of departure for her presentation on the Diverse/Social and Solidarity Economies (SSE) approaches. Drawing on J.K. Gibson-Graham’s depiction of the economy as an iceberg, Maliha explained that conventional economic actors focus on only what is visible, such as production for the market and waged labour. However, many invisible activities play large roles in sustaining life: production that occurs within families and households, unpaid labour, and alternative forms of market and not-for-market production.



Figure 1: J. K Gibson Graham's Iceberg Economy

Paying attention to the whole gamut of economic life offers potential for more sustainable and equitable futures. By seeing the economy differently, people come to being able to do economics differently. This is a central premise of the SSE Perspective which focuses on building forms of social provisioning based on need, reciprocity, community, and sustainability, rather than profit and accumulation objectives.

The establishment of cooperatives, community networks, ecologically conscious firms and, in general, socially responsible and ethical business practices around the world are examples of such alternatives to extractive and exploitative forms of capitalist business as usual. In particular, the cooperative model is fast

becoming an important means for promoting not only decent livelihoods, working conditions, and access to services for its members but also goals of economic, environmental, and social sustainability. Maliha drew on her research on worker cooperatives in New York, Philadelphia, and Massachusetts to demonstrate the positive benefits for women, households and communities. Worker cooperatives, she found, hire more workers than conventional capitalist firms, provide more stable employment, and can pay significantly higher wages, all things that benefit women and communities, thus challenging the value conventional economists place on capitalist models that support a narrow view of economic growth.

Suzanne and Maliha's presentations generated a rich discussion. Given that in a typical Global South country approximately 60% of the economic activity is outside of the capitalist market, and it is often higher in countries emerging from war, recognition of and support for economic diversity and for social reproduction is crucial. It also offers potentially fruitful ways of thinking about alternative economic models for post-war reconstruction, models which could further participation and equality. Participants were struck by the potential that SSEs have to achieve both economic and physical security, so crucial after war, since they are based on the building of social networks and taking collective action towards enhancing well-being. Sustainability approaches too were considered crucial, not least because environmental degradation and resource overuse are often central problems in war and post-war contexts, and the burdens of unsustainable development are disproportionately borne by women. The extent of the compatibility between the sustainability approach and the other feminist approaches was explored: would elements of all of them be useful in

post-war settings, or are there fundamental incompatibilities? To what extent could any of the approaches actually be transformative of current practice in post-war economic reconstruction?

The main discussion focussed on the question of “what is the economy for?” Is the goal economic growth as measured by an increase in the production of goods and services for market, or should we center other goals associated with provisioning and livelihoods, equity and poverty reduction, and environmental sustainability?

“When was it that it became the norm to expect growth rates that are insanely high? And also when was it that it became the norm to be respectful of such insanely rapacious capitalism? ...these rates of growth are unsustainable, they require extreme human inequality.” - Anne Marie Goetz

IV. Solutions and Strategies

With these three building blocks in place – the core economic needs and challenges of post-war countries, the critique of current economic recovery practice, and new feminist economic approaches – discussion over the rest of the workshop turned to potential strategies for change. What could happen in post-war contexts to tackle inequalities and build sustainable peace? Do feminist alternative economic approaches have relevance and applicability in/given the challenges of the aftermath of war? Might they offer solutions that would help build a Feminist Roadmap for Sustainable Peace? And if so, what are next steps? What openings exist for institutionalizing change, and how can bureaucratic resistance be overcome?

Solutions

One central discussion focused on the need to **rethink growth as defined by increasing GDP as the sole measure of economic success**. Participants asked, “Is growth itself the problem, or is the problem how growth is measured, or is it the rate of growth that is considered necessary?” For example, would growth be the right goal if only it were more inclusive and equitable to tackle poverty and inequality? Or is the problem more in how growth is conceptualized and measured? – i.e., if GDP were no longer the standard, would growth not be so problematic as the goal and the measure of success for postwar economic recovery?

The pros and cons of various conceptualizations of alternatives to neoclassical economic growth – such as equitable growth, sustainable growth, and inclusive growth – were debated. Participants noted that there already exist over a thousand alternative indices for measuring economic success, including, for example, the Human Development Index, which integrates a focus on increased output with measures of health and well-being. Suzanne Bergeron raised the crucial question: “To what extent are these different indices ways of talking about the economy differently, and ways of moving away from a growth-fetishized model? And in what ways do they get us stuck in some old ruts?”

Many participants felt that retaining continuous high rates of economic growth as the goal at a global level is untenable within planetary limits. However, it was not seen as justifiable for post-war countries to be denied the opportunity for vigorous economic growth, given the need to rebuild what had been destroyed in the war and to address pre-existing poverty and inequalities. As such, there may be the need for a globalized solution that links de-growth in the global North with higher growth in the war-torn regions of the Global South – but which also reconsiders the kind of growth that is desirable.

The potential of post-war states **adopting full-employment strategies** was then discussed at length. There were multiple dilemmas associated with this strategy. First, it was noted that

employment as an economic recovery strategy may help tackle poverty and inequality, but fails to tackle and could even contribute to environmental degradation and sustainability problems. Further, focusing on employment-creation as the solution is also a very market- and capital-centric vision that marginalizes crucial forms of unpaid economic activity such as subsistence agriculture and care work. Notwithstanding those challenges, many felt that the aim of full employment in post-war contexts—particularly a gender-aware notion of full-employment that did not leave out or ghettoize women—would be a welcome change from the current focus on GDP growth.

Certainly, prioritizing local employment over abstract notions of economic efficiency would seem to be in order. Carol Cohn, offering a “concrete” example, asked whether it was really so utopian to insist that in any large-scale infrastructure project such as road-building, local men and women had to be hired for both the building and support services. The benefits could include incomes where incomes are scarce, skill- and capacity-building, reintegration of combatants, and livelihoods for war widows and other female-headed households. Anne Marie Goetz shared examples from India, where the state employs women to build roads between rural markets, contributing to rural infrastructure, poverty reduction, and women’s collective empowerment. This sort of initiative is surprisingly absent from post-conflict economic prescriptions.

Policy makers currently perceive employment in peacebuilding as the challenge of balancing two imperatives. The first is to keep young men, the ex- or potential combatants and spoilers, busy and committed to the peace. The second is to fulfill commitments made to women’s rights and empowerment, which is too often seen as taking away precious and rare jobs from men. This conflict is especially acute in situations where the formal economy employs so few – as is so often the case in post-war settings. Post-war economic recovery policies that actively prioritize large-scale, diverse and gender-equitable decent employment, rather than assuming the trickle-down employment effects of market-led strategies, would ameliorate these tensions significantly.

A key point of consensus in the discussion was the need to prioritize an infrastructure to support care work, although a number of challenges to achieving this goal quickly emerged. Social provisioning and community organizing activities have historically been coded as feminine and devalued. Thus, an urgent task is challenging this coding, particularly in the masculinist contexts of post-war economic restructuring. Further, making care work visible and valuable is both a result of – and a prerequisite for – serious funding, posing a considerable challenge.

“Without infrastructures of care, economies would fall apart. It’s important to ask, ‘how do we use economic policy to reconstruct this infrastructure in a gender equitable way?’” - Kade Finnoff

Championing cooperatives and other solidarity economy and non-capitalist economic forms already operating at community level in post-war contexts was presented as an important solution. In many cases, notably Iraq and Syria, solidarity economy activities (such as community gardens and cooperatives) have delivered crucial services, food and other essential goods in war time, and they can continue to provide resilient and sustainable practices in post-war economies. Recent research on social and solidarity economies suggests that fostering cooperative forms to meet community needs could also contribute to goals of full employment, economic development, and livelihoods.

“I really do think that post-conflict environments have the chance to offer a different trajectory altogether if they only recognize the value of building networks and organizations, worker unions, producer cooperatives, and organize the economy in a radically different way.” - Smita Ramnarain

Universal Basic Income and use of **Cash Transfers** were discussed as other policies which offer potential in post-war economies. In contrast to a full employment approach to ending poverty, these policies represent an acknowledgment of and response to the fact that economies may fail to generate full employment due to globalization and mechanization, and also that the prevailing wage rate may not be a living wage. Providing universal basic income and/or cash transfers is increasingly an anti-poverty strategy being used around the globe. However, it is less likely to be recommended in post-war contexts where the focus is transitioning to a marketized economy as the primary way to fix what had been broken in the war economy.

Gender and Participatory Budget Initiatives were presented as an important tool which can facilitate implementation of feminist approaches which reorient the goals of the economy to human rights, care, sustainability or all three. In post-war contexts, gender budgeting can be used strategically to ensure that fiscal spending is attentive to advancing gender equity. Ensuring citizen participation in the budgeting process through attention to gender and other key equity issues can work not only to reduce inequalities and enhance sustainability, but also to transform citizens' relationship to the state.

“... something like participatory budgeting changes people's participation in civic life, in political life, it changes your relationship to the state to be an active decision maker about resources.” - Maliha Safri

Strategies

The fundamental practical question of how policy makers can be persuaded of the need for a new economic recovery paradigm was discussed at length. Participants agreed it would be crucial to map the full range of multilateral, national, regional and local mechanisms in post-war space that could offer particular openings. While that comprehensive mapping was beyond the scope of this short workshop, several key potential openings were discussed.

At the international level, there seem to be some positive shifts at the United Nations which might offer some promise. For example, the three 2015 UN reviews of peace and security work all call for wholesale organizational change and rethinking -- so might they provide openings to lobby receptive policy-makers?

But bureaucratic inertia and lack of political will are formidable challenges. Even before the three reviews, the UN made various commitments such as the 15% of UN Peacebuilding Fund grants to go to projects furthering gender equality, and the UN Secretary-General's 7-Point Action Plan's commitment to gender parity in employment on peacebuilding projects – which it needs help implementing. These commitments offer incremental change rather than the kinds of transformation of the economic model called for in this workshop, although they arguably have the potential to be transformative if feminists mobilize resources to push for bigger changes.

“we’re talking about total transformation and the UN can’t figure out how to do the 15%, let alone the total transformation. And yet, yesterday, we came up with all kinds of thoughts on how you could make gender part of the standard menu of post-conflict economic recovery, on how you could make all of that much more fruitful or much more profitable to women, if there were cash handouts to women, if there were job programs that had to hire at least 50% women, if not more, if there were job creation programs, if there were financial support programs that were targeted at women, if there were participatory budgeting and basic income. There’s a whole series of things that aren’t being done that are so doable and so accessible and could be done tomorrow actually, if there were any willingness....”
- Anne Marie Goetz

Do other multilateral organizations offer models that can be translated to post-war contexts? For instance, the ILO's focus on the policies of full employment and decent work could serve as an example of how to achieve post-war goals of sustainable and equitable growth contributing to the peace. Even a market-focused organization such as the IMF could be looked to for models to achieve feminist goals, given its recent commitment to include gender budgeting in all of its country policy recommendations.

Or is space for hearing about alternative economic models so marginal at the international policy-making level that a better use of time is building capacity amongst other feminists, women's organizations on the ground and Women Human Rights Defenders who might participate in peace talks?

Could any of the practical ideas above, with further development, be included in peace accords, PRSPs, PCNAs or post-war Constitutions? Right now, it is still a struggle for women to get into peace negotiations, and most often when they do, they are lucky to get one demand accepted, which is a quota for the next election. We need discussions about the kinds of economic and governance arrangements would work best for them. What patterns of natural resource management or taxation might be most beneficial?

“In a peace accord, all you need sometimes is one sentence, a few words in a few key places that plant the seed. If we can better understand what that seed should be, how to better conceptualize economic recovery to serve people more equally, we can look to plant those seeds... that gives people leverage in post-conflict countries to start fighting for change.” - Dyan Mazurana

Many of the feminist solutions discussed in the workshop assume some progressive role for the state. But are we asking too much of the post-war state? There was some sympathy for the arguments of scholars such as Alex de Waal that peacebuilders need to be more modest in their aims and accept that post-war states are as much political marketplaces as potential vehicles for the distribution of wealth. Yet there was also a sense that feminists must reach beyond fatalism and imagine ways to creatively integrate gender equity concerns into the political and economic processes of states emerging from conflict.

V. Conclusion

There is no doubting that the gendered economic challenges of post-war contexts are profound, and that current approaches to post-war economic reconstruction exacerbate many of the problems. This workshop went beyond outlining these multifarious problems, however, and, by engaging with the visionary thinking of feminist economics, began much-needed discussions on alternative approaches that could actually advance the twin tasks of consolidating peace and tackling inequalities.

That said, this work is only in its early stages. The rich conversations we had about rethinking how economies can work for women in post-war settings were generative of many avenues for further exploration:

- Are Human Rights approaches sufficiently transformative of current economic models? Does Human Rights Law, particularly on Economic and Social Rights, offer a useful tool in obligating donor states and IFIs to adopt a different approach? Could IFIs be persuaded to adopt a Human Rights approach to economic policies in their dealings with post-war countries?
- Could resourcing an infrastructure for caring work, broadly defined, provide solutions for the dearth of decent jobs and the increased level of demand for care the workshop identified in post-war contexts? How could such an infrastructure of care be funded?
- What does putting sustainability at the heart of economic models mean for post-war countries? Does it demand limits to growth, new measures of growth, global redistribution of wealth, or all three? What does it mean for extractive industries, physical infrastructure projects, and agriculture?

There is an evident need for more debate of these issues, reaching out to include more feminist economists and women from and working on economic development and/or gendered insecurities in conflict-affected areas. The workshop demonstrated, however, the potential of bringing different groups of scholars together to generate innovative ways forward.

“This small exploratory workshop, valuable in and of itself, has generated questions and ideas which will be crucial to carry forward and deepen in the larger thematic knowledge-building workshops of the Feminist Roadmap for Sustainable Peace. Feminist approaches to infrastructure reconstruction, natural resource policy, large scale land acquisition, extractive industries, public finance, livelihoods and climate change disruption – all of these must be refracted through the lens of issues raised in this workshop. And all of them offer opportunities to further develop the feminist economic imaginings we have explored together here.”

- Carol Cohn

Participants

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Founding Director of the Consortium on Gender, Security and Human Rights, University of Massachusetts Boston. Her research addresses a wide array of issues in gender, armed conflict and peacebuilding. Her current focus is on ways of bringing feminist political economic analysis into the WPS agenda.

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Clinical Professor at Center for Global Affairs, New York University, and former Chief Advisor on Peace and Security at UN Women. Published widely on women, security policy, and peacebuilding and is an influential gender expert in development policy circles.

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Research Director at the Feinstein International Center and Associate Research Professor at The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy. Her areas of focus include women's and children's rights during armed conflict and post conflict, serious crimes and violations committed during armed conflict and their effects on victims and civilian populations, armed opposition groups, and remedy and reparation. She works with a number of governments, UN agencies and NGOs on these areas.

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Assistant Professor of Economics at the University of Rhode Island. Her research focuses on the political economy of development in South Asia. She has worked on post-conflict reconstruction, peacebuilding and development, feminization of poverty and female headship, microfinance, and more recently, environmental adaptation and resource conflicts, with field based research in Nepal and India.

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Acknowledgements

The workshop was funded by Official Development Assistance research allocation by Scottish Funding Council to the University of Edinburgh for 2016/17. Contributions to this report came from Suzanne Bergeron, Carol Cohn and Claire Duncanson.

Recommended citation:

Consortium on Gender, Security and Human Rights. (2017). What Kind of Growth?: Economies that Work for Women in Post-War Settings (Workshop Report).

Retrieved from <http://genderandsecurity.org/feminist-roadmap-sustainable-peace>

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