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# MERGING CARE AND GREEN ECONOMY APPROACHES TO FINANCE GENDER-EQUITABLE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE POST-2015 FRAMEWORK[1]

Liane Schalatek

## INTRODUCTION

There is just one year left before the Millennium Development Goals process (MDG) is to end in 2015 – with the sober acknowledgement that the international community collectively has fallen short in achieving these goals. In parallel, in the follow up to the 2012 "Rio+20" UN Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) the outlines of a post-2015 framework with a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) as likely MDG successors are taking shape. Gender-equitable sustainable development approaches will be key to addressing the conceptual shortcomings of the MDG process, which failed to significantly reduce persistent poverty and inequalities, including between men and women, in a natural environment that is overstressed, continues to be depleted in the name of economic growth and development, and is taken as a given. In order to succeed, truly sustainable development needs to marry the care economy which recognizes and accounts for primarily women's unpaid social reproduction and care burden with efforts for greening the global economy. The latter will entail internalizing and valuing (but not commodifying) the careful use of environmental resources in ways that address growing inequality and corporate excesses and promote decent jobs and livelihoods as well as the realization of gender equality and women's rights. Significant resources for such interventions and making development and climate finance processes more democratic and gender-responsive are necessary to translate states' rhetorical commitments into lasting changes. Substantial structural policy reforms of the global trade and finance systems are also indispensable. However, it remains to be seen if these reforms and actions will be tackled in the proposed SDGs, which are still largely conceived within a business-as-usual market-based economic model of a growth-profit-efficiency trilogy.

## THE SHORTCOMINGS OF THE MDG PROCESS

To be fair, the set of eight MDGs with 21 specified targets and elaborating 60 indicators to monitor progress by 2015 against a 1990 base year, which some 189 countries endorsed in September 2000, were never constructed as a normative comprehensive vision of "the future we want" (one devoid of exploitation of people and nature, injustice and inequality). Instead they were conceived as a pragmatic and practical action plan focused on addressing the worst excesses of the "world we have". MDG indicators were selected based more on the availability of monitoring data, than on their meaningfulness for sustainable development. The MDGs set two specific, but largely separated goals for both gender equality (MDG3) and environmental sustainability (MDG7). In doing so, the MDGs conceptually failed to integrate a key message from the 1992 Earth Summit: sustainable development, which is centred on the notion of intergenerational and societal justice, of care and precaution in dealing with each other and the earth, is inconceivable without the inclusion of gender equality ideals into all aspects of development work and without giving women a key role in environmental and development policy decision making.[2]

Despite some progress, the years since the Earth and Millennium Summits have seen both non-advancement and setbacks on gender-equitable sustainable development, with multiple interrelated crises of finance, economy, ecology, food and fuel over the last years hitting women disproportionally hard. Gender-based violence and discrimination stubbornly persists despite the existence of a binding international legal framework with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Global poverty retains a predominantly female face, despite and in many critical aspects because of economic and financial globalization and liberalization efforts. Many heterodox and feminist economic thinkers feel that without fundamental reforms and strict government re-

regulations the prevailing neoliberal market-based economic model is simply incapable of supporting gender-equitable sustainable development. The care economy – predominantly women's poorly paid or unpaid work of caring for their families and their livelihoods, for nature or for future generations – remains largely unrecognized and undervalued in the economic sphere, excluded from national accounting systems and non-considered in economic policy-making from the macro to the micro level. If care and social reproduction are not viewed as intrinsically linked with economic production, they cannot be reflected in macro-economic policy making that puts people and their ties to the environment, not shareholder interests and profits, at the centre of sustainable development. At the same time, the externalization of the environment and natural resources in the prevailing market-liberal macro-economic model which treats them as free and unlimited production inputs has to be overcome.

Nowhere does this become clearer than when looking at progress toward implementation of MDG7 on ensuring environmental sustainability (UN 2013a). Climate change, called the "greatest market failure" by the 2006 Stern review on economics and climate change, has dramatically worsened with global emissions of carbon dioxide ($CO_2$) increasing by more than 46 percent since 1990. Today, climate change, which in the MDG framework did not even secure a separate target under MDG7 and only garnered one of 60 MDG progress indicators, is already undercutting and threatening current and future fragile equality and development gains made since the 2000 Millennium Summit, affecting many women disproportionally, especially in the developing world.

This trend is bound to continue if the challenge of climate change – in parallel to a focus on integrating women's rights and gender equality as a cross-cutting goal – is not centrally addressed and integrated throughout a set of new SDGs. The year 2015 must be a banner year for coherent and consistent "double mainstreaming" efforts to integrate gender equality and climate change considerations into several multilateral processes. In addition to an agreement on a set of SDGs, 2015 is also a crucial year for the international community to reach a new global agreement to address climate change that then can take effect in 2020, when current binding commitments by countries to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) end. And it is the year, when the world's nations will have to acknowledge significant shortcomings in implementing the "Beijing Platform of Action" for gender equality and women's empowerment 20 years after the Fourth Conference on Women amidst a strengthening of political forces that threaten the universality of women's human rights, including with respect to women's sexual and reproductive health.

## THE CARE DEFICITS OF EFFORTS TO "GREEN" THE ECONOMY

Unfortunately, the concept of the green economy, which the Rio+20 Summit endorsed in 2012 as an approach to redefine sustainable development and which informs the deliberations for the SDGs, missed the opportunity to advance new prosperity, lifestyle and consumption models built around equity and justice with sufficiency and a "good life" as the ultimate goal of human economic activity (Unmüßig 2012). Instead, it proposed a market-based approach, which focuses on decoupling economic growth from increasing carbon emissions and suggests prizing and commodifying natural resources like forests, land and water as a way to address the overuse of natural resources, including by further enclosing and privatizing global commons. In the climate change context, this thinking translates for example into mechanisms focused on reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation and supporting large-scale biofuel production. The latter prioritize the carbon-value of land and forests over their contributions to national and local food security, local livelihoods and gender-responsive land use and land tenure practices. Such approaches instead often encourage land grabs and displacement of local communities, including of women subsistence farmers who form the backbone of food production in most developing countries.

Green economy policy approaches, which give the corporate sector the prime role in implementation with the public sector acting as enabler by reducing investment risks and creating enabling environments globally and domestically for private sector actions, have been criticized on many grounds (van Heemstra 2012), including their lack of theoretical consistency (encouraging for example infinite growth in a finite world). While addressing the over-exploitation of natural resources, social exploitation and gender discrimination and the contributions of the care economy are not taken into account (Gottschlich 2012). Conceived largely as an enormous global green investment and job creation program for low-emission, pro-poor development with suggested investments of up to US Dollar 1.3 trillion per year, compliance with human rights principles and other rights and norms (such as the right to water, right to food or international environmental law) as the normative framework to guide such investments or integrate a gender-differentiated view are likewise not addressed (Unmüßig 2012). Women are either instrumentalized and seen as possible suppliers of labour for a greener economy – although because of gender-segregated employment patterns and discrimination few of the expected 50 million green jobs globally actually might accrue to women (Stevens 2012) unless special efforts are made to open up education and job-training in the science, technology and engineering fields to women. Or they are patronized as passive victims and welfare recipients, but not as holders of economic, social, political and cultural rights and agents of fundamental change (Bidegain/Nayar 2012). Likewise, neither the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) nor climate financing instruments apply a human and gender rights lens.[3] To the extent that they address women as beneficiaries and stakeholders, they focus mostly on women as victims and the need to reduce their vulnerabilities to climate change, but not on supporting women's agency in contributing to climate change solutions, including through targeted funding allocations.

These attitudes disregard the existing close link between mostly women's contribution to the unpaid care economy and necessary global efforts for greening the economy. An example is the persistence of worldwide 2.8 billion people still relying on biomass for cooking. Improving traditional cookstoves reduces the drudgery of care work of women who do most of the care work of firewood collection for cooking (contributing to deforestation in some of the most ecologically stressed regions of the world) and suffer from the negative health effects due to indoor pollution (the release of black carbon is also a potent climate enforcer). Large-scale investments in this area thus contribute to women's empowerment and well-being while improving the environment and addressing climate change.

However, it is not a given that ongoing efforts for a post-2015 global framework will focus centrally on the three R's of unpaid care work – recognize, reduce and redistribute – and embrace the principles of a caring economy. These include the prioritization of meeting human needs and ensuring sustainable use of natural resources, a valuation and remuneration of personal care services, the right to equal access to resources and an equal distribution of unpaid work between women and men. The report of the High Level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, for example, released in May 2013 upheld a corporate-driven extractivist[4] economy as a way "to create more value and drive sustainable and inclusive growth," (UN 2013b: 8) but ignored unpaid care contributions to development made by women at all levels as the most fundamental pillar of rural livelihoods and community well-being. It also failed to address the need for policy coherence between economic, aid, trade and financial global and national policy frameworks with international human and women's rights and environmental law agreements, including labour and Indigenous Peoples' rights, and the systemic reform and regulation of financial flows and markets in pursuit of this coherence. In a different workstream of the UN's post-2015 process, draft indicators recently proposed by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) for a possible SDG goal for achieving gender equality, social inclusion and human rights fail to acknowledge women's care economy contributions completely (SDSN 2014). In contrast, the progress report of the Open Working Group (OWG), which is tasked with preparing proposals for the SDGs by fall 2014, asks for a "more equal distribution of unpaid work within households" (OWG 2014a: 29) and lists "reducing the burden of unpaid care work" (OWG 2014b: 4) as issues that could be considered in a proposed focus area on gender equality and women's empowerment, one of 19 suggested. In integrating gender equality in the SDGs, it suggests a two-track approach, namely including a stand-alone goal on gender equality supplemented by cross-cutting targets under other goals, thus taking to heart the recommendations of gender advocacy groups and the lessons learned from the failure of the MDGs to do so (UN 2013b). It also recommends addressing climate change centrally in the SDGs and acknowledges a link between gender and climate change (OWG 2014a: 25). However, it is not guaranteed that these suggestions translate into comprehensive goals, targets and indicators in the post-2015 framework

## FINANCING FOR GENDER-EQUITABLE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Progress on future SDGs will depend to a significant part on the provision of adequate means of implementation, such as technology transfer, capacity building and above all sufficient financing. Financing for gender-equitable sustainable development has to be seen both in the context of systemic policy coherence as well as an effort to create and be accountable for tracking and reporting on gender-specific financing benchmarks. In the systemic context, stabilizing the global financial system, but also addressing illicit money flows and corporate tax evasion, as well as the overdue fulfilment of the long-standing goal of 0.7 percent of gross national product (GNP) as Official Development Assistance (ODA), generates necessary finance flows, primarily from North to South. The OWG progress report recognizes this and proposes a separate SDG focus area on means of implementation (OWG 2014b). However, creating sufficient public domestic and international resources to fund gender-equitable sustainable development needs must go much further to include the introduction of innovative financing instruments. These include a Financial Transaction Tax (FTT), carbon taxes and levies on maritime and air transport adjusted to provide no incidence on poorer societal and developing country groups (such as SIDS or LDCs), a redirection of harmful subsidies for the production of fossil fuels and for trade-distorting developed country agricultural exports and a shrinking of military budgets in order to create both necessary fiscal and policy space in developed and developing countries alike.

In the post-2015 framework, governments have to go beyond committing themselves politically with powerful rhetoric only. Instead they have to set specific financial benchmarks that create public accountability and institute comprehensive tracking mechanisms for expenditures and financial flows, particularly on gender equality, in order to address the earlier structural deficits of the Rio and MDG processes, which had failed to track any financial commitments for gender equality. While there have been numerous efforts to provide global cost estimates for specific development areas, energy investments or climate change actions, there have been few comprehensive efforts to calculate the costs for investments needed globally to advance gender equity. An analysis of gender-related finance needs and existing shortfalls is further inhibited by the significant gaps remaining in the quantity and quality of international and domestic collection of gender-disaggregated data, giving credence to the old adage: 'what is not counted, does not count...'. Yet, such data is the prerequisite for ensuring that international organizations and national governments translate their promises into practical policies and programs, with the gender-responsive participatory budgeting of public sector revenues and expenditures as a democratic goal. It is therefore crucial that an SDG on means of implementation includes as one indicator strengthened capacities for (gender-)disaggregated data collection for measuring progress. Likewise, international organizations, including multilateral development banks, UN agencies and climate funds must become part of the solution to close the gender-data-gap by creating gender data baselines for all their projects and programmes and by providing funding, technical assistance and capacity-building to strengthen developing countries' statistical systems in collecting and analyzing gender-disaggregated data (Schalatek 2012b).

What governments do currently spend on gender-equality is unfortunately often gender-biased and thus narrowly focused on a few select sectors. Additionally, the few mechanisms tracking gender-focused development aid expenditure internationally, such as the gender equality marker system by the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD-DAC), lack transparency and detail. For example, using this marker, in 2010 and 2011 OECD countries reported that roughly US Dollar 20.5 billion per year of their combined official development assistance (ODA) was having some gender equality focus (OECD 2013); this amounted to roughly 22.3 percent of all ODA allocated in sectors during the 2010-2011 timeframe. Spending was highest for government and civil society and was more concentrated in traditionally 'soft' sectors such as health, education and population policies as opposed to gender-equitable allocations in the 'hard' sectors, such as economic infrastructures, business and financial services, environment, energy and industry, where the policy frameworks are set which impact women's lives. Reporting by OECD DAC countries is purely voluntary with no clear guidelines on how to classify ODA as gender-relevant, does allow for multiple classifications of the same ODA amount ("double-counting") and does not extend to non-DAC countries. Although it is technically feasible – and would politically reinforce the call for gender-responsive climate-related development expenditure – the OECD-DAC has so far not cross-referenced the existing gender equality marker with its Rio Markers which are tracking adaptation and mitigation expenditures under ODA (Schalatek 2012a).

For global climate change action, some tracking of public climate finance pledges and expenditures exists, if incomplete, including through civil society monitoring and transparency efforts.[5] Yet, there are no regular or mandatory gender audits of public climate financing to account for whether it is spent in a gender-responsive way. Up to now, the design and funding for climate change projects and programs still insufficiently consider women's specific knowledge, experiences and contributions in addressing climate change, for example women's role in safeguarding the natural resources on which they depend more heavily than men for providing a livelihood for their families. A bias of existing climate funds toward spending on larger, capital-intensive mitigation projects instead of the low-tech, small-scale and community-based activities women typically engage in for both emissions reductions and adaptation efforts, aggravates this. This is short-sighted from a sustainable development perspective, because many of these women-led climate change efforts provide multiple benefits for families and communities such as economic income diversification and empowerment, social protection or support for biodiversity in addition to reducing emissions or vulnerabilities to climate change impacts (Schalatek 2012b). Thus, as one key contribution to global sustainable development, gender-responsive climate action plans are urgently needed. In order to implement them, climate funding mechanisms must be more democratic and gender-responsive. This will require improving climate funding mechanisms' structure, composition and operations. At the moment, dedicated climate financing mechanisms do not systematically address or integrate gender considerations – many mechanisms have started out largely gender-unaware. Although some improvements have been made, many more actions are necessary. For example, the new Green Climate Fund (GCF), a funding mechanism which could become the key global player to support climate action in developing countries, is the first dedicated multilateral climate fund to include a gender perspective from the outset by mandating a "gender-sensitive approach" to its mitigation and adaptation funding. As the GCF Board attempts to get the fund ready to start disbursing finance in early 2015, it needs to endorse concrete operational policies and guidelines that ensure that men and women benefit equally from GCF funding and that its projects and programmes contribute to low-emission, climate-resilient and gender-equitable development. This would be a true contribution toward the transformative impact that the new global climate fund hopes to achieve (Schalatek/Burns 2013).

## CONCLUSION

Providing adequate and predictable financing resources for gender equality is crucial for achieving any set of goals on sustainable development, such as those that the international community is hoping to formulate in a post-2015 framework. Such a framework has to marry the care economy with efforts for greening the economy as a way to stop exploiting both women's largely unpaid care work as well as the environment and its natural resources as seemingly inexhaustible and unappreciated sources for business-as-usual economic processes. Only with a fundamental shift of the economic development paradigm towards a caring inclusion of the life-sustaining contributions of the environment and the gendered care economy is sustainable development possible.

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1 This article is an updated and adapted version of an earlier article of mine (Schalatek 2013).

2 Agenda 21 and the Rio Declaration, particularly Rio Principle 20, explicitly recognized women as key actors for environmental protection and poverty eradication; Principle 10 affirmed their rights to participate in environmental and development policy decision making.

3 This despite the fact that all 187 parties that are signatories to CEDAW are also without exception parties to the UNFCCC, although not all 195 parties to the UNFCCC have ratified CEDAW (with the United States, Iran, Somalia, Sudan and South Sudan being among the exceptions).

4 The term extractivism was first coined in Latin America to refer to an export-oriented economy based on natural resource exploitation, particular of minerals and fossil fuels.

5 See for example the efforts by www.climatefundsupdate.org, a joint Heinrich Böll Foundation and ODI website tracking developed countries' climate finance pledges and payments via some two dozen climate finance mechanisms and climate funds.

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