



## Economic and Social Council

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### Commission on the Status of Women

#### Fifty-eighth session

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**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women  
and to the special session of the General Assembly  
entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development  
and peace for the twenty-first century”: implementation of  
strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern  
and further actions and initiatives**

**Statement submitted by the *Red de Educación Popular entre  
Mujeres* [“Women’s Network for Popular Education”],  
a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the  
Economic and Social Council**

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.



## Statement

Feminist theory has highlighted the fact that thinking about development has been blind to gender constructions and that it has been based on a hierarchical and inequitable order that has served to perpetuate those constructions. At the present time, there is on-going debate over the paths to development, one in which women's agendas must be considered in an effort to identify what is new, what needs to be promoted or discarded, and what things it is important to preserve, when it comes to women's participation in the construction of alternatives to development, through different forms of social and community organization.

We must begin by recognizing that the work of social organization and mobilization demands the appropriation of tools that will reveal the specific impacts on women and men that flow from different social problems, while proposing alternatives for change in favour of improving the situation of women at different levels. In this respect, we argue that there must be a broader vision of what women do, of what they are responsible for, and the conditions in which they are involved in the processes of economic production and social well-being. There are many issues surrounding this notion: for example, in Latin America voluntary work by women has relieved fiscal pressures on the State and has alleviated its responsibilities. This has offered an ideal opportunity for exploiting women's participation in social programs; in this way sector reform programmes (in health, education and social development) have been targeted at women, but not with a view to their interests and needs but rather as a means of improving their families' welfare. Moreover, as an effect related to the foregoing, we note that "targeted social policy" has been a functional instrument for creating and capturing organizations, making them dependent on State largesse and converting them into noncritical groups acquiescing in antidemocratic practices.

The varying approaches to development claim to shed light on the theoretical causes of inequality worldwide, and to identify the strategies needed to reduce them. In this context, thinking about women has gone through various stages, from "Women in Development", which emerged in the 1970s and which sought to address the negative impact of development on women, to what was called "Gender in Development", which originated in the 1980s and 1990s with the introduction of more elaborate theories about the differential impact of development programs on men and women, due to the existence of assigned gender-specific roles, in a conceptual shift from "woman" to "gender" as an explanatory and guiding factor for development actions. We must bear in mind that, beyond these approaches, there has emerged a significant body of critical thought about the concept of development and its hegemonic orientations, in which feminism has served to highlight the normative construction of "woman as subject" and her needs, from a Eurocentric viewpoint that is strongly imprinted by social class and ethnic origin.

Given these situations, we believe that the solution to gender injustices will demand not only equality plans and social policies but a more deep-ranging overhaul of the relations between families, State, community and market, within an alternative economic and social model to the neoliberal one.

To this end, the consolidation of the network of social movements and participation by female activists and academics can help to multiply the forums for discussion and the formulation of demands in a new agenda that could serve to

strengthen the social framework, to develop new forms of solidarity, and to deepen the processes of democratization. Defining the characteristics of that model, which will ensure social and gender justice, as well as modalities for articulating the different sources of well-being, is a pending task to be imagined and its contents rounded out. A key contribution within these debates comes from feminist economics, as a perspective that has gained strength during the last three decades and represents a specific theoretical and investigative contribution which includes a diversity of themes.

As a source of concepts and tools for action, the proposals of feminist economics are fully relevant for understanding current problems and for devising the guidelines for action by those working for women's rights in different spaces: for example, an alternative explanation of economic crises, related to the underlying structure of an economic system in which capitalism and patriarchy work together to place individual benefit and profit ahead of the basic necessities of life. This manner of functioning has generated consequences at different levels, such as: labour insecurity, environmental damage, unpaid caregiving work by women, and taking advantage of women's needs in order to have a low-cost workforce. In general, inequalities have been exacerbated by the successive application of neoliberal policies in what we may call a crisis of social reproduction that goes far beyond the financial crisis and is so important that it demands an examination of the very nature of the capitalist system.

These interpretations highlight the interrelationship of various closely-linked spheres that must be taken into account: nature, the underpinning of all economies and of human life, which has been greatly affected by the ecological problems caused by various kinds of pollution and the exhaustion of resources due to the current structure of production and mass consumption, pursued without thought to the environmental balance; the caregiving sphere, which has to do with the creation and sustaining of life, essential for reproducing the workforce needed for market production, as a sphere that is highly dependent on the goods and services produced within households, by women; and finally, the sphere of what is commonly called the "real economy", i.e. the production of goods and services by market enterprises or by the public sector. The analyses that include these different spheres allow us, then, to see that the capitalist system is totally dependent on the care economy and on natural resources, for without them the two basic elements required for its processes would be missing: socialized persons offering their labour, and the diversity of raw materials extracted from nature.

We stress the call proposed here for imagining new ways of being and living, for constructing different tomorrows. In this connection, we note that it is we women who are for the most part taking the initiative for promoting new forms of economy, alternatives to the hegemonic model of the neoliberal economy, and we are proposing projects that offer innovative action for true social change. Among them, we question the traditional allocation of gender roles, and we support solidarity among women in the search for real economic democracy. Thus women, protagonists of the social and mutually supportive economy, have been pursuing projects for true social change, through which they are resisting the traditional economic system, guaranteeing resources, balance, different forms of exchange and "fair prices" that have to do with more than money.