

## Gender and the Economic Crisis: Impact and Responses Workshop Post-workshop summary - 1<sup>st</sup> October 2009



The Gender and the Economic Crisis Workshop, held at Oxfam House on 15-16<sup>th</sup> September 2009 brought together twenty-five practitioners, economists, and academics from a variety of development and research organisations to present learning and experiences on the impact of the crisis on gender equality and women's rights.

The workshop was organised by Oxfam GB and *Gender & Development* journal as part of a wider learning project on the gendered impacts of the crisis. For more information on the project visit the Gender and Economic Crisis Network: [www.genderanddevelopment.ning.com](http://www.genderanddevelopment.ning.com)



The objective of the workshop was to share information and analyses available so far on the impact of the crisis on poor women, men and children in developing countries; to see how the economic crisis links with other crises including climate change, food security and HIV, and to focus on the ways in which individuals and households are attempting to survive.

The workshop drew on key themes and ideas developed in the Gender and Economic Crisis Network, an online community set up to facilitate discussions and resource sharing around the issues. The network has over 300 members actively involved in gender and development work. All presentations and outputs from the workshop are available to download from the network, together with a growing wealth of other resources from Oxfam and other organisations on impacts of the crisis. The network will continue to be used as a key tool in linking colleagues, sharing information, and updating members on the development of Oxfam's work on gender and the economic crisis.

Day one focused on the impact of the crisis on rights, livelihoods and gender relations with key inputs from **Professor Diane Elson**, Human Rights Centre, University of Essex, **Professor Ruth Pearson**, Head of the Centre for Development Studies, University of Leeds, **Sibel Selcuk**, UN Division for the Advancement of Women, and **Jessica Espey**, Research Officer, Overseas Development Institute. The afternoon sessions assessed impacts of the crisis in specific contexts with presentations on the impacts on women in South Africa, Peru, the Gulf, and South East Asia.

Day two was devoted to discussing strategies which development organisations are adopting or can adopt to support gender equality and women's rights in their campaigning, advocacy and community work during the crisis and its aftermath. Key inputs came from **Robert Fox**, Executive Director, Oxfam Canada and **Sutapa Choudhury**, Growth Team, DFID. A full agenda and participant list is available on the network.

We reflect below on some of the main issues addressed during the workshop.

## Understanding the crisis from a gender perspective

1. We are seeing the effects of a complex crisis, with impacts linked to other crises (which may feel much more real to many in developing countries): climate, food insecurity and HIV.
2. Context is key - depending on local economic, political and cultural factors, the crisis will affect women and girls, boys and men very differently.
3. We only have a partial picture so far. We know about the first wave of the effects of the crisis, and about the easily quantifiable impacts on jobs and state responses including fiscal stimulus in developed countries, and how this is being spent.
4. Research with affected communities is urgently needed. In addition, long-term research is crucial - not just 'snapshots'. The crisis and its impact will play out over several years. For example the impact of pregnant women eating less now, to eke food supplies out for their children will affect their unborn children and impact on their health and development throughout their lives.
5. The first wave effect of the crisis is about loss of income, including formal employment, remittances from migrants, and underemployment. A main focus needs to be the informal economy, as this is where the vast majority of women and men in developing countries make a living. Analysing the gendered impact of this means not only tracking what happens to women's work, but men's, too.
6. The second wave effect of the crisis is about how families and households survive the loss of income. Households act as shock absorbers, and women as primary carers are expected to find ways of ensuring survival.
7. Understanding what is going on for poor women and men, their families and communities as a consequence of the interlocking crises, requires a focus on social reproduction - mostly done by women. Social reproduction is community and family care. Policymakers need to focus on care work in household and community as this ensures human survival, especially when the market and the state cannot guarantee basic needs.
8. Women act as 'ultimate safety nets', by adopting 'coping strategies', but this cannot continue indefinitely. Their tangible and intangible assets are depleted and essential basic needs for food and sleep are foregone. However, it is wrong to call these 'coping strategies'. Rather, they are unsustainable, desperate actions. All these effects need to be monitored in poor communities worldwide as they play out in very different ways depending on context, in the short and long term.
9. Despite this, women are still absent from decision-making at all levels of society, thus their perspectives are neither represented nor heard. It is essential to have women as equal participants in determining solutions and strategies.
10. The crisis is accentuating pre-existing, underlying gender inequalities/power imbalances, which are often more significant than gender inequalities arising specifically from the crisis (and should therefore be addressed in responses).
11. The question of the extent to which the crisis, and responses to it, reinforce vs. decompose vs. challenge gender norms is important, and merits more analysis.

## **Suggested responses**

### **Research**

Community-driven, women-driven, research is needed into the short and long term effects of the crisis. Economist Professor Diane Elson suggested '10 things for women's organisations to do' as a framework (available to download from the network). Development organisations need to support and fund this research, working in partnership with each other and with women's organisations.

Action - The workshop agreed that a proposal is being developed by the UK Gender and Development Network, which will come back to Oxfam and other institutions attending the workshop, for consideration.

Timely dissemination of existing and new research and knowledge via international development organisations and research institutions, in support of a transformative responses to the economic crisis - to contribute to challenging unsustainable development, and advocate a new development model which places social reproduction - the reproduction of people - at its heart, and supports the interests and needs of all who do this work.

Action - Special Issue of *Gender & Development* and the online network to advocate this, and to be discussed within institutions present at the workshop.

### **Essential services**

Influencing allocation and auditing of government spending on Essential Services to ensure the basic needs of poor households and women caring for them are met. We also need to invest in researching and mapping the gendered impact of changes and cuts spending

Action - these points to be taken up and discussed in participants' institutions, on the electronic network on gender and the economic crisis, and circulated as widely as possible.

### **Social protection**

Stepping up work on Social Protection: international development organisations could usefully support poor women and men facing destitution by shifting the terms of debate about social protection - and advocating for universal global social protection. We could lead on research into the gendered impact of different models of social protection, and advocate the uptake of the best model(s).

Action - these points to be taken up and discussed in the institutions represented at the workshop, on the electronic network on gender and the economic crisis, and circulated as widely as possible

**Further information and outputs from the workshop are available at  
[www.genderanddevelopment.ning.com](http://www.genderanddevelopment.ning.com)**