



Photo: Miriam Djeordjian

For this issue, which covers the Global Week of Action by civil society and social movements against the World Trade Organization (WTO) during its 11th Ministerial Conference (MC11) in Argentina in November 2017, DAWN invited key actors and participants to contribute their reflections. The articles offer a critical overview of the global trade system, of the challenges of the G20, and of gender and trade issues, against the deep crisis in the multilateral system that has supported the advancement of human rights in the last 50 years. DAWN also shares its experience as co-organizer of the World Women's Assembly of the World Social Forum in Bahia, Brazil in March.

IN THIS ISSUE

2 Peoples' Summit "WTO Out, Building Sovereignty," pursuing alternatives

3 G20 and Women20 agenda: lessons learnt and challenges for the construction of a new feminist forum

5 What are we talking about when we talk about gender and trade?

6 Privatisation of the multilateral system and the National States: the case of Brazil

9 Challenges of the global order: multilateralism and human rights

11 Addressing Gender and Trade Issues in Trade Agreements: Creating more problems than solutions?

13 How to read a trade agreement

14 An overview of the World Women's Assembly at the World Social Forum 2018, Bahia, Brazil

15 Declaration of the Feminist Forum against Free Trade

18 Photogallery: Week of Action and Peoples' Summit against WTO

Peoples' Summit "WTO Out, Building Sovereignty," pursuing alternatives

by **Luciana Ghiotto**
(Argentina)

The 11th World Trade Organization (WTO) Conference Ministerial Conference held in the city of Buenos Aires left a bitter taste for trade multilateralism. Amid a strong crisis of the organization, the Argentine government insisted on saying "there is life beyond Buenos Aires," deferring the solution to the crisis. But the truth is that, as expected, nothing important happened at the ministerial conference in Buenos Aires.

However, this conference did have a significant impact on the South American political order. First of all, it was the first WTO Ministerial Conference in South America, a regional context highly favorable to free trade. Since Mauricio Macri took office, the government has promised a massive increase in foreign investment (which has not yet been recorded). This would be accomplished with the "return" to the principle of legal certainty by signing Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) and Investment Agreements that provide certainty for investors. This is the direction taken by the South American trade bloc member countries attempting to join the Pacific Alliance, while different intra-regional FTAs are negotiated in the same direction, such as Chile-Uruguay, Chile-Argentina, Chile-Brazil, South American trade bloc-Mexico, among others.

Secondly, the running of the WTO Conference was used as an excuse for increased militarization in the region. The Argentine government proceeded to buy military equipment to guarantee the security of this conference and the G20 summit in 2018, thereby spending over 150 million dollars in security and organizational expenses. As a result of these meetings, local armed forces will be more technologically advanced and equipped and, once the biennium of meetings and summits is over, they will be available for internal use in a context of increased criminalization of social protest.

Thirdly, this conference was held amid government's distrust of civil society that has historically followed the ministerial conferences. The creation of a list with more than 60 names of activists whose accreditation, as well as their entry to the country, were denied was an un-

precedented event that turned into an international disgrace. This policy of rejection of any kind of civil society participation in the Ministerial Conference revealed a deep lack of knowledge of the way this kind of international organization traditionally works and confirmed the tense internal relationship between the government and social organizations. It should be no surprise that the same strategy is applied to the G20 Summit, with the purpose of keeping everything "under control."

others, as well as newly created campaigns such as "Dismantling Corporate Power".

The "WTO Out" Confluence decided to oppose the Ministerial Conference with street rallies but also with debates on alternatives, holding the flag of the Peoples' Summit process in Bali in 2013. This does not mean that we disregarded what was happening inside the ministerial conference; however, the decision was to work on alternatives and to criticize the overall trade system. The



Photo: Miriam Djeordjian

Therefore, regardless of what happens inside those meetings, the local and regional impact is dramatic, not only on the host country but also on how regional policy is shaped in the coming years.

THE PEOPLES' SUMMIT: FROM NATIONAL TO GLOBAL

Even though the results of the Ministerial Conference were meagre, there was a clear indication of the resistance against this organization. Wherever WTO as well as G20 conferences and summits are held, social organizations speak out against them and organize themselves to set forth a critical position towards this devious multilateralism.

On occasion of the WTO Conference in Buenos Aires, the Confluence "WTO Out" was organized in Argentina. This confluence was created in mid-2017 and is composed of more than 100 national organizations, plus 100 additional regional and global organizations. "WTO Out" was promoted by the "Argentina better off without FTAs" Assembly¹, which works in coordination with regional allies against free trade, particularly the platforms created against the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) in Chile, Mexico and Peru, and also with usual allies such as Red Brasileira contra el Libre Comercio (REBRIP). Different long-standing global resistance organizations have further joined the Confluence "WTO Out", for example, Red ATTAC, Amigos de la Tierra, La Vía Campesina and CLOC, Latindadd, Global Forest Coalition, Transnational Institute, Global Justice Now, the Committee for the Abolition of Illegitimate Debt (CADTM), DAWN and Jubileo Sur, among

Peoples' Summit "WTO Out, Building Sovereignty" was built on this premise, running thematic forums focused on the alternatives to capitalism, sustainable ways of relating to nature, common goods, the model of production and consumption, popular economy and feminist economy².

Regarding the themes of the Peoples' Summit, it is important to note that the following two forums stood out: the Forum on Common Goods and the Feminist Forum against Free Trade. During the past decade these two issues have emerged strongly in the trade agenda because they refer directly to the impact of liberalization policies. On one hand, the environmental damage caused by agreements that lead to the reprimarization³ of economies and expand soybean monocultures, deforestation and extractivism while investors enjoy the privilege of suing countries at arbitration tribunals if they oppose this exploitative policy. On the other hand, the emergence of the Feminist Forum in this scenario puts forth a key issue in terms of liberalization and the impact of implementing these agreements on women's lives. Currently this impact is embellished in FTAs with the incorporation of chapters on "Women" (e.g. in the Canadian proposal); but in fact they only refer to female entrepreneurs and the economy, without mentioning the overall impact of trade liberalization on women's lives. These two issues are therefore of utmost importance for the debate on future trade policy in our countries.

The final outcome of the Peoples' Summit has been more than positive. The organization, coordination and debate process resulted

in the political growth of organizations that took on commitments at national and regional level. For many organizations the ministerial conference represented an introduction to the global resistance process. For summit attendees, this introduction entailed a leap in terms of political and human training.

There are several challenges ahead, particularly towards G20 in Buenos Aires, in 2018. Success has been significant but there is still more political work to be done, particularly in terms of coordination between movements. The urgency of change has been replaced by smoke and mirrors of capitalism, with its fake discussions and highly technical debates, filled with data, in different unintelligible languages. Thus it becomes crucial to avoid getting lost in the details. We need to keep fo-

cus on the big picture, on how capitalism works and regularly reshapes. With free trade or with protectionism, the essence is always the same: labor exploitation and plundering of the planet. The Peoples' Summits process focused on the debate of alternatives therefore becomes increasingly necessary.

NOTES

1 <https://mejorsintlc.org/>

2 <https://fueraomc.org/final-statement/>

3 *Reprimarization refers to the return to primary commodities, such as mining, oil, cattle, and soybean, as the main source of export revenues; a tendency seen in many countries of Latin America in recent decades.*



Luciana Ghiotto is an expert on International Political Economy, CONICET/UNISAM researcher, member of ATTAC Argentina and the "Argentina better of without FTAs" Assembly.

G20 and Women20 agenda: lessons learnt and challenges for the construction of a new feminist forum

by Patricia Laterra, Corina Rodríguez Enríquez and Florencia Partenio (Argentina)

This article is based on the lessons learnt during the Feminist Forum against Free Trade and the Great Feminist Assembly held within the framework of the Peoples' Summit "WTO Out, Building Sovereignty" from 10 to 13 December 2017 in Buenos Aires, Argentina, alongside the XI Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization taking place in the same city. Some reflections are also presented on the challenges faced by feminists in view of the agenda of the G20 Summit in 2018.

LESSONS LEARNT

Our societies are affected by the conditions imposed by corporate power in the struggle for resources and the promotion of trade agreements. Consequently this produces tension on the possibilities of local politics. This corporate power increasingly exerts influence on political actors, conditions the de-

isions of states and erodes the mechanisms of transparency, accountability and alignment with human rights principles.

Here we observe a premise for these troubled times: to transform the agendas imposed by corporate power into opportunities to renew our capacity to resist and build alternatives. This was one of the challenges left by the XI Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Or-

“It was necessary to discuss the global context of violence against women, criminalization of sexual dissidence and impunity of corporate power”

ganization (WTO) in Argentina. At the 'Peoples' Summit' the response was unexpected and rich in terms of dialogue and exchange of knowledge in the face of the WTO meeting. In this context, the Feminist Forum against Free Trade was held with the aim of establishing a dialogue between different perspectives and standpoints in the face of the agenda of free trade and the neoliberal advance in Latin America and the global South.

In these times, the second premise holds the principles and lessons learnt which serve as the foundation to be able to face this fierce and tricky world (Sen and Durano, 2015). The experience of the Feminist Forum against Free Trade was built collectively and we were able to review our practices. Therefore we were able to reflect on the conditions in place for this experience, based on a strong, inclusive and ready to listen feminism. To establish dialogues at the Forum it was essential to plan workshops and panels where most women, transgender people and lesbians would be represented and where, far from straining for hegemony as a response, we captured the challenges, tensions and questions.

Based on both premises, the first lesson learnt was to magnify and understand the difficulties faced by social movements, women and feminists to address and own the themes related to economics, particularly with more complex dynamics such as the impact of 'free' trade and investment agreements and corporate power, on our lives. At first, these themes seemed to be far from being address-

able, yet they were close to our reality. However we were able to have a full auditorium, ready to socialise knowledge and there was a smooth exchange of learning, from theory to grounded experiences. The pressing and ruthless reality we face made the course of the Forum go beyond what was merely relevant in terms of WTO and economic liberalization. It was necessary to discuss the global context of violence against women, criminalisation of sexual dissidence, impunity of corporate power and State collusion in the face of attacks against the rights of humanity and mother earth.

Another lesson learnt from the Forum was the need to share spaces that provide knowledge to understand the reality we face; and to discuss the interests of different sectors and subjectivities. In such spaces we were able to challenge issues and pose questions such as: which economic models are at stake, what are the objectives behind these trade debates and the different impacts they have - so as to be able to have the means to organise ourselves in an emancipatory way.

In this sense, the alternative nature not only of feminist thinking but also of its practical ethics and modes, reflect possible effective ways to deal with these problems through a territorial approach. These strengths help un-

infrastructure for development and food security. These issues are of vital importance for the lives of women, lesbians and transgender people, and the resistance of social organisation must contribute to expose the

“The forum was built on a powerful feminism, inclusive and ready to listen...”

derstand the multiple nature of our struggles, oppressions and diverse and creative ways of organising ourselves. Likewise, they create spaces where it is possible to give visibility and work on rising tensions. Importantly, tension built up when the distinctive nature of class and race was brought up. The distinct character of women as workers was widely discussed and showed it was essential to portray multiple and plural models of work, considering not only productive but also reproductive, unpaid care work. A tension that developed as one of the key disputes was over meanings in the #8M (8 March Women’s Day) mobilisations of this year.

THE CHALLENGES OF THE G20 AGENDA

The experience of social organisation against WTO is a powerful platform of action in the face of a new development of “elite multilateralism”¹ (Ocampo, 2011), which is the G20 Summit that will take place by the end of the year in Buenos Aires. In this case, there are formal channels to include women’s perspective and demands, through the specific affinity group (Women20 or W20)² as well as gender working areas in other affinity groups (such as the Gender Task Force within the T20 or the contributions made by C20 from this perspective)³.

The W20 has planned four areas of intervention: labor, digital and financial inclusion and rural development. It is important to engage in the different spaces of participation within this structure⁴ to mainstream the feminist perspective in the recommendations for the decision-making groups, to resist more conventional visions that predominate in a significant share of the prevailing perspectives in this process, and to expose tensions rising between the aspiration to promote women’s rights and the economic policies promoted by governments of G20 member countries. The follow-up of these spaces can also be a way to capture the core issues and languages that are dealt with, recreated and taken.

In this respect, it is important to insist on the need to link the W20 agenda and proposals with the issues being discussed at the ministerial meeting, including the future of work,

threat posed by: i) a future of work based on precariousness of working conditions, reduction of labor rights and the persistent non recognition of reproductive work; ii) the risk of public-private partnerships for the creation and expansion of infrastructure for development concentrated in mega projects that enable businesses with the private sector in a context of barely transparent contract and financial deals, which, at the same time, may result in a restricted access of women to basic social infrastructure and social services; iii) a paradigm of food security that enables market concentration, the commodification of food and despoiling of land that jeopardises food sovereignty and, thus, the livelihood strategies of women, households and peoples.

Once again, it will be necessary to create spaces to express these visions outside official structures that are hardly open to these demands; but also because we can build alternatives in these places ‘on the borders’. The challenge ahead is to recreate these spaces for dissemination of information, training, organisation and active resistance with a remarkable presence of feminisms.

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1 This is the way Ocampo (2011) refers to intergovernmental groups and institutions with exclusive and ad hoc membership, driven by developed countries that define policies in key areas such as global finance, trade and taxation. These organisations have serious problems of legitimacy. The G20, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the Financial Stability Board (FSB) are examples of elite multilateralism. (Ocampo, J.A. (2011) Reforming the International Monetary System. Helsinki: UNU-WIDER. Annual Lecture 14).

2 The affinity groups are transnational networks of civil society organisations, think tanks, representatives of unions and entrepreneurs, seeking to influence the agenda of the decision-making bodies of the G20. The goal of W20 is to “exert influence on public policies to increase women’s participation in the economies and societies of their countries.” (<http://w20argentina.com>).

3 The T20 is the affinity group of the so-called “think tanks.” The C20 is the affinity group of civil society.

4 For example, the National Forum of Consultation and Debate held last March 23 in Buenos Aires (http://w20argentina.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/programa_4.pdf).



Florencia Partenio is a member of DAWN’s Executive Committee and Social Mobilization team. She has a PhD in Social Sciences from the University of Buenos Aires and was co-organizer of the last Feminist Forum against Free Trade.



Patricia Lateralra is a feminist economist, teacher at the University of Buenos Aires (UBA), and member of the Space for Feminist Economics of the Argentinian Society for Critical Economy (SEC).



Corina Rodríguez Enríquez is part of DAWN’s Executive Committee. She is a feminist economist with a PhD in Social Sciences from the Latin American Social Sciences Institute (FLACSO). She works as a researcher at CONICET and CIEPP in Buenos Aires.

What are we talking about when we talk about gender and trade?

by Roberto Bissio
(Uruguay)

After many years of women's, union and human rights movements campaigning against bilateral and regional agreements known as "free trade agreements" or "trade and investment agreements", the government of the United States of America has taken the opposite direction.

"These power asymmetries account for the asymmetry in the results and shed light on why agreements, ultimately, favor the pharmaceutical and agrochemical industry..."

President Donald Trump has imposed protective tariffs on steel and aluminum, prompting retaliatory action and sparking a "trade war" with unpredictable consequences. Trump intends to renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and to withdraw from the Pacific Agreement, formerly known as the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), now renamed as the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) by the eleven countries that did sign it. However, these two additional adjectives in the name do not reflect a change in the essence of the agreement pushed by Barack Obama to oppose China's advance in the region.

Since on multiple fronts the Trump presidency stands against feminist and popular demands, the temptation is to take the opposite stance mechanically. If Trump is fighting against free trade, there must be something good about it. There is still scope for criticism in the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) between the European Union and the ACP (African, Caribbean and Pacific) countries or in the agreement under negotiation between the EU and the South American trade bloc called "Mercosur," but media has lost interest in these dissident voices or barely qualifies dissidents as "populists" or "protectionists," implicitly useful for Trump's intentions.

'Market' represents a very specific moment and place for women who resort to it to buy food for their families, sell the surplus pro-

duce from their plots of land or all types of homemade products, offer services, learn the news and strengthen their social networks. "Micro-entrepreneurs" is a term that, related to "small and medium-sized enterprises," makes us forget that we are referring to women. The "entrepreneur" side is frequently a profitable extension of women's role in social reproduction and care systems. In a recent article, Barbara Adams recalls¹ that small plots (less than two hectares) represent 80% of the world's estimated 500 million farms. These plots of land provide 80% of the food consumed in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, and most workers and managers in these farms are women. Access to market, as product and service buyers or sellers, is essential for women and barriers to this access, such as poor infrastructure or discriminatory legislation and regulations, represent a feminist cause, a human rights issue and an obstacle to sustainable development.

According to economist Dani Rodrik: "Trade agreements are the result of rent-seeking, self-interested behavior on the part of politically well-connected firms: international banks, pharmaceutical companies and multinational firms. They may result in freer, mutually beneficial trade, through exchange of market access. But they are as likely to produce purely redistributive outcomes under the guise of 'freer trade'" (to the benefit of these firms)².

Instead of making trade "free", "free trade agreements" regulate it. The emphasis that trade agreements used to place on tariffs and quotas has been replaced by a system of rules and regulations on different themes, such as intellectual property or investors' protection. Free trade agreements are used, for example, to extend the duration of industrial patents, which is equivalent to defending a monopoly. It is the opposite of free trade and leads to rising drug prices, among other consequences. Through investment clauses included in the "new generation" of trade agreements, multinational firms have gained access to international arbitration tribunals whereby they can sue countries, beyond national laws, and citizens or governments cannot resort to the same tribunals to sue investors.

The negotiations of free trade agreements are conducted in the utmost secrecy and submitted to parliaments for approval or disapproval when they can no longer be modified. However, large corporations have easy access to the documents and the diplomats

who negotiate the agreements throughout the whole process. These power asymmetries account for the asymmetry in the results and shed light on why agreements, ultimately, favor the pharmaceutical and agrochemical industry over the sustainable agriculture of small farms managed by women. Thus, the incorporation of truthful labels describing the content of processed food can be reported as a "barrier to trade" while the provision of generic drugs (often ten times less expensive) is not praised for extending free trade, instead, it is considered a violation of "intellectual property" in a legal hierarchy where the latter has precedence over the right to health.

In this context, the old metaphor on international trade as a rising tide that lifts all boats, big and small (thus, favoring women), is no longer true. In increasingly unequal societies, some women (and many men) in five-star cruisers are lifted by trade agreements designed by themselves, while artisan fishing barges are destroyed by the storm.

Considering the absence of tools to foresee the myriad impacts of free trade agreements before they are signed, citizens and, particularly, women's rights advocates must insist on the precautionary principle (when serious risks are involved, abstain) and on transparency, throughout all negotiations. After all, the gap between neoliberal post-Cold War promises and the injustices of real globalization is one of the causes of the increasing chauvinism that alarms and concerns democratic activism.

NOTES

1 See "Smallholder Farmers' Rights are Women's Rights," available in <https://www.globalpolicywatch.org/blog/2018/03/20/smallholder-farmers-womens-rights/>

2 See "What Do Trade Agreements Really Do?" available in <https://drodrik.scholar.harvard.edu/publications/what-do-trade-agreements-really-do>



Roberto Bissio is the Executive Director of Third World Institute. He also coordinates the secretariat of Social Watch, an international network of citizen organizations that produces annual reports on governments' and international organizations' implementation of poverty eradication and gender equity commitments.

Privatisation of the multilateral system and the National States: the case of Brazil

by Iara Pietricovsky,
Alessandra Cardoso and
Grazielle Custódio David
(Brazil)*

Since 2008, we have been experiencing an economic crisis of incalculable proportions and no prospect of a solution is yet in sight. This is an extremely serious situation in the financial system, caused by the excessive liberalisation of capital flows and applications which started in the USA and spread to Europe and the rest of the world. Its backlash in the developing countries was no less intense, even though each of these countries, according to its own internal capacity, tried to save itself from the looming debacle. However, it seems so far that all countries were set adrift.

The capitalist crisis of our times, or the revival of capitalism through this crisis, is characterised by the bankruptcy of a development model, which expresses itself by the energy, climate and food crises on the one hand, and on the other, by a deep crisis in the political systems of so-called modern democracies.

Nation States have been incapable of mediating the multifarious interests of society and are being superseded by the interests of large economic conglomerates. These conglomerates generally have the strength to impose their will on political and economic processes at their own convenience. The results of this include the privatisation of public goods, a reduced role of the State and polemic proposals such as public/private programs (PPPs).

The privatization of the State and multilateral institutions are now facts¹. We are experiencing an era in which corporations exercise unchecked power over local, national and international governments. Such corporations set priorities, dictate rules and exert a strong influence in the political-economic agendas. In short, they own the market. At the same time, they destroy all that happens to be in their way. And so the policies that enforce

human rights, combat inequalities and promote social justice are being ruthlessly confronted and quickly pushed aside.

Nowadays, it is common and 'natural' for corporations to have a seat at UN negotiations, acting, for instance, as advisors to the UN Secretary General, and to actively participate in international agreements. This practice was consolidated in 2007 with the creation of the Global Compact, and the GC's political strength and financial participation have increased since then.² Meanwhile, the reverse phenomenon has occurred in terms of representativeness (and mandatory support) by the countries, which have increasingly lost decision-making capacity and power. Indeed, the UN is becoming a captive of financial corporations and is being submitted to the interests and threats of the richest countries. It is no coincidence that the Trump administration is taking its first steps toward promoting cuts in funding for multilateral institutions, including the UN.

In the political field, democratic processes are being undermined by economicism and its logic, with resulting unemployment, the gradual loss of rights that were won after decades of struggle, and forced migrations caused by the climate crisis and war, among others. In recent years, the countries that experienced social democracy after a violent World War II and largely inspired the democratisation and incorporation of human rights in a number of developing nations, are now starting to experience cuts in social rights, promotion of austerity policies, closure of their own frontiers and to promote far-reaching discrimination.

In this context, representatives of the conservative elite worldwide are taking on the governments of their countries through election processes that are questionable from a democratic standpoint. These processes include Brexit in the UK; the Trump elections in the USA; radical religious groups in Turkey; liberal conservative governments in Europe; and a succession of coups d'état in Latin America that include countries such as Paraguay, Honduras and Brazil. In this article we will focus on reconstructing how the current scenario is configured and how it affects Brazil in fulfilling the broad Sustainable Development Goals agenda.

PATHWAYS TO THE 2030 AGENDA

In such context, what is the role of recently signed international agreements such as Rio+20, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that establish a possible international framework, considering the uneven correlation of forces that is emerging from the above-mentioned facts?

Starting with the UN Conference on Environment and Development (the Rio de Janeiro

Summit of 1992) several global meetings took place to deepen the bond between countries and their peoples with a new framework for rights and a new logic about the meaning of development. For this reason, the concept of development became a point of mutual dialogue for all themes at the summits promoted by the UN. During that period, the UN was still able to inspire a de facto global sense of political trust that allowed it to legitimately gather its member countries for several high level international meetings based on a human rights framework and approach. We refer to this phase as the Social Cycle of the United Nations.

A favorable political environment was noticeable during that cycle – as long as discussions on who would pay for the transitions between different development models were kept off the table. This was indeed one of the issues that blocked all negotiations, restructured institutions and redefined the actors who make decisions at the international forums. The international institutions are still the same, but a power shift has taken place.

In 2000, as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were launched and following the beginning of a new conference review cycle, signals of the "fatigue" of the international system became clear. The financial crisis of the traditional governance system contributed to weaken its activities even further. Since then, both the UN System and the nation states represented in it have gradually lost their strength and vigour. With this process in course, their agreements and treaties became more and more a matter of discourse and few of them have been effectively implemented. As a result of this situation, which is referred to as the "Summits' fatigue", an entire process was left in a state of risk that was reflected in the presentation of the Millennium Goals.

From then on, the world has endured all types of economic crises, starting in South-east Asia and including the economies in transition in Latin America (Mexico, Brazil and Argentina) and, more recently, the developed countries themselves. Since the outset of these conferences, several social movements and civil society analysts – among them the Social Watch network – drew attention to the urgent need for a new international financial architecture, a new governance and increased social responsibility by the Bretton Woods institutions and the World Trade Organization (WTO). These movements and analysts warned about the need to assess the social and environmental impacts of liberalising investments in all corners of the planet, and about how essential it is to seek new development models based on sustainability, on a departure from the neoliberal economic view and on tackling socio-environmental issues and the challenge of feeding the world population.

Issues such as poverty, inequality, foreign debt, official development assistance (ODA), the need for a new financial architecture, sustainable development and a new governance system, which are always a part of the vocabulary of social movements and civil society organisations, have not met with an effective response, while the UN did not have the necessary political strength to reverse international economic and financial decisions. Global policies started to be defined by the richest countries of the world in the G8 and at the World Economic Forum, and were later elaborated and implemented by the international financial institutions and the WTO. As the economic crisis began to severely affect the G8 countries, the world's governance system underwent some changes and a number of developing countries were summoned to this restricted group, to meet as the G20. This is one of the new configurations that have taken shape in the world since the financial crisis of 2008. But none of its features is directly concerned with strengthening the multilateral system spearheaded by the UN. This movement has a new governance format, and new authors are now exercising power.

However, to secure the hegemony of this privatisation process for the multilateral system and for nation states, it was necessary to change the previous framework of legally constituted rights. In this context, the *Global Compact*³ was created with the role of providing advice to the UN both under the leadership of former Secretary-Generals Kofi Annan and Ban Ki Moon, and also to the current UN Secretary-General António Guterres of Portugal. The Global Compact took up the environmental agenda renewed at the Rio+20 Conference, along with all post-2015 discussions. It presents itself as a solution for the global problems of poverty and the climate crisis by resorting to new types of technologies and funding options, and defends new political and economic governance models via public-private partnerships (PPPs).

The report written by the Global Economic Forum before the Rio+20 conference states – and this is the guideline that has been followed since then – that the governance system of the future will be better administered by coalitions of multinational corporations, nation states (including the UN) and a select group of non-governmental organisations.

According to data from the World Bank and Fortune magazine, three mega-corporations (Royal Dutch Shell, Exxon Mobile and Walmart) had more political and economic power in 2011 than 110 of the 175 largest global economies – i.e. more than half of the UN Member States.⁴ Such a situation leads to a staggering imbalance in the global power system and reveals the unambiguous power of these corporations in the world and in political decision-making spaces.



Photo: Claudia Ferreira

In this context, one of the main challenges that permeate the construction of the 2030 Agenda is the dilution of public power both nationally and multilaterally. One of the facets of such dilution is contained in the proposals of public-private partnerships (PPPs), which are based on a narrow view of economic growth and on market solutions for the issue of sustainable development, thus depoliticising the causes of poverty, inequality, environmental imbalance and the climate crisis.

While recognising that the global agenda is largely caught in the grips of private conglomerates, it is still important to underscore that this agenda is crucial for ongoing efforts to cope with the serious crises of environment and civilization we are now facing in our own day. It must be recognised that the SDGs still represent progress in terms of commitment by UN Member States, since it fosters the implementation of wide-scope policies. Without them, the countries would not meet their chartered objectives.

Within the present political and economic context, will Brazil be capable of fulfilling the commitments established by the 2030 Agenda?

REFLECTIONS ON THE CASE OF BRAZIL

After 27 years without political coups, Brazil recently experienced a new democratic disruption. According to philosopher José Antônio Moroni, member of the Executive Board of the Institute of Socioeconomic Studies (INESC),⁵ a political process took place in which some State institutions, political parties, mass-media outlets, churches, entrepreneurial sectors and "street movements" forged the impeachment of former president Dilma Rousseff without the sufficient and necessary legal grounds.

The political arrangement that led to such break in the democratic order included the imposition of an ultra-liberal agenda that violates and destroys hard-won rights and social policies. The new heads of the Executive Branch, along with their strong base at the National Congress – forged via corrupt practices and the co-optation of political representatives and the judiciary – quickly

implemented a deconstruction of the already fragile democratic rule of law that emerged after the end of the military dictatorship in Brazil (1964-1985).

The first 'package' delivered to the economic-financial elite that stood behind this coup was the approval of the so-called 'cap amendment,' a reference to Constitutional Amendment 95, which established a freeze on primary expenses to limit increases in public spending in real terms for 20 years.

Several political and economic analysts, social movements, NGOs and activists unanimously agreed in their assessments of the deep retrogression that enacting this amendment will produce in terms of rights. Popular reactions against it were also expressive, but they were blatantly ignored by the mass media and stifled by police repression.

Such a cycle of ultra-neoliberal reforms has advanced rapidly. The deterioration of work conditions and cuts in labor costs as solutions for resuming the accumulation of capital were secured through the quick approval of a legislative change that authorised outsourcing as a practice for all sectors and categories, which represents a deep loss of labor guarantee mechanisms.

The next reform of the neoliberal agenda will tackle social security. It has become a key piece in the strategy to constrict the role of the State and extirpate rights in Brazil. These reforms add up to other reforms currently in progress in the environmental area, which include provisions to render the environmental licensing process more flexible, review the policy that recognises and secures indigenous lands (to avoid additional demarcations), deconstruct the national policy of protected areas, increase flexibility and stimulate access to mineral resources, and expand land entitlement rights by foreigners, among other measures. All these reforms profess the same logic: to extend the spaces of accumulation through access to and appropriation of the country's natural resources.

Privatisation and the unchecked spread of Public-Private Partnerships became the third element of Brazil's austerity measures. To proceed down this path, the Temer adminis-

tration issued Provisional Measure 727/2016 and institutionalised the Investment Partnerships Program (PPI in its official acronym). PM 727 was the second measure adopted by the current administration, and it was issued even before the end of president Rousseff's 'impeachment' process.

The combined and intensified effects of such reforms, budgetary cuts and privatisation processes can be traced back to a clear logic: on the one hand, to reduce to the utmost the role of the State, both as a guarantor of rights and a regulator of capital; and, on the other, to reduce to the utmost the costs and opportunities so that capital may resume its accumulative trajectory in Brazil.

In such context, the hard-won universal welfare policies secured by the 1988 Constitution, such as education and social security are being dismantled, not only as a way of cutting social expenses, but also to provide new business opportunities and create the space so that economic groups may take hold of a considerable health and education market. At the same time, under the guise of a fiscal adjustment, the few policies that still strive to break with Brazil's historical inequalities and combat the country's shameful situation of poverty are being either cut, eliminated or changed for the worse. Thus the ongoing processes that seek to realise rights are being cut, while those public institutions and policies that worked to recognise the rights of historically rejected and invisible populations are being dismantled.

It is in such complex scenario, as we seem to stand before a long path of consequences and resistance, that the SDGs are starting to be implemented in Brazil.

In context, and in the light of the current deconstruction of the country's already fragile welfare state and the lack of a budget to finance its adequate realisation, it is indeed likely that Brazil will not be capable of adequately implementing the SDGs.

The current positions expressed by Brazil at UN meetings demonstrate these facts: 1) Brazil has voted against the drafting of a report on the effects of austerity measures for human rights at a meeting of the Human Rights Commission in March 2017; and 2) Brazil did not support the draft text containing fiscal justice suggestions for attaining women's rights at the 61st session of the Commission on the Status of Women in March 2017.

We are facing an imposed and illegitimate Brazilian government that promotes actions and sets up makeshift devices on behalf of the SDGs to justify its commitments internationally, while it is rendering these same SDGs unattainable as a result of its political and economic decisions. We are indeed facing dark times in the present and in our prospects of a future for Brazil, for the region and globally. In this context, the SDGs are a minimum reference - with a rough path ahead.

THE PPI AND PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

The PPI is an initiative by which the Brazilian federal administration is trying to shun its duties. It is an attempt to tread a path of no return in a privatisation process with incalculable damage in a number of ways for Brazilian society. Behind its neoliberal project stands the vision that it is not a task of the State to invest in basic sectors such as sanitation, along with the fallacy that such resources are essential for attaining fiscal balance. Brazil's recent past already demonstrated that privatisations do not solve the country's fiscal problem and that oftentimes, the bills and damage to citizens are too high.

As during the Fernando Henrique Cardoso administration (1995-2002), the National Economic and Social Development Bank (BNDES) is the institution responsible for implementing the PPI. The BNDES plays the strategic role of providing long-term funding based on a perspective of support to strategic sectors for development, but now its main mission is reduced to structuring privatisation and concession projects under the Investment Partnerships Program (PPI), which favors financial investors.

With the rationale of promoting new projects, which will emerge in the form of concessions, the government has cut environmental and human rights standards and guarantees by ordering public bodies to accelerate licensing processes for large works and projects.

It is in this context of "producing a favorable business environment" that the federal government is preparing a project to review its licensing processes and regulate what the PPI already does: to clear to path from any 'hurdles' (namely social, environmental, cultural and labor rights) that may either postpone or affect the profitability expected by investors.

NOTES

1 Adams, Barbara, and Jens Martens. *Fit for whose purpose? Private funding and corporate influence in the United Nations*. Global Policy Forum (GPF). Germany/USA, 2015.

2 Adams, Barbara, and Jens Martens. *Fit for whose purpose? Private funding and corporate influence in the United Nations*. Global Policy Forum (GPF). Germany/USA, 2015. Chapter "The UN Global Compact", page 38, chart 9

3 Available at: <http://unglobalcompact.org/Languages/portuguese>.

4 Pingeot, Lou. *Corporate influence in the Post-2015 process*. January 2014.

5 Interview with *Le Monde Diplomatique* on April 27, 2017. Available at: <http://www.inesc.org.br/noticias/noticias-gerais/2017/abril/a-desconstituicao-etica-moral-cultural-e-institucional-do-estado>.

* This text is a summary adapted from the original article published by Social Watch: "Utopia or Dystopia? The Sustainable Development Goals in Brazil and in the World". Available at: <http://www.socialwatch.org/node/17748>



Grazielle Custódio David is a specialist in Public Budget, Health Law (Fiocruz) and Bioethics (UnB). She has a master degree on Public Health (Health Economics - UnB) and her line of research is Evaluation of the Public Budget and of the Public Policies, with emphasis in Health. She is also a Policy adviser at INESC and works with the subjects of public budget analysis and fiscal justice.



Lara Pietricovsky de Oliveira, is Anthropologist, Master in Political Science by the University of Brasilia. Member of the Management Board of the Institute of Socio-economic Studies (INESC) of Brazil, where she is in charge of activities related with the UNFCCC, IFI, G20 and 2030 Agenda, among others.



Alessandra Cardoso is policy advisor for the INESC. She holds a Master's Degree in Economic Development from Federal University of Uberlandia, and is taking the Doctor's Degree Course in Applied Economics - Development and Environment, at Unicamp. She is responsible for developing the Investments Observatory in Amazon region.

Challenges of the global order: multilateralism and human rights

by Nancy Kachingwe (Zimbabwe)

As we approach the ten year anniversary of the 2008 global financial crisis, it seems contradictory that rather than rein in neoliberalism, the overall response of the global elite has been to double down, intensify and even expand the catastrophic policies of deregulation, privatisation, liberalisation and financialisation.

What we see today is an acceleration of the neoliberal corporate power grab across the global economy, with ever more virulent opposition to social and political forces that dare put forward alternatives. The array of these forces go from those that timidly suggest putting brakes on the neoliberal project, if only to save capitalism from itself, to more strident calls to reverse or dismantle neoliberalism as a global economic model. Either way, it is clear that the global ruling elite do not intend to allow anyone or anything to get in the way of what is now a successful global enterprise of extraction, accumulation and massive enrichment.

Neoliberalism has successfully raised the ideology of the free market and the supremacy of private over public through bilateral and multilateral trade and investment agree-

ments, through debt crises (World Bank and IMF), through propaganda and through out and out corporate capture of the state in one form or another. Both in the North and the South, there may never have been a time when the political class and the corporate elite were so embedded with each other. The mantra of “open for business” and “investor friendliness” from every politician is an indicator that governments have completely

now is to limit democracy and rising popular mobilization, if need be through authoritarian right wing regimes, in order to continue to bulldoze through policies that will remove the remaining obstacles to capital and effectively re-engineer the global world order to become completely subject to the open market. This includes tearing down all the social progress of the last century to create a world of shared responsibility and international

“With all its problems, the multilateral system incarnated by the United Nations, has been an invaluable structure for creating universal frameworks for human rights, social and economic justice, equality and equity and self determination.”

capitulated to the dictates of capital. In this sense, the role of institutions such as the G20, the IMF and World Bank and the WTO will continue to have even greater influence on national policy making, despite the self evident failure of their economic stewardship over the past four decades.

Neoliberalism has been able to pass itself off as a common sense, technical, apolitical, non-ideological and most importantly, nameless project—but with rising inequality and crises this is no longer possible and the game is up. With mounting social protests against economic injustice worldwide—even from the mainstream—the architects of neoliberalism have abandoned any pretence of allegiance to genuine democracy which could bring to power politicians who offer alternatives, even in the most limited forms. The aim

solidarity in achieving human progress, particularly through a system of internationally binding norms and obligations that are managed through a vast network of agencies and linkages.

MULTILATERALISM AND NEOLIBERALISM

With all its problems, the multilateral system incarnated by the United Nations, has been an invaluable structure for creating universal frameworks for human rights, social and economic justice, equality and equity and self determination. Under this model of global governance, multilateralism squarely puts the responsibility for protecting and guaranteeing rights on the state through binding treaties against which governments agree to be held to account. Over the decades of



Photo: Randy Colas/Unsplash.

its existence the multilateral system has been the vehicle for securing and indeed expanding civic, political, social, economic and cultural rights, from ending apartheid to setting labour standards or establishing gender equality. This work of constantly expanding rights and freedoms to those who have previously been denied them continues. However, the multilateral UN system is facing stiff

eral framework (ie. international law) are irreversible. It is stunning to see how the neoliberal project has been successful in replacing priorities of human rights and development to narrow preoccupations around GDP growth, competitiveness and so forth, even changing the language of public policy and development to fit the market paradigm. The human rights agenda now faces an exist-

ment, or youth development or even climate change and inequality. These are merely tactics to divert and distract while the core agenda of globalised structural adjustment continues unchecked.

The world continues on a path towards violence, precariousness, insecurity, authoritarianism and militarism brought about by per-

“The aim now is to limit democracy and rising popular mobilization, if need be through authoritarian right wing regimes, in order to continue to bulldoze through policies that will remove the remaining obstacles to capital...”

competition in its governance and developmental role from older parallel institutions such as the Bretton Woods Institutions, but also newer arrangements such as the World Economic Forum and the G20. The concern of these organisations is not human rights at all but that of putting capital at the centre of governance and development. They are increasingly powerful and influential and have been skillful in putting themselves at the forefront of resolving global challenges, with an expanding remit of issues (environment, security, gender, labour, health or education) away from their supposedly primary economic mandate.

Unlike the United Nations system, that represents all the governments of the world, the IMF, World Bank and WTO do not operate within the legally binding rights framework of the UN, they are governed by a different set of imperatives and most importantly, they do not have the same global political legitimacy. Currently however it is these institutions that enjoy unwarranted positions of influence and global leadership, deployed to protect neoliberal globalisation rather than to check corporate power. An example from the WEF highlighted by the Civil Society Initiative on the SDGs, is its report on the Future of Global Governance “Global Redesign” which “postulates that a globalised world is best managed by a coalition of multinational corporations, governments (including through the UN system) and select civil society organisations (CSOs). It argues that governments are no longer the overwhelmingly dominant actors on the world stage” and that “the time has come for a new stakeholder paradigm on international governance.” The WEF vision includes a “public-private UN, in which certain specialised agencies would operate under joint State and non-State governance systems...”¹

The saying goes “you don’t know what you’ve lost till its gone.” We can no longer have the certitude we once had that rights and entitlements established within in the multilat-

tential crisis as neoliberalism recasts values away from equality, tolerance, non-discrimination or justice towards business friendliness and openness, stock market confidence or shareholder value.

FRAMING AND REFRAMING OUR STRUGGLES IN THE CONTEXT OF NEOLIBERALISM

In the current global context, it is impossible for feminists to frame women’s rights struggles outside the framework of the global neoliberal political economy. Neoliberalism, even when pretending to champion women’s empowerment, is very much premised on the exploitation of women’s labour—both paid and unpaid—since the wholesale destruction of public provision of essential services relies on women’s unpaid and/or underpaid labour to avert a complete social meltdown. The weakening of national and international institutions and frameworks that women rely on to protect and deliver their rights further compromises women’s human rights, as does the increasing reliance on visibly authoritarian methods of governance which are always accompanied by an enablement of xenophobic, misogynist, racist and extremist forces.

Feminists from the South, understand acutely how capitalism, colonialism and imperialism as projects were fundamentally based on constructing divisions and hierarchies based on race, class, caste ethnicity and fundamentally, gender. Intersectionality is precisely about working simultaneously on these interlocking systems of oppression rather than dealing with them as separate struggles that themselves mirror the hierarchies deployed by imperialism in the way we address them. We also have to understand from what is happening today that like human rights or democracy, decolonisation was not the irreversible event we thought it was. It is all too easy to be sucked in by the rhetoric of supposedly progressive corporate elites and their institutions about women’s empower-

ment, or youth development or even climate change and inequality. These are merely tactics to divert and distract while the core agenda of globalised structural adjustment continues unchecked.

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¹ *Spotlight on Sustainable Development: Reclaiming Policies for the Public* <https://www.2030spotlight.org/en>



Nancy Kachingwe is a Harare based freelancer worker specializing in women’s rights, public policy and advocacy strategy. She has worked in various international and regional development NGOs in Brussels, Harare, Accra and Johannesburg on a wide range of development issues including trade and globalisation, regional integration, land rights, women’s empowerment and climate change. She now works as an adviser to NGOs providing policy and advocacy support including training, facilitation, analysis and programme formulation with a feminist political economy lens.

Addressing Gender and Trade Issues in Trade Agreements: Creating more problems than solutions?

by Ranja Sengupta (India)

In the era of post-globalisation and trade agreements that have traversed from the multilateral (read WTO), bilateral and plurilateral, and now to mega trade deals such as the TPP¹ and RCEP², it is clear that trade policy is creating an increasingly gigantic influence on all our lives including on women's lives. The discussion on trade and gender impacts has become even more important today as there is increased attention on it in trade fora, but the proposed solutions reflect very different and often problematic approaches.

THE GENDERED IMPACTS OF TRADE AND INVESTMENT AGREEMENTS

Are women affected differently by trade policy which is gender-neutral on paper? There is clearly a gendered impact of trade liberalisation because women suffer from unequal positions vis a vis economic, social and political relationships. This impacts how, if at all, they benefit from trade liberalisation, but also how they lose from it. Literature indicates that while women benefit less than proportionately from trade liberalisation, they bear a much higher share of the adverse impacts due to their unequal access to resources and power³.

The adverse impact is visible in traditional areas of trade in both agricultural and industrial goods, sectors where women are engaged as producers, workers and consumers. For example, in India agriculture employs about 75% of women farmers and workers, who are already struggling with increasing costs of production. Now they face competition from imported products coming in through the Free Trade Agreements (FTAs), especially in plantation production which is reeling from the impact of the India-ASEAN FTA. Western agricultural subsidies has also led to massive over-production and dumping in global markets, leading to a price fall for developing country farmers. In industrial work, women are getting higher opportunities in



Photo: Jack Young/Unsplash.

trade oriented sectors such as garments. But work is mainly informal, casual, and highly exploitative. This is especially visible in the trade oriented Global Value Chains (GVC) that exploit cheap, unorganised labour such as of women in developing countries to earn sky-high profits.

In the service sector, the impact on employment is already felt by women retailers in India (as in many other developing countries). Retail used to provide about 16-25% of total jobs to women who are already facing competition from domestic large retail chains. But now, with the easing of foreign investment norms⁴, they face competition from giant foreign supermarket chains with financial resources to give discounts till they capture the market. Not only employment, but access to critical services such as healthcare, energy and water are also impacted by trade policy, often with different outcomes for women.

The stringent patent protection norms set by the WTO-TRIPS⁵ Agreement and pushed further by TRIPS-plus Intellectual Property Rights provisions in FTAs, have already been pushing medicine prices to record highs. Women who suffer from disproportionate access to healthcare products and services are bearing a heavier burden from this. In India, talking to HIV/AIDS affected couples revealed how, due to high prices of patented medicines, women give up treatment in favour of the male bread-winner. This happens in spite of India being known as the world's pharmacy because of its generic medicine industry, which produces copy-medicines at low prices. But this industry is now under threat from strong IPR provisions in several FTAs that India is negotiating.

Further, foreign investors enjoy strong protection under the FTAs' investment chapters and

the stand-alone bilateral investment treaties (BITs), about 3300 of which proliferate in the world today. To top it, a multilateral investment facilitation agreement is now being proposed in the WTO. The investor-state-dispute-settlement (ISDS) clauses under these agreements are thwarting regulatory spaces of governments worldwide by allowing foreign investors to sue governments in secret international arbitration cases for any breach of their perceived profits from an investment, even if it is a (development) policy measure. This has led to severe policy freezes, including for ensuring the rights of women, indigenous peoples, workers etc; has increased tendencies for land and natural resources grabs; and challenged environmental and even public health regulations.

Notably, the adverse impact is visible even more strongly in the "new issues", or the new areas that are seeing a push for liberalisation in the WTO and the FTAs, mainly at the initiative of the developed countries. This includes investment liberalisation or facilitation already discussed above, liberalisation of e-commerce, government procurement, competition policy and so on, all of which deeply involve policy space, including development policy space, which is key to realising women's rights in many ways. In addition, these are areas which tend to benefit more the economically rich and socially powerful groups.

WTO SOLUTIONS MORE PROBLEMATIC THAN THE PROBLEM?

Interestingly, after decades of progressive women's rights groups' claims that there is a gender impact of trade which was not taken seriously, the 2017 Ministerial of the WTO in Buenos Aires suddenly decided to come up

with the “Buenos Aires Declaration on Trade and Women’s Economic Empowerment”¹⁶. Pushed by a WTO Member Coalition, this Declaration received endorsements from 121 Member States who “agreed to collaborate on making our trade and development policies more gender-responsive”, by sharing experiences and best practices, generating gender responsive data and so on⁷.

This Declaration does not seem to have any mandate from or been designed in consultation with progressive women’s rights groups that have been raising concerns about gender and trade for a long time. This is reflected in a letter⁸ which was released in response to the Declaration and was endorsed by 164 (now about 190) women’s rights groups and their allies. This challenged the premise of

al. As long as this approach does not change, talking or attempting to make rules about gender and trade remains cosmetic and is actually an effort to hijack issues of real concern to simply push more liberalisation. It is also clear that any effort to address gender and trade has to be encased in an enabling trade policy for developing countries without which women in these countries cannot benefit.

“The current approach in the WTO indicates instrumentalisation and misuse of women’s rights groups’ genuine concerns on gender impacts of trade by using them as a Trojan horse.”

However, instead of being good news, this initiative rings several alarm bells. First, this document does not propose any new approach to the WTO’s way of working or its agreements. Instead of assessing the negative gendered impacts in multiple areas (as described above) of such liberalisation, it proposes more liberalisation as the ultimate solution and a key driver for women’s empowerment. A few cosmetic words here and there cannot change nor address this. Further, the initiative has the potential to make the WTO agreements sound very beneficial for women if gender issues are addressed in very trivial and perfunctory ways.

The declaration also mentions areas such as government procurement, e-commerce, MS-MEs, and GVCs, all of which are “new issues” in the WTO and have no agreed mandate for WTO intervention or rule making. These are also areas where rule making has been resisted by most developing and least developed countries as these constrain their policy space and push new forms of liberalisation, often in disguise, for which they are not ready. Liberalisation of these areas could in fact create adverse impacts on weaker constituencies in developing countries, including women as described above.

The apprehension is corroborated by the fact that the follow-up discussion schedule proposed by the WTO and partners covers topics such as government procurement and the digital economy, all new issues not under WTO mandate, but not on important traditional issues such as agriculture; informal work of women in export industries; and access to medicines, services and natural resources; many of which are seen to be important issues for women in developing countries.

the Gender Declaration and called on Member States “to refrain from adopting the proposed “Joint Declaration on Trade and Women’s Economic Empowerment”. It said “we appreciate that governments are increasingly recognising the gendered impact of international trade and trade rules imposed through the WTO and preferential trade agreements. However, this declaration fails to address the adverse impact of WTO rules and instead appears to be designed to mask the failures of the WTO and its role in deepening inequality and exploitation”.

They argued that in any case women’s rights groups felt that gender and trade in any form must be discussed and acted on with their engagement, consent and based on their recommendations. The current approach in the WTO indicates instrumentalisation and misuse of women’s rights groups’ genuine concerns on gender impacts of trade by using them as a Trojan horse.

A question to explore is also which space is best suited for achieving gender equality or readjustment against the adverse impacts of trade policy and liberalisation. Is it the trade agreements, or should it be done in other enabling spaces such as the Human Rights mechanisms, or should it be done through domestic policy i.e. through a mix of enabling domestic macroeconomic policy (including sector-specific policies) and supportive policy to trade policy. In the current scenario of hard trade negotiations driven by large commercial interests and influenced directly by mega MNCs, the latter two are clearly better spaces. The overall approach of trade agreements, at multilateral, bilateral and plurilateral levels, has so far been to push for more aggressive liberalisation which works against women’s rights and equality in gener-

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1 The Trans-Pacific Partnership was signed by 11 Members across the Pacific after USA pulled out after Trump took office.

2 The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership is being negotiated between the 12 ASEAN countries, and China, Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand and India.

3 See for example Van Staveren, Irene, Diane Elson, Caren Grown and Nilufer Cagatay (eds.). 2007. *The Feminist Economics of Trade*, Routledge, London and New York. For a literature survey see Sengupta, Ranja and Abhilash Gopinath. 2009. *The Current Trade Framework on Gender Linkages in Developing Economies: An Introductory Survey of Issues with Special Reference to India*. December. New Delhi: CENTAD and Heinrich Boll Stiftung; For a short a survey of issues <https://www.twn.my/title2/unsd/2013/unsd130903/gender-related%20impacts%20of%20int%27%20trade%20and%20investment.pdf>

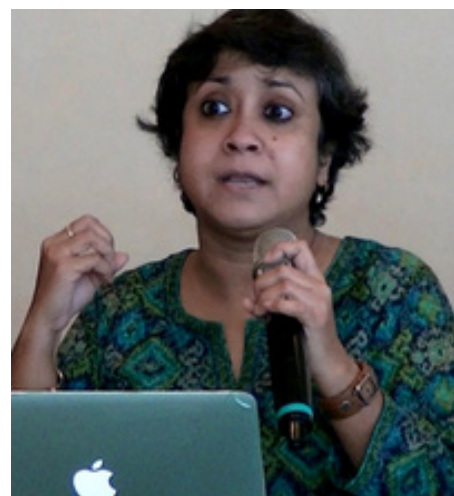
4 In India 100% FDI is allowed in single brand, and more recently 51% FDI is allowed in multi-brand retail if states opt for it.

5 *Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights Agreement of the WTO*.

6 https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/minist_e/mc11_e/genderdeclarationmc11_e.pdf

7 Some other FTAs by EU and Canada are also attempting to include very general language on gender in preambles without much depth or enforceability such as the EU-Chile FTA and the CPTPP.

8 <http://apwld.org/statement-womens-rights-groups-call-on-governments-to-reject-the-wto-declaration-on-womens-economic-empowerment/>



Ranja Sengupta is Senior Researcher with the Third World Network (TWN), based in New Delhi. She currently works on global trade and investment policies and their impact on development priorities in the South.

How to read a trade agreement

by Amaia Pérez Orozco (Spain)*

A new surge of trade and investment agreements looms over us. How do we deal with this? This text presents proposals based on the lessons learnt through feminist resistance in Abya Yala in the face of the previous surge¹.

1- Read it using your own language lens

Avoid using their language. Do not think of yourself as labor (will they create jobs?), consumers (will prices fall?) or entrepreneurs (how do we benefit from these business opportunities?). We must not fall into the trap of refuting their arguments on their grounds. Our language is different: How do these agreements deepen the commodification of living entities? To what extent do they curtail the ability to make decisions on vital personal and collective processes? What role do they play in the possibility of living lives worth living, today and in the future, on a living planet?

2- Read it in several languages

Do not let them confront us. Do not read them in the imperialist language of the competing countries. Agreements lay the basis for a project that confronts corporate power with community life. The conflict between peoples and capital crosses borders, although it is not the same to live in areas of accumulation in the world as in deprived ones. Opposing the new surge requires an internationalist struggle accountable for historical colonialism and present neocolonialism.

3- Do not read it in parts

Are we interested in making an impact analysis? Part 1: "what would happen if the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP)² was approved?" Part 2: "what would happen if a comma was changed? Yes and no. To take a stand, we need to foresee the impact of an agreement. But we cannot linger there, thinking that these agreements could be good or bad (so let's improve the wording) or that if the agreement was not signed we would get rid of the problem. The important thing is to identify the underlying and preceding project that uses the agreements (together, in surges) as a means to consolidate itself.

4- Do not read all 1400 pages of annexes

The agreement between Canada and the European Union, CETA³ has 1400 pages of annexes. Is it imperative to read them to reject it? Yes and no. Expert work is essential, but we need to avoid the risks of overestimating it: feeling discouraged, getting lost in a labyrinth of information, dictating from above how to move below, the affected population. The technical side is a means for political

action. Let's use it to know what is at stake and how the game is played. You and me, who haven't read the annexes, are also able to criticize CETA.

5- Do not read it alone

Read it together with others. Look for things in common from the area you better understand (peasants? sexual and reproductive health?...) and contribute to the collective effort instead of insisting that your issue is a priority. Let's read together with others, from our common standpoint of confronting corporate power. Although we know that the sum of diverse voices results in a distorting rather than a harmonious voice, we are forced to face the inequalities that come across. Let's address them to become political and inclusive actors.

6- Look for the violent end of the story

Agreements can be compared to a children's story where children are devoured: violence is hidden behind seemingly innocent words. We should not let them lure us with flattery. The previous surge brought promises of economic empowerment and cultural rights that would be delivered by a "colorful" or promising neoliberalism. There is no need to reform, water down, include social, environmental or gender clauses. We must refuse flatly any kind of agreement, as an essential step to stand up for other different, better and possible worlds. For that purpose, we need a different narrative, in direct opposition.

7- Burn it at the stake and write another story

What is the alternative? It's not clear, but we do have some clues: it must be a story that breaks through what we have been told until now.

7.1- If they say TTIP, we say territory⁴

Capital expands globally, our counterproposal is that territory should lie at the heart of socioeconomic and political organization. Territory is the soil (which is also below the pavement) with the ecosystems it contains; and the bodies that inhabit in it, together with the relationships they build. It is the body-soil territory, crossed by conflicts. Defending it does not mean sanctifying it but reconstructing it so that all of us can be included with all our diversity.

7.2- If they say TISA, we say common⁵

Agreements eliminate barriers so that anything could become a niche business. In the face of the advancement of this biocide logic, we should stand for the de-commodification of life and the construction of collective accountability regarding the processes that uphold it, with the de-privatization and defeminization of such accountability. This requires the transformation of means of production (of capital) into means of reproduction (of community life); challenging masculinity linked to a self-sufficiency delusion and femininity harassed by the reactionary ethics of care; and eliminating the logic of servitude whereby employers take for granted that there is another class, racially distinguishable, whose only purpose is to serve them.

7.3- If they say TPP, we say sovereignty

The new surge implies taking away decision-making power by expanding the meta-political spectrum. Our proposal is the opposite: politics must not start where markets end, instead, markets should start where we decide it politically, from a politics concept that goes beyond institutional aspects. Let's achieve sovereignty over collective life. A sovereignty that could be defined as feminist because it is rooted in everyday life, in life itself.

8- A manual is dead, let's write a living story

When we read the agreements, we would like to start building a language of confrontation, internationalist, which includes us with our commonalities and differences, reaching everyone and available to anyone, a useful tool to oppose corporate power while we address our inequalities. With this language we would like to write a different story, one that, using other referents (unlike those of trade language, these refer to life, to our pluralist language), will help us build a world that includes everyone: where we have sovereignty over good coexistence, addressed as a common responsibility, rooted in body-soil territory. We are working on it!

NOTES

¹ Amaia Pérez Orozco (2017) *Lessons learnt through Latin American feminist resistance against trade and investment agreements. From "Say No to ALCA" to challenging patriarchal capitalism*, OMAL. This text is a summary and an adaptation of an article from *Pueblos* magazine number 76.

² *Trans-Pacific Partnership covers countries on both sides of the Pacific Ocean and is waiting for Donald Trump's United States of America to resume negotiations.*

³ *Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement, which provisionally came into force on September 2017 and is waiting for ratification by the parliaments of EU member countries.*

⁴ *Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, between USA and EU, under negotiation since 2013.*

⁵ *Trade in Service Agreement, negotiated by 23 member countries of the World Trade Organization.*

* This text is an adaptation of the article published in *Revista Pueblos* no. 76: <http://www.revistapueblos.org/blog/2018/02/18/pueblos-76-primer-cuatrimestre-de-2018/?lang=eu>



Amaia Pérez Orozco is a feminist economist, actively involved in social movements in Europe and Latin America. She holds a PhD in International Economics and Development and is author of the book 'Feminist Subversion of the Economy: Contributions to a Debate on the Capital-Life Conflict' (to be published by PM Press).

An overview of the World Women's Assembly at the World Social Forum 2018

by **Alejandra Scampini**
(Uruguay)

Feminisms were clearly one of the highlights of the new session of the World Social Forum (WSF) held in the city of Salvador de Bahia in Brazil from 13 -17 March 2018. Once again, women and representatives of a vast diversity of feminisms flooded the Federal University of Bahia and more than 10 different places in the same city where WSF global linkages and mobilizations for equality, democracy and social justice converged. They did so with the momentum and energy of March 8¹ and of the massive, history-making strikes and rallies held in more than 150 countries. Towards the closing and evaluation of the WSF, many members of the WSF International Council agreed that feminisms were considered, par excellence, one of the political entities of this new edition of the Forum.

It must be admitted that this has not always been the case. At times in the past feminist and women's movements have received little recognition, but there has been a remarkable evolution in the relationship between feminisms and the WSF since the first was held back in 2001.

"The revolution of feminism has challenged the movements themselves, insisting on the fact that women's fight is not contradictory and cannot be subordinated."²

Currently, the different feminisms and women's movements from the South have man-

aged to include, more strongly, issues that have enlarged the WSF agenda itself. These were reflected in the thematic pillars of the 2018 session: Feminisms and women's struggles and LGBTQ activism and gender diversity. Out of more than 2,000 self-organized activities, there were debates that lay at the heart of the forum: legal, safe and free abortion; the fight against violence and discrimination of different women's groups; women and labor reforms; the struggle of environmental justice; natural resources and land advocates; and the struggle against fundamentalisms and in favor of democracies. Feminists' pres-

impachment process. This is how the call for international solidarity with the Brazilian people³ describes it.

Feminist and women's movements stood firm in this challenging context. In the massive rally on March 13, several voices were heard — young Afro-descendants, indigenous women, Quilombolas [descendants of slaves], lesbians, peasants, students, unionists, activists, women of different age groups, land advocates, women from across the world but mainly from Bahia—yelling "Out with Temer [Brazil President]," "It's my body" and "Femi-

"There is a clear need to incorporate debates on imperialisms and on how corporate power imposes a new development model that brings a new form of slavery and setbacks in human rights agendas."

ence were crucial in the meetings of the social movements' platforms against free trade or to strategize against the G20.

There's still a long way to go but we continue moving forward by way of convergence and in coordination with other movements as well as with feminists from other movements (for example LGBT, indigenous people, trade unionists) for the advancement of an intersectional feminism within the WSF.

This past session of the WSF represented a turning point for the Forum, as a process and event, wherein many of its founders questioned its validity and relevance. WSF returned to Latin America, a region without conflicts but the world's most violent one. According to Oxfam's report, it is one of the most dangerous regions in the world for activists, where 65 percent of the human rights activists are murdered every year. Additionally, the Forum took place in Brazil where its people are suffering the most serious assault on democracy since the coup perpetrated against president Dilma Rousseff through an

nist alert!" They walked holding up signs saying: "Machismo kills!" "Remove your rosaries from our ovaries" and "Women against corporate power" among others. It was a moving and amazing prelude that prepared us for what would happen in the days to come.

TOWARDS THE WORLD WOMEN'S ASSEMBLY

The workshop titled "Evaluation of the International Strike of 8M" convened by DAWN jointly with SOS CORPO (Brazil), Gender and Trade Network, Articulación de Mujeres Brasileñas (AMB), Articulación Feminista Marcosur, Espacio de economía feminista of SEC and Cátedra Libre Virginia Bolten (Argentina) served as a "starter" to understand the content of feminist debates at the WSF. The type of questions posed included: What are the lessons learnt from the feminist strikes and 8M, in their different contexts? What is our capacity to coordinate efforts and actions to exert influence on the Forum debates? Which issues do we want to take to the World Wom-



en's Assembly? The results were extremely positive, with clear messages. The Forum space was confirmed as a unique place to coordinate agendas, settings and movements.

The following women took a strong stand and showed great organizational abilities: local Afro-descendant women, female human rights advocates with their agenda on body and land defense; representatives of Afro-descendant youth with their own discourses, strategies and demands; lesbians and trans women with a strong agenda on violence in their countries. There was less presence of women from Asia and Africa, but a clear need to incorporate debates on imperialisms and on how corporate power imposes a new development model that brings a new form of slavery and setbacks in human rights agendas. All this went hand in hand with common issues such as the defense of democracies, institutions, freedoms and autonomies.

On this road paved by workshops and preparatory meetings, DAWN was one of the coordinators of the World Assembly together with a group of more than 10 local and international women's networks. We had the difficult task to collect ourselves and move forward with the World Assembly a day after receiving the news about the political murder of councilwoman Marielle Franco in the city of Rio de Janeiro. Pain and powerlessness did not stop us; we felt united in solidarity and this redefined the Assembly that was named after her.

TOWARDS THE WORLD WOMEN'S ASSEMBLY: MARIELLE FRANCO PRESENTE!

The World Women's Assembly was the only WSF activity of the morning held in Pelourinho. This activity gathered more than 3,000 women with the aim of meeting each other, recognizing our diversities and agreeing on the ten non-negotiables of women across the world. The meeting was framed by soli-

arity and love messages, crying: "Marielle Franco, presente!".

Women and feminists from more than 120 countries reached out to express their demands, struggles and slogans, amid capoeira [Afro-Brazilian martial arts dances] and encouraging messages. Apart from condemning the murder of Rio de Janeiro councilwoman Marielle Franco, women from other countries took the stage to condemn all the assaults suffered and to claim the liberation of their territories.

Thus the Assembly took different expressions and could not escape the Brazilian context. Manuela D'Ávila, Communist Party candidate, participated in a remarkable way by denouncing the coup and assault on democracy in Brazil. Sonia Guajajara, Socialist and Liberty (PsoL) Party pre-candidate for the vice presidency took the stage with a group of indigenous women and stated that "a full history of the struggles needs to be made and we must overcome inequality." Fábila Reis, Secretary of Promotion of Racial Equality of the government of Bahia (SEPROMI, by its Spanish acronym) also attended the assembly and mentioned the need to continue the struggles of "Quilombolas" and indigenous peoples. Nora Cortiñas from Mothers of Plaza de Mayo Línea Fundadora was also present, showing her solidarity by reading a poem dedicated to Kurdish women. She was warmly welcomed by a crowd shouting "Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, the people embrace you."

10 NON-NEGOTIABLES

The 10 non-negotiables were read in this emotional context. The first of the 10 approved non-negotiables was to fight for the full recognition of productive and reproductive work, as all women are workers regardless of place, whether at home, in the market or community. Then followed the demand of equal opportunities and equal pay; a stop to moral and sexual assaults in the work-

place and implementation of public policies that guarantee them. The Assembly also addressed the eradication of femicide and all forms of violence; and the right to make our own decisions about our bodies, feelings and thoughts, without the interference of the state, religious fundamentalisms and corporate power.

Activists closed the Assembly with the conviction that there is an urgent need to unite all struggles for economic, social and cultural emancipation, without violence. In this spirit, the rally moved towards the city hall, yelling: Against misogyny, silencing and invisibility! Against patriarchy and all forms of violence! A LUTTA CONTINÚA (The struggle goes on).

NOTES

1 *The International Women's Strike or the International Feminist Strike of 8M was a mobilization held on March 8, 2018, on the International Women Workers' Day/International Women's Day.*

2 Massiah Gustavo (2017) "Seminar on the international context", Social Forum of Resistances, January 18, Porto Alegre. https://www.dawnnet.org/feminist-resources/sites/default/files/enews/DawnInforms_201703.pdf

3 <https://wsf2018.org/en/chamado-a-solidariedade-internacional-com-o-povo-brasileiro/>



Alejandra Scampini is a feminist educator and activist, with extensive experience in popular education and mobilization for different networks and international organizations. She is part of DAWN's Social Mobilization team.

Declaration of the Feminist Forum against Free Trade and the Great Feminist Assembly

Buenos Aires, Diciembre de 2017

The Feminist Forum against Free Trade and the Great Feminist Assembly were held within the framework of the

Peoples' Summit "WTO Out, Building Sovereignty" on December 11, 12 and 13 in Buenos Aires, Argentina, alongside the XI Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization held in this city.

The XI Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization (WTO) was held in the city of Buenos Aires, Argentina, from December 10 to 13, 2017.

Once again, the WTO caught the attention of governments from 164 countries as well as big corporations, particularly interested in new norms that seek to provide profitable opportunities in the digitized economy of the future, detrimental to the advancement in

terms of equitable development measures and reduction of inequality. Outside the conference, women, lesbians, transvestites, transgender and bisexual people, non-binaries, gays, Afro-Argentines, Afrodescendants, immigrants, refugees, black, displaced and indigenous women, peasants, self-managed workers from different regions, sectors, identities, ethnic groups and cultures, joined the group Convergence of Movements, WTO Out, to build an alternative peoples' agenda, celebrating the failure of the negotiations led by a project of neoliberal and corporate economic globalization.

Far from being a real "development round", it unveiled the clear tensions among countries, the imbalances of power and the social crises felt before the Ministerial Conference. While

rich countries and corporations encouraged new rules to deregulate e-commerce and to promote the free circulation of data in the hands of large transnational corporations, evading their obligations in terms of taxes, labor rights or rights to protect the privacy of citizens and consumers, at the same time, the resistance in developing countries continued insisting on the protection of popular sovereignty, agriculture and food sovereignty and on allowing the adoption of public service policies on water, electricity and other basic needs.

The “Feminist Forum against Free Trade” was held within the Peoples’ Summit, back to back with official debates, to analyze the patterns of economic violence and the impact of so-called “free trade”; to debate on how trade openness affects living conditions and to share knowledge and grassroots and feminist alternatives against free trade.

Through our different struggles, we seek deep structural transformations to challenge neoliberal and extractivist macroeconomic policies that deepen inequality among people and peoples, increasing environmental degradation. As women, Afro-Argentines, Afrodescendants, immigrants, refugees, black, displaced and indigenous women, lesbians, transvestites, transgender and bisexual people, non-binaries, gays, peasants, self-managed and popular economy workers from rural and urban areas, we say that we’ve had enough of this model and we are working for an alternative, anti-patriarchal, anti-racist, anti-capitalist development model with environmental justice.

We have not been invited, as civil society, to join these debates. We have been excluded and also expelled. We endorse the letters of solidarity in the face of the political persecution actions of the Argentinian government that vetoed the entry and participation of representatives from organizations already accredited for the official ministerial conference. There are no grounds for this decision that clearly represents an attack on democratic processes that are already precarious, weak and barely transparent. These actions are clearly meant to silence the criticism against the growth of the so-called globalization of corporate power.

Regarding the agenda and debates on the liberalization of trade and financial flows we think there is enough evidence provided by Feminist Economics that confirms how it unevenly impacts our daily lives and paid and unpaid work -domestic and care work- deepening inequalities and poverty, expanding unemployment and informality. Furthermore, financial exploitation, proliferation of banking activities and the compulsive indebtedness of popular sectors creates ties that hold back women and limit their economic autonomy. On the other hand, the precariousness promoted by the system ultimately erodes the solidarity community and social fabrics, in-



creasing our exposure to situations of vulnerability and deepening all forms of heteropatriarchal violence.

Corporations take advantage of gender inequality. Accordingly, what we consider to be structural inequalities, are comparative advantages for governments and corporations, that translate into lower salaries and poorer working conditions. The signing and further success of this kind of trade agreements based on an unequal international division of work, is possible because the underlying structure is also unequal in terms of gender relations and, at the same time, their disastrous impact increases and deepens within this patriarchal and heteronormative structure. These conditions of precariousness and inequality are used to create a race to the bottom of all standards of labor and unpaid domestic and care work, entailing a double burden for us, as this becomes a vital buffer to sustain life. The life created through this system amidst the growing crisis and the precariousness that this civilization crisis brings, is sustained by this unpaid work.

Driven by a feminism mobilized in the face of the current political problems in our territories, concerned about the multiple structural and daily oppressions in women’s lives, struggling against them massively and persistently, seeking to implement direct democratic procedures in its constructive and questioning practices, a feminism that risks and takes risks based on feelings of indignation and hope, **we denounce:**

The viciousness against Mapuche women, children and young people indicates that in order to dispossess territories, the State has to focus its colonization plan on body repression. The processes of systematic repression in Patagonia are not politically isolated from what is happening in other Latin-American/

Abya Yala countries where the State-corporate extractivist model (proliferating through several Free Trade Agreements) uses ruthless politics with extreme ferocity over land defenders and groups that are considered unproductive for their “development model”.

We also denounce xenophobic and discriminatory policies towards immigrants and their families suffering the impact of the exclusive prioritization of capital and corporate power that encourages labor exploitation. The pursuit of further foreign investment leads to the signing of trade agreements that promote globalization and flows of capital, while mobility of people across the world is questioned and criminalized. Nowadays, we know that immigrants make great contributions to international development and society through their work, with more than 600 billion dollars in production and remittances to their countries of origin, three times as much as international aid. We demand WTO to transcend this productive vision and consider migration as a human right (national, regional and global) providing freedom to cross territories without being criminalized, based on the concept of building universal citizenship.

Therefore, we reject the **Joint Declaration on Free Trade and Women’s Economic Empowerment** released at the Ministerial Conference and aligned with the principles of neoliberalism and the WTO rules of the game. This declaration is based on a reductionist and binary vision of women’s economic empowerment without addressing the negative impacts such as the threats to the livelihoods of women, lesbians, transvestites, afrodescendants, racialized, indigenous, urban and transgender people, dissident identities, peasants, quilombolas. The trade rules promoted by the WTO favor privatization and restrict women’s access to water and land,

education, community decision-making, health services; they limit access to goods and essential basic services, encourage patent protection that increases the cost of seeds and medicine, and they promote forms of production based on a race to the bottom of all standards of labor, salary and social protection which affects us especially. We repudiate the political use of our struggles and demands to save a failed conference. **Not in our name!**

We fight for alternatives to the climate, care, financial and civilization crises. We raise our voice for participatory democracies in our region and across the world. We embrace our colleagues from the Women's Movement in Kurdistan who share their experience of women's science and economics. Our goal is to call for an alternative, political and transformative commitment to change trade rules and the financial system; they should be socially and environmentally sustainable, within the framework of fulfilled commitments and ensuring respect, protection and the realization of human rights.

We demand:

- The G-20, like the WTO and all Free Trade Agreements, only reflects the thirst for profit of transnational corporations rather than the needs of the peoples. It is no coincidence that both the WTO and the G20 are held in Argentina: this country wants to show itself as a regional leader in trade liberalization and neoliberalism. In the face of the next G-20 meeting to be held in Argentina during 2018, we demand guaranteed democratic practices, in terms of access and participation of civil society.
- The demilitarization of our lands and bodies to recover our lands for good living (buen vivir) instead of brutal extractivism.
- Justice and symbolic and economic compensation for transvestites, afro-descendants and transgender people who were victims of criminalization. For the implementation of the labor quota for transgender people and all other measures that guarantee labor inclusion in decent jobs. Recognition equals compensation!
- Compensation and justice for Caribbean peoples suffering invisibility and, at the same time, plundering of common goods, workers' exploitation. In solidarity with the women and people of Haiti!
- To guarantee the non-persecution and non-criminalization of all human rights defenders, securing their protection. Freedom to all political prisoners!
- Justice for Diana Sacayán, Isabel Arce Vera, Santiago Maldonado, Rafael Nahuel, José Delfin Acosta, Massar Ba! And all victims of persecution and murder in peoples' struggles in Latin America, represented by Berta Cáceres from Honduras, a symbol of popular struggles.

WE CALL ON SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS AND MOVEMENTS OF THE PEOPLES' SUMMIT #WTO OUT:

- To meet in Trelew, in October, at the National Women's Meeting in Argentina, to provide the opportunity to exchange and debate on the implications of free trade in our lives.
- To vindicate the Afro Matrix in our countries, so strongly denied, joining this struggle all together, as society, and we invite you to gather and join the celebration on July 25, the "International Afro-Latin American, Afro-Caribbean and Diaspora Women's Day" and on November 8, the "National Afro-Argentines and African Culture Day in Argentina". We refuse to forget the huge contribution to the economy of the African Community, through their work under the yoke of slavery.
- The failure of the WTO Ministerial Conference is the opportunity to move forward and organize the Second Feminist Forum against Free Trade back to back with the G-20 meeting in Buenos Aires, in November.

• The global resistance has been seen and heard in December in Buenos Aires. Once again, wherever global forums go, the resistance of the peoples standing up and fighting for their rights, will await them.

As feminists, we mobilize against trade liberalization, economic violence and neoliberalism, and we demand more equitable gender relations, economic and ecologic justice!

The struggle is global and feminist!

Women, Afrodescendants, immigrants, refugees, black, displaced and indigenous women, lesbians, transvestites, transgender people, peasants, united in the face of the civilization crisis!

Feminist Forum against Free Trade and the Great Feminist Assembly

Peoples' Summit:
"WTO Out, Building Sovereignty"

December 2017

CUMBRE DE LOS PUEBLOS FUERA OMC

foro y asamblea feminista frente al libre comercio

11 DE DICIEMBRE DE 2017

foros y paneles: desde 9.30 hs

asamblea: 18 hs

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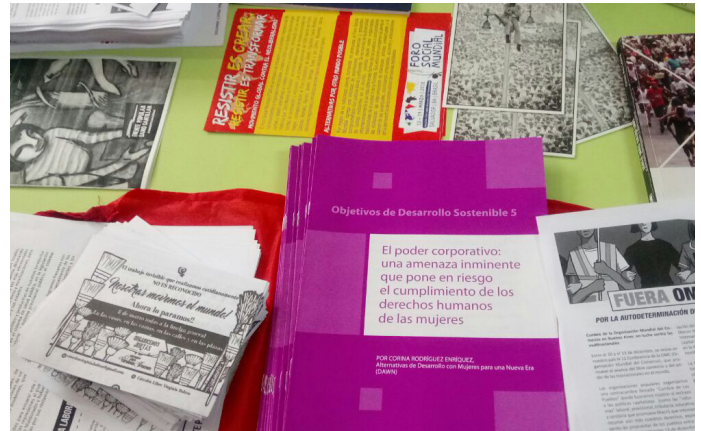
WEEK OF ACTION AND PEOPLES' SUMMIT AGAINST WTO

Buenos Aires, December 2017

FEMINIST FORUM AGAINST FREE TRADE



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More information and resources available at DAWN's website: www.dawnnet.org

DECLARATION OF THE WORLD WOMEN'S ASSEMBLY "MARIELLE FRANCO"

"We are women, lesbians, trans, bisexual, non-binary, from all around the planet, with no distinction; we are a force of resistance to all forms of oppression, inequality and discrimination; and we are ready to take collective action to stop this historical process of violent domination that is subjugating us".
Read the full Declaration::

<http://dawnnet.org/publication/declaracion-de-la-asamblea-mundial-de-mujeres-del-fsm-2018/>

SPECIAL COVERAGE: DAWN AT THE WORLD SOCIAL FORUM 2018

As part of its engagement in the World Social Forum (WSF) 2018 that took place in Salvador de Bahia, Brazil, DAWN held a two-day dialogue with feminists from around the global South on "Fundamentalisms, militarization and Corporate Power" and coordinated two self-managed workshops (14th and 15th of March) within the WSF. It also participated in the coordination of the World Women's Assembly. Check out the main pieces of information, pictures and videos shared from those days:

<http://dawnnet.org/2018/05/special-coverage-dawn-at-the-world-social-forum-2018/>

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Issue Team:
 Florencia Partenio
 Virginia Rodríguez
Copyediting:
 Seona Smiles
 Claire Slatter

PHYSICAL ADDRESS

Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN)
 Global Secretariat,
 JP Bayly Trust Building, 193 Rodwell Rd,
 Suva, FIJI.

DAWN EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Cai Yiping
 Cecilia Alemany
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 Gita Sen (General Co-coordinator)
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