

**WIDE contribution
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Since the 1990es, WIDE observed a strong tendency in EU policies towards neoliberal economic policies. Their prime objectives are growth, efficiency and competitiveness in the context of globalisation. This resulted in a growing gap or even contradiction between EU's social policies and their objectives of equality, fair distribution and social security on the one hand and its economic policies on the other hand. Parallel to this incoherence in internal EU policies, in external EU policies a lack of coherence between EU's development policy and its main objective of poverty eradication and its new trade agenda of progressive liberalisation, deregulation and privatisation emerged.

Looking at development aid I was deeply shocked about one of the conclusions of the Beijing+15 report from the African region: "There is no evidence to show that existing policies and strategies have curbed the feminization of poverty." Additionally a crucial indicator for women's well being and health, maternal mortality, could not be improved significantly. Keeping in mind that the EU is the Africa's largest donor this means that EU's development aid and the efforts to increase its effectiveness through new aid modalities have not made a difference with regard to women's poverty. Obviously EU's development aid has utterly failed. How is this possible?

One central reason is that trade liberalisation is considered to be the main driver for development in the global South. Trade liberalisation attempts to unlock business opportunities for the corporate sector but it locks up development objectives of small-scale market agents. Most of the women in these countries are small-scale farmers, small producers, or petty traders.

Generations of women's development projects aimed at market integration through micro-finance and so-called income generation. Those women who manage to earn some income in the informal sector as home or village based manufacturers, or street vendors are now outcompeted by big retailers, supermarkets and imported goods. An already classical example is the global chicken and the export of frozen chicken parts from the EU to west Africa. This shows that liberalisation policies which don't spare vulnerable sections and actors in the market undermine pro-poor development projects and generate new poverty.

At the same time, there is no monitoring by the EU whether the investments and economic operations of EU enterprises and corporations are in compliance with human rights, women's rights and labour rights.

Liberalisation of government procurement is another priority on the EU agenda. Though poor people are in dire need of cost free or low cost essential services, basic services are not excluded from liberalisation. This will 1) confine the policy space which is needed to protect vulnerable segments of the population and give preferential treatment to village and small-scale industries, women's co-operatives and self-help groups, 2) Liberalisation of "environmental services and goods" could imply privatisation of water and energy supply which leads to an increase of prices,

and distorts poor people's access to basic services. This is detrimental to poverty reduction and a threat to basic human and women's rights, and social security.

In the context of this economic restructuring, we have to critically review the strategic tool of gender mainstreaming which after the Beijing conference was deemed to be a magic bullet for gender equality. This tool has a lot of structural and political limitations. E.g. a gender mainstreaming approach cannot do anything about the ongoing privatization of health services in many countries. However, privatisation of medical services has become a main barrier for women's access to health because poor women cannot afford services and medicines. High fees and costs of medical care is one of the reasons why the maternal mortality rates in Asia, Africa and Latin America did not decrease significantly.

All those examples demonstrate that the EU did not use the women's human rights paradigm as a coherent framework for both its development and its trade policies vis-à-vis countries in the South.

Additionally, WIDE is concerned that the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) narrow down the comprehensive women's rights framework of the Beijing Platform for Action without any mainstreaming gender into all the MDGs. The MDGs ignore the structural nature of poverty as well as the structural nature of gender inequality.

The Beijing+15 review is an opportunity for the European Union and Member States to strengthen their commitments and implementation mechanisms towards the women's human rights paradigm. It should not be subordinated to or undermined by neoliberal policy objectives which work in favour of competitiveness of EU corporations, and their economic growth. On the contrary, the human rights paradigm and the European model of social entitlements should be extended as guiding principle to other policies e.g. migration policies, meaning migration should be addressed from a human and women's rights perspective including labour rights and global social rights.

Presently, the multiple and interlocking crisis poses a number of threats to the further implementation of women's rights.

- a) Due to indebtedness of EU countries – Greece is an outstanding example – governments further cut back their social services which has adverse affects on poor people, among them the majority women.
- b) Further deregulation of labour markets and flexibilisation of employment are declared to be solutions to the crisis.
- c) Trade liberalisation and opening of new markets for EU corporations are pushed forward as a recovery strategy.
- d) The G 20, national and international responses to the crisis and stimulus packages back gender sensitivity and respect for women's rights.
- e) Women's organisations are praised as service providers when it comes to affirmative action, violence against women and anti-discrimination mechanisms. But they are underrepresented in political and economic decision making when responses to the crisis are shaped.
- f) Funding for women's organisations has been drastically reduced while at the same time trillions of Euro were at hand to save bankrupt banks and corporations.

The multidimensional crisis has shown an urgent need to challenge the incoherencies in the economic, political and social model of the EU, to search for alternatives and gear towards structural transformation of the neoliberal market system, in particular the financial market. For this purpose contributions by women's organisations to policy formulation, monitoring and implementation of women's rights in a just, sustainable and equitable development framework are indispensable. 15 years after the landmark event in Beijing, women's organisations are struggling once again for voice, resources and space to start new policy dialogues which forge gender justice and women's rights, and at the same time promote another development model in which rights and need based objectives, social justice and gender equality are the guiding principles for economic policies.