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The Future We Want: Designing an East African Utopia - A Feminist Perspective: Work, Commons, Enough

Envisioning the future we want, we should keep in mind our critical analysis of the GDP-development model as starting point for thinking of alternative development paths. From a V-R-G-perspective gender, socio-economic and environmental concerns are linked up in this analysis.¹

Gender Concerns	Socio-Economic Concerns	Ecologic Concerns
GDP-model ➤ ignores & devalues women's work ➤ deepens gender inequalities ➤ undermines the logic of moral & care economies Payment of house/care work is no solution	GDP-logic ➤ ignores economic diversity & non-waged labour ➤ depletes human, social & natural resources ➤ produces inequalities & one crisis after the other ➤ is expansive & imperialistic Keynesian policies are no solution	GDP-model ➤ disregards limits to growth & endless resources ➤ high risk technology financialisation of eco-services & nature Decoupling of GDP-growth from resource & energy use failed Greening of growth is no solution

After Margaret Thatchers saying that “There is no alternative” to neoliberalism which is based on the GDP-Model, critical activists from around the world respond, that „there are a thousand alternatives“, meaning TATA instead of the TINA-principle. However, alternatives depend a lot from the specific context and there can't be a one-size-fits-all recipe for social-economic transformation. People have to democratically decide in their specific economic, political, socio-cultural and environmental context about their ways out of the GDP-based dead end street and about alternatives.

Critical scholars say that we need a „great transformation“. But where to start such a great transformation? What exactly are the entrypoints?

Many feminists got involved in the debates on buen-vivir-concepts, on new prosperity- and happiness indices, and on questions like: Which kind of growth do we want? At what expense? How can we liberate human and social growth as well as prosperity from the tyranny of GDP-growth? Which entry points can be identified to shape another development paradigm? An additional challenge for women is whether they want to become equal or even better “economic man” or “rationale man” in an socially, environmentally and economically unjust system? Most of the feminists are pragmatic and practical, and don't want to wait for a great transformation. They prefer to start at various points with many small transformations

¹ This input is a follow-up on my earlier presentation on „The ‚Africa rising‘ narrative: Gain prosperity or reproduce inequality“ in the same conference.

and transition strategies to change the GDP-oriented structures and the prevailing growth-oriented mindsets.

The critical debate of growth, GDP and “rising” is an opportunity for feminists to connect three debates on which they focused in the recent past: 1) work, including unpaid care work and social reproduction, 2) commons and commoning, and 3) an idea of enough which balances efficiency and sufficiency based on a critique of neoliberal globalisation, and its production and consumption patterns. These three debates could be entrypoints to break up and to counter the GDP-logic.

1) Work is a key element of social life in exchange with nature which constructs and reconstructs gender norms and gender relations. A triple R-strategy is needed from a gender perspective in order to develop an alternative concept of work: redefinition, revaluation and redistribution of work. Different from the exclusive GDP-measurement, an inclusive perspective on work has to account for the whole diversity of work and economies, meaning acknowledge as well the diversity of economic activities in the lower part of the iceberg. These forms of work are key to giving preference to provision, need satisfaction and enforcement of rights over efficiency and individual utility maximisation as the ultimate goal of economic activities.

Work has to be redefined in a holistic manner in order to include unpaid, moral-based and collective forms of economic activities beyond the market, remuneration and profitability. Women always struggled against the perception that unpaid care work and even paid domestic work is not seen as „real“ work. Thus, all the work aiming at social reproduction, provisioning, protection, precaution, nursing, subsistence, cooperation, solidarity and reciprocity has to be revaluated with another measurement than efficiency, competition and accumulation of money and material goods in form of private property. They create well-being and welfare as public good which have significant relevance for prosperity, wealth, human and social growth. This revaluation has to go hand in hand with a redistribution of labour, unpaid and paid, care and market labour which breaks up the gender hierarchical division of labour, the feminisation of care work and the prevailing roles and norms of femininity and masculinity, meaning care work and remunerated market work must be redistributed between men and women, and the gender wage gap must be closed.

2) In the context of privatisation and financialisation of natural resources and public services, a strong discourse emerged around **commons**. This follows Elinor Ostrom’s findings about the advantages of community-driven use of resources over market- and state-controlled resource use. **Commoning** means that communities define and administrate commons from forests to care for kids, from health facilities to digital soft ware, from food sovereignty to public transport. Sharing of commons benefits more people if equal access for all social classes, ethnic groups, women and men, is ensured, and rules and regulations for their use is decided in a democratical way. Local public goods and commons can be a good prerequisite for everyone being able to realize their needs and social rights. On the other hand commons and public goods must be protected from commercialisation and speculation; otherwise private capital owners and the rules of the market would decide about the common good and the enforcement of human rights and global social rights. Commons and commoning break with the logic of private property as root cause of individual greed for prosperity and

accumulation, and open up space for more democratic decision making, economic activity in solidarity and redistributive justice, including gender justice.

However, commons and an “economy of solidarity” do neither automatically harmonise the interests of different classes and identities, nor do they change gender stereotypes and the gender-hierarchical division of labour and decision making. Therefore, commoning is a social process of constructing communities, taking into account internal power relations and respecting and negotiating different interests and identities.

3) Following the critique of the expansive and imperialistic capitalist market model which is based on a permanent increase in resource extractivism, labour exploitation and care-extractivism, we must reflect how much production and how much consumption is **enough**, how much is really needed. Alternative development paths must acknowledge that resources are endless and respect the material limits to growth. The present corporate- and investor-driven, resource- and energy-intensive patterns of overproduction and overconsumption do not sustain their social and natural living foundations but deplete and destroy them. A concept of enough has to balance efficiency and sufficiency. While the care economy needs to grow, the resource-, energy- and emission-intensive superfluous production particularly in the North, e.g. the car and the arms industries have to be downsized and converted into resource-sparing and recycling industries. Trade and investment liberalisation, the global race for raw materials, land and water grab, and financialisation of resources have to be reregulated or dismantled while production has to re-turn from too much export orientation to domestic markets based on local and regional economic cycles. Not producing at the costs of others – the global south, weaker sections in the society, women, indigenous people - and of nature is the decisive criteria for sufficiency, the wisdom of knowing what is enough.

Shrinking of growth in resource-extractivism and production has to be accompanied by a change of consciousness and individual behaviour which now across countries and regions are geared at ever more consumption and an imperialistic life style based on the exploitation of human and natural resources. This refers most to global middle classes who lost a sense of sufficiency and measurement what is enough. The North has to pioneer this move because of its historical debt with regard to emissions of green house gas and exploitation of resources in the global South.

Those three building blocks for alternative development paths – work, commons and enough - could break up the hegemonic logic of unfettered growth and quick returns on investment. However, alternative development paths can only be just and sustainable if they are negotiated by the concerned people in a democratic way.

For alternative development paths it is not sufficient to add a few human, social and gender development indicators to the GDP-measurement. A shift of paradigm in economic and society-nature-relations is necessary. Instead of thinking and assessing the economy top-down from its aggregate results, it should be conceptualised bottom-up from a care and livelihood perspective, from the needs and rights of people. Instead of the expansion of the monoculture of the market, biodiversity, economic and cultural diversity should be sustained. Putting the economy back from its profit- and speculative-driven head on its caring feet would also imply that people are put before profit, meaning the economy would be remoralised and re-embedded in social relations and caring relations towards nature and the environment. This

results in four guiding principles for alternative development paths: economic diversity, social justice, care for nature, participatory democracy. Gender justice is a cross cutting principle for organising the future we want.

Links to the Buen Vivir Concept

There are many intersections between those transition strategies conceptualised from a European perspective with the Andine concept of buen vivir:

- valuation of all forms of work
- creation of collective spaces and agendas of solidarity
- respect for nature's own rights
- restriction of resource extractivism
- respect for cultural and bio-diversity
- reclamation of one's own concept of sustainable livelihood
- go beyond individual happiness and well-being based on material goods and private property: public goods and citizens' welfare

But in Europe as well we have women-led movements which explore alternative economic practices e.g. in the area of food sovereignty. In order to challenge and counter the industrialisation and financialisation of food with its many scandals, health hazards and environmentally destructive impact, many alternative production and consumption practices are set up, from local initiatives like urban agriculture, intercultural gardens, guerilla gardening, garden and food sharing and exchange, usage of so-called waste, producer/consumer cooperatives to a sometimes radical movement of veganism and animal protection. Based on the assumption that it is the responsibility of the west to start immediately to bring its own house in order, all these alternatives reclaim alternative concepts of work, commons and enough.

Whether the buen-vivir-concept in Ecuador and Bolivia, the Gross Happiness Index in Bhutan or the new food sovereignty-movement in the West, they all reclaim and politicise development and economic growth. What has been considered non-market and private – social reproduction, the care and moral economy, well-being and good living – is politicised, meaning power relations are questioned. Youth are strongly encouraged at this point of time, not to leave the shaping of our future to the present power elites and to the neoliberal GDP-model and the TINA-principle, but to negotiate power, to reclaim and occupy development, and to envision their own futures. Just imagine and think out of the GDP-Box!

Some leading questions to inspire your debates about the future you want:

- ✧ What kind of growth do you want für East Africa?
- ✧ At what expense?
- ✧ What is valuable for you beyond the GDP?
- ✧ How do you value unpaid care and family work, informal work, community and neighbourhood economies..?
- ✧ Which commons do you want to protect, which commons do you want to create?
- ✧ Do you want to continue African forms of solidarity, collective action and moral economy such as harambee and ubuntu?
- ✧ Which resources do you want to protect against commodification and privatisation?

