

Let's Work for Change

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I admire you economists because you are so critical in producing knowledge. Let me focus on one aspect of this here, that is producing knowledge for engendering economic policy.

Although economic policy is always gendered, reflecting either conscious or unconscious conventional gender opinions, say, for example, patriarchal or male domination, it is also tremendously important that economic policy be engendered, in other words, that the perspective of women's rights and gender equality be integrated into economic policy.

Recently, a Chinese columnist exiled in Germany wrote an article entitled "Feminism can save China." We Chinese know that this actually is a take-off from a reference to a famous Chinese official slogan entitled "Only Socialism can save China." But very few people actually recognize that feminism has the potential really to save China, that is, save China from increasing social inequalities (not only gender inequalities) and unsustainable growth. I might add, feminism can also save the world,

including both our two countries. And feminist economists are key for this great course by producing a brand new field of knowledge, including a new way of thinking about economics .

Regarding a gender transformative economic policy, thus far the knowledge you have produced or will produce mainly relates to the following:

The first, to increase supply.

Since 1995, the Fourth UN World Conference on Women, efforts to mainstream gender into policy making has become a accepted, at least on paper or lips services (but we can use this, right?)as a trend. Even my own government uses this new term rather than remaining wedded to the traditional "Marxist liberation of women." But there has been a great shortage of inputs into this new trend. We lack cases, data, and models as evidence from advocacy research projects to alter, support, refine, or even initiate new economic policy.

The second is to create demand. In reality, almost all policy makers, as well as think tanks and influential media, have no idea about what it means to engender economic policy, how a country can benefited from it.

So it has become problematic as to how to first promote it. How can the demand for a transformative gender economic policy be created?

Yet, this is possible and it can be done. The new knowledge that you economists have produced or will produce is capable of doing this. Your work will lead to demands for the emergence of an engendered economic policy.

How? This can be done if the knowledge you new produced reveals how gender inequalities, in particular in interaction with other inequalities and injustices, hinders the development of human resources, productivity, and the capability of enterprises and country, and constrains growth of GDP, the power of consumption, and so forth. What are the gender responses to financial, budget, human resource, structural reform, industrial upgrading, the environment, transportation, and agricultural policies. And how can these gender responses benefit economic and human development?

What needs to be done to produce this new knowledge? Actually, I have more questions than answers, but here are some of them.

We need strategic thinking about our own work and about cooperation:

what are our perceptions about the future trajectories of both the global economy and our own economies? What will be our long-term and immediate appeals based on our understanding of the general situation and women's needs and demands? How should we prioritize our wish list? What are the policy issues with which decision makers are most concerned? How can we find a common platform with decision makers and policy makers? How can we insert our issues onto their agenda? How can we make our arguments more convincing? How can we build and/or expand our network with other feminist colleagues and comrades? And how can we work with other social actors, movements, and interest groups?

We need to work together, through both cooperation and joint research with scholars in both China and India as well as with scholars within China. Today, in the global or glocal context, we cannot grasp a full picture of our respective economies, on our own. We also need a glocal perspective. We need to join hands with our colleagues in other economies or in other fields. As an example, we may even carry out joint research on women's participation in village autonomy, e.g.,

Panchayat Raj.

We need interdisciplinary research. For example, we must look at the

employment issue from different perspectives -- different sub-disciplines of economics, and from the perspectives of sociology, public administration, political sciences, organizational behavior, and psychology. Another example, if we want to advocate a gender-responsive budget, we need to analyze the impact of gender and the effects of various gender-related public expenses on the budget. We need to look at tax policy, the salary system, and family planning policy. We need expertise from other fields, such as health, education, human resources, sociology, and so forth. Of course, the gender lens must be equipped with knowledge from all these other disciplines.

We need to network with practitioners, especially with those from the grassroots or those who work in the grassroots. We can be inspired by their struggles, their daily routines, and their ways of dealing with the challenges they face. If economists do not realize that agricultural machines are still designed based on the standard of a middle-sized man, it will be impossible for women to handle such machines effectively. How can we expect such machines to help poor women farmers in a significant way? Where do we place the blame, if women are ill-equipped to use such machines effectively and hence are not qualified to be productive, modern, socialist farmers? If economists do not pay sufficient attention to violence against women because they deem it not

to be their business, how can we calculate the economic costs related to physical, psychological, and sexual violence to all related parties, including the victims, the perpetrators, as well as employers, service-providers, schools, insurance companies, health sectors, and governments.

Conventional economics tends to endorse gender injustices, which cause both exploitation and deprivation. You feminist economists can save economics, and can also help women receive a fairer share of the fruits of development and more actively participate in creating healthier and more sustainable human development.