

BEYOND GDP: A COMPENDIUM OF REGIONAL FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES



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FOREWORD

With six¹ of nine planetary boundaries breached, we are facing a crisis that threatens to cause irreversible harm to people and the planet. The global economic system and its fixation with the GDP growth-centric model is posing an existential threat while being disastrous for women, girls, and non-binary people.

For over forty years, the world, especially the Global South, has been subjected to the mantra of GDP at any cost. This has been championed by international financial institutions (IFIs), such as the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, and faithfully implemented by national governments through policies and measures driving privatization, austerity, and debt. All of which has led to an unprecedented consolidation of corporate power and concentration of wealth.

A different path is overdue.

This collection of articles presents critical perspectives and insights by leading feminist activists and scholars from four global regions: Jennifer Lipenga and Lumonya Faith (Africa); Samia Al-Botmeh (Middle East and North Africa); Nalini Rathnarajah (South Asia); and Natalia Quiroga Diaz (Latin America and Caribbean). Each article takes the reader on a journey, providing evidence of how this global obsession has for decades played out in each region, guiding policies that have disproportionately harmed those at the intersections of systems of oppression, whilst causing devastating harm to nature and the climate.

The authors demystify the debates beyond GDP and cut through the technical jargon to relate to the daily lives of ordinary people and the ongoing struggles for justice by feminist and wider social justice movements. Many of the issues they present are recurring and interrelated – showing how the same economic system manifests in different contexts, often exacting harms: slavery and forced labour in Africa, militarisation, and conflict in MENA, extractivism in Latin America, and exploitative working practices in global value chains in South Asia.

Other common themes include the enduring links the growth-centric agenda has with colonialism, imperialism, and patriarchy, as well as women's vast and unequal share of unpaid care and domestic work and informal work, which remain largely un-counted in GDP. Therefore, some might say conveniently, unpaid care's contribution to the economy is overlooked, its vital role in sustaining well-being and social reproduction erased; and how austerity, debt, and privatisation of public services intensify care and domestic workloads of women and girls remain obscured.

This collection contributes to decolonial feminist scholarship on economic alternatives not only to counter mainstream neoliberal narratives and framings but also very importantly, to provide us with pathways to inspire a radical transformation of economies, showing that another way is possible.

It comes at what could be a pivotal moment. The call to move beyond GDP is growing globally, including strengthened calls from feminist and wider social movements, and new

commitments to develop metrics that complement or go beyond GDP included in the recently agreed UN Pact for the Future. This collection of articles includes many important lessons for policymakers in this regard. It is a powerful call to abandon a dysfunctional economic metric towards a radically more equal, greener, feminist world, by grounding policy in decolonial feminist perspectives and financing a transition to a care-centred, wellbeing economy. As Jennifer Lipenga and Lumonya Faith remind us of the context of Africa: “What good is a high GDP if people aren’t content with their lives, if capitalist extraction erodes the spirit of solidarity and community, of the values that have long lived within African cultures, *ubuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, which emphasize ‘being self through others’?”

While the articles featured here focus on the Global South, the cult of growthism has also been a major driver of inequality and poverty in countries in the Global North. This is seen, for example, in the rising poverty and declining living standards in the UK, where women on low incomes, women from minority ethnic backgrounds, women living with disabilities, and families with children are among those who are the hardest hit.² Given that economic growth in the Global North is heavily reliant on the extraction of resources and labour from the Global South, and that the IFIs enabling this agenda to the benefit of multi-national corporations and global private finance are dominated by the Global North, addressing these injustices requires cross-regional and cross-movement activism and solidarity.



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SUMMARY

This publication presents perspectives from leading feminist scholars and activists from four regions across the Global South on why we must move beyond using gross domestic product (GDP) as the primary goal and measure of economic progress. Drawing on examples and evidence from their respective contexts, **Lumonya Faith** and **Jennifer Lipenga** (Africa), **Samia Al-Botmeh** (Middle East and North Africa), **Nalini Rathnarajah** (South Asia), and **Natalia Quiroga Diaz** (Latin America and the Caribbean) show how the GDP growth-centric model has been disastrous for the rights of women, girls, and others at the intersections of injustice.

Beyond GDP: A compendium of regional feminist perspectives powerfully demonstrates how the obsession with increasing GDP at any cost is skewing policymaking towards measures that drive austerity, debt, corporate power, and exploitative labour practices. This includes the invisibilisation of women's unpaid care and domestic work, which remains uncounted in GDP and unrecognised as a major contributor to a country's wealth, despite forming the backbone of economies. Other themes covered in the four articles include the links between GDP and colonialism, extractivism, militarization and conflict, food sovereignty, and climatic and environmental breakdown. In a challenge to the prevailing GDP growth-centric orthodoxy and an urgent call to action, the authors highlight local, indigenous, and feminist systems of knowledge and approaches which need to be pursued to transform economies away from systems that exploit and harm towards systems that centre care and wellbeing of people and planet. Feminist movements are central to such efforts.

Curated by Oxfam, this collection of articles comes at a critical time. There has been backsliding on gender justice globally, economic inequality within and between countries is on the rise, climate change is accelerating, and seven of nine planetary boundaries have now been transgressed. Global momentum to develop alternatives to GDP is building, including within the UN. However, what is included in any alternative frameworks and their ultimate goal, as well as how they are developed, implemented, and financed, will be critical in determining whether they catalyse meaningful change. Including the voices and perspectives of feminist movements and networks will be key to ensuring this. **Beyond GDP: A compendium of regional feminist perspectives** seeks to break through the technical jargon to demystify this agenda, making it more accessible to all, and support wider engagement in the push for transformational alternatives at national, regional, and global levels. It also offers many important lessons and insights for policymakers around the world on why this issue is so key to realising justice for all and safeguarding our planet.

1. FEMINIST AND DECOLONIAL ALTERNATIVES TO GDP: A PERSPECTIVE FROM LATIN AMERICA

BY NATALIA QUIROGA DIAZ



THE IMMEASURABLE VALUE OF ALL FORMS OF LIFE

The use of gross domestic product (GDP) as the key indicator of wealth among countries has raised questions around economic growth narratives and the reduction of the economy to market relations.

A decolonial perspective connects the economy with the ethical imperatives of living a good life. Similarly, *Buen Vivir* (good living or living well) approaches developed by different people across Latin America offer a concept of economics that is linked to the material foundations for life.³

The concept of *Suma Qamaña* of Bolivia's Aymara people proposes a balance between the social, communal, and natural worlds which, in turn, implies a balance with the spiritual world. Within this, the *Ayllu* is a political and economic organizing unit that sustains its members through life in the community.

In Ecuador, the principle of *Sumak Kawsay*, elaborated in the Quechua language, shares the ethical vision of *Suma Qamaña* and is articulated in Ecuador's 2011 national development plan along the following dimensions: the satisfaction of needs; quality of life; a dignified death; loving and being loved; the healthy flourishing of all things in harmony with nature; the unlimited sustaining of cultures; and free time for contemplation, emancipation and the growth of freedoms, capacities and potential.

Both the *Aymara* and *Quechua* visions, which are reflected in their respective countries' constitutions, recognize the principles of reciprocity and co-existence with nature, which is endowed with spirituality and capacity for action.

The *Küme Mogñen* of the Mapuche people asserts that an equilibrium between all creatures and spaces that make up a territory is central to maintaining the wellbeing of the community. Any imbalances stem from punishment by the *Ngen* (spiritual powers) who govern the use of spaces. To live in harmony, fundamental community principles must be observed, the breaking of which results in irreparable damage to nature and the punishment of transgressors.

For Afro-descendent people, *Ubuntu* provides an ethical way to inhabit the planet. Rather than viewing humanity as the sum of individuals, it emphasizes the collective and sees the welfare of all living creatures as interdependent, explicitly articulating their dependence on nature. Hence the assertion 'I am because we are', in recognition of the existence and re-existence of Black people in relation to the ecology of each territory. In Colombia, land rights defender Francia Márquez made *Ubuntu* the basis for the political platform that led to her becoming the country's vice president. Like the other concepts, *Ubuntu* is not anthropocentric, and includes all non-human beings in the 'we' who 'are'.

These ideas have been expanded upon by other proposals for living well made by the continent's diverse peoples across Mesoamerica, Río de la Plata, and the Amazon.

Common to the various visions of *Buen Vivir* is the integration of the spiritual and material dimensions and a recognition of our interdependence with nature, which is invested with agency and political capacity. Although *feminismos comunitarios* (community feminisms)⁴ warn of the consequences of the power of so-called 'Indigenous' patriarchies which impose a rigid gendered division of labour on women and diverse peoples, it is also true that feminist insurgencies have given rise to alternative ways of thinking about the world.

Perspectives on good living have given strength and political legitimacy to leading activists such as Berta Cáceres of the Lenca people in Honduras, whose struggle to protect the Gualcarque River cost her her life, and Machi Francisca Linconao, a Mapuche political leader who, despite suffering persecution for defending the land, was one of seven Mapuche representatives appointed to the recent Chilean constitutional convention.⁵

Efforts to defend nature and *Buen Vivir* perspectives serve as an effective counterpoint to the visions of growth and development that endless governments present as the only option, using GDP as their main point of reference.

Acknowledging the plurality of visions in Latin America casts doubt on the project of modernization and colonization, which has assumed a separation between nature and culture and created economies that are structured according to growth and development targets.⁶ Accordingly, nature is only valued as an input for production, and dependency is created on extractivist practices and the cultivation of crop monocultures that sustain the region's economies, and are used to explain increases or decreases in GDP.

The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (2023) has shown that the region accounts for an important share of global natural resources, which are unequally distributed between countries:

“Approximately 20% of all oil reserves, 25% of strategic metals and more than 30% of the world’s primary forests are found in the region ... The region is home to 47% of the world’s lithium reserves, 36.6% of copper, 34.5% of silver, 23.8% of natural graphite, 20.6% of tin, 18.8% of iron, 16.7% of rare earths and 15.7% of nickel. It also produces more than 50% of the world’s silver, 37% of copper, 36% of molybdenum, 37% of lithium, 20% of tin and zinc, and 16% of iron.”⁷

The development of alternatives to GDP must confront the reality that in South America, where many of the *Buen Vivir* proposals have been formulated, 35% of the land is being used to cultivate soya and there has been a 69% increase in the use of non-biodegradable fertilizers. Between 2019 and 2021, natural resources accounted for 50.7% of total exports and 10.1% of Latin America’s GDP.⁸ In Central America and Mexico, industrial activity driven by maquiladoras and migrant labour has a bigger influence on GDP, while South American countries are increasingly relying on net exports of natural resources, in particular biomass and minerals.⁹

Given this, any alternative proposed measure needs to expose how policies focused on growth and development rather than *Buen Vivir* depend on relationships that plunder ecosystems.

The current GDP-based economic model threatens forms of subsistence and small-scale agriculture by exacerbating existing conflicts over land; it leads to the displacement of peasant farmers, small-scale family farmers and Indigenous communities; it increases deforestation and contamination produced by pesticides and agrochemicals in general; it destroys regional economies; and it aggravates the loss of food sovereignty. These negative effects are even greater for Indigenous, Afro-descendent, peasant farming and migrant women, who occupy the most socially vulnerable positions due to structural racism. For example:

“In Latin America and the Caribbean, the rural population has reached 121 million, which represents 20% of the total population. Of this total, 48% (58 million) are women who work up to 12 hours a day tending the farm, the animals, gathering and preparing food, raising children, and caring for the elderly and infirm, among many other tasks. Of the 37 million rural women over 15 years of age, 17 million are considered part of the economically active population, and more than four million are classified as farmers. An estimated nine million of these women are indigenous, speak their language, and are subject – in most cases – to double or even triple discrimination, because they are women, poor and indigenous.”¹⁰

Alternatives to GDP should be evaluated according to how they counter a patriarchal and colonial model that situates racially defined peoples in spaces which are locked into a struggle with the most violent forms of accumulation. These spaces turn women’s bodies into ‘sacrifice zones’: places given over to the predatory dynamics of industries that breed disease and poison the soil, water, and air.¹¹ States offer up these lands and the bodies that inhabit them to preserve the logic of profit maximization.

The focus on economic growth has irreparable consequences for human and non-human life over generations, which are not captured by short-term economic indicators.

The construction of alternative measures should consider the immeasurable value of all forms of life. This ethical criterion challenges the concept of 'externality' that is intrinsic to polluting activities, which are only profitable because they do not bear the cost of destroying life.¹² A decolonial viewpoint recognizes that no price can be put on many of the natural elements that industries classify as resources, because much of the ecosystem is not renewable and human life cannot be reduced to a number.

CHALLENGING DOMESTICITY: HOW MEASURES OF GDP OVERLOOK CARE

The exploitative relationships that underpin economic growth figures are not always visible in mainstream debates about alternatives to GDP and need to be made explicit.

Critical thinkers in Latin America in the mid-twentieth century exposed the inequality generated by the international economic system. They warned of how capitalism, as the dominant system, relies on the creation of territories characterised by low-productivity activities and a plentiful supply of insecure labour.¹³ A decolonial perspective offers a fundamental critique of these schools of thought, which saw underdevelopment as the key problem and thus supported policies driven by the idea of progress. This continued to promote a colonial model that maintained GDP as the primary indicator and obscured the costs of economic growth policies to bodies, nature, and caring activities.

In the field of care, this creation of increasingly precarious social spaces is reflected in the increase in migration. This has a particular impact on women who, to ensure their families' survival, must generate income by caring for people in the Global North, thus forming global chains of care.

The growth of these global chains has been fuelled by inefficient production lines incapable of generating fairly paid jobs, and a state that has shirked responsibility for creating care infrastructure. The drop in the region's GDP since the COVID-19 pandemic does not reveal the extent to which North-South migration has gathered pace. Women's involvement in care work not only provides for the basic needs of household units, but their migration also guarantees the flow of dollars that sustain neoliberal economies, with remittances playing a central role in generating wealth and maintaining the system.

"Remittances received by Latin American and Caribbean countries were projected to reach a record [US]\$155 billion in 2023 if the trends observed to date continue ... an increase of 9.5% compared to the [US]\$142 billion received in 2022, ... remittances to Latin American and Caribbean countries have shown sustained growth of around 10% annually for the past 10 years."¹⁴

GDP does not account for the inter-generational consequences of the uprooting of women's lives, the disruption to life in their home territories, or the leadership deficit that the migration of the most qualified women creates for subsequent generations of young women and girls and community life.

Any proposal for the construction of alternative ways of measuring wealth creation must quantify the value produced by socially reproductive activities across the many dimensions in which they take place. This mapping constitutes one of the key measurement challenges. In the case of remittances for example, while estimates reflect the contribution of migrant labour,¹⁵ there is no comparable country-by-country information that tracks women's contributions to foreign currency flows.

As a result, women's involvement in wealth creation remains unseen, despite progress made in valuing unpaid household work and the fact that time-use surveys have shown the amount of time spent on that work, as well as the simultaneous activities women carry out to guarantee the provision of care.

We know that currently, across Latin America, care and household work accounts for an average of 25% of GDP.¹⁶ Measurement by quintile has also made it possible to show how, in the case of Argentina,¹⁷ women with the lowest incomes spend up to seven hours a day on this type of work compared with the three hours spent by women in the highest quintile, revealing that the poorest women contribute most to wealth creation.

Unpaid household work across Latin American countries generates more wealth than the industrial or service sectors and, unlike other economic activities, intensifies during times of crisis, as seen during the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁸ The capacity of care work to counteract economic recession is not captured by indicators focused on the market and goods. The pandemic demonstrated that commercial activity cannot take place without care and household work; despite this, GDP measurements ignore the contribution made by reproductive activities.

The construction of alternatives to GDP that measure unpaid household work faces a two-fold challenge from a decolonial perspective: understanding the unequal distribution of care work in society and how racialized and/or migrant women are over-represented in this type of work; and recognizing the contribution of reproductive activities at a collective level, that sustain economies in Latin America. This also requires urgently challenging the perceived 'domesticity' of reproductive work.

Analyses are needed that link the concept of wealth to work that preserves life, highlighting the central role played by social, grassroots, solidarity, Afro-descendent, Indigenous and peasant farming economies: economies that sustain life. An example of the strength of this approach can be found in Argentina's Registro Nacional de Comedores y Merenderos Comunitarios (National Registry of Community Food Centres and Initiatives (ReNaCoM), which recorded 34,782 active comedores populares (soup kitchens) countrywide in 2023.¹⁹ Likewise, 34,449 workers, mainly women or LGBTQIA+, were recorded as working in the soup kitchens of the social organization La Poderosa, preparing 10 million meals a day in a country with a population of 45 million.²⁰

Alternatives to GDP in Latin America must recognize the plurality of forms of economic activity and the central role reproductive labour plays in them. Refusing to frame care work as anything other than domestic work reinforces its patriarchal and colonial stronghold. It does so by denying the key role the wealth generated by care work in its multiple dimensions plays in creating community and sustaining the lives of millions of people on the continent.

As discussions around beyond GDP gather pace at regional and global levels, there is an urgent need for decolonial feminist scholars and movements to feed in such critical perspectives to help ensure the agenda is not appropriated by the neoliberal mainstream and can realise its transformative potential.

2. GDP AND THE REALITIES OF AFRICAN WOMEN: UNPACKING COLONIAL LEGACIES AND NEOLIBERAL AGENDAS

BY LUMONYA FAITH AND JENNIFER LIPENGA



INTRODUCTION

As the saying goes, ‘that which is measured is that which is valued and prioritized’. When we prioritize material aspects alone, disregarding the elements that connect us to each other and to the environment, our worldview risks becoming as distorted as the metrics we uphold when they focus exclusively on market production. This alone underscores the necessity for measures beyond gross domestic product (GDP). We cannot understand the breadth and depth of the problems we face, or develop solutions, without accounting for the perspectives and realities of those who have been made invisible by the systems that govern our world today.

As Oxfam highlights, the inherent flaws of GDP are evident: it perpetuates a neoliberal-capitalist, anti-feminist and colonial legacy by sustaining the framework of value creation and productivity that only counts what can be monetized. Market relations are given precedence over family and social relations, individualism over solidarity and interdependence,

and rational choice over well-being. Women are rendered to the 'private' sphere and their work is made invisible.²¹ In Africa, the repercussions are profound, with the pursuit of GDP growth fuelling the extraction and exploitation of labour, land and the bodies of women and other structurally marginalized people. GDP also does not consider whether the wealth it calculates was accumulated through legal, illegal, ethical, or just means. For example, in 2022, France boasted of an average GDP of US\$2.78 trillion.²² Yet this value does not account for the contributions that its former colonies have made following 'paper' independence and assumes that France's extraction and exploitation of resources from West Africa²³ is a productive and therefore inherently positive process.

To address these entrenched injustices, we must begin by dismantling the systems and structures that dominate our world and negatively shape our worldview, making it more and more unliveable. This involves reflecting deeply on the root of the problems from a historical, decolonial, anti-capitalist and feminist perspective. We must also question what alternative metrics look like, and how they will honour the underserved communities that GDP has peripheralized for decades, particularly in Africa.

GDP AND CARE

The value of care work to the global economy and the sustenance of ecological and human livelihoods and well-being cannot be emphasized enough. Despite sustaining the social structure – satisfying the primary needs of food, health and hygiene, and ensuring basic care for all people – care work is also the most precarious work, given little social value and assigned to women as an expectation and obligation.²⁴ At the same time, it contributes at least US\$10.8 trillion to the global economy, surpassing the combined revenue of the world's top 50 companies in 2018,²⁵ yet it is often undervalued, extractive and exploited within existing economic frameworks, such as GDP. This policy mismatch shows how GDP is used as a tool to perpetuate the ongoing exploitation of women's labour. It is a scheme orchestrated by the neoliberal capitalist agenda and designed to ensure that women continue subsidizing the state. On a positive note, feminist and women's rights organizations have been advocating to highlight these blind spots. Ongoing initiatives include the development of the Care Manifesto, which calls for the rebuilding of the social organization of care, the recognition of the social and economic value of care work (paid or not) and the human right to care.²⁶

In Uganda for example, the recent amendment of the Employment Act, 2021 recognized domestic work as work. While such policies may seem promising, they fail to redistribute the care burden and instead, further place the responsibility on women to act as shock absorbers for failed care infrastructure. On the other hand, countries with low minimum wages like Angola, Ethiopia, Rwanda, and Uganda cripple any hope or potential for this work to be adequately paid or facilitated through investment in labour-saving equipment, consequently stalling any progress towards reducing and or redistributing this work to further foster the transformation of women's lives and those of other structurally marginalised communities. Therefore, calls for measures beyond GDP must also consider these nuances and interrogate underlying power dynamics. Special attention should be given to exploring alternative approaches to addressing the systematic undervaluation of care work, particularly when performed by women experiencing multiple intersecting forms

of oppression. In this regard, valuing care could entail the granting of tax relief on essential care goods and services such as electricity, water, and fuel, among others; universal pension payouts to women (particularly those who have suffered gaps in their career/ professional life), and the provision of universally free and accessible health care, education, childcare, water, among other critical social services to all, particularly structurally marginalised communities.

GDP AND FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

In many African countries, the performance of the agriculture sector and therefore food production are key anchors in the measurement of a country's economic growth calculated through GDP. Meanwhile, women's contribution to the production of food for household consumption and commercial use has long been estimated to be 60-80%²⁷. In more recent years the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has suggested that women's labour contribution to the agriculture sector is slightly less than half.²⁸ As such, the value of the sector, including the value of those who work within it, is often limited to the monetary value earned when products are sold or bought, with the attainment of food security posited as the primary goal. Food security has also been positively associated with GDP growth. For example, a study by Krystyna Świetlik found that higher levels of food security were associated with higher levels of GDP, and the biggest improvements in food security occurred in those countries with the fastest rise in GDP per capita.²⁹

However, critics argue that the strategies and policies implemented under the food security paradigm have so far done little to curb global hunger and malnutrition, including in Africa.³⁰ Instead, the food security logic disenfranchises small-scale and subsistence farmers in favour of corporate production, profit and monopolization.³¹ Furthermore, the food security paradigm's focus on competition and economic advantage contributes towards depoliticizing the production regime and ignores the processes and conditions under which food ends up on the table, including the existing gendered dynamics of this.³² William Schanbacher argues that the food security model is 'founded on, and reinforces, a model of globalization that reduces human relationships to their economic value'.³³

Food sovereignty,³⁴ by contrast, holds that sovereignty over food is a fundamental human right and is a transformative alternative to the conventional food security approach. Food sovereignty recognizes and centres the experiences and lived realities of the people on which the world's food supply depends- small-scale food producers in the majority world, namely in Africa, Latin America, and Asia. It is not based on abstract theories about profit, growth, and GDP, but rather on human dignity, basic freedom, people's livelihoods and well-being. At the same time, food sovereignty is premised on the recognition of the complex nature of food systems, especially in Africa, where power and control over food production and supply are contested. It is a practical solution that respects people's right to determine the type, quality and quantity of food, and the frequency one wishes to consume it. It ensures ecologically sustainable farming practices, is anchored in locally led and/or indigenous production systems and proposes an end to corporate control of the global food system. It recognizes that both people and the ecosystem have an equal and vital role in the process of production and that no role is more valuable than the other.

As such, food is valued not merely as a substance to quench hunger and deliver an economic gain, but also for its social and cultural value.

GDP AND RESOURCE EXTRACTION IN AFRICA: MODERN SLAVERY/UNFREE LABOUR

Although more people are currently enslaved than ever before³⁵, slavery is mostly understood as a relic from the past, as is colonialism. There are many other ways in which slavery is being enforced in Africa through systems and structures of oppression like patriarchy, neoliberal capitalism, and neocolonialism, which consequently serve to maintain the power structures that reinforce the pursuit of profit, wealth accumulation and GDP growth. The struggles and justifications of Indigenous, peasant, black and brown, female, transgender, gender-diverse and marginalized communities around the world confirm two incontrovertible facts: first, that colonial powers, far from disappearing, continue to expand through neoliberal economics; and second, that it is imperative to think of alternative ways to address the challenges of modern slavery and neocolonialism, which make invisible the distinction between the public and the private. This distinction is artificially created by patriarchal, neocolonial, and neoliberal capitalist ideologies.

There is a concerning resurgence of unfree labour conditions across the world and in Africa, an estimated 40 million people were victims of modern slavery in 2016³⁶ alone. Among these, 'chattel slavery' remains prominent, with documented cases in Mauritania, Niger, Mali and Sudan.³⁷ However, the most rapidly accelerating form is often known as 'contract slavery', where individuals are coerced into bonded labour through fraudulent contractual relations.³⁸ This is evidenced in numerous industries, including rubber plantations in Liberia, cocoa production in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire, and tea and coffee plantations across East Africa. Additionally, domestic workers in South Africa face exploitative conditions, while forced and child labour persist in mining operations in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Zambia. These trafficked individuals, including children from Rwanda, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Somalia and Uganda, are often exploited as domestic labourers, sex workers or cattle herders.³⁹ Internal trafficking further compounds the issue. A report by the National Crime Research Centre in Kenya found that in 2021, the number of human trafficking cases increased by 82.4%, with the number of cases of labour trafficking having increased by 86.6% between the years 2020 and 2021 and accounting for 96.0% and 98.3% of all the human trafficking cases in the year 2020 and 2021 respectively.⁴⁰

African Governments are often coerced into implementing austerity measures as a condition for accessing loans, inadvertently reinforcing these harmful underpinning ideologies. GDP is a neoliberal metric, determining debt 'sustainability' and fiscal consolidation measures for indebted countries. This has exacerbated multiple inequalities, as well as driving modern slavery or unfree labour. We also see these linkages in the ways that neoliberal 'globalization' has entrenched a framework that provides maximum security for the owners of capital, and much greater inequality, immobility, and erosion of material conditions for much of the world's population.⁴¹ The reliance on GDP as

a primary metric also often glorifies practices that are detrimental to marginalized communities, particularly women. Clara Mattei coined the term 'industrial austerity' to describe authoritarian industrial policies that prioritize the interests of a few at the expense of workers, characterized by layoffs, wage reductions, anti-labour movement practices, and the favouring of profits over fair compensation.⁴² GDP growth-driven policies therefore catalyze labour exploitation by incentivizing deregulation and defunding of labour oversight institutions, as exemplified by the frequent budget cuts to ministries of labour across Africa. This, combined with union busting, erodes workers' protections and bargaining power, leading to declining incomes and increasingly precarious employment and exploitation, with particularly adverse impacts on marginalized households.

AN ALTERNATIVE REALITY ROOTED IN PAN- AFRICAN VALUES

We cannot look beyond GDP without fundamentally rethinking our economic systems. Orthodox economic theories have repeatedly faltered, proving their inadequacy in serving people's needs. As Jayati Ghosh says, 'the mainstream discipline of economics requires humility, historical context, recognition of power dynamics, and promotion of diversity'.⁴³ Other economists have also called for a shift in understanding that growth is not an end, with market forces determining what has value, what is produced for exchange and who consumes it. Rather, growth should be a means to achieve ends that have intrinsic value. This would include the care of family members, thriving communities, an absence of extreme inequalities, and a healthy environment.⁴⁴

We must therefore stop giving significant power and credibility to harmful economic models to guide policy making, especially as they continue to make the world increasingly unliveable. What good is a high GDP if people aren't content with their lives? If capitalist extraction erodes the spirit of solidarity and community, and the values that have long been held within African cultures, *ubuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, which emphasize 'being self through others'? What good is a high GDP if it is invisible to the fact that it is only high because of extraction, plunder, and exploitation? That is low not because production is low but because of the invisible power and influence wielded by a class of tyranny.

We must, including within Africa, come to a collective understanding that if the purpose of economics is not to improve human well-being, then it is missing the mark; we are failing to measure what truly matters in our existence. By embracing alternative frameworks like the well-being economy, which measures quality of life, we can ensure that macroeconomic policies are not detached from reality. We must also pay more attention to the role that neocolonialism, modern slavery, and the continued extraction and exploitation of Africa's resources have played in driving Global North countries' GDPs higher while ensuring that Global South countries' GDPs remain low.

3. GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA: FROM PARTIALITY TO FAIRNESS

BY SAMIA AL-BOTMEH



Concerns about gross domestic product (GDP) as a concept of overall economic activity and measure of economic well-being are not new. Researchers and activists have articulated the shortcomings of GDP over many decades,⁴⁵ while economists have come up with various proposals to address these shortcomings. Given this dynamic debate, this article focuses on the problems associated with GDP within the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), the underlying conceptual notions giving rise to these problems, and ways forward for addressing them.

GDP ISSUES AND SHORTCOMINGS WITHIN MENA

According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), GDP measures the monetary value of final goods and services (those that are bought by the final user) produced in a country in a given period (say within a particular year or month). GDP comprises goods and services produced for sale in the market and includes some nonmarket production, such as defence or education services provided by the government.⁴⁶

GDP is one of the most widely used instruments for measuring the economic performance of a country, since it gives information about the size of the economy and its overall state. In general terms, an increase in real GDP (excluding inflation) may indicate that the economy is performing well since employment is likely to be increasing and the population may have more money to spend.⁴⁷

While GDP may be an indication of the broad performance of a particular economy, it fails to provide an accurate picture of a country's well-being. GDP does not provide information about the distribution of income within a society, nor does it capture societal features such as discrimination and crime. More importantly, GDP as a measure of economic activity does not include significant economic contributions, such as unpaid care and domestic work. Many of these activities effectively increase household consumption, benefit employers as the reproduction of the workforce is ensured while passing the cost to unpaid carers and have a direct positive impact on economic growth. If such unpaid household services were included in GDP, it is estimated it would increase by 15% to 70%.⁴⁸

To illustrate the above challenges, we will consider four examples in the context of the MENA region. The first relates to women's work and participation in the labour market, the second focuses on the issue of militarization, the third refers to Palestinian GDP growth rates and the final one focuses on the environment.

Women's work: Since non-market-based activities, including unpaid care and domestic work, are not included in GDP, the hours invested in such activities are not counted as labour in official statistics. Those performing these activities are thus not considered workers and have no labour-based rights, such as work-based pensions. Over the past 50 years, women's engagement in market-based activities, as measured by their participation in the labour force, has increased worldwide. Yet according to World Bank data, women in the MENA have the lowest labour market participation rates in the world, averaging 19% in 2023 compared to a world average of 49%.⁴⁹ The table below shows estimates of daily hours spent on unpaid care and domestic work by women and men in various regions around the world. A closer consideration reveals that this work is disproportionately shouldered by women across all regions, yet women in the MENA countries spend more time on unpaid care and domestic work than anywhere else. In other words, women's extensive unpaid care and domestic activities across the world are rendered 'valueless', since they are not accounted for within national accounts and GDP, and nowhere more so than in the MENA countries.

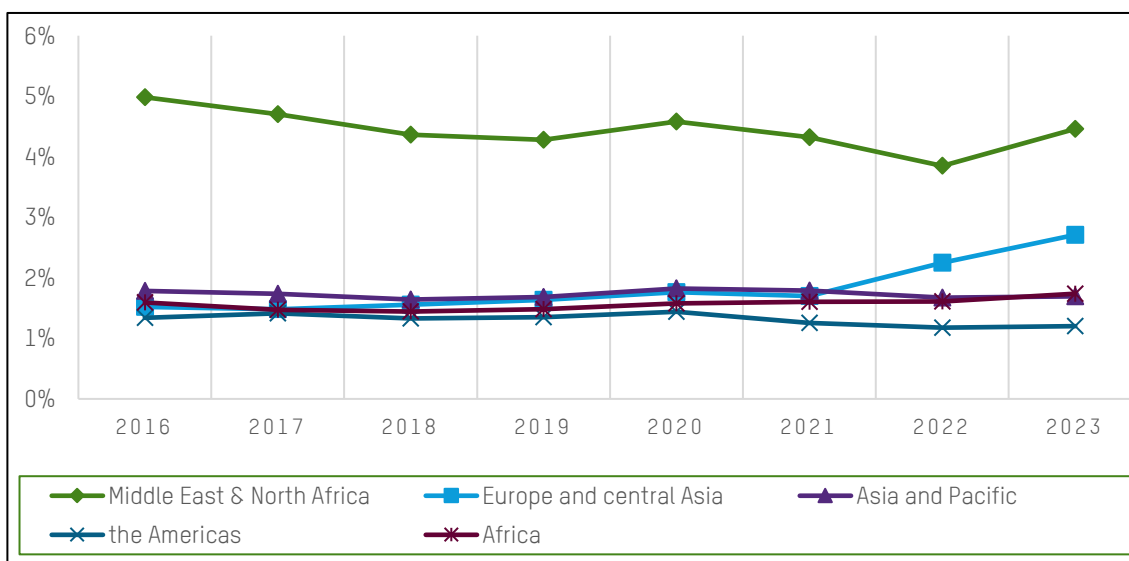
Table 1: Daily hours spent in domestic and unpaid care work by region.

Region	Women	Men
<i>Middle East and North Africa (Arab States)</i>	5.5	1.2
<i>The Americas</i>	4.5	2.6
<i>Asia and the Pacific</i>	4.4	1.1
<i>Europe and Central Asia</i>	4.5	2.2
<i>World</i>	4.4	1.4

Source: Care work and care jobs for the future of decent work / International Labour Office – Geneva: ILO, 2018. P. 56.

Militarization: Militarization also highlights an issue with GDP. Within MENA countries, military expenditure as a percentage of government spending is the highest in the world standing at 12.5% in 2023 compared to a global average of 7.1%. At the same time, military expenditure as a percentage of GDP stood at 4.7% in the MENA compared to less than 3% in all other regions (see Figure 1).⁵⁰ A major component of economic expenditure which contributes towards GDP is therefore directed towards building war capabilities or engaging in civil wars and conflicts. Women and children bear the brunt of this militarization. GDP inflated by such high military expenditure may be seen as reflecting a prospering country, but in reality, this expenditure underscores the possibility of destruction of lives and livelihoods.

Figure 1: Military expenditure as a percentage of GDP by region, 2016 to 2023



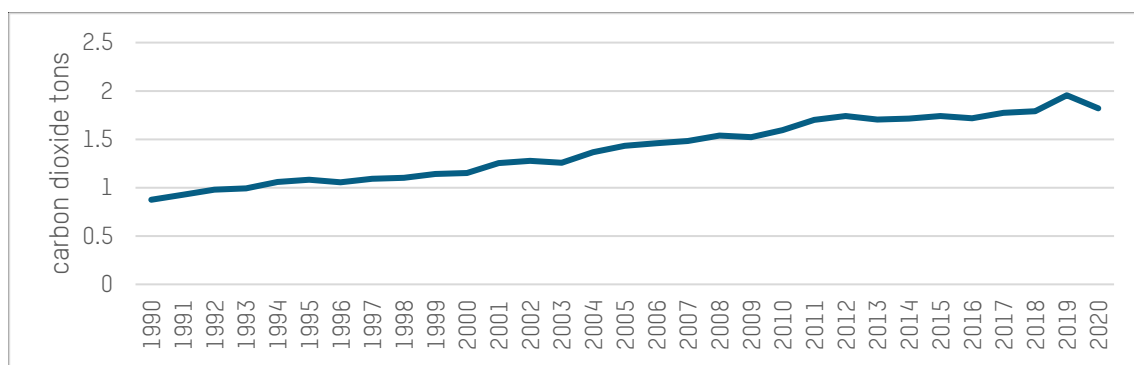
Source: calculated by author from SIPRI (2023) Military Expenditure Data: <https://www.sipri.org/databases/milex>

GDP growth rates: In the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT), GDP growth rates have fluctuated significantly and seen sharp rises during certain periods, obscuring the impacts of the ongoing conflict. For example, rising GDP rates from 2008-2010 were praised by the International Monetary Fund (IMF).⁵¹ These sharp rises were the result of increased levels of aid transferred to the OPT economy following Israeli wars, and the easing of Israeli restrictions and access to the Gaza Strip.⁵² However, during the same period, a major Israeli military offensive (2008-2009) destroyed over 60% of Gaza’s total stock of productive capital (which refers to both the means of production and labour power), while further military

strikes in 2014 destroyed 85% of what was left, including roads, power stations, industrial and commercial establishments and agricultural lands.⁵³ This shows that, in reality, the apparent growth merely alleviated a small proportion of the severe destruction inflicted on the Gaza Strip since 2006, and does not reflect any progress in economic well-being. Moreover, the significant growth following Israeli military offensives is in considerable part due to reconstruction efforts.

Environmental concerns: GDP does not capture any environmental factors. The increasing growth rates of many MENA economies have been associated with deteriorating environmental outcomes in recent years. For example, Morocco has experienced an average economic growth rate of 2.6% in the decade to 2022, above the 2% average for the region and reflected in its increased GDP,⁵⁴ yet its carbon dioxide emissions have also been rising (Figure 2). This may harm the overall environment and the health of Morocco’s population, yet GDP fails to account for this adverse environmental impact.

Figure 2. Carbon dioxide emissions per capita in Morocco, 1990 to 2020



Source: The World Bank Data Catalog: <https://datacatalog.worldbank.org/search/dataset/0037712>

The problems with GDP are accentuated as unsustainable economic growth has been the result of aggressive neoliberal policies across the MENA region. Several countries, including Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, and Jordan have been subjected to World Bank and IMF structural adjustment policies for decades.⁵⁵ These policies are marred with many problematic issues. We’ll focus on two. The first is to normalize the dominant neoliberal economic model as inevitable. This implies that problems arising from neoliberal policies should be resolved within the realms of neoliberal thought and using neoliberal tools. For example, initiatives to increase female labour force participation are often understood primarily in instrumentalist terms, i.e. as a means to increase economic growth, whilst ignoring structural problems with the economy, such as a lack of decent, well-paid jobs, and a failure to provide adequate public services to alleviate women’s unpaid care and domestic work. The neoliberal model upon which policies are constructed does not recognize such factors as crucial. On the contrary, they prescribe the reduction of public sector jobs where women are over-represented, hence they become the first victims of neoliberal austerity.

A further issue is that GDP and economic growth rates are used as a measure of the success of neoliberal policies worldwide and in the MENA countries, which have focused on reducing government expenditure, downsizing public sector employment, reducing subsidies on fuel and staple foods, privatizing production, and public services, and lifting controls on exchange rates.⁵⁶ This is despite ample evidence showing how austerity

policies typically depress economic growth.⁵⁷ These policies have had detrimental repercussions for vital segments of society, including women, children, elderly people, people living in poverty and unemployed people.⁵⁸ Therefore, during the past few years, especially since the uprisings, many countries of the region underwent aggressive austerity policies resulting in subdued growth, while standards of living, poverty, unemployment rates, pollution and inequality have all been deteriorating. MENA was already one of the most unequal regions in the world, even before the Covid-19 pandemic. Since then, half of total income went to the top 10%; the bottom half only received 11%.⁵⁹ These spiralling levels of inequality are also not reflected in GDP.

UNDERLYING CAUSES OF GDP'S SHORTCOMINGS

GDP shortcomings are not just measurement problems that can be dealt with by improving statistical techniques or devising better data collection methodologies. The underlying reason for these problems requires us to tackle how GDP is defined and to offer more effective means of measuring social and economic well-being.

The main problem underscoring GDP definitions originates from the emphasis on the market value of goods and services. Goods and services that are not traded on the market and hence do not carry a market exchange value are seen as valueless. These include many of the goods and services produced by women as part of their domestic work or care activities, including cleaning, cooking, and taking care of children and elderly people. These activities become economically worthy only if, for example, a household sells its home-produced meals or hires out its care services.

Well-intentioned economists have directed their efforts to overcome this issue on statistical techniques to count the 'uncounted' goods/services using time-use surveys. Yet the underlying problem is in our fundamental understanding of the traded market exchange value of goods and services.

The second underlying problem is that the mainstream economics on which the current approach to GDP is based only measures things at face value and deliberately ignores any negative impacts.⁶⁰ This has implications for considering issues such as pollution as negative outcomes that should be tackled.

The following suggestions aim to help address the issues around GDP and their underlying causes within the Arab region:

- a. It is important to broaden our understanding of economics and go beyond mainstream concepts and theories. This includes taking a broader view of definitions such as market value and how these limit the construction of GDP. Considering other schools of thought, including feminist analysis, is essential for devising more relevant concepts and measures.
- b. Addressing the capacity of GDP as a measure of economic activity in the short run is also important. There are many examples where home production and unpaid care activities have been accounted for through the utilization of time-use surveys and other techniques. These attempts should be replicated more often in the Arab

region and carried out routinely by national statistical bureaus as a step in the right direction towards changing concepts and measurement techniques to make GDP more inclusive.

- c. Since Arab states are experiencing similar challenges concerning GDP but more extreme in certain respects as illustrated above, activists and feminists from the region should advocate for economic indicators that reflect these challenges as part of a wider push by the Global South to go beyond economic growth as defined by the Global North.
- d. Feminist networks and wider civil society should also call for the construction of economic measures that take account of the harms caused by economic activities. Environmental deterioration, and expenditure on militarization, conflict and the systematic oppression of people, should not be counted as having a positive impact on GDP.
- e. Building relations with like-minded feminist, environmental, trade union and other civil society organizations and networks around the world is essential for addressing issues around GDP, as well as the wider neoliberal economic system in which it is rooted. Pressure from many regions and through various networks may increase the likelihood of success.

4. TRANSITIONING FROM A GROWTH-LED MODEL OF THE ECONOMY: A FEMINIST POSTCOLONIAL PERSPECTIVE FROM SOUTH ASIA

BY NALINI RATHNARAJAH



INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The feminist agenda to move beyond GDP as a measure of success emphasises the need to transition from a growth-centric economic model—which exacerbates social injustices by distributing benefits in deeply unequal ways — towards a well-being economy model, explicitly geared towards the attainment of social and environmental well-being.

For many years, economists, and activists from South Asia, including Bina Agarwal⁶¹, Jayati Ghosh⁶², Naila Kabeer, Vandana Shiva⁶³ and Devaki Jain⁶⁴, have criticized patriarchal and capitalist systems and institutions, advocating for more inclusive and equitable development models that empower women in the region.

Vandana Shiva's activism has significantly influenced agricultural and environmental policies in India, particularly through her advocacy for sustainable farming practices, food sovereignty, and the rights of small farmers whose contributions are often defined as non-production and not captured by GDP.⁶⁵

Others have contributed to measures that better enable us to capture well-being: The Human Development Index (HDI), which was created by Pakistani economist Mahbub-Ul Haq in 1990, measures human development in three areas: longevity, education, and standards of living. The HDI, which includes GDP, is designed to improve human capabilities and promote a more equitable society.⁶⁶

Amartya Sen, an economist, and philosopher, emphasizes the interconnectedness of poverty and inequality, advocating for a capabilities-based approach.⁶⁷ His work highlights systemic disadvantages faced by women, inspiring movements for gender equality and social justice.

This article highlights the need to address economic and gender inequity in South Asia, focusing on peace, security, and environmental preservation. It applies an intersectional postcolonial feminist analysis to specific issues and their connection to global dynamics to emphasize the importance of moving beyond GDP.

CHALLENGES

Despite the seminal contributions of feminist economists and activists, the dominant economic models in South Asia continue to be driven by GDP-centric growth ideology. The integration of a feminist well-being agenda poses various challenges that must be overcome.

ECONOMY

a. Imperialism and patriarchal power dynamics

The current GDP growth-oriented economic model perpetuates imperialism and patriarchal power, exacerbating the region's poverty and underdevelopment whilst systematically oppressing women and marginalised people, increasing their vulnerability. Long-term social and economic consequences of imperialist exploitation in South Asia include the unfair distribution of wealth and resources, which has been worsened by discrimination based on caste, gender, religion, class, and ethnicity.

For instance, British colonization of South Asia systematically exploited natural resources and labour for the benefit of the British Empire, leading to de-industrialization⁶⁸ and enriching elites at the expense of the majority. Traditional industries, such as textiles, were deliberately degraded by British competition and policies. The legacy of British colonialism continues to shape the development trajectory of South Asia, with uneven regional growth, entrenched social hierarchies, a caste system and weak institutions as well as an export-oriented model that benefits multinational companies over local needs.⁶⁹ For example, in Bangladesh, the garment industry is a major contributor to GDP, accounting for over 84% of the country's total exports, and employing millions of women. However, it has also perpetuated low wages, poor working conditions, and job insecurity, reflecting patriarchal values and a growth-centric economy.⁷⁰

Similar to Bangladesh, the garment sector has a significant position in the Sri Lankan economy. This sector relies heavily on the labour of women, but most of the line managers and supervisors are male. Women workers regularly endure infringements of their

fundamental human rights, such as sexual harassment and inadequate access to lavatory facilities, as well as being both underpaid and over-burdened with excessive workloads. The working environment itself poses risks, with hazards including poor lighting, excessive noise, inadequate ventilation, and a failure to provide personal protective equipment.⁷¹

In addition to this, multinational companies exploit the patriarchal system to maximize profits by devaluing women's work, often resulting in lower wages and poor working conditions for female workers.⁷² By capitalising on the perception of women as cheap, flexible, and docile labour, these companies reduce labour costs significantly.⁷³ The intersection of capitalism and patriarchy allows industries to prioritize economic gains over the well-being and rights of workers. This dynamic also reinforces gender norms, maintaining men in positions of power while relegating women to subordinate roles. The lack of robust state support for labour rights and gender equality further enables these exploitative practices.⁷⁴

b. Economic and gender disparities

The GDP-centric model drives significant economic inequality and poverty in South Asia, reflected in a major wealth gap between the rich and poor. The Gini coefficient of inequality in South Asia is approximately 0.62, higher than in East Asia, Europe, Oceania, North America, and Central Asia.⁷⁵ In addition to this gap, higher per capita incomes have not translated into greater gender equality, as women remain largely excluded from the growth economy. A lack of access to information on credit and loan disbursements, agricultural transformation, and extension services, has disproportionately affected rural women.⁷⁶ For example, despite being one of the fastest-growing economies globally⁷⁷, fuelled largely by a small number of affluent individuals and corporations, particularly in sectors like technology and manufacturing, India has one of the world's lowest rates of formal female labour force participation. India is one of the most gender-unequal countries in the world, ranking 108th in the Gender Inequality Index.⁷⁸ In addition to paid work, farmer women and fisherwomen often juggle unpaid care and paid work which is invaluable to the economy but remains largely invisible within GDP whilst men's work is counted.

Rather than pursuing growth at any cost, integrating a feminist approach to the economy and development requires governments to adopt gender-sensitive policies to reduce disparities, improve access to education and training for girls and women, especially in STEM fields, and support women entrepreneurs, including women from farmer and fisher communities, through financial and technical assistance. Promoting work-life balance, increasing women's participation in decision-making positions, strengthening legal frameworks, and conducting public awareness campaigns to challenge gender stereotypes is crucial.

HIGH DEBT BURDENS

South Asian governments' debt-to-GDP ratio is 86%,⁷⁹ the highest among emerging markets and developing economies. Countries like Afghanistan, Maldives, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka are either in debt distress or at high risk of it, with their total long-term public and publicly guaranteed external debt nearly doubling over the past decade.⁸⁰ The heavy reliance on debt financing means that a significant portion of national budgets is allocated to debt repayments, detracting from funding for social welfare, health,

education, social protection and gender-sensitive programs. In Sri Lanka, the tax on sanitary napkins has increased to aid debt servicing, causing many rural girls to drop out of school.⁸¹ The prioritisation of debt repayment over social spending disproportionately affects women, especially in rural areas, who face increased economic vulnerability and limited access to opportunities. Women are also more vulnerable to becoming entrapped in debt. Debt serves as a tool by many IFI and Northern governments to discipline states and populations, often leading to austerity measures justified by the need for fiscal responsibility. These measures, which also involve public spending cuts, again disproportionately affect women and marginalised groups.⁸²

CLIMATE CHANGE AND ITS IMPACT ON THE GDP AGENDA

South Asia's vulnerability to climate change is rooted in its colonial past. Under British rule, agricultural systems were transformed to serve imperial interests, disrupting traditional water management and land use practices. The cultivation of cash crops such as indigo, opium, and cotton—intended for export—was encouraged, often at the expense of food production, which exacerbated food insecurity and famine.⁸³ Many farmers also became indebted due to high taxes imposed by landowners, further entrenching poverty and leading to widespread landlessness among peasants.⁸⁴ This legacy of extractive development continues to shape the region's economic and political structures. The adoption of neoliberal economic policies in recent decades, including deregulation, privatisation, and a focus on export-oriented growth, have accelerated climate risks and environmental degradation. Subsidies for fossil fuels and industrial agriculture have exacerbated greenhouse gas emissions and resource depletion.⁸⁵ Austerity measures have also undermined the ability of South Asian states to invest in climate adaptation and social protection. The prioritization of economic growth over sustainability has left many communities ill-prepared to withstand climate impacts.⁸⁶ Women, especially those in rural areas, rely heavily on natural resources for their livelihoods and subsistence. However, climate change, excessive deforestation⁸⁷, and pollution have severely disrupted these resources. Asia has one of the highest deforestation rates globally, with land being cleared for agriculture and other raw materials.⁸⁸ Women face increased caregiving responsibilities as their families struggle with the consequences of environmental degradation, such as water scarcity, food insecurity, and health issues. In the Maldives, for instance, water scarcity causes health problems, particularly among women and children who are responsible for household water management. Poor sanitation and contaminated water sources increase the risk of waterborne diseases, skin irritations, and infections⁸⁹, particularly in rural areas where access to healthcare is limited.⁹⁰ These issues also increase economic vulnerability and gender-based violence.⁹¹

MILITARIZATION, WOMEN, PEACE, AND SECURITY

Military expenditure generally contributes negatively to GDP growth in the long term, although it may boost GDP in the short term due to increased military-related production. Military expenditure often results in job creation within the defence industry, mainly for men, and can lead to improvements in infrastructure, such as transportation networks when necessary for military operations.

In 2022, Military expenditure in South Asia accounted for 2.3%⁹² of GDP with countries spending US\$98bn⁹³ on defence in 2022. Pakistan has historically spent the highest proportion of its GDP on military expenditure, followed by India and Sri Lanka.⁹⁴

As such, in South Asian countries, the military industry is often viewed as a positive contributor to economic growth.

However, this narrative overlooks the social costs of military spending.⁹⁵ Redirecting resources from the military to social welfare could ensure quality education for girls and women, strengthen healthcare systems including for women's reproductive health, could improve women's status and the sustainability of economies. Investing in infrastructure projects, such as clean water, sanitation, and energy access, would significantly benefit women and girls, who often bear the burden of collecting water and firewood.⁹⁶

Additionally, the human costs of war, such as death and disability, enforced disappearances, imprisonment, sexual and gender-based violence, and destruction, are often omitted from economic calculations. Women, who disproportionately experience these impacts as caregivers and victims, are particularly affected.

OPPORTUNITIES

Despite these challenges, there are numerous opportunities for enhancing women's rights and empowerment. By focusing on feminist alternatives to GDP, we can foster a more inclusive and equitable society. These alternatives prioritise well-being, social justice, and environmental sustainability over mere economic growth. Economic models need to be decolonized and diverse, considering the cultural differences and requirements of the Global South. Kerala, a state in South India, offers an example of prioritizing social welfare over economic growth, challenging colonial, and patriarchal power structures.⁹⁷ The state has achieved high human development, including high literacy rates, low infant mortality, and improved maternal health, fostering a more equitable society. Empowering women through education and employment initiatives has challenged traditional patriarchal norms, enhancing gender equity and participation in decision-making.

GROWING AWARENESS AND REGIONAL COOPERATION

The growing awareness of the need for equitable and sustainable economic development is reflected in the support for feminist economic policies among civil society organisations, policymakers, and international development agencies.

Regional cooperation can promote feminist approaches to measuring well-being, including standardised metrics that account for gender disparities and the value of unpaid care work. For example, SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) member countries can develop indicators that reflect women's contributions to the economy, and promote feminist approaches to measuring well-being, including based on time-use that counts the value of unpaid care work to the national economy.⁹⁸ Such surveys are a key way to help recognize, reduce and redistribute unpaid care work as a way to promote gender equality.

Meanwhile, organisations like the South Asia Women's Fund (SAWF) advocate for women's rights to mobility and work, promoting initiatives that support women's migration for

employment and addressing socio-political restrictions. Building regional networks empowers women and destigmatizes their work, improving their overall well-being and rights.

FEMINISM AND YOUTH ACTIVISM

South Asia has a long history of feminism, with activists demanding equal rights for women and social justice. Feminist economists advocate for a basic income as well as reduced working hours, particularly for women, who often bear unequal responsibility for unpaid care work.⁹⁹

Young people are increasingly involved in feminist and climate justice campaigns, including through social media activism. Campaigns like #Women4ClimateAction have gained traction, allowing women to share their experiences of resilience in the face of climate challenges.¹⁰⁰

South Asian women activists are also working to increase women's political participation and representation in decision-making processes, challenging patriarchal structures and advocating for gender-inclusive governance. For example, In Sri Lanka, a 2018 bill established a 25% quota for women's political involvement in local government, after decades of youth activism and campaigning.¹⁰¹ International cooperation with feminist and climate justice movements and CSOs in G7, G20, and BRICS countries can improve the advocacy agenda and create a united front for change.

Civil society organisations and movements from South Asian countries can also participate in initiatives like C20¹⁰² (Civil Society 20) and P20¹⁰³ (Peoples 20). These initiatives are parallel efforts by the people of G20 nations to pressure the global community to adopt better approaches to economic transitions. This engagement can help amplify regional voices and shape global policy directions, allowing South Asian countries to participate in the making of more progressive global economic policies that are inclusive of women's rights and needs.

CONCLUSION

By focusing on gender-sensitive policies, decolonial economic frameworks, and integrating feminist economic and climate justice perspectives, South Asia can move towards a more inclusive and sustainable economic model. Raising awareness, fostering regional cooperation, promoting feminist activism, encouraging political participation, and engaging globally is essential for achieving systemic change and ensuring no one is left behind.

NOTES

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⁵ Struggles and alternatives for a feminist economy. Clacso- CEDE. Compiled by Natalia Quiroga Díaz and Patricio Dobree. Chapter authors: Natalia Quiroga Díaz, Patricio Dobree, Silvia Federici and Virginia (Gina) Vargas. Asunción- Paraguay 2019.

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⁷ Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (2023). Natural Resources Outlook in Latin America and the Caribbean: Executive Summary. ECLAC. Accessed 26 March 2024. <https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstreams/32eeb7a7-84fe-484c-bf98-db60407ec771/download>

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Maquiladoras are factories that are largely duty- and tariff-free, often with the parent company's administration facility being based in North America. Women who work in maquiladoras often endure low wages and poor working conditions.

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¹² Externalities are activities deriving from a company's production processes that affect other people or the environment, without these effects being reflected in production prices. As such, the effects are borne by society at large and do not have implications for the company.

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