
Author: Eva van der Sleen, Hivos

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Speakers and contributors to the book

Molly Scott Cato (UK): Professor of Strategy and Sustainability at the University of Roehampton
Ana Agostino (UR): lecturer Development and Culture at the University Institute CLAEH in Montevideo.
Irene Dankelman (NL): Lecturer sustainable development at Radboud University Nijmegen.

Facilitation:
Wendy Harcourt (IT/Aus): Senior Lecturer at ISS and editor of the book Women reclaiming sustainable livelihoods; spaces lost spaces gained.
Josine Stremmelaar (NL): Knowledge Coordinator at Hivos and contributor to the book

In a highly interactive setting over 40 participants joined the authors - Molly Scott Cato, Ana Agostino, Irene Dankelman, Rhiannon Pyburn, Wendy Harcourt and Josine Stremmelaar, in an in depth discussion focusing on the themes gender, green economy and sustainable livelihoods.

As the second the Environmental Studies Colloquium Series the discussions brought together environmentalist, economists and gender experts in a debate around the green economy. The focus was on how to deepen the analysis on gender and sustainable livelihood to the green economy reflecting the main theme of the book Women reclaiming sustainable livelihoods. The colloquium and the book launch were timed as inputs into Rio +20 summit by looking at two key questions: How should women be ‘reclaiming’ space in the sustainable livelihoods debate? And were global conferences like Rio +20, be the spaces were their energy should be placed?

Wendy Harcourt kicked off the session by reminding us of the history of sustainable livelihoods as a concept. She explained that since the last Rio summit in 1992 a lot has changed. Back then it was agreed that all the stakeholders – e.g. civil society organizations and the business sector- had to engage in these global forums. Now, she states, the business sector has taken over the agendas, something they – feminist, environmentalist and academics- were too naïve about in 1992. But the overall agenda’s set in 1992 Agenda 21 still held. That is why we are now seeking to reclaim sustainable livelihoods including the gender aspect as a valid strategy and focus in 2012.

Irene Dankelman answered whether the global summit like Rio +20 should be were women’s energy should be placed in the quest to reclaim sustainable livelihood should be placed. She stated that on the one hand it is good that groups organize themselves in these big events, otherwise their voices would never be heard. On the other hand, so much energy is wasted in these summits: not only personal
energy but also the energy used in flying in all the people and organizing all the events. Ana Agostino added that the Rio negotiations already started in March and May. In more informal settings different groups could develop their policy, join alliances and influence the language and it was in these pre conference settings that the real advocacy was done. The audience tended to agree with the speakers: it is a tiring process, but it is important to be there otherwise for networking and advocacy work, and to continue to push for alternative ways to change the status quo.

There are also other spaces where women’s sustainable livelihoods can be reclaimed, for example practices of the green economy. Molly Scott Cato claimed green economy for progressive agendas. She felt that others had infiltrated the term. She also added that economy as a whole is dominated by men. She asked why women have left the economic analysis and practice to be. The household had to be reclaimed. She also felt the environment was dominated by men, particularly in the media, even if women, on the ground were the environmentalists. Scott Cato asks why is environment and the economy left to the people who are the ones that produce most of the carbon dioxide. Rhiannon Pyburn added to this discussion by asking how things can change while we are living it? She suggested to look at where we can intervene along the value chains in order to create new spaces for women’s sustainable livelihoods.

Harcourt added that it is important not to talk about women and nature as if they were two separate identities, but to bring them together in a more holistic manner. This will stimulate network building between different entities, which will result in more persistent actions, inspire creative solutions and position new alternatives. Eco feminists already proposed this in the 70ties. Nowadays we see these kinds of developments in the slow food movement, people living off the grid and other alternative lifestyles, and in a rethink about the commons. According to Wendy Harcourt we will have to think how we can influence the debate further around the care economy and the commons and replace efficiency with sufficiency.

One young woman from the audience stated that gender issues nowadays are too abstract and too vague and is failing in addressing the real problems. There was considerable response from the speakers and the audience. Pyburn felt that there a lot of women who are doing a tremendous job, but are not recognized for it. Agostino added that indeed the situation for women has changed for the better in some parts of the world, but in others it has deteriorated. Solidarity between women is thus pivotal, and without it no social transformation can occur. Jayati Ghosh –Indian feminist who was invited to launch the book- underlined that gender issues are very context specific, and that gains from the past can be detained. You can see this happening in Eastern Europe, Greece, Iraq and even Spain.

Other issues raised were the role of transnational companies and the stronghold of consumer capitalism.
The second part of the afternoon was dedicated to discussions of three of the chapters and concluded with a book launch. Irene Dankelman talked about the historical background on women’s movements related to environmental issues. In her presentation she emphasized that talking about women’s rights is also talking about human rights. The Women’s Action Agenda drafted during the Rio 1992 summit is mentioned as an important historical step in the women’s movement. The main goal of this agenda was that there would be no environmental security without women’s rights. At first there was some disappointment about the Rio ’92 outcomes, because they had very high expectations: they wanted to change the world. Now there is acknowledgement that they did emerge change, e.g. setting up of local initiatives, and the empowering of many women groups. Dankelman concludes that during the years the women’s movement did not take certain aspects into account: they were acting as if they had one voice, but did they pay attention to the differences between women? And what about the power question, those who could come to the summits were there, but what about those who were not there?; and does the women’s movement have to reorganize? The book gives some answers on these questions.

Molly Scott Cato discussed women, labour and sustainability, and how we can go to a more co-operative based economy. According to Scott Cato, the economist Karl Polanyi is a useful economist for her preposition, as he uncovers the market myth and sees the economy as a social study. He argues that traditional economic life has shifted to a market economy, thus loosing the social aspect of economics. Also he considers capitalism to be utopian and unrealistic. He questions if you can buy land or labour, and argues that ‘landship’ should be something of kinship. By selling land or buying labour you lose morality. Scott Cato sees the bioregional economy as an alternative to the neo liberal economy. With this new economy we come to rely on a system in which our own resources count. Through a system of co-operations almost all the value of a product goes back to the producer. This way no more shifts are made and middle men are excluded in the process. Women portray a valuable place in this economy, since a lot of women work in co-operatives, are not that profit driven and take social consequences more into account than men.

Ana Agostino raised the issue of women and justice in relation to climate change rights of growth and climate change with the principle of differentiation of responsibility. In the chapter she wrote with Rosa Lizarde she discussed this extensively. In her presentation she spoke about the danger of only short term solutions, without taking sustainability into account. This is a dangerous thing to do, since climate change is affecting so many things, like women’s livelihoods; they rely heavily on natural resources, but have limited access to the participation processes. Ana feels this differentiated impact on sustainability issues has to do with justice: the redistribution of the least advantaged are not secured, the natural resources have been taken away from people who cannot make decisions about nature. This also implies nature has its own rights. Restorative justice is needed. But this does not only imply repairing the damage that has been done, but it also stipulates giving space to those who are denied to solve the
problems or take decisions in a different manner. The establishment of Women’s Climate Tribunals are important in the strategy to regain space. They can provide a platform to the voiceless. Besides, the tribunals recommendations can help decision makers in legitimating their policy.

Concluding the colloquium with the book launch, Ghosh observed that the book strives to combine different levels: analytical theory, individual stories and national policy. The book is open, positive, but it does not claim to have answers, it just provides space for creativity. Ghosh stated that if we all contribute in reclaiming the spaces that are lost, we can make a difference. This can be done through education, but also by creating spaces for the women the book speaks about.

A further launch of the book was held 18 June at the ISS Book Fair and at the People’s Assembly organized by Rosa Lizarde author and Coordinator of the GCAP Feminist Task Force on 19 June at Rio+20. A Report of those meetings will be forthcoming.

On the 19th and 20th of November the Final Critical Environmental Studies Colloquium on Greening the Economy will be held, entitled: ‘Bodies, Technologies and Resources: Deepening Conversations on Gender and the Green Economy’ at the ISS.
Women Reclaiming Sustainable Livelihoods: Spaces gained, spaces lost
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