Feminist analysis of social and solidarity economy practices: views from Latin America and India

Research Question and Objectives

General Objective: How do Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) practices look from a feminist perspective? By crossing the theoretical frameworks of feminist studies and SSE, the research explores the organization of social reproduction in SSE initiatives, taking into consideration gender, race and class inequalities.

The research brings new insights in four axes: (1) articulation of productive and reproductive work, value of work; (2) solidarity and its modalities; (3) processes of deliberation, decision-making and constitution of political subjects; (4) SSE’s transformative potential and its relation to the State.

We claim that SSE cannot contribute to sustainable development and become an alternative to the current economic situation if it merely offers innovative forms of production, consumption, exchange and financing. To be truly transformative, SSE needs to also address the reorganization of social reproduction, integrating the political goals of gender equality and more equitable power relations.

Methodology

The team of researchers worked across six different case studies in South America (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil) and India. The project’s multi-scalar, pluri-disciplinary and ethnographic perspective produced original empirical and in-depth information on SSE initiatives with a feminist perspective, and contributed to the renewal of theoretical debates in the field of social reproduction, emancipation, public action and policies on SSE. Research findings will: (1) support SSE and feminist organizations and networks, providing accessible information and spaces for debate; and (2) contribute to the definition of public policies at local, sub-regional, national or international level.

Current State of Work

The project involves SSE women’s initiatives embedded in diverse realities. In India there are three cases: (1) SEWA, the national union of informal workers, joining and supporting the organization of domestic workers in Kerala who struggle for their rights; (2) an association of fisherwoman in Udupi contesting access to markets and to be recognized as workers; (3) an NGO in Tamil Nadu which works with small farmers and landless workers, mostly women, on violence against women, women’s empowerment and protection of natural resources through collective action. In Latin America there are three more cases: (4) in Argentina, child care community organizations in suburban underprivileged neighborhoods of Buenos Aires, providing service to inhabitants in general and to participants of SSE initiatives specifically; (5) in Bolivia, women associations located in the rural and urban areas of the municipality of Bataillas, a small city 50 km from La Paz; and in Brazil, agro-ecological initiatives led by rural women in the Vale do Ribeira region, State of São Paulo, supported by a feminist NGO, who struggle for their social rights, improved and healthy production, access to fair local markets and for the creation of spaces of democratic deliberation.

In all these case studies, the constitution of solidary alternatives for the unequally divided reproductive activities, including unpaid care work, lowly valued work in agriculture and craftwork, weak provision of public social services is central.

Research Keywords and Disciplines Involved

Anthropology
- solidarity
- feminism

Sociology
- social reproduction
- deliberation

Economics

Political Science

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