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Explorations on human rights

Transgressing rights: La Via Campesina's call for food sovereignty / Exploring collaborations: Heterodox economics and an economic social rights framework / Workers in the informal sector: Special challenges for economic human rights

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Abstract

The notion of rights is a powerful one, but the channels through which they have been promoted and enforced since World War II have militated against the more radical promise of rights. These explorations examine the question of economic rights with an international focus. The contributions touch on such diverse topics as the international peasant federation called La Vía Campesina, heterodox and social economic analyses, and the informal sector. The authors address the question of human rights with respect to the conditions that delimit and enforce these rights, the connections between

macroeconomics and human rights, social movements that strive to protect these rights, and the different theoretical approaches to incorporating rights into an academic framework. Though each contribution's methodology and focus are different, the composite takes an important step in evaluating this very critical question of economic rights that greatly affects individual lives, social conditions, economic policies, and the study of economics.

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Uma Narayan's work on issues relating to the informal sector began in Fall 2003 with the support of a Rockefeller Fellowship on the theme of "Confronting Global Capital, Finding Human Security: A Gendered Critique" organized by the National Council for Research on Women and the Center for the Study of Women and Society at the City University of New York. Her ideas have benefited from conversations with other fellows and with the participants in the seminars organized around the fellowship. She would like to thank all of them. She would also like to thank Radhika Balakrishnan and the reviewers for their help with this essay.

Notes

¹ NGOs cannot, as a result of La Via Campesina's founding constitutional principles, become members of the organization. There are, however, friendly relations between a handful of organizations and La Via Campesina's secretariat. The Foodfirst Information Action Network has launched the Global Campaign for Agrarian Reform, and La Via Campesina representatives sit on the steering committee for that project. Specifically, the Foodfirst Information and Action Network is looking to use the UN General Comment 12 to argue for a robust framework of economic, social, and cultural rights, in addition to civil and political rights for people living in rural areas (UN - Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights [UNCESCR][1999](#)).

² Some of the initial ideas in this paper were a result of long conversations with Uma Narayan.

³ See the work done by Third World Network ([2001](#)) review of Doha WTO Ministerial meeting and the work of the International Forum on Globalization ([2000](#)) analysis of Asian Financial crisis.

⁴ See International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (www.icftu.org) for discussion of WTO and labor standards discussion. There are many articles that have current analysis of this issue.

⁵ For work on the global living wage, see Mark Brenner ([2004](#)). This work does not use the concept of a universal minimum core content.

⁶ See Nussbaum's article ([2003](#)) for an argument on why the listing of particular capabilities is better at addressing the conception of the kind of person we might envision when we talk about human rights. In the same issue of Feminist Economics, Marianne T. Hill ([2003](#)) argues that the capabilities approach does not adequately deal with the structural of power within the economic system that creates deprivation. Hill's argument can also be used as a critique of the human rights approach.

⁷ See work by the International Working Group on Gender Macroeconomics and International Economics, such as the special issues of World Development edited by Nilufer Cagatay, Diane Elson, and Caren Grown ([1995](#), [2000](#)).

⁸ Macro policy changes intended to help increase formal sector employment might not foresee the impact on women workers or indigenous communities not connected easily to formal sector employment.

⁹ The dialogue between these two frameworks has already begun. The Ford Foundation funded an initial meeting; for the report, see Radhika Balakrishnan ([2005](#)).

¹⁰ Useful discussions and definitions of the informal sector can be found in Alejandro Portes, Manuel Castells, and Lauren A. Benton ([1989](#)) and Lourdes Beneria ([2003](#)).

¹¹ On its website, WIEGO describes itself as “a global research-policy network that seeks to improve the status of the working poor, especially women, in the informal economy through statistics, research, programs and policies and through increased organization and representation of informal workers.”

¹² Particularly relevant to the rights cited here are Articles 17, 23, and 24.

¹³ For an account of the struggles and benefits of organizing a union of domestic workers, see Marina Karides ([2002](#)).

¹⁴ For information about SEWA see Mirai Chatterjee ([2001](#)), Martha Alter Chen ([2000](#)), and Ratna M. Sudarshan ([2002](#)).

¹⁵ Jeanne Kirkpatrick quoted in Joseph Wronka ([1995](#)). Morris Abram's, Statement, UN Commission on Human Rights, on Item 8, “The Right to Development,” February 1991, quoted in Noam Chomsky ([1999](#)).

¹⁶ European Commission, Communication Sur le Travail Non Declaree, Brussels 1998. Cited in Anne Renaut ([2002](#)).

¹⁷ Jeffrey Sachs (2003), UN special adviser on the Millenium Goals, states that the amount of assistance needed to meet the Goals is US\$175 billion a year, but only about US\$50 billion is currently available.

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