



WIDE Annual Conference

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"Let's care about care..."

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Ladies and Gentlemen, dear Partners, dear colleagues

Few days ago I was still on a mission in Mozambique. Care economy wasn't an issue on the agenda, but it was a reality in every household - in every program we have visited...

To think and reflect intensively and consciously on the issue of care is relatively new for SDC. However, in certain contexts, the factor "care" has already been recognized as an important element in development cooperation. In the context of HIV/AIDS projects in Southern Africa e.g., we have provided financial support to elderly women taking care of orphaned children. In Nepal, SDC supports forestry management programs which are organized along the opportunities of women dealing with multiple roles and being themselves the main users of wood. And in Central America, we support initiatives to improve women's access to drinking water from a time use perspective. The issue of time use and the unequal share of women and men in unpaid care have been addressed in SDC trainings and tools. Still, there is a lot to do.

The study on care carried out by UNRISD – co-financed by SDC - is an important step forward in the recognition of the issue and in establishing a system to deal with it. The presentation of the findings of the study to SDC staff last month by the author,

Shahra Razavi, showed how and why cooperation agencies should care about care and what makes the difference.

The participation of a Swiss delegation in the 53rd annual conference of the Commission on the Status of Women also helped to promote the issue and showed that there is a major international consensus on the importance of care and of the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, as well as on the necessity of state measures to include information on care in policies, statistics, and activities.

In development work, the issue of care is not sufficiently addressed. Care – and linked with it the issues of well-being and time use - has been neglected in macro-economic concepts, pro-poor growth approaches or income generation measures. Even though the majority of the poor are women, and even though we know that the majority of the providers of unpaid care are also women, the interrelations of poverty, gender equality and care are veiled and therefore rarely addressed systematically.

What we need is a critical view on power relations to understand why the value of care is underestimated - if considered at all -, and why those who provide care, do not share equally the wider social benefits or positive externalities that it generates.

Care work tends to be delegated from the richer to the poorer, especially women, as the international domestic worker issue clearly shows. There might also be a shift of the care burden to children, especially girls, who then can't attend school and have again reduced life chances. Income generation for poor women and other economic empowerment activities should not increase exploitation by overloading the extremely poor women or children. To make the efforts of development aid successful means that the very poor women and children should benefit accordingly from the financial support and become part of a system that actually decreases discrimination and exclusion.

The new economic crisis is a key moment for development actors to put the issue of care on the agenda. Wherever public sectors like finance management, health and others are reformed, we have to be attentive to the way how gender specific needs, roles, responsibilities are taken into account. Gender responsive budgeting is a crucial instrument to analyze financial flows and public services as well as their impact on gender relations and gender equality. It should be promoted as an effective political instrument to change the allocation of public finances, as SDC has been doing within its own organisation as well as by supporting it in partner countries, e.g. Benin, Pakistan, and Tanzania.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Where do we see obstacles and chances for change in our respective field -?

SDC thinks that governance issues at all levels and in the whole world play a crucial role for the acknowledgement and improvements concerning the equal share of care responsibilities. The shift towards and concentration on the private sector as an agent of change as well as the shift of the care burden towards the 'individual' and the weakening of the role of the state have hidden away an important factor: Only 'well-functioning' state institutions at all levels have the legitimacy as well as the interest to organize the provision of care in a non-discriminatory way, based on a human rights perspective to guarantee social protection to everyone.

Through our long-term experience with gender equality mainstreaming in SDC, we have seen that because of the complexity of societies, there is no 'one size fits all'. The development of adequate measures and monitoring systems for promoting gender equality - in careful consultations with all actors involved, and in all societies - are therefore important.

SDC's new board of directors has confirmed its strong commitment to gender equality and adequate measures. Switzerland has already increased its effort in the context of food security policies and programs, and will further invest on gender equality in the fields of social protection and welfare policies. Still we think that it is very important to have networks like WIDE, centres of research like UNRISD, the Interdisciplinary Centre for Gender Studies in Bern or Bridge in Sussex to improve our work, to know how to care about care, to make our work still more responsive to gender needs.

Ladies and gentlemen, dear Partners

Global issues are treated in a global network. This is a chance to break up and renew a North-South discourse which is still often based on feelings of 'Northern superiority' or related claims on both sides. WIDE provides an opportunity to open the perspective, to break through barriers and national borders and look at social and economic development also from a global angle and based on equality of approaches.

We also welcome the opportunities which WIDE provides for the exchange between scientists, policy-makers, and development practitioners around the globe. We believe that this is a unique possibility for an exchange based on equality, experience and necessary innovation. SDC supports research as much as the implementation of concrete programs.

Let me conclude with congratulations to the interesting and comprehensive program.

I wish you a successful conference, a successful start of wide-Switzerland, and hopefully a fruitful cooperation also in the future.