



## **Green Economy: Gender\_Just!**

**Towards a resource-light and gender-just future**

### **Discussion paper prepared by**

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***The earth is issuing a warning and the crises in financial markets and unemployment are illustrating: things cannot continue as before. Our economic and lifestyle models are being put to the test and must reorientate themselves in line with social and ecological imperatives. The current crises present an opportunity for fundamental change. There are no ready-made answers and no single correct approach for the necessary societal transformations. We – women from different organisations throughout Germany – appeal to us all to realise the need for such changes and actively shape our future.***

What are the challenges we have to confront? The acute crises range from the overconsumption of resources to global financial crises, famine in many countries and the crisis of care work. These crises are connected to each other, and it is not enough to take a one-dimensional approach – we need to look at the whole system and its interdependencies. Simply adjusting the current system in favour of more environmentally friendly consumption and methods of production, as other approaches to a 'green economy' have suggested, does therefore not go far enough. Our understanding of a green economy means prioritising a socially and environmentally just society and a corresponding economic system that will facilitate a 'good life for all'.

To achieve this, a fundamental shift in thinking is required. We need a social contract in which natural resources, as well as human and societal actions, are linked with each other as the basis of our economic system. Thus, it is essential to acknowledge the multifaceted and productive care work that is overwhelmingly performed by women, as well as the productivity of the natural environment, as the basis of any economic activity.

This does not depend on the social sphere being economised or monetised; rather, it is about integrating care work, like natural resources, into a holistic conception of the economy.

### **Where we stand**

Experts disagree about whether the peak of oil production – often referred to simply as 'peak oil' – has already been transgressed. But one thing is certain: when looked at from a historical perspective, we are on the brink of *peak everything* – the decline in the availability of many natural resources. The economic systems and lifestyles of industrialised nations use up large quantities of natural resources, whilst simultaneously causing severe air, soil and water pollution, as well as the irreversible destruction of polar ice caps, rainforests and biodiversity.

In particular, the crisis of climate change harbours unforeseeable dangers. The goal of international climate policy of limiting global warming to just two degrees means for Germany a reduction in each person's annual CO<sub>2</sub> consumption from, on average, just under eleven tonnes today, down to less than two tonnes by 2050. This does not take into account that with the 0.7 degrees of warming (compared to 1990 levels) that has already been reached globally, people today are already becoming refugees or dying as a result of climate change-induced floods, droughts and storms.

### *Limits of growth*

A decoupling of growth from resource use has so far proved to be illusive. Increases in efficiency have been counteracted by increases in consumption ('rebound effect'); that is, while decreasing amounts of resources are required to manufacture a product, increasing amounts of the product are being produced and consumed. When considered from a global perspective, the rapid increases in economic growth in developing countries and the needs of the growing global population are further challenges that are leading to an increase in resource consumption.

Scarcer resources lead to higher prices, which can slow down this process. But the effect of these price increases and the downturn in economic activity could also accompany economic, political, day-to-day and even military dangers. Solutions to these problems must be sought.

### *Crisis of our economic and social constitution*

In the last financial and economic crisis, a worldwide collapse could only be avoided through public loans to banks to the sum of billions. Such a rescue package will not be able to be repeated during the next crisis – and Wall Street experts themselves consider a further crisis to be unavoidable. At the same time, however, such money is lacking for measures for societal reform, which further limits the opportunities for action by governments.

Yet crises relating to resources, climate and financial markets are not the only serious crises that need to be counteracted. Two others will be mentioned here. Our type of economic system has implications in relation to the lack of fulfilment of basic physical needs in other parts of the world: despite the proclamation of the Millennium Development Goal to halve the world's starving by 2015, the number of people without enough food has risen significantly since the turn of the century. But even in a materially affluent society there are problems relating to the fulfilment of basic physical needs: the German Federal Ministry of Health estimates that there are four million people in Germany who require treatment for depression; in 2010 the diagnosis of 'depressive episode' was the top reason for days absent in the workplace in Germany; and the World Health Organization surmises that by 2020, depression will be the second most common cause of years 'lost' through illness. Causes of this disease can include both being overworked and under-challenged.

While some people suffer from a lack of employment, others suffer from too much work. In both cases what is often missing is what is today commonly referred to as 'quality of life' – much lost time, leisure, sense of purpose and social immersion. In order to attain material wealth, the diversity of our capabilities is restricted to mere competitiveness and focuses on material worth.

In general, our economic model still intends for socially essential care work to be provided in the private sphere. In many cases such work remains unperformed because of time pressures and overloading, and as gainful employment it is underpaid. Well-educated working women in the global west increasingly free themselves from this predicament by delegating care work to the market. In this way, a new and indeed questionable international division of labour between women has arisen ('transnational supply chains'), which is leading to a worsening of social inequality.

**By developing an awareness of how much material growth<sup>1</sup> comes at the expense of fellow people, the next generation and also our own happiness, it becomes clear to us that we cannot pursue this path, and nor do we want to.**

### **Is a 'green economy' the answer?**

We welcome existing initiatives of a 'green economy', including well-developed concepts with concrete measures such as Green New Deal, post-growth economy and post-growth society, as approaches that take ecological limits into account in their design.<sup>2</sup> But many problems remain unsolved – for example, the crisis of care work. We are not consciously proposing a counter concept; rather, we are highlighting the gaps from a gender\_just<sup>3</sup> perspective and calling for discussion.

We do not believe that things can or should continue as they have, simply with a shift to 'green' production. This is particularly important in terms of an environmentally orientated economic system. A shift in production is not in itself sufficient, as the factors listed above illustrate.

A good – resource-light, low-emissions, equitable – life can only be attained through a comprehensive social-ecological transformation of our society. The accompanying changes must not impose a burden on the weakest in society, e.g. by generating higher unemployment. If this were to occur, it would not only be fatal for those affected. Studies show that the more a society falls into a rich and poor divide, the more illnesses, distrust and dissatisfaction increase – not only amongst the poor, but also amongst the affluent.<sup>4</sup>

**In general, we distrust technocratic politics in which experts tell us what needs to be done. Only widespread social discussion that spurs us all into action holds the potential for a comprehensive transformation. A transformation that constitutes social gain despite material limits.**

### **A fundamental shift in thinking is required**

We have consciously phrased our considerations in an open manner, since for us it is not about a finished concept that could immediately be translated into political action; rather, it is about triggering socially based dialogue and processes for change. The criteria of low emissions, resource light and just should provide guidance for action.

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<sup>1</sup> Material growth that is based on the exploitation of resources – ecological and human – is not sustainable, contributes to social disparities and robs itself of its own basic principles.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example: Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund/ Industrie- und Handelskammer et al. (2009): *Wachstumsinitiative Berlin 2004-2014*; UNEP (2011): *Towards a Green Economy. Pathways to Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication*; Reinhard Bütikofer/ Sven Giegold (2009): *Der Grüne New Deal. Klimaschutz, neue Arbeit und sozialer Ausgleich*; Nico Paech (2010): *Die Postwachstumsökonomie. Eine Alternative zum Entkopplungsmythos*, in: *Humane Wirtschaft* Nr. 5, S. 12-14; Irmi Seidl /Angelika Zahrnt (Ed.) (2010): *Postwachstumsgesellschaft. Neue Konzepte für die Zukunft*, Weimar.

<sup>3</sup> With the term 'gender\_just' we want to convey that justice is sought for every person, regardless of their sex, social status, physical ability, sexual orientation, descent or ideology.

<sup>4</sup> See Richard Wilkinson/ Kate Pickett (2009): *Gleichheit ist Glück. Warum gerechte Gesellschaften für alle besser sind*, Berlin.

We would like to emphasise the following:

***The private sphere is political – to a certain extent***

The fact that the private sphere is political was recognised long ago by the women’s movement. Our own everyday actions seem to be an obvious starting point for change for many people. But barriers quickly arise. It is not sufficient to simply call private consumption into question. *What* is produced, how and where it is produced, how products are marketed and who receives the revenue are questions that must also be raised. To this end, appropriate information must be prepared and made accessible. Transparent processes enable consumers to understand the connections and consequences of their actions and to make conscious decisions.

***Producing more efficiently and living more sufficiently***

It is also necessary to expand the boundaries of problem solving in relation to these questions: the pursuit of efficiency is inadequate, and must be complemented by thinking about sufficiency.<sup>5</sup> This does not simply mean producing things in a more energy-efficient way, but also considering: who really wants and needs this product and can we as a society bear the social and environmental consequences?

In this sense, it is not only the amount of material (input) and the efficiency of the manufacturing process that is determinative, but also what emerges from it (output): alongside the desired product there is waste, noise and emissions, as well as the burden of work, spiral of consumption and general pressures that accompany growth. Thus, awareness can be created about the consequences a lifestyle, and indeed a product, has.

***Social recognition and new ways of living beyond the pressure of the workplace***

In the private sphere, the social recognition of more sufficient lifestyles must increase – people should have the option of 'not always having to want more' (Uta von Winterfeld). In fact, diverse ways of living that are less influenced by the rigid concept of gainful employment *are* possible. To this end, being 'time wealthy' is both the aim and the prerequisite for a resource-light life. This goes for both women and men – sufficiency is not the female equivalent to male efficiency. We dismiss a feminisation of environmental responsibility just as we dismiss a gender-specific separation of roles and lifestyles.

We also reject a conception of sufficiency that is purely individualised, moralising and limited to an ethics of 'going without'. Instead, we consider sufficiency to be a guideline for the analysis of whole-of-society developments: we do not have to automatically follow growth-driven approaches to politics and the economy that emphasise only productive aspects and cover up destructive aspects.

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<sup>5</sup> With the term 'sufficiency' we do not mean the ethical or moral dimensions of renouncing or 'going without', but rather the political and consumption-related decision to free oneself from materialistic junk and an overflow of stimuli and options (see Nico Paech: Wachstumsdämmerung. In: Oya 7/11).

### ***Valuing resources and re-localising production***

In reaching a different relationship to nature, natural systems and resources, the shift to renewable energy and the focus on preservation rather than continual production, as well as a 'cradle to cradle' approach through the closing of material cycles, are necessary but not in themselves enough. A different valuing of resources and respect for all living things require a new whole-of-society logic.

Average calculations such as the 'ecological footprint' can be useful, but mask both significant differences between the sexes and social classes (etc.), and the fact that the bulk of the damage is not caused by individuals and does not increase the wellbeing of individuals. Almost half of all global trade is comprised of the transportation of products of global companies, simply to take advantage of different production costs. Furthermore, the same types of products are often both imported and exported. A corresponding re-localisation of production would reduce ecological problems to a huge extent.

An ecological re-localisation of agriculture does not simply mean reduced energy input and reduced environmental damage. The global report *Agriculture at a crossroads* also sees chances for sustainable food security in such an approach, in which the current phenomena of massive over-production and subsequent destruction of food could be concurrently counteracted.

### ***Ethical financial markets***

Today, over half the revenue of the hundred biggest transnational companies is generated in the oil, car and aircraft construction industries. Other significant economic sectors are considered by many to be dangerous: armament, nuclear energy or genetic engineering are examples. Financial resources, as well as innovation and research efforts, could potentially be applied elsewhere. Yet however this is discussed in detail, under the pre-existing parameters there is often a tension between corporate returns and social expectations or demands from investments. This also goes for the financial market. The unanswered question remains: how can a process of transition be brought forward that includes ethical criteria and participation?

### ***Carelessness versus care and prevention***

The excess that is inherent to the logic of growth is paired with carelessness. Care and prevention are principles of a care economy that both take into account asymmetrical relationships – such as care for children, the elderly and the sick – and take on responsibility for everything and everyone who cannot stand up for their own rights: whether it be the environment or future generations. The logic of efficiency becomes absurd within the sphere of the care economy, in which increases in growth are generally unfeasible. As employment – for instance in the form of individual-based services – it is usually underpaid; and when it is not, it is regarded as unproductive, since it does not contribute to economic growth. In this sense, the care economy is excluded, hidden and devalued in a similar way to the destruction of nature, which from an ecological perspective is borne by the general public. That means the market economy permanently utilises care services – which are diverse, productive and predominantly performed by women – just as it utilises the productivity of the natural environment, and yet it systematically excludes these factors from the macro-economic models used to ascertain social welfare ('externalisation').

The incorporation of care work, which has so far been unpaid, into the market economy can be a meaningful demand, but a monetisation of the care economy is not the point. Rather, it is necessary to at least weaken the principle of externalisation – and to increase the value of all of the diverse social occupations that are not attributed to the formal economy.

This is about the dissolution of ways of living that have traditionally been divided according to gender, and about a realignment of the institutions that play a role throughout all stages of life, so that the connection between education, paid employment and care work can be experienced as the basic pattern of a person's life, independently from gender, in different configurations and with flexible opportunities for crossover.

This requires a new appraisal of all forms of work that are essential to society and, in a related sense, requires a fundamental reconfiguration of the existing gender order of modern societies.

### **A call for discussion**

Our future requires technical, social and cultural renewal. A solution to the existing social and environmental problems will not be reached solely through green technologies. At the very least, technical solutions must be embedded within social reality by way of intelligent connections between social and technical aspects. So that our society becomes gender-just and operates in a gender\_just way, we require a gender-just transformation process that involves everyone, as well as a corresponding paradigm shift in society. Social welfare can only be developed in a diverse, multi-dimensional way. How exactly that might look cannot be pre-determined, but is itself dependent on participatory processes. It requires the dismantling of pre-existing instruments and the creation of new ones that facilitate democratic participation and enable the comprehensible publication of results, as well as consideration of corresponding decisions. The delegation of issues to expert commissions is not an example of this. Rather, avenues that are essential for this transformation and participatory process must start to be used and created anew.

Right from the start, this debate should endeavour to involve a diverse range of people and seek out exchange beyond national and European borders. Our view of a necessary re-localisation of the economy does not contradict efforts towards more solidarity in (global) society – rather, it is based on this. What this means in practical terms cannot be understood as a particular amount of gross national product – rather, it must be continually redefined through joint discourse and enabled through social arrangements.



## **Green Economy Gender\_Just**

Towards a resource-light and gender-just future

### **Statement from genanet – focal point gender, environment, sustainability**

The discussion paper “Green Economy Gender\_Just” was developed in consensus with all those involved in the project – both partner organisations and scientific experts acting in advisory roles. As with all papers developed by consensus, it represents the highest possible level of agreement. However, the paper did not go far enough in everyone’s opinion.

genanet – focal point gender, environment and sustainability, as the initiator of the discussion paper, would like to emphasise that, from our perspective, some important points were not presented clearly enough. These points are the results of our internal discussions. At the same time, they should make clear that we seek discussion of the paper and encourage the related exchange of ideas.

#### **1. A gender\_just, sustainable future has its foundation in a rejection of growth paradigms**

Growth as it has occurred to date can and will no longer continue. We cannot confront such realisations by tilting at windmills – filled with fears of loss and blind to the signals of the time – but rather we must actively shape our future into something that is liveable. To do this we do not just need a ‘green economy’, but a fundamental re-routing and departure from the prosperity model of western industrialised countries.

The economic growth that is supposedly required for this prosperity promotes higher and higher levels of consumption. It is essential to set limits to this. Material prosperity does not automatically lead to happiness; it is justice that is the most decisive factor for wellbeing. The more we each have, the more we lack. And to try and attain this with money restricts the diversity of our skills and abilities to mere competitiveness.

#### **2. Measurement of wellbeing must recognise justice as a determinative factor**

In the future, measurements of wellbeing must include dimensions other than material possession. Opportunities for self-fulfilment or the freedom to pursue a sufficient lifestyle, actively form

social relationships or interact sustainably with the natural environment could shape a new concept of wellbeing.

### **3. The view of efficiency from a sufficiency perspective**

A further increase in resource consumption will not be absorbed by efficiency alone. The ecological limits of economic growth have to be acknowledged and dealt with constructively (post-growth society). The question of a 'good life' must take sufficiency as its starting point and then deal with efficiency, which must orientate itself towards social-ecological qualities. Through this, the care economy and the preventative/precautionary economy would gain a different level of significance.

### **4. The transformation process in a gender\_just post-growth society must be supported**

To instigate the transformation processes mentioned here and in the discussion paper, such processes must be supported and flanked by governments.

**First, financially:** It is only when people do not have to worry about their material survival that they can feel free to make decisions and utilise potential.

**Second, with respect to time:** A gender\_just, socially sanctioned reduction in working hours that is self-determined by each person creates individual and societal freedom from the need for economic growth. "Being 'time wealthy' is both the aim and the prerequisite for a resource-light life."<sup>6</sup>

**Third, with respect to (infra)structure:** On the one hand, this is about the allocation of public goods such as water, energy, education, culture, sport, mobility and health, as well as a general strengthening of care work. On the other hand, it is about the establishment of infrastructure that is developed with social use in mind and facilitates solidarity economy at the local and regional level (such as community supported agriculture, donation markets or 'free cycling', and cooperatives).

A prerequisite for this would be the transparency of political processes, as well as the political will to provide structural support for democratically supported transformations.

**Fourth, but by no means least, democratically:** new models of participation must be found that take into account various interests and represent real opportunities for influence.

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<sup>6</sup> Discussion paper, page 4.

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Berlin, November 2011