

Feminist Perspectives on the
Green Economy
in the MENA Region



Samia El-Baouchi

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About The Author

Samia El-Baouchi is a contractor and coordinator for the Participatory Democracy Project at the Mundiapolis University Research Centre. Baouchi has experience in communication and gender perspectives. She is a former member of the Climate Action Network Arab World and a member of the executive board at the Moroccan Association for Human Rights. Baouchi chairs the Femmes Bladi Association for Development and Tourism in Morocco. She has thirty years of experience in charity work and was selected by USAID as one of the fifty most influential personalities in Morocco (50 Years... 50 Personalities). She is an expert on climate change, gender policies, and youth integration policies. She has given lectures at several gatherings on climate change during UN Conferences of the Parties, along with other regional events with UNESCO and ESCWA. Baouchi is a member of the Committee for Equality, Equal Opportunities and Gender, the Committee on Combatting Violence Against Women, and the Committee of the National Initiative for Human Development in Morocco. She has also contributed to several programmes on the economic, political, and legal empowerment of women, particularly rural women.

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung
P.O. Box 116107 Riad El Solh
Beirut 1107 2210
Lebanon

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Translation: Language Platform

Editing: Livia Bergmeijer

Design and illustrations: Rawand Issa, and May Ghaibeh @Fabrika.cc

2020

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Part 1.

Introduction

The world is facing major challenges as a result of changing demographics, population growth, and increasing urbanisation. Moreover, the dominant economic model that heavily relies on oil is straining the world's natural resources and accelerating climate change. This has caused extreme weather events such as melting glaciers, forest fires, floods, desertification and long-term droughts to become more frequent and intense. This industry and consumption-oriented economic model not only contributes to the rise in air, water, and soil pollution, but also exacerbates social disparities, inequality, exclusion, marginalisation, and poverty amongst vulnerable groups, particularly women (more than 2.7 billion people around the world live under the poverty line, 70% of whom are women). This has prompted some to question this particular economic model and consider a more sustainable one which prioritizes environmental justice and safeguards the rights of future generations.

Environmental justice is a comprehensive term encompassing environmental issues such as the relationship between human beings and their natural, economic, and cultural environment. It directly relates to social justice and human rights. In this context, the US Environmental Protection Agency has defined environmental justice as the "fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, colour, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. This goal will be achieved when everyone enjoys the same degree of protection from environmental and health hazards, and equal access to decision-making to build a healthy living, learning and working environment."

In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, economic growth and social development policies do not usually result in any substantial job creation or decrease in social and geographical disparities. It is thus necessary to redirect the existing economic models in the region towards

an integrated green economy which will create jobs, lower poverty rates, and increase gender equality. The World Bank estimates the economic costs of environmental deterioration at 2.1% of the gross domestic product in Tunisia, and 7.1% in Iran. These high costs undermine the public finance system, household budgets, the capacity of regional economies to compete, and justice and fairness for successive generations.

In order to address these challenges, many countries in the region are veering towards green economies by formulating policies, strategies, plans, and programmes for sustainable development, including renewable energies, sustainable transport, green building, and water management. As such, Morocco, Jordan, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have developed massive investment programmes to produce solar and wind power and to build sustainable cities. Morocco, for example, aims to produce almost half of its energy needs through renewable sources by 2030. In addition, some countries have stopped subsidising fuel and started investing in solid and liquid purification, recycling waste and adopting irrigation methods that save water, such as drip irrigation. However, these plans and strategies remain limited and vary from country to country. Moreover, the reality remains that there is limited scope for implementation of these strategies.

Women have been playing a pivotal role in protecting the environment, managing natural resources and protecting them from depletion, contributing considerably to water and energy management and maintaining a clean environment. They also contribute to the green economy by recycling waste, raising cattle, farming, and preserving seeds, thereby producing more than half of the amount of food in the world. According to a 2010 survey by the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), women constitute 43% of farmers in the region, a number that has increased as climate change has pushed men to migrate towards cities in search of

paid labour. For instance, more than 93% of rural women in Morocco work in agriculture, forestry and fishing, compared to around 65% of men (according to the Economic, Social and Environmental Council of Morocco). Despite the considerable percentage of women working in these environmentally-friendly fields, the number of environmental activists, women's associations and feminist organisations working on environmental issues in the MENA region remains limited.

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Part 2.

Global and Regional Developments, Modern Methods of Protecting the Environment, and the Transition to a Green Economy

Studies have shown that all developmental models based on capitalist economies encourage the rapid accumulation of material capital at the expense of the depletion and destruction of natural resources. These developmental models have instigated many economic, social, and environmental crises. Economically, they caused the collapse of the banking system, an increase in public debt, and the emergence of the global economic crisis of 2008. Environmentally, the dependence on fossil fuels, polluting industries, and forest eradication have all accelerated the pace at which climate change is taking place. Socially, these models have further deepened social divides, alienated and marginalised women's work, and increased poverty.

In an attempt to surmount these economic and environmental challenges, key international actors, such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the European Union, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the United Nations Environment Programme, and the G20 and G7 countries have become obligated to direct efforts towards an integrated, sustainable economy that takes into account environmental justice, naming it the "green economy". In its 2011 report, the United Nations Environment Programme defines a green economy as "one that results in improved human well-being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities." The outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) considers the green economy as one of the important tools available for achieving sustainable development and providing various options for policymaking. Aside from eradicating poverty, a green economy aims at sustaining economic growth, enhancing social inclusion, improving human welfare and providing employment opportunities and decent

work for all, while maintaining the healthy functioning of the earth's ecosystems.

Prior to the Rio+20 conference, a group of international actors expressed their concerns and doubts with regard to the adoption of this economy, among whom:

- Joseph Deiss, President of the General Assembly, who noted as he opened the Thematic Debate on the Green Economy, that there are fears that a green economy is just a new conditionality and will hinder some countries' development. He noted that it is important to ensure that all countries can benefit from the emerging opportunities.
- Asha-Rose Migiro, Deputy UN Secretary-General, who also highlighted many challenges, "especially in mobilising the political will to make sustainable development a reality", emphasising the need for true international cooperation.
- Soren Sondergaard Kjaer, Deputy Permanent Secretary for Environment in Denmark, who also emphasised that the key factor is political will, stated that "when public institutions and governments demand efficient resources and improved environmental protection – backed by policy initiatives – research institutions and the private sector will respond by innovation, and as a result new marketable solutions will be created in the green economy which would contribute to sustainable development."

Despite these fears, the transformation towards a green economy has effectively begun, as noted by the United Nations Environment Programme report, and an increasing number of studies conducted by global organisations, countries, institutions, and civil society organisations. For

example, the EDF Climate Corps Programme's studies have shown that the United States of America has moved towards a more environmentally-friendly and energy-efficient economy during the last 10 years, where many commercial models, goods and services, such as efficient and renewable energies, have emerged, while traditional companies and institutions have made the effort to reduce their carbon footprint. Studies conducted under this programme proved that green sectors surpass other sectors in the US economy in a number of ways in terms of growth and employment opportunities. For example, the green economy has:

- Employed over 4 million workers, compared to 160,000 workers in the coal industry, according to a 2017 survey.
- Provided jobs that pay higher-than-average wages. For instance, the average wage for solar installation workers is \$26 per hour, the average wage for solar sales and distribution workers is \$45 per hour, and the median salary for a wind technician is \$25 per hour. These wages exceed average compensation for private jobs in all non-farming sectors.
- Created local economic benefits by supporting an on-site workforce to construct, install, operate, and maintain technologies that promote renewable energy solutions and efficiency.
- Spread widely across all states in the U.S.
- Increased employment opportunities in solar and wind energies by over 20% yearly, i.e. more than 12% of what the global economy provides.

The International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) confirms the accuracy of these employment figures. In its latest report, employment figures in renewable energy reached 11 million in 2018, compared to 10.3 million in 2017. A report by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) forecasts that 24 million new jobs will be created globally by 2030 if "the right policies to promote a greener economy" are put in place. ILO Deputy Director-General Deborah Greenfield noted during the launch of the report that "the efforts directed towards reducing global temperatures by two degrees Celsius will lead to the creation of more

employment opportunities than the 6 million ones that would be lost."

Sweden, for instance, recycles 99% of its solid waste and turns it into household heating energy. The initiative was so successful that Sweden depleted its solid waste supply and started importing waste from other countries.

In the MENA region, more than seven countries have established national strategies related to the green economy and have begun adapting some of their laws accordingly. In Morocco, for instance, a number of institutional, organisational, and financial reforms were implemented alongside policies to incentivize and encourage the development of strategic sectors in the green economy such as renewable energy, energy efficiency, water saving, sustainable management of solid and liquid waste, integrated farming, aquaculture, and ecotourism. The National Charter for the Environment and Sustainable Development was also adopted in 2012, followed by the framework law, also known as the Charter for the Environment and Sustainable Development, in 2014. The National Strategy for Sustainable Development was developed in 2017 and aims to encourage the private sector to double its investment in green sectors, especially in the fields of solar and wind power and sustainable cities.

However, transitioning and adopting a green economy is likely to face a number of economic, social, and political challenges as it requires the following:

- Providing massive investments in scientific research and creating, innovating, producing, and marketing green products. Whereas the world has gotten used to a fast-paced market economy, the returns on green investments tend to be medium to long term. In addition, companies that are used to making large profits from the "brown economy" may resist transitioning to a green economy because their production costs will be affected after introducing environmental regulations, such as limiting air and water pollution.
- Enacting laws and legislations that comply with the requirements of the green economy, including recycling waste, strengthening solid and liquid purification networks and reusing purified water, rationing water used

in industries and agriculture, etc. This requires an in-depth understanding of climate change and how to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt policies accordingly. It also requires knowing how to link the different elements of the green economy with relevant laws and legislations, such as construction and agriculture laws. It is therefore essential to strengthen the capacities of legislators as well as hire expert consultants in the field.

- Investing in training and education in line with the new technologies used in the different sectors of the green economy, such as renewable energies, energy efficiency, sustainable buildings, ecotourism, sustainable transport, and the agriculture practices that are most resistant to climate change.
- Mobilizing countries whose resources and economies rely on fossil energy. Such countries fear losing their position as leading global economies since transitioning to a green economy is expected to lead to the emergence of new economic powers.

“Aside from eradicating poverty, a green economy aims at sustaining economic growth, enhancing social inclusion, improving human welfare and providing employment opportunities and decent work for all, while maintaining the healthy functioning of the earth’s ecosystems.”



Part 3.

The Main Challenges of a Green Economy In the region from a Feminist and Social Justice Perspective

The World Bank noted in a new index published in February 2019 that “globally, women are accorded only three-quarters of the legal rights that men enjoy, constraining their ability to get jobs, start businesses or make economic decisions that are best for them and their families.” The World Bank has already stated in its Women, Business and Law 2018 report that “women continue to face widespread barriers, entrenched in laws, which keep them out of jobs and prevent them from owning a business by restricting their access to credit or control over marital property.” It also states that “in 104 economies, women are barred from working at night or in certain jobs in many areas, including manufacturing, construction, energy, agriculture, water and transportation,” noting that “this negatively affects the choices of more than 2.7 billion women.”

The Middle East and North Africa Gender Innovation Lab (MNAGIL) states that the region suffers from an outrageous gender gap in employment, earnings, disaggregated gender data (there is a lack of data related to the tendencies and opinions of men and women on gender equality), mobility, use of digital means and affordable access thereto, and acquisition of soft skills such as decision making and leadership. It also highlights that currently women only constitute 21% of the workforce in the region.

Geographical, geostrategic, historical, political, economic, social, and environmental factors all influence the situation of women in the MENA region. The impact of climate change, such as floods, long-term drought, soil erosion, desertification and wildfires, on different social groups varies. Vulnerable groups, notably women, are considered most exposed to its risks as they are more likely to reside near valleys or in urban pockets, and be

deprived of basic infrastructure, such as water, electricity and liquid purification networks. It is thus harder for them to avoid the impact of sudden climatic fluctuations. This situation is aggravated by certain policies adopted by some countries, such as the use of certain tax systems or lifting the subsidies of certain materials, with no regards to the effects on vulnerable and marginalized groups. In Morocco, for instance, the fuel subsidies were lifted without taking the necessary measures and procedures to protect such groups.

The political conflicts, turbulences, and wars (be they internal or between countries) taking place in the region cause psychological, economic, and social instability. This, combined with the historical legacy of patriarchy, upon which norms and customs are based, restricts the role of women, limits their freedom and deprives them of universally recognised rights. The capitalist economic models of the region alienate, marginalise, and impoverish populations, while the excessive dependence on profits from fossil energies leads to stagnant economies which contribute to the increase of unemployment, particularly among women.

Furthermore, in light of the pressing demand on natural resources and the concerns over the depletion of non-renewable energies, women recognize that transitioning to a green economy will mean facing certain structural challenges. In the MENA region, women rarely reach decision-making positions, as female representation in parliamentary, legislative, and ministerial councils is amongst the lowest in the world. Some countries also prohibit women from assuming judicial, military, and security posts, leading to the exclusion of feminist perspectives from the development of public strategies and policies.

During the past few years, certain countries have developed an interest in eco-friendly education, which resulted in the adoption of strategies, techniques, applications, and tools aimed towards environmental conservation, sustainable development, and keeping up with technological evolution. They relied on environmental programmes for buildings, energy afforestation, and services. Certain new subjects were introduced at universities and higher education institutions, such as environmental and ecological engineering, ecotourism, renewable energy engineering, energy efficiency, and water management. However, women still do not benefit from all of these developments as much as men do. The limited education and training opportunities afforded to women and girls means they lack the skills related to technology and financial affairs, and, subsequently, miss out on the chance to start businesses or gain access to jobs provided by the green economy.

As a result, gender inequality and the lack of equal opportunities between genders will increase, negatively impacting women, and, eventually, the global economy. The President of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Christine Lagarde, stated that the global economy loses 90 billion dollars yearly due to disparities in the levels of education between girls and boys. She stated that, for girls, an extra year of primary school boosts earning potential by 10-20 per cent, and 25 per cent for an extra year of secondary education. Moreover, according to the World Economic Forum, greater gender equality, which includes greater use of human capital, correlates positively with competitiveness and human development. Squandering that human capital has the opposite effect. The United Nations Development Programme reports that gender inequality costs Sub-Saharan Africa, to name one example, \$95 billion per year, on average.

Certain governments have demonstrated weak preparedness and limited logistical and financial capabilities when it comes to climate change. This includes weak early warning systems, neglecting to maintain intervention vehicles, and not preparing human resources to face the risks of climate change. Many interventions were not as quick or efficient as they should have been, leading to human and material losses, most of which could have been prevented, like the floods in Morocco and Jordan, and the wildfires in Lebanon and Morocco.

We believe that providing equal training to both men and women in the field of climate change is an issue of utmost importance that can no longer be overlooked. Rural women in particular are the first to be affected, since these risks not only threaten their livelihoods – death of cattle and destruction of crops – but also their lives. To mitigate these risks, it is crucial for the region's countries to introduce policies on climate change in all sectors, particularly education, media, and health.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) estimates that the number of women suffering from natural disasters is 14 times that of men. Women often lack secure recourse to land ownership and have limited access to natural resources such as minerals, fisheries and livestock, arable lands, water, and rare lands. Making matters worse is the disparity of property division laws between men and women, particularly in relation to divorce and inheritance, as well as norms and traditions that tend to discriminate against women. In some countries of the MENA region, women are deprived of any inheritance, and subsequently of land, capital, and asset ownership. It is also worth mentioning that certain parties and progressive associations in a number of these countries are spearheading important political discussions on the question of inheritance.

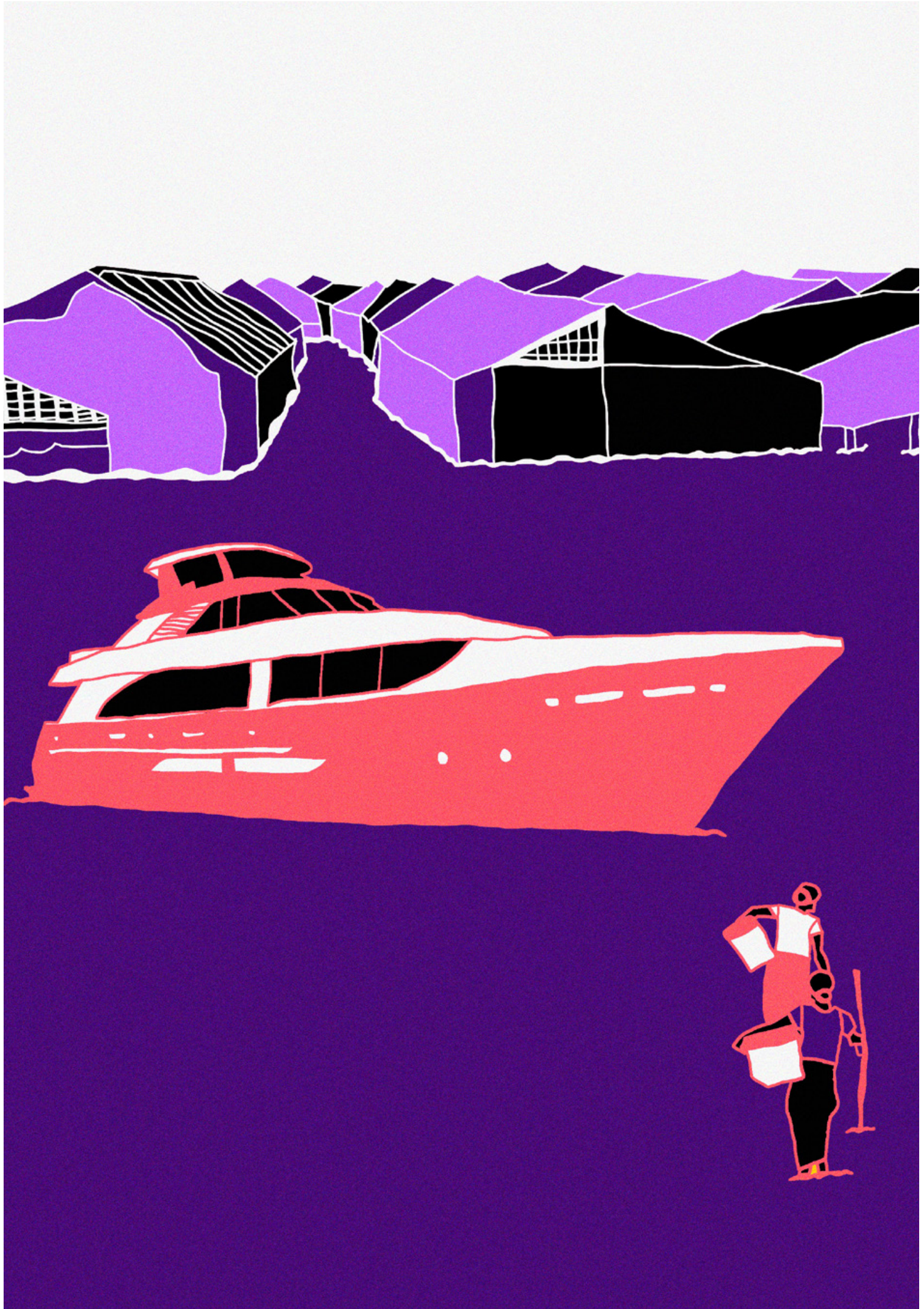
Women in developing countries generally have fewer opportunities to utilise resources than men. The FAO report on the state of food and agriculture, "Women in Agriculture: Closing the Gender Gap for Development", states that in "developing countries for which data are available, between 3 and 20 percent of all landholders are women. The share of women in the agricultural labour force is much higher and ranges from 20 to 50 percent in developing country regions." As a result, women are deprived of economic empowerment, because land is essential for food production, income generation, and credit guarantee.

Despite these challenges, a number of international organisations continue working on integrating gender and the green economy into their agendas. They include the Women's Major Group, the International Alliance of Women, the International Network for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ESCR), and UN Women.

However, their work in the field is yet to reach the expectations of feminists across the region.

It should also be noted that feminist networks in the region are few and far between. Most networks are either local, such as the “Spring of Dignity” coalition in Morocco, the “Coalition for Tunisian Women” in Tunisia, the “Rights Coalition” in Jordan, or regional, like the “Euro-Mediterranean Women’s Foundation”, and the “EuroMed Feminist Initiative”, or global, like the “Global Innovation Coalition for Change”. But even these networks, and many others, do not prioritise issues related to the environment and the green economy in their work. Rather, they simply refer to the subject as a bullet point in the framework of economic empowerment.

“The capitalist economic models of the region alienate, marginalise, and impoverish populations, while the excessive dependence on profits from fossil energies leads to stagnant economies which contribute to the increase of unemployment, particularly among women.”



Part 4.

Feminist Perspectives on Green Economy: A Discussion Impulse

Adopting a green economy does not mean social justice and gender equality will automatically follow. Economic, political, and social actors are used to the practices of exclusion, alienation, inequality, and unequal opportunities as a result of the hegemony of capitalistic and patriarchal systems. All countries have agreed on achieving equality and development at multiple UN conferences and summits on women, starting with the Third World Conference on Women (Nairobi 1985), to the Sustainable Development Goals 2015, of which the fifth goal was specifically dedicated to gender equality. Certain countries in the region have also enacted national policies aimed towards fairness, equality, and equal opportunities. The 19th chapter of the Moroccan Constitution, for instance, outlines the pursuit of fairness, and a Fairness Committee has been established to combat all forms of discrimination. In addition, all countries in the region ratified the Paris Climate Agreement during the Conference of the Parties (COP 21), aimed at limiting the global rise in temperature this century to 2 degrees Celsius, while pursuing ways to limit the increase to 1.5 degrees. Most countries in the region have established relevant environmental and sustainable development policies and have updated their legal frameworks to comply with international agreements on climate change. Whether through adaptation or mitigation, all aim to steer their countries closer towards a green economy. However, despite all the aforementioned efforts, we are still a long way away from achieving social justice and gender equality, as well as from the economic, social, political, cultural, and environmental empowerment of women. We also believe that the absence of feminist women from decision-making positions will recreate the same legislative, legal, and economic models that have, and will continue to, exclude and marginalise women.

Rural women have qualifications that can help them enter the green economy, with jobs in

biological farming, environmental and ecological tourism, waste recycling, water management and rationing, and environmental conservation. However, as women are prevented from owning land, deprived of their inheritance and the right to make decisions regarding land rehabilitation, they continue to suffer from all forms of exclusion, alienation, and discrimination. The highest rates of illiteracy and poverty are among women. They suffer from work conditions that violate basic human rights, notably in informal sectors such as farming. Female farmers work more than 8 hours a day for less than a man's wage. They are subjected to sexual harassment and exploitation and lack social security and healthcare. They are also susceptible to developing health issues related to the use of chemical pesticides. We can trace all of this back to the lack of women's empowerment at the economic, social, cultural, and environmental levels, and to societal constraints, norms, and traditions. The reason behind the failure of these policies could well be the exclusion of feminist women from decision-making, strategizing, and planning. There is a clear need for more female participation in labour unions and for the establishment of feminist unions to ensure that women are properly defended in the workplace.

As feminists, we must all work for the empowerment of women and fight for their rights, as stipulated in the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action, the Sustainable Development Goals (Goal 5), and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. One of the major opportunities that we need to take advantage of is encouraging female students to venture towards new university majors related to the environment and climate change. This will enable women to attain decent jobs, particularly in engineering, and to establish female-led businesses in green sectors, thereby strengthening the capacities of feminist organisations and actors in forming alliances

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to advocate for relevant reforms. Feminists must also be able to participate in discussions related to the green economy, especially in the Conference of the Parties on Climate Change, which currently formulates its policies without taking into consideration a feminist perspective. This would push us to build a strong, effective network, comprising of feminist activists and influencers from different fields, allowing us to become represented and to partner with governmental and non-governmental bodies that influence economic and social decisions and policies, whether locally, nationally, regionally, or internationally. This includes parliaments, political parties, economic alliances, the private sector, UN bodies, and civil society organisations, all of which we must coordinate with to ensure the interconnected topics of gender and the green economy become a key part of their agendas.

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