Building and Transforming Economic Power for Women
Economic Security?

Money is important, but it’s also about ...  

- adequate public services, decent wages, labor rights, health care, childcare & safety  
- and economic policies that are made democratically and serve the public interest
So, micro-finance, small business support and job training are critical to help women meet their needs in a time of growing economic insecurity, but they must be COMBINED with strategies for...

Organizing and educating women to advocate for structural changes needed to ensure equality, rights and security.
To promote women’s rights, resources and opportunities, let’s think about economic security as building ECONOMIC DEMOCRACY.
Economic Democracy is about... 

building and leveraging women’s power as citizens, workers, consumers, business leaders, shareholders and funders
Economic Democracy is about:

Advocating for policies that better serve the long-term interests of women and their families

Holding public and corporate leaders accountable to the ‘common good’
Why economic democracy?

Globalization, liberalization, deregulation have concentrated wealth and power – in many cases, off the sweat of women ...

We find ourselves with too much unchecked corporate power, too little public power, deepening poverty, instability & inequality

To realign this imbalance and reclaim the public good, we need to activate our economic roles and adjust our political strategies.
How do we build and leverage women’s economic power?

As:
- Workers
- Consumers
- Citizens
- Shareholders
- Funders
California Nurses Association

- CNA represents 58,000+ RNs in 165 facilities across California
- Providing better healthcare with fixed nurse-patient ratio
- “The Special interest” says the Governor
  - 60% of LA nurses are immigrant Asian women
- **CNA 101**: Manual for Organizing
Organizing Domestic Workers

Formalizing their status...

Domestic Workers United (NYC)
- Standard contract - health care, paid vacation, severance
- Local laws and resolution for domestic workers rights
- Research on occupational safety and health issues

Break the Chain Campaign (DC)
- Legal advice and defense
- Media work & training for agencies and enforcement
- Drafting legislation for domestic worker visa holders
Organizing Domestic Workers
Strengthening the Base, Empowering Workers...

Domestic Workers United (NYC)
Leadership and organizing skills workshops

Break the Chain Campaign (DC)
Educating domestic workers about US labor laws
Developing a theatrical play about their experiences
Targeting the Supply Chain

Taco Bell Boycott Victory after a 4-year effort -- increased rights & wages for tomato pickers by a penny/pound

Taco Bell is a ‘smart target’ - Yum Brands doesn’t pay the tomato pickers, but its buying practices can influence suppliers

Who? Coalition of Immokalee Workers, FLORIDA in alliance with students, unions, religious groups, supportive business

It's a matter of changing the industry, and you do that by raising awareness and targeting not only the contractors and the growers but the corporations that buy the produce and the consumers who buy the products…

- CIW leader
CIW put pressure on Taco Bell from consumers, shareholders and the media by

Educating the public...Winning allies...Creative organizing

- Link worker exploitation to major food-buying corporations
- Frame: “Slavery” - armed guards, debt
- Taco Bell Truth Tour – Freedom March – taps into U.S. struggle history
- Connect to global agricultural trade issues – participate in FTAA in Miami

As consumers...
Consumer Boycott Victories

**Supplier Code of Conduct:** integrates rights and food safety

**State Legislation:** Attempts to establish new laws state-wide

**Industry-wide:** Sets precedent for others in the industry

**Human Rights Prosecutions:** 5 human slavery rings

**RFK Human Rights Award:** 3 CIW members

**Líderes Campesinas, California**
- Only statewide farmworker women's organization
- Develops leadership among farmworker women
- 12 youth chapters in CA
- Peer education to help women address domestic violence
As workers & citizens...

**Consumer Solidarity – Citizen Action**

**Living Wage Campaigns**

Student campaigns pressure universities to abide by their legacy in support of workers at home and abroad

**Ripple Effects:** Campus-wide anti-sweatshop growing with many victories; now focusing on working conditions *on* campuses for low-wage (often immigrant) workers

**The Georgetown Living Wage Victory**

It's almost hypocritical to be helping other people around the world and turn a blind eye to the problems of people here on campus.

-Gladys Cisneros, a graduate student
Citizens advocating for transparency and realigning public priorities

Right to Know: MKSS (India)

People’s Budget (South Africa)
   A progressive budget shows the feasibility of poverty eradication, equality, restoring/improving public services

Poor People’s Economic Human Rights Campaign (USA)
   Documents violations: lay offs, denied healthcare, homeless and without food
   Monthly vigils at UN for international intervention and to make poverty in the U.S. visible
Living Wage Campaigns

“...based on the simple notion that people who work full time should not be forced to survive at or below the poverty line”

Why? Shrinking value of minimum wage

* 1968-2005: productivity up 60% – minimum wage down by 35%.
* Welfare reform and weakened social safety nets

Over 60 municipalities have passed LW laws & 75 campaigns underway

A winnable campaign builds the foundation for other efforts -

Won through legislation and ballot box initiatives

Expanding to include businesses that benefit indirectly from public funds

Actions - lobbying, rallies, door-to-door leafleting, media outreach, research

As citizens...
Shareholder Activism: 
Public Pension Funds

Shareholder activism reached new levels since 2001 corporate scandals

**CalPERS:** the largest pension fund in the US - $180 billion invested

“Enduring Value” – rebalancing short-term profits with social values

**CalPERS reforms**
- Blacklisted 10 “emerging markets” that ignore labor standards
- Drop Tobacco investment
- More capital for inner-city development
- Innovative environment technologies

**Organized labor:** SEIU (largest shareholder) and AFSCME support CALPERS

We are just beginning to have an impact on the ethos, the thinking, the culture in corporate America and the financial markets. Why should we stop now?”

-Phil Angelides, CA Treasurer

As shareholders...
The Las Vegas Dancers Alliance

- Spearheaded by a dancer, LVDA fought local government regulation that penalized dancers and undercut women’s earnings.

- After organizing 1000s of women dancers, managed to gain a seat at the table with police and city attorneys.

- "Politics of Dancing": a course for the average apolitical 19-year-old dancer.
The Las Vegas Dancers Alliance

Andrea Hackett, LVDA president, hopes her work can "help solidify the great natural allies of the American left and begin to heal the wounds inflicted by ... the American right...the first basic facts to remember are:

There are far less rich people than poor people. And the rich generally want things to stay the way they are. The poor, by their very nature, want things to change, hopefully for the better."
So what can women activists and women’s funds do to build economic democracy?

- Funding is key part of a long-term political strategy (small ‘p’)
- Funding choices guided by power analysis of economic issues, policies, players and women’s inequality
Strategies that advance women’s rights and economic democracy need to influence:

- What’s on the table
- Who’s at the table
- Who’s under the table
- The bigger agenda & messages (ideology)
Women have been bombarded with market dogma ...
Support efforts to demystify economics & push open economic decisionmaking

*Myth:* economics is a hard science and there’s only ONE way

This myth hides the real power agendas, prevents women from questioning and demanding more from the public and private sectors
Building women’s economic change power requires -

*In addition* to economic literacy and grassroots education and research...
Organizing to use our numbers
Alternative agendas
New voices, new leaders, popular media
Creative actions tied to big strategy
Money used strategically
...and strategies need to focus and link the...

- Local
- National
  and
- Global levels
Economic security is really about expanding women’s rights and roles in political decision-making that shapes economic agendas and choices.
Let’s make women the center of a long-term economic democracy agenda and remember that ...

* Women leaders and women’s issues are found in ‘unlikely’ places.
* We need to build alliances with unions and citizens fighting for economic justice.
* Social security, public resources, labor rights, corruption and corporate power ARE WOMEN’s ECONOMIC security BATTLES.