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Intersectionality and the Solidarity Economy: Exploring Equity in All Dimensions in Development

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“Equity is not only a matter of social justice or morality: It is an economic necessity. Equity matters to our economic recovery and our economic future. Equity is the superior growth model.”

-Angela Glover Blackwell

Equity is a word that gets thrown around often in economic development.

Terms such as equitable development, regional equity, and equitable growth all too often become little more than rhetorical intent concerning development initiatives, as opposed to a principle of practice. Historically, women, the disabled, indigenous peoples, Blacks, and other people of color have meaningfully been left out of the development process. All the while, normative pro-growth economic development strategies have affected minority and marginalized communities differently, largely producing inequitable outcomes that shape the experiences and hardships of those outside of the towers of power. These burdens and hardships range from the exclusion of gender-nonconforming persons encountering conflict when trying to use public restrooms to indigenous peoples being denied access to clean and safe drinking water. By and large, development has largely been a something that has been *done to* communities, as opposed to *done with* communities.

This essay explores what it means to fully embrace equity as a principle of economic development in local and community development initiatives. It posits that equity realized must take a multidimensional intersectional approach, considering the many overlapping identities of individuals and communities, and *Submission for consideration to solely present at the CAF Conference 2017.*

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incorporate intentional inclusionary practices in the design, process, inputs, and outcomes. Drawing upon solidary economy theory, “mainstreaming gender” theory and other feminist strategies of urban planning and development, the essay concludes by setting forth a framework and an assessment tool to develop and analyze equity targets (in all dimensions) on a development initiative.

A. The Purpose of Development

Consider for a moment a federally subsidized housing development project. How would the project look different if equity were a core principle of the project impetus, design, implementation, and sustainable access? Would the construction crew look different? Would the project itself be designed differently to account for untraditional families structures? How would the outcome affect different populations? How would those of different abilities genders, race experience the project differently? What is the purpose of development? Development generally is the process of improving and creating better possibilities not necessary more. However, the focus on economic growth and increasing financial wealth and capital has long dominated the economic development sphere. Yet, the underlying purpose and justification of development is almost always retorted to being the improvement of the quality of life of communities at large.

B. What is equity?

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Equity,¹ in its various forms, is a word that gets thrown around often in community and economic development. Such terms as equitable development, regional equity, and equitable growth often become little more than rhetorical intent on development initiatives as opposed to meaningful principles of practice.² To complicate matters further, equity can mean different things or look very different depending on one's perspective. While some may concentrate on the equitable distribution or access of resources, others may focus on equitable outcomes of a development initiative.

There are three dimensions to a substantive equity framework: 1) distributive equity, 2) procedural equity, and 3) contextual equity.³ Distributive equity refers to the allocation of benefits, risks, costs, and losses.⁴ Distributive decisions can be justified or based on equality (wanting everyone to have the same, even if the inputs are different), social welfare, merit, or need. ⁵ Procedural equity refers to need for fairness in the processes, participation, and decision-making. ⁶ Finally, contextual equity incorporates historical socioeconomic conditions that limit or facilitate people's access to decision-making procedures, resources and, thereby, benefits. It recognizes that individual's differential "capabilities and access to resources and power determine the extent to which they are able to utilize procedural equity to determine the best distributive outcome for themselves."⁷

¹ Oxford Dictionary: Equity generally means the quality of fairness or justice in access, substance, and outcomes.

² Melanie McDermott et. al, *Examining Equity: a multidimensional framework for assessing equity in payments for ecosystem services*, REDD-Net Policy Brief at 1.

³ *Id.* at 3-4.

⁴ Kate Schreckenberg, *Defining equity in the context of the ecosystem service market*, available at: <http://www.espa.ac.uk/files/espa/PFG-Poster-Schreckenberg.pdf>.

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ *Id.*; Melanie McDermott et. al, *Examining Equity supra* note 2.

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C. What is the Solidarity Economy?

Solidarity economy (SE)⁸ is a set of theories and practices that promote equitable, ethical, democratic, ecological, and sustainable development with an ultimate vision of 1) growing these values and practices through grassroots initiatives, and 2) linking these solidarity economy activities in a network of mutual support, such that they transform the current dominant global economy into a just, democratic, and sustainable economic system.⁹ Many communities across the United States and the globe, are engaging in SE activities through grassroots economic initiatives such as: alternative currencies; community-run resource libraries; participatory budgeting; worker, consumer, and producer cooperatives; community land trusts; intentional communities; community development credit unions; community supported agriculture programs; open source free software initiatives and others.¹⁰

⁸ This essay grounds its exploration of SE in its development of practice and theory in the United States. As such, the author distinguishes solidarity economy from what is referred to as the social economy. While both concepts share certain principles, social economy seeks only to enact progressive change within the confines of the current social order; whilst solidarity economy seeks an alternative society with a fundamentally different economic system. *See generally* MICHELLE WILLIAMS, *THE SOLIDARITY ECONOMY ALTERNATIVE: EMERGING THEORY AND PRACTICE*, South Africa University of Kwam Natal Press (2014).

⁹ Penn Loh & Boone Shear, *Solidarity economy and community development: emerging cases in three Massachusetts cities*, 46 *Comm. Development* 244, 245 (2015); MICHELLE WILLIAMS, *THE SOLIDARITY ECONOMY ALTERNATIVE: EMERGING THEORY AND PRACTICE*, South Africa University of Kwam Natal Press (2014). (Solidarity economy is a “series of experiments, becoming, emerging possibilities and prefigurative practices” that envision “an alternative society that seeks to overcome capitalism through a democratic, pluralist process of worker and population control of the means of production, distribution, and consumption); Jenna Allard & Julie Matthaei, *Solidarity Economy: An Overview* at 2 (“Solidarity economy involves both transforming current economic institutions, and growing alternatives to them. Solidarity economy values, practices and institutions currently coexist with neo-liberal capitalist ones in all sectors of the economy. The ultimate vision is: 1) to grow these values, practices and institutions through conscious activity designed to transform civil society, the market, and the state; and 2) to link these solidarity economy activities in a network of mutual support, such that they transform neo-liberal capitalism into a just, democratic, and sustainable economic paradigm and system).

¹⁰ Ethan Miller, *Solidarity Economy: Key Concepts and Issues*, Papers and Reports from the U.S. Social Forum 2007. Chicago: ChangeMaker Publications at 1.

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Solidarity economy broadly defines the economy as all of the ways in which people, communities, and organizations meet their material needs.¹¹ Not only do these initiatives and enterprises currently exist in every sector of the dominant economy, but also are prevalent in informal diverse economies.¹² As a political project, solidarity economy proposes a transformational shift of the relationships between the market, the state, and people, centering the needs of people and the environment over the needs of private interests and capital.¹³ In doing so, SE seeks to be the “next system,” replacing neoliberal capitalism by building and connecting networks of grassroots economic initiatives and practices that embody the five core principles of SE: solidarity, sustainability, equity in all dimensions (race, gender, ability, etc.), participatory democracy, and pluralism.¹⁴

Solidarity economy is not a static concept or blueprint for a new economy. It is an ever-evolving movement that grows from existing and emergent practices, guided by the theoretical principles. In other words, the theory and the practice of SE are circular

¹¹ Ethan Miller, “*Other economies are possible!*” *Building a Solidarity Economy*, Grassroots Economic Organizing, available at: <http://www.geo.coop/node/35> (“Solidarity economics embraces a plural and cultural view of the economy as a complex space of social relationship in which individuals, communities, and organizations generate livelihoods through many different means and with many different motivations and aspirations-not just the maximization of individual gain.”)

¹² Brian Burke & Boone Shear, *Introduction: Engaged scholarship for non-capitalist political ecologies*, 21 *J. Pol. Eco.* 127 (2014); Janelle Cornwell, *Worker co-operatives and spaces of possibility: An investigation of subject space at Collective Copies*. *Antipode*, 44(3), 725–744 (2012); J.K. Gibson-Graham, *THE END OF CAPITALISM (AS WE KNEW IT). A FEMINIST CRITIQUE OF POLITICAL ECONOMY*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press (1996); J.K. Gibson-Graham, *A POSTCAPITALIST POLITICS*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press (2006); J.K. Gibson, *Diverse economies: performative practices for ‘other worlds’*, *Progress in Human Geography* 32(5) (2008) pp. 613–632.

¹³ Ethan Miller, *supra* note 4; Nancy Neamtan, *The Solidarity Economy, State Organization and Political Power*, Papers and Reports from the U.S. Social Forum 2007. Chicago: ChangeMaker Publications at 341 (“The fundamental goal of the solidarity economy movement is to put the economy at the service of human beings, rather than putting human beings at the service of the economy, which is more or less the situation today.”).

¹⁴ Emily Kawano, *Crisis and Opportunity: The Emerging Solidarity Economy Movement*, Papers and Reports from the U.S. Social Forum 2007. Chicago: ChangeMaker Publications.

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through an ongoing praxis of “debate, experience research, organizing and reflection.”¹⁵

This continuous iterative evolution of SE allows for new forms of organization and experiments of exchange that best serve the material needs of its practitioners.¹⁶

Therefore, solidarity economy can be thought of as “a dynamic process of economic organizing in which organizations, communities, and social movements work to identify, strengthen, and create democratic and liberatory means of meeting their needs.”¹⁷

Solidarity economy is not a unified theory, but a variety of practices that share core values and principles.¹⁸ SE initiatives share the following five core principles: solidarity, sustainability, equity in all dimensions, participatory democracy, and pluralism.¹⁹ The core principles of SE are indivisible and multidimensional. They can be applied to the overall governance of the economy as well as to each aspect of the economy: creation, production, exchange, or transfer, consumption, and surplus allocation.²⁰

Solidarity economy practices aim to redress the structural underpinnings of intergenerational poverty, inequality, and environmental ills that have been exacerbated by global capitalism.²¹ In implementing these practices, local stakeholders employ SE to engender new economic possibilities and advance democratic, just, and sustainable community development.²² In connecting SE to improved neighborhood outcomes, SE bolsters community economic development in three conceptual and practical primary

¹⁵ *Id* at 19.

¹⁶ Ethan Miller, “*Other economies are possible!*” *Building a solidarity economy; Defining Solidarity Economy*, *supra* note 11.

¹⁷ *Id.*

¹⁸ Solidarity Economy, *Building Alternative for People and Planet* (2010).

¹⁹ Emily Kawano, *Crisis and Opportunity* *supra* note at 13.

²⁰ Ethan Miller, *Solidarity Economy: Key Concepts and Issues*, *supra* note 10.

²¹ *Id.*

²² Jessica Gordon Nembhard, *Collective Courage* (2014).

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ways.²³ First, SE reframes the current economic arrangement to be more equitable and communal.²⁴ “Second, SE employs democratic and solidarity economic practices that support material wellbeing through interconnected trade networks and purchasing groups.²⁵ Third, SE is a movement that builds “inter” and “intra” networks at local to global levels to improve access to resources and more equitable policy agendas.²⁶

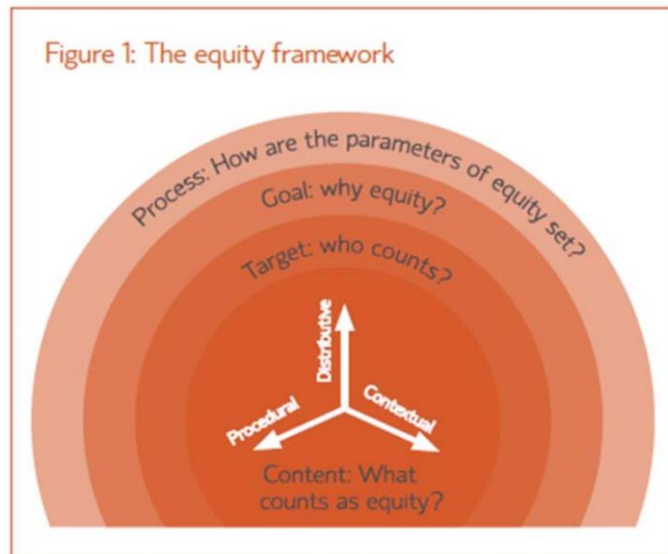
D. Equity, Development, and the Solidarity Economy

For the purpose of examining equity in the context of development, important insights can be gained from a broad construction of equity as defined within the solidarity economy (SE), and considers

equity in conjunction with the other SE principles. SE requires an intersectional approach²⁷ to realizing equity consistent with the principles of solidarity, participatory democracy and pluralism. In terms of

development, much of the emphasis of scholarly and

public discourse has focused on the distributive equity, examining outcomes or



Kate Schreckenber, *Defining equity in the context of the ecosystem service market*, Figure 1, available at: <http://www.espa.ac.uk/files/espa/PFG-Poster-Schreckenber.pdf>

²³ *Id.*

²⁴ *Id.*

²⁵ *Id.*

²⁶ *Id.*

²⁷ See generally Kimberle Crenshaw, *Mapping the margins, Intersectionality identity politics, and violence against women of color*, 43 *Stanford L. Rev.* 6 (Jul., 1991), pp. 1241-1299.

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distribution of benefits and hardships on communities. In other words, more time focusing on inequality in outcomes as opposed to the process, structures, power dynamics, and underlying assumptions that create such outcomes. As such, there is a need to focus attention and debate on both procedural and contextual equity in local development initiatives.

Procedural equity in development requires that there be fairness in the political process that confers resources in development initiatives. In practice, procedural equity in development initiatives demands recognition, inclusion, representation and participatory parity of all affected persons and constituencies.²⁸ This requires structural arrangements of development processes allow all to participate as peers in development planning. Overcoming injustice in development means dismantling institutionalised obstacles that prevent some people from fully participating with others, as full partners.²⁹ Often times, in the local development process low-income community members cannot meaningfully participate due to limited opportunities for community input or participation, time constraints, or work obligations. Furthermore, citizens do not receive formal education about the more technical aspects of the development process, and often their input is not given the same weight as technocrats that may facilitate the development process.

Contextual equity in the development process requires the thorough consideration and adequate intervention of the “uneven playing field” as created by the pre-existing political, social, and economic conditions in which benefits and burdens have been conferred. Such consideration, requires a thorough review of development practices but more importantly a power analysis of organizational and community actors to access,

²⁸ Melanie McDermott et. al, supra note 4.

²⁹ Nancy Fraser, *Scales of Justice; Reimagining Political Space in a Globalising World*. Columbia University Press (2009).

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maintain, leverage benefits or bare burdens of development. For example, Black communities and citizens have suffered historical discrimination and disempowerment in development policies and programs. Redlining, coordinated disinvestment, and displacement are particular burdens that have been racialized and suffered by Black communities. Equity targets must consider the many overlapping identities of individuals and incorporate intentional inclusionary practices in their efforts. Initiatives must have clearly defined processes for determining equity goals and targets.³⁰

E. Gender Mainstreaming

Social experiences are gendered. This includes not only the treatment and gender roles of women by people and institutions but also the ways in which women experience the built environment and access resources. Gender mainstreaming is the process of considering gender inequalities and differences in policy and development considerations and impacts.³¹ As a strategy, gender mainstreaming requires the following five steps in undertaking policy or development initiatives: 1) the consideration of gender differences and inequalities in the formulation of the policy issue to be addressed; 2) the needs assessment in the policy or development options of the initiatives; 3) assessment of the options based on gender; 4)

³⁰ Melanie McDermott et. al, *Examining Equity supra* note 4 Table 1. Elaborating the Parameters and Dimensions of the equity framework at 6.

³¹ *Gender Mainstreaming: An Overview*, Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, UNITED NATIONS, Overview (2002), available at: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/pdf/e65237.pdf>

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determination of what constituencies will be consulted in the policy process; and 5) the formulation of the recommendations for a policy.³²

In extending the theory of gender mainstreaming to the intersectional experiences of individuals and communities, one must consider the ways in which social experiences are shaped by racial, sexual orientation, ability, class, and ethnic identities. The strategies of gender mainstreaming can be applied to each of these overlapping identities as means to achieve equitable development processes.

In conclusion, in drawing upon the theories of solidarity economy and gender mainstreaming, it is possible to strive towards a more equitable process of development. Policy makers and development technocrats should first do an honest assessment of the current inequities in the local development process. More importantly, local development initiatives should consider equity targets, incorporate a deliberative process of contextual, procedural, and distributive equity. Furthermore, incorporating an extension of gender mainstreaming strategies should be extended to the ways in which social and political experiences are racialized and shaped by ability, sexual orientation, and class. Taking such steps would serve as important first step to addressing historical inequities and creating conditions for all communities and individuals to thrive.

³² *Id.* at 14.