



municipal services project

exploring alternatives to privatization

## **BRIEFING NOTE No. 1**

**December 2010**

### **Gendering Justice, Building Alternative Futures**

*Forthcoming book chapter and extended Bibliography*

*by Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Sarah Miraglia*

#### **Introduction**

In previous phases of research, the Municipal Service Project (MSP) has undertaken in-depth examinations of the gendered effects of privatization of public services, with a particular emphasis on the ways in which privatization creates additional burdens for women and exacerbates the power imbalance caused by the gendered divisions of labour. Several publications have been produced from this research, including a book entitled *Dumping on Women: Gender and Privatization of Waste Management*, available on the MSP website.

The MSP is now building research capacity on questions of gender and ‘*alternatives to privatization*’. We aim to build a multi-dimensional gendered analysis within our research methodology, data collection processes and advocacy work. Beyond initial questions of access and equity, we want to understand better the gendered implications of particular service delivery models. How, for example, should non-commercialized models be evaluated to ensure that the diverse voices and experiences of women are included? What kinds of research questions should be asked with regards to public versus private? What is the role of gender in community decision making on service delivery?



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To begin this exploration we commissioned a study by Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Sarah Miraglia, which will be published in 2011 as part of an edited book by the MSP on “Alternatives to Privatization”. The Briefing Note provided here is a summary of that chapter.

This brief also includes an extended bibliography from that research, broken down by sector (water, health and electricity/energy) and thematic areas of interest.

#### Research Summary

Women’s lives and livelihoods are fundamentally shaped by basic resources such as health care, water and electricity. While much is known about the negative effects of privatization on women and girls, very little has been written about the gendered nature of services under ‘public’ service regimes. It is essential, therefore, that any study of ‘alternatives to privatization’ foreground an understanding of the gendered nature of service delivery.

Our chapter in the forthcoming MSP book explores gender as a theoretical lens, as an apparatus of governance, and as lived culture in the context of neoliberalism, in an effort to better understand gender justice in non-commercialized service delivery systems. *Gendering Justice* thus contributes to a critique of privatization, while focusing attention on the significance of gender in struggles for ‘public’ notions of economic and social justice, calling attention to the ‘place based politics’ that shape women’s struggles. Following the work of Harcourt and Escobar, the chapter argues for a ‘politics of place’ approach that conceptualizes struggles for gender justice through ‘place-based globalism’ which is attentive to the politics of bodies, environments and economies that mark women’s struggles around the world.



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This politics of place framework argues for an analysis of women's struggles in relation to larger global processes. Beginning with a review of the profoundly negative gendered effects of the privatization and commercialization of essential services, the paper goes on to illustrate the tensions surrounding gender mainstreaming and 'women's empowerment', arguing that this essentially neoliberal approach to advancing women's interests atomizes gender equality, subjects women's interests to tests of market efficiency, and re-privatizes women's bodies, labor, and environments. In contrast, we advocate recognizing and enlarging the spheres of women's agency, envisioning new 'publics' committed to gender justice.

Methodologically, the paper advocates research practices that begin with women's place-based struggles and works to build 'alternatives' that are accountable to these struggles. This methodology involves a bottom-up process that recognizes and seeks to augment women's agency in order to create alternatives that are accountable to multiple constituencies. A historical and contextualized understanding of gendered inequalities and a long-term commitment to gender equity is a must.

In practical terms, projects should strive to center women's experiences through case studies, ethnographies and participant-observation. Women must be represented in numbers that are at least equal to the number of men, but beyond numerical representation it is necessary to have a gender justice advocate who is consistently willing to advocate on behalf of women and who recognizes and is accountable to structures of power and privilege between women. Constructing 'alternatives to privatization' that are accountable to women requires an epistemological shift that is committed to excavating the systematic and structural nature of gendered inequalities across multiple sites, thus undoing the 're-privatization' of women that is the hallmark of neoliberal cultures and economic arrangements.



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