

## Correspondence for 1/2018

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Published online: 14 February 2018

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As Editor-in-Chief of this Journal it is a pleasure to write this editorial on the speech of Professor Bina Agarwal, who is also a distinguished member of the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei founded in 1603—the world’s oldest Academy!

I thank Professor Bina Agarwal for sharing with us the speech she delivered at the Balzan Prizewinners’ Interdisciplinary Forum held in Berne on 16 November 2017. I also thank the International Balzan Prize Foundation for giving us permission to publish the speech.

As background, I share with our readers the citation highlighting the reasons given by the Foundation for awarding her the 2017 International Balzan Prize for Gender Studies:

For challenging established premises in economics and the social sciences by using an innovative gender perspective; for enhancing the visibility and empowerment of rural women in the Global South; for opening new intellectual and political pathways in key areas of gender and development.

This thoughtful and concise statement, and the bibliography published on Balzan’s website (<http://www.balzan.org/en/prizewinners/bina-agarwal>), highlights the originality and excellence of Bina Agarwal’s life time research, and her remarkably effective engagement with policy and legal change.

I believe her contributions offer to economists a new paradigm on the economics of human and sustainable development, and institutional analysis. Let me stress some points which I find especially striking.

Bina Agarwal has done sustained pioneering research not just in one field of economics but in several major fields, from a political economy and gender

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perspective. Her writings cover agriculture and food security; inequality in property and land; poverty and sustainable livelihoods; collective action; and environmental governance. Few academics have written with such authority on such a wide range of major fields and contributed with originality in each.

She was the first economist to have focused in great depth on gender inequality in property and land in her 1994 book *A Field of One's Own* published by Cambridge University Press. The book traverses a vast field, drawing on economics, law and anthropology. Today we globally recognize Thomas Piketty's major work on economic inequality, *Capital in the 21st Century*, but he does not say much on gender inequality. Bina Agarwal focused on this subject over two decades ago, opening up entirely new pathways for others to follow. Her work received many significant international awards and widespread global acclaim within the social sciences. But perhaps because her book was on *gender* inequality most mainstream economists failed to recognize the true extent of its seminal and pathbreaking nature. I believe it deserves more than equal recognition with Piketty's much later work. Her writings on the subject also had extraordinary impact on policy and practice among international agencies, governments and NGOs. She herself led a successful initiative to amend India's Hindu inheritance law to make it gender equal in 2015. This legal change has benefited millions of Indian women across a wide social spectrum. Internationally also, within the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 5, women's rights in property is now a major goal. I believe, none of this would not have been possible without the sustained research work of Bina Agarwal.

Another area which Professor Agarwal has pioneered is gender and the environment. Many even say she created the field itself. She began writing on this subject in the 1980s, and continued contributing to it both theoretically and with empirical evidence. Her 2010 book *Gender and Green Governance* published by Oxford University Press, like *A Field of One's Own*, covered new ground. Instead of simply focusing on why women are usually absent from natural resource governance, she measured the impact of their presence, identifying what percentage would constitute a critical mass to make them effective. She was able to do so because she collected her own primary data, in the absence of any existing data set. Her findings offer insights for natural resource conservation and biodiversity preservation and are of great relevance in our discussions on climate change. Her current work on small farmer cooperation and group farming in Asia and Europe is again, I believe, likely to be pathbreaking in its contribution to our understanding of ways to achieve food security and sustainable livelihoods, as well as to collective action theory.

Bina Agarwal's work provides many new leads in the fields of institutional analysis, economic inequality, and sustainable development; it covers both private and public property resources; and it provides new pathways for creatively integrating economics with other disciplines, and quantitative with qualitative analysis. I think mainstream economics needs to pay closer attention to this highly original thinker.