

Changing the world  
with **women and girls**

**act:onaid**

**Volume 1**



## Another World is Possible:

Advancing feminist economic alternatives to secure rights, justice and autonomy for women and a fair, green, gender equal world.

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# Contents

<b>Glossary</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>1. Introduction</b> .....	<b>6</b>
Feminist economic alternatives: an urgent agenda for change .....	<b>7</b>
Report aim, scope and structure.....	<b>8</b>
<b>2. Defining feminist economic alternatives and their transformative power</b> .....	<b>9</b>
Feminist economic alternatives: a contested term.....	<b>9</b>
Recognising longstanding feminist economic critique & activism .....	<b>9</b>
Feminist economic alternatives: strategies for systemic transformation .....	<b>11</b>
<b>3. Feminist economic alternatives: some examples</b> .....	<b>16</b>
Theme 1: Centring economies around care.....	<b>16</b>
1. Investing in the care economy .....	<b>17</b>
2. Ensuring decent jobs .....	<b>20</b>
Theme 2: Ensuring a just transition .....	<b>23</b>
1. Women's land rights, food sovereignty and self-sufficiency .....	<b>24</b>
2. Resisting extractivism for a just transition.....	<b>26</b>
Theme 3: Building the conditions for feminist economic alternatives to flourish.....	<b>28</b>
1. Reclaiming public goods and services from privatisation.....	<b>30</b>
2. Women's leadership .....	<b>33</b>
3. Corporate accountability .....	<b>35</b>
4. Maximising public financing .....	<b>37</b>
<b>Conclusion and recommendations</b> .....	<b>41</b>
<b>References</b> .....	<b>45</b>



# 1 Introduction

It has long been argued that the prevailing economic system serves to both exploit and exacerbate women's relative position of economic, social and political exclusion. Feminist economists and academics, feminist activists, women's rights organisations (WROs) and labour movements working at local, national, regional and international levels have demonstrated how this intersects with systems of patriarchy, racism, (neo) colonialism and heteronormativity,<sup>1</sup> resulting in the exploitation of the majority of the world's women and the environment, with those in the Global South hit hardest.<sup>2</sup> While the period from 1945 to 1980 saw the unravelling of colonial empires, challenges to the idea of limitless growth, the rise of global social movements including women's movements, expansive policies of the welfare and developmental states, and greater monitoring of the activities of transnational corporations, the period from 1980 to 2008 saw the breaking of these beliefs and related institutions.<sup>3</sup> For four decades, under the powerful steer of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, G20, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and other major architects of the international economy, the world has pursued a neoliberal economic model centred on privatisation, deregulation and trade liberalisation. This has led, for instance, to the privatisation of public goods or public owned enterprises; to the deregulation of labour and to relaxing laws and regulations for the benefit of the private sector, including those that protect the environment; and to the liberalisation of trade through the removal of export tariffs, thereby leading to deindustrialisation, the creation of low skilled, exploitative jobs that promote a race to the bottom in wages and the privatisation of public services through trade agreements. All of the above have gendered impacts and perpetuate the power imbalances between the Global North and the Global South, as well as within countries of the Global South, which intensify gender inequalities. Through the prevailing economic system, Global North actors both directly exploit women's relative position of economic disadvantage and perpetuate the inequalities women face within their respective countries and communities.

Endless rounds of austerity, often implemented as a condition to access IMF and World Bank loans or issued as influential – and often coercive<sup>4</sup> – IMF policy advice, have hollowed out the role of the state through deep, enduring cuts to public services and social protection systems.<sup>5</sup> These regressive fiscal policy measures are persistently pursued despite the fact that progressive taxing and spending are integral to the progressive realisation of human rights and the achievement of gender equality, which governments

have committed to achieving under numerous global and regional human rights conventions as well as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Governments have equally made commitments to climate justice under the Paris Agreement, however aim to fulfil these commitments through superficial measures as carbon offsetting and technofixes rather than transforming extractive approaches to the environment, which means two Earths a year are required to satisfy demand.<sup>6</sup> Yet it is precisely the overreliance on women's underpaid labour, their unpaid care and domestic work and the exploitation of natural resources that sustains the exploitative neoliberal economic model.

Immediately prior to the Covid-19 outbreak and the fiscal and economic support measures aimed at mitigating its crippling impacts, austerity was already becoming 'the new normal'. In 2019, Some 93 developing countries and 37 high-income countries were projected to cut public spending by 2021, affecting around three quarters of the global population.<sup>7</sup> When gaps in services exist or fees make them prohibitive, the burden of caring for the sick, children and the elderly is transferred onto women,<sup>8</sup> as has predictably happened during the Covid-19 epidemic.<sup>9</sup> The 1994 Mexico crisis, 1997 Asian Financial Crash, and the global financial crisis that began in 2008, the burgeoning climate crisis and now Covid-19, have repeatedly laid bare the startling volatilities and gendered inequities of the current financialised economic system, in which money can move freely across borders. This system has enabled rapidly increasing accumulation of wealth in the hands of a few, fuelling the inequalities across the world.

It is estimated 150 million people will be pushed into poverty as a result of Covid-19.<sup>10</sup> Given that women are already overrepresented amongst those facing poverty and exclusion, and as with previous crises, these fall-outs will disproportionately be borne by them, especially those already facing intersecting forms of discrimination based on, for instance, their class, race, caste, age, sexual orientation and gender identity, religion, ethnicity, migrant status, physical ability or geographical location, etc.<sup>11</sup> The Covid-19 pandemic has brought underfunded national health systems – in which 70% of workers globally are women – to the brink of collapse, whilst greatly increasing women's unpaid care work and laying bare the startling precarity endured by millions of informal sector workers across the world, especially women from poor and marginalised communities in the Global South.<sup>12</sup> Because women represent the majority of carers, and frontline professionals in the health and social sectors, they are more likely to be exposed to Covid-19. Women may also be more likely to

experience the secondary impacts of the virus, including its psychosocial effects, increased levels of gender-based violence (GBV), and economic insecurity due to a higher likelihood of working in the informal sector.<sup>13</sup>

Research by ActionAid found that at least six countries, including Ghana, Zambia and Sierra Leone, are spending more on debt servicing than they are on health and education combined, massively depleting urgently needed resources for quality, universal gender responsive public services, infrastructure and social protection.<sup>14</sup> Such spending is now needed more than ever given the devastating impacts of Covid-19 on already struggling healthcare systems, as well as the livelihoods of women in the Global South.

Business-as-usual by governments, the private sector and International Financial Institutions (IFIs) will not deliver secure, decent, dignified work and livelihoods, social protection, quality public services, and the protection of the natural environment that are needed to redress gender and other injustices based on intersecting oppressions and ensure a dignified standard of living for all. Human rights, especially the rights of women in the Global South, as well as the environment and climate, have been readily sacrificed in the name of economic growth – particularly for countries, corporates and elites based in the Global North, based on the persistent belief that if enough wealth is generated at the top through private sector enterprise, it will trickle down to benefit the majority and pay for technical fixes to our damaged climate. This assumption has now been repeatedly and unequivocally proven wrong.

## Feminist economic alternatives: an urgent agenda for change

The time for a complete overhaul of thinking and approach to economic development as well as our understanding of the economy and its role to society and nature has never been more urgent. As the world emerges from the Covid-19 pandemic it is crucial that human rights and climate and social justice drive social reform. This must redress gender inequalities at the national level as well as power imbalances between the Global North and Global South, which intensify gender inequalities.

Feminist economists and activists and women's rights organisations (WROs) and movements have been imagining, developing, advocating for and implementing economic models, frameworks, strategies and approaches as ways of organising economies and engaging in economic activity as alternatives to mainstream, orthodox approaches for decades. Although extremely varied and context-specific, these feminist economic alternatives (FEAs) all tend in

some way to address women's position of structural disadvantage, resist mainstream economic norms, and seek to challenge and transform gendered and other oppressive power relations and the systems and structures in which they manifest themselves. FEAs are rooted variously in principles and values of care for all life forms, the promotion of women's autonomy and leadership, cooperation and solidarity, democracy and pluralism, valuing of local knowledge, and freedom from gender-based violence. They offer principles as well as concrete policy frameworks, ways of decision-making, distribution and allocation of resources, strategies and approaches – from local to global level – that can support the re-forging of our economic system to one that serves and sustains people and planet.

“At the economic level it means going beyond the artificial and even false categories of perpetual economic growth, so-called free trade, consumerism and competitiveness. It means shifting to a focus on planetary and human well-being... to living well, to not having more, to valuing cooperation rather than competitiveness”.

**Vandana Shiva in Mies and Shiva's "Ecofeminism"**

These FEAs need to be recognised, supported and taken-up by decision-makers as part of an urgent change agenda, even more so in the context of responding to Covid-19, grounded in an understanding that the economy, economic policies and the ways these are experienced by women and men are deeply gendered as well as shaped by colonialism and its inescapable legacies like racism and other unequal power differentials rooted in interlocking systems of oppression (such as homophobia, transphobia, the discounting of indigenous communities' knowledge etc.).<sup>15</sup> Despite being rooted in the lived experiences and practices of diverse communities of women, as well as the analysis and economic modelling of feminist academics, FEAs – along with anything that falls outside current economic orthodoxy – have been largely ignored within economic decision-making, both at country-level and within global institutions. Especially since the rise of the prevailing economic system's push towards privatisation, deregulation and liberalisation since the 1980s. Instead, feminist advocates are typically met with perpetual calls for more evidence, a strategy that serves to de-value and discount their practices and diverse systems and forms of knowledge.<sup>16</sup> In addition to our principal call for states to meaningfully implement their international commitments to upholding human rights and advancing gender equality and institute

gender transformative policies and frameworks rooted in feminist principles, states can support FEAs through building the conditions for them to flourish. These conditions can only be constructed through fiscal, monetary, trade and investment policies and national development strategies that rein in corporate power and impunity, and respect and expand civic space, ensuring decision-making processes are transparent, democratic and participatory, and by urgently instituting measures to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls.

This compendium of examples shines a light on just some of the vast multitude of feminist economic alternatives that exist, demonstrating their huge value and providing inspiration and practical examples for policy-makers. We argue that their uptake is essential if commitments under the Beijing Agenda and Platform for Action, the Sustainable Development Goals, the Convention on All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESR), the Right to Development and other regional and global commitments to women's rights are to be met, and a climate crisis averted. The horrifying lessons from the Covid-19 crisis must be heeded.

## Report aim, scope and structure

The compendium is spread across four volumes. Volume 1 collates and shines light on an important pool of feminist economic alternatives. It shows how they secure rights, justice and autonomy for women and girls, while working for a fairer, gender-equal and green future, and gives selected examples from existing policies, systems and initiatives around the world that demonstrate another world is possible. Volumes 2, 3 and 4 showcase further examples of FEAs around the world organised by one of the following themes: centring economies around care, ensuring a just transition and building the conditions for FEAs to flourish.

Following this introduction, Section 2 of this volume (Volume 1) shares some of the broader frameworks and thinking developed by WROs, feminist networks and economists. We offer a working definition of and framework for thinking about feminist economic alternatives – noting that there is no single definitive version of these, that context matters greatly, and that the term itself is contested.

Section 3 showcases eight examples of feminist economic alternatives from across the world – selected from a bigger pool of examples which are available in volumes 2, 3 and 4. The featured initiatives draw from the practices, strategies and thinking of women's rights organisations, women at the community level, feminist economists, as well as promising examples of

exemplary legislative or policy frameworks at the macro or sub-national level. These are organised around our three key interrelated themes: centring economies around care, ensuring a just transition and building the conditions for FEAs to flourish. According to ActionAid's analysis these three themes form the key areas where efforts towards achieving transformative changes should be focused, seizing the opportunity for transformation presented by Covid-19 and the disposition of IFIs – even if temporary – to advise countries to increase public spending.<sup>17</sup> Each theme is in turn split into sub-themes, each of which represent the critical issues around which feminists and WROs have been organising and seeking to implement alternatives.

Violence against women and girls is a cross-cutting issue, core to developing and expressing FEAs. As well as being one of the most egregious assaults on the rights of women and girls, its prevalence in every socio-economic sphere (from the household upwards) and the ways in which it is used to oppress women and their communities in support of a reckless pursuit of economic growth mandates an agenda with freedom from violence at its heart. Eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls, protecting and preserving their bodily integrity, sexual autonomy and productive and reproductive labour, and holding perpetrators to account – whether individuals, institutions, states or multinationals – are vital to the fostering of feminist economies, where women can live in genuine peace.

We recognise that the scope of this report is by no means exhaustive – in an agenda as broad as this, there are many issues, areas, countries and examples we were not able to cover. Rather than give an exhaustive treatment of the issue, our aim is to highlight a varied range of practices, policies and approaches that governments, donors, IFIs and multilateral development agencies should use as a basis for the much needed shifting of our economy towards one that cares for, nourishes and sustains human life and the environment. Faced by the imminent global economic depression through the Covid-19 pandemic and climate breakdown within generations, we call for as rapid and far reaching change as possible to make this economic shift a reality. A great deal of what is in this report is not new, but the initiatives featured demonstrate that the solutions for a swift change in policy are available. To this end, we conclude by offering a range of recommendations for governments and IFIs to embark on a process of incremental change, recognising that truly transformational change does not happen overnight.

## 2 Defining feminist economic alternatives and their transformative power

### Feminist economic alternatives: a contested term

Not all the approaches and strategies described in what follows are the result of explicitly feminist perspectives. Some, including the renowned development economist Jayati Ghosh, have challenged the idea that it should be up to women to come up with alternatives to the current damaging economic system, noting that where they have, their ideas and approaches have sometimes been implemented so badly as to be rendered meaningless. Ghosh has highlighted the actual practice of gender budgeting in India as one such example (see more on page 19, volume 4).<sup>18</sup> ActionAid also recognises that feminist economic alternatives typically emerge in response to particular contexts and forms of oppression experienced by specific groups of women. Certain community level initiatives featured in this report are therefore very localised. There are obvious questions around scalability or adaptability, which is why the specific initiatives featured in this report are highlighted as examples to learn from and not necessarily as one-size-fits-all models.<sup>19</sup> We also note that the term 'alternatives' could imply we see FEAs as secondary options to current approaches, and as therefore somehow lesser. We do not mean to suggest this with our use of the term and fully acknowledge that many aspects of FEAs are based in pre-colonial, centuries-old forms of economic organising that were replaced by neoliberal policies as countries were forced to engage with the international financial architecture – e.g. when accessing loans from the IMF or trading under WTO rules. We do not mean to imply that there is any one definitive feminist economic alternative. Rather, we argue squarely that the idea of 'one economic' system must be challenged and that feminist economic alternatives should be pursued as an urgent priority, recognising that it is not ActionAid's legitimate place to decide on these and that this report builds on the work of many feminist economists and activists and WROs and groups. As AWID's work on feminist economic realities demonstrates: there are many economies possible.<sup>20</sup> Our modest contribution to this area of work is to help shine a light on the diversity of economic approaches and strategies, as a way to challenge the perpetual undervaluing and denial of this thinking, practice and evidence by decision-makers at the national and global level.

### Recognising longstanding feminist economic critique & activism

Feminist economists and theorists, such as Vandana Shiva,<sup>21</sup> Bina Argawal, Tithi Battacharya, Lebohang Liepello Pheko, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Nancy Fraser, Maria Mies and Silvia Federici, show how the prevailing neoliberal economic system is predicated on an artificial, cis-heteronormative, gendered separation of the productive and social reproductive spheres. Unpaid care and domestic work and subsistence work (such as subsistence farming for home or community consumption), which is predominantly undertaken by women, is counted as non-productive and therefore excluded from calculations of GDP, rendering it invisible and undervalued. This gendered division of labour and the non-valuing of women's labour translates into the world of paid work, which is why women predominate in social care roles such as nursing and teaching, or in jobs deemed 'low-skilled,' such as garment manufacturing. Similar to unpaid care and domestic work within the home, these roles are notoriously undervalued and therefore often poorly paid and exploitative. The closer a paid role in the health and education professions is to delivering care, the worst it is paid.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, the male breadwinner model can be challenged not only on the basis that many women from poor communities have always had no choice other than to work even when caring and so are working a double shift, but also because of women's essential role in reproducing the labour force, which is neither visible nor valued.

Intersectional feminist thinkers, activists and movements, including AWID, APWLD, DAWN, FEMNET, The African Women's Development Fund and JASS Associates, build on these theories to further offer rich and varied critiques of prevailing economic systems, which go hand-in-hand with activism to push policy demands and propositions for feminist alternatives. They point out how the logic of the prevailing economic system dictates that, in order for anything to have perceived economic value, it needs to be commodified. Common lands, forests, seeds and natural resources are all privatised. Communities currently engaged in subsistence and solidarity economies are pushed by IFIs to engage in waged labour for the production of cash crops and exportable commodities. This notion of 'economic progress' and development was

## Mainstream economics missing the mark

Agenjo-Calderón and Gálvez-Muñoz<sup>23</sup> drawing on Elson, Young and Bakker have identified some of the inherent conceptual issues and biases within the prevailing economic system. These include:

- **A focus on individuals and individualism** and a belief in the primacy of rational self-interest as the determining force of human behaviour.
- **The artificial separation of economic life from nature and social relationships.**
- **The subordination of all other goals to the pursuit of economic growth.**
- **The deflationary bias.** When market activity is kept below its potential, the first ones to be expelled from it are women, who are then consigned to unpaid work.
- **The privatising bias.** When the private sector is promoted over the public sector, the amount of unpaid or ill-paid care work increases and property rights tend to be primarily held by men.
- **The male breadwinner bias.** Neoliberal policies reinforce the traditional distribution of roles of male breadwinner and female caregiver.
- **The risk bias.** The individualisation of risk affects women in a particularly negative way by reducing social support in case of accidents or misfortune, or – ActionAid would add – other harmful events, including those perpetuated by mainstream economic models.
- **The credit bias.** Financialisation, the increasing size of the financial sector, exacerbates the asymmetry between debtors and creditors, which has a markedly negative impact on women.
- **The knowledge bias.** When economic interests determine the forms of knowledge taught in universities, neoliberal policies are legitimised, feminist history is silenced and the predominant language represents men.<sup>24</sup>

To these biases can be added the **cis-heteronormative bias**, whereby it is assumed that the majority of households, as economic ‘units of production’ reflect the cis-heterosexual nuclear family, with policies developed accordingly.<sup>25</sup>

violently imposed upon countries across the Global South under colonialism, destroying local systems of subsistence (recognising that many of them were deeply patriarchal). These racist, imperialistic systems of oppression shaped exploitative relations and enabled wealth extraction that continues today by countries in the Global North and which are preserved and institutionalised in global development and financial institutions and processes. In the context of economic globalisation and the expansion of global supply chains, Federici points out that the “distancing of production from reproduction and consumption leads us to ignore the conditions under which what we eat, wear, or work with have been produced, their social and environmental cost, and the fate of the population on whom the waste we produce is unloaded.”<sup>26</sup>

The notable progress that has been made to date in advancing women’s economic rights and building recognition of how they are linked to macroeconomic policy is down to women documenting, analysing and collectively mobilising around sets of progressive policy alternatives at national, regional and global levels. Collective action has historically been key to secure lasting and transformative change.<sup>27</sup> In contrast to mainstream economics, alternative feminist perspectives strive for holistic understandings of the processes that support life and social provisioning, paying attention to dynamics of power, exclusion and gender and how these play out in economic analysis and decision-making.<sup>28</sup> Reflecting a growing recognition of the failures of the prevailing economic system to address poverty, inequality and environmental degradation, there is also growing interest amongst policy-makers in alternative economic approaches.<sup>29</sup> Two such approaches are the well-being economy and the social and solidarity economy (SSE). There are overlaps between these and FEAs and feminists are active within these approaches, however they do not necessarily make use of an explicitly feminist lens and can still exclude women from the economy (as is the case in Mali, see box on page 11).

## The social and solidarity economy

The social and solidarity economy (SSE) is about developing economies that are not profit-driven, but are based instead on the principles of solidarity, common good, social reproduction, self-management and collective well-being.<sup>30</sup> The social and solidarity economy is often embedded within cooperative movements and other traditional and modern systems of cooperation, as well as community-based mutual ownership and exchange, such as barter and timebanks. By enhancing community access to and control over economic resources and services, SSE approaches serve to challenge or find ways to be resilient against the social and economic exclusion caused by mainstream economic approaches.<sup>31</sup>

At a global level the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on SSE, created in 2013 as part of the Post-2015 Agenda,<sup>32</sup> is putting SSE forward as a possible alternative model of production, financing and consumption that can deliver on sustainability and social justice.<sup>33</sup> This Task Force and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) are also highlighting the important role SSE organisations are playing globally in the Covid-19 response, including in the care sector.<sup>34</sup> At a national level however very few countries have dedicated, integrated policies to support the promotion of SSE. Several Latin American countries have passed laws and constitutional articles and have created Secretariats dedicated to SSE. In Africa, Uganda<sup>35</sup> and South Africa<sup>36</sup> both have policies aimed at supporting cooperatives as components of SSE, whilst Morocco and Mali both have ministries for SSE. Mali also formally recognised SSE with a national policy<sup>37</sup> and five-year action plan (2014-2018).<sup>38</sup>

However, Mali’s policies do not go beyond acknowledging women and women’s organisations as important actors within SSE. Strategies to support SSE in Mali are much needed given that some 90% of Malians are engaged in non-agricultural employment work in the informal economy, including around 94% of women.<sup>39</sup> Hawa Traoré, Executive Director of APROFEM (Association for the Promotion of Women and Children in Mali) notes that women largely remain excluded from SSE governance and decision-making bodies, which limits their ability to influence policy processes. The particular barriers and issues women face in terms of access to land, social protection, markets and training are also commonly overlooked by SSE institutions and policies.<sup>40</sup>

Elsewhere too, despite women playing a large role in SSE, the increasing attention being paid to SSE by policy-makers remains largely gender blind.<sup>41</sup> As argued by the Women’s SSE Working Group of the Intercontinental Network for the Promotion of Social Solidarity Economy (RIPESS), SSE does not automatically challenge or transform gendered power relations or the patriarchal systems that underpin these.<sup>42</sup> They argue that a gender perspective must be incorporated into SSE if its feminist emancipatory potential is to be realised.<sup>43</sup> Nonetheless, SSE is increasingly being seen by many as a window through which to advance feminist alternatives given the strong existing overlaps. As reflected by Dr Bernadette Wanjala of the University of Nairobi, “women have long been key players in the construction of transformative, solidarity economy solutions to respond to market-based/capitalist crises.”<sup>44</sup> Through a focus on solidarity driven initiatives – such as the extension of social protection through cooperatives (see the discussion of childcare cooperatives on page 20), the promotion of decent work (see page 20) collective financing, and the provision of basic services – SSE approaches offer a means to address core feminist concerns around, for instance, unpaid care burdens and debt.<sup>45</sup>

## Feminist economic alternatives: strategies for systemic transformation

Women’s collective action is central in pushing the transformation of the prevailing economic system. Although incredibly diverse and often context-specific, feminist economic alternatives recognise and reckon with the biases in the prevailing economic system, while demanding and putting into practice steps towards the *systemic transformation* of the rules of the economy. Systemic transformation entails calling out and dismantling unequal power relations that are rooted in interlocking systems of oppression (patriarchy, racism, neo-colonialism, extractivism, ableism, cis-heteronormativity, classism etc.) and a reconstruction of the economic systems, structures, policies and institutions that both perpetuate and benefit from them, so that economic systems are instead focused on ensuring the democratic and accountable attainment of human rights for all and environmental preservation.

While the aim of feminist economic transformation is urgent systemic transformation, the sheer scale of the task means that many strategies seek to achieve this through incremental steps. These changes will not just

require incremental steps, but also take place at different levels – from the very local to the global – and take different forms. To make what this means more tangible we will describe two forms of change that contribute towards systematic transformation: *changes to the material realities* in the lives of women and *changes to relations and structures of power*. When such material and relational forms of change are pursued together, the transformative potential of the strategy or approach is enhanced, leading to increased opportunities for systemic transformation.<sup>46</sup> FEAs exist from the grassroots to the global levels and in most cases these forms of change are pursued simultaneously.

For example, an initiative that socialises care-giving at the community level (such as through a care cooperative or

expanded public service provision) can lead to changes in the material realities in the lives of women, who may have more time to engage in decent work, as well as fostering changes to relations and structures of power by challenging gendered norms around care-giving and allowing new forms of organising care-giving to emerge. The example of the Uruguay Care Act is case in point (page 19).<sup>47</sup>

Many of the propositions and frameworks for feminist economic alternatives featured as examples in this report contribute to systemic transformation. They all share a number of key underlying transformative commitments.<sup>48</sup>

## Two forms of change contributing to systemic transformation.<sup>49</sup>

<b>Changes to the material realities in the lives of women at the local, regional, national and/or global level.</b>	These include changes to large-scale <b>social patterns of provisioning; policies and public services</b> aimed at redistributing wealth, work and unpaid care responsibilities, or which otherwise address inequalities; <b>actions</b> aimed at the prevention of harm in contexts where agency is seriously constrained; <b>strategies</b> to protect bodily integrity and the prevention of harm to specific persons.
	These changes are <b>generally visible</b> or embodied in specific policy instruments and social and political actions.
	Results of these material reality changes can be that wealth, work and care responsibilities are <b>more fairly redistributed</b> , women and marginalised groups gain <b>greater control</b> over resources and have <b>increased access</b> to decision-making and a fair and decent income. <sup>50</sup>
<b>Changes to relations and structures of power at the local, regional, national and/or global level.</b>	These include changes to and the creation of <b>new forms of power</b> in the internal personal and/or external social spheres which may be subtle, as well as <b>new relationships</b> and shifts in <b>norms or worldviews</b> .
	These changes may be <b>small scale</b> and require care to observe or be <b>difficult to observe</b> .
	Results from these changes may include new and different ways of being that challenge prevailing gender stereotypes, such as <b>new forms of masculinity</b> , as well as changes to gender and social norms, for instance, assigning <b>greater value to qualities associated with women or femininity</b> . It can entail new relationships, the relinquishing of privilege, new forms of individual or collective agency, such as <b>increased bargaining power</b> for domestic or informal workers, and changes to worldviews that encompass a <b>revaluing of traditional, place-based knowledges</b> .

## Underlying transformative commitments:

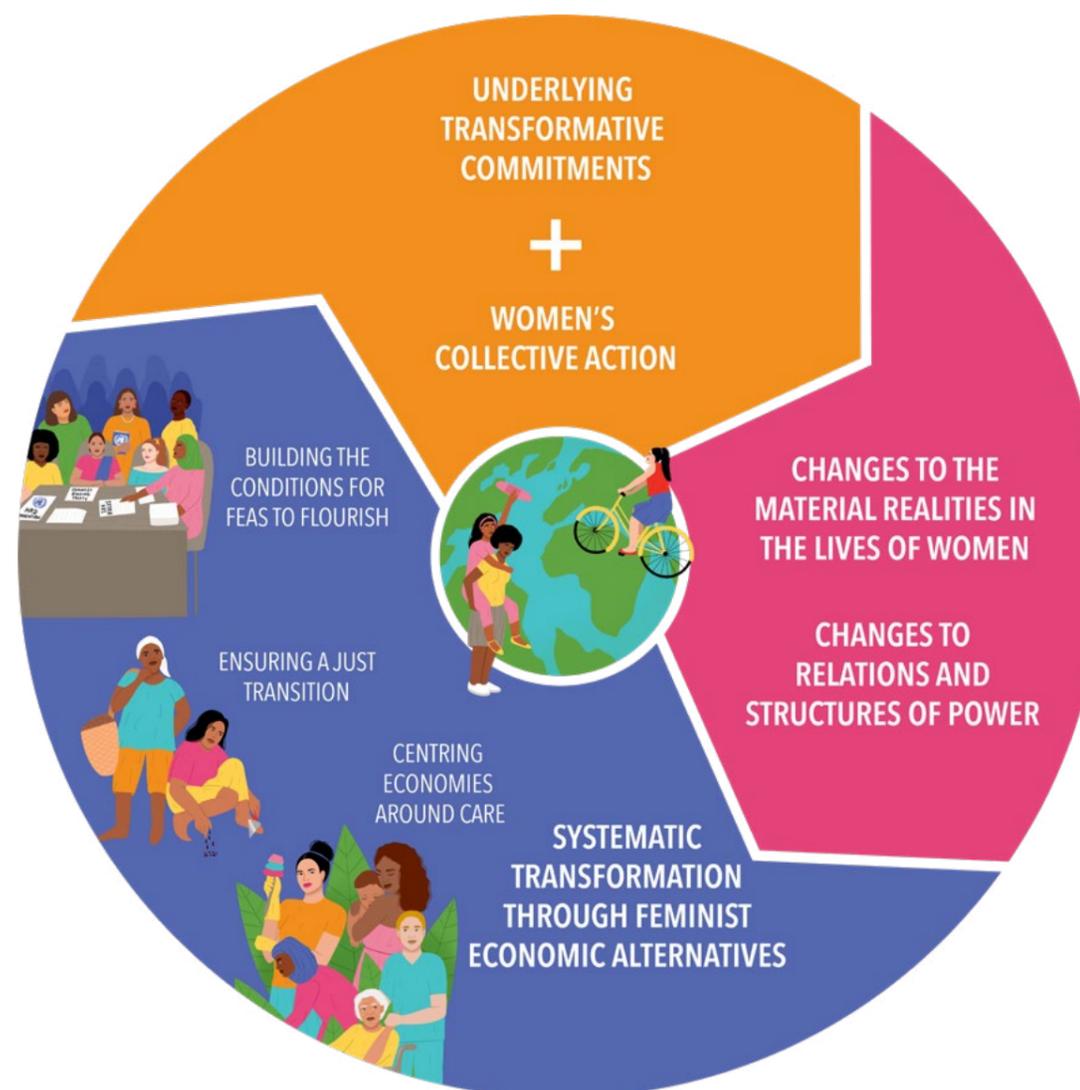
- Re-centring and re-valuing unpaid care and domestic work linked to a centring of human and environmental well-being over economic growth, capital accumulation and profit. Challenging categories of productive and non-productive work, and the heteronormative male breadwinner-female caregiver household model. Challenging narrow measures of progress and growth that focus solely on GDP and economic productivity, thereby perpetuating the invisibility of the social reproductive systems that sustain capitalism.
- Emphasising solidarity economies based on mutual cooperation, democracy, accountability, pluralism, environmental sustainability and cooperation.
- Fostering caring relationships with the natural environment and valuing place-based local, community, indigenous forms of and women's knowledge in addition to widely recognised forms of knowledge, including scientific evidence.
- Creating an environment conducive to and supportive of women's collective autonomy and leadership, feminist leadership and the democratisation of

economic decision-making that is accountable, incorporating an intersectional analysis of how economic policies impact differently on different groups of women based on overlapping systems of oppression.

- Decolonising global systems of power away from an extractivist economy dominated by economic elites in the Global North, towards a feminist solidarity-based economic multilateralism and the restorations of social contracts between governments and their people.

These underlying transformative commitments underpin the incremental changes that lead to systemic transformation through FEAs. Analysis carried out in order to identify FEAs to feature in this report<sup>51</sup> found that FEAs had a number of crosscutting demands<sup>52</sup> and a number of unmet demands<sup>53</sup> which can be grouped under the following three key interrelated themes that make up the goals of FEAs:

1. Centring economies around care;
2. Ensuring a just transition;
3. Building the conditions for FEAs to flourish.



## Women's collective action central in pushing for transformation

The notable progress that has been made to date in advancing women's economic rights and building recognition of the links between women's rights and macroeconomic policy is down to women documenting, analysing, and collectively mobilising around sets of progressive policy alternatives at national, regional and global levels. For example, research and advocacy by feminist networks such as Development Alternatives with Women of a New Era (DAWN) led to the Beijing World Conference on Women in 1995 calling for unpaid care work to be factored into national accounts. Twenty years later, again due largely to women's evidence-based activism, a ground-breaking target on recognising, valuing and redistributing women's unpaid care work was included in the Sustainable Development Goals.<sup>54</sup> Sustained advocacy by feminists<sup>55</sup> has led the IMF to accept that the impacts of macroeconomic policies can be gendered,<sup>56</sup> along with other members of the UN Secretary General's 2016-2017 High Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment.<sup>57</sup> These included the World Bank and government ministers from the UK, United Arab Emirates, the President of Costa Rica and a range of private sector representatives.<sup>58</sup> And at the regional level, African women's rights organisations were critical to the formation of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, which includes strong provisions around economic rights.<sup>59</sup>

Women's rights organisations have offered broader frameworks and principles for feminist economic and development alternatives. The Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) and the Centre for Women's Global Leadership coordinated the development of a set of Feminist Propositions for a Just Economy.<sup>60</sup> More recently, AWID launched Co-Creating Feminist Realities, an initiative which aims to "go beyond resisting oppressive systems to show us what a world without domination, exploitation and supremacy look like."<sup>61</sup> APWLD coordinated the first Global Women's Strike in 2020.<sup>62</sup> FEMNET and GADN launched their introduction to a feminist analysis of macro-level economics to increase feminists' capacity to influence macroeconomic policies on the African continent, and globally.<sup>63</sup> Womankind Worldwide has outlined what a just feminist economy would look like,<sup>64</sup> while the Women's Budget Group is gathering evidence of progressive economic policies under its Commission for Gender Equal Economy.<sup>65</sup> At European level, the European Women's Lobby released its Purple Pact in 2019, whilst WIDE+ has developed a body of work around feminist economic literacy.<sup>66</sup> WIEGO has been working to bring informal workers' concerns to the forefront.<sup>67</sup> These are only a number of the many instances of women and feminists organising for systemic transformation and we recognise that we have mainly referenced international women's organisations, while this takes places in local, national, regional and global levels.

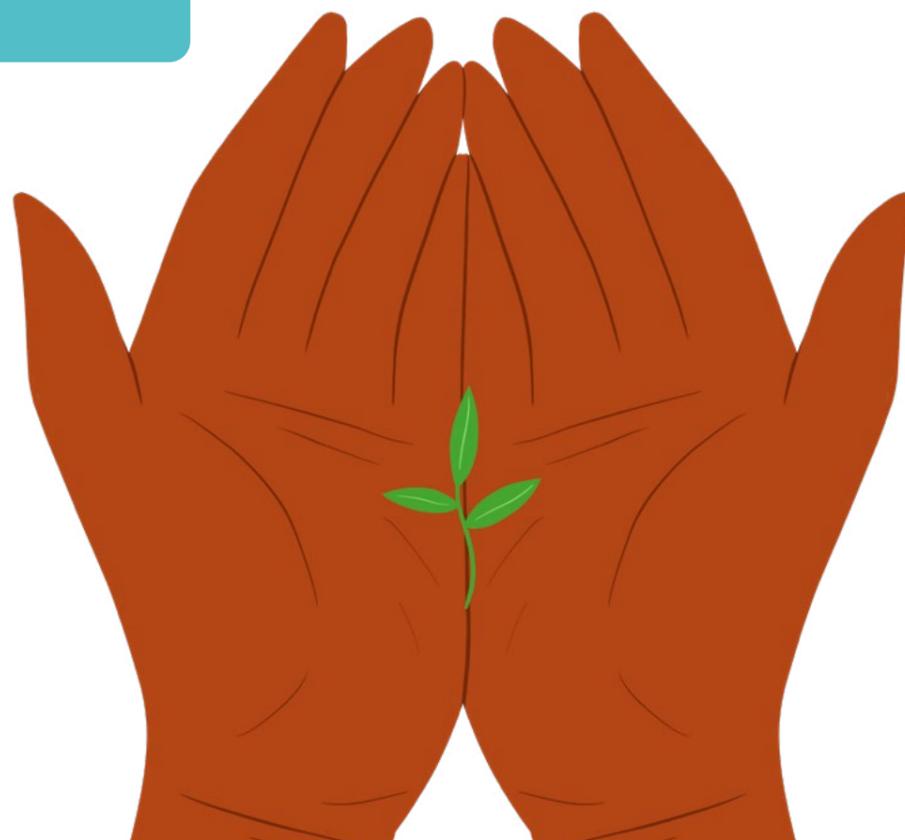
## Feminist economic alternatives as a counter to mainstream approaches to WEE

'Women's economic empowerment' (WEE) has been a development buzz-phrase for several years. The World Trade Organisation, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, G20 and OECD – not to mention numerous bilateral donors – are increasingly talking it up and launching related initiatives. The WTO's Ministerial Declaration on Trade as Tool for Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) is one such example.<sup>68</sup> However, whilst attention to this long-neglected issue is much needed, very often these institutions apply an instrumentalist framing to women's economic empowerment, seeing it ultimately as a tool to increase economic growth. For example, there is typically a focus on encouraging policies aimed at increasing women's labour-force participation and financial inclusion, with little or no attention to rights and conditions. Such approaches are not rights based and largely continue to ignore the contributions of women's unpaid labour to the global economy and their time poverty, further exploit women's paid and underpaid labour and fail to address fundamental questions around redistributing unfairly accumulated wealth through progressive taxation, provision of quality public services, decent work for all and corporate accountability. And all while doing nothing to redress the unequal share of power and wealth wielded by corporations and capitalists in the Global North.<sup>69</sup>

This critique applies more broadly to WEE initiatives that seek to engage with and partially reform economic policy, focusing primarily on very limited equality of opportunity while avoiding fundamentally challenging the socio-cultural gendered, racialised and class-based inequalities or the patriarchal structure of the market-economy at large.<sup>70</sup> Such initiatives – like those focused on women's entrepreneurship – encompass, for instance a focus on individualism, competitiveness, profitability and economic purchasing power, paradoxically placing the emphasis on women to pull themselves out of poverty by incorporating themselves into the very economic system that is oppressing them. In this way, all too often, gender and WEE are used as "tools" to reinvent the status quo,<sup>71</sup> meaning that the "power has been taken out of empowerment."<sup>72</sup> In other

words, if early feminist conceptualisations of WEE entailed agendas for transforming social, economic and political power relations at local and global levels, the mainstreaming of WEE emptied it of this potential. A focus on women's entrepreneurialism and improved market access as a panacea for poverty alleviation, do not address the systems that create and sustain women's economic struggles.<sup>73</sup>

Just as many approaches to WEE have been appropriated by actors for instrumentalist ends through depoliticisation, 'feminist approaches' are also at risk of this, especially when there is a push to make them mainstream. This indicates a lack of accountability and isn't true feminist leadership. As reflected by Inna Michaeli of AWID, the mainstream uptake of 'feminism' should be viewed cautiously, whilst building strong and ambitious agendas and collective understanding of what an economy that works for the people and for the environment looks like.<sup>74</sup>



## 3 Feminist economic alternatives: some examples

Following on from the introduction and section 2 on defining FEAs and their transformative power, in this section we will showcase eight examples of feminist economic alternatives from across the world that are reflective of the framework we have developed above. The featured initiatives range from the macro level to the community level. Many of these examples show how feminist agendas and movements for economic alternatives overlap with, and in many cases form part of, wider economic as well as social and environmental justice movements. These include, for instance, movements around agroecology, quality public services, land rights, decent work, as well as movements for climate, trade, fiscal and tax justice. These examples are organised around the three key themes of centring economies around care, ensuring a just transition and building the conditions for FEAs to flourish. In this volume, each theme will feature two or three examples. For additional examples of FEAs organised per theme we encourage the reader to refer to volumes 2, 3 and 4.

### Theme 1: Centring economies around care

As Tithi Bhattacharya, from Purdue University explains, “The best way to define social reproduction is the activities and institutions that are required for making life, maintaining life, and generationally replacing life. I call it “life-making” activities.”<sup>75</sup> Social reproduction systems, or the creation of people, workers, societies and maintenance of social bonds,<sup>76</sup> as well as social reproduction institutions, as public education, health, care, water, transport, housing etc., are essential to societies and critical to sustaining the prevailing capitalist model. Yet they are taken for granted as mostly free and infinitely available provisions. But they are not. They are gendered, carried out predominantly by women and girls and those whose physical and emotional labour is finite. For instance, women’s unpaid labour is assumed to fill the gaps when state provision of public services are lacking or poor quality due to financing shortfalls and austerity, resulting in many women facing time poverty (not to mention physical and emotional exhaustion) as they try to balance the demands of paid and unpaid work and reducing the quality of such provision. When care work is paid, it remains undervalued and poorly remunerated, as is the case with domestic workers, care workers, cleaners, social workers, teachers and nurses – the majority of whom are women. Women and girls are also largely seen as virtuous environmental carers. While men make

decisions on and design infrastructure, women and girls are often expected to manage farms, homes and resources like water as part of their broader unpaid care burden. When environmental shocks and stressors occur, it is women and girls who clean up and get their homes and communities back on track, often dropping out of school or paid work to do so.<sup>77</sup>

Feminist economic alternatives place a huge emphasis on valuing women’s work, both paid and unpaid, and on recognising that care and well-being<sup>78</sup> are critical to sustaining societies and economies. As such, they should be equally or more important than economic growth.

Diane Elson coined the now-famous ‘Recognise, Reduce and Redistribute’ framework for how this should be achieved.<sup>79</sup> By calling for the recognition of unpaid care work, (some) feminist economists are not necessarily advocating for it to be counted as part of GDP,<sup>80</sup> but for economic systems to be founded on care’s inherent value and the valuing of all those who undertake such work, whether unpaid or paid.<sup>81</sup> Reduction does not only imply lower amounts of unpaid care or domestic work, but also a reduction in its drudgery, such as the 40 billion hours women and girls in Africa spend each year walking to collect water.<sup>82</sup> Finally, redistribution of unpaid care work means not only a shift from women to men within the household, but also redistribution from households and communities to the state in the form of universal, well-financed and high quality gender responsive public services and infrastructure (see page 30 on reclaiming public services).<sup>83</sup> Centring economies around care also requires that both paid and unpaid work, within and outside of the care sector, are decent and free from violence. Towards this purpose, two more elements were recently added to Elson’s RRR framework by the UN High-Level Panel on Women’s Economic Empowerment (UNHLP): Reward, referring to the need for adequate wages and proper working conditions for paid care workers, and Representation, to ensure that such women workers are included at decision-making tables.<sup>84</sup>

Reducing and redistributing women’s unpaid care and domestic work should not be done with the sole purpose of forcing women into the labour market so they can contribute to economic growth as narrowly measured by GDP. Instead, the objective should be to protect and advance women’s rights, including by ensuring women and men have the option to earn a living through decent work opportunities and equally the

right to education, to participate in community decision-making, as well as to rest and leisure. If they choose to be full time carers, appropriate public provisions for pensions and other types of funding ought to be part of economic and social policy planning. Alternative measures of progress and development – no suitable solution yet.

### Alternative measures of progress and development – no suitable solution yet

Mainstream economic principles determine that progress and development ought to be measured purely in terms of economic growth through GDP. Feminist economists almost unanimously agree that this is a narrow approach which fails to acknowledge and address inequalities and perpetuates the invisibility and undervaluing of women’s reproductive role. Whilst some feminist economists have called for unpaid care work to be counted in GDP, others have argued for a fundamental shift away from its use, pointing out that it is a patriarchal construct in the way it discounts unpaid care work, devalues low-paid and unpaid work which is not considered to be productive, as well as externalises and renders invisible the exploitation and environmental destruction necessary for its achievement.<sup>85</sup> Moreover, GDP is focused on economic growth and is no measure for well-being, gender equality, or for how growth is being (re)distributed across a population. In recognition of GDP’s detachment from well-being, an increasing number of countries are now measuring wellbeing.

Bhutan has been measuring ‘Gross National Happiness’ (GNH) as an alternative to GDP as far back as 1972. Its Gross National Happiness Index<sup>86</sup> covers a range of issues, including living standards, health and education, as well as time-use and psychological wellbeing, all of which can be scrutinised according to gender and geographical region.<sup>87</sup> However, although the gendered differences uncovered by the GNH index have led to some positive policy measures, the transformative impacts of these remains contested.<sup>88</sup>

In 2019, under the leadership of Jacinda Ardern, New Zealand designed its entire budget based on well-being priorities, wherein its ministries are mandated to design policies to improve well-being.<sup>89</sup> Budget priorities include addressing child poverty, mental health, a green transition and domestic violence.<sup>90</sup> The budget is not without its criticism, however. Its lack of explicit reference to

We have grouped FEAs looking to centre economies around care under two subthemes: those focused on investments in the care economy and those ensuring decent jobs and we discuss them below.

### 1. Investing in the care economy

Many feminist economists have shown how investing in the care sectors redistributes women’s unpaid care load, but also yields returns to the economy and society well into the future in the form of a better educated, healthier and better cared for population.<sup>96</sup> As such, allocating scarce public resources in this way should be seen as an investment in social infrastructure, rather than as ‘expenditure’ or ‘consumption,’ as is currently seen around the world.

A recent UN Women study found that investing in care sectors is worthwhile. “Although the total annual cost of such investment can go up to 3 to 4% of GDP, the net cost can be halved thanks to significant fiscal returns stemming from increased employment and earnings, without changing the tax structure itself (rates and bands).”<sup>97</sup> The study looked at the costs of providing free universal early quality childcare and education in

gender (in)equality has caused some experts to push for Ardern, who has globally become an icon of good women’s leadership, to make many more systemic changes.<sup>91</sup>

Under women-led administrations, Scotland<sup>92</sup> and Iceland<sup>93</sup> have also developed well-being policy alternatives to a pure focus on GDP, which aim to redress gender and other inequalities by promoting family-friendly policies and tackling wider social inequities. Other countries and entities now monitoring well-being include the UK,<sup>94</sup> EU,<sup>95</sup> and even the global auditing company KPMG has developed an Africa Goodlife Index. Some of these, such as the EU and KPMG examples, are still rooted in the primacy of economic growth and perhaps even instrumentalise well-being as a way to increase GDP. Others may not explicitly address issues from a gendered perspective or recognise other forms of systematic exclusion that impacts negatively upon the well-being of marginalised and excluded groups. Certainly, the growing uptake of such approaches reflects the feminist concern with well-being and an increasing recognition that a focus on economic growth alone is not a measure of human progress. However, so far, there is no single measure of progress and development that is widely accepted across feminist macroeconomic alternatives or that guarantees a holistic, intersectional understanding of societal relations and therefore that does not perpetuate power imbalances.

South Africa, Turkey and Uruguay. It found that, whilst the initial costs for all children from 0-6 years old may be 3-4% of GDP, the employment-generating effects – especially for women, who form the large majority of early education professionals – and the long term fiscal return on the investment would outstrip all costs due to mothers closing their lifetime employment and earnings gaps following such a comprehensive childcare offer, and therefore contributing more through taxes.<sup>98</sup> For example, in South Africa, a modest gross annual investment of 1.8% of GDP into early childhood care would create more than 1.2 million new jobs, and assuming that most of these jobs would go to

women, an increase of 5.3 percentage points in the female employment rate. These jobs would generate more than US \$2 million in new tax and social security revenue.<sup>99</sup> UN Women also show that state provision of a package of family-friendly policies that includes income support across the life-course and healthcare is affordable for most countries. A quarter of countries (41 out of 155 studied) could implement these policies for less than 3% of GDP, and just over half (79 countries) could do so for less than 5% of GDP. For one fifth of countries (35) included in their study, these policies would cost more than 10% of GDP, which would require additional external support to achieve, including Official

Development Assistance (ODA), as well as renewed efforts to eliminate tax evasion and avoidance, which cost developing countries up to 200 billion dollars every year.<sup>100</sup>

Research by the ILO in 2018 found that a doubling of investment in the care economy could lead to a total of 475 million jobs by 2030, meaning 269 million new jobs globally.<sup>101</sup> Research by the UK Women's Budget Group for the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) in 2016 showed that investing public funds in childcare and elder care services is more effective in reducing public deficits and debt than austerity policies.<sup>102</sup> A follow up study from June 2020 showed that post-Covid-19, in the UK, investing in both child and adult social care would create 2.7 times as many jobs as the same investment in construction, resulting in 6.3 times as many jobs for women and 10% more jobs for men. 2 million jobs would be created by increasing the number of care workers to 10% of the employed population.<sup>103</sup>

### The Integrated National Care System - Uruguay

Uruguay is one of several countries in Latin America<sup>104</sup> – and one of very few in the world – that has worked to develop a coherent policy framework on care.<sup>105</sup> The care agenda in the Latin American region has sought to go beyond making visible and recognising women's unpaid contributions to the economy to proposing concrete policies for redistributing care both between men and women as well as between households and society.<sup>106</sup>

The Uruguay Integrated National Care System (Sistema Nacional Integrado de Cuidados – SNIC) aims to implement and coordinate care policies for all those with care needs, notably young children, the elderly and people living with disabilities. In line with the rights-based approaches to care that have been progressively enshrined through the Regional Conferences on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, the SNIC is set within a strong rights framework. This recognises both the right to receive quality care and rights of paid carers to perform their work in decent working conditions.<sup>107</sup> The SNIC and its unique feminist framing is enshrined in a legal document that explicitly states the urgent need to redistribute unpaid care and domestic work between women and men.<sup>108</sup>

Launched in 2016, the SNIC aims to complement existing policies on health, education and social security with new policies for those with particular care needs. For example, the SNIC aims to provide universal care services for children aged three to five and increased coverage for children from birth to two years. This includes the extension of paid parental leave and the option of part-time work for parents during their child's first six months.<sup>109</sup>

The SNIC is based on a principle of co-responsibility for the provision of quality care that is shared by the State

– which is clearly positioned as principal rights duty-bearer – and the community, the market, families, and women and men. It seeks to challenge the gendered division of labour within households and promoting the social (re)valuation of paid care work. The SNIC helps facilitate the improvement and availability of public services, the regulation of private care givers, guaranteeing quality standards and the provision of training to caregivers.<sup>110</sup>

The SNIC and its strong rights-based framing and approach was the result of years of activism by an alliance of women's movements, social movements, female politicians and feminist academics, who successfully politicised the issue of care so it is framed as a societal, human rights and women's rights issue.<sup>111 112</sup>

How it works: A National Care Secretariat sits within the Ministry of Social Development and coordinates with other ministries, representatives from which make up the SNIC 'board.' The board establishes broad policies and priorities.<sup>113</sup> Women's organisations participate in the monitoring and implementation largely through their membership of Red Pro Cuidados (Pro Care Network), a civil society network set up to monitor and advocate for the effective implementation of the SNIC. Red Pro Cuidados is a member of an Advisory Committee, designed to help ensure accountable implementation of the care system by engaging with the SNIC board and secretariat along with others from civil society, academia, care service providers and care workers.<sup>114</sup> The Advisory Committee enjoys a good relationship with the authorities, who have been receptive to feedback and proposals.<sup>115</sup>

Although, to date, there has been no systematic gathering of data to evaluate the care system's effectiveness,<sup>116</sup> there is evidence that the expansion of services has helped address care needs in areas where early education quotas were full and by increasing accessibility to day centres for the elderly, which many women attend. Furthermore, as a result of training, personal care assistants are showing increased levels of professionalism and are able to deliver better quality care.<sup>117</sup>

A few challenges with the SNIC should be noted, however. One criticism relates to the early closing hours of the childcare centres, which can create challenges for working parents.<sup>118</sup> Another argued by Valeria Esquivel is that, although the Care Act integrates a strong gender perspective, women's groups such as the National Women's Institute must strengthen their position on the SNIC board to ensure that gender mainstreaming takes place in the policy design and implementation phases. Its gradual approach to implementation also means universality of access will not be immediately achieved.<sup>119</sup> In terms of sustainable financing, fiscal pressures could emerge in respect to Uruguay's demographic trends, which see an aging



population and lower fertility rates.<sup>120</sup> The recently elected government has also made reducing the fiscal deficit a key priority and seems much less interested in further advancing the SNIC's coverage beyond what has already been rolled out, which could pose risks to future funding and future expansion of the services and packages offered<sup>121</sup> – a risk that could increase given the economic impacts of Covid-19. Indeed, Red Pro Cuidados has criticised the siphoning of funds from the SNIC budget to pay for Covid-19-related equipment at a time when care needs due to the pandemic were intensifying dramatically.<sup>122</sup>

## 2. Ensuring decent jobs

The four pillars of decent work, as defined by the International Labour Organisation, encompass opportunities for work and job creation; protection and promotion of rights at work; access to social protection; and freedom of association and social dialogue, with gender equality as a cross-cutting issue.<sup>123</sup> Feminist advocacy on decent work overlaps with the labour movement and in some contexts includes collaborations with trade union and worker organisations. Demands and strategies promoting feminist economic alternatives to advance decent work put forth by groups such as APWLD, FEMNET, Womankind, PSI and ITUC, include the redistribution of women's unpaid care work;<sup>124</sup> full implementation of relevant ILO Conventions and labour standards, including for women working in the informal economy and those working in the care economy; ambitious gender-transformative industrial strategies that foster decent jobs for women; no trade-offs between job creation and job quality, including with respect to trade deals and expansion of global value chains; robust social protection systems; and effective regulation of the corporate sector to end rights violations and ensure accountability.<sup>125</sup>

Feminist analysis also shows us how patriarchal and racist norms mean that women's work – especially the work of women of colour, working class and migrant women – is fundamentally undervalued, unrecognised and unsupported. As such, as highlighted on page 17, women's rights organisations, feminist economists and trade unions have argued for investing in social care as a key strategy to both foster decent jobs for women whilst redistributing the care workload to the State.

As discussed in the introduction, women around the world, particularly in countries in the Global South, face barriers with respect to every one of the decent work pillars. Violence and harassment of women in their homes, on the streets and in the places where they work is also a major barrier to decent work. Without collective bargaining, freedom of association and the widespread knowledge among workers of their rights, prevention and redress of violence and harassment in the world of work cannot be possible.

### Cooperatives as an important tool

Women and their wider communities in many countries and regions have long been organising themselves into cooperatives. These are enterprises controlled by and run for the benefit of their members, where profits are used to develop the business or are returned to the members. They are typically based on principles of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity,<sup>126</sup> and engaging in forms of solidarity-based exchange and mutual support to promote sustainable livelihoods and access to decent work.<sup>127</sup>

Women's cooperatives can help create and preserve employment in traditional sectors and promote decent work by providing quality and stable jobs, facilitating women's entry into the labour force, building solidarity and collective voice, integrating disadvantaged workers and helping the transition from informal to formal employment.<sup>128</sup> The ILO also argues that by bringing workers together under a collective, cooperatives can help guard against the precarity of jobs in emerging sectors such as paid care work managed through the gig economy.<sup>129</sup> As such, they are hailed as helping to address gender gaps in employment and in women's leadership,<sup>130</sup> including through their frequent provision of childcare and other public services that shift women's burden of unpaid care work and promote access to finance and credit. In this report series we showcase seven examples of cooperatives around the world as feminist economic alternatives.

However, cooperatives face challenges that put their viability and sustainability at risk, including a lack of knowledge of cooperative management and legal systems and limited access to funds, particularly for new and developing cooperatives. These challenges can be overcome through information sharing, training programmes and developing networks and alliances across the cooperative movement.<sup>131</sup>

### Ending violence in the world of work – the transformative potential of ILO Convention 190 around the world

The conventions of the ILO provide a critical set of global labour standards that have been mutually agreed to by states, trade unions and employers. The recently passed Convention 190 on Violence and Harassment (C190)<sup>132</sup> is the direct result of trade unions and global feminist organising (within and outside of trade unions),



Nasima Akhter, manages Kalyanpur Café, Safety and Rights Society in Dhaka, which supports garment workers, mainly women, to understand labour law and their rights. The cafés, supported by ActionAid Bangladesh, provide advice, training and support on a range of issues, such as being paid the minimum wage, unfair dismissal and sexual violence and harassment. She says she hears about incidents of sexual violence and harassment about once or twice a month. "I would assume there are more such incidents, but women are not talking about it," she says. "I have spoken with around 600 workers, mostly women. I would say I have heard stories of violence from around 150."

supported by wider civil society advocacy, including by ActionAid.<sup>133</sup> Approved by a two-thirds majority at the International Labour Conference in June 2019, the historic C190 and accompanying Recommendation No. 206<sup>134</sup> recognise for the first time the pervasive levels of violence and harassment faced by women in the world of work and provide a concrete framework for addressing it. It recognises public and private spaces as sites of violence, including the journey to and from work. Working conditions are acknowledged as a risk factor of violence along with other underlying causes, such as gender stereotypes, multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and unequal gender-based power relations, which states are required to take actions to address.

The progressive content and inclusive scope of C190, covering both formal and informal sector workers as well as public and private sectors, means it holds significant transformative potential for women workers if ratified by states and implemented effectively. C190 outlines a universal legal definition of what is meant by violence and harassment and gender-based violence in the world of work, making it visible and challenging its normalisation.<sup>135</sup>

"[It is] the first time that we've had [an] International Labour instrument that's this clear in the fact that it covers anybody regardless of your contractual status, and it covers apprentices, interns, trainings, job applicants, job seekers, retirees, racialised Indigenous workers, migrant workers, LGBTI workers, pregnant women, young woman. The fact that it marries the two worlds of human rights, and occupational health and safety and labour rights, I think is where the real transformative power resides."

**Chidi King, Director of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) Equality Department**

## The justice deficit for women in Jordan: a case study of violence and harassment in the workplace

In 2018 ActionAid carried out research in Ghana and Jordan on the main barriers for women and girls' access to justice. Our research in Jordan found that Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG), or fear of VAWG at work, is a key factor in preventing women from joining the workplace in a sustainable way.

In a survey with 2,323 workers (85% of whom were women) in eight industrial zones across Jordan we found that one in five women have experienced one or more forms of VAWG in the workplace. We learned that women have to face a wide range of violence at work, particularly i) unwanted staring (20%); ii) verbal sexual harassment (17%); iii) unwanted messages (16%); iv) unwanted touching (15%); v) unwanted gestures (15%); vi) stalking (10%) and vii) unwanted invitations of a sexual or romantic nature (10%). Even in the lowest percentage categories, the figures are deeply worrying. For example, twenty women shared that they had experienced rape in the workplace. Given the deep sensitivities and hesitations around

reporting, the actual number is likely to be higher. A clear trend emerged that the more informal the work, the higher the risk of violence and harassment. The groups facing the biggest rates of violence at work were interns (25%) and daily wage workers (21%) (see Figure 3). It is important to underscore that most working women in Jordan, especially from poor and marginalised groups, tend to be found in such informal roles. Further, according to the latest UN calculations, in 2011 (even before the largest arrival of Syrian refugees), approximately 44% of the Jordanian economy was comprised of informal work (almost 500,000 people). This highlights the significant scale of women and girls at risk. This research found that – in the largest pool of women at work in Jordan – 21-25% have experienced one or more forms of violence. On the other hand, where women were found in more formal roles, such as those with permanent contracts and in management, only 3-4% reported experiencing violence at work. A further key finding is that there is a serious risk of VAWG outside of the official place of work. Women answered that 40% of the time, violence and harassment occurred on the way to and from work. This finding is relevant to the ILO Convention, which emphasises that governments and organisations should take steps to ensure protection from VAWG on the commute to and from work.



Photo: Marah Khalid/ActionAid

The “Be Safe” “كوني الآمان” initiative focused on addressing GBV, early marriage and violence issues using interactive theatre. Women learned crafts (crochet, cup design, soup and candle making) while sharing their views on these issues.

Member states are required to take appropriate measures to monitor and enforce national laws and regulations regarding violence and harassment in the world of work, and ensure access to appropriate, safe and effective remedies and reporting and dispute resolution mechanisms, so that perpetrators can be held to account. C190 also acknowledges the ramifications of domestic violence in the world of work, with states required to take measures to mitigate its impacts. States are also re-committed to respecting and promoting the fundamental rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining, which is crucial to ensuring women have a voice and can engage with employers to advocate for their rights. As Chidi King highlights, C190 and Recommendation 206 recognise that the world of work “is not operating in a vacuum”: there are societal factors that states also need to be addressing. It is not exclusively the role of employers to address and implement the commitments in C190.<sup>136</sup>

Now the work of pushing countries to ratify and fully implement Convention 190 has begun.<sup>137</sup> Uruguay and Fiji were first to ratify C190 in June 2020,<sup>138</sup> while Namibia, Argentina, Finland, and Spain had formally committed to do so.<sup>139</sup> To be transformative and foster a world of work free from violence for women and girls, implementation of C190 must go hand-in-hand with wider actions at national level to promote equality and non-discrimination and prevent and respond to violence, as well as ratification of other important conventions aimed at advancing women's right to decent work. These include Convention 100 on Equal Remuneration,<sup>140</sup> Convention 111 on Discrimination, Convention 156 on Workers with Family Responsibilities, Convention 183 on Maternity Protection, as well as the equally ground-breaking Convention 189 on Domestic Workers (discussed further below).<sup>141</sup> Moreover, urgent global action is needed to redress the governance gaps that allow violence and other rights violations in global supply chains and linked to corporate activities to go unchecked. States must support the development of a UN Binding Treaty on business and human rights (see page 35) as one important strategy for pursuing this.

## Theme 2: Ensuring a just transition

Women are more impacted by the ways that the climate crisis is changing their living environment and are at the forefront of the struggle for climate justice, yet women are less likely to take part in meetings where decisions are made that affect how we deal with the climate crisis. Confronted by the effects of human-induced climate change, accelerated by extractivist and exploitative economic methods, the case for transitioning from our current agriculture, food and energy systems which cause the massive depletion of natural resources and biological diversity is an urgent one.<sup>142</sup> The term

“just transition” does not only describe what the new system will look like, but also how that transformation should be carried out. To be truly just, transitions must: address – and not exacerbate – inequalities; transform systems to work for people, nature and the climate; ensure inclusiveness and participation; and develop comprehensive policy frameworks.<sup>143</sup> Feminist academics are deeply involved in current global debates on natural resource management and the case is being made by feminist movements and women's rights organisations (as JASS and WoMin) for a just transition that goes beyond an energy transition. A just transition is needed to replace the global extractive economy, which is based on the concentration of power over and exploitation of resources and human labour – especially of women's bodies and work. With a regenerative economy, based on community resilience, social equity and ecological & social care and wellbeing.<sup>144</sup> Moreover, they are demanding that the externalisation of the costs of the prevailing extractive neoliberal system, through for instance the impending natural disasters caused by the climate crisis, on women and the environment is ended. There are many different ideas on what a just transition should look like (see more in Volume 3), but the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD) speaks about a universal basic income, energy democracy and the redistribution of land as key components of a just transition.<sup>145</sup>

There can be no just transition without addressing the barriers and exclusions that women face in the prevailing economic system. Patriarchy is one of the key pillars of the extractive economy that is causing the climate crisis. As the WRO Just Associates (JASS) explain in their framework for a just transition “Patriarchy together with racism and colonialism constitute the interconnected and pre-capitalist structures of domination that are the foundation of the extractive economy.”<sup>146</sup> A just transition must recognise that women's unpaid work sustains societies and that women's work commonly is in low emission, yet insecure and informal employment, including subsistence farming, service industries, domestic and care work.<sup>147</sup> In a just transition towards ‘green jobs’ it is crucial that jobs are also created in the care sector. Some ecological feminists - including feminist economists) have adopted or refer to the term ‘ecofeminism’, explaining this as challenging both the patriarchal and neo-colonial structures for women's communal ownership and control over land, seeds, and the valuing of associated indigenous knowledge. In their seminal book ‘Ecofeminism’ Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva explain how “everywhere, women were the first to protest against environmental destruction. As activists in the ecology movements, it became clear to us that science and technology were not gender neutral; and in common with many other women, we began to see that the relationship of exploitative dominance between man and nature, (shaped by reductionist modern science since the 16th century) and the exploitative and oppressive relationship between men and women and prevails

in most patriarchal societies, even modern industrial ones, were closely connected.”<sup>148</sup> Gender, race and class inequalities are of importance in intersectional ecofeminism.<sup>149</sup> Ecofeminism is understood by others as a ‘feminist political ecology’ (FPE). Central to FPE is the notion of the commons (which are not reducible to mere “resources,” care work for instance is included) and the recognition that commons reflect gender and other relationships in society that are inseparable from relations to nature. Attention must be paid to how gender and other power dynamics shape access to and control over resources (as land, seeds, water etc.) in a specific place and that commons are the product and site of communal acts of care and responsibility. Or as academics Sato and Alarcón explain: there can be “no commons without a community.”<sup>150</sup>

**Ruth Nyambura of the African Eco Feminist Collective, explains further:**

“In a very narrow scope, an ecofeminist movement to me is concerned with transforming the ways in which economic, intellectual and ecological resources are accessed by women, especially those most vulnerable and often on the frontlines of ecological devastation and climate change. It also means constantly working to re-claim and re-imagine much more just and egalitarian ways of being with one another and fundamentally for me that means destroying patriarchy and reclaiming ideas of the commons.”<sup>151</sup>

There are two types of FEA within this theme: the first an example of the feminist demand for women’s land rights, food sovereignty and self-sufficiency within a just transition from extractive food systems. This is followed by two examples of the alternatives that are created while resisting extractivism for a just transition away from extractive and destructive energy systems.

### 1. Women’s land rights, food sovereignty and self-sufficiency

Working a triple shift is a burden most women farmers face. In addition to farming, women do most of the household labour, collecting water and firewood, cooking, cleaning and washing, as well as caring for family and community members. Women have always been active in producing food crops, processing food and marketing. However, despite comprising almost

half of the world’s agricultural producers,<sup>152</sup> women have access to and control less than 20% of the land globally.<sup>153</sup> Their weak land rights and limited access and control over land makes them extremely vulnerable to land grabbing by investors or even by the men in their communities and families. Measures as the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests (VGGTs)<sup>154</sup> and Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) or the right to say ‘No’ are weakly applied, if applied at all. Land rights affect women’s livelihoods in many ways and determine their access to affordable nutritious food, their economic, educational and healthcare options and their resilience in the face of climate change.<sup>155</sup> Poorly designed trade policies and a system of rules that privilege the interests of wealthy countries and corporates over women’s rights, human rights and the environment have been deeply harmful to women. Trade policies often undermine the livelihoods and land rights, including of small-scale women farmers, producers and informal economy workers, who struggle to compete with multinational companies and commonly face displacement and the fall-out of environmental harm.<sup>156</sup> This is repeated in ODA disbursements, through donors promoting industrial agriculture for export by MNCs, such as the G8’s New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition in Africa<sup>157</sup> from which countries such as France and the US have been withdrawing.<sup>158</sup> Food sovereignty allows communities control over the way food is produced, traded and consumed, so that food systems are created for people and the environment rather than to make a profit.<sup>159</sup> Peasant organisations (for which the struggle against the oppression and exploitation of women is often fundamental<sup>160</sup>) are calling for food self-sufficiency, to ‘take the neoliberalism out of agriculture,’ focusing on trade, localisation and shorter food supply chains in addition to reclaiming the sovereignty of southern governments. Moving the focus from just national self-sufficiency in food production (‘the right of nations’) to local self-sufficiency (‘the rights of peoples’).<sup>161</sup>

### Food justice through feminist agroecology – Senegal

A strong feminist movement for food justice and resource rights in the West African region has caused an important shift in Senegalese policy. We Are the Solution (WAS), a women-farmer-led organisation based on agroecological practices and food sovereignty, directly challenged agro-industrial policies and commercialised agriculture to propose alternative mechanisms for food sovereignty across West Africa, including in Senegal. WAS is made up of 800 rural women’s associations across seven countries and is a pan African campaign born of African farmer platforms mobilising to fight against corporate agricultural policies. The movement seeks to build the capacity of women leaders on a number of aspects related to gender-aware agroecological practice and

everyday land, seed and business management.<sup>162</sup> Ultimately the WAS campaign’s aim is: to promote good agricultural practices and knowledge that have been known and handed down for generations in Africa and have sustained food sovereignty on the continent; to influence decision-makers and promote better agricultural governance; and to value family agricultural production.<sup>163</sup> As a result of WAS efforts, Senegal is about to start its agricultural transition to agroecology. The agroecological transition, which has the support of the President, is one of the five major initiatives of the priority action plan for the second phase of the Plan Sénégal Emergent (2019-2024). Increasingly severe climate hazards, strong population growth and the adverse environmental consequences of the Green Revolution<sup>164</sup> mean that it is necessary to take a fresh look at agricultural development strategies and foster more sustainable practices.<sup>165</sup>

### What is agroecology?

Agroecology is the science of sustainable agricultural ecosystems, a set of farming practices, and a social movement. The agroecology movement is part of the struggle for the right to produce healthy food and to preserve natural resources: land, water, seeds, plants and all the teeming life that is biodiversity.<sup>166</sup> Agroecology draws on social, biological and agricultural sciences and integrates these with traditional, indigenous and farmers’ knowledge and cultures. It focuses on the interactions between microorganisms, plants, animals, humans and the environment.

Highly knowledge-intensive, context specific and locally adaptive, its technologies are developed based on farmers’ knowledge and participatory on-farm experimentation. Adopted by millions worldwide, and increasingly as a strategy to mitigate the effects of climate change, agroecology knowledge and skills are ‘scaled out’ or transmitted horizontally most powerfully through ‘peasant protagonism’ and social movement-driven ‘farmer-to-farmer’ methods. Agroecology’s key principles include recycling nutrients and energy on farm, rather than introducing external chemical inputs; integrating crops and livestock; diversifying species and genetic resources; and focusing on interactions and productivity across the agroecosystem, rather than focusing on individual species. Highly people-centred, the main agroecology approaches include integrated pest and nutrient management, conservation tillage, agroforestry, aquaculture, water harvesting and livestock integration.<sup>167</sup>

As Mariama Sonko, who has been part of the WAS movement since 1990, explains: “The focus on conventional agriculture, an agro-industrial policy imposed on us by multinationals, which is based on seductive theories but in reality is fragile, dangerous and even destructive in its socio-economic and environmental impacts. This works to the detriment of family farming or agroecology that has always sustained food sovereignty in Africa... We practice agroecology and family farming; we encourage food sovereignty, farmer seeds, biodiversity and the demand for equitable access to resources.” Sonko explains how the aim of the movement is ‘One Africa’ where, in solidarity, small scale farmers are involved in decision-making, and cultivate, process, consume and sell the products of African family farming while preserving the environment for a harmonious development.<sup>168</sup>

When reviewing agroecological movements elsewhere it is important to remain aware of the risk of patriarchal bias within agroecology and food sovereignty unless specifically addressed, even though feminism is often seen as inherent to the agroecological movement. Moreover, moving beyond binary conceptions of gender and considering multiple axes of differences remain critical tasks for many agroecological initiatives. As Nyambura explains: a technologically different way of farming, away from industrial agriculture, is useless unless questions of power are not constructively addressed. “Patriarchal relations of power do not disappear just because people are farming using agroecological methods and it is dangerous to assume this.(...) Agroecology and family farming are limited in their revolutionary potential if womxn continue to face the violence of patriarchy in their immediate surroundings and especially with relation to access and control over the ecological resources and the exploitation of their reproductive and productive labour.”<sup>169</sup> Agroecology can form part of efforts to address gender inequalities and create alternative economies, especially when changes are made to the material realities in the lives of women and to relations and structures of power (see ‘Defining FEAs’ on page 9). Such as the challenging and changing of gender and social norms within food production and access and control over resources (as land and seeds), as well as the recognising, valuing, redistributing and collectivising of women’s work, including their unpaid care work, to end the triple shift (see page 24).<sup>170</sup> Moreover, feminist agroecology could be the result of a just transition, as it addresses inequalities, is inclusive, good for nature and people, and as a comprehensive framework was developed to address the current issues caused by largescale agro-industry

## Climate Resilient Sustainable Agriculture

Agroecology-based Climate Resilient Sustainable Agriculture (CRSA) prioritises the right to food, environmental conservation, and long-term community resilience, and is on the key pillars of ActionAid's POWER project. Women participants received training on homestead vegetable gardening through agricultural extension service providers from the government's Department of Agricultural Extension in Bangladesh. Jamila is a participant who learned about homestead vegetable gardening and CRSA techniques along with her group. She is applying her learning in her vegetable garden.

Jamila works as a day labourer in other people's crop fields to generate income during cultivation and harvesting seasons. Now she is earning from selling the vegetables that she produces. From vegetable gardening, she thinks she can earn more as there are different vegetables to be cultivated in different seasons. Her family members, especially her husband, support her to do the household chores at home, she can manage extra time for gardening, and producing vegetable and selling them into market.



Photo: Noore Jannat Proma/ActionAid

Ms. Jamila Khatun – member of 'Amrao Pari Women Group', Kakiya village, Mogolhat Union, Lalmonirhat in Bangladesh.

Food sovereignty and agroecology offer powerful alternatives to the unequal and gendered power relations in rural and urban communities and are themselves tools and pathways to overcoming the oppressive structures in which women are embedded (involving race, caste, class, gender, sexuality, age, ethnicity and (dis)ability).<sup>171</sup> For instance, a mid-term evaluation of ActionAid's Agroecology and Resilience (AER) project in Senegal and The Gambia highlighted that it had led to increased solidarity and joint action between women at community level, reporting a shift in power relations at family, community and government level and having greater access to land, tools, seed, small ruminants, finance and knowledge. Women farmers participating in the project have also begun producing cash crops that have traditionally been grown by men, such as groundnut, maize and cassava, and tools such as milling and de-hulling machines and water saving techniques, have reduced their physical burdens, freeing up hours and days of their time.<sup>172</sup> Women-led agroecological practice, grounded in women's collective and self-organisational power, can be a feminist subversion to the extractivism (not just mining but also agri-business, industrialised fishing etc.) that dominates mainstream policy. Ensuring equal spaces of shared power, participation and income, combined with ending gender-based violence and sexism are critical components of feminist agroecology.<sup>173</sup>

## 2. Resisting extractivism for a just transition

Alternatives are often born from women's collective resistance. In resisting extractivism, women are actively saying 'Yes' to an alternative for the future. As Samantha Hargreaves from WoMin explains: "As people say 'No' they are saying 'Yes' to what they are defending: their land, their own decision-making processes, their way of living, resources they are depending from etc. We can look at resistance and see what the alternatives are that people are defending. Women are often clear in their defense of their resources as they know what is necessary."<sup>174</sup> This is where the spaces for collective co-creation and imagination are once again of importance. "Often women at the community level do not have the opportunity to move towards a space that is imaginative and offer more propositional ideas, away from what corporates and the government make possible. Going to the 'Yes' [and what women are actively defending] more thoughtfully is how we can support the ideas needed for an ecofeminist just transition."<sup>175</sup>

## Resisting extractivism while building the alternative – South Africa & Brazil

In the Eastern Cape region of South Africa, the iconic case of the Amadiba Crisis Committee of Pondoland provides a powerful testimony of the effective realisation of the 'Right to say No'. This community rejected extractivism and came up with its own development alternatives, namely ecotourism and renewable energy projects. As community activist Nonhle Mbutuma explains "We know who we are because of the land. We believe that once you have lost the land, you have

lost your identity. We also believe that it is our right to live in a healthy environment, an environment which is not harmful to us, that has clean air with no air pollution, no pollution of the land and no contamination of the water. To make all these things happen, we believe that women must be a part of decision making."<sup>176</sup> Demonstrating that the right to say 'No' to mining is also the right to say 'Yes' to self-determined living and giving communities a concrete instrument to come up with their own development model through grassroots processes and law from below. The promotion of the 'Right to say No' concept builds on the FPIC concept



(Free Prior and Informed Consent), which goes further to affirm the rights of affected communities to say 'No' to proposals from TNCs when they are not satisfied with negotiation outcomes. As such, the 'Right to say No' gives communities a greater voice and puts them in a more equitable position in the negotiating processes, while putting pressure on TNCs to respect indigenous and customary rights.<sup>177</sup> Similarly, the Movimento dos Atingidos por Barragens or 'Movement of People Affected by Dams' (MAB), is a national grassroots social movement in Brazil that rose out of popular protests against the construction of hydroelectric dams across the country. These mega-infrastructure projects led to the displacement of thousands of communities and over a million people, in order to generate cheap electricity for electro-intensive industries. MAB fights for environmental sustainability and peoples' rights to land, housing and community life. They believe that access to energy should not be a commodity but a common public good, available to all without speculation and profit. The movement is proposing an alternative energy model that puts women and oppressed peoples at the centre and gives them a voice in the decision-making process. In line with this, MAB demands national legal reform to secure equal compensation for men and women workers in cases of displacement, retrenchments and ecological damage. They are calling for an entire overhaul of the energy system (production, transmission, distribution and commercialisation) in Brazil with a sharp reduction in electricity prices by promoting equal energy tariffs for the general population and large corporations, free electricity for rural households below a minimum energy threshold and the application of a low-wage tariff for low-income households.

The ways in which the resistance to Brazil's current energy system is offering a more democratic alternative can be seen also from MAB's movement-building work. The movement-building work reflects the alternative model through its emphasis on popular political education and leadership trainings for women and oppressed groups. All MAB local grassroots groups must have an equal number of women and men in the group's leadership. In order to address gender discrimination within the movement, MAB also created autonomous spaces for women to meet and strategise about their demands and actions. MAB is trying through its advocacy to address gender discrimination in the labour market and recognise women's unequal role in social reproduction. Policy changes can take time, so the movement also works to secure concrete achievements that improve women's lives, such as access to electricity, incentives for the production of healthy food through organic gardens, and water storage and heating technologies. This also frees up women's time to participate in mobilisations and decision-making processes at all levels within the movement.<sup>178</sup>

### Theme 3: Building the conditions for FEAs to flourish

The feminist strategies and initiatives for systemic transformation are not enacted within a vacuum. DAWN's "Remaking of Social Contracts: Feminists in a Fierce New World" describes the overall dynamics that shape the contexts for FEAs. The period from 1945 to 1980 saw post-war economic growth, the unravelling of colonial empires, belief in the possibility of a New International Economic Order, challenges to the idea of limitless growth, the rise of global social movements including women's movements, expansive policies of the welfare and developmental states, and greater monitoring of the activities of transnational corporations. Then the period from 1980 to 2008 saw the breaking of these beliefs and related institutions, and the emergence of more conservative social contracts and the start of an era of financial globalisation driven by the pressure to remove all barriers to free flows of money and capital, as well as the shrinking of the state, which was caricatured as inevitably bloated and corrupt.<sup>179</sup> During this second period, social contracts<sup>180</sup> between governments and their people, especially in the Global South became fractured.

In fact, as can be seen throughout the report, many FEAs are born from, and are themselves, acts of resistance due to the oppressive external environment and the erosion of the social contract. Increasing restrictions on civil society space, exploitative trade policies, privatisation of and cuts to public services, unbridled corporate power, rising authoritarianism, the erosion of democratic accountability, along with violence and threats against women human rights defenders, are posing serious risks to any fragile gains and women's ability to collectively advocate for and implement feminist economic alternatives.

Indeed the contexts for feminist economic alternatives, premised as they are on women's autonomy, collective action, and state responsiveness and accountability, is becoming increasingly restrictive and disabling. Nonetheless, as this report series shows, women continue to develop creative strategies for surviving, thriving and resisting in often extremely challenging contexts. And there are numerous encouraging examples of states and municipalities implementing progressive policy frameworks that serve to support women's rights.

Central to this is the the reversion of the power imbalance of the Global North and South and the restoration of sovereignty and self-determination of global south governments. The struggle for the reclamation of the social contract between people and their governments in the global south cannot happen without this power reversion.



Post-independence, developmental states in the Global South made alternative policy, embarked on economy-restructuring as well as making geopolitical choices (South-South cooperation/solidarity/collective negotiations in intergovernmental spaces). While they were largely patriarchal in nature they were the contexts women lived in and have lost. These alternative political choices have been systematically dismantled through the weakening of multilateralism and the promotion instead of elite club governance through the G8, G7 and the G20. As well as, of course, the imposition of Washington Consensus-style structural adjustment programmes and wider neoliberal policies across the Global South. These include poorly designed trade policies, tax evasion and avoidance schemes that break the social contract and a system of rules that privilege the interests of wealthy countries and corporates over women's rights and which exacerbate and exploit women's historical position of social and economic disadvantage.<sup>181</sup> Feminist struggle is taking place within the context of extreme power differentials between the North and the South.

Therefore, in addition to our principal call for states to institute gender transformative policies and frameworks rooted in feminist principles, states can support FEAs by creating the conditions for FEAs to flourish. These conditions are constructed through economic policies, financing, reining in corporate power and respecting and expanding civic space. Emphasising a conducive environment for FEAs is not to suggest that the burden of ensuring their rights are fulfilled and redressing the wrongs of the economic system should continue to rest with women, or that states do not need to urgently step up to finance and provide quality gender responsive public services, social protection and decent work opportunities for women. Rather, in addition to this and as part of the shift towards a more progressive economic system, states need to recognise and support women-led initiatives and women's autonomous organising that fall outside of current mainstream economic discourse and approaches.

There are four types of FEA within this theme: firstly, essential initiatives to centring care in our economies are those that reclaim public goods and services from privatisation. Specifically the reclaiming of access by women to Brazil's Babassu forests. Next are initiatives for protection and collective healing to sustain women's leadership and movements. Followed by initiatives to ensure corporate accountability globally and maximising public financing through shaping feminist solidarity-based economic multilateralism.

## 1. Reclaiming public goods and services from privatisation

Reclaiming public goods and services from privatisation is essential to ensuring the centring of care in our economies. Public care services in particular, are a

way in which states acknowledge and ensure the redistribution of social reproductive work and women's care work as integral to our economies.<sup>182</sup> Good quality, gender-responsive public services (GRPS)<sup>183</sup> are key to redressing the historical gendered division of labour that places the burden of unpaid care predominantly on women and girls as well the intersectional nature of discrimination. GRPS are vital to ensuring the progressive realisation of women's economic and wider human rights, as well as to tackling social exclusion based on other intersecting aspects of women's identities.

To ensure their universality of access, quality and coverage, along with accountability of the State as principal rights duty-bearer, public services should be publicly financed and publicly delivered. However, since the 1980s, waves of commercialisation (where for instance user fees were introduced) leading to a wave of privatisation often linked to IMF and World Bank loan conditionalities, have taken things in the opposite direction. According to the IMF, as of 2019, privatisation of public assets and services is being considered by 59 governments in 39 developing and 20 high-income countries. Meanwhile, 60 IMF country reports suggested strengthening public-private-partnerships (PPPs), representing 50 developing countries and 10 high-income countries,<sup>184</sup> as a way to finance social services and infrastructure projects. With the negotiation of the 'Trade in Services Agreement' (TiSA) by some 50 members of the WTO – although talks have been on hold since 2016 – public services are at risk of being further used as bargaining chips and privatised as key export products.<sup>185</sup>

The Covid-19 pandemic has, however, exposed the consequences of decades of privatisation strategies that have undermined public health systems and stifled progress on universal social protection.<sup>186</sup> Numerous privatisation failures, such as poor quality and fragmentation of services, escalating fees, job losses, wage cuts, displacement and loss of livelihoods, the emergence of private monopolies,<sup>187</sup> not to mention the breakdown of democratic accountability and transparency, are prompting numerous municipalities as well as women's movements and wider civil society to reclaim public goods and services from privatisation, and to seek justice from its negative fall-outs.<sup>188</sup> Such movements are unfolding in both the Global North and South, often focusing on land, energy and water,<sup>189</sup> as well as at the global and regional level, as seen in FEMNET's work challenging the promotion of PPPs by donors,<sup>190</sup> IFIs and even within the SDGs.<sup>191</sup>

Remunicipalisation is the act of reclaiming essential services from private operators and bringing their delivery back into the public sphere.<sup>192</sup> New research by the Transnational Institute and its international partners shows that between 2000 and 2019, there have been over 1,400 new cases of "municipalisation" or "remunicipalisation" – the creation of new public

enterprises run by the local governments or the return of privatised enterprises to municipal hands. This trend has taken place across 2400 localities in 58 countries.<sup>193</sup> As with other feminist economic alternatives, there is no singular solution or approach that should be pursued with respect to gender-responsive (re)municipalisation. Rather, similar to what is argued by energy democracy advocates, a range of collective and collaborative alternatives to privatisation are needed, including autonomous citizen associations, worker cooperatives, (re)municipalisation and nationalisation, as well as national-level public planning.<sup>194</sup> As well as frameworks such as the Abidjan Principles on the obligations of States to finance public education, developed in 2019 with human rights experts to resist privatisation in education.<sup>195</sup> Within these, women's collective voice and agency should play a lead role in determining how public services are managed, designed and delivered, recognising that women are not a homogenous group and have distinct needs and priorities based on the particular intersecting forms of identity-based oppression they may face.

### Reclaiming access to Brazil's babassu forests – Brazil

"When the agribusiness and extractive companies come to our land, they take away our rivers, ponds, the babassu palm trees, and finally take our lives away breaking our way of living, our spirit",

**Maria do Rosário, leader of the Interstate Movement of Babassu Coconut Breaker women (MIQCB)**

The Movimento Interestadual de Quebradeiras de Coco Babaçu (MIQCB) in Brazil, also known as the Babassu Coconut Breakers Movement, consists of over 2,000 women and represents more than 350,000 women who make a living from gathering babaçu or babassu palm tree coconuts. This is a women-led movement focused on accessing and protecting the babassu forests, who see the babassu as a common good, for community use. Milk, oil, coal, bread, even cleaning products, roofs, fertiliser and textiles –over 70 products – are made from the coconuts without damaging the coconut trees. However, deforestation and privatisation threaten the coconut breakers' livelihoods and are destroying the babassu forests. Many forests are being sold off to large scale agricultural business, who violently block the coconut breakers' access to the babassu forests and who prefer to cut down the babassu trees in order to create monocultures and plant crops that are highly lucrative on global markets, as soybean, eucalyptus



Maria Alaiques Alves de Sousa is the general coordinator of the Babassu Coconut-breakers Interstate Movement (MIQCB). Maria actively participated in the development of the Free Babassu Law project. And was the coconut breakers' representative in the National Food Security and Food Sovereignty Council (directed connected to the Presidency cabinet in previous Brazilian governments) and the National Committee for Traditional Peoples and Communities. She was city councillor in Lago do Junco, Maranhão state, elected by an articulation of local social movements. Lago do Junco was the first municipality to enact the Free Babassu Law.

and sugarcane. Meanwhile the legitimate land tenure rights of people and communities, established through customary systems of living on and using land, have been ignored and violated. In addition to the challenge in accessing the babassu forests, the coconut breakers also face difficulty gaining direct access to markets for their babassu products, which would provide greater security for their livelihoods and futures. 'Middlemen' buying the babassu directly from the women are keeping them in working poverty, while making a profit selling the coconuts on the market.<sup>196</sup>

MIQCB's long struggle led to the establishment of the 'Free Babassu Law' in 17 municipalities across Brazil, mainly in the Cerrado region, protecting the Babassu forests and giving the landless coconut gatherers free access to babassu forests, including those now privately owned.<sup>197</sup> When it became clear that a national law was not possible, due to an unwillingness to listen to the movement's demands at national level, the movement turned to the state and municipal level. The women babassu coconut breakers organised themselves to work collaboratively with municipal and state governments at every step of the legislative process – from the design of proposed laws to the choice of councillor or deputy that would represent



them in presenting the laws. The women remained involved in the development and presentation of new legislation to different chambers and assemblies and during voting days. This process proved to be important in strengthening the babassu coconut breakers' collective identity as traditional people and in creating and exchanging knowledge, memories and experiences between themselves and the Brazilian public. These laws vary in their content; while some do guarantee free access to babassu areas, others must be reworked in order to secure greater access to babassu groves for the coconut breakers. Drafted in the context of pressure from economically powerful actors, some of these laws prioritise private landowners' control over the land containing babassu trees. Despite this, the approval of each one of these free babassu laws represents a very important achievement in the creation of innovative legal mechanisms in which women from traditional communities have successfully leveraged their political power and worked successfully with government representatives and administrators in order to secure their rights, resist privatisation of their lands and limit the influence of powerful landowners.<sup>198</sup>

Enforcing the law has sadly often fallen on the coconut breakers, where landowners have started to poison trees rather than cut them down. This, in addition to the constant pressure of new landowners, many of them land grabbers, taking over their territories, has led the movement to also start demanding stronger, or more stable, tenure rights. The coconut breakers are not advocating for individual titling, but for collective titling so that the forests are protected for future generations and resist pressure to sell the land. An additional strategy has been the formation of associations and cooperatives by the coconut breakers to 'cut out the middlemen' and guarantee fair prices for the work done by women. The spaces where these cooperatives operate are open to any coconut breaker without them having to be an associate or having to pay to make use of the facilities. These cooperatives simultaneously serve as spaces for political discussions and organising.<sup>199</sup> The coconut breakers' strategies present an alternative proposal to the dominant management practices of landowning elite. The practices of the women allow communities to coexist with nature rather than depleting it. The successes of the MIQCB, in gaining local recognition of land-use rights and protection of common resources that the coconut breakers share, serve as a powerful example of what could be achieved on a national level in Brazil for other communities, and in many countries across the world in order to realise the right to food, protect the forests and to meet human rights obligations.<sup>200</sup>

## 2. Women's leadership

It is the principal duty of states to protect and progressively realise human rights. However, despite this they are often complicit in or even the worst

perpetrators of abuse. Many human rights defenders (HRDs) are working within a system where the rule of law is weak and are particularly vulnerable as the opposition they face from governmental and private entities act without fear of punishment. HRDs who work specifically to counter corporate abuse and impunity and promote the rule of law are often subject to aggressive threats and reprisals from those who benefit most from the status quo.<sup>201</sup> Women human rights defenders (WHRDs) face many of the same challenges and threats in addition to obstacles, threats and impacts on account of their gender. Women human rights defenders suffer threats, stigma, social rejection, gender based and sexual violence, not only because they are promoting and defending the rights of others, but also because they are women doing that work.<sup>202</sup> The UN Special Rapporteur on HRDs has a mandate to integrate a gender perspective and pay particular attention to women human rights defenders. In his 2019 annual report to the Human Rights Council in Geneva he explains how "[i]n the current political climate, in which there is a backlash against human rights, women who defend and promote rights are often the first to come under attack." The report shows how the rise in misogynistic, sexist and homophobic speech by political leaders in recent years has normalised violence against women human rights defenders.<sup>203</sup> A survey conducted by the Mesoamerican Initiative of Women Human Rights Defenders (IM Defenders) amongst 55 women human rights defenders in the region, uncovered that 55% of all attacks are perpetrated by state actors; 35% are perpetrated by de facto powers, such as private companies, paramilitary and religious groups; and 15% are committed by other private actors, such as the spouses or ex-partners of women who are victims or survivors of violence.<sup>204</sup> The UN Special Rapporteur therefore recommends that: "States and international organisations must recognise the specific challenges and risks women defenders face. They must ensure that such defenders are recognised, supported and enabled to participate equally, meaningfully and powerfully in the promotion and protection of human rights."<sup>205</sup> As can be seen throughout this report, it is often from women's resistance that FEAs are born and through women's collective action that FEAs are realised. It is essential to supporting FEAs that states recognise and counter the additional gendered threats and obstacles WHRDs face so that women can continue seeking strategies to withstand and protect themselves from the most egregious, often systematic violence perpetrated by state and corporate actors in the interests of advancing a particular version of economic growth and development. Moreover, the formal policy commitments and frameworks of states with regards HRDs, notably the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, are in need of being further developed and implemented from a women's rights perspective.<sup>206</sup>

## Protecting & supporting women human rights defenders globally

The Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition has been instrumental in creating the identity category of the Women Human Rights Defender, which activists find legitimising and empowering.<sup>207</sup> The Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders defines women human rights defenders as both female human rights defenders, and any other human rights defenders who work in the defence of women's rights or on gender issues (A/HRC/16/44).<sup>208</sup> Women have also been innovating mechanisms aimed at protecting and defending WHRDs. The Mesoamerican Initiative of Women Human Rights Defenders designed a Rapid Response Fund for Security and Self-care for WHRDs and established a house providing collective well-being and care services for WHRDs in Oaxaca, Mexico called La Serena. This house has benefitted activists such as Lolita Chávez and her companions of the K'iche's Peoples Council (CPK) who had been demonstrating against corruption and discriminatory policies against indigenous peoples. Her first stay provided her a space of rest and reflection away from a situation of permanent stress, harassment, and attacks against her, her family and her organisation. The temporary stay house is used for recuperation, healing, rest and reflection.<sup>209</sup> Similarly,

the Urgent Action Fund Africa set up the African Women Human Rights Defenders Platform aka 'the Feminist Republik' focused on holistic (protection) security, safety, wellbeing and collective care; healing justice; as well as documentation and knowledge generation for WHRD. The focus on self and collective care and wellbeing is in response to collective, structural and intergenerational distress caused by persistent forms of exclusion, violence and marginalisation. It is based on research into the indigenous African ways through which women generally, and WHRDs specifically, have practised collective care and healing. UAF-Africa sees healing justice and collective care as critical in societies that criminalise women's resistance and fierceness and structurally cause WHRDs' trauma while creating no space, time or resources for healing and regeneration.<sup>210</sup> Collective care is essential to sustaining movements.<sup>211</sup> Moreover, as women's collective action is usually unfunded or underfunded, AWID has designed a framework towards creating a 'Feminist Funding Ecosystem.' In this feminist funding ecosystem, feminist movements – particularly in the Global South – would be at the centre and equal partners in the political project for global gender justice. Funders themselves would see and understand their role within the ecosystem and are able to pull the levers of change so that the clear majority of their funding commitments toward gender justice and women's rights are going to movements directly.<sup>212</sup>



Community volunteers and self-proclaimed 'gender defenders' (from left to right): Veronica, Jurusha, Alice, Patience, Nancy and Rukia. These women see themselves as advocates for the rights of women and children in Mukuru, Nairobi, Kenya.

## 3. Corporate accountability

According to the UN, financial outflows from developing countries largely to the Global North in the form of interest payments on foreign debt, capital flight and foreign investments amounted to approximately US\$970.7 billion in 2014 alone, far more than they received in aid and investment.<sup>213</sup> The Global South currently lose somewhere between US\$100 billion and US\$200 billion a year in lost tax revenue every year to corporate tax avoidance.<sup>214</sup> Most of these multinational corporations (MNCs) are based in the Global North and many utilise European and US tax havens, deriving their profits and wealth from the 'cheap' labour and unpaid care work of women in the countries where they produce, enabled by global tax rules and norms set by the OECD – a Northern-based agenda setter. In 2018, 69 of the richest 100 entities globally are corporations, not governments.<sup>215</sup>

Corporate wealth and power is being further consolidated and state policy space constrained by the growing number of public private partnerships (PPPs) replacing publicly owned and delivered public services, growing multi-stakeholderism which is shrinking multilateralism<sup>216</sup> and the increasing use of investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) clauses in trade and investment deals. ISDS clauses allow multinationals to sue states for millions of dollars in private corporate courts if they feel an investment is jeopardised, even where a state is implementing legitimate policy measures aimed at promoting equity or addressing climate change.<sup>217</sup> Analysis by the Corporate Europe Observatory and Transnational Institute (TNI) reveals how, even as the global death toll during Covid-19 exceeds exceeds 1 million (as of October 2, 2020)<sup>218</sup>, corporations and their lawyers could soon launch lawsuits against governments that took steps to address the pandemic. These include State measures to ensure that people can afford clean water for hand-washing, taking control of private hospitals and hotels to treat coronavirus patients, acting to secure affordable medicines, vaccines and tests, and preventing water, gas and electricity cuts due to lack of payment.<sup>219</sup> Not only do these cases cost governments millions of dollars in court fees and possible pay-outs, but just the perceived threat of being sued could discourage governments from introducing policies that are beneficial to citizens but challenging to investors' interests.

Power inequalities, patriarchal systems and entrenched discrimination mean that human rights abuses as a result of business activities are not gender neutral and have a disproportionately adverse impact on women and their economic rights: their access to land, their right to decent work, their unpaid care and domestic work.<sup>220</sup> States are obliged to prevent and address human rights violations resulting from corporate practices under international human rights law. While national and international actors increasingly promote

a business case for gender equality, through increasing women's labour force participation as a tool for higher economic growth, the structural causes of women's economic inequality and human rights violations in the unjust global economy remain unaddressed.<sup>221</sup> While resisting corporate power and demanding accountability is very much an act within the current economic structures, the following outlined initiatives demonstrate how from this resistance frequently alternatives are born that can both create changes to the material realities as well as relations and structures of power. These are strategies for change, rather than end goals.

### Feminists for a Binding Treaty globally

The current negotiations for a legally binding treaty on business and human rights, led by the Open-ended Intergovernmental Working Group on Transnational Corporations and other Business Enterprises (IGWG), offer an historic opportunity to plug the accountability gaps, regulate transnational corporations and other business enterprises and ensure access to effective remedy for those whose rights have been violated. Global initiatives and frameworks to date, such as the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises and the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs), have failed to ensure access to remedy and justice for survivors, due to not having internationally agreed sanctions for companies that fail to meet their duties to respect human rights overseas, nor being binding. The UNGPs also fail to establish extraterritorial obligations of states to ensure access to justice for abuses committed by MNCs in third countries. The UNGPs acknowledges and tries to address this governance gap by establishing the corporate responsibility to respect human rights via human rights due diligence (HRDD), but this remains largely voluntary and is still weak in terms of ensuring access to either judicial or non-judicial remedy and redress for those whose rights have been violated. Feminists for a Binding Treaty is a collective of feminist organisations, including women's rights organisations and INGOs, that work together to ensure that an intersectional-feminist perspective underpins the binding instrument and its various provisions. The coalition was established in recognition of the fact that women's under-representation in political decision-making due to prevailing patriarchal power structures means that there is a risk that women human rights defenders' voices will be excluded from this important new process on corporate regulation and accountability and women's experiences will be left invisible. These voices are vital to represent the gendered impacts of corporate abuse, the gendered challenges in accessing remedy, and gendered impacts on women human rights defenders (WHRDs) standing up to corporate abuse. If a gendered approach to the treaty is not prioritised, it may further the normalisation of human rights violations experienced by women, girls, including trans women and those from other groups experiencing intersecting forms of

oppression.<sup>222</sup> Feminists for a Binding Treaty are calling for the inclusion of the following: mandatory gender impact assessments by companies (mandatory human

rights due diligence); gender-sensitive justice and remedy mechanisms; and respect, protection and an enabling environment for Women Human Rights Defenders.<sup>223</sup>



Photo: Janny Ozinga for ActionAid

Human rights and environmental activists from Zambia and Guatemala stand outside the Dutch Parliament to hand over a letter to the Minister for Trade & Development Cooperation, demanding action for a feminist UN binding treaty business & human rights and national gender due diligence law.

## National gender due diligence legislation

In recent years, following the unanimous endorsement of the UNGPs by the Human Rights Council in 2011 and sustained advocacy by civil society, many countries have started to consider binding requirements on companies to identify, prevent and mitigate human rights abuses in corporate supply chains, and to guarantee access to justice for victims of these abuses. These legislative developments provide an important opportunity to advance a feminist economic alternative of a world free from corporate abuse. To ensure corporations respect women's rights and fulfil their responsibility to respect human rights, as set out under the UNGPs and subsequently the revised OECD Guidelines, states should integrate a gender perspective in existing mandatory human rights due diligence laws and those being drafted. These would require companies to conduct gender responsive due diligence throughout their entire operations and value chains, take steps to address violations identified, and ensure access to remedy, with civil and criminal liability for companies failing to do so. As the call for mandatory human rights due diligence legislation grows louder in many countries and even among actors in the corporate sector,<sup>224</sup> gender considerations need to be reflected in emerging due diligence legislation, or we risk adopting laws that leave women behind.<sup>225</sup> This has also been emphasised and called for by the UN Working Group in Business and Human Rights.<sup>226</sup> On the first of July 2020, Dutch government coalition party *ChristenUnie* together with opposition parties *Partij van de Arbeid*, *GroenLinks* and *Socialistische Partij* submitted their policy proposal for mandatory human rights due diligence legislation in Parliament. This initiative follows in the footsteps of several legislative processes in the USA, Australia and several European Member States where governments have introduced binding obligations on corporations to prevent adverse impacts on human rights and the environment due to their activities throughout their supply chains. The Dutch policy proposal is the first piece of legislation worldwide that acknowledges the differentiated impacts of corporate human rights violations on women and requires corporations to mitigate these impacts. In the coming months, the Dutch government will decide whether to take on board this proposal. INGOs advocating for women's rights, such as ActionAid – including ActionAid

## 4. Maximising public financing

“The global reform of tax systems is the low hanging fruit for radical change.”

**Jayati Ghosh - Professor of Economics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi**

Current rigged global economic structures and taxation systems allow corporates to dodge taxes, shifting income to tax havens and contributing significantly to the vast levels of illicit financial flows (IFFs) leaving the Global South. This system facilitates private appropriation of public resources and illicit financial flows allows multinational corporations and wealthy individuals to avoid paying their fair share of taxes.<sup>228</sup> This denies the Global South between US\$100 billion and US\$200 billion of dollars each year<sup>229</sup> and estimations in the report by the High Level Panel on Illicit Financial Flows from Africa led by the president of South Africa Thabo Mbeki are that the African continent loses up to US\$50 billion dollars annually as a result of IFFs. This is double the amount that the continent receives in form of Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) making Africa a net creditor to the world.<sup>230</sup> Tax justice and ending IFFs represents one of the strongest areas of feminist advocacy for alternative economic policy approaches. Networks such as the ‘Global Alliance for Tax Justice (GATJ) Tax and Gender Working Group’ are providing space for advocates leading the charge to combine forces in demonstrating tax as a feminist issue.

Taxation is widely recognised as the most reliable, sustainable and democratic way of funding the state budget and public services. Taxation is one of the principal means through which the collective responsibility to finance public goods and services is realised. It is vital to the preservation of the social contract between citizens and the state (as discussed above on page 28). Therefore taxation also strongly determines the potential resources states may have available to remunicipalise public goods and services from private providers. A progressive approach to tax ideally entails higher tax rates appropriately set for those with more wealth, based on the ability to pay with governments then spending/investing the revenue according to need. This is the redistributive power of

Netherlands – have been advocating for years that the due diligence process corporations undertake as required by international standards, should include a gender lens. If the Dutch government decides to adopt the proposal, it will be a milestone for feminists demanding corporate accountability and access to justice for survivors everywhere.<sup>227</sup>

progressive tax systems. There is not a one-size-fits-all answer for how much tax a country should collect, but most developing countries should be aiming to increase their tax revenue. Right now there are huge gaps in the provisioning of quality public services, as education, childcare, healthcare, WASH and transportation. ActionAid's "Who Cares for the Future" report demonstrates how international benchmarks on spending on education and early childcare, health and SRHR, water and sanitation compared to GDP are currently far off from being met, especially in low income countries.<sup>231</sup> And according to the UN a bare

minimum of at least 20% tax-to-GDP ratio is needed to deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals and to provide quality public services that are gender-responsive.<sup>232</sup> Worryingly, the estimated financing gaps for achieving the SDGs are now being used as an excuse for bringing in corporate actors and PPPs, instead of more progressive taxation measures.<sup>233</sup> Moreover, while overseas aid and loans from IFIs might provide temporary, partial support to gaps in financing, they are not a sustainable solution and often come with conditions set by lenders that create challenges and new restrictions on policy autonomy.<sup>234</sup> The obligation

of states to use the maximum available resources and mobilise for the progressive realisation of rights is prescribed in Article 2 of the International Covenant on Economic and Social and Cultural Rights.<sup>235</sup> World leaders have also committed to maximising domestic resources, including on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Addis Ababa Agenda for Action.<sup>236</sup>

Feminist analysis has shown how right now, tax policies do not work for women.<sup>237</sup> Current revenue raising systems are often regressive and have a disproportionate impact on women from the poorest and most marginalised communities.<sup>238</sup> For instance, value added tax (VAT) and other consumption taxes almost invariably lead to women being disproportionately taxed, because the tax rate is the same no matter an individual's income and women spend more of their limited revenue on household or basic goods and services. This has a further regressive and gender-discriminatory impact.<sup>239</sup> Despite this, corporation taxes have been reduced by half while consumption taxes including VAT have doubled over the past 20 years or so.<sup>240</sup> IMF tax policy advice, contained in surveillance and loan programmes, continues to regularly encourage governments to introduce, expand or raise rates of VAT or sales taxes. As of 2018, 166 of the world's approximately 193 countries employ a VAT. In sub-Saharan Africa, about 25% of tax revenue comes from VAT, compared to 6.8% in OECD countries.<sup>241</sup> Moreover, of critical importance to increasing Southern countries' ability to maximise public financing for gender equality is the fair taxation of multinational corporations. The Independent Commission for the Reform of International Corporate Taxation (ICRICT) and UNCTAD, among others have been calling for unitary taxation – an agreed minimum rate of 25% which is determined by the current corporate average tax rate in G7 countries – to prevent tax dodging and a competition among countries to offer the lowest possible tax rates to MNCs in order to secure investment and therefore perpetuating a race to the bottom.<sup>242</sup>

The way in which tax is spent matters strongly to gender equality and the power of tax lies in the way that taxation policies can contribute to strengthening democratic accountability for effective exercise of the social contract.<sup>243</sup> Due to loan and tax conditionalities countries are being pushed to implement austerity measures (which are more or less unchanged since the discredited and now more commonly known as 'structural adjustment' or 'fiscal consolidation' policies from the 1980s) by the IMF.<sup>244</sup> This means spending on public services, including public sector wage bills, is held down or cut, further disadvantaging women for whom quality provision of health, education, child care or other services can significantly reduce and redistribute unpaid care and domestic work responsibilities and address the wider poverty they may face. Moreover, through the heavy burden of debt repayment to the IMF, the public funds available to

governments is further limited. Over the past decade, developing countries have faced a growing debt burden entailing that they are now spending 85% more on debt repayment than at the start of the decade. In Kenya for instance, over 36% of the budget goes to debt repayment, this is more than expenditure on education and healthcare combined.<sup>245</sup> Western governments that dominate the leadership of the IMF need to embark on transforming their institutions and change their policy prescriptions for the developing world that are ultimately extractive and maintain their neo-colonial power. Governments in the Global South need to, as much as possible within this unbalanced power dynamic between North and South, resist IMF advice on austerity and regressive tax reforms<sup>246</sup> and adopt more progressive approaches to taxation.<sup>247</sup> Governments in the Global North have a role to play to ensure business pay their fair share, also via mandatory due diligence and a UN Binding Treaty on business and human rights.<sup>248</sup>

### Shaping a feminist solidarity-based economic multilateralism

The Bretton Woods Project describes how there is currently a "crisis of multilateralism [that is] structurally undermining democratic governance and human rights, while destroying the environment."<sup>249</sup> Women's rights organisations such as AWID and DAWN highlight how the international multilateral and financial system we know today, encompassing institutions such as the WTO, IMF, World Bank, OECD, has largely been shaped by colonial interests, that persist to date in new forms, and is structurally not fit to tackle the major challenges of the 21st century, including climate change and the global inequality crisis, which require an urgent, ambitious and coordinated political action across borders.<sup>250</sup> Moreover, one of the most important post-WWII multilaterals – the UN – is being undermined by underfunding, increasing involvement of corporate interests and shrinking civic space. While certain states largely ignore what comes out of the UN's various bodies and refuse to partake (for instance the US and the UNFCCC Paris Agreement). Following the independence of many countries in the South from colonialism, a new generation of political leaders created new economic opportunities and challenged the rules of the multilateral game when these efforts were stymied. However efforts since the 1970s by economic elites, both national governments and in the financial and corporate sectors, used the multilateral system to expand global markets and cross-border financial flows as ends in themselves. In many cases, this means that multilateralism is not concerned anymore with advancing common concerns by establishing and upholding universal standards.<sup>251</sup>

The right to self-determination is key to the feminist approach, which includes for states and communities to have policy autonomy independent of IFIs conditionality



and corporate power. UNCTAD shared its vision on a “New Multilateralism Based on Shared Prosperity” in 2019. The main problem this report aims to tackle is the way in which multilateralism has been used by the economic elite. “Under the umbrella of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), with the active engagement of the IMF and World Bank, and through a plethora of trade and investment treaties, [economic elites] have put in place a set of enabling norms and rules that allows footloose finance and firms to move freely within and across borders and into ever expanding spaces for profit making through privatisation of previously (and properly) public functions.”<sup>252</sup> Critically UNCTAD sets out recommendations for financial regulation. Central principles in this vision are: 1. Global rules should be calibrated toward the overarching goals of social and economic stability, shared prosperity, and environmental sustainability and be protected against capture by the most powerful players. 2. States share common but differentiated responsibilities in a multilateral system built to advance global public goods, such as global health, peace and the planet, and protect the global commons 3. The right of states to policy space to pursue national development strategies should be enshrined in global rules. 4. Global regulations should be designed both to strengthen a dynamic international division of labour and to prevent destructive unilateral economic actions that prevent other nations from realising common goals. 5. Global public institutions must be accountable to their full membership, open to a diversity of viewpoints, cognisant of new voices, and have balanced dispute resolution systems.<sup>253</sup> Moreover in UNCTAD’s recent report on ‘How South-South cooperation can support economic recovery’ it explains how while certain countries have found the fiscal and policy space to respond to the crisis, most countries have been struck by capital flight, currency collapse, dwindling foreign exchange earnings and shrinking fiscal space. The response from the multilateral system to this extreme financial stress has been underwhelming, falling short of the efforts necessary to avoid recession turning into depression. With this in mind, UNCTAD proposes a South-South cooperation agenda oriented on three broad objectives: scaling-up financial resources; enhancing policy space; and building resilience.<sup>254</sup>

Justice reforms in the dialogue and negotiation processes on tax policy between OECD countries and Global South is a highly necessary part of this. It is not just through IFFs that governments are losing out on tax revenue, but also through the global ‘race to the bottom’ or the competition by governments constantly reducing tax rates or offering tax cuts, in order to attract or retain foreign investment. In order to maximise public financing for gender equality, feminist advocates highlight the need to challenge elite multilateralism, global power imbalances and global inequalities among countries.<sup>255</sup> Feminist activists and women’s rights organisations have been part of a campaign for an inclusive intergovernmental body

within the United Nations (often referred to as the Global Tax Body) to reform international tax rules to finance public services and to realise gender equality since 2015.<sup>256</sup> The existing UN tax group cannot set or change rules as it is not a political body. It should be therefore be upgraded.<sup>257</sup> The Global Tax Body would ensure that a negotiated, globally agreed system would be less complex and more transparent and fair for all.<sup>258</sup> Developing countries see the Global Tax Body as a way to remove tax rule-making from the tight influence of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) giving developing countries a say, and broadly democratising the process.<sup>259</sup> The UN tax body would operate on the basis of One Country, One Vote, where developing countries would have an equal say. However, several OECD members have repeatedly blocked any attempts to create a Global Tax body, arguing that they are already reforming international tax rules through the Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS) project. Although the BEPS project attempts to create some level of transparency, by encouraging information sharing between countries on financial flows, it does nothing to address the unequal division of power in defining global tax rules and their application.<sup>260</sup>

## 4 Conclusion and recommendations

Feminist organising and leadership has demonstrated time and time again that another world is possible, a world that values care, wellbeing and the crucial contributions that women, girls and the environment make to our everyday lives. While the deep flaws of the current economic system have been apparent for decades, the Covid-19 pandemic has laid bare the extent of gender inequalities at all levels. Business as usual will not bring the solutions women and girls so urgently need. Now more than ever is the time for systemic transformation. Essential is an economic policymaking geared towards realising changes to the material realities and lives of women as well as changes to relations and structures of power so that human rights, climate and social justice are primary drivers and not just profit and GDP growth. Feminist economic alternatives, as the manifestations of women’s knowledge, experience and collective imagination are an achievable yet transformative opportunity and must urgently be heeded and taken-up by policy makers and global agenda setters, including as part of efforts to implement a post-Covid 19 recovery.

Drawing from the extensive examples of FEAs covered in the four volumes of this report series, we end this volume with a series of recommendations for governments, IFIs and the private sector, many of which have been extensively made already by women’s rights organisations, feminist economists and activists themselves. These recommendations are not necessarily new, but demonstrate that the solutions for a swift change in policy are available. Acknowledging the scale on which truly transformational change is necessary, these recommendations are presented grouped per theme and area of change. A number of them are so urgent in the context of Covid-19 that we have highlighted them in bold text.

### For Governments

#### 1. To centre economies around care

- 1.1. Centre fiscal, monetary, trade and investment policies and national development strategies on the provisioning of human needs and human well-being, based on an understanding of the centrality of the care economy and lessons learned from the Covid-19 crisis.
- 1.2. Drop GDP and growth as sole measures of progress and develop additional gender-transformative indicators based on well-being, human rights, tackling inequalities based on gender and other social and economic

discrimination, and protection of the environment and climate.

- 1.3. Invest in more comprehensive research and data gathering tools to track and assess progress and macroeconomic policy impacts that use robust intersectional analyses to better track and address gender inequalities, ensuring women at the margins are neither made invisible nor left behind.
- 1.4. In the context of Covid-19 lockdowns, tackle the shadow pandemic of gender-based violence by ensuring services for survivors are deemed essential and remain accessible and adequately funded.
- 1.5. Ratify and enshrine in national law and fully and effectively implement relevant ILO Conventions (including C190 and C189) in consultation with WROs and unions and worker associations including those representing women working in the informal sector and domestic workers.
- 1.6. Support efforts of women workers to build collective power, particularly as they go back to work following the Covid-19 pandemic by implementing the ILO Decent Work Agenda and therefore aligning labour policies accordingly.
- 1.7. Provide support and resources for mutual support and reciprocity networks, including specific legal policies, frameworks and funding to support women’s cooperatives.
- 1.8. Enshrine a multidimensional right (like the Uruguay National Care System) to both give and receive care and ensure quality childcare and elderly care is accessible and affordable to all.
- 1.9. Develop integrated care policies and systems through participatory processes that engage and consult with civil society, feminist economists and the women’s movement so as to develop a comprehensive definition of care and therefore address it with the right institutional frameworks for each specific context.

#### 2. To ensure a just transition

- 2.1. Embark on a just transition away from harmful agriculture, food and energy systems that addresses – rather than exacerbates – inequalities; transform systems to work for people, nature and the climate; ensure inclusiveness and participation; develop comprehensive policy frameworks.
  - a. Climate policies must recognise that vulnerable mining and farming communities may already face precarious livelihoods and

may not be able to bear the burden or cost of just transitions unless they are given strong support and positive incentives to do so.

- b.** Just transitions must address the lack of access to secure food, nutrition, energy and livelihoods faced by poor and vulnerable communities, and that women face particular challenges and burdens.
  - c.** When shifting away from fossil fuels towards renewable energy, the transformation of energy systems must take into account the potentially harmful impacts of renewable energy's increased demand on metal and mineral extraction and must not simply shift exploitation and land grabs to new areas.
  - d.** Strong labour, social, environmental and gender-responsive standards must govern all sectors involved.
- 2.2.** Plans must be developed through the inclusive participation of women, workers, farmers, communities and stakeholders, especially those that are marginalised, and by taking account of new communities and sectors that will be involved in or affected by the transition. Ensure and promote women's rights to access and control land, water, forests, commons, and especially women's collective rights to use, exchange, obtain, select and sell their own seeds.
  - 2.3.** Revise positions and policies on the Green Revolution approach to national agricultural development and pull back current policies that favour industrialised and market-driven paradigms.
  - 2.4.** Invest in Research and Development on proven agroecological practices such as water and nutrient conservation, organic pest management and the development of local plant varieties, and gear agricultural policies towards scaling these approaches.
  - 2.5.** Decentralise power to local communities, with a focus on women-led accountability mechanisms, for their full participation in the formulation and implementation of policies and programmes that affect them. Improve collaborative competences through capacity strengthening of rural institutions.
  - 2.6.** Enact policies to prevent rural dispossession and land grabbing.
- 3. To build the conditions for FEAs to flourish**
    - 3.1.** Cancel all debt servicing and renegotiate all other debts so that servicing of debts never again exceeds spending on health or education – and all future loans are taken out in a transparent and accountable way.
  - 3.2.** Increase tax-to-GDP ratios at least to 20% in order to provide quality public services that are gender-responsive. Invest too in social protection, including in the expanded provision of quality care, and ensure access to decent work for care workers.
  - 3.3.** Redistribute wealth and maximise resources by instituting systems of progressive taxation that adopt a gendered lens, tackling corporate tax avoidance and other forms of illicit financial flows and closing tax havens.
  - 3.4.** Make enhanced spending on care and GRPS one of the primary charges on the state budget. Allocate budgets using participatory gender-budgeting approaches.
  - 3.5.** Open up meaningful and representative spaces for women, women's rights organisations and movements at decision making tables, recognising the value of their knowledge and practice by, for example, including them in the design, implementation and review of any further Covid-19 response and recovery policies and programmes.
  - 3.6.** Make and reshape economic policies with an intersectional lens, to ensure that women facing intersectional forms of oppression have their rights fulfilled, as part of a conscious effort to break with patriarchal, racist and colonial mindsets and policies that reflect and entrench these.
  - 3.7.** Governments that dominate the leadership of the IMF must embark on transforming their institutions and commit to UNCTAD's recommendations for financial regulation:
    - a.** Global rules should be calibrated toward the overarching goals of social and economic stability, shared prosperity, and environmental sustainability and be protected against capture by the most powerful players.
    - b.** States share common but differentiated responsibilities in a multilateral system built to advance global public goods, such as global health, peace and the planet, and protect the global commons.
    - c.** The right of states to policy space to pursue national development strategies should be enshrined in global rules.
    - d.** Global regulations should be designed both to strengthen a dynamic international division of labour and to prevent destructive unilateral economic actions that prevent other nations from realising common goals.
    - e.** Global public institutions must be accountable to their full membership, open to a diversity of viewpoints, cognisant of new voices, and have balanced dispute resolution systems. As part of this, governments ought to resist

and reject the policy recommendations that advance neoliberal ideologies, trade liberalisation, austerity, privatisation and conditionalities imposed by the IMF and other international financial institutions.

- 3.8.** Support and contribute to the establishment of an inclusive intergovernmental UN Global Tax Commission where all member states have a seat at the table and equal say in determining international tax rules.
- 3.9.** Take a gender-transformative approach to trade, recognising how trade policies impact on women as workers, producers, providers of unpaid care. As part of this, governments should reorient trade to support human rights, gender equality and protection for the environment over growth. Trade policies and agreements ought to include mandatory gender and human rights impact assessments with meaningful consultations and engagement with women's rights organisations and movements, remove ISDS mechanisms and preserve countries' policy space to create decent jobs and provide GRPS.
- 3.10.** Support efforts led by the UN to develop a feminist UN binding for treaty business and human rights and integrate a gender perspective in existing mandatory human rights due diligence laws and those being drafted.
- 3.11.** Introduce binding obligations on corporations to undertake gendered human rights due diligence in order to identify, prevent and address adverse impacts on human rights and the environment due to their activities throughout their supply chains, and ensure access to effective remedy.
- 3.12.** Develop mechanisms to ensure access to effective judicial remedy for victims of abuse overseas committed by and/or linked to MNCs domiciled in a State's jurisdiction.
- 3.13.** Cease all forms of criminalisation, persecution and repressions against WHRDs and civil society at large. Protect and expand civil society space and support multiple forms of civil society. Vital to this is the recognition and valuing of the ideas, knowledge and contributions from autonomous feminist mobilisations and organising (including indigenous women) which may develop alternative and novel ideas for organising economies more equitably.
- 3.14.** Strengthen existing mechanisms to protect WHRD by, for instance, upholding the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders and developing this further from a women's rights perspective so that WHRDs are recognised, supported and enabled to participate equally, meaningfully and powerfully in the promotion and protection of human rights.
- 3.15.** Dramatically scale up flexible, long-term funding for WROs and feminist networks, including

to cover core costs, as a way to support autonomous feminist organising in line with their self-defined priorities. Support efforts to work towards a feminist funding ecosystem.

## For IFIs and other multilateral global agenda setters

### 1. To centre economies around care

- 1.1.** Stop promoting privatisation of public goods and services and reverse privatisation especially of public services.
- 1.2.** The IMF must review its policy advice and loan conditionalities that promote austerity and the reduction of public sector wage bills.
- 1.3.** G20 leaders, IFIs and private sector lenders must cancel all debt servicing and renegotiate all other debts so that servicing of debts never again exceeds spending on health or education – and all future loans are taken out in a transparent and accountable way.

### 2. To ensure a just transition

- 2.1.** Support countries to develop and implement national climate policies by granting them the fiscal space to finance them in the short and long term.

### 3. To build the conditions for FEAs to flourish

- 3.1.** Support and materialise a more democratic global tax system hosted within the UN where each country has one vote.
- 3.2.** Support and contribute to the establishment of an inclusive intergovernmental UN Global Tax Commission where all countries member states have a seat at the table and equal say in determining international tax rules.

## For companies

### 1. To build the conditions for FEAs to flourish

- 1.1.** Conduct gender-responsive human rights due diligence throughout their entire operations and value chains, take steps to address violations identified and ensure access to remedy.
- 1.2.** Commit to become tax-responsible by making incremental changes to its structures and tax-related transactions eschewing the tax avoidance

measures currently widely practised so they stop using tax avoidance schemes and pay more taxes in the countries where their profits are created.<sup>261</sup>

- 1.3. Recognise that women face particular disadvantages and discrimination, by developing and publishing a gender policy, addressing the systemic problems faced by women and how the company will seek to address them throughout their supply chains and business operations.
- 1.4. Leverage influence to positive ends, by publicly calling on governments to respect women's rights and address gender inequalities, and provide an enabling environment for responsible business conduct and women's empowerment and equality.
- 1.5. Truly progressive companies wishing to play a positive and proactive role in meaningfully addressing women's rights issues should:
  - a. Guarantee a living wage for all workers – including in their supply chain.
  - b. Guarantee paid parental leave for all workers with care responsibilities and make childcare provisions in the workplace for workers with care responsibilities.
  - c. Offer gender-transformative training, mentoring and opportunities for advancement of women.
  - d. Ensure that women workers, especially temporary and informal workers, are represented and listened to in collective bargaining about pay and conditions.
  - e. Commit to a zero tolerance of GBV and work with women workers and their worker organisation or trade union representatives to establish that survivors of gender-based violence and harassment in the workplace have effective access to gender-responsive, safe and effective complaint and dispute resolution mechanisms, support, services and remedies.

While this report mainly focuses on the role of governments and IFIs in centring economies around care, ensuring just transitions and building the conditions for FEAs to flourish, the work that will be necessary for systemic transformation will need to continue to be supported by a strong and collaborative civil society with well-funded WROs and grassroots groups. As such, donors and the international community ought to commit to supporting WROs both financially and by acknowledging their crucial role in protecting and advancing women's rights.

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