

Stepping up

Recommendations for CSW61: How governments can contribute to women's economic empowerment

Achieving women's economic empowerment is high on the agenda at the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) this March. In our full briefing¹, we argue that it's time for governments to step up to the challenge, that their priority should be to tackle the underlying barriers to empowerment - particularly those faced by marginalised women, and that it is in the area of economic policy that change is most needed. Government economic policy could, we argue, be a force for gender equality, yet too often this potential is not realised.

The following are recommendations for government action - at CSW and beyond - to promote the economic empowerment of all women.

Create an enabling macroeconomic environment

- Governments should reaffirm their commitment to fulfil women's rights and achieve gender equality under the SDGs and international binding agreements such as the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA).
- Governments should use fiscal policy to maximise their available resources for the promotion of gender equality and women's rights.
- Government spending, taxation and monetary policy should be evaluated for their effects on gender equality and women's rights. Gender-responsive budgeting, involving women-led civil society organisations, should be used by governments to ensure sufficient resources are allocated to implement laws, policies and programmes promoting gender equality, in the process.
- Governments should adopt progressive tax regimes that do not reinforce economic or gender inequality.
- Governments should increase their investment in social infrastructure, through deficit financing if necessary, to improve care provision, create decent jobs and reduce women's unpaid care burden.
- Governments should use counter-cyclical macroeconomic policies to reduce the risk and impact of economic shocks.
- Board members must ensure that International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan programmes are agreed only after gender impact assessments have been conducted to ensure that gender equality and women's rights are not undermined.
- In negotiating trade and investment agreements, governments should conduct *ex ante* gender impact assessments and ensure sufficient policy space is maintained for policies that protect and promote women's rights.

¹ Also available at: <http://gadnetwork.org/gadn-publications/#Briefings>

Create decent work

- Governments should promote and protect labour regulations that promote decent work for women, including collective bargaining and freedom of association, and should ratify International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention 189 on domestic workers and support the proposed ILO convention on gender-based violence in the world of work.
- Governments should set and enforce minimum wage levels sufficient for workers to attain their right to an adequate standard of living.
- Governments should ensure that employment regulations and social and legal protection are extended to cover workers in the informal economy.
- Governments should create more decent work for women including investing in public sector jobs where women are disproportionately represented.

Recognise, redistribute and reduce unpaid care work

- Governments should recognise unpaid care work as valuable *work*, and include it in national accounts.
- Governments should make macroeconomic decisions based on an understanding of the importance of care provision in sustaining societies.
- Governments should increase public spending on quality care services, ensuring that high quality care services are accessible and affordable to all.
- Governments should ensure access to basic social protections for all women, without regard to employment or migration status.
- Governments should reduce the time it takes to provide quality care by investing in labour-saving equipment and infrastructure including water, sanitation and hygiene, electricity and public transportation.

Hold corporates to account

- Governments in the Global North and South should support the UN Human Rights Council working group on the development and implementation of strong, legally binding guidelines to ensure corporations protect and promote women's rights.
- Governments should develop gender-sensitive national action plans to implement the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, setting out the actions needed to ensure gender-sensitive human rights due diligence throughout global supply chains.
- Governments should call for the end of investor-state dispute settlements mechanisms that undermine their capacity to regulate and protect against harmful practices of multinational corporations.
- Governments must ensure that all corporations pay a fair share of taxes in each country in which they operate through support for public, country-by-country reporting and by democratising decision-making on global tax reform, and should undertake gender equality, human rights and environmental impact assessments on the tax incentives they offer corporations.

Promote democratic economic decision-making

- Governments should protect the right to freedom of association, collective bargaining, assembly and speech to allow women workers to join unions and workers' organisations and engage in policy debates and negotiations.
- Governments must fund organisations led by and for marginalised women, and protect women human rights defenders and labour activists from harassment, intimidation and retaliation
- The transparency, openness, responsiveness and accountability of the institutions that develop and implement macroeconomic policy nationally and internationally should be improved, creating space for marginalised women's voices in economic decision-making.

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The Gender & Development Network (GADN) brings together NGOs, consultants, academics and individuals committed to working on gender, development and women's rights issues. Our vision is of a world where social justice and gender equality prevail and all women and girls are able to realise their rights free from discrimination. Our goal is to ensure that international development policy and practice promotes gender equality and women's and girls' rights.

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