GENDER & DEVELOPMENT NETWORK
Briefings
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UK Women's Budget Group (WBG)

A feminist strategy for a caring and sustainable economy in the UK

The UK Women's Budget Group (WBG), which is independent of all UK political parties, is a network of researchers, policy analysts and activists. The WBG analyses government spending on public services, social security and infrastructure, and taxation of individuals and businesses, to promote a better understanding of the impact of government decision-making on women and to improve the quality of that decision-making so that public resources are allocated in ways that reduce gender inequality. The analysis is distributed to politicians, officials, journalists, women's organizations and other NGOs with the aim of influencing economic policy.

1. A caring and sustainable economy[1]

The WBG calls for the creation of a caring and sustainable economy based on mutual support and respect for rights. Such an economy is oriented to the broad and inclusive aim of improving our well-being in ways that reduce inequalities, not only today but also for future generations. It prioritises care for people and for the planet.

The WBG emphasises that economic policy making is not neutral: it involves political decisions about the distribution of resources and power, and as such it can contribute to or undermine the pursuit of equality. Underpinning the work of the WBG are the following principles: firstly, well-being should take precedence over growth as the ultimate goal of economic policy making; secondly, the fundamental role of unpaid care work in achieving well-being should be recognised, alongside an acknowledgement of the finite nature of the earth's resources. Neither of these 'external' inputs is adequately factored into current economic policy making. Failure to acknowledge unpaid care work and to adequately value paid care work, combined with socially constructed gender roles around male breadwinners and female care-givers, has had numerous repercussions: women's unpaid work is not taken into account in economic policy decisions, wages in paid care work are shockingly low, investment in social infrastructure is underfunded and so on. Thirdly, economic analysis must cease to treat households as units where all resources are equally shared, and where all adults participate equally in decision-making. There is a wealth of evidence to show that there are economic inequalities within couple households. It makes a difference in household decision-making whether money (whether from paid work, savings or social security) comes into a household via women or via men. At the same time, single women – with

and without children, of working age and of retirement age – tend to be economically worse off on average than both single men and couple households.

To create a caring economy in which women are financially autonomous and enjoy equality with men, we need policies to ensure that:

- paid care workers (who are mainly women) get better training, better pay, better employment rights and better job security
- unpaid carers looking after family and friends (who are mainly women) get better support from public services and social security benefits, enabling them to take paid employment if they wish to do so
- both private sector and public sector employers recognize a duty of care for their employees, paying them a living wage and pro-actively reducing the gender wage gap, including reducing job segregation[2]

Since 2010 the UK has seen cuts to public services and social security, and while there have been tax reductions, these mainly benefit big business and well-off men. There has been some increase in economic growth, as measured by GDP, but women's real incomes are not growing nor is their well-being improving. Moreover, cuts in services, public sector employment and social security benefits are set to continue, alongside obstacles to claiming working-age social benefits. This means yet more women will:

- be unable to access adequate care for their children, disabled or frail elderly relatives and themselves
- be denied adequate support when they experience domestic abuse
- lose good jobs in the public sector
- be unable to make ends meet while they wait longer to get social security benefits[3]

The WBG has proposed an alternative long-term feminist economic plan for a caring and sustainable economy called Plan F. This outlines both the specific policies that are needed to move towards such an economy and the way in which these could be funded. The problem is not a lack of funds, but that these resources are not being mobilized for an economic strategy that values care.

2. Plan F: a feminist strategy for economic recovery

The WBG calls for the following policies, required for a caring and sustainable economy, to be implemented:

1. Reverse cuts to public services and social security that have had particularly adverse impacts on women, such as cuts to Sure Start Children's Centres for pre-school age children and their parents, the reduction of care for the frail elderly, and the introduction of the bedroom tax and the benefits cap.

2. Reform plans for Universal Credit (a new social security benefit to replace six existing benefits) to ensure that women with employed partners gain from earning. As it stands, Universal Credit payment will decline faster than under the previous tax credit system if such women start earning. In addition, the arrangements for payment should be changed so that not all the money goes to one person in a household – something that may hinder women leaving abusive relationships.
3. Invest in social infrastructure – care, health, education and training services, social security and housing – complemented by investment in renewable energy and environmentally friendly public transport. This would improve both well- being and productivity, in the short run but also in ways that persist over time, benefiting people not only today but in years to come.
4. Improve the terms and conditions of work for the paid work force who staff the social infrastructure (among whom women are the majority), including both those directly employed in the public sector and the increasing numbers employed by subcontractors in the private sector. This would lead to better quality care.
5. Strengthen workers' rights throughout the economy. A large proportion of new jobs are part-time or zero-hours (with contracts that do not commit employers to pay for a minimum number of hours), which mean people are earning so little that they cannot meet their living costs. This contributes to a rise of in-work poverty, a rise in the cost of in-work benefits, and a loss of dignity and security. All workers, regardless of type of contract, should enjoy basic rights including collective bargaining. The minimum wage must be raised to ensure a decent living.
6. Ensure access to affordable care, best achieved through care that is both publically funded and provided – for children, for people with illnesses and disabilities, as well as for frail elderly people.
7. Improve support for the people – currently mainly women – who provide unpaid care in families and communities. Men should also be supported to contribute more to unpaid care, for instance through well-funded care leave schemes and a reduction in full-time working hours.
8. Create a social security system that aims at fairer sharing of caring and the costs of caring, both between women and men and between families and the wider community, and provides adequate independent income for all over the life course.
9. Increase investment in social housing (built by local authorities or not-for-profit housing associations) and in insulating homes. An affordable home for all is central to a caring economy; however, support for access to housing has been concentrated on subsidies to enable people to buy a house and the payment of housing benefit, which simply ends up in the hands of private landlords.

How to pay for Plan F:

- In part it would pay for itself: our Plan F would increase employment and average weekly earnings, and thus generate more revenue from income tax and national insurance and save money on social security.
- Reducing arms spending. Deciding not to commission a replacement for the UK Trident nuclear submarine system would save £100 billion over the next 30 years.[4]

- Reversing tax reductions in the UK that benefit corporations, the wealthiest and those in work but not those with incomes below the tax threshold, 63 per cent of whom are women.[5] Corporate tax cuts cost around £7.9 billion a year in 2015-16.[6]
- Taking effective action on tax avoidance and evasion, which it is estimated could bring in almost £120 billion per year.[7]

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[1] This section has been adapted from WBG. 2015a. "Plan F: A feminist economic strategy for a caring and sustainable economy". Available at: http://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/PLAN-F-2015.pdf (accessed 28 Feb 2016).
[2] This section is an extract from WBG. 2015b. "To ensure economic recovery for women, we need Plan F". Available at: http://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Plan-F_WBG-Parties-briefing_Sept-2013_final.pdf (accessed 28 Feb 2016).
[3] This section is an extract from WBG 2015b.
[4] Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. 2015. People not Trident: the economic case against Trident replacement. London: Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. Available at: http://www.cnduk.org/information/briefings/trident-briefings/item/1861-peoplenot-trident-the-economic-case-against-trident-replacement (accessed 11 Apr 2016).
[5] WBG. 2014. "Budget 2014 – giveaways to men, paid for by women". Available at: http://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Budget-Briefing-2014.pdf (accessed 11 Apr 2016).
[6] Miller, H. and T. Pope. 2015. "Corporation Tax Changes and Challenges", IFS Briefing Note BN163. Available at: http://www.ifs.org.uk/uploads/publications/bns/BN163.pdf (accessed 11 Apr 2016).
[7] Murphy, R. 2014. *The Tax Gap: Tax evasion in 2014 – and what can be done about it.* London: Public and Commercial Services Union. Available at: http://www.taxresearch.org.uk/Documents/PCSTaxGap2014.pdf (accessed 11 Apr 2016).

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The Gender & Development Network (GADN) brings together expert 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 where 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. Our role is to support our members by sharing information and expertise, to undertake and disseminate research, and to provide expert advice and comment on government policies and projects.

For more information on the UK Women's Budget Group: http://wbg.org.uk
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Development Alternatives Project
The project seeks to bridge the gap between current development policy, programmes and donor thinking and alternative visions for gender equality. Our objective is to promote alternatives to current agendas and problems in women's rights and gender equality, identify solutions with women in the Global South and developing strategies to promote these alternatives.

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