



Clockwise from top left: Margaret Mumbua, a domestic worker in Nairobi, Kenya washes clothes (photo: Allan Gichigi/Oxfam); A woman works in a garment factory in Hanoi, Vietnam (photo: Eleanor Farmer/Oxfam); A woman speaks at an event in Morocco held to encourage women's political participation (photo: Ellie Kealey/Oxfam); Flonira Mukamana works on her tree tomato plantation in Musanze District, Rwanda (photo: Aurelie Marrier d'Unienville/Oxfam).

AN ECONOMY THAT WORKS FOR WOMEN

Achieving women's economic empowerment in an increasingly unequal world

Women's economic empowerment could reduce poverty for everyone. In order to achieve it, we need to first fix the current broken economic model which is undermining gender equality and causing extreme economic inequality. The neoliberal model has made it harder for women to have better quality and better paid jobs, address inequality in unpaid care work, and women's influence and decision making power is constrained. To achieve women's economic empowerment, we need a human economy that works for women and men alike, and for everyone, not just the richest 1%.

SUMMARY

*'Despite important progress in promoting gender equality, there remains an urgent need to address structural barriers to women's economic empowerment and full inclusion in economic activity...If the world is to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, we need a quantum leap in women's economic empowerment.'*¹

– UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, January 2016

'Women had no voice in this community. They had no right to join other women. The co-op has changed women's lives in this community. They [men] saw us being self reliant – bringing home money, bringing sugar for porridge, they have really changed their mindset on women.'

– Flonira Mukamana, member of COPAPF women's cooperative in Kinigi sector, Musanze District, Northern Rwanda.

Women's economic empowerment requires the creation of decent, quality work opportunities with fair pay, and an increase in women's decision making power.² It is vital for fulfilling women's rights, reducing poverty and achieving broader development goals. To end extreme poverty will take much more than just money. But gender inequality in the economy costs women in developing countries \$9 trillion a year³ – a sum which would not only benefit women but would unleash new spending power across communities and provide a massive boost to the economy as a whole.

However, progress in making women equal to men in the economy is painfully slow, and women are still more likely than men to live in poverty.⁴ Across the world, women consistently earn less than men and are concentrated in the lowest-paid and least secure forms of work.⁵ Globally, the average gender pay gap is 23 percent⁶ and 700 million fewer women than men are in paid work.⁷ The World Economic Forum has warned that instead of improving in 2016, gender inequality in the economy reverted to where it stood in 2008.⁸ At the current rate of progress, it will take 170 years for women and men to be employed at the same rates, paid the same for equal work, and have the same levels of seniority.⁹ Clearly, a structural change is needed.

Evidence shows that although gender equality supports economic growth, not all economic growth supports gender equality.¹⁰ Our current economic model is concentrating wealth at the top of the economy, causing extreme economic inequality and leaving the poorest women and girls behind. Currently eight men own as much as the poorest 3.6bn people on the planet.¹¹ Rising inequality has slowed down reductions in poverty, and the majority of the world's poor continue to be women.

To achieve women's economic empowerment, we need to make the economy work for women. Harmful social norms devalue and restrict women's work: research in 67 developing countries revealed that on average, one in five men disagreed that women should have work outside the home, even if they are qualified to do it.¹² Inequalities also persist in the law and regulation. 155 countries have at least one law which means women have fewer economic rights than men.¹³ There has also been a failure to recognize that economic policy impacts women and girls differently to men and boys.

This report looks at how this economic model, neoliberalism, constrains women's economic empowerment in three main ways:

- **Neoliberal policies have led to poor labour rights and low pay. Countries are pursuing economic development strategies that prioritize cheap and precarious work, the majority of which is done by women.**

For example, women working in garment factories in Vietnam and Myanmar interviewed by Oxfam work very long hours, sometimes up to 18 hours a day, or they have to work through the night. Yet they are still not earning enough to sustain themselves and their families. This is despite the industry being one with famous brands and huge profits – brands like Zara, whose owner, Amancio Ortega, is one of the eight richest men on earth,¹⁴ or H&M, owned by Stefan Persson, ranked 32 in the Forbes list.¹⁵

Women are also concentrated in the informal sector where they often lack rights and privileges such as a secure contract, minimum wages and social protection. The example of domestic workers in Kenya (see page 11) illustrates the challenges this creates, such as vulnerability to exploitation.

- **Unpaid care work has failed to be recognized and valued for its contribution to the economy. Current economic policies have undermined investment in infrastructure and public services like education, healthcare and social protection, meaning women have increased responsibility for unpaid care work.**

Worldwide, women carry out between two and 10 times more unpaid care work than men.¹⁶ This work is worth \$10 trillion to the global economy each year,¹⁷ equivalent to over an eighth of the world's entire GDP, and more than the GDPs of India, Japan and Brazil combined.¹⁸ Women's disproportionate responsibility for this work squeezes the amount of time that they have to go to school and earn a living. Recent research showed that globally, 57 million unpaid workers are filling in the gaps caused by inadequate healthcare provision.¹⁹ The majority are women who have given up employment to carry out this role.

- **Women's collective voice and influence on economic decision making is hampered by restrictions placed on labour organizing and undue influence of the richest in society over economic policy.**

Women's collective action and organizing is a proven factor in improving their rights, including key aspects of economic empowerment, as shown by the story of women strawberry pickers in Morocco (see page 22). However women are often concentrated in informal sectors that are harder to organize, or face restrictions that mean their voices are not heard in labour movements. Investing in women's organizations and movements, and implementing policies such as gender budgeting, can ensure economic policies reflect women's priorities and are designed to support gender equality rather than undermine it.

In recent years, we have seen greater recognition by governments and policy makers that women's economic and workforce participation can pay powerful economic dividends. At the same time we have seen less concern with making sure that the benefits of their work are also experienced by women themselves. **While the focus remains on making women work for the good of the economy, making the economy work for women has yet to be seriously addressed.** Feminist economists and women's organizations have consistently drawn attention to this – but their

contributions continue to be sidelined in male-dominated economic spheres.

Oxfam is calling for a 'human economy' which works for everyone, not just the few; one that benefits women and men alike. It would create fairer, better societies. It would ensure secure jobs paying decent wages, and treat women and men equally. The people who should benefit disproportionately from our economies are people living in poverty. Our economy would thrive within the limits of our planet, and hand a better, more sustainable world to every new generation. Building a human economy requires us to fundamentally reject the current economic model, and agree to rebuild our economies in a different way.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Ensure decent work, including a fair income, secure contracts and safe working conditions.

Governments and businesses should address the quality and security of women's economic opportunities by:

- Assessing current labour and wage standards to ensure domestic workers, migrant workers and informally employed workers are covered by all current and future labour standards legislation.
- Addressing workplace violence and discrimination through legislation, prosecution, public information campaigns and holding corporate actors to account.
- Committing to lifting minimum wages to living wage standards, and setting out a roadmap to do so in consultation with workers and unions.
- Undertaking concerted efforts to end the gender pay gap, including ensuring equal pay for equal value and promoting decent work opportunities for women.
- Repealing laws that discriminate against women's economic equality, and implementing legislation and regulatory frameworks that support women's rights.
- Promoting positive social norms and attitudes to women's work and to the rebalancing of power at the household, local, national and international levels.
- Ensuring women have pathways to better-paid positions, and improving access to education and training for well-paid careers. Encouraging transparent promotion pathways and policies that encourage employers to hire and train low-skilled, low-wage workers.

2. Recognize, reduce and redistribute unpaid care work.

- Governments should invest in public services and infrastructure which reduces and redistributes unpaid care work, including universal free public healthcare, social care, child care, water and sanitation, and education services.
- Governments and International Finance Institutions should include unpaid care work as part of their economic development strategies.
- Governments and businesses should recognize women's greater responsibility for unpaid care work and help to reduce the proportion borne by women through providing child, dependent adult, and elderly care and paid family and medical leave, flexible working hours and paid parental leave.
- Governments should promote the redistribution of unpaid care work through policies that encourage men to do their fair share of this work. These include flexible working and parental leave for both parents. Social norms on the gender distribution of care work should also be challenged, for example through advertising

or public campaigns.

- Governments and international institutions should collect better data on the distribution of unpaid care work and its contribution to the overall economy. Governments should maximize fiscal space for women's economic empowerment, through progressive and gender sensitive tax policies. They should crack down on tax dodging by rich corporations and individuals; raise taxes on the richest and reduce them on the poorest; and use these additional revenues to invest in public services.

3. Support women's voices – in labour and feminist movements, collective enterprise, and political participation and leadership.

- Governments should adopt gender budgeting approaches that systematically involve women's organizations and civil society, to provide proper scrutiny and fully assess the impact of economic policies on women and girls. They should support the training of organizations and women in this area and improve data collection that would enable it.
- Governments, international institutions and civil society should provide increased, accessible funding to women's organizations to enable them to consistently and effectively raise the concerns of women, in government, civil society and corporate sector spaces.
- Governments should ensure laws are in place that protect the rights of women workers to unionize and strike, and rescind laws in opposition to those rights.
- All actors should support women's collective enterprises and cooperatives, including through providing training and integrating them fairly into supply chains.
- Governments and civil society should implement policies to promote women's political participation and leadership.

Governments, business and civil society should recognize the danger that confronts women advocating for women's rights. They should establish effective measures to ensure that women human rights defenders, including trade unionists, enjoy full protection and a safe environment in which to carry out their actions without fear of reprisal.

1 INTRODUCTION: WE CAN REDUCE POVERTY, BUT ONLY IF WE MAKE THE ECONOMY WORK FOR WOMEN

Gender inequality is one of the oldest and most pervasive forms of inequality and shapes our economies, societies and communities. It denies women their voices, devalues their work and results in power imbalances between women and men from the household to the national and global levels. In recent years, there has been some important progress to change this: for example, today many more girls are going to school than 20 years ago,²⁰ there are more laws in place against violence against women and girls, and there are more women in political leadership, even if they are still far outnumbered by men.²¹

Yet progress in making women's position equal to men's is painfully slow, and women are still more likely than men to live in poverty.²² The World Economic Forum has warned that the biggest gaps between men and women are in the economy and health. In fact, instead of improving in 2016, gender inequality in the economy reverted to where it stood in 2008.²³ At the current rate of progress, it will take 170 years for women to be employed at the same rates, paid the same for equal work, and have the same levels of seniority at work as men.²⁴

Women's economic empowerment is a crucial part of achieving gender equality and realizing women's rights. For women to be economically empowered means having equal access to and control over economic resources and opportunities, in order to have the power to make their own decisions in all areas of their lives.²⁵ These opportunities would result in women experiencing less discrimination in their homes and communities, challenging gender inequality. Having access to quality, decent work – which means a fair income, a safe working environment, and the ability to organize to increase their negotiating power in the workplace²⁶ – is important to achieve these changes. Women's heavy and unequal responsibility for unpaid care work must also be addressed, to enable women to have more choices in how they spend their time.

Greater gender equality is essential to reducing poverty overall, and women's economic empowerment is a key part of achieving this. Although an end to extreme economic inequality will take more than just money, gender inequality in the economy costs women in developing countries \$9 trillion a year. Evidence from a number of regions and countries shows closing this gap leads to overall reductions in poverty.²⁷ In Latin America, an increase in the number of women in paid work between 2000 and 2010 accounted for around 30 percent of the overall reduction in poverty and income inequality experienced in the region.²⁸ In the United States, if women were paid equally to men of comparable education and age, the poverty rate for working women and their families would be cut by half.²⁹

Supporting women to improve their livelihoods benefits their families and the wider community.³⁰ It means they can afford to pay for their children to go to school, buy better food, make improvements to their homes, and find more time to be involved with

the community.³¹ Across the world women are using their voices to challenge poverty and inequality. Oxfam sees time and again how supporting women to challenge gender inequality is one of the best ways to end poverty for all.

Women's economic empowerment would also have positive implications for economic growth. Countries with higher levels of gender equality tend to have higher than average income levels,³² and evidence shows that economic growth increases when women and men participate at more equal rates in the economy.³³ Increasing women's economic equality is therefore vital for fulfilling women's rights, reducing poverty and achieving broader development goals.

However, evidence shows that although gender equality supports economic growth, not all economic growth supports gender equality. Our current economic model is concentrating wealth at the top of the economy, causing extreme economic inequality and leaving the poorest women and girls behind. The model constrains women's economic empowerment because it does not create decent work opportunities with fair wages, or recognize and invest in addressing unpaid care work, particularly for the poorest. Women's voice and influence is also constrained and marginalized. Clearly, a structural change is needed.

This report looks at three aspects of women's economic empowerment – access to decent work with fair pay, addressing inequalities in unpaid care work and women's collective voice and action – that are currently undermined by economic policies. It also looks at the need to build a more human economy that works for everyone, not just the few.

There is growing international recognition of the need for action (see Box 1), and this year, there are global opportunities for governments to act on their commitments. In March 2017, the UN's Commission on the Status of Women will meet in New York to debate the issue, which will again be assessed when the UN meets in July to review progress in meeting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 1 and 5 (No Poverty and Gender Equality).³⁴ This will be an important milestone in assessing what progress has been made since 2015 and ensuring that governments have the best policies and funding in place to meet their commitments. At the same time, the G20 is continuing its work to reduce the gender gap in labour force participation by 25 percent by 2025.³⁵

In the face of growing economic inequality, where it is the poorest of women who most suffer its harmful effects, the need to accelerate progress is all the more pressing. That is why we must take the opportunities of 2017 to inject new life into the mission to improve women's economic empowerment and push for a fairer economy. To do this we need to look at why the economy is not working for women.

Box 1: International commitments to women's economic empowerment

Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development sets global goals for governments to end poverty and achieve sustainability by 2030. Women's economic empowerment is recognized throughout the framework as essential to achieving this. Goal 5 commits governments to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Other relevant targets included in the framework are:

1.4: By 2030, ensure that all men and women, in particular the poor and the vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services, ownership and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, appropriate new technology and financial services, including microfinance.

5.4: Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate.

8.5: By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value.

8.8: Protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers, including migrant workers, in particular women migrants, and those in precarious employment.

10.4: Adopt policies, especially fiscal, wage and social protection policies, and progressively achieve greater equality.

UN High Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment

The UN High Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment, formed by then-UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, has put forward recommendations for how the commitments made in Agenda 2030 to women's economic empowerment can be realized.³⁶ Winnie Byanyima, the Executive Director of Oxfam International, has joined the panel alongside leaders from civil society, the private sector, government and international institutions including the Executive Directors of the World Bank, IMF and UN Women, among others.

The Panel has outlined a framework for action comprising seven drivers of women's economic empowerment:

1. Tackling adverse norms and promoting positive role models.
2. Ensuring legal protection and reforming discriminatory laws and regulations.
3. Recognizing, reducing and redistributing unpaid work and care.
4. Building assets – digital, financial and property.
5. Changing business culture and practice.
6. Improving public sector practices in employment and procurement.
7. Strengthening visibility, collective voice and representation.

Working from the principle of 'leave no one behind', the Panel has recommended that efforts should start with women living in poverty and those facing multiple forms of discrimination and exclusion. This includes a specific focus on women in the informal sector and women working in agriculture as those most likely to lack equal economic opportunities. The Panel has also recognized the importance of macroeconomic policies in creating the enabling environment for women's economic empowerment.

2 THE ECONOMY IS NOT WORKING FOR WOMEN

Making the economy work for women is the key to women's economic empowerment. In no country have women achieved economic equality with men, and women continue to be disadvantaged compared to men across virtually all aspects of economic empowerment.³⁷ Research shows women value a good quality job just as much as men do, even in the countries with the highest levels of gender inequality.³⁸ However, globally, 700 million fewer women than men are in paid work,³⁹ with only marginal progress being made to reduce this gap over the decade up to 2015.⁴⁰

Across the world, women consistently earn less than men and are concentrated in the lowest-paid and least secure forms of work.⁴¹ Globally, the average gender pay gap, which measures the difference between women's and men's waged earnings, is 23 percent, with women in most countries earning 70 to 90 percent of men's wages.⁴² In South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, where women are concentrated in low-paid informal and agricultural sectors, and strong gender inequalities persist across women's lives, the wage gap tends to even be higher.⁴³ The pay gap is higher when gender inequality intersects with other forms of social and economic inequalities and marginalization based on, for example, race, ethnicity, age and class. In Latin America, the gender pay gap is much higher for indigenous women.⁴⁴

Although narrower, gender pay gaps also persist in high-income countries. In the UK for example, women are paid less than men in 90 percent of sectors⁴⁵ and in Canada, the pay gap for women in full-time work widened between 2009 and 2011.⁴⁶ Even in New Zealand, the OECD country with the lowest gender gap, women still earn on average five percent less than men.⁴⁷ One factor associated with the gender pay gap is the 'motherhood penalty', where women who choose to have children see higher inequality in their pay, while for men there is a 'fatherhood bonus', where men's pay on average is higher for those with children.⁴⁸

Women are also more likely to work in the informal sector, especially in Asia and Africa, where this includes up to 75 percent of women.⁴⁹ Women who work in the informal sector are less likely to have decent work, employment contracts, legal identity or social protection, and face much higher restrictions in organizing for labour rights. Nearly 600 million women worldwide are in the most precarious forms of work – as home-based workers or subsistence farmers for example.⁵⁰ Women's work in the informal sector is also often not recognized or counted as part of the economy, as it goes undocumented. As outlined in Box 2, specific efforts must be made to ensure policies recognize and support the rights of women working in the informal sector.

Agriculture also remains an important area of work for women, particularly in developing regions. In sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, women are less likely than men to have access to secure, good quality land or to the inputs they need to earn an income through farming.⁵¹ In Latin America, although women and men have equal legal rights to land ownership in most countries, deep-rooted cultural and institutional barriers mean that in practice women own less land than men, and the land women do own is of the poorest quality. This ranges from women owning eight percent of total landholdings in Guatemala, to 30 percent in Peru.⁵² Women also carry out unpaid agricultural work, for example contributing to subsistence farming for their families and

communities. Nearly a quarter of all women globally are defined by the ILO as ‘unpaid contributing family workers’.⁵³

As well as these inequalities, women do at least twice as much unpaid care work as men – sometimes 10 times as much, often on top of their paid work.⁵⁴ This includes tasks such as cooking, cleaning and looking after children and other family members, including people who are sick or elderly.⁵⁵ Gender stereotypes, which traditionally see men as ‘breadwinners’ and women as caregivers, mean that even where women are increasingly responsible for earning an income, unpaid care and domestic work still falls largely to them.

Women’s disproportionate responsibility for this work squeezes the amount of time that they have to go to school and earn a living. For many women, this inequality restricts those choices women can make to earn an income, participate in public life, and to spend on essential rest and leisure.⁵⁶ In Latin America and the Caribbean, a study found that over half of women aged 20 to 24 who were not seeking employment said it was because of their unpaid care work responsibilities.⁵⁷

Inequality in responsibility for unpaid care work means that on average, women work longer days than men when paid and unpaid work is counted together.⁵⁸ This inequality accumulates, resulting in the fact that globally, a young woman today will work on average the equivalent of four extra years over her lifetime than a man – an extra month of work for every year of a woman’s life.⁵⁹

The fact that this work is seen as ‘women’s work’ explains why it is not valued by society, despite it oiling the wheels of our economies.⁶⁰ This work is worth \$10 trillion to the global economy each year,⁶¹ equivalent to over an eighth of the world’s entire GDP, and more than the GDPs of India, Japan and Brazil combined.⁶² When care work is professionalized, it tends to be poorly paid and insecure. Over 80 percent of the world’s domestic workers are women, many of them migrant workers, and they face high risks of exploitation and a lack of decent work.⁶³

Case study 1: Domestic workers in Kenya raise their voices⁶⁴

In Kenya, where the richest man's net worth is over 70 billion Kenyan shillings (\$700m), an estimated 2.2 million residents of Nairobi still work in the informal sector and live in underserved settlements and slums. There are huge disparities in empowerment levels between women and men, with women facing challenges such as limited education, lack of employment, and the risks of physical and sexual violence.

Domestic workers, who are predominately women, receive low wages, have insecurity of income, and are often not aware of their rights. Margaret Mumbua lives in Mukuru, a slum in Nairobi, with her four children, two of whom are still in school. She has been a domestic worker for 18 years.

Margaret explains that the wages she receives are not enough to meet her family's basic needs: 'The main challenge is that the payment is very poor...The amount I earn depends on customers. Sometimes you can work so much, and other times you go without. If I work two 10-hour days, I can earn 400 [Kenyan shillings]. The maximum per week I can get is 700 [approximately \$8].'

Domestic workers are also vulnerable to sexual harassment and exploitation. 'Sometimes, a man can come and tell you he wants somebody to work for him,' says Margaret. 'When you get inside the house, he can tell you – "The work is me." The work is inside the bed, not washing clothes.'

There are policies and laws which set out workers' rights to decent working standards, but only one-quarter of domestic workers are aware of these. Margaret is being supported by Oxfam and partners to organize with fellow domestic workers to raise awareness of and improve their rights and to challenge the economic inequality they experience.

She says: 'It is important to be informed because if I knew my rights, I would not work 10 hours – I would work eight hours. If the regulations change, people will start liking the job. Many people don't like it now because we are mistreated and overworked. In Kenya, if these organizations are formed and employers know there is a strong organization, they wouldn't mistreat people, because they know they will be taken to the authorities. Domestic workers will be like the other workers if they are put on the same level as other jobs.'

Kenya has not yet ratified ILO Convention 189, which sets the labour standards for domestic work, so these workers remain vulnerable to unregulated wages and working hours, without benefits such as paid sick leave. Oxfam is pushing the Ministry of Labour to enforce better regulation of domestic workers' rights.

Women's inequality in the economy is influenced by a number of factors that have always been present in all economies: a lack of equality under the law and in regulation and a failure of economic theory to count or value women's work. Both of these are driven by harmful social norms which devalue women's work and constrain their choices. Our economies exploit these social norms and unfair laws, and our economic theory fails to recognize this.

HARMFUL SOCIAL NORMS

Gender inequality is perpetuated by harmful social norms and discrimination. These norms are deeply held beliefs and attitudes which constrain what is and is not acceptable behaviour for men and women, and often devalue women's role and status. Harmful norms limit women's mobility outside the home, justify violence against women and place more value on roles traditionally held by men.

In the economy, they constrain individual women's opportunities, and mean certain forms of work are considered as suitable for either men or women but not both. Those

seen as suitable for women tend to have less status, and are paid less.⁶⁵ For example, women in developed countries dominate the service sectors, where pay is about 70 percent of the national average.⁶⁶ Men, on the other hand, are over-represented in senior official and management positions, where earnings are twice the national average.⁶⁷ Social norms can also prevent women having economic opportunities altogether. Research in 67 developing countries revealed that on average, one in five men disagreed that women should have work outside the home, even if they are qualified to do it.⁶⁸ And when job opportunities are scarce, nearly two in five people globally think that men should have stronger rights to them than women.⁶⁹

Case study 2: Social norms and care work in Uganda

Social norms mean women and men have unequal responsibilities for unpaid care work. Florence and Zakayo live with their two young children in the Acholi sub-region of Uganda and are small-scale farmers. Traditional gender roles are strongly held in the community, with women generally being responsible for household and domestic work, and men's authority being seen as absolute.

Florence was the typical Acholi wife, waking up earlier than the rest of the family each morning to fetch water and firewood, bathe the children, prepare and serve them and her husband breakfast, before working to grow the family's food. At lunchtime, she would return home to make lunch and then go back to the field till the end of the day, when she would return home in time to prepare supper before Zakayo came back from the bar.

She says: 'When we got married I was living at my husband's extended family home. We left after I had my second child. It was a big family of about 20 people, and I was among the few who were doing most of the household chores and the farming. I would leave the field to go to prepare lunch and return to the field until 6pm. My brother-in-law's wife and I used to do most of the work. We would work a lot, just the two of us, to produce food for the entire family. There was nothing like division of labour.' For Florence, long hours spent doing unpaid farming and domestic work meant she had little time to spend on income-earning activities.

Zakayo recalls that he would resort to violence towards Florence whenever he found she had not done something he was expecting her to: 'I used to beat my wife. I would expect her to wash my clothes, for example, and if she hadn't done it I would beat her.'

Oxfam's WE-Care initiative works in the community to give training and raise awareness about women's heavy and unequal responsibility for care work. Zakayo attended the training, and reports that it changed his attitudes towards domestic tasks and his wife's role:

'As a man, I used to feel it was not my responsibility to engage in that kind of work. It was a mindset borne out of the patriarchal nature of our Acholi society that gave the men absolute authority over their wives. Of course, I now know it was wrong to subject my wife to such a punishing schedule that would not allow her to do anything else that was beneficial to all of us.'

As a result, Zakayo now helps with both farming to support the family and domestic work. The couple have faced criticism from their peers because they are acting contrary to traditional gender roles, and Florence also admits that she needed to adjust her own views: 'Before the training, whenever I saw Zakayo washing his own clothes, I would get offended, thinking he was taking up my role.'

However, despite these challenges there have been many benefits to the family. And because Zakayo now helps with both farming to support the family and domestic work, they have more time for activities that boost the family's income.

INEQUALITY UNDER THE LAW

Many of these social norms have been codified in law, leading to unequal treatment for women and men. Globally, 155 economies have at least one law which means women have fewer economic rights than men.⁷⁰ This includes 18 countries where husbands can legally prevent their wives from working, and 100 countries where women are not allowed to do the same jobs as men.⁷¹ Legal restrictions also impede women's rights in other areas of their lives that directly affect their participation in the workforce; for example, 46 countries have no laws against domestic violence.⁷² Progress also needs to be made to ensure that regulation supports the rights of women in the most precarious forms of work, for example by extending social protection and labour rights to those with casual or temporary contracts.⁷³

Without repealing laws which discriminate against women, or ensuring that regulations designed to give workers labour rights extend to women in the most precarious forms of work, it will not be possible to build an economy that works for women.

TRADITIONAL ECONOMIC THEORY IGNORES GENDER

An economy that worked for women would be based on policies that recognize and seek to reduce gender inequality. However, harmful social norms also translate into economic theory and policy making. Traditional economic theory has tended to ignore the fact that gender inequality affects how people participate in and benefit from the economy, and has also largely ignored the contribution that predominately women provide through unpaid care work.

Feminist economists have pointed out, for example, that the theory of rational choice, which says people will act in a way which maximizes the gains to themselves, does not recognize that people often choose to act in ways to support their families rather themselves as individuals, and that gender norms mean women are more likely to do this than men.⁷⁴ Rational choice also does not recognize that women may have less power to make these decisions, for example because they are constrained in the types of work they can take up or in their ability to work outside the home. The exclusion from measures of the economy of unpaid care and domestic work, and other types of unpaid work predominately carried out by women such as subsistence farming, is also a major way that our current economic model has always discriminated against women. By asking the wrong questions or ignoring women outright, economists and policy makers have often put in place policies that have cemented gender inequality rather than helped solve it.⁷⁵ As well as excluding unpaid care work from measurements of economic well-being, the effects of government spending decisions on gender inequality are often not taken into account. It is perhaps no coincidence then that the field of economics has been dominated by white, Western men – in the 47 years it has been awarded, only one woman has received the Nobel Prize for Economics.⁷⁶ In this way economic theory has failed to challenge and in many ways has legitimized the exploitation of women's inequality for economic gain. In recent decades this process has been accelerated by the nature of the current economic model, which has dominated economic decision making across the world.

3 WOMEN'S WORK ISN'T WORKING: HOW THE CURRENT ECONOMIC MODEL MAKES THIS WORSE

Women's economic empowerment requires the creation of decent, quality work opportunities to ensure that work provides women with a high enough income to move out of poverty and boosts their decision making power in other areas of their lives.⁷⁷ It also requires governments to be able to invest in the services and infrastructure that women need to achieve equality, such as education and healthcare, and to support care work. However, these goals are being undermined by an economy that is increasingly unequal, and doesn't work for women. Extreme economic inequality is being driven by failed economic policies that also undermine gender equality and the achievement of women's economic empowerment.

In recent decades, we have seen the benefits of economic growth disproportionately accrue to the very richest, the majority of whom are men. This has resulted in extreme economic inequality, with eight men now owning as much wealth as the bottom half of humanity – 3.6 billion people.⁷⁸ The poorest in the global economy have seen their income levels grow much more slowly than those of the richest; over the last 25 years, the top one percent has gained more income than the bottom 50 percent put together.⁷⁹

This extreme economic inequality is slowing down progress in reducing poverty. Had inequality not increased between 1990 and 2010, 700 million more people, most of them women, would not be living in poverty today.⁸⁰ The World Bank has said that without redoubling their efforts to tackle inequality, world leaders will miss their goal of ending extreme poverty by 2030.⁸¹ Rising economic inequality has exacerbated other forms of inequality based on, for example, ethnicity, caste, race or geography.⁸² Here, we discuss how these policies have also made achieving women's economic empowerment, a key component of gender equality, much harder.

Economic and gender inequality are by no means separate phenomena. The majority of the richest in society continue to be men,⁸³ while women are more likely to live in poverty and be in lower income groups, carrying out the majority of unpaid care work.⁸⁴ This holds true even in advanced countries where women and men have the same access to education.⁸⁵ The IMF has also shown that gender inequality contributes to higher income inequality, as women have lower access to healthcare and education, and participate in the labour market at lower rates, lowering their overall income levels.⁸⁶ This is confirmed by research that showed that countries which have reduced gender inequality more slowly than average have not managed to reduce economic inequality.⁸⁷

Oxfam has identified neoliberal policies and political capture as two driving forces in the explosion in extreme economic inequality in the last 30 years.⁸⁸ Neoliberal policies have enabled a concentration of wealth at the top of the economy, while political capture, where the richest have undue influence on policy making, has made it less likely economies will work for everyone rather than the few. Neoliberal policies can be

characterized as those that focus on expansion of markets and individualism. These have led to increased rights, mobility and freedoms for corporations, and a corresponding reduction in collective action, state regulation and government intervention in the economy. Recent research published by the IMF found that instead of supporting growth, some neoliberal policies have increased inequality.⁸⁹

There are many aspects of the neoliberal model that have been critiqued by feminist economists.⁹⁰ The three major areas this report focuses on are the role of neoliberalism in the downward pressure on the incomes and quality of work for the poorest, the majority of whom are women; the failure to recognize or invest in unpaid care work; and constraints on women's voice and decision making power. In these ways the current economic model of neoliberalism makes the fight for women's economic empowerment far harder. To empower women, we need a new approach to the way we run our economies.

Box 2: The women at greatest risk of being 'left behind'

Evidence shows that women's rights and gender equality do not automatically improve as a result of economic growth, and that for this to happen, specific actions must be taken which make growth more inclusive and redistribute gains to women.⁹¹ Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development commits governments to ensuring that no one is left behind, and states that targets will only be deemed met if they have been met for the poorest groups in society.⁹²

It is clear, therefore, that these goals will not be met without increased attention to those currently in the most vulnerable forms of employment. Based on the ILO's conceptualization of vulnerable employment,⁹³ global reports on trends in employment, and research on women farthest from the labour market, Oxfam has identified the following **key criteria** to identify which groups of women are most vulnerable and at greatest risk of being left behind from economic empowerment:

- Likely to experience multiple forms of discrimination such as income, age, class, ethnicity and caste.
- Low access to social protection, such as pensions or welfare.
- Likely to lack voice through effective participation/representation in trade unions and in the community.
- Inadequate earnings (based on minimum wage or average earnings).
- Difficult working conditions (e.g. long hours of work, labour intensive, lack of security and safety, prevalence of sexual harassment) that undermine fundamental rights.
- Discrimination in accessing fair work opportunities, for example due to undocumented or illegal status or laws which discriminate based on gender or other factors.

Policy making must pay particular attention to addressing these inequalities and ensuring the economic inclusion of women working in the most precarious forms of work. Women most likely to fall into this category include agricultural workers, domestic workers, migrant workers and those in the informal sector.

WOMEN'S LOWER-PAID AND LESS SECURE WORK SUPPORTS HIGHER PROFITS FOR OTHERS

No country has ever achieved equality in pay between men and women, and when increasing numbers of women have joined the workforce, they have consistently been in lower-paid and lower status jobs than men. However, since the 1980s, neoliberal economic policies have further eroded the wages of the lowest paid workers, disproportionately affecting women. In developing countries, women's low-paid labour at the bottom of new global supply chains created by globalization has facilitated higher profits for others, while failing to offer economic empowerment.

As the world economy has globalized, many women have been brought into new employment opportunities, especially in manufacturing and agricultural export sectors, for example in East Asia's textile and food sectors.⁹⁴ While these new jobs have opened up new opportunities for women, trade and labour policies have undermined the quality of the roles and the power of the women working in them.

In these sectors, women typically are concentrated in the lowest paid and least secure roles, for example manufacturing garments, footwear or small electronics.⁹⁵ This is no accident – specific strategies have been used to bring women into the labour market to provide a cheaper source of labour.⁹⁶ Evidence from East Asia showed that despite rapid economic growth that relied on women workers, gender wage gaps remained persistently wide, and in some cases worsened.⁹⁷ To compete with other countries for investment, countries have kept wages in export sectors low, often clamping down on labour organizing and rights as a way to mitigate upward pressure on wage levels.

The garment industry, where 80 percent of manufacturing workers are women, is an example of a sector where wages are set too low and labour rights infringements frequently occur. In Vietnam, Oxfam has interviewed women working in garment factories who, despite working 12 hours a day, six days a week, struggle to meet their basic needs with the wages they receive. Tham is a worker in The Tinh Loi factory, which produces garments for global brands. Tham earns less than \$1 an hour. In an interview, she said:

'My working hours and salary are unfair. The thing I find unfair is that with the same amount of work, my salary has decreased... We, as workers, cannot do anything to influence management. In case of urgent orders and difficulties the overtime and salary are decided by management. We only follow those decisions.'

However the garment industry is one which generates large profits for some of the richest people in the world. For example, annual share dividends from the parent company of fashion chain Zara to Amancio Ortega – the world's second richest man – are worth approximately €1.1bn.⁹⁸ Stefan Persson, a major shareholder in H&M and ranked 32 in the Forbes list of the richest people in the world, received €658m in share dividends last year.⁹⁹ Although not directly connected to the factory that Tham works in, this shows the stark inequality in the industry.

Increasing the availability of decent work opportunities and raising pay levels in the lowest paid sectors would reduce poverty and inequality and are essential to achieving women's economic empowerment. Concentrated in low-paid work, women stand to gain the most from these policies.¹⁰⁰ Raising minimum wage levels can also lower the

gender pay gap. Governments and companies should make sure to extend these measures to the informal sector.

Case study 3: Minimum wages for Myanmar's garment workers

In Myanmar, Oxfam research revealed that garment workers, 90 percent of whom are women, were receiving poverty wages despite producing clothing in profitable supply chains.¹⁰¹

Swe Swe, a garment worker, explains her experiences:

'Last month we had to do overtime until dawn, for one week continuously. With regular hours of work, we should be finishing at 7:30pm but we had to work through the night until 6am the next day, and then at 7:30am we had to start work again. It harms my health. I don't want to work all night until the next morning. We also regularly don't receive all of our overtime wages. We only receive overtime pay for two hours. But the usual overtime working period is three-and-a-half hours each day. If I work all night until morning, I only receive, 2600 Myanmar Kyat (\$2). I am afraid of raising these issues or problems. If someone raises problems or makes complaints, he or she is dismissed from work. Because of this threat, I haven't made any complaint.'

Before September 2015, there was no minimum wage in place and some workers were earning as little as \$0.60 a day as a base wage, as well as doing long hours of overtime, including forced overtime. Throughout 2012, workers held mass strikes in protest. Following more than two years of negotiations between unions, employers and the Government of Myanmar, a new minimum wage was announced, with effect from 1 September 2015.

When the government increased the national minimum wage level in 2016, it had the potential to increase earnings for the 300,000 workers in the sector by nearly \$80m a year.¹⁰² Multinational companies who source garments from Myanmar supported the implementation of the minimum wage.

However, success is not guaranteed when a law is approved; there is still much to do to ensure that it translates into real improvements for workers and their families.

Women working for poverty wages is not simply a developing country phenomenon. In the United States, women form the majority of low-wage workers in every state and comprise 57 percent of those who earn under \$15 an hour – the minimum wage level that campaigners say would provide a route out of poverty.¹⁰³ In the UK, women continue to be over-represented in low-paying sectors such as care and hospitality, where pay and job security are poor.¹⁰⁴

Recently, concerns have also been raised about emerging forms of work in sectors where women are concentrated. Increasing 'flexibilization' of work – meaning that workers are no longer offered a secure, long-term contract with guaranteed wages, but instead participate in 'zero hour' or 'gig economy' employment, undermines workers' position and quality of employment. Research showed that a rapidly growing 'on-demand' approach in the domestic work sector, in which 80 percent of workers are women,¹⁰⁵ using digital apps and platforms to ensure workers' availability as needed, is failing to provide decent work opportunities.¹⁰⁶ This is because the jobs created offer low and insecure incomes, and reinforce discrimination and unequal power relations between domestic workers and their employers. They also fail to be covered by established labour and social protection measures.

Case study 4: Women's economic empowerment through supporting decent work in the UK

Since the economic crisis, a rising share of employment growth in the UK has been in jobs that pose challenges to the rights and conditions of workers. The evidence shows that there is a serious problem of 'precarious work' in the UK, including the prevalence of low pay, a rise in in-work poverty, as well as greater use of zero hours contracts and more self-employment. This all makes for a labour market that doesn't provide 'decent work' for many people.

What has received less attention when analysing these key trends in earnings and employment, is that UK women workers in particular are often more disadvantaged in this precarious labour market. Today:

- Female employees are now the single largest group of workers in in-work poverty (**1.5 million women employees** – compared to 1.4 million men).
- Women are more likely to be low-paid than men – 62 percent of all low-paid employees (**3.1 million female employees**) are women.
- Over half of workers on zero hours are women (**350,000**), who usually take on these contracts as a second-best option to permanent work.
- There is also a growing trend in self-employment, such that now, up to one in 10 women (**250,000**) are self-employed, which can bring insecurity.

Through 'Future Skills', and other UK projects, Oxfam is directly taking up the challenge of this gender biased UK labour market. Working in partnership with Oxfam's extensive shop network in the UK, Oxfam teams provide a six-month supported volunteer placement in an Oxfam shop.

Women receive training in skills and work with a professional mentor to gain confidence, break down barriers and plan their personal and professional development. Participants meet up once a month to take part in workshops on topics such as leadership, assertiveness, careers and employability skills.

Over the course of the project, the women develop their social skills and networks by engaging with shop staff, volunteers, customers and other project participants. Stronger social networks increase women's confidence, resilience and language skills as well as increasing their sense of belonging to a community. One participant said:

'I have been unemployed for over 5 years – it is a long time. I have skills but I did not believe in myself anymore. You start losing faith in yourself and you start believing that you are not worth very much. Now, a year later, I train other volunteers, I operate the till in the Oxfam shop, and I manage the floor of the shop, deal with difficult customers and manage the stock. I'd love to run my own shop one day. Now I know I can do it. It is thanks to Oxfam I feel valuable, stronger and determined. Whatever I will decide to do in the future – I know now that I can do it.'

Oxfam is working directly with women who face the highest barriers in the labour market, such as asylum seekers and the long-term unemployed, to amplify their voices. We are challenging the practices that leave these women vulnerable in the current precarious labour market, while advocating for a stronger floor of rights for all low-paid workers. Oxfam's vision is of a UK labour market that does guarantee decent work for all – jobs that do mean that there is a route out of poverty for women and their families.

THE POWER OF PUBLIC SERVICES TO REDUCE GENDER INEQUALITY IS UNDERMINED BY THE CURRENT ECONOMIC MODEL

To achieve women's economic empowerment, unpaid care work must be recognized for its value, the drudgery of the tasks reduced, and responsibility for this work redistributed more equally to men and to wider society. A quality education, access to healthcare and social protection are essential foundations for women to have equal opportunities – and for the poorest women and girls to escape poverty. The state can play a key role in providing these services, and giving women opportunities to change their lives. However, these goals run counter to neoliberal economic policies, which have advocated for reductions in public spending and the privatization of services.

As mentioned previously, traditional economic models are blind to the contribution that unpaid care work makes; it is not counted in GDP despite being worth as much as \$10 trillion a year to the global economy.¹⁰⁷ In high income countries, labour rights such as parental leave and pensions have supported women's entry into the labour force, although there is some way to go in ensuring these support full equality. However, in both high-income and developing countries, governments have failed to adequately invest in public services. Governments have also used public spending cuts in times of economic crisis.

As recognized by the UN High-Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment, 'reductions in public spending – including health, education, social services and social protection – are especially damaging for women.'¹⁰⁸ These reinforce gender inequality in opportunities, and result in women's free labour subsidizing the economy. For example, recent research showed that globally, 57 million unpaid workers are filling in the gaps caused by inadequate healthcare provision.¹⁰⁹ The majority of these unpaid workers are women who have given up employment to carry this out role.

Recent evidence also points to a growing childcare crisis in developing countries, where at most, only half of three- to five-year-old children have some form of early childhood education.¹¹⁰ The least access is available for the poorest children, which both restricts their mothers' time and the benefits that the children would see from attending nursery. A lack of investment in social protection and welfare measures such as sick pay, maternity and paternity leave and pensions also increases the costs of care shouldered by women.¹¹¹

There is clear evidence that policies which invest in the care economy have positive effects for economic growth, employment and gender equality. Research in seven OECD countries shows that if two percent of GDP were invested in care services, in this case social care and childcare, employment would rise by an estimated 2.4 to 6.1 percent.¹¹² The policies would also boost overall employment and economic growth. These investments could also reduce economic inequality for many women with caring responsibilities, as they could take advantage of services being provided at a lower cost and therefore would have more opportunities to increase their paid work.

Investments in infrastructure which prioritize supporting unpaid care work can also be effective. In Pakistan, having water sources closer to home has been associated with women devoting less time to housework and increased female employment.¹¹³ And in South Africa, electrification in rural areas has been linked to a reduction in the time women spend on housework, increasing the opportunities for women to take up employment.¹¹⁴

Fiscal policy is a key tool in reducing both gender and economic inequality: progressive tax policies ensure that enough revenue is raised from those who can afford it to spend on public services that improve outcomes for everyone – healthcare, water and childcare, for example. UN Women’s research has found that although many countries have made commitments towards gender equality, an analysis of national action plans to achieve these goals shows funding deficits of as high as 90 percent.¹¹⁵ The capacity of governments to raise enough revenue has been reduced by policies that prioritize attracting trade and investment through tax incentives such as tax holidays, tax exemptions and free trade zones.¹¹⁶ Most of the people who benefit from these policies are the already well off, the majority of whom are men.¹¹⁷

On top of this, to compensate for these tax breaks, governments increasingly rely on indirect taxation such as VAT on goods and services.¹¹⁸ Indirect taxes are considered regressive since the poorest people pay the same rate of tax as the richest. They also tend to exacerbate gender inequalities, as most of those poorest people are women.

WOMEN’S VOICE AND LEADERSHIP WEAKENED BY THE CURRENT ECONOMIC MODEL

Women’s economic empowerment requires women having the chance to shape their opportunities based on their own interests, and for policies to be shaped in line with their priorities. Women therefore need to have full and equal participation in economic, social and political life at all levels, from the household to the national and global levels. Government and economic policy making also need to be just as accountable to the poorest citizens as to the richest.

Research shows that women mobilizing and organizing can be a powerful force in challenging inequality and poverty, and achieving change against discrimination which holds women back. For example, the presence of strong women’s rights and feminist movements has been found to be the single most effective factor in governments taking action to end violence against women and girls.¹¹⁹ Despite this, women’s rights organizations face a chronic lack of funds, and experience difficulties in accessing the types of funding they need to build sustainable futures.¹²⁰

Women’s organizing in the workforce has also been key to achieving better economic rights and empowerment. Research has shown the influence of women’s activism in bringing about stronger labour rights and increased parental benefits.¹²¹ Another study showed that countries with strong collective bargaining coverage, and higher than average minimum wage levels, have smaller gender pay gaps.¹²² The examples in this report of strawberry pickers in Morocco and domestic workers in Kenya also illustrate the improvements that can be made through organizing together (see pages 11 and 22).

Women-run cooperatives or producer groups that bring together self-employed women are better able to access markets and global supply chains. Being organized into collective enterprises allows women to pool their assets, skills and other resources to produce goods and services of higher quality and quantity.¹²³ In Rwanda, Oxfam interviewed Flonira, who has been working as part of a cooperative since 2009. Since then she has earned enough money to renovate her house, grow her own tomato tree plantation and support her son's university education. She reported that the cooperative has changed perceptions of women in her community, who are now valued and respected for their contributions.

Historically, trade unions have bargained for improvements in the rights of workers that have in many ways supported gender equality, for example parental leave policies and for the rights of part-time workers. Women are, however, often concentrated in sectors that are harder to organize – particularly in informal forms of work. Formal trade unions have also not consistently prioritized gender equality, perhaps because their leadership has tended to be male-dominated. The ability and rights of workers to organize collectively has also been restricted by neoliberal laws and policies in order to keep the costs of labour down and increase profits. The decline in the number of workers covered by unions in the last two decades has been linked to growing inequality in wages.¹²⁴

Supporting women-led labour movements, and ensuring laws and regulations do not prohibit labour organizing, is important to enabling women to challenge unfair working conditions and mobilize for improvements that will better support gender equality in the economy.

Economic policy has often been blind to gender equality, and in being so has reinforced inequalities in women's low-paid and unpaid labour. Oxfam has also found that political capture, where the richest in society – such as large corporations – have more influence over priorities and economic policy, results in an economy which is skewed towards making them even richer, rather than benefitting everyone equally.¹²⁵

Gender budgeting, which is a process through which budgets are analysed and made more accountable to women's rights and priorities, has proven a powerful tool in reversing this. The IMF has found that governments that have used some form of gender budgeting are more likely to reach the goals they have set on gender equality.¹²⁶ In Oxfam's experience, involving civil society, particularly women-led organizations, in the process means that budgets can become more accountable to women's priorities. This can be a process which happens at the local as well as national and global levels. Governments, international organizations and wider civil society play can play an important role in increasing the funding and training available for women's rights organizations and feminist movements, in order to be able to engage in these processes.

Increasing women's political leadership is also effective. In India, a study showed that female-led local councils had a 62 percent higher number of drinking water projects than male-led councils.¹²⁷ Another study in Norway found a direct causal relationship between women being in municipal councils and childcare coverage improving.¹²⁸ Men also have a responsibility to promote gender equality, but without addressing the bias against women's voices in the economy, the economy will continue to not work for them.

Case study 5: Morocco's strawberry pickers organize to call for their rights

Morocco's strawberry industry grew rapidly between 1995 and 2013, bringing an estimated 20,000 women into the workforce for the first time. However, Oxfam and partner research in 2009 showed that the jobs that women were brought into were characterized by low wages, sexual harassment, and poor health and safety standards. Women worked long hours, weekly rest was rarely respected, and overtime did not result in more pay.

Women workers had a low level of awareness of their rights, and were reluctant to challenge their mainly male supervisors who controlled their access to employment, payment, transport and supervision.

According to one strawberry picker (interviewed in 2014): 'When I started working ...I accepted the money they gave me without questioning the supervisor and without counting the hours I worked.'

In response, Oxfam in Morocco and partners implemented a workers' rights programme. This involved training women workers to become leaders in their communities, who eventually went on to set up the Al Karama Women's Association, supporting more women to claim their rights.

Realizing that many of the strawberries ended up on the shelves of UK supermarkets which were members of the Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI), Oxfam in Morocco joined forces with Oxfam in the UK to raise the issue of workers' rights with the supermarkets. This collaboration resulted in the Better Strawberries Group, whose membership comprises major supermarkets as well as importing firms.

A progress review in 2014 found that there had been an increase in workers registered for social security, in the number of women workers who were aware of their rights, and in women refusing to take up work which did not pay the minimum wage. According to a member of a local NGO partner, RADEV, 'Now, when we go into the villages, women come to us to see if their employers have paid for the correct number of days. This is quite a change!'

Following the programme, the producers were also more aware of the importance of having a constructive relationship with their workforce. However, far more progress needs to be made to ensure that all growers respect workers' rights and retail companies do not put pressure on them to lower standards in order to be more profitable.

To sustain progress in the longer term, producers and the Moroccan government need to devote more resources to protecting the rights of workers in the agricultural sector. Buyers in other European countries need to act too. The initiative has taken the vital first steps in a long journey towards ethical trade in Moroccan berries. For now, for most of the women in that sector, a living wage in secure employment remains a distant dream.

4 BUILDING A BETTER FUTURE: IMAGINING A HUMAN ECONOMY THAT WORKS FOR WOMEN

In recent years, we have seen greater recognition by governments and policy makers that women's economic and workforce participation can pay powerful economic dividends; however, we have seen less concern with making sure that the benefits of their work are also experienced by women themselves. **While the focus remains on making women work for the good of the economy, making the economy work for women has yet to be seriously addressed.** Feminist economists and women's civil society organizations continue to provide critiques of prevailing economic models and policies – but their contributions continue to be sidelined in male-dominated economic spheres.

Oxfam is calling for a 'human economy' which works for everyone, not just the few; one that benefits women and men alike.¹²⁹ It would create fairer, better societies, ensure secure jobs paying decent wages, and treat women and men equally. The people who should benefit disproportionately from our economies are people living in poverty. Our economy would thrive within the limits of our planet, and hand a better, more sustainable world to every new generation. Building a human economy requires us to fundamentally reject the current economic model, and agree to rebuild our economies in a different way.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Ensure decent work, including a fair income, secure contracts and safe working conditions.

Governments and businesses should address the quality and security of women's economic opportunities by:

- Assessing current labour and wage standards to ensure domestic workers, migrant workers and informally employed workers are covered by all current and future labour standards legislation.
- Addressing workplace violence and discrimination through legislation, prosecution, public information campaigns and holding corporate actors to account.
- Committing to lifting minimum wages to living wage standards, and setting out a roadmap to do so in consultation with workers and unions.
- Undertaking concerted efforts to end the gender pay gap, including ensuring equal pay for equal value and promoting decent work opportunities for women.
- Repealing laws that discriminate against women's economic equality, and implementing legislation and regulatory frameworks that support women's rights.
- Promote positive social norms and attitudes to women's work and to the rebalancing of power at the household, local, national and international levels.
- Ensure women have pathways to better-paid positions, and improve access to education and training for well-paid careers. Encourage transparent promotion

pathways and policies that encourage employers to hire and train low-skilled, low-wage workers.

2. Recognize, reduce and redistribute unpaid care work.

- Governments should invest in public services and infrastructure which reduces and redistributes unpaid care work, including universal free public healthcare, social care, child care, water and sanitation, and education services.
- Governments and International Finance Institutions should include unpaid care work as part of their economic development strategies.
- Governments and businesses should recognize women's greater responsibility for unpaid care work and help to reduce the proportion borne by women through providing child, dependent adult, and elderly care and paid family and medical leave, flexible working hours and paid parental leave.
- Governments should promote the redistribution of unpaid care work through policies that encourage men to do their fair share of this work. These include flexible working and parental leave for both parents. Social norms on the gender distribution of care work should also be challenged, for example through advertising or public campaigns.
- Governments and international institutions should collect better data on the distribution of unpaid care work and its contribution to the overall economy. Governments should maximize fiscal space for women's economic empowerment, through progressive and gender sensitive tax policies. They should crack down on tax dodging by rich corporations and individuals; raise taxes on the richest and reduce them on the poorest; and use these additional revenues to invest in public services.

3. Support women's voices – in labour and feminist movements, collective enterprise, and political participation and leadership.

- Governments should adopt gender budgeting approaches that systematically involve women's organizations and civil society, to provide proper scrutiny and fully assess the impact of economic policies on women and girls. They should support the training of organizations and women in this area and improve data collection that would enable it.
- Governments, international institutions and civil society should provide increased, accessible funding to women's organizations to enable them to consistently and effectively raise the concerns of women, in government, civil society and corporate sector spaces.
- Governments should ensure laws are in place that protect the rights of women workers to unionize and strike, and rescind laws in opposition to those rights.
- All actors should support women's collective enterprises and cooperatives, including through providing training and integrating them fairly into supply chains.
- Governments and civil society should implement policies to promote women's political participation and leadership.

Governments, business and civil society should recognize the danger that confronts women advocating for women's rights. They should establish effective measures to ensure that women human rights defenders, including trade unionists, enjoy full protection and a safe environment in which to carry out their actions without fear of reprisal.

NOTES

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