

**From  
a Feminist Bailout**

**to  
a Global Feminist  
Economic Recovery**



**#FeministBailout**

**#FeministRecovery**

# What lies before us is a decisive moment, not just to shape the post-COVID economic recovery, but life in the future.

It is not an exaggeration to say that we are at a critical juncture and defining moment in history.

COVID-19 has laid bare the multiple failures of the dominant economic model and no part of our lives has remained untouched, with disruptions being felt across social networks, mobility patterns, and systems of labour, health, and care.

We urge policymakers and civil society to take this COVID-19 crisis as a moment to advance more just, equitable, and sustainable forms of economic life. The deeply violent, exploitative, and unsustainable nature of our current economic models and policies must not be replicated.

This Global Feminist Economic Recovery Plan will highlight **the pathways, principles, and policy directions for a realignment towards economic systems and institutions that are people- and environment-centred.**

**We all deserve a recovery**, not only from COVID-19, but from ages of economic injustice and exploitation. To do this, our plan is anchored in feminist knowledge, practice, and a radical re-imagining of what it takes to create resilient and thriving economies.

Such an approach rejects any hierarchy of needs among social groups. It also calls for a meaningful engagement with the communities most impacted by COVID-19 who are the experts on their lives and their needs.

The plan's Principles and Actions **build on contributions from the feminist movements around the world** that took part in the #FeministBailout Action Week campaign from July 1 to July 5, 2020. They are also inspired by the powerful articulations in the [Building Bridges Not Walking on Backs: A Feminist Economic Recovery Plan for COVID-19](#) document by the Hawaii State Commission on the Status of Women, the [African Feminist Post-COVID-19 Economic Recovery Statement](#), and [A Feminist Economic Recovery Plan for Canada: Making the Economy Work for Everyone](#) by the YWCA Canada, as well as the resources compiled on the collective platform [Feminist Response to COVID](#).

## Why a global perspective?

Because local, national, and regional economies are embedded in the global political-economic systems that both influence and constrict them. This plan aims to highlight these dynamics and shift the asymmetries of power between communities, states, and regions.

We are encouraged that many national and regional economic recovery plans are already moving ahead. However, we implore national authorities to adapt their plans to ensure that their proposals are firmly rooted in local feminist expertise which **has the capacity to guide policy, strategy, and response beyond the limitations of traditional economics.**

# Principles

- 1. Social infrastructure and systems of care for people and the environment are the foundations of thriving economies. Invest in them.** The purpose of any economy must be the individual and collective wellbeing of its people and the planet. Investment in social infrastructure, including in systems of care for individuals and households; public services such as health, education, and quality housing for all; equitable distribution of resources and common goods; food sovereignty; and safeguarding the environment, must become the new indicators for successful economies.
- 2. Recognize the plurality of economic models, including community economies, informal economies, and solidarity economies.** It is time to end the dogmatic belief in 'economic growth', the myth of 'trickle down' economics and the laissez-faire approach to development and policy. COVID-19 is the latest of the many repeated failures of neo-liberal capitalism<sup>1</sup> which has had to be bailed out time after time. In reality, millions of people can only survive the violence of this dominant economic model thanks to alternative economies. It is crucial to recognize the value of these models to local communities, and their potential for reimagining and reshaping the global economy.
- 3. Redefine wealth as a community asset that is created through our collective unpaid and paid labour.** We must understand wealth, value, and essential labour beyond their narrow and financialized meanings, and ground them in people- and environment-centred economies. Those who perform essential labour such as care work and food production, predominantly the women who perform care work as well as migrant and undocumented workers, are those who sustain human economies and human life.
- 4. Eliminate structural discrimination.** Eliminating all forms of structural discrimination is both a condition and the end result of just and equitable economies. Policymakers and other stakeholders must prioritise this principle and ensure their policies and practices are not contributing to the perpetuation of injustices such as impunity for corporations, exploitative labour conditions, and gendered, racial, or class-based inequities.
- 5. Work towards the transformation and restructuring of the global economy.** States, multilateral institutions, communities, and social movements must commit to dismantling the destructive financial and legal architecture of the global economy, from International Financial Institutions (IFIs) that are pushing for disastrous austerity measures, to the thousands of trade and investment agreements that are being used by corporations to press for COVID-19 relief measures that will only balloon their already outrageous profits. In addition, states must work towards restructuring global markets and supply chains so that transnational labour markets are not rebuilt to replicate the exploitation and systematic violations of the rights of millions of workers.

<sup>1</sup> Neo-liberal capitalism is a term used to define the removal of restrictions on global flows of goods and capital, often in the form of finance, under pressure from global finance capital. Neo-liberal capitalism is characterized by the financial hegemony of global capital, "free" markets and placing profit above people and the environment. [COVID-19 Highlights the Failure of Neoliberal Capitalism: We Need Feminist Global Solidarity, APWLD.](#)

# Actions

The following set of recommendations addresses the global economy in which we live, but they must be taken alongside the expertise of local, national, and regional feminist movements which are rooted in the context and lived realities of their people.

- 1. Restructure the labour market.** With an equivalent of 400 million full-time jobs lost globally - a number which has disproportionately impacted women - policymakers must respond to the urgent need for access to decent and socially secure work. This is an opportunity to transition from precarious industries and financialized economies towards more sustainable forms of production directed at meeting the needs of the population while raising taxable revenue to fund social infrastructure.

States ought to ratify the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 190 on Violence and Harassment. They also need to remove the bureaucratic hurdles, and all other barriers such as racism, sexism, and ableism, that prevent people from accessing employment, compensation, recovery, and other financial packages. This includes recognizing sex work as work and fully decriminalizing it; recognizing the household as a workplace and securing the human labour rights of domestic workers; and securing the rights and freedom of movement of migrant and undocumented workers.

- 2. Reform global tax and trade systems.** Illicit financial flows divert valuable public resources from those who rely on them, particularly women and gender-diverse people. States and their relevant institutions should increase domestic revenue by curbing tax evasion by multinational companies, redirecting taxes and stimulus packages away from corporate bailouts, military expenditures, and physical infrastructure mega-projects. Instead resources should go towards sectors that support human and environmental wellbeing, as well as programs such as universal income support, and public infrastructures such as health, water, and sanitation. Progressive taxation systems should introduce special taxes on the financial transactions of pandemic profiteers such as the 'big tech' and e-commerce sectors that have benefitted exponentially from the COVID-19 crisis.

Over the years, odious debt has systematically depleted states' capacity to fund adequate public services and stripped their tax recovery revenue. Debt moratoriums and cancellations are critical for the restructuring of national economies. States must put an end to trade and investment policies that put corporate interests above human rights, including stopping investor protection mechanisms. Investment protection mechanisms give corporations the right to sue for unlimited amounts of taxpayer money if they feel a government has taken any actions that will interfere with their profit generation. In the context of COVID-19, these actions could include mandating business closures to slow down the spread of the virus and protect workers, suspending mortgage, rent and utility payments, or any laws ensuring the affordability of medicines, tests and vaccines.



- 3. Set up systems of care.** Shouldered for centuries by women, trans, and gender-diverse people<sup>2</sup>, care is central to thriving societies and the planet. However, it is a labour that has been systematically undervalued and underpaid. The COVID-19 pandemic has not only reminded us of the weaknesses in our social protections systems but has also sharply increased the care burden on communities. We need robust investments to center care in the formal economies and to change the gender disparities in care work. To do this, states must adopt a systematic approach to care, investing in care infrastructure and services, and ensuring decent labour conditions for those employed in care sectors such as childcare, elderly care, health, housing, water, and sanitation.
- 4. Provide resources to feminist movements and community-led organisations.** Feminist, social justice, and women's rights organisations have been heavily impacted by the global economic crisis. Not only has it restricted their access to money, it has also increased demand for their action - for example, in response to the rise in gender-based violence. Funders and policymakers in state and multilateral institutions should prioritize core, multi-year, flexible funding and eliminate any barriers to accessing resources from domestic and international sources.
- 5. Design human-centred digital policies.** As the world goes through massive technological shifts intensified by the COVID-19 crisis, policymakers must make sure that tech systems serve the needs of the people rather than corporate profits – especially those that come from data mining, expanding digital markets in the Global South (known as digital colonialism), and anti-democratic surveillance tools. This includes international and national laws to end the impunity of 'big tech' corporations, secure labour rights for all people in the digital sector and curb the use of digital tools in the service of authoritarianism.

*Refer to resources like the collaborative [Digital Justice](#) project between Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN) and IT for Change for a feminist approach to the digital economy and visions for a post-COVID World.*

- 6. Guarantee and secure the right to health.** Reject and overturn the patent protection and intellectual property laws that commodify health and cost the lives of millions of people for the sake of corporate profits.

*"Knowledge cannot be a commodity, all vaccines and medicines related to COVID-19 and beyond must be universally accessible for all people, as should the related knowledge." - [African Feminist Post-COVID-19 Economic Recovery Statement](#).*

Policymakers and health institutions must ensure that essential health services are funded and accessible to all during and after the COVID-19 crisis. This should include sexual and reproductive health services such as access to safe abortion, gender-affirming treatments, and the provision of comprehensive sex education that is inclusive of all bodies, genders, and sexualities. Stakeholders should also promote harm reduction, be gender-responsive, and end the persecution, criminalization, and discrimination of people who use drugs.

**7. Address root causes of gender-based violence and create alternatives to policing and criminal justice systems.** Policymakers must invest in the transformative and restorative justice practices developed by communities, researchers, and social movements – especially when addressing gender-based violence (GBV). Decades of experience show that policing and criminal justice systems are incapable of effectively eradicating gender-based violence, and often result in higher rates of violence and discrimination in societies. Community knowledge and scientific evidence have produced alternatives to policing, as well as pragmatic solutions better equipped to tackle social problems. Adequately funded public services, welfare systems, and secure economic rights can ensure that all those trapped in violent relationships, abusive homes, and exploitative situations have accessible pathways to lives free from violence.

**8. Place gender justice and human rights at the core of climate emergency response and policy.** Contrary to [eco-fascist discourses](#) that advance human beings as the problem, the outbreak and spread of COVID-19 is linked to the effects of capitalism, neo-colonialism, and the extractivism of ecosystems by big business interests, corporations, and states. We need to end this ecocidal trajectory by putting the planet's survival and wellbeing ahead of individual and corporate profit interests. States must push back against corporate influence over climate policy and advance gender-just, equitable, and sustainable climate solutions.

**9. Protect food and seed sovereignty.** In the current system, women are the majority of the world's food producers, yet experience [hunger and poverty at higher rates](#). The outbreak of zoonotic diseases such as COVID-19 points to the intricate links between nutritional debt, climate change, ecocide, and industrial global food systems that are controlled by a few large transnational corporations. The international farmers movement, Via Campesina, [recommends six principles](#) that promote community autonomy, solidarity economies, cultural integrity, and environmental stewardship.

States need to regulate the growing corporate control of global food and seed systems. We need to reduce the reliance on global supply chains by shifting the geographies of production and consumption to sustainable and socially just food production systems. This means localised and sustainable supply chains that privilege farmer and peasant-led seed systems.

**10. Build local, national and peoples' feminist COVID-19 response and recovery plan.**

When adapting their responses to the pandemic, policymakers should rely on the extensive local regional, and global feminist expertise on micro and macroeconomics that is available. This expertise accounts for the lived realities and the specific social, economic, and political impacts of COVID-19 on communities, states, and regions. This must include addressing all concerns and grievances, as well as enabling the equal participation of women, trans, and gender-diverse persons. Feminist voices and experiences from all communities - particularly marginalized and underrepresented ones - must be recognized as experts in decision-making platforms.

# Way forward

States, policymakers, and public institutions are accountable to the people for embracing the principles and actions necessary for societal wellbeing. However, our recent economic disasters have been closely connected to governance failures to hold these leaders accountable. This is the inevitable result of a political economy that privileges profits over the planet, and economic policies that repeatedly bail out corporations instead of people.

**This is why, in the absence of government support, people's survival in times of crises like COVID-19 has often depended on community solidarity. Policymakers must step up to their mandate. Community organizations, and feminist and social justice movements, can guide economic policy so that it finally works in the service of society and the environment.**

Recognising that national economies are entangled in the structures of transnational economies, we must continue holding political actors and institutions accountable and demand they take transformative action at all levels. Policymakers must not limit themselves to economic responses and recovery plans that rebuild previous systems. Instead, they must commit to taking on the broad range of solutions and economic alternatives already being articulated by communities and movements.

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