

Corporate power and women's economic justice

Results from a joint webinar and recommendations for CSW

Women's economic justice is not just about integrating women into a given economic model – it is also about improving women's control over economic resources, access to decent work and control over their own time; pursuing climate justice, limiting corporate power and resisting austerity; and promoting self-determination and autonomy for women in economic decision-making at all levels, from the household to national parliaments to international institutions. On 28 February 2017, the Gender & Development Network and the Association for Women's Rights in Development came together with their allies working on women workers and labour rights, women human right defenders, popular educators, global governance and the informal economy. Together, we formulated key steps for limiting the power of transnational corporations to infringe on women's rights – and supporting economic justice for women everywhere.¹ **The 61st Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) will focus on women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work.** Key stakeholders and thousands of diverse women are expected to ensure a robust discussion and international support for the implementation of SDG 5 on gender equality. CSW will also address empowerment of indigenous women, progress and gaps in implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and other issues related to gender equality and the empowerment of women. This is an opportunity to take these recommendations forward and pursue real change.²

Speakers

- **Ana Abelenda**, Association for Women's Rights in Development (*moderator*)
- **Jessica Woodroffe**, Gender & Development Network (*discussant*)
- **Dr Mariama Williams**, South Centre
- **Rachel Moussié**, Consultant
- **Kunthea Chan**, JASS Southeast Asia
- **Chidi King**, International Trade Union Confederation

Recommendations for governments attending CSW

- **Provide adequate universal social protection:** Economic justice is not just for those in paid employment. Universal social protection is critical for alleviating poverty and providing a basic level of wellbeing to everyone, but particularly to women who are most affected by the absence of these protections and most likely to be excluded from work-based provision.³
- **Promote decent work:** Governments should set, and enforce, minimum wage levels sufficient for workers to attain their right to an adequate standard of living and should ensure that employment regulations and social and legal protections are extended to cover workers in the informal economy, where the majority of women work worldwide.

- **Protect freedoms of association and collective bargaining:** These are fundamental labour and human rights for women as well as men. Trade unions and women workers' organisations must be empowered to ensure women's work is safe, secure and fairly remunerated. Collective action can play a major role in improving women's access to decent work. Governments should ratify ILO Conventions 87 and 98 – and protect these rights within their own borders.
- **Address violence at work:** All forms of violence and harassment in the workplace must be prohibited by law. This is still a significant and shocking legal gap that leaves women workers vulnerable – and all the more so when they face losing their jobs and livelihoods for reporting abuse. Governments should support the proposed ILO convention on gender-based violence in the world of work and ratify Convention 189 on domestic workers.
- **Recognise, reduce and redistribute unpaid care work – and represent carers:** Affordable, accessible and high-quality public services are critical for alleviating women's disproportionate burden of unpaid care work. It is also essential that this unpaid care work be included in national accounting measures like GDP. Governments must commit to deploying a "care lens" in all areas to properly examine and mediate the effects of their policies and programmes on women's unpaid care work, while pursuing comprehensive social services and infrastructure to reduce women's workloads.⁴
- **Integrate gender and climate justice in economic debates:** Climate change has direct consequences on food security, livelihoods and the level of unpaid care and domestic labour required, which disproportionately falls upon women. A just transition to post-carbon or low-carbon economies is necessary to mitigate these impacts.
- **Enact progressive tax reform:** Consumption taxes place a disproportionate burden on women, but progressive taxation is possible with reforms that shift the load to high-income individuals and corporations. Regressive taxation models also contribute to a narrow tax base and thus to the underfunding of public services that perpetuates women's disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care work.⁵
- **Pursue better measurement:** Governments should carry out impact assessments to understand how changes to policies in taxation, social services, public-sector investment, infrastructure and other areas affect gender equality and women's rights and livelihoods. Data should account for diversity amongst women – urban or rural; low- or high-income individuals, households and regions; women of colour, indigenous women and migrant women.
- **Challenge corporate power:** Ensure that all corporations, transnational companies, the financial sector and extractive industries pay their fair share of taxes to the governments of countries where their economic activities occur. Corporations must be held accountable when they fail to respect and protect basic human rights of their workers, subjecting them to low wages and dangerous working conditions. Governments should support the UN Human Rights Council working group in developing legally binding regulations to ensure that all corporations respect and promote human rights, including women's human rights, and ecological impact assessments.
- **Make trade deals work for women:** International trade agreements have a profound impact on the quality and amount of work available to women.⁶ Governments must protect women's rights against export-oriented labour exploitation, land appropriation and resource extraction based on a better understanding of the gendered impact of trade policy.⁷
- **Protect policy space for gender equality and women's rights:** Current trade and investment agreements and International Monetary Fund policies constrain and proscribe government policy choices. Space for governments to choose alternative social and economic policy options should be created and protected.
- **Rethink macroeconomic policy:** Governments must reassess what macroeconomic policy is for – and direct their macroeconomic decision-making, from taxation to debt management and monetary policy, towards economic justice, human rights, environmental sustainability and wellbeing for everyone.⁸ Transformative change cannot be achieved with technical tweaks; real change necessitates a substantive shift in how we design and execute economic policy.⁹

¹ Moussié, R. 2016. Challenging corporate power: struggles for women's rights, economic and gender justice. Toronto: AWID and Solidarity Center. https://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/ccp_fullreport_eng.pdf

² GADN. 2017. Women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work: recommendations to governments. <http://gadnetwork.org/gadn-resources/2017/1/30/csw61-factsheet-womens-economic-empowerment-in-the-changing-world-of-work>

³ See especially chapter 3 of UN Women. 2015a. Progress of the world's women 2015-2016: transforming economies, realizing rights. New York: UN Women. http://progress.unwomen.org/en/2015/pdf/UNW_progressreport.pdf; UN Women. 2015b. 'Making national social protection floors work for women', policy brief no. 1. <http://www2.unwomen.org/~media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2015/unwomen-policybrief01-makingnationalsocialprotectionfloorsworkforwomen-en.pdf?v=1&d=20151216T170541>

⁴ GADN. 2017. Sharing the load: unpaid care work and women's economic empowerment. <http://gadnetwork.org/gadn-resources/2017/2/7/sharing-the-load-unpaid-care-work-and-womens-economic-empowerment>

⁵ Christian Aid. 2014. Taxing men and women: why gender is crucial for a fair tax system. <http://www.christianaid.org.uk/images/taxing-men-and-women-gender-analysis-report-july-2014.pdf>

⁶ GADN. 2017 (forthcoming). Making trade deals work for women. See: <http://gadnetwork.org/gadn-publications/#Briefings>

⁷ Williams, M. 2016. 'Gender and finance: coming out of the margins'. https://www.southcentre.int/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/CPB18_Gender-and-Finance_EN.pdf

⁸ AWID. 2013. 'AWID think piece on fiscal policy, women's rights and gender equality.'

https://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/Fiscal%20Policy%20and%20Human%20Rights_AWID_FINAL.pdf

⁹ GADN. 2017. Stepping up: how governments can contribute to women's economic empowerment. <http://gadnetwork.org/gadn-resources/2017/2/7/stepping-up-how-governments-can-contribute-to-womens-economic-empowerment>