

BEYOND COVID-19:

A FEMINIST PLAN FOR SUSTAINABILITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE



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Feminist Ideas for a Post-COVID-19 World

To inform the Feminist Plan, a series of think pieces were produced, called Feminist Ideas for a Post-COVID-19 World. These are:

- Shahra Razavi: The social protection response to COVID-19 has failed women: Towards universal gender-responsive social protection systems
- Mignon Duffy: How can the COVID-19 crisis be harnessed to improve the rights and working conditions of paid care workers?
- Jennifer Piscopo: Pathways to building back better: Advancing feminist policies in COVID-19 response and recovery
- Juliana Franzoni and Veena Siddharth: Care after COVID-19: Time for a U-turn?
- Ilene Grabel: Enabling a permissive multilateralisms approach to global macroeconomic governance to support feminist plans for sustainability and social justice

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BEYOND COVID-19: THE IMPERATIVE FOR TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE



Eighteen months after the pandemic was declared in March 2020, it had claimed more than 4 million lives¹, destroyed countless livelihoods and forced the global economy to its knees. With an end still out of sight, the crisis has already taken a disproportionate toll on women and girls. As countries locked down, rates of domestic abuse spiralled upwards. With more girls out of school, child marriage and female genital mutilation will likely rise. As the health crisis morphed into a full-blown economic recession, women bore the brunt of job losses, seeing their economic autonomy stifled and their poverty risk rise. As health systems have struggled to stem the onslaught of cases, and schools and care services have shut down, women have stepped in to provide support for families and communities, often at the expense of their own mental and physical health.

The virus has drawn attention to other, more long-standing crises that have held back progress on gender equality: a livelihoods crisis, which has pushed large swathes of people behind and increased their vulnerability to shocks; and a care crisis, which has left millions of children and care-dependent adults without support while imposing hard choices and enormous costs on women and girls.

At the same time, the pandemic has provided a warning about the looming environmental and climate crisis that, like the pandemic, is already erasing hard-won progress on gender equality. The pathway to achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030, based on the current trajectory, looks very rocky indeed.

This trio of interlocking crises is deeply rooted in an economic system that, despite significant cross-country variations, displays some critical features everywhere: it freerides on women's unpaid and underpaid labour, exploits the natural environment and has led to an extreme concentration of wealth and power among the few while causing a deep sense of insecurity among the many. This, in turn, has fuelled a range of unsettling political dynamics, including widespread disenchantment with mainstream politics, hostility towards 'elites' and rising nationalism, often fuelled by a backlash on gender equality and ideas of a return to an imagined, better past. But going back is not the

answer. Instead, a visionary agenda that places sustainability, social justice and gender equality at the centre of economic recovery and transformation, is urgently needed to pave the way towards a new social contract.

The Feminist Plan for Sustainability and Social Justice lays out such a vision, building on the vast array of feminist scholarship and activism that has long reimagined economies and societies (see Box 1.1). The Plan draws key lessons from the pandemic, discusses the building blocks of gender-responsive economic recovery and transformation and provides insights on the levers that will help achieve the vision.

Box 1.1 WHAT MAKES THIS A FEMINIST PLAN?

This Plan is inspired by diverse feminists who are calling for systemic change across the world. It recognizes the plurality of voices within progressive feminist movements, including Global South, Black and Indigenous activists who have long rejected the portrayal of the experiences of Global North, white, class-privileged women as universal. It embraces the concept of 'intersectionality', the idea that women's lived experiences are shaped by interlocking structures of inequality based on gender, class, and race/ethnicity, among others.² Each of these structures is influenced by legacies of colonialism which continue to violently shape economic and ethnic/racial relations, as well as imposing certain ideals on the Global South, including restrictive gender binaries that marginalize those with diverse gender identities that have always existed across the world.³

These insights have inspired the analytical approach of this Feminist Plan. This means going beyond describing intersecting inequalities as compounded 'disadvantages' that individuals or groups experience.⁴ Instead, it is necessary to focus on the historical, social and institutional mechanisms that reproduce interlocking systems of subordination and privilege, creating specific patterns of discrimination.⁵ To bring about change, as well as using disaggregated data to analyze who is being pushed behind, it is important to identify how this happens – the ideas, interests and institutions that perpetuate intersectional forms of oppression.

The Plan also supports an intersectional political vision. On the one hand, this means recognizing that since an inclusive feminist politics represents multiple perspectives, historically marginalized voices must be brought together to generate common agendas and solidarity.⁶ On the other hand, this vision understands feminism as inextricably linked to other social justice movements. Feminists have long focused their energies on fighting for civil and political, economic, social and cultural rights for all. Inspired by these experiences, the Plan calls for diverse progressive alliances to put gender equality, social justice and environmental sustainability at the centre of recovery and transformation.

1.1 COVID-19: THE BIG REVEALER

Lessons from the pandemic and initial responses to its economic and social fallout provide an important starting point for defining the building blocks for a sustainable and just economy.

The precarity of women's jobs and livelihoods

Following almost three decades of sluggish progress in female labour force participation, the economic recession triggered by the pandemic has wiped out women's jobs at much faster rates than those of men. Job losses have been particularly acute in the services sectors, including retail, hospitality, tourism and care, where women, especially young women, are over-represented.⁷ Large numbers of women have dropped out of the labour force altogether—meaning that they are no longer actively looking for jobs—with lack of childcare often a major factor. As such, the pandemic revealed that women's employment is shaped by care responsibilities in a way that men's is not. Economic penalties associated with unpaid care are particularly devastating for women at the lower end of the income distribution. Before the pandemic, women in their reproductive years were already much more likely to be living in poverty than men of the same age—a gap that is now projected to grow even wider.⁸

Many of these problems were exacerbated for the world's 740 million women working in the informal economy.⁹ While job losses were generally higher in the formal economy, women informal workers experienced sharper declines and slower recovery in working days and earnings than their male counterparts; and this pattern is even more pronounced among women workers who experienced a parallel increase in unpaid care responsibilities.¹⁰ At the same time, these workers were least likely to enjoy access to social protection, resulting in severe economic hardship, including rising poverty, food insecurity, asset depletion and indebtedness. While

some governments rushed to plug the holes in social protection systems, including by expanding the reach and generosity of cash transfers, most of these measures have been short-lived and not necessarily gender-responsive.¹¹ Large-scale loss of income and limited access to social protection quickly ushered in rising food insecurity that is affecting women disproportionately.

An already fragile care economy in crisis mode

While business activities ground to a halt, paid and unpaid care increased in both intensity and significance. Suddenly, the very work that is routinely devalued by markets and inadequately supported by governments was recognized as essential.¹² The extent to which the care economy relies on women's unpaid and underpaid labour has also been exposed as never before. As even the best prepared health-care systems struggled to cope with the onslaught of COVID-19, countries that had already faced shortages in infrastructure and staff due to persistent underfunding or recent retrenchment faced the perfect storm. The health and social care sector workforce, among which women are at least 70 per cent of workers, paid a high price.¹³ While social recognition of care sector workers may have risen during the pandemic, this recognition is yet to be translated into better wages and working conditions.

As the pandemic strained public services and created significant economic hardship, women's unpaid work in families and communities became, once more, a shock absorber.¹⁴ The mass closure of schools, nurseries and day-care centres as a result of COVID-19 has added another layer to these dynamics as families witnessed a massive shift of childcare responsibilities into their homes. Unpaid family care may be provided for free, but it has hidden costs. During the pandemic, these costs have been unequally borne by households, with

women and girls paying a disproportionate price in terms of their economic security, health and well-being. The impact has been particularly harsh in low-income contexts, in developing countries—where even access to basic infrastructure, such as water, sanitation and energy is often lacking—as well as among poorer families in developed countries.

A warning about the looming environmental and climate crisis

The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed how under-prepared the world is for systemic crises, re-emphasizing the urgency of other, rapidly escalating crises, including environmental degradation and climate change.¹⁵

Like the care economy, ecosystems and natural resources are a critical foundation for the economy but are taken for granted and treated as though their supply is limitless and their use costless.¹⁶ The result is over-exploitation of natural resources, loss of key habitats and biodiversity and pollution of land, seas and the atmosphere. The impacts of environmental degradation are unevenly distributed, disproportionately affecting low-income countries and the most marginalized women who have contributed least to the crisis. Women's reliance on agriculture, fisheries and forests for subsistence or employment in many contexts—and their primary responsibility for household food, water and fuel provision—means that land degradation, deforestation, water scarcity and pollution intensify their paid and unpaid workloads and increase their risks of poverty and hunger, against which they typically have fewer resources to buffer the impacts.¹⁷

In sum, the COVID-19 pandemic has ignited an already smouldering care and livelihoods crisis that will likely set back women's economic autonomy for years to come, while the rapid advance of unchecked climate change and environmental degradation will only make matters worse. Capable and accountable states will be critical to reverse these trends.

The state's role is critical, but democracy is under threat

The need for a capable state that can deliver public health, invest in and distribute vaccines and shore up communities and businesses to weather the storm has become crystal clear during the pandemic. As the climate emergency worsens, people in countries around the world will look to governments not only for protection and relief, but also to lead the world's transition away from polluting, fossil fuel-based economic models.¹⁸ Yet, the COVID-19 crisis has also revealed the fragility of state institutions and democracy in many places. On the one hand, some governments have used the crisis to curtail civil and political rights, ramping up the surveillance of citizens and restricting freedom of expression and assembly to quash opposition and dissent; and on the other, many states have struggled to provide health services and emergency relief at the requisite scale.

In some contexts, community-based organizations, often powered by women, have stepped in to fill the gaps, coordinating food aid and the supply of personal protective equipment (PPE), organizing collective childcare, distributing reproductive health and hygiene kits and providing psychosocial support for survivors of violence.¹⁹ But community-based organizations cannot compensate for poor state provision. In low-income countries, in particular, these organizations are often resource-poor themselves and unable to provide even a basic safety net. Despite the critical role that women have played in the response to the pandemic—in providing services, advocating for gender-responsive policies and acting as a watchdog for governments—they have been largely excluded from decision-making. For example, women hold only 24 per cent of the seats on the COVID-19 taskforces that have coordinated the policy response around the world.²⁰

More of the same will not be sufficient even to get back to the previous, inadequate status quo, let alone to ensure a more sustainable and gender-just future.

1.2 THE WORLD AT A CROSSROADS

The world stands at a crossroads, facing the choice between doubling down on the mistakes of the past or seizing the opportunity to do things differently. World leaders can choose to allow the global economy to stumble into another lost decade marked by austerity and economic stagnation or lay the foundations for gender-just transitions through public investments in the care economy, renewable energy and sustainable agriculture. They can choose to use nationalism, xenophobia and misogyny to appeal to increasingly alienated citizens or win people over by reimagining a new social contract—based on partnerships with families, communities and businesses—that provides universal access to collective goods and services.²¹ They can choose to retreat into vaccine nationalism and continued competition over corporate tax rates or fix the broken multilateral system to live up to the ambition on which it was founded.

The risk of a botched recovery

The threat of a botched recovery is particularly high for developing countries, where a combination of precarious work conditions, high levels of debt distress and insufficient fiscal and policy space limit their capacity to respond to the pandemic-induced shocks and to build back better.²² Indeed, there has been a yawning stimulus gap, with low- and lower-middle-income countries only able to muster a tiny fraction of the stimulus measures put in place in high-income countries, incommensurate with the scale of the economic and social disruptions they have experienced. Even where fiscal support has been forthcoming, it has often been less gender-responsive and green than general rhetoric would suggest. For example, out of a total of 580 fiscal measures taken across 132 countries in response to the pandemic, only 12 per cent targeted female-

dominated sectors.²³ Similarly, an analysis of COVID-19-related fiscal response efforts across the world's 50 largest economies found that only 2.5 per cent of recovery spending is likely to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.²⁴

Another worrying trend is the pressure on many countries to cut back on public spending to meet debt obligations. Analysis of International Monetary Fund (IMF) fiscal projections shows that budget cuts are expected in 154 countries this year and as many as 159 countries in 2022. This means that 6.6 billion people, or 85 per cent of the global population, will be living under austerity conditions by next year, a trend likely to continue until at least 2025.²⁵ While high public and private debt is a major concern, especially for low- and middle-income countries, and needs to be dealt with (see Box 1.2), going down the road of austerity will not resolve high debt to gross domestic product (GDP) ratios.²⁶ Moreover, the implications for gender equality and women's rights would likely be devastating. Previous waves of fiscal contraction have had regressive outcomes, especially for low-income women, given their greater reliance on public services and transfers, their role as default care providers when services are eroded and their strong presence as front-line public sector workers.²⁷

To change course, an alternative vision is needed: one that places care for people and the planet at the centre of economic recovery and transformation.

Building blocks of a sustainable and socially just economy

The alternative vision for a sustainable and socially just economy would not prioritize economic growth as an end in and of itself. Instead, it starts with basic questions about what the economy is for. If the main purpose of the economy is to support “the flourishing

and survival of life”—as feminist economists have long argued—economic policies need to align with social and environmental goals.²⁸ This new economic paradigm would ensure sustainable livelihoods for all and would stop treating unpaid care work and the environment as limitless resources that can be used for free and depleted without cost or consequence. Instead, it would put economic policies at the service of sustainability, gender equality and social justice.

Translating this paradigm shift into practice requires far-reaching changes that need to be aligned with local realities; it is also clear that structural transformation will not occur overnight. But concrete, widely applicable building blocks and levers can be identified to move towards this vision, which are explored in greater depth in subsequent chapters of the Plan.

An economy that supports women’s livelihoods

A livelihoods-led recovery would centre on making up ground that has been lost on women’s economic autonomy during the pandemic and aim to reduce economic inequalities within and between countries to lay the basis for a more equal, inclusive and sustainable future for all (Chapter 2). The creation of decent jobs in strategic green sectors, such as care, agroecology and energy, is a key priority. Rebuilding the broken global food system from the bottom up, and supporting diverse food crop production for local, national and regional markets, would also be critical to support women’s livelihoods and ensure food security for all. Essential labour protections—collective bargaining rights, living wages and social protections—need to be beefed up. The rights of women in the informal economy would be strengthened, benefiting small-scale farmers, domestic workers, home-based industrial outworkers, waste pickers and food vendors who provide essential services to their communities but as workers are assigned second-class status, leaving

them with little control over their working conditions and earnings. The expansion of gender-responsive social protection systems would be used to boost demand in the short-term and ensure greater resilience against future shocks, including those caused by the escalating environmental crisis.

Putting care at the centre of a sustainable and just economy

A care-led recovery would prioritize investments in the expansion of quality care services to create jobs and increase support for unpaid caregivers, including through paid family leave and universal child allowances, to address long-standing care deficits (Chapter 3). Instead of a commodity, a personal choice or family obligation, care would be treated as a collective good that is adequately resourced and regulated to ensure continued supply and quality as well as decent pay and working conditions for paid care workers. The critical role that women-led cooperatives, workers’ organizations and other civil society organizations can play in the articulation of community-based health, child and elder care networks would be recognized, and sustainable partnerships would be forged with national and local governments to enable these networks to deliver quality care that is affordable for the families they serve while ensuring living wages and social protection for all care workers.

Gender-just transitions for a sustainable future

To stave off environmental catastrophe, rapid transitions to sustainable patterns of production and consumption are essential, with the recognition that doubling down on the same old market-driven solutions is not the answer. Gender-just transitions would deliberately aim to create synergies between greater gender equality, social justice and environmental sustainability (Chapter 4). To this end, the creation of new jobs in the care

economy—which are quintessentially green and regenerate human capabilities—is a major priority, alongside ensuring that women benefit from new green jobs in emerging sectors such as renewable energy. In the energy transition, supporting decentralized energy systems would help to connect people to the grid, provide alternatives to polluting, environmentally destructive traditional cooking fuels and reduce the drudgery of women’s unpaid care work.

Partnerships between governments and civil society are also needed to scale up gender-responsive agroecology, an alternative to industrial agriculture that has proven benefits for women small-scale farmers, supports food security and protects precious biodiversity and ecosystems. Above all, gender-responsive financing must underpin the transition and be directed to women in local communities to enable them to adapt to the unavoidable impacts of climate change that are already destroying lives and livelihoods.

Levers for a sustainable and socially just economy

To transform the economy, and steer it towards gender equality, social justice and sustainability, an enabling environment is required based on four levers that are interlinked and mutually reinforcing: financing, partnerships, accountability and metrics. Chapters 2–4 of the Plan explore key priorities for these enablers of the building blocks outlined above.

FINANCING

The world needs a big public investment push to enable economic recovery and lay the basis for structural transformation. Such a public investment-led “growth revival”²⁹ would target fiscal stimulus to ‘multipliers’ in green and labour-intensive sectors, opening up important opportunities for advancing gender equality—for example, by pushing

investments in the care economy (Chapter 3) and by ensuring that women are employed in newly created green jobs (Chapter 4). Continued spending on social protection, in turn, would boost demand and incomes, thereby triggering a much faster decline in unemployment than a strategy that stifles recovery through premature austerity and budget cuts (Chapter 2).³⁰

Making available the necessary resources to finance these critical investments, particularly for poorer and highly indebted countries, calls for global policies to enlarge fiscal space through progressive macroeconomic policies and multilateral cooperation (see Box 1.2); for governments to implement progressive tax policies to ensure that the wealthiest people, companies and countries contribute the most; and for resources to be directed to sectors that support human flourishing within planetary boundaries. Indeed, it is high time to consider public spending in these areas as investment rather than consumption spending. Adequate support for care and environmental preservation would not only enhance future productivity; it is critical for the very survival of our economies and societies.

PARTNERSHIPS

Apart from raising and allocating public resources to engender much needed economic transformations, governments also need to rethink their role and their partnerships with other stakeholders. Much attention has been paid to partnerships between states and business, which are critical. But other partnerships that prioritize families and communities—those spaces that sustain the functioning of both markets and states—are equally important from a gender perspective.

States can and should assume an active role in value creation and innovation, steering production and investment towards sustainability and social justice. In this sense, public-private partnerships must have

a clear purpose, which prioritizes people and the environment over profits, to secure the conditions for the innovations that are needed to tackle the huge challenges of our time.³¹ Some governments have taken steps in this direction by, for example, making bail-out funds for the aviation and motor industry conditional on faster action to reduce carbon emissions.³² By contrast, few or no strings were attached to public investments for COVID-19 vaccine development, de facto privatizing the gains and ceding control over what should have been global health commons.³³ Immediate steps are needed to put the global collective good of a people's vaccine over the intellectual property claims and profits of pharmaceutical companies, by waiving patent rights and allowing and supporting developing countries to produce their own doses, with the additional benefit of bolstering productive capacities and employment creation in these countries.

Value creation and innovation can happen in communities too. Instead of relying on families and communities as a safety net of last resort, states can build lasting synergistic relationships with community organizations, including women's groups, workers' organizations and farmers' groups, to promote policy innovation in areas as varied as care, occupational health and safety, energy and agriculture, by devising new solutions to old policy problems while making service delivery more effective and adaptable to the changing realities of women on the ground.

ACCOUNTABILITY

For these synergistic partnerships to work, robust processes and mechanisms are needed to ensure that those in power can be held accountable for their decisions. Accountability requires that those in a position of authority have clearly defined duties and performance standards (responsibility) and provide reasoned justifications for their actions and decisions (answerability). It also requires a mechanism to assess compliance with defined duties

and standards and enforce sanctions and remedies where required (enforceability).³⁴ The human rights system provides a universal framework for such accountability, particularly of government duty bearers to rights-holders. There is also a growing recognition of the need for greater accountability of non-state actors and beyond national boundaries. A group of United Nations Member States, with support from civil society organizations, including feminist networks, have been advocating for a treaty to regulate the activities of transnational corporations under human rights law, which is currently under discussion in the United Nations Human Rights Council.³⁵ Existing human rights law is increasingly being used to litigate environmental issues and to hold both businesses and governments to account for their action, or inaction (Chapter 4).

Strong and well-resourced civil society organizations are vital for counterbalancing state and market power and for bringing historically excluded groups into decision-making processes. Feminist movements have a long history of ensuring women know and claim their rights, and holding governments to account for their obligations, thereby driving progress and ensuring the implementation of progressive policies more broadly.³⁶ As subsequent chapters show, feminist movements have been most effective in challenging vested interests when they form broad coalitions and alliances with other social movements, notably trades unions, workers' and farmers' groups; environmental groups; and organizations for sexual and reproductive rights and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex or queer (LGBTIQ+) rights. The process of building alliances and bridges between different groups and interests strengthens feminist claims and makes them more effective in the face of backlash. Together these groups have pioneered and deployed a flexible range of strategies to demand accountability, including public protests, strategic litigation as well as networking and lobbying elites.

Implementing the Feminist Plan, and ensuring that care for people and the planet is at the centre of

economic recovery plans, is therefore as much about fair outcomes as it is about open democratic processes, recognizing the virtuous cycles that they create together.³⁷

METRICS

Monitoring and holding decision-makers accountable for progress towards a sustainable and socially just economy requires adequate and accessible data. Yet, even before the pandemic disrupted data collection efforts in many countries, vast gender data gaps hampered policy advocacy, monitoring and accountability work.

Data on key outcome indicators, such as the prevalence of informal employment by sex, are lacking for a significant number of countries or not reported consistently over time, making it difficult to assess trends. Similarly, key process indicators, such as social protection coverage, are often not disaggregated by sex; while reliable and comparable data on specific policy areas—such as the coverage and quality of childcare services—is almost completely lacking. Moreover, persistent

methodological gaps still impede the monitoring of progress in certain areas, such as the gender and environment nexus.

At a broader level, a rethink of the metrics used to measure economic and social progress is needed.³⁸ This includes moving beyond GDP, which measures the monetary value of commodities produced and exchanged for money, as the sole yardstick for economic performance. Alternative metrics must not only pay greater attention to inequalities and the strengthening of human capabilities but also capture the value and contribution of non-market domains, notably unpaid care and ecosystem services, to economic and social progress. To date, the Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI) is the most promising approach, but it is yet to be taken up by governments.³⁹

As the world emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic, the time is surely right to step up advocacy for new approaches on how the economy is conceptualized, including new forms of measurement that would do a better job of capturing the goods, services and resources needed to ensure that both people and the planet can survive and flourish.

1.3 BUILDING SUSTAINABILITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE IS A POLITICAL CHOICE

The purpose of this Feminist Plan is to provide a vision of where the world could be if choices were made to prioritize the flourishing and survival of both people and the planet. It is possible to orient economic policies towards sustainability, equality and social justice and to support caregiving for each other and the natural environment, on which all life depends. Whether and how the world makes these choices is fundamentally about power and politics, and the ability to forge a new feminist social contract that brings together states, markets and people to meet the formidable challenges of our times.

Feminist politics for a post-COVID-19 world

To make the transformative vision of this Plan a reality, societies must break with the vicious cycle of socio-economic insecurity, environmental destruction, shrinking civic space and exclusionary politics. Doing so requires a shift in power relations that reconnects power holders with the constituencies they are meant to serve and limits the undue political influence of elites and corporations (Chapter 5). Instead of amplifying the

voices of the few, historically excluded groups need to be brought into decision-making spaces, with women having an equal voice to men in all decisions that affect their lives. The active presence of feminists across institutional spaces helps to ensure effective gender mainstreaming, while women's rights organizations working outside the state can play indispensable roles as advocates, government watchdogs and service providers. An inclusive, rights-based feminist politics can reinvigorate democratic processes, promote power sharing and form the basis for a new social contract that delivers sustainability and social justice for all.

A new feminist social contract

Indeed, the idea of a new social contract has gained currency in the context of the pandemic. In July 2020, the United Nations Secretary-General delivered a landmark speech arguing that “[t]he response to the pandemic, and to the widespread discontent that preceded it, must be based on a New Social Contract and a New Global Deal that create equal opportunities for all and respect the rights and freedoms of all”.⁴⁰

Whatever shape ‘old’ social contracts may have taken, they never fully included women and other marginalized groups. Largely concerned with the relationship between states and markets, workers and capital, they tended to ignore social reproduction and

the environment. A new feminist social contract needs to prioritize those who sustain the functioning of both markets and states—people in families and communities;⁴¹ establish a more sustainable relationship between human beings and the natural environment; and shift gender power relations. It must acknowledge the interdependence of countries and people in building a common future and recognize diversity while tackling intersecting inequalities. The foundations for this new social contract would be laid at the national and local levels, but global institutions and processes also need to be transformed towards solidarity, power sharing and democracy (see Box 1.2).⁴²

Towards a Feminist Plan for Sustainability and Social Justice

At a moment of unprecedented upheaval and suffering, the COVID-19 pandemic has forced people to stop, take stock and reflect on where we are as a human race. The virus has wreaked havoc with the health, education, livelihoods and security of billions of people around the world, but it was able to do so only because of the deprivation, precarity and rampant inequalities that have marginalized so many over recent decades. The meagre progress on gender equality in the past 25 years has not only stalled but has gone into reverse. Having revealed these

“The clearest lesson from COVID-19 is that only global solidarity and cooperation is going to get us out of the pandemic. The global community needs to share vaccines, cancel debt and end illicit financial flows, so that we can fairly redistribute resources, and finance essential social protection, public services and labour market measures for gender-just reform and recovery.”

BUSI SIBEKO, Economist, Institute for Economic Justice, South Africa



inequalities and provided this perspective on where the world is now, the question is: where to next?

Recognizing that the policies and the pathways for change will differ by context, this Feminist Plan is not a prescription but a framework to inform discussions at global, regional, national and local levels. The mobilization of feminists around the world to demand transformation has been one of very few bright spots during this time, with alternative visions put on the table from contexts as

varied as Austria, Canada, Chile, Ireland, the United Kingdom, and the state of Hawaii in the United States, as well as broad global agendas such as the Feminist Bailout Campaign, developed by the Association of Women's Rights in Development (AWID), among others. With the world at a crossroads, this Feminist Plan is a contribution to this array of policy proposals, to be used by policymakers and gender equality advocates in diverse spaces to influence the progressive change that the world so desperately needs.

Box 1.2 ANOTHER DECADE LOST TO AUSTERITY? THERE ARE ALTERNATIVES

COVID-19 pushed the global economy into the worst economic crisis since World War II. In 2020, global output dropped by 3.5 per cent⁴³ and while the global fiscal response has been unprecedented—amounting to US\$16.5 trillion as of July 2021—it has been overwhelmingly concentrated in high-income countries.⁴⁴ While economic growth has strongly rebounded in 2021, expected to reach 5.6 per cent globally, this is driven by a few high-income countries. By 2022, global output will remain about 2 per cent below pre-pandemic projections, and per capita income losses incurred in 2020 will not be fully regained in about two-thirds of developing countries.⁴⁵

The result is a growing divergence between the Global North, where the stimulus and access to vaccines has jump-started economies again, and the Global South, where plummeting global investment flows, unstable commodity prices and crushing debt levels point to sustained economic recession, which will only be exacerbated by impending austerity measures.⁴⁶ To reverse this situation, as well as bold action to make vaccines widely available in all countries, urgent measures are needed to ensure that governments in the Global South have fiscal space to support their economies, protect jobs and shore up their health and social protection systems. Such measures have profound significance for gender equality: When governments are unable to properly fund public services, women are impacted the most because they rely on the public sector for employment as well as for services—on sexual and reproductive health, education for their children, violence prevention and response services and much more.

In August 2021, the IMF announced US\$650 billion in **Special Drawing Rights (SDRs)** to increase liquidity for governments.⁴⁷ This is much below the US\$2.5 trillion that experts estimate developing countries need,⁴⁸ and most of it will go to advanced economies and China, leaving around US\$21 billion in added reserves to low-income countries and US\$212 billion to other developing and emerging countries.⁴⁹ This vital injection of finance could be significantly enhanced if richer countries transferred their share of SDRs to developing economies to, for example, cancel unsustainable debt or to fund access to vaccines via the COVAX facility.⁵⁰

Fiscal space is also constrained by long-standing debt, which has come to a head during the crisis. In 2020, funding allocated to external public debt service was larger than health-care and education expenditure in at least 62 and 36 countries, respectively.⁵¹ Debt relief has been offered by the IMF and the G20's Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI), providing vital short-term breathing space to some low-income countries.⁵² Private lenders and multilateral development banks have not yet offered debt repayment suspension to any country, however, which means that as much as US\$11.3 billion of IMF emergency financing issued to support 28 heavily impacted countries is being used to service private debt.⁵³ A comprehensive global mechanism, which is independent from creditors and can provide space for debt restructuring to be negotiated in a transparent and democratic way with borrowers and all lenders at the table, is needed to facilitate substantial debt cancellation and restructuring.⁵⁴ Given the severity of the debt crisis, another proposal is to require private creditors, to swap a reduced amount of their debt for new 'green recovery bonds', which would create fiscal space for indebted countries to implement the SDGs and the Paris Agreement.⁵⁵ Debt relief could also be provided in exchange for indebted countries agreeing to keep fossil fuels in the ground.⁵⁶ Such proposals depend on the G20 and the IMF taking on a strong leadership and coordination role.

With resources so urgently needed, **robust measures to stop tax evasion and avoidance** have become even more pressing. Up to 10 per cent of the world's GDP is held in offshore financial assets, with an estimated US\$7 trillion of the world's private wealth funnelled through secret jurisdictions and haven countries. Corporate profit shifting, whereby companies report profits in tax-free jurisdictions, cost countries where the profits are actually made in the order of US\$500 to US\$650 billion each year.⁵⁷ In February 2021, the High Level Panel on International Financial Accountability, Transparency and Integrity for Achieving the 2030 Agenda called for a new Global Pact for Financial Integrity for Sustainable Development.⁵⁸ The Panel proposed a new United Nations tax convention to facilitate greater global cooperation and the agreement of international tax norms. Establishing a global minimum tax rate for corporations was also a key recommendation, which was taken up by the G7 in June 2021. While some experts heralded the G7's proposal as an historic end of the global race to the bottom,⁵⁹ others argue that the proposed minimum tax rate of 15 per cent is too low, and it contains exemptions that will prevent developing countries from generating resources.⁶⁰ The G20 is next to consider the proposal.

For low-income countries, **official development assistance (ODA)** remains an important source of finance. If the donor community met the target for ODA of 0.7 per cent of gross national income (GNI) for the next two years, US\$380 billion above current commitments would be generated.⁶¹ But the signs are that donor countries are looking to cut back rather than increase aid, and even for those that manage to meet the ODA target, it will be against the backdrop of sharply reduced GNIs, leading to reduced resources overall.

Unprecedented levels of **multilateral cooperation and solidarity** are needed to prevent a massive regression in the living standards and welfare of the majority of the world's people, among whom women will be impacted the worst. To be fit for purpose for the challenges of the 21st century, the Bretton Woods institutions need to be modernized and democratized. To regain legitimacy, reform is needed to reflect the voices, needs and rights of their entire membership and to draw on the full range of views in decision-making and analysis.⁶²

2

AN ECONOMY THAT SUPPORTS WOMEN'S LIVELIHOODS



COVID-19 has pushed an already strained global economy over the edge and into the worst economic recession since the Second World War. The ensuing employment and livelihoods crisis has taken a disproportionate toll on women, who have lost their jobs at alarming rates. In developing countries where women's livelihoods were already on a knife-edge before the pandemic, poverty and food insecurity have skyrocketed. The asymmetric fallout of the crisis has exposed an economic system where wealth, income

and power are in the hands of the few, while economic insecurity prevails for the many. The growing gap between the rich and the rest, between Global North and Global South, not only flies in the face of shared prosperity and social justice; it also jeopardizes social stability. Rebuilding women's livelihoods must therefore go hand in hand with broader efforts aimed at creating a more sustainable and socially just economy that prioritizes decent work, social protection and food security for all.

LESSONS FROM COVID-19: WOMEN'S LIVELIHOODS HAVE TAKEN A MAJOR HIT

COVID-19 is exacerbating inequalities

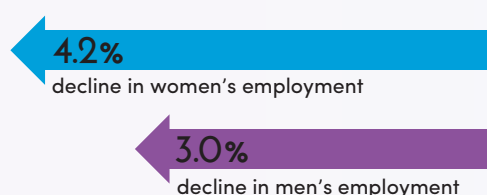
In 2020, the combined earnings of workers around the world fell by **US\$3.7 trillion** while global billionaire wealth increased by **US\$3.9 trillion**

By September 2020, the world had spent a total of **US\$790 billion** on social protection, but these resources were not equally distributed.

US\$695 spent per capita in high-income countries
US\$4 spent per capita in low-income countries

Women have lost their jobs and earnings at alarming rates

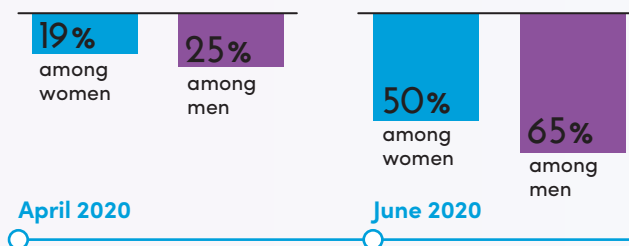
Globally, in 2019 and 2020, women lost more than **54 million jobs**



Across 45 countries, **one in five women** reported losing their job during the pandemic.

Informal workers experienced a sharp drop in earnings, with women losing a greater share of their pre-pandemic earnings and recovering them more slowly than men.

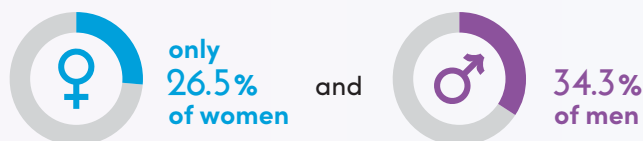
Informal worker earnings as percentage of pre-COVID earnings



In 2021, globally, men's employment will recover to 2019 levels, but there will still be **13 million fewer women** in employment.

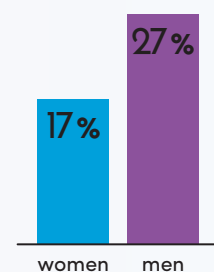
Gaping holes in social protection systems have left women with little to fall back on

Globally, before the pandemic



enjoyed comprehensive social protection by law.

Across **45 countries**,



reported receiving cash relief in response to COVID-19

219 countries and territories have taken 1,700 social protection and labour market measures.

95 have taken measures to strengthen women's economic security

81 have taken measures to address unpaid care

2.1 LEARNING THE LESSONS FROM COVID-19

Navigating the same storm, but in vastly different boats

The pandemic has underlined how much women's livelihoods—their access to decent work, social protection and even food—are structured by inequalities within and between countries. It has revealed that though the world may be navigating the same storm, some people are doing so in superyachts while others cling on to the drifting debris.¹ In 2020, the combined earnings of workers around the world fell by US\$3.7 trillion² while global billionaire wealth increased by US\$3.9 trillion.³ Large swathes of small and medium-sized enterprises have gone bankrupt, taking millions of jobs with them. This has further concentrated market power among large corporations, which the International Monetary Fund (IMF) warns will pose a threat to medium-term growth, innovation and investment.⁴

This asymmetric fallout is not accidental but the result of economic policies that have shifted the balance of power squarely towards large corporations and financial capital through privatization, deregulation and trade liberalization. In the process, shareholder profits have taken precedence over living wages for workers. Taxes have become more regressive and their share in national income has declined,⁵ with the global race to the bottom on corporate taxation limiting investments in social protection and public services that provide a buffer against shocks (see Box 1.2). When the pandemic hit, almost two thirds of the world's workers—including 740 million women—were in informal employment with little or no access to social protection.⁶ This left millions of people with nothing to fall back on when the crisis hit. Women, who already faced substantial disadvantages in access to jobs and incomes, have borne the brunt of the economic fallout of the pandemic. As a result, UN Women estimates that an additional

47 million women worldwide will be pushed into extreme poverty by 2021 and gender poverty gaps are expected to widen further, particularly among women and men of reproductive age.⁷

Large-scale loss of jobs and earnings, with women hit the hardest

The COVID-19 crisis has exposed just how limited and fragile women's labour market gains have been. Even before the pandemic, progress in closing the global gender gap in labour force participation rates had stalled, occupational segregation and gender wage gaps remained pervasive and the majority of the world's working women were stuck in informal and precarious jobs with few rights and protections.⁸ With the onset of the pandemic, women were among the first to lose their earnings. In 2019 and 2020, women lost more than 54 million jobs globally, a 4.2 per cent loss, compared to 3.0 per cent for men. In 2021, there will still be 13 million fewer women in employment compared to 2019, while men's employment will have recovered to 2019 levels.⁹ Across the 45 countries covered by UN Women's Rapid Gender Assessments, one in five women reported losing their job during the pandemic. Partnered women with children were more likely to lose their jobs than their male counterparts.¹⁰ As the crisis has dragged on, many women have left the workforce altogether to care for children amid school and day-care centre closures (see Chapter 3).

Slow recovery risks cementing women's status as 'second-class' workers even further, with potentially devastating implications for their long-term economic autonomy. The situation is particularly dire for women who are subject to multiple and intersecting inequalities. In the United States, for example, Black women account for the bulk of jobs lost during the pandemic

due to a combination of high pre-pandemic employment rates, occupational segregation in hotel/restaurant and health-care/social services industries and over-representation in insecure, low-wage occupations.¹¹ Globally, domestic workers, particularly migrant domestic workers, the vast majority of them women, have been especially affected by jobs loss and reductions in working hours.¹² Young workers, too, have been hit hard, with proportionate losses (8.7 per cent) more than double those of older workers (3.7 per cent). Since young women were twice as likely as young men to not be in education, employment or training (NEET) before the pandemic, its scarring effect is likely to be profound.¹³

Across the developing world, women in informal employment have found themselves not only locked down but also locked out of their livelihoods. Across twelve cities included in a survey conducted by Women in Informal Employment Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO), the spread of the pandemic and the accompanying government restrictions prevented almost three-quarters of informal workers from doing their jobs in April 2020.¹⁴ Average earnings fell dramatically, with a sharper drop registered among women (to 19 per cent of pre-COVID-19 earnings) compared to men (to 25 per cent).¹⁵ Women's earnings also recovered more slowly than men's once the lockdown restrictions eased. By June and July 2020, men's average earnings had recovered to 65 per cent of pre-COVID-19 earnings compared to 50 per cent for women.¹⁶

Gaping holes in social protection systems revealed

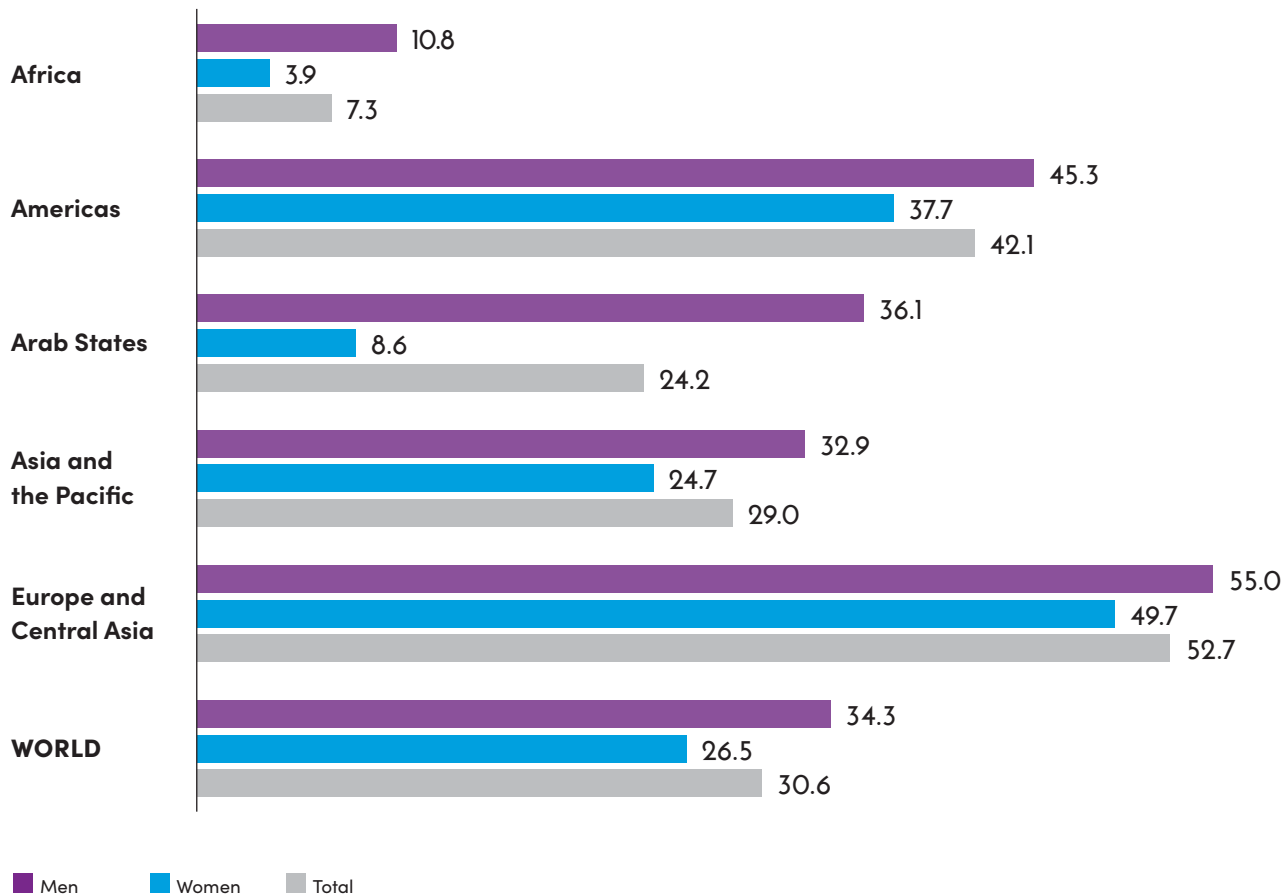
Inequalities within and across countries also affected access to social protection in the face of the profound jobs and livelihoods shocks triggered by the pandemic and exposed gaping holes that left women particularly vulnerable. Before the pandemic, less than a third of the global population

enjoyed comprehensive social protection coverage—i.e., covered by law in all eight areas defined by International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 102 (sickness, unemployment, old age, employment injury, child/family, maternity, invalidity and survivors' benefits) (see Figure 2.1).¹⁷ Gaps in effective coverage, i.e., the proportion of women and men receiving social protection benefits, are likely to be even wider, but sex-disaggregated data are insufficiently available to assess this. Women in Africa had the lowest rates of legal coverage (3.9 per cent), followed by women in the Arab States (8.6 per cent)—less than half and just over a quarter of the coverage achieved by men, respectively. This reflects women's over-representation in informal work, particularly unpaid work on family farms and businesses, in the former case, and women's lower labour force participation rates in the latter.

As countries rushed to plug these holes, they had vastly different resources available and systems to build on. Based on estimates from administrative data, as of September 2020 about 18 per cent of stimulus spending—or US\$790 billion—had been devoted to social protection globally. Yet, per capita amounts ranged from US\$695 in high-income countries to only US\$4 in low-income contexts.¹⁸ Countries that had broad-based social protection systems in place could rapidly use and adapt existing schemes to extend coverage and increase levels of protection in the face of the crisis. In Europe, for example, wage subsidies made up for over half of the earnings lost by the reduction in working hours, thereby mitigating increases in inequality.¹⁹ Some of the larger cash transfers in Latin America, too, including in Brazil, helped prevent an even sharper rise in poverty and often prioritized women among recipients (see Box 2.1).

Most countries, however, had to improvise, often under duress and with varying degrees of success. The lack of preparedness of safety-net type approaches characterized by narrow targeting and tightly monitored conditionalities was brought into sharp relief as countries struggled to reach

Figure 2.1 PERCENTAGE OF WORKING-AGE POPULATION LEGALLY COVERED BY COMPREHENSIVE SOCIAL SECURITY SYSTEMS, BY REGION AND SEX, 2019



Source: ILO 2021e.

Notes: Global and regional aggregates are weighted by working-age population. The numbers do not include healthcare coverage. Legal coverage refers to the proportion of the population protected by law against risks and contingencies, such as maternity, old age and unemployment. Comprehensive legal coverage refers to protection by law in all eight areas defined by International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 102.

women in informal employment. This sizeable 'missing middle' includes large numbers of women in informal employment who are often not considered 'poor enough' to qualify for narrowly targeted social assistance programmes but lack the capacity to make regular contributions to social insurance. Without income replacements, these workers were forced into the impossible choice between their families going hungry and breaking the rules to put food on the table, risking contagion or sanctions. Women were less likely to receive cash relief

across 36 out of 45 countries surveyed as part of UN Women's Rapid Gender Assessments, with less than one in five women (17 per cent) receiving cash relief in response to COVID-19, compared to 27 per cent of men. Single mothers and younger women aged between 18 and 24 years were especially less likely than their male counterparts to report receiving cash or in-kind relief.²⁰

Overall, most social protection responses have been short-lived compared to the enduring and

ongoing hardship caused by the pandemic, and explicit attention to gender dynamics has been the exception rather than the rule. As the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UN Women COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker shows, out of 1,700 social protection and labour market measures taken in response to the crisis, only 13 per cent targeted women's economic security and only 11 per cent provided support for rising unpaid care demands (see Chapter 3).²¹ But the pandemic has also raised awareness and triggered collective action for the extension of social protection, which, if backed by global solidarity and cooperation, could engender more enduring change (see Box 2.1).

Escalating food insecurity is indicative of a broken global system

Large-scale loss of income and limited access to social protection quickly ushered in rising food insecurity. The pandemic revealed hundreds of millions of people living permanently on the cusp of hunger, malnutrition and extreme poverty who lacked the means to procure food in light of movement restrictions, supply chain interruptions, lost income and even relatively minor price increases. Women were already 27 per cent more at risk of severe food insecurity than men before the pandemic, and this gap is expected to widen further.²² Women are also often responsible for household food provisioning and preparation. With school closures, school feeding programmes faced disruptions, further increasing the pressure on families and the burden on women. Across countries as diverse as India, Kazakhstan, Mexico, Morocco, Nigeria, Pakistan, Paraguay, Philippines, South Africa, Turkmenistan and Uganda, the pandemic spurred women's protests specifically addressing access to food (see Chapter 5).²³ Across the Global North and South alike, women-led organizations played a critical role in relief efforts, organizing food deliveries and soup kitchens for affected communities (Box 5.2).

Similar to the crisis in labour markets, the food crisis triggered by COVID-19 has come on top of and was exacerbated by long-standing structural deficiencies and inequalities in global food systems. Like care workers, food workers have been essential during the pandemic but largely treated as sacrificial—with racialized and migrant food workers being particularly affected.²⁴ Small-scale producers, migrant and seasonal workers as well as local food vendors all saw their livelihoods severely disrupted, paying the price for a global food system that for decades has hedged its bets on the expansion of industrial farming methods and international trade.²⁵

Current international food agreements—notably the 1995 World Trade Organization (WTO) Agreement on Agriculture—have served to protect powerful countries and large corporations through reducing tariff protections for small farmers in the developing world while allowing countries across Europe and the United States to subsidize agriculture at home, flooding the global market with below-cost food commodities.²⁶ Unequal terms of trade and reliance on global supply chains have left developing countries dependent and vulnerable to shocks. The horticultural sector in Kenya, for example, which accounts for about a fifth of agricultural exports and in which women workers are over-represented,²⁷ was hit hard by plummeting external demand in the early months of the pandemic that resulted in cancelled contracts, massive layoffs and salary cuts for women workers.²⁸ Regional supply chains were also disrupted as truckers spent days at border crossings for COVID-19 screening, leaving fruit and vegetables to rot in their holds, while market prices spiked in cities such as Nairobi.²⁹

The vulnerability of other workers in the food system, including those working in processing and distribution, was also revealed, with low priority given to their income protection or health and safety. Precarious and unsafe work conditions, low wages, lack of social protection and limited bargaining

power were already widespread in the food sector. During the pandemic, these workers were on the front lines because they could not otherwise survive. Some of the epicentres of illness and death in North America have been in meat processing plants that employ predominantly immigrant and migrant workers.³⁰ Across cities in the Global South, women often dominate food vending on streets and in open markets, relying on the use of public spaces for their livelihoods.³¹ Even where these workers were




exempted from national and local lockdowns, they faced sharp drops in their incomes alongside unsafe working conditions, including limited access to protective gear, handwashing facilities and sanitizer.³²

As such, COVID-19 has exposed underlying problems and injustices in the global food system that have been decades in the making³³ and need to be urgently addressed as the world continues to deal with the pandemic and starts to rebuild.

2.2 VISION: REIMAGINING WOMEN'S LIVELIHOODS IN A MORE EQUAL WORLD

What would a different future look like? In a sustainable and just economy, everyone would enjoy an adequate standard of living; workers would share the profits of their labour in jobs that regenerate rather than degrade the natural environment (see Chapter 4); and dignified working conditions and living wages would provide women with a pathway to economic empowerment and autonomy. None of this will be possible without

addressing the pervasive inequalities within and between countries that have exacerbated people's vulnerability to shocks, eroded their hopes for a better future and are distorting the healthy functioning of politics (see Chapter 5). Reimagining women's livelihoods—their access to decent work, social protection and sufficient nutritious food—requires a fundamental shift in how economies and societies have been structured:

-  **Instead of accepting rising inequalities within and between countries as inevitable, a sustainable and just economy would actively seek to redress the economic disadvantages faced by women and other marginalized groups, including through progressive taxation and social protection for all.**
-  **Instead of treating women as 'second class' workers, a sustainable and just economy would recognize their contributions and protect their right to work and rights at work, including ensuring workplaces are safe, healthy and free from violence, in the informal as well as the formal economy.**
-  **Instead of prioritizing the interests of corporations, investors and shareholders above all else, a sustainable and just economy would rebalance power with those who sustain it, including women workers, and create an enabling environment for collective action.**

To turn this vision into reality, governments must prioritize the fight against inequalities and take the high road to economic recovery and transformation. This is particularly important in a context in which, even before the pandemic, environmental

degradation, technological change and automation, as well as demographic shifts were transforming work and livelihoods, with a disproportionately negative impact on those who already faced significant socio-economic disadvantage.³⁴

KEY LEVERS TO TRANSFORM WOMEN'S LIVELIHOODS IN COVID-19 RECOVERY

FINANCING:

Invest in universal, gender-responsive social protection systems.

Progressive taxation and global cooperation are needed to finance these systems, which are critical to mitigate the gendered risks and vulnerabilities that women face, as well as an essential bulwark against economic and environmental shocks.

Strengthening self-determination in food systems in countries in the Global South requires trade agreements based on solidarity and cooperation and local food systems that prioritize women-led cooperatives, community agriculture and public procurement.

Rebuild global and local food systems by working in **PARTNERSHIPS** with those who sustain them.

ACCOUNTABILITY:

Ensure the voices of all workers can shape the economic recovery.

Governments, trade unions and employers must make space for informal workers' organizations to articulate their claims and guarantee their rights to decent work, freedom of association and collective action.

Closing evidence gaps, developing new methodologies and spurring data collection, particularly on gender-responsive social protection, so that progress can be monitored and decision-makers can be held to account, is essential for building an inclusive economy.

Strengthen sex-disaggregated **DATA** to secure women's livelihoods.

Building a people-centred economy by prioritizing women's access to decent work, social protection and right to food.

2.3 PRIORITIZING WOMEN'S LIVELIHOODS IN ECONOMIC RECOVERY

Building economies that support women's livelihoods will take time, but governments must harness their economic recovery strategies now to regain the ground that has been lost during the pandemic and lay the foundations for a more equal and just future. Doing so requires a greater policy emphasis on employment creation, with a focus on the green and care economies (see Chapters 3 and 4) as well as the generation of fiscal resources—through progressive taxation and global cooperation—for investments in universal, gender-responsive social protection, public services and food systems that leave countries better prepared for the next big crisis.

FINANCING: Invest in universal, gender-responsive social protection systems

Social protection policies, working in tandem with employment and fiscal policies, are critical to ensure an adequate standard of living by protecting people in the face of shocks and across the life course. They also hold significant promise for advancing gender equality if and when they are specifically designed to do so by addressing women's more limited access to employment and economic resources, their disproportionate responsibilities for the unpaid provision of care and their gender-specific risks (from costly health conditions to domestic violence) and vulnerabilities (from constrained access to information and administrative structures to discriminatory gender norms that limit their mobility). The imperative to build robust and equitable social protection systems is becoming more urgent as the world faces up to the challenge of adaptation to the irreversible impacts of climate change and environmental degradation.³⁵

Extending social protection to informal workers, especially women who are clustered at the bottom of the labour market hierarchy—such as contributing

workers in family firms and farms, domestic workers and waste-pickers—must be a priority. As the pandemic has shown, these workers are not marginal to the economy but are, in fact, essential for its functioning by supporting food security, collecting waste and recyclables and providing care.³⁶ Yet, the contributory capacity of many of these workers is low and some groups lack a clearly identifiable employer, including a growing share of workers in the gig economy in the Global North, meaning that their access to social protection requires greater financing out of general taxation or cross-subsidies from other sources. Before the pandemic, significant progress in incorporating informal workers into solidaristic social security systems was achieved this way in countries such as Rwanda, Thailand and Viet Nam in the context of universal health coverage reforms, as well as in Uruguay, where informal workers can access contributory social protection, including maternity benefits, through lower, simplified and flexible contributions.³⁷ Although many of the COVID-19 emergency measures have been short-lived and often insufficient to meet mounting needs,³⁸ the pandemic has created greater awareness among policymakers and catalysed policy experimentation and bottom-up claims-making for more universal and inclusive social protection systems (see Box 2.1).

How these systems will be financed is an important question. In many countries, there is potential to mobilize additional resources through progressive taxation, including through corporate and wealth taxes. Argentina, for example, introduced a one-off tax on the country's 12,000 richest people (0.02 per cent of the population) to help cover the costs of the COVID-19 response, including medical supplies, assistance to small- and medium-sized enterprises, and social development policies. The tax ranges between 3.5 per cent (for assets held in Argentina) and 5.3 per cent (for assets held outside

of the country)³⁹ and, according to official sources, has already raised US\$2.4 billion, equivalent to 0.5 per cent of the country's GDP.⁴⁰ But for many low-income countries, even the implementation of a basic social protection floor will require an additional US\$77.9 billion, or 15.9 per cent of their GDP⁴¹—an

investment that cannot be financed through domestic resource mobilization alone and requires global action, including debt cancellation, equitable global tax accords that ensure multinational corporations pay their fair share and measures to crack down on illicit international financial flows (see Box 1.2).

Box 2.1 SOCIAL PROTECTION FOR ALL? PRESSURES AND POLICY INNOVATIONS GENERATED BY THE PANDEMIC

For many governments around the world, the pandemic was a wake-up call. Even those that had made significant strides in the extension of non-contributory cash transfers to the poor suddenly found themselves scrambling to identify and reach individuals outside of their pre-pandemic poverty thresholds who, from one day to the next, found themselves without jobs or incomes. As such, COVID-19 generated pressures and policy innovations that could form the basis for more universal social protection systems that are more inclusive of women.

Many governments undertook significant efforts to extend social assistance to informal workers, sometimes giving priority to women or female-dominated occupations. For example, **Togo** introduced a six-month mobile cash transfer (*Noviss*) for informal economy workers, reaching nearly 575,000 people, 65 per cent of whom were women, who also received the highest benefit amount in recognition of their roles as both workers and managers of household needs.⁴² Similarly, in **Brazil**, Congress approved an emergency cash transfer (*Auxilio Emergencial*) in March 2020 that provided monthly benefits to 66 million informal workers—almost one third of the country's population—over a nine-month period. Pressure by social movements and trade unions resulted in a comparatively generous transfer (over four times the national poverty line), and women heads of households received double the benefit.⁴³ While the *Auxilio Emergencial* was framed as a temporary measure from the outset, it was extended several times and has renewed the debate about a permanent universal citizen income (*Renda Cidadã*).⁴⁴

In other countries, the pandemic spurred renewed efforts to improve unemployment protection for vulnerable workers through existing social insurance schemes. In **Chile**, for example, where 40 per cent of domestic workers lost their jobs during the first months of the pandemic, after years of mobilization by workers' organizations, Congress unanimously passed a law in September 2020⁴⁵ that incorporated domestic workers into the country's unemployment insurance (*Seguro de Cesantía*). In **South Africa**, domestic workers had already been incorporated into the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF) in 2003, and contribution rules had been adapted to account for the reality of part-time domestic workers with several employers. However, widespread non-compliance with registration by employers before the pandemic caused major blockages and delays in the rollout of COVID-19 support to these workers. By October 2020, only just over 60,000 out of 1 million domestic workers in the country had received support.⁴⁶ Despite these shortcomings, there is a sense that the pandemic has promoted awareness about the importance of unemployment insurance—and domestic worker organizations are planning to capitalize on this by conducting a registration campaign in 2021. Whether such worker-led registration has the potential to mitigate against the highly unequal employer-employee relationships that have limited the effectiveness of the current employer-led arrangement remains to be seen.

An economy that supports women’s livelihoods would include universal gender-responsive social protection systems, which are critical for ensuring an adequate standard of living for all and to mitigate the gendered risks and vulnerabilities that are a particular feature of women’s lives. Comprehensive social protection is also an essential bulwark against the economic and environmental shocks that are increasing in frequency and intensity. Going beyond a minimalist safety net approach calls for action to shore up social insurance systems as well as to extend non-contributory social protection, and financing these measures depends on progressive taxation and, especially for low-income countries, global cooperation.

PARTNERSHIPS: Rebuild global and local food systems by working with those who sustain them

To build food systems that can withstand future crises and achieve the interlocking goals of supporting women’s livelihoods, food sovereignty and environmental sustainability, a paradigm shift is needed. Instead of doubling-down on industrial food production, as was the response to past crises, food systems must be rebuilt in ways that reduce dependence on long and often wasteful value chains and address entrenched inequalities based on gender, class, race/ethnicity and other forms of discrimination. This requires new partnerships that empower those historically dispossessed from control of food systems, including Indigenous people, and strengthen the position of small-scale farmers and informal food vendors—groups among which women are often overrepresented. Territorially rooted food systems and markets⁴⁷ would be geared towards realizing the right to culturally, nutritionally and ecologically appropriate food for all people, and the rights to lands, territories and natural resources as well as their sustainable use (see Chapter 4).⁴⁸

On a global scale, agricultural trade rules are in urgent need of reform to return policy space to developing countries to shape their agricultural sectors in ways that support food sovereignty: the right of communities and/or states to exercise self-determination in their food production, distribution and consumption⁴⁹ and local livelihoods.⁵⁰ A fundamental shift is needed in new multilateral or bilateral trade agreements away from an exclusive focus on economic growth and towards cooperation based on the principles of dignity, self-

sufficiency and solidarity.⁵¹ New trade agreements should support food practices that work in harmony with nature, ensure workers’ rights and provide governments with the tools to facilitate people’s access to diversified food, including traditional and/or Indigenous foodstuffs.⁵²

On a regional and national level, partnerships between the state, food producers and vendors could strengthen local food networks. Evidence suggests that small-scale producers organized in cooperatives, or selling through fair trade initiatives or socially responsible buyers have received better support to cope with economic shocks than those operating solely through market intermediaries (see Box 5.2).⁵³ Properly resourced, and with attention to gender inequalities at the household and community level, cooperative models such as women’s group farming or community-led agroecology could also constitute a pathway towards resilient and gender-just livelihoods (see Chapter 4).⁵⁴ Trade partnerships between local food producers and public food procurement programmes for schools, hospitals or long-term care facilities are another lever for strengthening local food chains and supporting small-scale producers (see Boxes 2.2 and 5.2).⁵⁵

The essential role of workers in food distribution systems also needs to be better supported. The majority of the world’s population relies on informal food markets for access to staple products, fruit and vegetables, and this is especially the case for lower-income communities who need to buy food in small quantities at more affordable prices than supermarkets offer.⁵⁶ Some countries took steps to support informal food vendors during the pandemic by exempting them from lockdown restrictions or

expressly declaring them essential workers, as in Peru and South Africa, where informal vendors had already been officially recognized as workers before the pandemic.⁵⁷ However, despite these

formal declarations, street vendors still faced stigmatization as potential vectors of the virus and shutdowns from police and military unaware of the official guidelines.⁵⁸

Box 2.2 GENDER-RESPONSIVE PUBLIC PROCUREMENT TO STRENGTHEN LOCAL FOOD MARKETS

Public procurement programmes employing small-scale women food producers offer one gender-responsive approach to support localized food systems and livelihoods. Such programmes can potentially directly connect women small-scale producers to a predictable source of income and offer reliable support to their livelihoods in times of crisis, as well as ensuring fresh and nutritious food for the public programmes they supply, including for schools, hospitals, care facilities or food-assistance programmes.⁵⁹

To ensure women's access to public procurement contracts, governments can establish quotas or award criteria that give women preferential selection. In **Kenya**, for instance, the Government has reserved 30 per cent of public procurement contracts for women.⁶⁰ Programmes should also use gender-sensitive eligibility criteria by, for example, recognizing that women may not be considered household heads or own property, yet still have rights to agricultural land and to be food producers.⁶¹

In **Senegal**, women provide more than 80 per cent of agricultural production, and women farmers have been hit particularly hard by COVID-19, exacerbating poverty and food insecurity.⁶² To combat this, the Senegal Ministry of Women, Family, Gender and Child Protection, in partnership with UN Women, launched a gender-responsive public procurement initiative to prioritize women farmers in purchasing cereals for the emergency food basket programme. Overall, the Government purchased 231 tons of rice and 23 tons of cereals from 285 women's cooperatives and micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), enabling the distribution of food kits to 10,000 vulnerable households.

Brazil's Fome Zero (Zero Hunger) Programme includes a well-established, public food procurement scheme for school feeding that has reached significant scale. The Programme sources fresh food products directly from small-scale farmers, reducing the role of intermediaries such that a larger proportion of the market price goes to local farmers.⁶³ There is a national quota of 30 per cent of purchases reserved for family farmers and, within this category, women, Indigenous people and Afro-descendent people are prioritized.⁶⁴ Small-scale farmers who participate in the programme report more reliable access to markets and incomes and increased food security at the household and community level, which in turn have enabled crop diversification and agroecological production practices.⁶⁵

An economy that supports women's livelihoods would aim to ensure the right to food for all through partnerships with the women who underpin local food systems, such as small-scale farmers, local food producers and vendors, and Indigenous women. Strengthening self-determination in food systems in countries in the Global South, as well as in local communities, would require trade agreements based on principles of solidarity and cooperation and sub-national efforts to build local food systems that prioritize women-led cooperatives, community agriculture and public procurement.

ACCOUNTABILITY: Ensure the voices of workers are central to economic recovery

To ensure a job-led recovery that addresses inequality and supports women's livelihoods, strong workers' organizations will be critical. During the COVID-19 crisis, social dialogue between governments, companies and trade unions has been effective in devising practical and equitable solutions to protect health, support jobs and ensure businesses stay afloat.⁶⁶ Trade unions have tended to be biased towards the male, formal workforce, but over time they have nevertheless been a critical force in organizing workers, negotiating for their rights at work and ensuring they receive a fair share of the profits that their work generates. In recent decades, the weakening of trades unions is one of the factors that has contributed to the declining labour share of income, which has in turn driven widening inequality within countries.⁶⁷ To ensure their future relevance and effectiveness, trade unions and collective action efforts must be inclusive of all workers and go much beyond formal, higher-skilled or male-dominated sectors.

Responding to the narrow scope of some trade unions, informal worker organizations have emerged to voice collective demands. They too have been active in a range of areas to protect their members during the COVID-19 crisis, as well as in longer-term efforts to expand labour rights. In Thailand, for example, over more than a decade, organizations

of informal workers have secured the extension of labour rights and social protection to 2 million women home-based workers (see Box 2.3).⁶⁸ During the pandemic, the Federation of Informal Workers has raised awareness about the detrimental impact of the crisis on informal workers and lobbied the national and local authorities for measures in their support.⁶⁹ As a result, the Government agreed to a 40 per cent increase in social security contributions for informal workers for a period of six months and opened rehabilitation and health centres, hitherto reserved for formal workers, to informal workers who experience employment injury or health issues.⁷⁰

Around the globe, domestic worker organizations have worked tirelessly to challenge their exclusion from national labour laws and to draw attention to the specific forms of exploitation and abuse that they face. The International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWF) has conducted surveys with member-based organizations at the national level, documenting the widespread violence and harassment inflicted on domestic workers by their employers, other members of their employers' households, employment intermediaries or members of their own families or households.⁷¹ National legislation against violence at work that includes domestic workers, official legal complaint mechanisms for domestic workers, private home inspections, and efforts aimed at raising awareness about rights are essential for these workers to seek justice and hold perpetrators accountable. Domestic workers' organizations play an essential role

“The COVID-19 pandemic has brought into the open both the challenges that domestic workers face—from lack of access to social protection and healthcare to unsafe working conditions—as well as their immense contributions to caring for millions of people across the world. Domestic workers deserve the same rights and protections as any other worker.”

ELIZABETH TANG, General Secretary, International Domestic Workers' Federation



in supporting workers to report cases and often provide essential services, such as legal advice and referrals to government services where these exist.

Migration status can complicate the picture further, particularly if the migrant domestic workers' right to be in the country is tied to a particular employer. This is the case in some countries in Western Asia, where under the *Kafala* employer-sponsorship system, domestic workers cannot enter or leave the country, resign from a job or transfer employment without their employer's explicit permission. Alongside ongoing pressure from

civil society, the pandemic has forced change because many migrant domestic workers lost their jobs and were stranded, unable to return home. Since 2020, Lebanon, Qatar and Saudi Arabia have made their sponsorship systems more flexible to allow migrant workers, including domestic workers, to change jobs or leave the country without obtaining permission from their employers.⁷² Moreover, in March 2021, a new law came into force in Qatar stipulating a minimum wage applying to all workers of all nationalities and sectors, including domestic workers, which will benefit more than 400,000 workers.⁷³

Box 2.3 BUILDING BRIDGES WITH TRADE UNIONS TO EXTEND RIGHTS TO WOMEN INFORMAL WORKERS

To ensure the recovery is gender-responsive, social dialogue mechanisms that include marginalized categories of women workers are essential.

In **Burundi**, for example, where 98.8 per cent of women work in the informal economy, with little protection under labour legislation, four national informal worker federations—encompassing transport, domestic, food and manufacturing workers—have been working closely with the Confederation of Trade Unions of Burundi (COSYBU) since 2011. Together they signed a national tripartite charter on social dialogue that included informal workers on the same level as their formal counterparts, ensuring they are represented in collective bargaining processes and on the board of social protection schemes. To play this official role effectively, the four informal workers' federations increased their membership, created units dedicated to representing women workers and promoted women's leadership. These actions led to a significant increase in the unionization of women and men informal workers, almost tripling from 32,000 members in 2013 to around 90,000 members in 2018.⁷⁴ Further efforts are needed to reach contributing workers in family businesses and farms, among whom women predominate.

In **Thailand**, HomeNet Thailand Association, a network of home-based producers and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), supported by WIEGO, a transnational network of informal workers' organizations, campaigned for more than a decade to pass the Home Workers' Protection Act in 2010, enshrining new protections for this feminized sector. The law requires fair and equal wages for home-based workers and mandates contracts and occupational health and safety standards, enhancing the protection of an estimated 2 million women home-based industrial outworkers.⁷⁵ The Act also established a Committee for the Protection of Homeworkers, on which both women and men are expected to serve, which provides access to the courts in labour disputes. In 2016, HomeNet Thailand helped establish the Federation of Informal Workers of Thailand, which covers more than 20,000 workers, bringing together a wider range of sectors including domestic workers, market traders and street vendors. Since informal workers still have no representation in tripartite committees, informal workers' organizations collaborate with trade unions in various areas, including lobbying for access to childcare and universal coverage of child allowances.⁷⁶

As well as building their own organizations, informal workers have forged alliances with formal trade unions to bridge the divide.⁷⁷ In recent years, workers' and employers' organizations in countries including Burundi, Togo, Uganda and Zimbabwe—where more than 95 per cent of women are employed in the informal economy—have made progress towards affiliating informal workers and

representing their interests in official tripartite negotiations to improve their working conditions.⁷⁸ For instance, in Togo, informal workers' organizations and trade unions created the Inter-union Technical Committee for the Informal Economy in 2018 and, through this mechanism, collaborated on a successful campaign to extend the right to social security to informal workers.⁷⁹

An economy that supports women's livelihoods would ensure that the voices of all workers can influence the policies that shape their working lives. This requires action by governments, trade unions and employers to support informal workers' organizations, which represent millions of marginalized women workers, and to identify institutions and mechanisms to guarantee their rights to decent working conditions, social protection, union representation and collective action.

METRICS: Strengthen sex-disaggregated data on employment quality and social protection

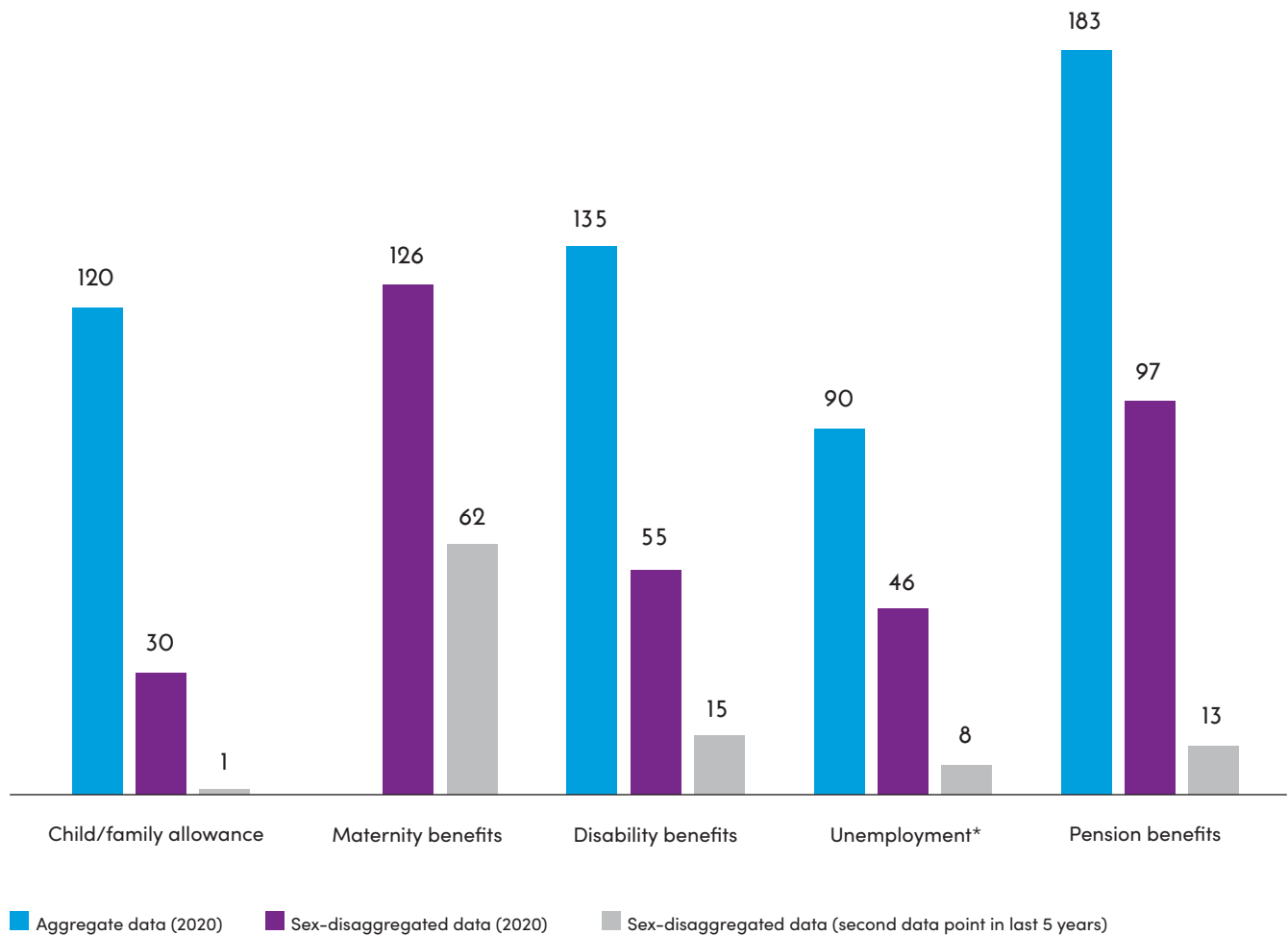
Data on women's labour force participation have improved massively over the past two decades, with sex-disaggregated data on employment and unemployment rates now widely available.⁸⁰ Further disaggregation, including by marital status and presence of young children, has shed further light on gender dynamics in paid and unpaid labour (see also Chapter 3).⁸¹ Whether access to employment translates into secure livelihoods for women—including adequate wages, access to social protection and food security—remains more difficult to assess. Despite important progress, only just over a third (68) of countries reported sex-disaggregated data on the proportion of informal employment in non-agricultural employment in 2020.⁸² The share of countries reporting on average hourly earnings by sex is similarly low and tends to exclude the informal economy altogether, while virtually no data are available on women's and men's incomes from

small-scale farming—Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) indicator 2.3.2—a sector where women, while being counted as employed, often labour as unpaid family workers.

Sex-disaggregated data on effective social protection coverage also remain inadequate. Data on the proportion of women and men covered by at least one social protection benefit are currently available for only 17 out of 193 countries.⁸³ Data availability also varies widely across types of benefits (see Figure 2.2). But even in areas that are relatively well covered in aggregate terms, such as pensions, sex-disaggregation is reported by only about half of the 183 countries with data. When looking for countries with a second sex-disaggregated data point within the last five years, which is needed to assess progress over time, the number drops even further. In the area of maternity benefits, for example, roughly two thirds of countries register coverage data in 2020, but fewer than half of these report a second data point within the last five years.⁸⁴

An economy that supports women's livelihoods can only be achieved if data and evidence gaps are addressed, so that progress can be monitored and decision-makers can be held to account. Innovative analysis of existing datasets has provided new perspectives on women's position within labour markets, and sex-disaggregated data availability on informal employment has improved, but there is still much room for improvement, including on earnings. The gaps in data on social protection are particularly stark and will require new methodologies and data collection efforts to build gender-responsive systems for the future.

Figure 2.2 NUMBER OF COUNTRIES WITH DATA ON SOCIAL PROTECTION COVERAGE (OUT OF 193), BY TYPE OF BENEFIT



Source: UN Women calculations based on UNSD 2021.

Notes: * 83 countries reported no coverage data, because they had no statutory unemployment programme in place.

Effective coverage refers to the proportion of the population receiving a social protection benefit, or actively contributing to a social security scheme.

3

PUTTING CARE AT THE CENTRE OF A SUSTAINABLE AND JUST ECONOMY

Like few crises before it, COVID-19 has surfaced the importance as well as the fragility of the care economy. While business activities ground to a halt, paid and unpaid care increased in both intensity and significance. Suddenly, the very work that is routinely devalued by markets and inadequately supported by governments was considered essential.¹ The extent to which the care economy relies on women's unpaid and underpaid

labour has also been exposed as never before. While COVID-19 may have pushed care arrangements to breaking point, these arrangements were already patchy, fragile and plagued by inequalities before the pandemic.² Lessons from the unfolding pandemic can therefore inform a long overdue paradigm shift that recognizes the centrality of care to economies and societies.



LESSONS FROM COVID-19: THE CARE ECONOMY IN CRISIS MODE

Paid care work is recognized as essential, but health risks and economic penalties persist

Globally, **women are**



of health workers and, in most regions, upwards of



of nurses and social care workers.

Across 11 countries with sex-disaggregated data, women account for



of confirmed COVID-19 cases among health care workers.

In the United States, essential workers in care services earned

↓ **18% less**

than other workers that were defined as essential during the pandemic.

Countries across sub-Saharan Africa rely on over

900,000

community health workers to support their fragile health systems.



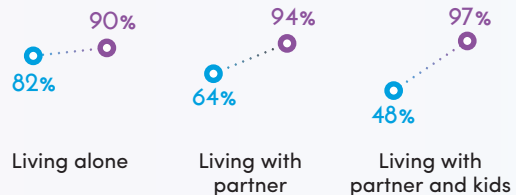
Over two thirds of these frontline workers are women.



Unpaid care is critical but neglected, and women pay the price

Even before the pandemic, having children reduced women's **labour force participation rate** (LFPR) and earnings, while the opposite is true for men.

LFPR by living arrangement

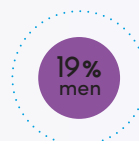


Based on data from 16 countries women have done

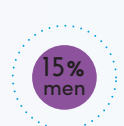
29% more

childcare per week than men, during the pandemic.

Lower-income households



Higher-income households



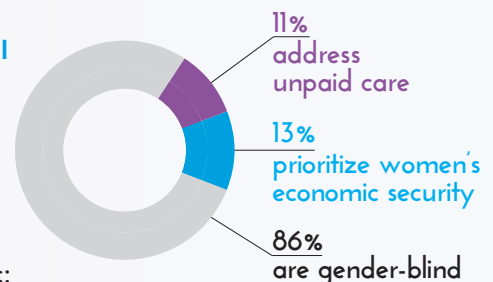
In Germany, mothers were significantly more likely than fathers to cut back on paid working hours due to childcare constraints in the early days of the pandemic. **Women in lower-income households faced the deepest cuts.**

Support for the care sector has been inadequate and often gender-blind

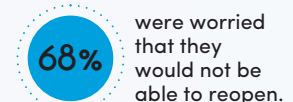
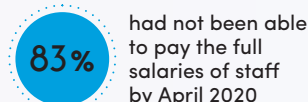
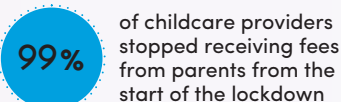
Only **1 in 10**

countries mention gender in their guidelines on the protection of healthcare workers.

Globally, out of **1,700 social protection and labour market measures** taken in response to the pandemic:



In South Africa



3.1 LEARNING THE LESSONS FROM COVID-19

Care is critical but neglected, and women pay the price

The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically exposed the deficits and inequalities in access to and provision of care that had been hidden in plain sight for decades. As even the best-prepared health-care systems have struggled to cope with the onslaught, countries that already faced shortages in infrastructure and staff due to persistent underfunding or recent retrenchments have faced the perfect storm. The health sector workforce paid a high price. Globally, women are 70 per cent of health workers and, in most regions, upwards of 80 per cent of nurses and social care workers, roles that mean prolonged contact with sick patients and higher infection rates.³ The intersection of gender and racial hierarchies in the health sector has often exacerbated health and safety risks. In Brazil, for example, the majority of community health workers (CHWs) are Black women, while white women are over-represented among nurses, and most physicians are white men.⁴ During the pandemic, CHWs reported far lower rates of access to personal protective equipment (PPE), COVID-testing, training and leadership support than did physicians.⁵

Care sector workers: Social recognition rises, but economic penalties persist

The fact that health and other care workers have been declared essential workers and asked to put their lives on the line while earning comparatively low wages has exposed the profound disjuncture between the social value of care work and its private, pecuniary reward.⁶ In the United States, essential care workers (in health, education and social services) were found to earn 18 per cent less than other essential workers (in law enforcement,

transportation and retail).⁷ In many low-income countries, it is not uncommon for community health and childcare workers to be paid either a minimal stipend or nothing at all. Inadequate wages have been compounded by care workers' lower likelihood of receiving hazard pay even as their exposure to COVID-19 was more frequent and direct than for other essential workers. Penalties for care work are not restricted to the United States or to the pandemic context. Researchers have documented them across countries and argued that the distinctive features of care work—intrinsic motivation, emotional skills, team production and positive externalities that are difficult to assign a price to—contribute to the failure of markets in assigning adequate value to this work.⁸

Care services: Longstanding deficits increase vulnerability to shocks

While in the initial phase of the pandemic, much attention focused on health services, shortfalls in other parts of the care economy have also become painfully clear as the virus ravaged through nursing homes across Europe and North America, taking a disproportionate toll on the lives of residents and staff.⁹ In Canada, nursing home residents accounted for more than two thirds of COVID-related deaths¹⁰—a trend attributed in part to long-standing infrastructure deficits and poor working conditions as well as lack of oversight and accountability of private-for-profit facilities in the long-term care sector, with for-profit facilities registering higher death rates than both not-for-profit and municipal facilities.¹¹ The gendered, classed and racialized hierarchy between 'cure' and 'care' also contributed to intensive care units being favoured in terms of finances and PPE over the long-term care sector, which suffered shortages of both.¹²

In many countries, the pandemic has also pushed an already fragile childcare sector, plagued by inadequate public funding and disproportionate reliance on parental fees, over the edge. The weak institutional structure of childcare services in many countries left them highly vulnerable to the shock caused by public health-related closures, with detrimental consequences for childcare workers and potentially lasting effects on availability and access. In South Africa, for example, according to a survey conducted in April 2020, 99 per cent of childcare providers stopped receiving fees from parents from the start of the lockdown; 83 per cent had not been able to pay the full salaries of staff—predominantly women—of whom only 35 per cent were registered for unemployment insurance; 96 per cent were unable to pay their operating costs; and 68 per cent were worried that they would not be able to reopen.¹³ In the United Kingdom, too, there are concerns that the pandemic could wipe out a significant proportion of childcare service providers with negative ripple effects on economic recovery and women’s ability to (re)enter the workforce.¹⁴

Unpaid family and community care: Women stepping up but stretched thin by lack of support

As the pandemic strained public services and created significant economic hardship, women’s unpaid work in families and communities has, once more, become a shock absorber. With schools, nurseries and day-care centres shut down, families have witnessed a massive shift of childcare responsibilities into their homes. Other childcare arrangements, such as grandparent care, on which many working parents rely during ‘normal times’, have also faced disruptions as families responded to shelter-in-place orders and sought to protect the older generation from the risks of contagion.¹⁵

While both women and men have increased their unpaid workloads, women continue to shoulder the bulk of unpaid care and domestic work. Across

45 countries surveyed as part of the UN Women Rapid Gender Assessments, women were more likely than men to report an increase in childcare responsibilities.¹⁶ Across a subset of 16 countries, women spent an average of 31 hours per week only on childcare, compared to 24 hours spent by men.¹⁷ With heightened hygiene requirements and more people at home 24/7, domestic chores also increased, with women being much more likely to report increases in time spent cleaning and cooking compared to men. These tasks are particularly arduous in low-income contexts where access to basic services, such as running water and electricity, is lacking. Community-based organizations also stepped in to fill the gaps left by slow and insufficient government responses, coordinating food aid and the supply of PPE, organizing collective childcare, distributing reproductive health and hygiene kits and providing psychosocial support for survivors of violence.¹⁸

Considered outside of the production boundary, the increase in unpaid family and community care may not have dampened fluctuations in gross domestic product (GDP), but it undeniably ‘added value’ by stabilizing household consumption. That this work is provided for free does not mean that it comes without costs. During the pandemic, these costs have been unequally borne by households, with women and girls paying a disproportionate price in terms of their economic security, health and well-being. Across most countries with available data, women are significantly more likely than men to report an increase in anxiety, stress and depression since the onset of the pandemic. In the Asia and the Pacific region, for example, 66 per cent of women reported mental health effects as a result of COVID-19, compared to 58 per cent of men.¹⁹

Meanwhile the care economy has been largely ignored in policy responses. Data collected by UN Women and UNDP for the COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker shows that out of a total of over 1,700 social protection and labour

market measures, only 11 per cent address unpaid care through provisions such as extended family leaves, shorter or flexible work time arrangements, compensations for school and day-care closures, emergency childcare services for essential workers and support for long-term care facilities or home-based care services




for older persons and those with disabilities.²⁰ Moreover, most of the care-related measures are concentrated in richer countries across Europe and Northern America, while a large proportion of developing countries register no measures to support unpaid care at all.

3.2 VISION: POSITIONING CARE AS A PUBLIC GOOD

What would a different future look like? In a sustainable and just economy, care would not be reduced to a commodity, a personal choice or a family obligation. By creating, developing and maintaining human capabilities,²¹ good quality care generates benefits that extend beyond the individual care recipient to societies at large and into the future. But many of these benefits are intangible and difficult to measure. It is hard to put a price tag on the sustenance of life and improvements in well-being; to bill for empathy in relationships between care workers and those who rely on them; to quantify the dignity of an older or disabled person receiving quality care; or to avoid discounting investments

in children's capabilities that are made today because their economic benefits will accrue largely to future generations. In other words, care has important characteristics of a public good. Treating it as a commodity can depress both supply and demand, leading to suboptimal social and economic outcomes. It also dilutes oversight and accountability, disempowering paid care workers, unpaid caregivers and those with intense care needs to seek improvements in care arrangements or redress when those arrangements fail.

To overcome these challenges, the following shifts are needed:

-  **Instead of being taking for granted, the contributions of care work to economic development, social cohesion and human capabilities would be recognized and factored into economic and social policymaking.**
-  **Instead of free riding on women's unpaid and underpaid labour, society as a whole would collectively assume the costs of care work, including through the funding and provision of quality public services, time-saving infrastructure and social protection. Workers in the paid care sector would enjoy a safe and stimulating work environment as well as equal pay for work of equal value, with value being redefined to recognize social contributions, not merely market-based rewards.**
-  **Instead of making policy choices in a technocratic vacuum, policymakers would deliberately seek guidance from those who are most affected by existing care deficits, including those in need of care and those who provide it on a regular basis.**

To turn this vision into reality, governments must harness this moment of crisis to shift from 'low-road'

strategies of poorly paid, low-quality care provision to taking the 'high road' towards a care-led recovery.²²

3.3 LEVERS: TAKING THE HIGH ROAD TOWARDS A CARE-LED RECOVERY

An economy that places care at the centre is not built overnight, but governments must activate key levers now, as part of ongoing efforts to get through the pandemic and as integral to economic recovery strategies, to shift their economies onto a high road that prioritizes quality care and support for caregivers as a public good.²³

FINANCING: Recasting public spending on care as investment in social infrastructure

If care work enables economies and societies to thrive, then public spending that enables the sufficient supply and adequate quality of this work must be seen as a productive investment not unlike spending on the railways, ports and bridges that enable commercial activities. Stronger public care services must go hand-in-hand with measures that

reduce the trade-off between economic security and unpaid care for families, including through universal child allowances, access to parental leave and a reduction of economic penalties associated with part-time work.

In some countries, the lessons from the pandemic have provided an opening for these ideas to enter mainstream policymaking. Both Canada and the United States have announced plans for sizeable investments in the care economy as part of economic recovery strategies, aimed at beefing up affordable childcare, strengthening long-term care services and improving the working conditions and wages of care sector workers, a majority of whom are migrant women and women of colour. Taking up a long-standing feminist idea, both governments have cast these efforts as public investments in “essential social infrastructure”, integral to rebooting and achieving sustainable economic growth (see Box 3.1).²⁴

Box 3.1 CANADA'S INVESTMENTS IN THE CARE SECTOR AS A KEY PILLAR OF ECONOMIC RECOVERY

Canada's 2021 budget recognizes women and the care economy as central to economic recovery.²⁵ The creation of a nationwide affordable childcare system is one of the budget's cornerstones, with CA\$30 billion committed over five years. Through these investments, the Government aims to cut childcare costs for families by half by 2022 and institute a CA\$10 per day fee by 2026. Specific allocations are earmarked to improve service quality and accessibility, including for children with disabilities and families in Indigenous communities. Estimates suggest that the creation of a universal childcare system could create over 300,000 jobs over the next decade and enable up to 725,000 women to join the labour force. The combined effect would raise additional government revenue of between CA\$17 billion and CA\$29 billion per year.²⁶

While allocations to long-term care for older persons and persons with disabilities are less far-reaching, the Government has allocated CA\$3 billion over five years to support provinces and territories in ensuring standards for long-term care.²⁷ It has also committed to introducing a federal minimum wage of CA\$15 and to working with trade unions on improving recruitment, retention and retirement savings options for low-income workers in the sector.

This framing challenges standard macroeconomic theories and prescriptions, which associate investment only with private businesses, and underlines the critical role that both the state and households play in maintaining the economy's productive capacity in the long run. Yet, in most countries public spending on social protection, education, health, childcare and long-term care services remains classified as consumption in macroeconomic accounting, leaving these sectors particularly vulnerable to cut-backs when revenue shortfalls arise. Although alternatives exist, the threat of this happening again in the current context, when countries have amassed huge levels of debt, is very real (see Box 1.2).²⁸

Going down this road would be enormously damaging. It would also be a lost opportunity for sustainable recovery given the significant economic multiplier effects of public investments in care services, including health as well as childcare and long-term care. A recent simulation for eight Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries shows that

investments in a reformed care sector—with better wages and working conditions—would create 40–60 per cent more jobs than the same investments in construction. Depending on the country, between a third and three fifths of any gross spending on the care sector is recouped through additional revenue from taxes and social security contributions—a ‘fiscal merit’ that is also larger than that of any comparable investment in construction.²⁹

Because the demand for care and gaps in supply are even greater in developing countries, the initial fiscal outlay is high but so are the potential returns. In South Africa, for example, making childcare services universally available to all children under the age of 5 could create 2.3 million new jobs and raise female employment rates by 10 percentage points.³⁰ New tax and social security revenue from these jobs would reduce the required fiscal outlay from 3.2 per cent to 2.1 per cent of GDP. With the devastating impact of the pandemic, the Government has recognized the need for greater support and formalization of the early childhood education and care sector (Box 3.2).

“COVID-19 has shown how essential care work is. It has also revealed the enormous inequalities in how care is provided in our societies today. Instead of returning to a system that reproduces these inequalities, care must be at the centre of efforts to rebuild and transform. Public policies should recognize our collective interdependence, strengthen care provision and redistribute care work in ways that guarantee the rights of care givers and receivers.”

CORINA RODRÍGUEZ ENRÍQUEZ, Argentinian feminist economist and Executive Committee Member of Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN)



Box 3.2 SUPPORTING CHILDCARE SERVICE PROVIDERS IN SOUTH AFRICA

The early childhood education and care sector in **South Africa** is highly informal and dominated by small private providers, including non-profit organizations (NPOs), subsistence entrepreneurs or micro-social enterprises that rely on a combination of parental fees and relatively meagre public subsidies (R17 per-child-per-day compared to roughly R96 per-learner-per-day at the primary school level).³¹ Programmes serving the poorest communities are particularly precarious, staffed by workers who earn subsistence stipends, often without formal employment contracts or any benefits. Both parental fees and public subsidies are tied to attendance. This set-up has made the sector extremely vulnerable in the face of the pandemic, which has led to a massive and sudden drop in attendance, leaving workers without support and a large number of childcare providers “hanging in the balance”.³²

In February 2021, the Government responded by launching a R496 million employment stimulus relief fund aimed at sustaining and creating employment and reducing the risk of permanent closures.³³ By the end of the same month, the Department of Social Development had received applications by more than 28,000 providers for over 116,000 childcare workers through an online platform. Yet, rollout has been slow, partly because the informal nature of the sector has meant that many providers lack the documentation to prove eligibility. By April 2021, about 33,500 workers—or 30 per cent of applicants—had received their payments (R4,186 each).³⁴ While further delays were expected with the end of the financial year, the Government promised to resolve all outstanding payments as soon as possible. One of the positive outcomes of the exercise was the registration of previously unregistered childcare service providers, which could provide a stepping stone towards formalization and greater access to government subsidies in the future.

A care-led recovery would lay the basis for shifting from low-road strategies that treat care as a commodity to high-road strategies that treat care as a public good. Unpaid care work in families and communities would be supported, including through access to social protection, and public investments in care services would be used to create jobs, address long-standing care deficits and improve the working conditions and wages of those who provide it.

PARTNERSHIPS: Empowering community-based care networks

Care services can be delivered through a variety of arrangements. Some countries have predominantly public health and/or childcare systems, while others rely more heavily on private for-profit, non-profit or community-based providers that receive varying levels of public funding. The effectiveness of such partnerships must be assessed based on whether they enable broad-based, affordable access to quality care and adequate working conditions for paid care workers. In this sense, the state bears a particular responsibility: Its policies, programmes and regulations can shape the institutional set-up of the care system as a whole and gear it towards the goals of sustainability and social justice.³⁵

When governments rely on community-based organizations for the delivery of care services, they must avoid low-road strategies that exploit women's labour and lead to precarious arrangements of varying quality. Countries across sub-Saharan Africa, for example, rely on over 900,000 community health workers (CHWs) to support their fragile health systems.³⁶ CHWs are playing an important role in COVID-19 door-to-door testing and contact tracing³⁷ and will be critical to vaccine rollout in the coming years.³⁸ Yet, CHWs experience huge variations in their working conditions in terms of job demands, level of remuneration and access to legal protection or benefits.³⁹ Many CHWs are unpaid and are themselves members of the underserved populations they work with, so they may be at heightened risk of severe disease due to social determinants of health, including poverty and stress.⁴⁰ Nearly 70 per cent of these workers are women, mostly young adults with only primary education.⁴¹ Some 86 per cent are unpaid, few receive ongoing training and many shoulder unmanageable caseloads while lacking basic life-saving supplies and PPE for their patients and themselves, compromising the provision of quality care.⁴²

In many countries, CHW programmes are also internally fragmented, with a professional, paid cadre of CHWs supported by a larger, 'hidden' cadre of unpaid volunteers. These models are prevalent in countries such as Ethiopia (see Box 3.3), Ghana, Mali and Niger, where the volunteer cadre is exclusively or majority female.⁴³ Despite clear guidance from the World Health Organization (WHO) that CHWs must be properly remunerated, the extent to which there are pathways to professionalization and pay for these volunteers remains unclear.⁴⁴

But it does not have to be so. Well-resourced community networks and organizations could be a central lever for high-road strategies to expand quality care services. Brazil, for example, runs a long-standing CHW programme that is integrated into the public health system and affords CHWs the same rights and benefits as other public health workers, including a salary floor and health risk premiums.⁴⁵ Progress has also been made in Pakistan, where an all-female community health worker squad successfully mobilized for formal recognition and remuneration (see Box 3.3). Taking such a high road is only possible where community-based workers are afforded the legal recognition and resources they need to provide quality care in a sustainable way.

There have been cases where such partnerships between governments and communities have emerged in the area of childcare too and have made significant headway, but fiscal constraints often stand in the way of sustaining progress. In Ecuador, for example, the Government built on pre-existing community structures to expand childcare services for working parents, improve quality and provide the (almost exclusively female) staff with training, better working conditions and wages.⁴⁶ Over the past years, however, progress slowed down significantly in the context of economic recession and austerity measures.

Box 3.3 RIGHTS AND REMUNERATION FOR COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKERS: ETHIOPIA AND PAKISTAN

It is imperative that community health workers (CHWs), who are employed under a range of legal arrangements worldwide, are recognized as workers. Two examples illustrate the pitfalls of depending on voluntary CHWs and the potential role that these workers can play in bolstering resilience for future crises when they are integrated into broader public health systems.⁴⁷

Ethiopia embarked on this route in 2004 with its health extension worker (HEW) programme. HEWs are considered formal, government-salaried workers. They receive one year of training to provide health education, immunisations and basic services at the *kebele* (lowest administrative unit) level.⁴⁸ Today there are around 40,000 mostly female HEWs whose monthly salaries have varied from US\$90–120 per month as the programme has evolved.⁴⁹ During the pandemic, these workers received training in hygiene and pandemic response through an app launched by the Ministry of Health.⁵⁰ In April 2020, nearly 1,500 workers conducted door-to-door COVID-19 screening across Addis Ababa, simultaneously educating families about symptoms and preventative measures.⁵¹ Alongside these paid community health workers, the Government created the Women’s Development Army (WDA) from 2011, which today comprises 3 million women volunteer workers who engage in health promotion and prevention at the village level. The intention of this ‘dual cadre’ approach was to extend the reach and effectiveness of the HEWs, but these workers receive only informal training and no monetary compensation. The WDA programme sought to empower women volunteers by encouraging them to leave the house and increasing their bargaining power vis-à-vis husbands. In practice, however, by requiring women to work without compensation in a top-down structure that limits their ability to speak up for themselves, the programme has done little to redress women’s economic insecurity and lack of voice.⁵²

Facing similar challenges, the 125,000 Lady Health Workers (LHWs) in **Pakistan** organized collectively to demand better working conditions and wages.⁵³ LHWs were first introduced in 1994 to provide information, basic services and referrals through door-to-door services in rural and marginalized urban areas. Workers came together in the All Pakistan Lady Health Workers Association (APLHWA), organizing sit-ins, road blocks, rallies and national strikes to press for their rights. As a result, the Supreme Court established in 2012 that LHWs were entitled to the minimum wage—making them the first community health workers to gain this entitlement in South Asia—and ruled that they be recognized as government employees in 2013.⁵⁴ Salaries are paid monthly into the LHWs’ personal bank accounts, but delays are common⁵⁵ and access to PPE during the COVID-19 pandemic has been lacking.⁵⁶

A care-led recovery would empower community-based care networks to provide quality care services through true partnerships with central and local governments who commit to providing the support needed to comply with quality standards, be affordable for the families they serve and provide living wages and social protection for their workers. Ensuring that community health workers are fairly paid, well trained, adequately supervised, able to unionize and fully equipped to serve their communities should be a top priority during this moment of profound crisis.

ACCOUNTABILITY: Building coalitions for change

Shifting spending priorities and service delivery models to support a more sustainable and socially just care system requires smart advocacy strategies and robust accountability mechanisms. Building broad-based coalitions to get power-holders to recognize and respond to the rights and needs of care-dependent populations, unpaid caregivers and paid care workers has been a key strategy over time in a range of contexts. In the 1970s, it was the joint mobilization of researchers, trade unionists and gender equality advocates across political parties that placed the massive expansion of childcare services and progressive parental leave reforms onto the political agenda in Sweden.⁵⁷ Their combined claims for women's rights (to economic independence) and children's rights (to high quality care and early education) laid the basis for what are considered some of the most egalitarian family policies in the world today.⁵⁸

Four decades later, in Uruguay, a similar constellation of actors harnessed the political opportunity of a progressive government to pass Law 19.353 creating a national care system (*Sistema Nacional Integrado de Cuidados, SNIC*), building on the long-standing groundwork of feminist academics, women's organizations and female legislators.⁵⁹ The SNIC establishes the right to care for young children, persons with disabilities and frail older persons as well as the rights of their caregivers, both paid and unpaid, and deliberately aims to equalize the gendered division of unpaid care and domestic work. To achieve these goals, care services for young children, dependent adults, older persons and/or those with disabilities have been expanded; family leave

provisions have been reformed to extend coverage and encourage a greater sharing of responsibilities between women and men; and training for paid caregivers has been rolled out to upgrade skills and improve the quality of care.

In other cases, accountability structures have emerged more organically from experiments with childcare services by community-based organizations and cooperatives. Organizations of informal workers, for example, have played an important role in responding to the childcare needs of women waste pickers (in Belo Horizonte, Brazil), handicraft workers (in Villanueva, Guatemala) and self-employed workers (in Ahmedabad, India).⁶⁰ Some of them have used their governance structures to bring care providers and other workers together with beneficiaries and service users, governments and community agents, creating space for real partnerships and accountability structures to emerge.

Broad-based coalitions that span multiple constituencies are particularly important to confront vested interests and institutional legacies where outsourcing to private providers, labour market deregulation and fiscal constraints have entrenched the undervaluation of care work. New Zealand's 2017 equal pay settlement for workers in the residential and home care sector is a case in point. It followed on the heels of five years of intensive equal pay activism that included a statutory human rights inquiry, civil society coalition building and trade union-led worker organizing and strategic litigation (see Box 3.4). In a less than enabling legal and regulatory environment, this multipronged approach not only achieved significant redress for workers in the sector, but in the process redefined the country's understanding of equal pay.⁶¹

Box 3.4 ADDRESSING THE UNDERVALUATION OF LONG-TERM CARE WORK: NEW ZEALAND'S PAY EQUITY SETTLEMENT

In **New Zealand**, strategic advocacy by a broad coalition of feminists across trade unions, civil society and government led to an historic pay equity settlement for a group of care workers in 2017.⁶² The settlement provided substantial wage increases and training opportunities for around 55,000 long-term care workers, many of whom are Māori, Pacific and migrant women.⁶³ It was groundbreaking for its recognition that gender biases have led to the historical undervaluation of work in the care sector compared to male-dominated industries that require similar levels of skill, effort and responsibility. Rather than simply comparing wage differences between care workers of different genders, the claim and settlement accounted for occupational segregation.⁶⁴ In 2020, the 1972 Equal Pay Act was amended, dispensing with a narrow definition of “equal pay for equal work,”⁶⁵ and replacing it with the broader provision of “equal pay for work of equal value”. This means that women in underpaid female-dominated sectors are now entitled to receive the same remuneration as those doing ‘equal value’ work in male-dominated occupations.⁶⁶

These changes were achieved in a less than favourable environment: Since the 1990s, sweeping labour market deregulations had weakened collective bargaining, and the responsibility for care of older persons had gradually shifted from the public health system to the community and private-for-profit sector. It took years of coalition building and multipronged advocacy strategies to make change happen.⁶⁷ A statutory inquiry into elder care employment conditions by the independent human rights commission in 2012, which exposed the gendered devaluation of care work and the injustice of low pay in the sector, was catalytic.⁶⁸ Following the inquiry’s recommendations, 22 women’s organizations, representing trade unions, Pacific and Māori women’s groups, gender-based violence groups and faith-based organizations formed a coalition to push for pay equity, organize care workers and amplify their experiences in policy discourse and the media.⁶⁹ The inquiry also spurred the E Tū Union to file the pay equity claim, on behalf of care worker Kristine Bartlett, that ultimately led to the landmark settlement in 2017.⁷⁰ The case has set a precedent for other care workers, such as teaching aides and mental health and social workers, to lodge their own pay equity claims.

While the settlement was widely welcomed by care workers and advocates, there have also been concerns that the new funding model has tended to benefit larger providers over smaller care service providers, and that employers have reduced numbers of permanent staff to cut costs, with implications for quality of care and workplace safety.⁷¹ This points to the need for ongoing accountability and campaigns to build a strong and equitable care system, for both care workers and those needing care.

A care-led recovery requires broad-based coalitions that can put care onto the political agenda and hold policymakers accountable for ensuring the rights of unpaid caregivers, paid care workers and those who rely on them. Experience over time and across contexts demonstrates that holding governments to account for providing high-quality care services can be achieved through a combination of strategies, including creating networks, working with trade unions and worker organizations and strategic litigation. The thread that connects these diverse coalitions and strategies is a focus on positioning high quality and equitable care services as a public good, with benefits for all.

METRICS: Improving data on outcomes and policy efforts

Clear and compelling data and statistics are a critical component of successful advocacy and accountability strategies. How can government responsiveness and progress towards more sustainable and just care arrangements be assessed in a meaningful way? Ultimately, success can only be claimed on the basis of more equal outcomes, including reduced time and income poverty among unpaid caregivers, more equal sharing of care responsibilities between women and men, improved capabilities and well-being of children and care-dependent adults and better wages and working conditions for care workers. There are still significant gaps in data needed to systematically assess outcomes. For example, only 92 out of 193 United Nations Member States have submitted time-use data for Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) indicator 5.4.1, and many countries do not regularly update these data, making it difficult to monitor progress over time.⁷² There is also a continued need to improve time use survey methodologies, which generally understate the temporal constraints on women caregivers by undercounting supervisory care or “on-call” time.

Better monitoring of policy efforts, including resource allocations, is also required to ensure that

things are moving in the right direction. Availability, accessibility, acceptability, adaptability and quality (AAAAQ)⁷³ have long been important dimensions for the assessment of policy efforts on essential services, such as education, health and water, and can be extended to other services, such as child and elder care. However, evidence to monitor progress along these dimensions is scarce. For example, many countries do not collect data regularly on coverage and quality of childcare services or public spending allocated to them and, beyond the OECD, there is no global database that would enable cross-country comparisons along these lines.⁷⁴

Even less is known about access to and financing of long-term care services for older persons or persons with disabilities. In most developing countries, a baseline mapping of the existing care services landscape, coverage, types of providers and funding arrangements will be necessary to assess gaps and inequalities, define priorities and monitor policy efforts going forward. There are also major information gaps on the demographics, characteristics, working conditions and wages of childcare and long-term care workers. Sex-disaggregated data on the community health workforce, for example, are still hard to come by in many countries.

Closing data and evidence gaps on care will be critical to monitor progress in a meaningful way and hold decision-makers accountable for their actions. To do so, the process of defining priorities for data collection matters just as much as the results. Data gaps on critical outcome indicators, such as time use, need to be closed. The AAAAQ framework needs to be translated into indicators that allow for monitoring progress in context-specific ways. Only an open, transparent and participatory discussion of desirable outcomes, policies to achieve them and criteria for monitoring progress can foster the broad-based alliances needed to create and sustain a caring economy that tackles deep inequalities and is responsive to the rights and needs of different groups.

KEY LEVERS TO ENABLE A CARE-LED RECOVERY

Strong public care services must go hand-in-hand with measures to reduce the trade-off between economic security and unpaid care for families: universal child allowances, parental leave and flexible employment policies.

FINANCING:

Invest in the care economy to create jobs and address care deficits

Strengthen quality care services through **PARTNERSHIPS** between governments and communities

Well-resourced community organizations can be a central lever for high-road strategies to expand quality care services that create decent work opportunities and meet the needs of marginalized groups.

Broad-based alliances between civil society organizations, trade unions, researchers and policymakers are needed to place care firmly onto the political agenda and ensure proper resourcing and implementation of services and support.

Ensure **ACCOUNTABILITY** through broad-based coalitions for change

Strengthen gender **DATA** on care practices and policies

Data on policies, including resource allocations, and their effect on outcomes, such as reduced time and income poverty, improved working conditions and wages among paid care workers can help to drive change.

Putting care at the centre of a sustainable and just economy

4

GENDER-JUST TRANSITIONS FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE



By revealing how under-prepared the world is for systemic shocks, COVID-19 has refocused attention on another, rapidly escalating crisis: that of environmental degradation and climate change. Only six years ago, the global community agreed the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, recognizing the need for environmental, economic and social transformation to work in tandem to achieve human rights for all. Even before the pandemic, the world was off-track to meet these commitments. Now, with the world at a crossroads, one of the most consequential questions facing governments, business and the

global community is whether decisive action will be taken to rapidly transition the global economy to more sustainable patterns of production and consumption to prevent—or at least reduce the extent of—environmental breakdown. There is growing recognition that market-based solutions are ineffective in driving change at the requisite scale and pace. As the world looks to recover and rebuild after COVID-19, there is an opportunity to advance ‘gender-just’ transitions, a transformative approach that can achieve greater gender equality and set economies on more equitable and environmentally sustainable paths.

LESSONS FROM COVID-19: MAJOR SYSTEMIC CRISES ARE GENDERED, AND THE ENVIRONMENT IS NEXT

The environmental crisis is impacting women and girls the hardest

Women's greater dependence on and unequal access to natural resources, public services and infrastructure mean that they are disproportionately affected by environmental degradation and climate change.

Insecure land rights make women especially vulnerable to land-grabbing for largescale environmental projects.

40% of countries have at least one restriction to women's rights to property.

Every year,

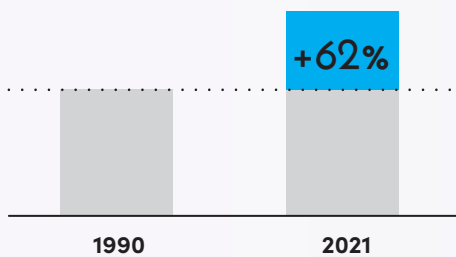
3.8 million people

most of them women and children, are killed by air pollution caused by the use of unclean energy for cooking and heating in households.

The current economic system is causing environmental breakdown

The natural environment and women's labour are both treated as infinite resources and undervalued, even though they are the foundation for all economies.

Greenhouse gas emissions are 62% higher than when international climate negotiations began in 1990.



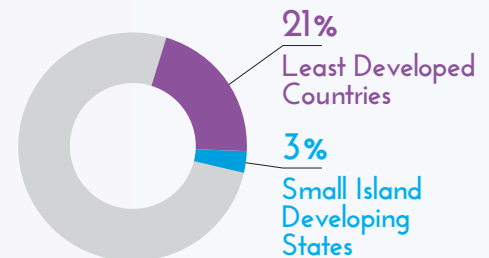
Extractive industries are responsible for

50% of the world's carbon emissions and more than **80%** of biodiversity loss

The potential for green recovery and gender-just transitions is so far unrealized

Only **2.5%** of COVID-19 rescue and recovery spending by the world's 50 largest economies in 2020 was green

Amount of climate finance received in 2017-2018:



In 2018, only **15.7%** of Global Environment Facility projects undertook a gender analysis prior to their approval.

4.1 LEARNING THE LESSONS FROM COVID-19

Like COVID-19, the environmental crisis is causing immeasurable human suffering

The fact that COVID-19 has managed to bring global market economies close to collapse has refocused and intensified attention on the looming environmental crisis. The economic system that has made it so difficult for most people to carve out a sustainable livelihood, and has been built on the back of women's unpaid and underpaid care work, has also created patterns of consumption and production that are destroying the natural environment.¹

The result is widespread and interlinked environmental crises that are creating havoc for nature and all of humanity. Rising greenhouse gas emissions, produced by burning fossil fuels, are contributing to approximately 1.0°C of global warming above pre-industrial levels.² Without deep reductions in emissions, which are now 62 per cent higher than when international climate negotiations began in 1990,³ global warming of 2.0°C will be exceeded by 2100.⁴ With all 20 of the 2010 Aichi Biodiversity Targets having been missed, 1 million species are under threat of extinction in the coming years, a loss that is unprecedented in human history.⁵

The pandemic has brought into sharp relief the dangers inherent in humankind's current relationship with nature. Many experts link the emergence of COVID-19, labelled "the disease of the Anthropocene", to the destruction of habitats and biodiversity loss.⁶ Scientists have warned that without dramatic intervention to address environmental degradation, COVID-19 may be the first of many pandemics.⁷

The environmental crisis is gendered

The devastating consequences of climate change and environmental destruction can be seen across

the world as land degradation, biodiversity loss, global warming and pollution have intensified. Apocalyptic fires and floods, cyclones and hurricanes have become the new normal. The catastrophic collapse of biodiversity is threatening the earth's interconnected ecosystems, human life, settlements, sources of food, clean water and air and is demolishing natural defences against extreme weather and natural disasters.⁸

Paradoxically, those who have contributed the least to the problem, notably the poorest women in low-income countries, are those most harshly impacted. As a result, the environmental crisis is fuelling inequality and exacerbating the care and livelihoods crises described in previous chapters. Women are disproportionately affected because of their greater dependence on and unequal access to environmental goods—land, water and other natural resources—as well as to public services and infrastructure, including energy, transport, water and sanitation. Droughts, deforestation and land degradation mean that women, who are usually responsible for family provisioning, must work harder to make a living, produce or procure food, gather fuel and collect water. This is particularly true for rural and Indigenous women. In urban areas, in turn, low-income women are highly vulnerable to the impacts of pollution and natural disasters.

Pollution—linked to land and water degradation, ecosystem and biodiversity destruction and climate change—is the largest environmental driver of disease and premature death, disproportionately affecting the poor, women and children in low- and middle-income countries and minorities and marginalized populations everywhere.⁹ Underlying gender inequalities also mean that women are more likely to die in natural disasters, which are becoming more frequent and intense, while the longer-term impacts reduce women's life expectancy and health and

their access to education, nutrition, livelihoods and housing, among others.¹⁰ Emerging evidence suggests that by increasing poverty and triggering forced migration, environmental degradation and droughts may also be increasing instances of violence against women, such as early, forced and child marriage in some parts of the world.¹¹

The current economic system is causing environmental breakdown

The roots of the climate crisis lie in centuries of colonial, extractivist models of economic growth, in which the relentless pursuit of wealth and power entrenched the exploitation of natural resources and Indigenous communities seen across the world today. In fact, the history of anti-colonial resistance is interwoven with that of environmental protection: Indigenous, Black, Global South and racialized communities have always been at the forefront of the fight against deforestation, land grabs and resource exploitation.¹²

The same harmful economic models have widened racial and gender inequalities, thriving on the exploitation of women's unpaid care work while at the same time scaling back state regulation, investments in public goods and services and support for social reproduction.¹³

Indeed, feminist scholars have consistently drawn attention to the similar treatment of the natural environment and women's labour, both treated as infinite resources and undervalued even though together they create the foundation on which the formal economy rests.¹⁴ They have also highlighted how the environmental crisis is underpinned by an understanding of humankind as separate from the natural world, of 'humanity over nature', in which the natural environment is subordinated to solely serve the interests of human beings. The hierarchies of power and entitlement that imbue this narrative also subjugate women and groups such as Indigenous people, as they are seen as being closer to nature.¹⁵

Market-based approaches have failed to deliver results

Where environmental concerns are incorporated into economic policymaking, it is often through the lens of market efficiency, in efforts to either 'correct' market prices that reflect social costs and benefits or to introduce new carbon markets that assign prices such as, for example, schemes for trading emissions permits.¹⁶ Indigenous women and feminist environmentalists have long argued that the environment is 'invaluable' in the most literal sense: Spiritual and cultural ties to the natural world simply cannot be monetarily valued through the reductive lens of mainstream economics.¹⁷ Other critics hold that carbon markets are tantamount to permits to pollute and do not provide strong enough incentives for governments and companies to make the sweeping and rapid changes needed.¹⁸

Not only has the commodification of the environment failed to stem environmental degradation, it has also intensified inequalities. Carbon market-driven land grabs by governments and companies for reforestation or large-scale renewable energy projects have led to land and resource dispossession and the undermining of sustainable livelihoods.¹⁹ For example, the promotion of palm oil as a source of renewable energy has led to the expansion of oil palm plantations in parts of South Eastern Asia, displacing Indigenous people from their ancestral lands and destroying local biodiversity and livelihoods.²⁰

The potential for green recovery is so far unrealized

COVID-19 has shown that it is possible to generate shifts in patterns of consumption and production very quickly. The pandemic and associated lockdown measures led to short-term declines in coal, oil and gas production in 2020. Yet, at the household level, the contraction in consumption around the world was "chaotic and often inequitable", at the cost of those who were already most vulnerable.²¹ Job and

income losses have constrained essential purchases for many low-income households, including of electricity, transport and clean cooking fuels.²² Meanwhile, the relative resilience of the charter flight and private jet industry is one indicator that the wealthiest individuals have not changed their consumption patterns.²³ Further, global energy-related carbon dioxide emissions are predicted to rebound and grow by nearly 5 per cent in 2021, reversing the temporary drop in emissions of 2020, indicating that a more fundamental shift in production and consumption is necessary.²⁴

Although a 'green' recovery from COVID-19 has emerged as a priority across many countries, an analysis of the world's 50 largest economies found

that only US\$368 billion of US\$14.6 trillion, or 2.5 per cent of COVID-19 rescue and recovery spending in 2020, was green.²⁵ Further, despite 'green' intentions, policy interventions are often working at cross-purposes. For example, with respect to air pollution, while on the one hand 16 per cent of recovery spending may bring positive impacts, on the other, a further 16.4 per cent of spending is projected to increase net air pollution.²⁶


If the COVID-19 pandemic provides an opportunity to rethink and do things differently, then nowhere is this more urgent than on environmental degradation and climate change. More of the same failed solutions will not do; the world desperately needs a new path.



4.2 VISION: AN ECONOMY THAT ENABLES THE FLOURISHING AND SURVIVAL OF PEOPLE AND PLANET

What would a different future look like? In a sustainable and just future, the purpose of the economy would be understood as enabling the "flourishing and survival of life", with human and ecological well-being as the ultimate goal.²⁷ Building on the feminist concept of 'social provisioning', which places value on unpaid care in economic analysis and views human well-being as a central criterion for economic success,²⁸ 'sufficiency provisioning' would orient the economy for the production of enough goods and services, on a sustainable basis, to enable all humans, other species and the natural world to flourish.²⁹ The interconnectedness of humanity and the natural environment would be recognized, so that humans seek to meet their material and cultural needs without creating social or ecological 'debt'.³⁰ This requires major shifts to redefine the relationship between humans and the environment and

reorient economic policies away from depletion to regeneration.³¹

Approaches that seek to 'green' capitalism have too often replicated and even exacerbated gender and other inequalities. A more transformative approach is encapsulated in the idea of 'gender-just' transitions, which would ensure that pathways to more environmentally sustainable economies also promote social justice and gender equality. The demand for just transitions originated in the trade union movement, with a central focus on supporting the shift of (mostly male) workers into new, decent, green jobs when employment is lost in fossil fuel and other polluting industries.³² A *gender-just* transition would go further by making gender equality a central goal of policies aimed at creating an economy that works for people and the planet. To move in this direction, the following shifts are needed:

 **Instead of imposing the costs of climate change and environmental degradation on the poorest, the wealthiest countries, companies and people would take on the responsibility to reduce their consumption and provide the financing needed to enable gender-just transitions to environmental sustainability.**

-  **Instead of taking the environment for granted and depleting natural resources on the assumption that degradation and pollution are costless, ecosystems and biodiversity would be regenerated and the rights of the people who rely on and defend them would be recognized and protected.**
-  **Instead of taking their cues from corporate interests and lobbying, policies would be co-created with those most affected by environmental degradation, trusting local communities and Indigenous people, including women, to have the knowledge to devise appropriate solutions.**

4.3 ACCELERATING GENDER-JUST TRANSITIONS AS PART OF COVID-19 RECOVERY

The recovery from COVID-19 provides a vital opening for governments to change course and steer economies and societies towards a sustainable future. Seizing on this moment to foster gender-just transitions has the potential to create powerful synergies between environmental and gender equality goals through generating high-quality green jobs for women, ensuring that the transition reduces rather than increases women's unpaid care burdens and supporting community empowerment and women's leadership in the development and delivery of policies.

FINANCING: Investing in gender-just transitions

The transition to environmental sustainability will require very significant finance. It is estimated that meeting the Paris Agreement target to limit global temperature rises to 1.5°C will cost in the range of US\$1.6 trillion to US\$3.8 trillion per year.³³ Who provides these resources, how they are raised and what they are spent on matters enormously if the transition is to proceed hand-in-hand with gender and social justice.

In terms of the 'who', those with the largest historical responsibility for emissions should carry most of the burden of financing the transition. This requires the redistribution of resources between countries—from the Global North to the Global South—including through

the use of concessional loans and grants. At the global level, this is recognized through the normative principle of "common but differentiated responsibility and respective capabilities".³⁴ In 2009, developed countries agreed to mobilize US\$100 billion every year by 2020 to support developing countries' adaptation and mitigation efforts. By 2017–2018, climate finance had reached US\$59.6 billion per year, but a large and growing proportion of this (around 40 per cent) was in the form of non-concessional loans, which saddles low-income countries with more debt.³⁵ Recognizing that countries in the Global North were built on the colonization and exploitation of the Global South, some Member States and civil society organizations are now framing demands for increased support as a matter of ecological or climate debt for which reparations are due, including through 'loss and damage' mechanisms.³⁶

When it comes to the 'how', governments can use an array of fiscal and regulatory instruments to green their economies in an equitable way: by funding and incentivizing new technologies, services and jobs through subsidies, tax credits and grants,³⁷ and by imposing regulations and taxes to disincentivize old polluting industries and encourage divestment from fossil fuels. Fossil fuel subsidies are in place in 40 countries worldwide, amounting to US\$320 billion in direct spending in 2019 (and up to US\$5 trillion if the true costs of pollution and climate change are

factored in), dwarfing some countries' entire social spending budgets while contributing to unsustainable emissions.³⁸ Fossil fuel subsidies can be reallocated, and taxes on carbon or pollution can generate new revenue. Supporting access to clean energy for poorer households, within which women predominate, especially if it is initially more expensive, would be a key policy priority for a gender-just transition.³⁹

Carbon tax revenues collected in the Global North can also be used to provide climate finance and overseas development aid (ODA) for countries in the Global South. For carbon taxes to make a significant contribution to changing practices and raising resources, the price of carbon needs to be set at an adequate level. Currently, only about one fifth of global greenhouse gas emissions are covered by carbon pricing, around half of which are priced at less than US\$10 per ton of carbon dioxide, well below the target of US\$50 to US\$100 set by the High-Level Commission on Carbon Prices. On the other hand, countries such as Liechtenstein, Sweden and Switzerland have demonstrated leadership in this area by setting the price of carbon at US\$100 or more.⁴⁰

In terms of what climate finance should be spent on, it is critical that—as well as mitigation—it is directed towards gender-responsive adaptation in the poorest

countries, in recognition of the severe impacts of climate change and biodiversity loss that are already being experienced. This includes supporting women to diversify livelihoods impacted by environmental degradation and ensuring that they can access a fair share of the 24 million new green jobs that could be created in the transition.⁴¹ It also means ensuring that 'mainstream' initiatives—for example, building flood defences or regenerating mangroves—take gender into account in their planning and implementation. Gender-responsive adaptation therefore needs to be based on context-specific analysis of how existing gender inequalities increase diverse women's vulnerabilities to environmental and climate change; and prioritize women's substantive participation in policy design and decision-making.⁴²

In 2017–2018, only about one quarter of climate finance (US\$15 billion) was directed towards adaptation, and the share of all climate finance that went to the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS) was only 21 and 3 per cent, respectively.⁴³ Moreover, several assessments of the main climate finance funds find gender mainstreaming has fallen short due to a lack of dedicated funding, insufficient expertise and a failure to adequately consult with stakeholders and beneficiaries (see Box 4.1).

To achieve gender-just transitions, governments must mobilize all fiscal and regulatory policies at their disposal to divest from fossil fuels and encourage green sectors to thrive. Countries in the Global North bear a particular responsibility for enabling poorer countries to do the same without compromising their economic and social development. To promote gender equality alongside environmental sustainability, it is paramount that resources are spent in ways that benefit women and men equally and account for gender-specific risks and vulnerabilities.

PARTNERSHIPS: Empowering local communities for gender-just transitions in energy and agriculture

The transformation of the energy and agricultural sectors is critical to achieve environmental

sustainability. Gender-just transitions require new partnerships between national and local governments, small- and medium-sized businesses, social movements and local communities that can harness these transformations to ensure that they benefit women and promote sustainable livelihoods

Box 4.1 HOW GENDER-RESPONSIVE ARE MULTILATERAL CLIMATE-FINANCING INSTRUMENTS?

The global climate finance architecture is vast and spans public, private and philanthropic funding streams. Within public multilateral climate finance, the main mechanisms are the Adaptation Fund (AF), the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and the Green Climate Fund (GCF)—all of which are formally part of the financial mechanism of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)—as well as the Climate Investment Funds (CIF), which are administered by the World Bank.⁴⁴

Most of these climate-financing mechanisms were not gender-responsive in their initial design and operationalization.⁴⁵ The exception is the Green Climate Fund, which was the first multilateral fund to anchor gender mainstreaming in its funding objectives and guiding principles from its inception.⁴⁶ In recent years, external pressure from civil society has contributed to efforts to retroactively incorporate gender considerations into climate-financing mechanisms more broadly.⁴⁷ Over the past decade, the GEF,⁴⁸ the AF⁴⁹ and the CIF⁵⁰ have all increased efforts to gender mainstream their funding through the development of gender policies and/or gender action plans. Despite this progress, feminists have critiqued these gender ‘add-ons’ for not systematically altering the focus of funding operations in a way that is necessary for truly gender-responsive climate financing.⁵¹ In addition, the implementation of gender action plans and policies is often lacking. For example, an independent evaluation of gender mainstreaming in the GEF in 2018 found that just 15.7 per cent of the completed projects reviewed undertook a gender analysis prior to their approval.⁵²

It is clear that having a formal gender policy or gender action plan for a climate-financing instrument is rarely enough.⁵³ It is essential that climate financing systematically integrates gender equality within governance structures and public participation mechanisms, ensuring that the expertise of women’s organizations is central in programme design, implementation and evaluation. Particular efforts must be made to increase accessibility for smaller women’s organizations, which often lack the time and capacity to fulfil bureaucratic accreditation requirements and are frequently precluded from accessing funding by a financing architecture oriented towards large-scale projects.⁵⁴

for all. Decentralized energy and agroecology are approaches demonstrating significant promise for meeting these goals.

Energy production and use is the largest source of global greenhouse gas emissions and, globally, the shift to renewable sources has so far been slow.⁵⁵ Meanwhile, at the current rate of progress, 650 million people will still lack access to electricity by 2030, 9 out of 10 of them in sub-Saharan Africa.⁵⁶ Expanding access to clean, renewable energy would yield significant benefits for all, but especially for women,

by eliminating indoor air pollution arising from the use of biomass for cooking and reducing the drudgery of unpaid care and domestic work; and increasing the productivity of small-scale farming, through powering small equipment such as grain processing mills, grinders and sorters.⁵⁷ The transition could also create new green jobs for women in the renewable energy field, which is significantly more labour intensive than fossil fuels.⁵⁸ Currently, women make up 32 per cent of the renewable energy workforce, a significantly higher proportion than in traditional energy (22 per cent), but they are concentrated in lower-paying non-technical

positions.⁵⁹ Retraining and reskilling programmes, as well as robust labour regulations, will be needed to combat gender discrimination and ensure equal pay and opportunities in new green jobs.

Feminists have joined trade unions in calling for ‘energy democracy’, to go beyond a technical transition from one energy source to another and design new energy models that are gender-responsive and support equality. Emphasizing the interdependency of energy systems and the natural environment, they have argued that the energy transition should be centred on an ethos of rehabilitation rather than resource extraction.⁶⁰ While there is clearly a role for the private sector, its record on delivering ‘last mile’ public services and infrastructure like energy and water to remote or marginalized communities is uneven at best.⁶¹ Moving away from highly centralized, male-dominated corporate models towards more egalitarian control over energy management and consumption, through community-managed mini-grids and energy cooperatives that create opportunities for women’s leadership and employment, could provide greater access, affordability and accountability to consumers, as well as contributing to a greener future (see Box 4.2).⁶²

The food sector is also a major source of climate and environmental destruction, accounting for one third of all anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions.⁶³ Monoculture agriculture, which has been strongly

promoted by transnational agribusiness in many parts of the Global South, has resulted in less varied and nutrient-rich diets and requires high levels of chemical inputs, such as pesticides and fertilizers, which contribute to carbon emissions and erode biodiversity and soil quality.⁶⁴ Agroecology, on the other hand, combines different plants and animals and uses natural synergies rather than synthetic chemicals. It reduces the use of inputs that require fossil energy and increase nitrous oxide emissions, offers unmatched benefits to biodiversity and soil health, and can improve nutrition by supporting diversified and balanced diets.⁶⁵

To harness this potential, agroecology prioritizes horizontal partnership models that privilege small producers, mutual learning, Indigenous knowledge and local ecosystems rather than unsustainable top-down policy prescriptions.⁶⁶ Agroecology can also support gender equality in several ways. With low start-up and production costs, climate-resilient techniques and stable yields, agroecology is more affordable and less risky for women small-scale farmers than agricultural approaches that require large amounts of land and ongoing investments in costly inputs. In eliminating synthetic chemicals, agroecological techniques avoid harmful health impacts that disproportionately affect women. Growing diversified grains, vegetables and fruits improves nutrition and household self-sufficiency, which can reduce hours and money women spend procuring food. By breaking down hierarchies between productive and reproductive labour, there is potential

“We are in the midst of an intersecting COVID-19 and climate crisis, in which some of the drivers of climate change—increasing greenhouse gas emissions, deforestation, fragility and inequalities—may also impact the likelihood of future pandemics. This is a critical point for action, and an effective and gender-just transition to a low-carbon economy is essential.”

MARIAMA WILLIAMS, Principal Researcher, the Integrated Policy Research Institute, and a Director of the Institute of Law and Economics, Jamaica



for women's roles in families and communities to be valued, and their knowledge recognized, and to create sharing and learning, building women's agency and broader social cohesion.⁶⁷

However, the benefits are not automatic. If these partnerships do not challenge gender inequalities in access to resources, land and information, and ensure a fair distribution of work between women and men, agroecological models may reinforce inequalities at the household and community level.⁶⁸

To avoid these pitfalls, women farmers have formed cooperatives and groups to share and reduce their

workloads and increase their productivity and incomes.⁶⁹ The campesino-a-campesino (CAC) or farmer-to-farmer methodology,⁷⁰ developed in Latin America and the Caribbean since the 1970s, is based on farmer-promoters who use popular education to share knowledge and solutions for common problems with their peers, using their own farms as classrooms.⁷¹

Women farmers, including in Brazil, Cuba and Nicaragua, have used this methodology to support their agricultural livelihoods and developed CAC organizations to provide education, promote food security, improve health and prevent gender-based violence for themselves and their broader communities.

Box 4.2 PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT THROUGH DECENTRALIZED RENEWABLE ENERGY PROJECTS

Decentralized or distributed energy systems play an increasingly important role in extending access to underserved areas in the Global South. For example, **Afghanistan, Bhutan and Nepal** have rapidly expanded access to electricity and reduced gaps between rural and urban areas by combining grid and off-grid solutions. In Afghanistan, overall access to electricity went up from 28 per cent to 84 per cent between 2006 and 2016, with much of the expansion accounted for by micro- and mini-grids and solar home systems.⁷² Women in villages in Bamiyan, one of the poorest provinces in the country, reported that they were able to perform their unpaid care and domestic work more effectively and more safely, as a result of access to off-grid solar energy.⁷³

As well as increasing access to energy, employment and entrepreneurship in decentralized energy could become a source of income generation for women, with the off-grid sector potentially able to create 4.5 million jobs by 2030.⁷⁴ Women's social networks within communities and their role in household decision-making on energy give them unique insights into and access to consumers.⁷⁵ In **Nigeria, Uganda and United Republic of Tanzania**, non-profit organization Solar Sister trains and supports women to deliver clean energy to homes in rural areas. Solar Sister has trained over 4,000 women in business, technology and leadership skills and supported them to sell durable and affordable solar-powered products and clean cookstoves in off-grid communities.⁷⁶ In **South Africa**, the non-profit GenderCC: Women for Climate Justice Southern Africa runs a similar project in an urban setting. Since 2016, GenderCC has worked in informal settlements and peri-urban areas in Johannesburg and Tshwane to train women to sell sustainable products such as smokeless stoves, solar chargers and cookers. The initiative also provides training in business skills and mentoring.⁷⁷

The extent to which female entrepreneurship models of electrification translate into women's empowerment and gender equality will depend in practice on whether projects strengthen women's economic security as well as challenge structural inequalities in both leadership and ownership of green energy systems.⁷⁸

Thousands of small-scale, grassroots agroecological groups now exist, many of them members of the international movement *La Via Campesina*, which links peasant and popular feminist movements across 81 countries.⁷⁹

Although the bottom-up approach is what makes agroecology powerful, governments can provide a supportive public policy framework by, for example, investing in gender-responsive research on agroecology and public procurement initiatives to provide markets for women's agroecological produce (see Boxes 2.2 and 5.2).⁸⁰

Gender-just transitions require new partnerships to create synergies between environmental sustainability, social justice and gender equality goals. Governments must support local communities to lead more sustainable approaches to energy and food production. Decentralized, community-managed mini-grids and energy cooperatives are expanding access to clean energy while creating opportunities for women's leadership and employment. Agroecological partnerships that privilege small producers, mutual learning, Indigenous knowledge and local ecosystems are also critical to promoting sustainable food production.

ACCOUNTABILITY: Putting social and gender goals at the heart of environmental sustainability initiatives

To advance gender-just transitions, potential trade-offs and tensions need to be negotiated in transparent, participatory and accountable ways, ensuring that the voices of women and other marginalized groups are heard in policy- and decision-making processes and that their rights are protected.⁸¹ Some policies to improve environmental sustainability may, without due attention to gender relations, take women's unpaid care work for granted and increase their workloads. Similarly, protecting jobs from the impacts of climate change can sometimes come at the expense of environmental goals and the livelihoods of others. For example, in the cut flower sector in Kenya, which is an important source of employment for women, a growing focus on environmental sustainability has prioritized climate change adaptation to protect flower yields rather than addressing the decimation of local ecosystems and commons driven by the growth of the flower sector. This approach protects some jobs but neglects the long-term threats to the environment through biodiversity loss and the livelihoods of many other women dependent on common resources.⁸² To

navigate these tensions, policymaking processes need to be transparent and based on genuine participation and partnerships with local communities, Indigenous groups and a range of social movements, most importantly feminist and women's organizations.

Where the private sector is involved in efforts to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions, or developing or expanding environmentally sustainable services or infrastructure, it must be done in a way that is accountable. At the very least, a 'do no harm' approach means not violating the rights of local communities through appropriating land to produce biofuels or generate renewable energy, which often has highly gendered impacts. Since formal ownership and control over land usually favours men, even when land use changes are negotiated with local communities and Indigenous peoples, women are typically excluded from deals on access to employment, compensation or payment. Where women are incorporated into 'social' aspects of projects—for example, in reforestation work or in running health centres or other community services—their unpaid labour effectively subsidizes projects, reinforcing existing gender hierarchies of power and resources.⁸³

KEY LEVERS TO CATALYSE A GREEN AND GENDER EQUITABLE RECOVERY

FINANCING:

Invest in gender-responsive policies to mitigate and adapt to climate change and environmental degradation.

Those countries with the largest historical responsibility for emissions should bear most of the burden of supporting poorer countries to transition to environmental sustainability, with financing taking account of gender-specific risks and vulnerabilities.

Governments must support civil society organisations to lead sustainable approaches that privilege local ecosystems, Indigenous knowledge and women's leadership.

ACCOUNTABILITY

to ensure social and gender goals are prioritized in environmental policies.

Gender-just transitions can only be achieved through transparent and accountable processes, which calls for support for women's organizations to ensure they can participate meaningfully, as well as robust measures to protect women human rights defenders.

Addressing data and evidence gaps will be essential to support gender-just transitions, requiring new conceptual and methodological work and enhanced data collection and gender analysis, including on environmental policymaking.

PARTNERSHIPS

to empower local communities for gender-just transitions in energy and agriculture.

Developing new **DATA** on the gender environment nexus.

Ensuring gender-just transitions to build economies that support the flourishing and survival of people and planet.

Where environmental and women’s organizations have formed coalitions to protest against these projects and demand accountability for their impact, they have often been met with violence. In 2019, at least 212 land and environmental defenders were killed for protecting their homes from climate-destructive industries—the deadliest year yet recorded.⁸⁴ Women human rights defenders frequently face gender-specific risks, such as sexual violence and threats against family members. During the COVID-19 pandemic, threats

against them have increased in many contexts, especially where lockdown measures have been used to weaken democracy and where judicial processes have been suspended (see Chapter 5).⁸⁵ The courts are increasingly being used by activists to seek justice for individual cases and for strategic litigation to establish new legal standards. At the regional level, new human rights and environmental treaties are emerging that hold out the prospect of increased accountability to local communities (see Box 4.3).

Box 4.3 USING COALITIONS AND COURTS TO DEMAND ACCOUNTABILITY

Social movements have long worked together to demand accountability for environmental destruction and to accelerate gender-just transitions. The courts are an increasingly important venue for their claims, with some promising signs of development in the normative sphere.

Berta Cáceres, an Indigenous Lenca woman from **Honduras**, co-founded the *Consejo Cívico de Organizaciones Populares e Indígenas de Honduras* (Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras, COPINH) in 1993, and built a diverse coalition unified around the struggle against extractivism, racism and patriarchy.⁸⁶ Berta ensured that women were leaders and central to COPINH’s political education and direct actions.⁸⁷ COPINH has stopped at least 50 logging projects, prevented the building of 10 hydroelectric dams and won over 100 communal land titles for Indigenous communities.⁸⁸ In 2016, Berta Cáceres was murdered and, after a long campaign for justice, in July 2021, the former head of a hydroelectric company, against which Berta protested was convicted as a co-collaborator in ordering her murder.⁸⁹

Spurred by Berta’s case, social movements lobbied for the Escazú Agreement, a landmark environmental treaty that entered into force in April 2021. The treaty, which has been ratified by 11 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, enshrines the right of every person of present and future generations to live in a healthy environment and to sustainable development. It includes strong protections for Indigenous peoples and environmental human rights defenders, ensures access to judicial mechanisms to challenge environmental harms and guarantees public participation in environmental decision-making.⁹⁰

Accountability has also been sought in a range of other legal and normative spaces. Since 2016, the International Criminal Court (ICC) has recognized environmental crimes, identifying illegal exploitation of natural resources, cases of environmental destruction and ‘land grabbing’ as all within its remit.⁹¹ Meanwhile, strategic litigation on climate change targeting both governments, for their inaction or lack of ambition, and companies, including for the human rights impacts of their operations and deliberate disinformation or ‘greenwashing’, is becoming more common. Cases focused on ‘just transitions’—for example, on the impact of wind farms and biofuels—are also emerging.⁹² In May 2021, campaigners in the Netherlands hailed a ground-breaking court decision that obliges Royal Dutch Shell to comply with the Paris Agreement emissions targets and holds the company responsible for preventing human rights violations linked to climate change beyond its own activities to the whole global value chain.⁹³

Gender-just transitions can only be achieved through transparent, participatory and accountable processes that centre the rights of women and ensure that local communities have a say in how environmental sustainability initiatives are designed and implemented. This requires support for women’s organizations to ensure they can participate meaningfully in policy processes, as well as robust measures to protect women human rights defenders. Integrating gender into emerging environmental justice activism to set new legal and normative standards to hold power-holders accountable is also a priority.

METRICS: Filling data gaps to support accountability

Assessing progress towards gender-just transitions will require further development of metrics to capture the nexus between gender and the environment. Gender equality is quite effectively mainstreamed across the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) framework, with the prominent exception of the environmental goals. Six of the seventeen SDGs lack gender-specific indicators altogether—on water and sanitation; industry and innovation; sustainable consumption; energy; and the environment (both oceans and terrestrial ecosystems)—all of which have a significant bearing on the agenda set out above.⁹⁴

The nexus between gender and the environment has typically been presented through qualitative or small-scale quantitative studies only, and mainstreaming gender in environment statistics programmes is yet to be a key part of work programmes of national statistical systems. Mainstreaming gender in environment statistics is not just about compiling sex-disaggregated data, which is methodologically challenging for environmental goals at a macro level. It also requires measuring and monitoring environment-related issues affecting or affected by women or men alone, or a preponderance of women compared to men, or vice-versa. This in turn can ensure data captures socially constructed vulnerabilities and the specific needs, challenges and priorities of all genders in relation to the environment.⁹⁵

UN Women has worked with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) to recommend a set of 35 indicators to capture the gender-environment nexus, on six priority areas: land and biodiversity; natural resources including food, energy and water; climate change and disasters; sustainable consumption, production and wealth; health, well-being and sanitation; and environmental decision-making. A model survey questionnaire has been developed, which several countries in the region have implemented (Bangladesh and Mongolia) or plan to do so (Cambodia, Samoa, Solomon Islands and Viet Nam). Innovative analysis of existing household survey and geospatial data can also shed light on how droughts, increases in temperature and evapotranspiration affect the odds of child marriage, adolescent births, violence against women, access to clean water and use of clean cooking fuels.⁹⁶

The integration of a gender perspective into environmental policymaking is also an important area for developing new evidence and metrics. One step in this direction is work underway to analyse OECD-DAC data using both the gender marker and the Rio marker, to assess the extent to which bilateral aid addresses the intersection of gender equality and the environment.

Addressing data and evidence gaps will be essential to support gender-just transitions, by ensuring that progress can be monitored over time and decision-makers can be held to account. This will require further conceptual and methodological work to translate the findings of qualitative studies into meaningful statistical indicators as well as enhanced data collection and analysis, including on gender and environmental policymaking.

5

HOW DO WE GET THERE? FEMINIST POLITICS FOR A POST-COVID-19 WORLD

The paradigm shift needed to achieve sustainable livelihoods for all, a thriving care economy and gender-just transitions requires healthy and robust democratic processes at national level as well as global governance institutions that can foster solidarity and cooperation. However, the human suffering and yawning inequalities revealed by this deadly virus, alongside the emergency measures implemented in many nations to curb its spread, have not only exposed democratic shortfalls but deepened them. Civic spaces have narrowed and accountability has been eroded in ways that further disconnect

power-holders from women's groups and the communities they are meant to serve. Equal women's representation, stronger women's rights organizations and decisive resistance to backlash can play a critical role in reversing these trends. Building on longstanding organizing and networking, feminists across different institutional settings have been rallying to influence COVID-19 response and recovery, provide services and hold governments to account. Their work provides glimmers of hope that the pandemic could be a critical juncture for a new feminist politics in a post-COVID-19 world.¹

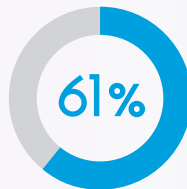


LESSONS FROM COVID-19: PROGRESSIVE AND FEMINIST POLITICS ARE IN LOCKDOWN

Democratic rollbacks deepen, further disconnecting states from citizens

Over the past **10 years**, the number of countries experiencing democratic erosion **has doubled**.

In 2019, **44%** of the world's population lived in countries that had experienced some form of democratic erosion in the previous 5 years.



of countries have implemented pandemic containment measures concerning from a democracy and human rights perspective.

Feminist policy advocacy is relentless, but women's influence is limited

Out of 225 COVID-19 taskforces in 137 countries,

only **4.4%** have gender parity



84% are dominated by men



24 countries did not have a single woman on their taskforces



Despite government restrictions on mobility, globally,

5,012 women's demonstrations

took place between March and December 2020.

Grassroot activists provide a safety net, but a fragile and under-funded one

In a survey, **more than 1/3** of women's organizations

in conflict-affected and humanitarian settings reported risking closure due to the pandemic.

In 2018-19, women's rights organizations received only around

1%

of bilateral aid allocated to gender equality, **a tiny fraction of total aid**.

5.1 LEARNING THE LESSONS FROM COVID-19

Democratic rollbacks deepen, further disconnecting states from citizens

As well as disrupting economies and societies, the COVID-19 pandemic has created major disruptions in governance and participation, exacerbating an already challenging political context. In 2020, many countries postponed elections, adjourned parliaments and curtailed due process through imposing emergency powers.² Public health emergency measures, from lockdowns to movement restrictions, have deepened ongoing processes of democratic backsliding; and while some forms of activism moved online, in many contexts the pandemic has been leveraged to close civic spaces, quell political dissent and institute new forms of surveillance.³

Even before the pandemic, democracy was already weakening in many countries. Failure to address growing economic inequality, especially after the 2008 global financial crisis, led to the concentration of wealth in ever fewer hands, while prosperity for the many has remained elusive.⁴ As a result, trust in politicians and elites is low and solidarity between social groups has eroded, hindering inclusive politics as well as economic development and hollowing out democratic values and institutions in the process.⁵

Analysis by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) shows that, over the past decade, countries where the quality of democracy has deteriorated outnumber countries where it has improved.⁶ The main areas of deterioration include declining freedom of expression, closing spaces for civil society, erosions in the rule of law and increasing hate speech.⁷ The pandemic has further accelerated this trend, exacerbating past grievances and further undermining social cohesion and trust. By November 2020, 61 per cent

of the countries assessed (99 out of 162) had implemented pandemic containment measures that were concerning from a democracy and human rights perspective. These included widespread (and mostly temporary) restrictions on freedom of assembly and ongoing restrictions on freedom of expression and/or the media.⁸ Often framed as a way to combat disinformation about the virus, these restrictions also limit state accountability.⁹

While trend data show some improvements in the last quarter of 2020, overall the pattern that emerges is clear.¹⁰ Where democratic deficits and weak institutions were already in evidence before late 2019, the crisis deepened and weakened them further.¹¹ Lockdowns and states of emergency triggered by COVID-19 have been used by opportunistic leaders to further shut down political dissent, including by feminist and women's rights organizations.¹² In some instances, state force has been used disproportionately to enforce mobility restrictions against poor and marginalized groups—including migrants and refugees, informal workers and street vendors—in the name of containing the pandemic.¹³ In such contexts, surveillance of the population, ostensibly to track the virus, has been stepped up in ways that potentially also silence opposition.¹⁴ Democratic rollbacks have long-term consequences because they are often hard to reverse, even once the pandemic is under control.¹⁵

Feminist policy advocacy is relentless, but women's influence is limited

There are inspiring examples of women heads of state and government who have overseen swift, effective and inclusive responses to the pandemic. Notwithstanding their achievements, they have mostly been in charge of Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

countries, whose resources and state capacity provide a stronger basis on which to tackle the crisis.¹⁶ In general, women have been largely excluded from pandemic-related policymaking spaces, including the many ad-hoc COVID-19 taskforces, reflecting their historic under-representation in formal politics.

The UNDP-UN Women COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker shows that of 225 COVID-19 taskforces in 137 countries and territories with sex-disaggregated data, only 4.4 per cent have gender parity, 84 per cent are dominated by men and 24 countries have no women among taskforce members.¹⁷ Not surprisingly, this has translated into limited and uneven attention to women's rights and needs, with less than one fifth of countries (42 out of 219) rolling out a holistic response that encompasses measures to prevent violence against women, strengthen women's economic security and support unpaid care work.¹⁸

The "tyranny of the urgent"¹⁹ means that when governments operate in 'crisis mode', they often close ranks and rely heavily on male-dominated executive structures, frequently without consulting adequately with parliaments, civil society and other stakeholders, drowning out women's voices in the process.²⁰ Accountability to and participation of civil society actors—for example, through citizen consultations or participatory budgeting—have been largely side-lined during the pandemic.²¹

Although there have been limited institutional entry points, gender equality advocates in civil society have been more vocal, interconnected and internationally active than during any previous pandemic (such as Ebola or Zika, for example).²² Feminist advocacy networks have produced an array of campaigns, petitions and technical documents to influence both the immediate response and to provide feminist visions of post-pandemic recovery and transformation.²³ In countries including Austria, Canada, Chile, Ireland and the United Kingdom, as well as in Hawaii in

the United States, activists have developed new advocacy and accountability tools, including feminist plans and gender budget assessments.²⁴

As a result of these efforts, in some contexts, gender equality advocates have been able to shape COVID-related policies and government agendas. The experiences of Argentina (Box 5.1) and Canada (Box 3.1) reflect not only good leadership but also strong, transparent political processes that have provided feminists with openings and opportunities to shape government responses to the pandemic.²⁵ On the other hand, in contexts where political or civil society actors advancing anti-gender equality agendas had gained access to state structures before the pandemic, the crisis provided opportunities to strengthen their cause by restricting the space for human rights civil society to challenge them and, in some instances, by successfully rolling back commitments to women's rights.²⁶ Turkey's withdrawal from the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (the 'Istanbul Convention') is a salient example.²⁷

Grassroots activists provide a fragile safety net, but with costs for women

Across countries, women's rights organizations have mobilized community networks to distribute food aid, organize care and provide services for survivors of violence.²⁸ These collective efforts, provided largely by women of colour or otherwise marginalized women, have provided an important, albeit fragile, informal safety net for struggling communities.²⁹

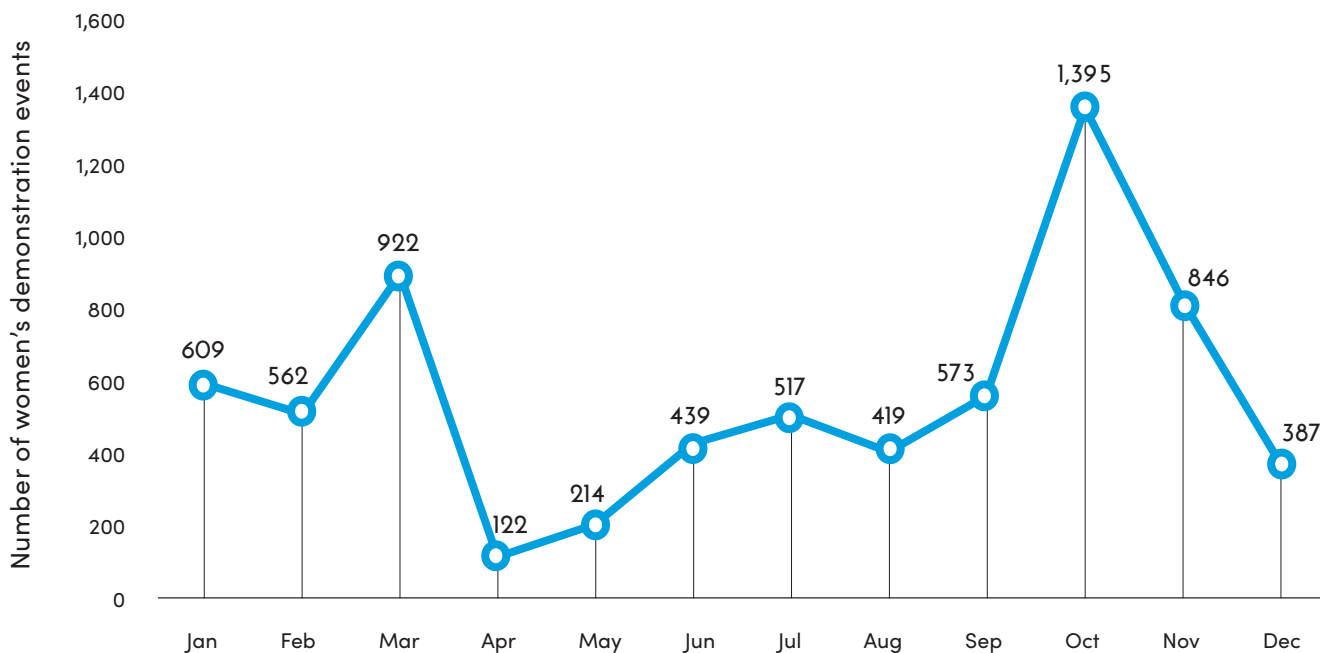
The scope and effectiveness of these efforts has depended, to a significant degree, on organizational structures and networks built long before the pandemic. Grassroots movements with strong organizational capacity, such as the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in India or *La Poderosa* (The Powerful)—an autonomous,

shantytown-led community organization in Latin America—have been able to swiftly scale up support during the crisis.³⁰ In various settings, women’s rights organizations have worked hand-in-hand with national or local governments and provided ‘last mile’ services, connecting vulnerable or hard-to-reach communities to emergency support (Box 5.2).³¹ But, more often than not, civil society organizations have plugged gaps without official support or even recognition for their work.³²

As well as keeping communities afloat, women’s rights organizations have played a critical role in organizing them politically, fighting misinformation about the virus, monitoring state performance and demanding access to quality infrastructure and services.³³ Between March and December

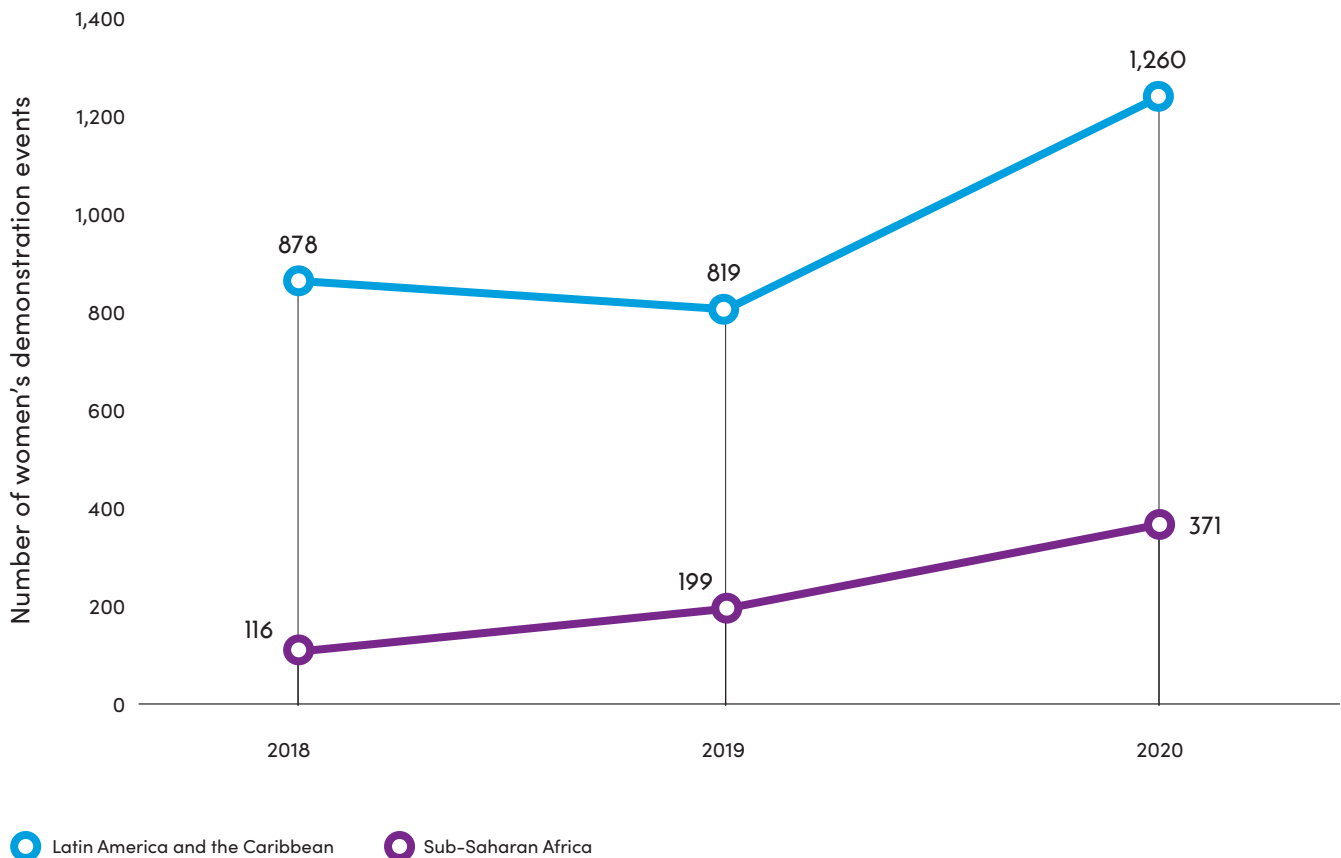
2020, after an initial sharp drop in protests when the global pandemic was first declared, and in spite of government restrictions on mobility, women regrouped and a total of 5,012 women’s demonstration events were recorded across 193 countries and territories (Figure 5.1).³⁴ Alongside the development of advocacy campaigns and policy demands, these demonstrations aimed to influence official emergency responses and longer-term recovery, from protests demanding food aid and support for online schooling in Kazakhstan to calls for improving livelihoods and working conditions for domestic workers in the Republic of Korea.³⁵ Based on longstanding activism, Latin America and the Caribbean and sub-Saharan Africa, the two global South regions with available trend data, show significant spikes in women’s protests in 2020 (Figure 5.2).

Figure 5.1 NUMBER OF WOMEN’S DEMONSTRATIONS, GLOBALLY, JANUARY–DECEMBER 2020



Source: UN Women analysis based on ACLED 2021.
Notes: Data cover 193 countries and territories.³⁶

Figure 5.2 NUMBER OF WOMEN'S DEMONSTRATIONS IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN AND SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA, 2018-2020



Source: UN Women analysis based on ACLED 2021.

Notes: Data cover 31 countries and territories in Latin America and the Caribbean and 35 countries and territories in sub-Saharan Africa. See endnote 35 for definition of women's demonstrations.

Despite their critical contributions, the ability of small and medium-sized women's rights organizations, which form the core of autonomous feminist movements worldwide, to deliver services and advocate for rights is at risk.³⁷ In the early days of the pandemic, a survey conducted by the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund found that nearly one third of surveyed women's organizations (22 out of 75) operating in conflict-affected and humanitarian settings were at risk of closure as a result of the pandemic; one year later, these organizations report an even more precarious situation.³⁸ For activists and women's human rights defenders working

in especially hostile circumstances, emergency restrictions and lockdowns have disrupted their ability to create safety plans and risk assessments when potentially exposed to violence.³⁹ Women civil society leaders are reaching breaking point, with concerning signs of emotional distress and burn out.⁴⁰

This is exacerbated by the limited availability of economic resources: Even before the pandemic, women's rights organizations received only around 1 per cent of all OECD-Development Assistance Committee (DAC) bilateral official development assistance (ODA) allocated to gender equality,

amounting to a tiny fraction of total ODA in 2018–2019,⁴¹ while only 0.4 per cent of foundation grants went to women’s rights in 2017.⁴² Feminist groups working with those facing intersecting forms of




marginalization—including sex workers, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, or queer (LGBTIQ+), Indigenous and young feminists—were especially under-funded.⁴³

5.2 VISION: REINVIGORATING DEMOCRACIES POWERED BY FEMINIST POLITICS

What would a different future look like? Building back better in the wake of COVID-19 requires a decisive break with the vicious cycle of socio-economic insecurity, environmental destruction and exclusionary politics. Breaking this cycle is fundamentally political: The economy and politics are inextricably intertwined, and shifting towards a sustainable and just economy is therefore as much about open democratic processes as it is about achieving fair outcomes.⁴⁴ Action is needed to revive and strengthen democracies to ensure that governments can deliver socially just and sustainable policies for their people. The pandemic has reinforced the relevance of the state, but has also shown that it needs to be counter-balanced by a strong civil society, able to monitor and hold

public actors to account. A new feminist politics would renew democratic practices at all levels, by promoting power sharing, diverse social movements and synergistic partnerships between states and rights-based civil society actors, while putting in place robust mechanisms to counterbalance corporate and/or elite capture. The foundations for this new politics would be laid at the national and local level, but global institutions and processes also need to be transformed towards solidarity, power sharing and democracy.

Even though the pandemic and its political impacts are still unfolding, some important lessons have emerged that reveal some of the political shifts that are needed to achieve this vision:

-  **Instead of being dominated by the voices of male elites and corporate interests, decision-making spaces would include historically excluded groups, and women would have equal voice to men over all decisions that affect their lives.⁴⁵**
-  **Instead of stifling dissent, civil society—particularly human rights groups and women’s and feminist organizations—would be protected and encouraged to thrive. The critical work of women’s rights organizations in promoting progressive alternatives would be recognized and rewarded, supporting their capacity-building and the long-term sustainability of their work while respecting their autonomy to set their own agendas and priorities.**
-  **Instead of prioritizing the interests of the powerful, capable public institutions would effectively prioritize human capabilities and environmental protection through care, green investments and human rights, making sure gains are equally shared. To do so, states would build lasting partnerships with community organizations, including women’s groups, to promote policy innovation, adaptation and accountability from below.**

5.3 LEVERS: PROMOTING FEMINIST POLITICS FOR TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE

A new feminist politics will not materialize overnight. As countries emerge from the multiple crises brought about by COVID-19, three key levers can help them strengthen both state institutions and the civil society mechanisms to counterbalance them. Thus, state and civil society actors would have a relationship not of conflict or of uncritical support but instead of productive tension to ensure accountability and gender-responsive governance.

Boosting women's representation and feminists' presence across institutional spaces

Women's representation in political decision-making matters because when women are not consulted or included in decisions on issues that have direct impacts on their lives, policy outcomes are likely to be ineffective or even harmful.⁴⁶ Women's representation matters not only in and of itself but also because, by bringing their perspectives to bear on policy issues, women's presence is associated with a range of positive policy outcomes. Across the globe, larger proportions of women legislators are associated with higher public spending on family-friendly policies such as childcare, early childhood education, parental leaves and health care, as well as lower spending on defence and less military engagement.⁴⁷ Women's representation makes a difference on environmental policy too. A cross-country study of 18 countries found a positive association between the number of women officeholders (parliamentarians and cabinet ministers) and environmental protection standards.⁴⁸ Currently, only about one quarter of parliamentarians and one fifth of ministers are women globally, so there is a long way to go to ensure political power is equally shared between women and men.⁴⁹

Moreover, women's representation in politics tends to be dominated by professional and class-privileged women. While these women can use their privilege strategically to ensure buy-in from elites for progressive policy alternatives, to be truly inclusive women's representation in political leadership positions must be diverse, to encompass a broad range of women's needs and interests.

As well as boosting women's representation, promoting the shifts in policy framing and design proposed in this Feminist Plan require alliances between feminist organizations and progressive parties and a critical mass of feminists throughout state bureaucracies who can catalyse policy change and exert influence to ensure transformative policies are not watered down in implementation.⁵⁰ This was critical in the process to establish the groundbreaking national care system in Uruguay, for example, where having feminists and allies in strategic ministerial and technical positions within the Ministry of Social Development was key to success (see Chapter 3).⁵¹ Although gender ministries are also important, feminists' capacity to influence policy can be limited when they are siloed in one institutional space.

Women's participation is most effective when it is multi-sited, encompassing different branches (executive, legislative, the judiciary) and tiers of government (national and sub-national), as well as in civil society.⁵² In that way, women and their allies can use multiple institutional pressure points, both inside and outside the state, depending on the context and issue at hand.⁵³ For instance, in Argentina and Canada, where executive leadership was receptive to their proposals, feminists have successfully advocated for gender-responsive measures during the pandemic. In the case of Argentina, three key lessons emerge: A pro-

feminist male leader can open up opportunities for change, which is important given that only 24 countries worldwide have a woman head of state or government⁵⁴; feminists in key ministerial positions, together with civil society pressure, can be effective in ensuring policies support marginalized women; and, to be effective, feminist bureaucrats often rely on informal networks of like-minded individuals, leveraged by technology, to exchange information, galvanize support and coordinate actions (Box 5.1).⁵⁵

In other contexts where executives were less receptive, such as Brazil, parliamentary and civil society networks were nevertheless partly successful in prioritizing single mothers in emergency relief and were instrumental in monitoring and resisting rollbacks of existing provisions.⁵⁶ Even if initially unsuccessful, attempts at incremental change and enhanced oversight by feminists in different spaces can ensure policy options remain on the table or provide institutional entry points that can be exploited at a later point.

Diverse women’s representation in political decision-making, and ensuring women are on an equal footing to men, is a matter of social justice but also improves policies and the quality of democracy. Ensuring that women (and feminists) are adequately represented in different institutional spaces, across different branches and tiers of government, is instrumental for fostering progressive advocacy networks of like-minded individuals, including civil servants, politicians, activists or journalists, that can promote gender-responsive policies and foster policy innovation.

Supporting women’s rights organizations for democratic accountability and public service delivery

Women’s rights organizations play indispensable roles as advocates, government watchdogs and service providers. In doing so, they can enhance the effectiveness of state policies and programmes to support recovery from the crisis. However, to play this role, they need adequate support, including sustainable funding and entry points to engage with the state. It is also critical that governments do not shift responsibility for service delivery onto women’s grassroots organizations, exploiting women’s unpaid community work in the process.

Women’s organizations are key in lobbying for new policies but also matter for monitoring and ensuring the effective delivery of public services. Feminists have a long history of keeping governments in check: Comparative research across 70 countries leaves no doubt that women’s movements are critical in driving the implementation of progressive policies to advance gender equality.⁵⁷ Involving women’s organizations

and communities in service delivery, monitoring and evaluation can improve the quality, affordability and accessibility of public services.⁵⁸ Ensuring that human rights-based organizations fulfil this role is also an important bulwark against groups that are anti-democratic or anti-gender equality. In a range of contexts, especially where state capacity is limited, these groups have stepped into service delivery roles in order to gain popular support for their goals.⁵⁹

Comparative research suggests that building state effectiveness in the delivery of collective goods and services is not a simple function of countries’ income level or wealth.⁶⁰ Bureaucratic capacity plays an important role, but so do robust connections to civil society organizations on the ground because they help to build inclusive solutions that are context-specific, enhance bottom-up accountability and promote trust between the state and communities.⁶¹ Reinforcing formal channels of consultation, participation and monitoring that are inclusive of grassroots women’s rights organizations is key to connecting state bureaucracies with marginalized groups, while building relationships of trust between public officials and communities in the process.

Box 5.1 FEMINIST LEADERSHIP IN THE COVID-19 POLICY RESPONSE IN ARGENTINA

Longstanding efforts to bring feminist perspectives to bear on policymaking in **Argentina** have come to fruition during the COVID-19 crisis.⁶² The country has achieved gender balance in both lower and upper legislative chambers (42.4 and 40.3 per cent women, respectively, as of April 2021)⁶³ and, under the administration of President Alberto Fernández, the national gender machinery has been elevated to ministerial status and is led by Minister Elizabeth Gomez Alcorta, a human rights and Indigenous rights lawyer.⁶⁴ Strong gender equality divisions have been established across the Ministries of Defence, National Security, Health and Work.⁶⁵ Under the Ministry of the Economy, a national division dedicated to gender equality was established in December 2019 under the leadership of feminist economist Mercedes D'Alessandro.

Within this institutional architecture, top feminist policymakers have brought their civil society experience and connections, as well as their technical knowledge, to the pandemic response. In March 2020, to mitigate the impact of the shutdown, the Government rolled out a comprehensive policy package, including social protection and active labour market policies. Of the 42 measures captured by the UNDP-UN Women COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker in March 2021, 26 are gender-sensitive, including nine targeting women's economic security, seven addressing unpaid care work and 10 tackling violence against women.⁶⁶ In the emergency response, policymakers ensured that economic relief prioritized the rights of vulnerable women and feminized sectors of the economy, including specific provisions for domestic workers, which is likely to hold down poverty and inequality rates.⁶⁷

Feminists in key executive positions also ensured that the 2021 national budget committed US\$13.4 billion (3.4 per cent of the country's GDP) to address gender gaps in education, health care and other areas affected by the pandemic.⁶⁸ A WhatsApp group, *Mujeres Gobernando* (Women Governing), of more than 150 cabinet ministers, lawmakers and national and subnational bureaucrats was created to incorporate a gender perspective into public policies, to facilitate information sharing and strategize across institutions to influence the budget.⁶⁹

Broad-based feminist street mobilizations kept the pressure on the Government, creating insider-outsider networks of influence. This was especially important in rallying legislative support to legalize access to abortion in Argentina in December 2020, an historic achievement made amid immense pressure to shelve the issue and focus exclusively on the ongoing economic and health emergency.⁷⁰

Despite these gains, as infection rates remain high, Argentina is confronted with problems of limited fiscal space and a volatile macroeconomic context. The Government faces perhaps its toughest challenge: to rally international support, including from the international financial institutions, to enact active fiscal and monetary policies for a recovery that puts human rights and gender equality at its centre.

Some of the most effective COVID-19 responses have been those in which governments have partnered with civil society or have created an enabling environment for civil society organizations to thrive.⁷¹ For instance, in the decentralized Indian system, Kerala has led the way in its response to COVID-19 by relying on partnerships between the state government and women’s organizations. The involvement of women’s groups through formal mechanisms of participation and oversight—such as self-governance institutions, sectoral policy councils and participatory budgeting mechanisms—has ensured that the state can accurately identify community preferences and that service delivery meets the needs of diverse women and girls (Box 5.2).⁷²

Another example is the involvement of informal workers in COVID-19 response decision-making, which has ensured that the implementation of emergency measures by municipal governments did not preclude food street vendors from earning

a living in Peru and South Africa (see Chapter 2). States have also worked effectively with civil society to provide care services, as seen in Ecuador, before the pandemic, where the government partnered with community-based care providers to expand childcare provision in hard-to-reach communities (see Chapter 3). In other settings, community-care workers are demanding formal recognition, including salaries and social protection, for their work (see Box 3.3). Looking forward, as the need for climate adaptation becomes more urgent, top-down government initiatives will not be effective without the collaboration and expertise of workers’ organizations, farmers’ groups and Indigenous communities—those bearing the brunt of the impacts (see Chapter 4).

The lessons learned from these positive partnerships could inform equitable and sustainable recovery efforts that build state capacity, enhance healthy state-civil society relations and foster solidarity among different social groups.

“When the pandemic hit, we acted quickly to build momentum for a feminist economic response in Hawaii. Incremental reform through elite advocacy is insufficient to address interlocking systems of exploitation that crush women. Our plan is a tangible expression of the communal and egalitarian value systems shared by Native Hawaiian women, Black women, and women from oppressed countries who are living in Hawaii, and throughout the world.”

KHARA JABOLA-CAROLUS, Executive Director, Ka Komikina Kūlana Olakino o Nā Wāhine (Hawaii State Commission on the Status of Women)



Box 5.2 **SYNERGIES BETWEEN WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS AND THE INDIAN STATE IN KERALA'S LIVELIHOOD RESPONSE TO COVID-19**

The track record of Kerala, in **India**, on rights-based policymaking and women's participation in local government, supported by quotas, combined with a vibrant civil society and robust mechanisms of community consultation and oversight, meant this South Indian state was in a relatively strong position to respond to the pandemic.⁷³ Dynamic partnerships between women's groups and local state institutions enabled an inclusive, rapid and coordinated response, attentive to the rights of the most marginalized women.⁷⁴

The Kudumbashree Mission is a unique state-sponsored anti-poverty programme established in Kerala in 1998 that promotes collective solutions to poverty eradication and incorporates women's groups with over 4 million members. When the pandemic started, the groups mounted a rapid response, with public support, which included informing public officials of community needs (especially those of older persons) and implementing a prominent public health information and awareness campaign.⁷⁵

Free and low-cost community kitchens run by Kudumbashree members were established to ensure food security in marginalized communities, including for migrant workers.⁷⁶ As early as April 2020, 1,255 community kitchens were in operation.⁷⁷ Many of these procured food from women's group farms, also an initiative of the Kudumbashree Mission.⁷⁸ As well as providing nutritious food to those in need, these partnerships provided vital livelihood support for women farmers, whose produce markets were severely disrupted by the pandemic. As a result, many fewer women's group farmers reported serious losses due to harvesting delays or other problems, compared to other farmers in the state.⁷⁹

The Kudumbashree Mission has nurtured women's political participation for years, which has resulted in a significant share of its members being elected to local government. This has meant that their experience and insights have directly fed back into public policymaking and service delivery, improving the pandemic response and ensuring that it meets the needs of the people.⁸⁰

COVID-19 recovery calls for strong collaboration between rights-based civil society organizations and capable public institutions to ensure that the goods and services needed to achieve a sustainable and socially just economy are delivered in an effective and accountable way. States must not be bureaucratically isolated but instead establish connections with civil society stakeholders, including women's rights organizations, in order to ensure policy formulation, implementation and oversight are gender-responsive. The critical role played by women's rights organizations in the pandemic response should be recognized and rewarded, with support provided for capacity building, the long-term sustainability of their work, and the promotion of a safe and enabling civic space.

Resisting backlash by building progressive coalitions

In many countries, relations between the state and women's rights organizations are a far cry from the kind of synergistic partnerships described above. In such contexts, resisting rollbacks, crafting progressive coalitions, prying civil society space open, (re)building trust in public institutions and developing rights-based alternatives—ready for when political opportunities open up—are a priority.

Even before the COVID-19 crisis, in the wider context of democratic erosion, exclusionary forces had gained in visibility and strength in all parts of the world and had become more vocal in their attempts to “normalize” inequalities,⁸¹ hollow out public provision and reinstate gender, social or racial hierarchies.⁸² Such exclusionary politics not only fuel fear and discrimination but can also foster political violence and risks for women politicians and activists, already heightened by the pandemic.⁸³

In contexts where exclusionary forces are ascendant, those in positions of power sometimes amplify regressive discourses around ‘traditional family values’, even while they under-invest in the public services on which families depend.⁸⁴ A retreat from public education and reduced public spending on health, social protection, care services or environmental protections all contribute to shifting responsibility back to the private sphere (and onto the backs of women), undermining public responsibility and the need for collective solutions. Gender equality advocates and their allies have highlighted this paradox and have used it as a platform to mobilize against the retreat of the state.

Alongside attempts to influence the COVID-19 policy response, autonomous feminist groups have worked relentlessly to resist rollbacks and maintain their own priorities. In Poland, for example, networks of women's rights activists

have rallied to oppose repeated attempts to curtail reproductive rights.⁸⁵ In the last week of October 2020, 617 women-led protests were orchestrated across the country, coinciding with a Constitutional Court ruling that aimed to implement a near total ban on abortion.⁸⁶

To resist backlash, broad progressive alliances are needed between different kinds of social movements, nationally and internationally, and across a range of issues.⁸⁷ In Spain and Italy, economic austerity policies have brought together non-traditional coalitions of feminists (from multiple generations), LGBTIQ+ groups, trade unionists, informal workers, immigrants, students and disabled people, fostering new forms of activism and solidarity. Activists have coalesced around campaigns to defend the public health sector and community gardens, and protest against evictions, gender-based violence and precarious economic conditions.⁸⁸ Coalitions that bring together feminists, Indigenous groups and environmental movements have defined platforms that demand justice in the face of racist violence, land dispossession, destruction of the natural environment and economic deprivation. One prominent example is *Consejo Cívico de Organizaciones Populares e Indígenas de Honduras* (Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras, COPINH), whose founder, Berta Cáceres was murdered in 2016, a stark reminder of Governments' obligations to prevent violence against women politicians, activists and human rights defenders (see Box 4.3). Evidence from Brazil suggests that inclusive and interconnected feminist networks that combine diverse groups of women and have close connections with LGBTIQ+ organizations are better equipped to block the rollback of women's rights (Box 5.3).

While national and local coalitions play a vital role in crafting progressive alternatives, deepening transnational solidarities is also extremely important—particularly in more restricted political

settings. Such transnational organizing can pollinate policy ideas across countries, build international momentum and influence that can support national or local initiatives (the so-called “boomerang effect”)⁸⁹ and create external pressure on regressive regimes by calling out human rights abuses.

For such coalitions to emerge, consolidate and be effective takes time and resources. It is vital for movements and networks to construct common framings and understandings of existing problems, expand internal mobilization capacity and build action repertoires, knowledge and skills, as well as nurture relationships and shared loyalties with partners. Regular spaces for transnational civil

society dialogue—for example, in the parallel and preparatory processes for the United Nations Conferences of the 1990s, at the World Social Forum and Generation Equality Forum—have been central to building and consolidating broad-based transnational alliances across sectors.⁹⁰ These arenas for internal development and debate are where movement participants articulate their identities, build their communities and hone their strategies. Supporting and reinforcing these coalition-building ‘melting pots’—including through digital communication and mobilization strategies—will strengthen the resilience of women’s organizations to future shocks as well as their capacity to turn their visions of a sustainable and socially just future into reality.⁹¹

Counteracting gender backlash and democratic backsliding is a central goal of a new feminist politics. Governments are responsible for defending civic space and protecting women politicians and activists from violence and harassment, which is a basic foundation for a strong and diverse progressive civil society. Besides collaborating with state bureaucracies, it is essential that women’s rights organizations retain the capacity to set their own agendas and priorities, acknowledging that where tensions exist between the national state and feminist organizations, international solidarity can be critical. Fostering and financing mechanisms that enable different groups of women, workers and environmental activists working across thematic silos to organize and collaborate are fundamental to harness long-lasting and broad-based progressive coalitions for change.

Box 5.3 INTERSECTIONAL AND DIVERSE FEMINIST MOVEMENTS AS A STRATEGY TO BLOCK BACKLASH IN BRAZIL

A hallmark of feminist activism is that it is propositional—it proposes alternatives. But for many feminist movements, strategies are also needed to defend against rollbacks and attacks on progress made. Research in **Brazil** suggests that broad-based, diverse and intersectional feminist movements have been particularly effective at defending against regression and backlash.⁹²

While the recent political context in Brazil has not been conducive for success in lobbying Congress for the expansion of sexual and reproductive rights, feminists have managed to block more than 76 restrictive bills presented between 2015 and 2020.⁹³ They achieved this by building a broad-based and diverse network, linked with the executive branch, in alliance with national legislative actors and supported by formal participatory mechanisms, such as Women’s National Conferences and Women’s Rights Councils. These brought together a diverse set of sub-national activists and policymakers, creating space to negotiate common platforms, organize and foster bottom-up capacity building among feminist organizations, afro-descendants and groups working for racial and economic justice and LGBTIQ+ rights. This movement has developed legislative strategies as well as regularly taking to the streets. In 2015, large-scale demonstrations were held, including the Daisy March by rural women workers and the first Black Women’s National March. These events, together with a series of protests—known as the Feminist Spring—brought millions of women onto the streets in many cities to defend women’s reproductive rights and to demand greater accountability and transparency in politics.

While the organizing work to bring together diverse, intersectional movements is undoubtedly more time-intensive and complex, it is an investment worth making, especially in contexts where women’s rights are being threatened.

KEY LEVERS TO PROMOTE FEMINIST POLITICS FOR TRANSFORMATIVE RECOVERY

Building back better in the wake of COVID-19 calls for reinvigorated democracies, powered by feminist politics

Resist backlash by building progressive coalitions

Boost women's representation and feminists' presence in politics

Support women's rights organizations and their contributions to democratic accountability and public service delivery

Fostering and financing mechanisms that enable different groups of women, workers and environmental activists working across thematic silos to organize and collaborate are fundamental to building broad-based progressive coalitions and countering backlash.

Women's representation is a matter of equality, and also leads to better policy outcomes, which calls for legally binding quotas and gender parity in appointments for executives and bureaucracies.

Robust connections between governments and civil society organizations help build state effectiveness; to enable this, the work of women's rights organizations should be recognized and supported, including through capacity building, funding for the long-term sustainability, and a safe and enabling civic space.

6

FORGING A NEW FEMINIST SOCIAL CONTRACT



“Now is the time to renew the social contract between Governments and their people and within societies, so as to rebuild trust and embrace a comprehensive vision of human rights. People need to see results reflected in their daily lives. This must include the active and equal participation of women and girls, without whom no meaningful social contract is possible.”





António Guterres, United Nations Secretary-General, Our Common Agenda, September 2021

The previous chapters have made it abundantly clear that the ‘old’ social contract is broken. Built from the ashes of World War II, it promised to balance the relationship between labour and capital by combining economic growth imperatives with greater rights and protections for workers and their families. Particularly in the Global North, this bargain led to significant improvements in living standards and a reduction in economic inequality, with positive spill-over effects on citizens’ trust in government and their willingness to pay taxes. In much of the Global South, the success of this model was more limited, reflecting power asymmetries and financial constraints. The developmental promise of post-colonial social contracts in much of sub-Saharan Africa, for example, was rapidly stifled by debt and dependence.¹ Even in the Global North, the golden age of the post-war social contract was short-lived. Since the late 1970s, labour market deregulation, retrenchment and privatization have shifted power squarely towards corporations, gradually releasing employers from the responsibility to provide stable jobs and living wages and reducing the state’s responsibility for social provision. As a result of this revocation of the social contract, trust in public institutions and traditional political parties has been further eroded.²

Notwithstanding its various manifestations, the ‘old’ social contract never fully included women

and was often based on an understanding of ‘universal citizenship’ that relied on and cemented pre-existing hierarchies based on gender, class, race and ethnicity.³ Gender stereotypes and inequalities were firmly built into this system of so-called solidarity, which rested on the unpaid and underpaid work of women whilst leaving them largely unprotected against economic risks and physical and emotional harm.⁴ The ‘old’ social contract was also one that rested on white supremacy.⁵ This can still be seen today when people of colour within countries in the Global North—including, for example, migrant domestic workers—are subject to discrimination and accorded fewer rights than white people, while oppressive forms of colonial domination continue to be exerted over Indigenous people and populations in the Global South.

The old social contract was concerned mainly with the relationship between states and markets, workers and capital, while ignoring relationships that fall outside these boundaries but are required for social reproduction and the preservation of global ecosystems. Therefore, a new social contract is needed that prioritizes those who sustain the functioning of both markets and states—people in families and communities—as well as the natural environment on which all life depends.⁶ This new contract needs to be:

-  **Feminist, aimed at shifting gender power relations and tackling multiple forms of discrimination**
-  **Based on social justice, by addressing pervasive inequalities and rebalancing economies towards the rights and needs of the majority**
-  **Eco-social, recognizing that humans are not disconnected from nature but part of a global ecosystem that needs to be preserved⁷**
-  **Global, based on solidarity and the common good, acknowledging that no one is safe until everyone is safe.**

While the foundations for this new social contract would be laid at the national and local level, global institutions and processes also need to be transformed towards solidarity, power sharing and democracy. The fate of countries is interdependent, but this interdependence is asymmetric, with poorer countries facing significant disadvantages. Creating a socially just and sustainable future must therefore be a common goal with differentiated responsibilities.

Previous chapters have provided clear indications of *what* governments should commit to now, as part of their recovery strategies, to lay the basis for this new social contract: prioritizing the provision of collective goods and services—quality care, secure livelihoods and a clean environment for all. They have also made the case that it matters *how* the provision of these goods and services is pursued. A new feminist social contract requires the state to redefine its role and re-articulate its relationship with markets, families and communities. Unfettered markets would be replaced with appropriate regulations to ensure that all business activities respect the rights of workers and those in the broader community, as well as the need to protect and regenerate the natural environment.⁸ Instead of leaving value creation and innovation to the ‘invisible hand’ of markets, states would actively steer production and investment towards sustainability and social justice, making sure gains are equally shared.⁹ Instead of relying on women’s unpaid community work as a safety net of last resort, states would seek to empower community-based organizations, including women’s groups, to promote policy innovation and make service delivery more effective and adaptable to the changing realities of women on the ground. Instead of engaging in a global race to the bottom, states would find ways for corporations and wealthy individuals to pay their fair share of taxes to finance investments in collective goods and services for all.

While the pandemic has reinforced the relevance of the state in this way, it has also underlined the

importance of strong civil societies to hold both governments and corporations accountable. A new feminist social contract is therefore as much about fair outcomes as it is about open democratic processes, recognizing the virtuous cycles that they create together.¹⁰ The state can only fulfill its obligations for human rights and social and gender justice as part of a new social contract if it functions in a representative way. Instead of amplifying the voices of the few, it would actively seek to expand understandings of *who* is party to the contract by bringing historically excluded groups into decision-making processes and making their voices count. Instead of top-down decision making, productive tensions and power sharing between the state and civil society, including feminist movements, would protect against the roll back of rights, drive the transformation towards sustainability and social justice, and sustain it over time.

The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare the fragility of our economies and our societies and revealed and exacerbated the systemic inequalities that blight the lives of the majority. Out of the wreckage of the pandemic, with the right amount of political will and imagination, policymakers, civil society activists, businesses and the United Nations can come together to ensure that the recovery does not just take the world back to where it was but fundamentally transforms economies to prioritize care for people and planet, based on a revitalized feminist social contract.

ENDNOTES

CHAPTER 1

1. WHO 2021a.
2. Crenshaw 1989.
3. UN HRC 2021.
4. Viveros Vigoya 2016.
5. Crenshaw 1989.
6. Ewig 2018; Lykke 2011.
7. ILO 2020a.
8. Azcona et al. 2020.
9. ILO 2018b.
10. Ogando et al. 2021.
11. UNDP and UN Women 2021.
12. Mazzucato 2020.
13. Turquet and Koissy-Kpein 2020.
14. Elson 1998.
15. Heintz et al. 2021.
16. Perkins 2007.
17. UN Women 2014a.
18. Willis 2020.
19. UN Women 2021a.
20. UNDP et al. 2021.
21. Guterres 2020.
22. UNCTAD 2020.
23. UNDP and UN Women 2021.
24. UNEP and Oxford Smith School of Enterprise and the Environment 2021.
25. Ortiz and Cummings 2021.
26. UNCTAD 2020.
27. UN Women 2014b.
28. Nelson and Power 2018.
29. UNCTAD 2020.
30. Ibid.
31. Mazzucato 2011.
32. OECD 2020a.
33. Torreele et al. 2021.
34. UN Women 2018a.
35. See Business & Human Rights Resource Centre 2020.
36. Htun and Weldon 2018; McBride and Mazur 2010.
37. Sen 1999.
38. This has been recognized by a diverse range of policy experts and groups, including the Stiglitz Commission. See: Stiglitz et al. 2009; OECD 2020b; WBG Commission on a Gender Equal Economy 2020.
39. Berik 2018.
40. Guterres 2020.
41. UN Women 2019a.
42. Grabel 2021.
43. UNCTAD 2021.
44. IMF 2021a; 2021b.
45. World Bank 2021.
46. Ortiz and Cummings 2021.
47. Ghosh 2021a; UNCTAD 2020.
48. World Bank 2021.
49. U.S. Department of the Treasury 2021; Gallagher and Ocampo 2021.
50. Gallagher and Ocampo 2021; Ghosh 2021a; Ocampo 2021.
51. Munevar 2021.
52. Fresnillo 2020.
53. Ibid.
54. United Nations Secretary-General 2020; UN DESA 2020.
55. Volz et al. 2020.

56. West 2020.
57. FACTI 2021, p. 9.
58. Ibid.
59. Rodrik 2021.
60. Ghosh 2021b.
61. UNCTAD 2020.
62. Grabel 2021.

CHAPTER 2

Data graphic — Lessons from COVID-19:

Women's livelihoods have taken a major hit

Row 1: ILO 2021a; Oxfam 2021; Almenfi et al. 2020.

Row 2: ILO 2020a; UN Women forthcoming.

Row 3: WIEGO 2021a; WIEGO 2021b; ILO 2021b.

Rows 4 & 5: UNDP and UN Women 2021; UN Women forthcoming.

1. Guterres 2020.
2. ILO 2021a.
3. Oxfam 2021.
4. Akcigit et al. 2021.
5. Berg 2015; ILO 2019a; UNDP 2019.
6. ILO 2018a.
7. Azcona, Bhatt, Encarnacion et al. 2020.
8. UN Women 2020a.
9. ILO 2021b. 54 million jobs is likely an underestimate since official labour market statistics often do not pick up loss of jobs and livelihoods in the informal economy.
10. UN Women forthcoming. Pooled estimates and microdata are accessible on the Women Count Data Hub at: <https://data.unwomen.org/rga>.
11. Holder et al. 2021.
12. ILO 2021c.
13. ILO 2021d.
14. WIEGO 2021a.
15. WIEGO 2021b.
16. WIEGO 2021a.
17. ILO 2021e; Razavi 2021.
18. Almenfi et al. 2020.
19. ILO 2020b.
20. UN Women forthcoming. Pooled estimates and microdata are accessible on the Women Count Data Hub at: <https://data.unwomen.org/rga>.
21. UNDP and UN Women 2021.
22. UN Women and UN DESA 2020.
23. ACLED 2020.
24. Klassen and Murphy 2020.
25. Clapp and Moseley 2020.
26. Giménez and Shattuck 2011; UN General Assembly 2020.
27. Women account for 70 per cent of workers in fresh produce production in Kenya. See: Barrientos et al. 2005.
28. HIVOS 2020.
29. Clapp and Moseley 2020.
30. Klassen and Murphy 2020.
31. Roever 2014.
32. WIEGO 2020; WIEGO n.d.
33. Friedmann 1982; Friedmann 1995; Giménez and Shattuck 2011; IPES Food 2020.
34. UN HRC 2020.
35. ILO 2019a; ILO 2021f.
36. Braham and Ogando 2021.
37. ILO 2021g.
38. Alfery et al. 2020; Gentilini et al. 2021.
39. BBC News 2020.
40. Olivera Doll 2021.
41. Durán Valverde et al. 2020.

42. Itcovitz 2020.
43. Al Masri et al. 2021; Alfery and Bastigliali forthcoming.
44. Alfery and Bastigliali forthcoming.
45. Bergallo et al. 2021.
46. Alfery and Bastigliali forthcoming.
47. Guttal 2020.
48. UN General Assembly 2007.
49. La Via Campesina 2003.
50. Prato et al. 2018; World Forum for Food Sovereignty 2007.
51. UN General Assembly 2020.
52. Ibid.
53. UK Aid and WOW 2020.
54. Agarwal 2020.
55. FAO 2018a.
56. WIEGO 2020.
57. Ibid.; Bamu and Marchiori 2020; UN-Habitat 2016.
58. Mayimela and Shabalala 2020.
59. CFS 2019.
60. FAO 2018a.
61. Ibid.
62. UN Women West and Central Africa Regional Office 2020.
63. Otsuki 2013.
64. Miranda 2018.
65. Wittman and Blesh 2017.
66. ILO 2020c.
67. Keune 2021.
68. ILO 2019c.
69. WIEGO et al. 2021.
70. Author communication with Rachel Moussié and Sarah Reed (WIEGO).
71. ILO 2021c.
72. Business & Human Rights Resource Centre 2020; Human Rights Watch 2020; Lewis 2021.
73. ILO 2021h.
74. Chen et al. 2021; ILO 2018a.
75. For the cases of Burundi, Uganda and Zimbabwe, see: ILO 2019c. For the case of Togo, see: Alfery 2019; DTDA and ITUC-Africa 2015.
76. DTDA and ITUC-Africa 2015.
77. ILO 2019c.
78. WIEGO 2013.
79. ILO 2019c.
80. In 2020, 176 out of 193 Member States reported sex-disaggregated unemployment data for SDG Indicator 8.5.2. See: Encarnacion and Maskey 2021.
81. Azcona, Bhatt, Cole et al. 2020.
82. Encarnacion and Maskey 2021.
83. UN Women calculations based on UNSD 2021.
84. Ibid.

CHAPTER 3

Data graphic — Lessons from COVID-19:

The care economy in crisis mode

Row 1: Turquet and Koissy-Kpein 2020; Global Health 50/50 2021a; Folbre et al. 2021.

Row 2: Nepomnyashchiy et al. 2020; ILO 2018b.

Row 3: Azcona et al. 2020.

Row 4: UN Women 2020b; Kohlrausch and Zucco 2020.

Row 5: Global Health 50/50 2021b; UNDP and UN Women 2021.

Row 6: BRIDGE et al. 2020.

1. Mazzucato 2020.
2. Duffy 2005; Folbre 2001; Filgueira and Martínez Franzoni 2019; Razavi and Staab 2012b.

3. Turquet and Koissy-Kpein 2020.
 4. Lotta, Fernandez and Corrêa 2021; Lotta et al. 2020.
 5. Ibid.
 6. Folbre et al. 2021; Duffy 2021.
 7. Ibid.
 8. Budig and Misra 2010; Folbre 2012; Folbre 2018.
 9. Béland and Marier 2020; Daly 2020; Duijs et al. 2021.
 10. CIHI 2021.
 11. Béland and Marier 2020; Webster 2021.
 12. Duijs et al. 2021.
 13. BRIDGE et al. 2020.
 14. WBG and New Economics Foundation 2020.
 15. Cantillon et al. 2021.
 16. UN Women forthcoming. Pooled estimates and microdata are accessible on the Women Count Data Hub at: <https://data.unwomen.org/rga>.
 17. UN Women 2020b.
 18. UN Women 2021a.
 19. UN Women 2020c.
 20. UNDP and UN Women 2021.
 21. Nussbaum 2003.
 22. Folbre 2006; Martínez and Siddharth 2021.
 23. Folbre 2006.
 24. Government of Canada 2021; Snell 2021.
 25. Government of Canada 2021; Lum 2021.
 26. Stanford 2020.
 27. Government of Canada 2021, p. 66.
 28. Ortiz and Cummins 2021.
 29. De Henau and Himmelweit 2021.
 30. De Henau et al. 2019. Based on Scenario 3.
 31. BRIDGE et al. 2020.
 32. Wills et al. 2020.
 33. South African Government 2021.
 34. South Africa Department of Social Development 2021.
 35. Razavi and Staab 2012a.
 36. Nepomnyashchiy et al. 2020.
 37. Feroz et al. 2021; Nachega et al. 2021.
 38. Westgate et al. 2021.
 39. Ballard et al. 2021.
 40. Mayfield-Johnson et al. 2020.
 41. ILO 2018b.
 42. Nepomnyashchiy et al. 2020.
 43. Leon et al. 2015; Perry 2020.
 44. WHO 2018.
 45. Ballard et al. 2021.
 46. UN Women 2019a.
 47. Ballard et al. 2021.
 48. Damtew et al. 2020.
 49. Admassu et al. 2021.
 50. Apolitical 2020.
 51. Getachew 2020.
 52. Closser et al. 2019.
 53. Business Recorder 2020.
 54. Public Services International 2020.
 55. Zulliger 2021.
 56. Bacha 2020.
 57. Mahon 1997; Bergman 2004.
 58. Chzhen et al. 2019.
 59. Aguirre and Ferrari 2014; Colacce and Manzi 2017; UN Women 2018b, pp. 18–19.
 60. ILO and WIEGO 2018.
 61. Charlesworth and Heap 2020; McGregor and Davies 2019; Sánchez et al. 2020.
 62. McGregor and Graham Davies 2019.
 63. Charlesworth and Heap 2020.
 64. Apolitical 2018.
 65. Charlesworth and Heap 2020.
 66. Sánchez et al. 2020.
 67. Charlesworth and Heap 2020.
 68. New Zealand Human Rights Commission 2012; McGregor and Graham Davies 2019.
 69. McGregor and Graham Davies 2019.
 70. Douglas and Ravenswood 2019.
 71. Apolitical 2018; Long 2019.
 72. Encarnacion and Maskey 2021.
 73. These criteria have been laid out and defined in various General Comments issued by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in its interpretation of the provisions of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), including General Comments No. 13 (education), No. 14 (health), No. 15 (water) and No. 22 (sexual and reproductive health).
 74. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Institute for Statistics (UIS) database holds data for SDG indicator 4.2.2 on participation in organized learning in early childhood, but the indicator only covers the year before the official primary entry age, leaving out care for children aged 0–4 years in most cases. The OECD Family Database holds the most comprehensive dataset on childcare services for 0–5-year-old children, but it covers less than 45 countries (depending on the indicator). It includes data on coverage (enrolment and participation), public spending and quality (child-to-staff ratios). OECD also provides data disaggregated by household income and type (two-parent, single-parent) for childcare coverage and childcare costs shouldered by parents.
- ## CHAPTER 4
- Data graphic — Lessons from COVID-19: Major systemic crises are gendered, and the environment is next**
- Row 2:** World Bank 2018; WHO 2021b.
- Row 4:** WMO et al. 2020; IRP 2019.
- Row 5:** UNEP and Oxford Smith School of Enterprise and the Environment 2021; Oxfam 2020b.
- Row 6:** GEF IEO 2018.
1. Heintz et al. 2021.
 2. IPCC 2018.
 3. WMO et al. 2020.
 4. IPCC 2021. With the Paris Agreement, 195 governments agreed to the goal of “holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, recognizing that this would significantly reduce the risks and impacts of climate change”. See: UNFCCC 2016.
 5. UN News 2020; United Nations 2020.
 6. O’Callaghan-Gordo and Antó 2020.
 7. Vidal 2020.
 8. IPBES 2018.
 9. Icahn School of Public Medicine at Mount Sinai et al. 2017; The Lancet 2017.
 10. Erman et al. 2021.
 11. Alston et al. 2014; Subramanian 2020.
 12. Malik 2019; Weiss and Moskop 2020.
 13. Leach et al. 2016.
 14. Nelson 1997.
 15. Salleh 2020.
 16. Heintz et al. 2021.
 17. Weiss and Moskop 2020.
 18. Comes et al. 2016.
 19. Leach et al. 2016.
 20. Thazin Aung 2020.
 21. Oxfam 2020a.
 22. IRENA 2020.
 23. Kommenda 2021.
 24. IEA 2021.
 25. UNEP and Oxford Smith School of Enterprise and the Environment 2021.
 26. Ibid.
 27. Nelson and Power 2018.
 28. Power 2004.
 29. Mellor 2012.
 30. Salleh 2017.
 31. Rai et al. 2010.
 32. Just Transition Centre 2017.
 33. IPCC 2019.
 34. United Nations 1992.
 35. Oxfam 2020b.
 36. Ciplét 2017.
 37. Mazzucato 2015.
 38. Basseti and Landau 2021. See also a case study on fossil fuel reform in Egypt: ILO n.d.
 39. UN General Assembly 2020b.
 40. Carbon Pricing Leadership Coalition 2017.
 41. UN General Assembly 2020b.
 42. Dazé and Dekens 2018.
 43. Oxfam 2020b.
 44. Cooper Hall et al. 2019.
 45. Schalatek 2020.
 46. Ibid.
 47. Ibid.
 48. GEF 2017.
 49. Adaptation Fund Board 2016.
 50. Cooper Hall et al. 2019.
 51. Schalatek 2020.
 52. GEF IEO 2018.
 53. Schalatek 2020.
 54. Cooper Hall et al. 2019.
 55. IRENA 2018, p. 10; IEA et al. 2019.
 56. IEA et al. 2019.
 57. UN Women 2019b.
 58. UN General Assembly 2020.
 59. UN Women and UN DESA 2021.
 60. Bell et al. 2020; Howe 2019.
 61. Muliro Wapakala 2019; Bank Information Center Europe et al. 2017.
 62. The Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights 2021.
 63. Crippa et al. 2021.
 64. Akram-Lodhi 2021; Biovision Foundation for Ecological Development and IPES-Food 2020; Focus on the Global South and Alternative Law Forum 2020.
 65. See Akram-Lodhi 2021; Shattuck et al. 2015; Anderson and Tripathi 2019; Guttal 2020.
 66. FAO 2018b; UN HRC 2011.
 67. SOF 2018; Seibert et al. 2019; Working Group on Global Food Governance of the CSM for relations with the UN CFS 2020.
 68. FAO 2018b; UN HRC 2011.
 69. Razavi 2009; Bezner Kerr et al. 2019.
 70. Agarwal 2017.
 71. Rosset 2015.
 72. UN Women 2019b.

73. Standal and Winther 2016.
74. IRENA 2013.
75. Pearl-Martínez 2020.
76. Solar Sister 2018.
77. Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights 2020.
78. Osunmuyiwa and Ahlborg 2019.
79. La Via Campesina 2021; Friends of the ATC 2017.
80. González De Molina and Lopez-García 2021.
81. UN Women 2014a.
82. Nyambura 2021. Also see: Kuiper and Gemahlich 2017.
83. Gay-Antaki 2016; Thazin Aung 2020.
84. Global Witness 2020.
85. IM-Defensoras 2020.
86. Méndez 2018.
87. COPINH 2018.
88. Ibid.
89. Lakhani 2021.
90. Negotiating Committee of the Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean 2018; IISD 2021; OHCHR 2020a.
91. ICC 2016; Smith 2016; Durney 2018.
92. Setzer and Higham 2021.
93. ECCJ 2021.
94. UN Women 2018a.
95. Serrao et al. 2019.
96. Duerto Valero et al. Forthcoming.

CHAPTER 5

Data graphic — Lessons from COVID-19:

Progressive and feminist politics are in lockdown

Rows 1 & 2: International IDEA 2020.

Row 3: UNDP and UN Women 2021.

Row 4: Data based on ACLED 2020. See endnote 36 in Chapter 5 for definition of women's demonstrations.

Row 5: WPHF 2020; OECD 2021.

1. Green 2020; Anderson et al. 2021.
2. UN Women 2020d.
3. International IDEA 2020; Anderson et al. 2021; OHCHR 2020a; Pleyers 2020.
4. UN DESA 2021.
5. Justino 2015.
6. UN ECOSOC 2019.
7. International IDEA 2019; V-Dem Institute 2019.
8. International IDEA 2020.
9. Ibid.
10. Kolvani et al. 2020.
11. Ibid.
12. UN Women 2021a.
13. Leach et al. 2021; Devenish and Afshar n.d.; OHCHR 2020b.
14. OHCHR 2020a.
15. International IDEA 2020; Kolvani et al. 2020.
16. Piscopo 2020a.
17. As of March 2021, there were 26 COVID-19 task forces in 24 countries that had no women among their membership. UNDP et al. 2021.
18. UNDP and UN Women 2021.
19. Term borrowed from Julia Smith's gender analysis of the Ebola response: Smith 2019.
20. Herbert and Marquette 2021.
21. International Budget Partnership 2021.
22. UN Women 2021a.

23. Al-Ali 2020.
24. Piscopo 2021.
25. Herbert and Marquette 2021.
26. Denkovski et al. 2021.
27. UN Women 2021b.
28. Youngs 2020; Tabbush and Friedman 2021.
29. UN Women 2021a.
30. SEWA 2020; Tabbush and Friedman 2020.
31. Alfors et al. 2020.
32. UN Women 2021a.
33. Ibid.; Youngs 2020b.
34. Data based on ACLED 2020. See endnote 36 for definition of women's demonstrations.
35. ACLED 2021.
36. Women's demonstrations are defined as demonstration events that are (a) made up entirely of women, a women's group or have a majority of women participants or (b) organized around women's rights or issues. Events in which women demonstrated alongside men on issues not specifically related to women's rights are not included. As such, the data do not fully encapsulate women's involvement in social movements. The number of 'demonstration events' recorded by ACLED may differ from the number of 'demonstrations' recorded via other methodologies. The number of demonstrations is reliant largely on reporting and the terminology used in doing so. To avoid reporting biases, ACLED codes an event based on an engagement in a specific location (e.g., a town) on a specific day as one event.
37. AWID et al. 2020.
38. WPHF 2020; 2021.
39. UN Women 2021a.
40. Ibid.
41. OECD 2021.
42. Dolker 2021.
43. Ibid.
44. Sen 1999.
45. Lasagabaster et al. 2018.
46. UN ECOSOC 2020.
47. Piscopo 2020b.
48. Atchison and Down 2019.
49. UN Women and IPU 2021.
50. McBride and Mazur 2010; Ferree and Gamson 2003.
51. Johnson et al. 2019.
52. Weldon and Hassim 2020.
53. Htun and Weldon 2018; Htun 2003.
54. Data for Heads of State and Government, as of 1 September 2021, compiled by UN Women. Only elected Heads of State have been included.
55. Piscopo 2021; Rodriguez Gusta 2021; Smith-Johnson et al. 2021.
56. Blofield et al. 2020.
57. Htun and Weldon 2018; McBride and Mazur 2010.
58. UN Women 2018a.
59. Roggeband and Krizsan 2020.
60. Evans et al. 2015.
61. Ibid.
62. This box draws heavily from Piscopo 2021 and Rodriguez Gusta 2021.
63. Marx et al. 2009; IPU 2021.
64. Telesur 2019.
65. These also include the commitment of the new Minister of National Security, Sabina Frederic, to implement a gender equality perspective

through a Federal Dialogue on Security, Gender and Diversity and the appointment of Valeria Isla, a renowned sexual and reproductive rights specialist, as National Director of Sexual and Reproductive Health under the Ministry of Health, among others.

66. UNDP and UN Women 2021.
67. Blofield et al. 2021.
68. D'Alessandro et al. 2021.
69. Cafferata 2020.
70. Cora Fernández forthcoming; Phillips et al. 2020.
71. CIVICUS 2020.
72. Mukherjee 2021a; 2021b.
73. Mukherjee 2020.
74. Agarwal 2021.
75. Ibid.; Holmes and Hunt 2021; Shamsuddin 2021.
76. IPES Food 2020.
77. The Hindu 2020.
78. Agarwal 2021.
79. Kudumbashree 2020.
80. Agarwal 2020.
81. Brown 2015.
82. Biroli 2019; Roggeband and Krizsan 2020.
83. Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy 2021.
84. Biroli 2019.
85. Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy 2021.
86. UN Women analysis based on ACLED 2021.
87. Gago 2020.
88. Portos 2019; Chironi and Portos 2001.
89. Keck and Sikkink 1998.
90. Alvarez et al. 2003; Friedman 2003.
91. Friedman 2016.
92. This box is heavily based on Zaremberg and Rezende de Almeida 2021; forthcoming.
93. Luna 2019; CFEMEA 2020.

CONCLUSION

1. Nugent 2010.
2. UN DESA 2021.
3. ILO 2021e; Thompson et al. 2018.
4. UN Women 2016.
5. Mills 1997. Also see: Lim 2020. Carole Pateman (1988) also identified the 'slave contract' as integral to the social contract.
6. UN Women 2019a.
7. Hujo 2021.
8. Morrison 2014.
9. Mazzucato 2011.
10. Sen 1999.

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UN Women supports UN Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to ensure that the standards are effectively implemented and truly benefit women and girls worldwide. It works globally to make the vision of the Sustainable Development Goals a reality for women and girls and stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on four strategic priorities: Women lead, participate in and benefit equally from governance systems; Women have income security, decent work and economic autonomy; All women and girls live a life free from all forms of violence; Women and girls contribute to and have greater influence in building sustainable peace and resilience, and benefit equally from the prevention of natural disasters and conflicts and humanitarian action. UN Women also coordinates and promotes the UN system's work in advancing gender equality.



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