

**Gender and Development Network's submission to the Labour Party
Consultation on Achieving Gender Equality in Development**

July 2021

1. Introduction

The Gender and Development Network (GADN) works with over 150 member organisations as well as expert practitioners and academics to promote gender equality in international development policy and practice. Our extensive experience reinforces the understanding that gender equality can only be achieved through transformative policies that address the structural causes of inequality. Our experience also suggests that women in the Global South are at the forefront of innovate and transformative responses to today's challenges, while being front-line responders in times of crisis. However, they are rarely genuine interlocutors in international decision-making. Our recommendations as part of this consultation are therefore based on our work with feminists in the Global South.¹

We also recognise the importance of intersectionality in our understanding and analysis of how different and overlapping forms of discriminations, particularly race and class, define the inequalities women face. Crucially, gender equality and international development cannot be understood in isolation from calls to decolonise, recognising the devastation caused by the British Empire and the way this historical oppression continues to shape Britain's relationship with the Global South today, particularly through the aid sector.

In section two of this submission we suggest possible defining features of transformative policy, with proposals to address structural causes and the challenges that exist. GADN member organisations, alongside others, are likely to focus on areas such as violence against women and girls (VAWG), women's political participation and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). Therefore, we have chosen to focus our response in this section on the need for a feminist approach to macro-level economic policy to address the economic inequalities which underlie so many aspects of gender equality. Our proposal is that gender equality requires feminist economic policy that deliberately promotes just and equitable policy choices.²

Section three then addresses how the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) can facilitate the delivery of policies to address gender inequalities, while section four briefly touches on the identification of key stakeholders and the importance of women's rights organisations.

¹ FEMNET, Nawi Afri-fem Macroeconomics Collective and GADN. 2021. 'Feminist proposals for a just, equitable and sustainable post-Covid1-19 economic recovery'. <https://gadnetwork.org/gadn-resources/briefing-feminist-proposals-for-a-just-equitable-and-sustainable-post-covid-19-economic-recovery?rq=macroeconomics>

² For a full discussion of GADN's proposals see: GADN. 2019. 'Push no-one behind: how current economic policy exacerbated gender equality'. <https://gadnetwork.org/gadn-resources/push-no-one-behind-how-current-economic-policy-exacerbates-gender-equality>

2. What defining features should a transformative policy to tackle gender equality have, how can challenging the structural causes of gender inequality be implemented, and what challenges exist?

A transformative policy to tackle gender inequality must address macro-level economic policy making. Far too often, gender equality strategies either ignore economic justice altogether or focus only on micro level interventions, often addressing the needs of women entrepreneurs, without addressing structural causes. In this submission, we examine two areas of macro-level economic policy which will address structural causes: recognising and resourcing the care economy and using national development strategies to promote decent work for low-paid women. We then explore the way in which these can be achieved through the creation of fiscal and policy space for national governments.

2.1 Recognising the centrality of care in the functioning of economies and societies

Orthodox economic policy ignores the essential contribution that the provision of care makes in the functioning of economies and societies.³ That women's labour provides most of this care – both unpaid and low paid – in part explains why it is taken for granted and is invisible in macro-level economic policy making.⁴ Care work is devalued and dismissed as 'women's work' despite its centrality for the functioning and maintenance of capitalist economies.⁵ In turn, the invisibility of this sector significantly contributes to and shapes gender inequality. Even before the Covid-19 pandemic, women have done the lion's share of unpaid care – globally, up to three times that of men.⁶ This includes childcare responsibilities, domestic work, looking after the sick, elderly and vulnerable as well as work within the community. Women are also disproportionately represented among low paid workers in health and care provision.

The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the centrality of care in our global responses to the pandemic as well as the global systemic crisis of care provision. From healthcare to social care and women's disproportionate unpaid care burdens, care has been integral in addressing the health epidemic itself as well as the fallout from the lockdowns instituted by many governments. Universally, it has been women who have had to fill the gaps as care burdens shifted from the public to the domestic sphere. Covid economic recovery plans thus provide an excellent opportunity to reshape the way economic policy is framed in order to include the provision of care.

Recognising care work

To remedy this systemic form of gender inequality, our economic systems must acknowledge care as an economic issue. One important symbol of progress would be to include unpaid care work in national accounts. Conservative estimates suggest that it accounts for up to US\$10 trillion a year to the global economy – roughly 13 percent of Global Domestic Product

³ GADN, 2017. 'Sharing the load: Unpaid care work and women's economic empowerment'. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/536c4ee8e4b0b60bc6ca7c74/t/5899e0316b8f5bbffd74b7d4/1486479412285/GADN+Sharing+the+load+briefing+2017+final.pdf>

⁴ GADN. 2019. 'How social protection, public services and infrastructure impact women's rights'. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/536c4ee8e4b0b60bc6ca7c74/t/5c34c34cb8a04568549dc77d/1546961742579/How+social+protection%2C+public+services%2C+infrastructure+impact+women%27s+rights.pdf>

⁵ Fraser, N. 2016. 'Contradictions of capital and care'. *New Left Review*, Issue 100. <https://newleftreview.org/issues/ii100/articles/nancy-fraser-contradictions-of-capital-and-care>

⁶ Samman, E., Presler-Marshall, E., and Jones, N. 2016. 'Women's work: mothers, children and the global childcare crisis'. London: Overseas Development Institute. <https://www.odi.org/publications/10349-women-s-work-mothers-children-and-global-childcare-crisis>

(GDP).⁷ Recognising the true value of unpaid care would, for example, reveal the high hidden costs of austerity measures.

Investing in the care economy

Too much emphasis has been placed on the redistribution of unpaid care work from women to men, which is frequently not an option for low-income households and fails to address the structural causes of inequality. Instead, redistribution of responsibility for the provision of care should be from the private sphere of the family to the state. Much of the solution lies in the improvement of gender-responsive public health and care services that improve service provision for the most marginalised who cannot afford market substitutes due to endemic structural inequalities. Such investments can help reduce women's unpaid care burdens as well as help create decent work for women in the process.⁸ A number of organisations have called for an additional public investment of two per cent of GDP into social infrastructure including healthcare, education, childcare, social care.⁹

Providing universal social protection schemes that are accessible for women working in the informal sector are also part of the solution. At an international level, there have been calls to finance a Global Social Protection Fund to kickstart universal, publicly funded national protection schemes for low-income countries.¹⁰

Focus on public funding and the role of the state

Increasingly, there has been an ideologically driven push towards public-private partnerships (PPPs) by international institutions like the World Bank and the United Nations that have been promoting its use for the provision of services that are central for the fulfilment of women's human rights. These include healthcare, water and sanitation, as well as education. However there is mounting evidence that private investments – particularly PPPs – fail to meet the needs of marginalised women amid concerns about the quality and reach of the services provided by PPPs, the application of user fees, as well as the cost and risks taken on by governments with limited evidence of efficiency gains.¹¹

Moreover, as the duty bearer, it is the state's responsibility to ensure the fulfilment of its human rights obligations to its residents. This is not a responsibility that can be shifted to private corporations and PPPs whose duties and responsibilities are profit maximisation.

It is critical that such investments are made through public and not private funds if they are to have the desired impact on reducing long-standing gender and other inequalities. Investment in social infrastructure must be publicly funded, publicly managed and publicly accountable.

⁷ McKinsey Global Institute. 2015. 'The power of parity: how advancing women's equality can add \$12 trillion to global growth', Washington, DC: McKinsey, 2. https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/McKinsey/Featured%20Insights/Employment%20and%20Growth/How%20advancing%20womens%20equality%20can%20add%2012%20trillion%20to%20global%20growth/MGI%20Power%20of%20parity_Full%20report_September%202015.ashx

⁸ International Trade Union Confederation. 2016. 'Investing in the care economy: a pathway to growth'. Brussels: ITUC. <https://www.ituc-csi.org/investing-in-the-care-economy>

⁹ See note 8 as well as the Communiqués from the official G7 Engagement Groups: Women 7. 2021. W7 Communiqué. <https://gadnetwork.org/s/W7-Communique-29042021.pdf>; Civil Society 7. 2021. C7 Communiqué. https://www.bond.org.uk/sites/default/files/c7_communique_recommendations.pdf

¹⁰ ITUC. 2020. *A global social protection fund is possible*. Brussels: ITUC. <https://www.ituc-csi.org/global-social-protection-fund>

¹¹ GADN. 2020. 'The impact of PPPs on gender equality and women's rights'. London: GADN. <https://gadnetwork.org/gadn-resources/the-impact-of-ppps-on-gender-equality-and-womens-rights>

2.2 A role for the state in creating decent work

Women's concentration in low paid occupations and the informal sector is a substantial cause of their low income, exclusion from power and inequality. The pandemic has further intensified women's economic inequalities with an estimated 47 million¹² women pushed into poverty over the last year due - in part – due to their concentration in precarious work, with women's jobs nearly twice as vulnerable to loss as men's worldwide.¹³ Further still, on average, women earn less at work, face greater precarity in the workplace and have fewer labour rights.¹⁴ Yet, while women have been on the frontlines of global Covid-19 responses as carers and health workers, they only represent an average of 24 per cent of national-level decision-making bodies on Covid-19.¹⁵ But Covid economic recovery plans also provide a window of opportunity to reframe economic policy to promote gender equality.

Traditional interventions to promote women's economic empowerment frequently address the needs of individual women, supporting them to compete in the labour market, rather than addressing the structural causes. State intervention to create more decent work for women will be a more impactful part of transformative strategies.

National development strategies can be used to invest strategically in those sectors that will create most decent work for women, alongside public investment in social infrastructure and other sectors where women workers predominate.¹⁶

Importantly though, targets should not be set for female inclusion in labour force with focus instead on the need to promote decent work. This includes ratifying, funding and enforcing International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions on collective bargaining and freedom of association, as well as Convention 189 on domestic workers and Convention 190 on the elimination of violence and harassment in the world of work. Ensure these conventions are enforced throughout supply chains.

2.3 The challenge - creating fiscal and policy space for governments to promote gender equality and women's rights

If governments are to be able to make investments in social infrastructure, create decent work and implement other measures to promote gender equality (such as funding for VAWG prevention measures or the provision of reproductive services) they will need increased *fiscal space*, including the transfer of resources from the Global North to the Global South, and the

¹² UN Women. 2020. 'Covid-19 will widen poverty gaps between women and men'. Press release. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/8/press-release-covid-19-will-widen-poverty-gap-between-women-and-men>

¹³ Women made up 39 per cent of global employment but accounted for 54 per cent of overall job losses as of May 2020. See Madgavkar, A., O. White, M. Krishnan, D. Mahajan, and X. Azcue. 2020. 'COVID-19 and gender equality: Countering the regressive effects'; McKinsey, 15 July. <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/Covid-19-and-gender-equality-countering-the-regressive-effects>. See also ILO. 2020. The COVID-19 response: getting gender equality right for a better future for women at work. Geneva: ILO, pp. 1–2. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---gender/documents/publication/wcms_744685.pdf

¹⁴ For example, the gendered wage gap across the OECD was 12.8 per cent, with individual countries as high as 32.5 per cent. See OECD. 2020. 'Gender wage gap'. <https://data.oecd.org/earnwage/gender-wage-gap.htm>

¹⁵ UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association. 2020. 'COVID-19 recovery "unattainable" without women-led organizations and movements', 5 November. <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/Womens-movements-and-freedoms-of-assembly-and-association.aspx>

¹⁶ ILO. 2020. The COVID-19 response: getting gender equality right for a better future for women at work. Geneva: ILO, pp. 1–2. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---gender/documents/publication/wcms_744685.pdf

policy space in which to make public spending decisions as part of their social contract with their populations.

If Labour is to promote global gender equity goals, a major challenge will be reform of the international financial architecture and orthodox economic policies that have played an instrumental role in eroding women's human rights - particularly those from marginalised groups.

Thus far, both the immediate and medium-term global responses to the unprecedented challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic have failed to address the need for policy and fiscal space if national governments are to overturn increases in gender and other inequalities. Instead, International Financial Institutions (IFIs) have relied on orthodox macroeconomic economic policy choices that have left governments in the Global South with limited fiscal space to provide much-needed emergency relief or to promote gender equality through investment in care, decent work, sustainable energy, universal gender-responsive public services, social protection systems and other social infrastructure.

Fiscal space

Over the last year, governments in the Global South have been hit by multiple and severe economic shocks which have been caused or exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. This has drastically reduced national incomes although many governments had very limited fiscal space even before the pandemic. To increase this fiscal space, a redistribution of resources from the Global North to the Global South is urgently needed. This can take a number of different forms:

Debt cancellation

The economic challenges caused by the Covid-19 pandemic have raised the prospect of many countries defaulting on their debts, although almost half of low-income countries were already in full debt distress or at high-risk of it by the end of 2019.¹⁷ Furthermore, calls for action on an internationally agreed mechanism for resolving the sovereign debt crisis remain unheard by international decision-makers across the G7, G20 and IFIs. Therefore, the unconditional cancellation of all public external debt across private, bilateral and multilateral creditors would free up much-needed resources and allow governments in the Global South to reallocate these funds from debt reseriving to the fulfilment of human rights obligations.

Reforming global tax rules

The UK has a disproportionate influence on financial transparency¹⁸ and global tax policies, in large part due to its Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies — a network of secrecy jurisdictions which it supports and over which it has ultimate sovereignty. This means that it has a pivotal role to play in reforming global tax rules. Initially, by 2023, this requires full implementation of public registers of beneficial ownership of companies in the Overseas Territories, as required in the Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Act, 2018.¹⁹ These transparency reforms must also extend to the UK's Crown Dependencies.

Furthermore, in addition to acknowledging and redressing the wider impacts of its tax havens on women's rights, the UK must also Commission an independent and holistic analysis of how

¹⁷ Jubilee Debt Campaign. 2019. 'Crisis deepens as global South debt payments increase by 85%'.
<http://www.cadtm.org/Crisis-deepens-as-global-South-debt-payments-increase-by-85>

¹⁸ Tax Justice Network. 2020. 'Financial Secrecy Index 2020: Narrative report on the United Kingdom'.
<https://www.financialsecrecyindex.com/PDF/UnitedKingdom.pdf>

¹⁹ UK Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Act. 2018.
<https://services.parliament.uk/bills/2017-19/sanctionsandantimoneylaundering.html>

its network of Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies violate women's human rights and impair the development opportunities that more diverse economies can generate (sometimes referred to as 'spill-over analysis').

Additionally, while consensus was reached at this year's G7 about the introduction of a global minimum corporate tax rate²⁰ the establishment of an intergovernmental tax body – under the auspices of the United Nations – is still vital. Such a body would help create a coherent and level playing field where global tax rules are determined multilaterally instead of by a small handful of high-income countries.²¹

Reparations

European imperial ambitions have created many of the global challenges we are witnessing including the unequal global economy and unfair trade, tax and investment rules which ravage Southern economies. Reparations are one way for former colonisers to recognise and provide redress for these historic harms caused by centuries of oppression and exploitation. In addition to demands for monetary compensation for past and ongoing injustices, reparations movements seek to reshape our global structures to better meet the needs of people in the Global South.²² This unconditional form of resource transfer will substantially support the promotion of transformative gender equality strategies. GADN has also proposed an independent commission to interrogate the true impact of Britain's colonial legacy and its continuing manifestations – including through the aid sector – and proposed recommendations.²³

Policy space

IFI conditionality

The Covid-19 pandemic has seen IFIs take a central role in the provision of emergency loans to governments in the Global South whose economies were dramatically hit by falling revenues and lower exchange earnings and so did not have the resources to meet their fiscal needs. However, in this midst of the pandemic, IFIs such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), are imposing fiscal consolidation targets on their medium term financing, and even promises attached to emergency funding, akin to old style austerity conditionality.²⁴ Such conditions have traditionally increased women's unpaid care work and hindered investment in public services and social protection, while restricting governments ability to set labour regulations.²⁵ These areas, we argue, are central to a transformative gender equality strategy. A Labour government should use the UK's disproportionate influence on the Boards of the IFIs to end this creeping conditionality thereby allowing governments in the Global South the much-needed policy space to determine how best to allocate vital resources and promote gender equality.

²⁰ UK G7. 2021. 'G7 Finance Ministers agree historic global tax agreement'. Press Release, 5 June 2021.

<https://www.g7uk.org/g7-finance-ministers-agree-historic-global-tax-agreement/>

²¹ Ryding, T. 2020. 'An intergovernmental UN tax commission – why we need it and how we can get it'.

https://d3n8a8pro7vhm.cloudfront.net/eurodad/pages/529/attachments/original/1590691263/An_intergovernmental_UN_tax_commission_%E2%80%93_why_we_need_it_and_how_we_can_get_it.pdf?1590691263

²² Lukka, P. 2020. 'Can reparations help us re-envision international development?'

<https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/transformation/can-reparations-help-us-re-envision-international-development/>

²³ GADN. 2021. 'Decolonising Aid'. <https://gadnetwork.org/gadn-resources/decolonising-aid>

²⁴ <https://gadnetwork.org/gadn-resources/warning-may-contain-austerity>

²⁵ UN Women. 2015. Progress of the World's Women 2015-2016: Transforming Economies, Realising Rights.

<https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2015/4/progress-of-the-worlds-women-2015>

Trade and investment rules

Trade and investment regimes, particularly the Investor State Dispute Settlement mechanism, further constrain the ability of governments to introduce labour regulations and other human rights protections.²⁶ A gender transformative international economic strategy therefore needs to include opposition to such measures that put the rights of corporations above those of governments and their populations.

3. What should the FCDO, as an organisation, do to facilitate the delivery of policies to overcome gender inequality?

Despite professed commitment to maintain DFID's Strategic Vision for Gender Equality²⁷ the FCDO has been led by the Prime Minister's narrow focus on girls' education. Tackling gender inequality concerns requires a holistic, multi-sectoral approach covering all the different areas of gender discrimination, including issues such as VAWG, SRHR, women's economic empowerment (WEE) as well as women's political empowerment. The reputation that the UK government had developed as a champion of gender equality has rapidly eroded over the last two years, with widespread recognition that the perceived commitment is both hollow and hypocritical. Below are some key focus areas for the FCDO if it is to deliver policies for overcoming gender inequalities:

Political commitments

The Secretary of State, alongside the department's senior leadership, must publicly affirm and demonstrate their commitments to addressing and promoting gender equality, globally. This includes global leadership and strong advocacy on gender equality on the international stage as well as ensuring that it is prioritised across all aspects its foreign policy, economic diplomacy and foreign aid work.

It is also critical for the FCDO to demonstrate an unwavering commitment to 0.7% of GNI to ODA while simultaneously working to decolonise development aid, assistance and relations with the Global South as a way of correcting historic legacies. In addition, the FCDO must work across HMG to leverage the UK's influence within the multilateral system to help shape global macroeconomic policies that are rooted in a commitment towards global equality and internationalism.

Targeted aid spending on gender equality programming

The most recent aid cuts have hit vital work on gender equality that were proven to be effective.²⁸ Clearly gender equality requires resources to invest in specific programmes like VAWG prevention and response, SRHR, women political empowerment and girls' education. Partly this means aid funding for specific programmes aimed at achieving gender equality. The FCDO must commit to ensuring that the proportion of UK aid which has gender equality as a 'principal' objective under the OECD DAC gender marker increases to 10 percent by 2024, with 75 per cent of bilateral aid having gender equality as a 'significant' objective.

²⁶ UNCTAD. 2007. 'Investor-State Dispute Settlement and Impact on Investment Rule-Making'.

https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/itejia20073_en.pdf

²⁷ DFID. 2018. 'Strategic Vision for Gender Equality'. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dfid-strategic-vision-for-gender-equality-her-potential-our-future>

²⁸ Care International UK et al. 2021. 'UK Government decisions to cut UK Aid are disproportionately falling on women and girls'. <https://insights.careinternational.org.uk/publications/uk-government-decisions-to-cut-uk-aid-are-disproportionately-falling-on-women-and-girls>

The continued, long-term and flexible funding of women's right organisations and movements is also essential. These organisations have long proved to be effective in bringing about change and providing vital services. However, currently, only one per cent of international aid earmarked for gender equality reaches women's rights organisations globally. Of this, a tiny amount – only 0.5 per cent – reaches Southern women's and girls' rights organisations. This proportion needs to be substantially increased.²⁹

Gender expertise staffing

The merger between DFID and the FCO has risked the loss of invaluable gender expertise in the new department. The FCDO's focus on girls' education is likely to see specialised expertise in areas like SRHR and women's political leadership lost permanently. Lessons from similar mergers in other countries – namely Australia, Canada and New Zealand – demonstrate the potential long-term negative impacts of such decisions.³⁰ The importance of specialised gender expertise cannot be overstated in the development and delivery of policies to address gender inequality.

4. Which stakeholders should Labour be working with to develop policy recommendations to tackle gender inequality?

In brief, in developing policy recommendations it is essential to work with those who will be most affected by the reforms. Women's rights organisations and movements led by women based in the Global South are thus the most important stakeholders to be consulted.³¹ At the same, time any such consultation should be sure to remunerate these women for their time.

²⁹ OECD. 2016. 'Donor support to women's rights organisations: OECD findings'. Paris: OECD. <https://www.oecd.org/dac/gender-development/donor-support-to-southern-women-s-rights-organisations.htm>; AWID. 2021. 'Where is the money for feminist organising'. <https://www.awid.org/news-and-analysis/new-brief-where-money-feminist-organizing>

³⁰ GADN. 2020. 'Gender equality in the creation of the UK's new Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office'. <https://gadnetwork.org/gadn-resources/gender-equality-in-the-creation-of-the-uk-new-foreign-commonwealth-development-office>

³¹ UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association. 2020. 'COVID-19 recovery "unattainable" without women-led organizations and movements', 5 November. <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/Womens-movements-and-freedoms-of-assembly-and-association.aspx>