

Feminists Speak Truth to Power in the Beijing+ 25 review: Building a coalition on economic rights and tax justice

Our key proposals, 1 February 2020

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Summary

Without question, women form the mainstay of the so-called 'care economy'. In fact, Oxfam estimates that the annual turnover of the unpaid care sector is nearly \$11 trillion US dollars every year¹- three times the size of the world's tech industry. As workers, women are often faced with low incomes and minimal workers' rights. All over the world women and girls provide the bulk of unpaid care for family and others, barring them from fully taking on opportunities to earn a better income.

Mainstream economic policies often still ignore this ominous fact that is connected to other forms of gender discrimination. These not only affect women's economic position but also impact on women's and girls' bodies, as violence against them at work goes unpunished, women are trafficked, and they face many other forms of abuse or discrimination.

As a result, gendered inequalities in our economies are reducing only slowly, and women continue to face unacceptable levels of violence, including in the workspace.

We call for urgent action in three areas: (i) addressing **fundamental barriers built into the current economic structures** and the neo-liberal model; (ii) fixing the failures of **our democratic governance that gives in to the privilege of**



Photo 1: taken by Claudio Schwarz, @purzlbaum, at: unsplash.com

¹ Oxfam: 2020. Time to Care: Unpaid and underpaid care work and the global inequality crisis, Oxfam: Oxford, available at: <https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/620928/bp-time-to-care-inequality-200120-en.pdf>.

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transnational companies and; (iii) dealing with an outdated and broken **international tax system and financial architecture** which facilitates illicit financial flows and fails to provide enough revenues for sustainable development.

Our demands for the rights of women and girls should be met by sustained political will, and national, regional and international policy and legislative coherence and finance; underpinned by democratic control and accountability.

Structural Economic barriers

The gender gaps in labour – such as the labour force participation gap, the gender pay gap, the glass ceiling, the occupational segregation that keeps women in low paying jobs, the unequal access to economic resources – should be addressed. But gender equality can only be achieved globally if we address global economic inequalities, including the worldwide unequitable distribution of care work. Current macro-economic policies, including fiscal and trade policies, fail to comply with the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) and therefore-contribute to women’s rights abuses as well as an overall increase in gendered *inequalities*.

We call for a complete overhaul of the current economic system, moving away from extractive and profit-driven capitalism; from broken indicators – such as the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) which doesn’t not reflect unpaid care work and the destruction of our environment – away from stiff tax competition that drives a global race to the bottom; and from the notion of infinite growth beyond our limited natural resources.

The new economy we envision is one that puts people’s well-being and that of the planet at the core, which is underpinned by human rights commitments that enables people to thrive. This would ensure we drastically restructure care work among other oppressive systems that keep women and girls behind. Governments (including companies for some measures) should:

- **Provide and finance social security, healthcare and education in order to free up time for women and that create decent universal social protection standards.** This includes providing universal high-quality, flexible and affordable public childcare and parental and carers’ leave. It is about promoting investment in social infrastructure opposed to recent austerity measures in many countries that have had multiple disproportionate impacts on women, increasing their vulnerability to poverty especially that of single female pensioners and single mothers.
- Provide **more and better data**, not only disaggregated by sex, but also by ethnicity, age, migration status, family/marital/maternity status, disability, etc., in order to better understand and address intersectional discriminations and gendered inequalities. This should pay attention to girls and women not included in official statistics, for example because their births are not registered. Data should be publicly owned and accessible. There is no abstract woman: each woman is unique and faces a multitude of different discriminations during her life span.
- **We need to ensure decent work for all** and prioritize ratification and effective implementation of four key ILO Conventions that address Gender Equality², Convention 189

²The four key ILO gender equality Conventions are the Equal Remuneration Convention ([No. 100](#)), Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention ([No. 111](#)), Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention ([No. 156](#)) and Maternity Protection Convention ([No. 183](#)). No. 156 and 183 are limitedly ratified.

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on domestic workers, Convention 190 on Violence and Harassment in the World of Work, and implementation of the measures contained in Recommendation 204 on formalizing the informal economy. This includes taking more measures to implement CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women) in relation to work. Women work more than men (in terms of unpaid, informal and formal labour) and they need foremost better working conditions; work for women should not be feminized, which in the worst cases becomes like slave labour.



Photo 2: a painting on wall in Spain taken by Red Dot, www.design-factory.co.uk, at: unsplash.com

Democratic governance vis-à-vis companies

Many states promote a form of economic development that is favourable to large TransNational Corporations (TNC) through their trading systems, taxing schemes and through setting rules that allow companies to provide public goods and services (often through privatization or public procurement schemes). In this process, companies are gaining rights that are more protected than the rights of individuals, and their power grows at the expense of democratic governance at national and transnational level.

On the issue of equal pay, a recent example of good practice is the obligatory equal pay certification for employers in Iceland (2018).

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Large companies have been able to significantly influence the policies of governments through lobbying and advocacy. In many countries and institutions, companies have privileged access to politicians, by using their monetary capacity and receiving exclusive access that often happens behind closed doors, invisible to public scrutiny.

Citizens should be able to hold their government accountable to the rights of people and the planet. Policy making should be transparent and inclusive to different groups in societies, with additional efforts to involve marginalized groups. Similarly, we call for a United Nations that can effectively protect our environment and human rights through agreed multilateral, binding and enforceable mechanisms. This requires that current economic policies reduce the privileged rights and participation of companies to a level in which they are at equal or of less importance than the protection of human rights and our planet. Governments should:

- **Improve the criteria and monitoring mechanism for corporations and corporate foundations to participate in UN programmes and policies, especially in UN Women.** Companies should be able to demonstrate their commitment to core ILO decent work conventions, CEDAW, and the environment and climate change commitments throughout their production chain. Their involvement should be monitored in a transparent manner through an independent body of experts that includes women.
- **Promote the negotiation, ratification and effective implementation of the UN Binding Treaty on Business and Human Rights and ensure it covers gender specific issues.** While awaiting a binding treaty, ensure a gender-responsive implementation of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights³ and, therefore, the implementation of the Gender Guidance to the UNGPs.
- **Trade policies should not prioritize business rights and corporate interests over the rights of people, but instead should be bound to protecting nature, human rights and women's rights.** Instead of the privileged and secret access of companies to negotiations of trade agreements, the perspectives of all stakeholders in societies should be transparently included and heard in such negotiations.



Photo 3: taken by Lawrence Makoona, at: unsplash.com

- **The collection and use of personal data should be regulated, transparent and under democratic control.** This means that public ownership of data should become part of law; individuals should get more control over how their data is used and it should not be possible for big companies to collect and own data without democratic accountability.

³ As outlined in the report “Gender dimensions of the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights” by the Working Group on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises.

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Tax Justice

Tax Justice policies and practices are fundamental to achieving gender equality for women and girls. Tax policies allow governments to mobilize revenues that can realize the full human rights of women and girls. Progressive taxation is a necessary tool to raise the revenue that allows people to live a safe, healthy and dignified life free from injustice and discrimination. Taxes are also a way of redistributing economic wealth, of repricing social 'bads' through, for instance, carbon taxes on the heaviest polluters. Tax policy has a pivotal role in building the social contract and supporting government accountability.

Currently the economic redistribution through taxes leads to an uneven tax burden in which companies and their shareholders find it easy to make a profit, while poorer citizens, especially women in lower income countries, pay most of the burden. As countries face competition in offering the most desirable investment for the climate to companies, pressures are put on limiting corporate tax, which in turn leads to upward pressures on other tax, especially on increasing VAT (Value Added Taxes) on goods like food and other necessities. In addition, current policy and practices allow for all kinds of legal and illicit movements of money across countries hidden from taxes.

We call for redistributive and regenerative national tax policies and a transparent international financial architecture that curtails illicit financial flows and supports gender equality through gender equal tax laws and budgetary practices.

Governments should:

- **Raise all tax revenues with truly 'progressive' rates** - meaning each pays percentage wise a more socially just part of their income to tax, instead of the poor more and the rich pay less.
- **Ensure that taxes and regulatory policies collect the full costs from fossil fuel producers and consumers, eliminating and remediating all climate, ecological, and environmental damage** and their disproportionate burden on women and girls.
- **Establish systematic coordination mechanisms to eliminate Illicit Financial Flows, human trafficking and gender-based discrimination** including comprehensive introduction of the globally accepted 'transparency' policy platform of Automatic Exchange of Information, public registries of ultimate Beneficial Owners, and public registries of MNCs Country by Country Reporting. These provide important counter measures to global enablers/facilitators of tax abuse IFFs with a special focus on banks, secrecy jurisdictions, shell companies, legal advisors/law firms and corrupt government authorities and push for a more comprehensive definition of illicit financial flows that puts human rights front and centre.
- **Establish an adequately resourced UN intergovernmental tax body** with membership of all nations and equal voting rights, providing it with gender equality expertise and mandating it to review national, regional and global tax policy in line with women's equality and human rights obligations.