

**GENDER &
DEVELOPMENT
NETWORK**

**Lessons for a feminist Covid-19
economic recovery:
multi-country perspectives**



Summary

Times of crisis and renewal present opportunities for brave and innovative policy choices. Yet, despite calls to “build back better”, powerful actors around the world are showing little real vision. For a Covid-19 recovery that is equitable and just, what is needed is transformative change that rejects the old “normal” in favour of an economy centred on wellbeing and care.

The fact that the pandemic has exposed, and drastically exacerbated, inequalities is now widely acknowledged. Feminists from all parts of the world have documented how women experiencing intersecting forms of discrimination have borne its worst impacts, but now decisions are being made with little regard for the realities that face those most affected, and with no attempt to include them in the policymaking process. It is time for feminist alternatives to take centre stage.


What’s different about this report?

With this context in mind, this report seeks to do two things. First, it centres women’s lived realities and experiences. Women’s rights organisations and feminist consultants located in four countries analyse the impacts of both the pandemic and government responses, with summaries of these case studies provided at the end of the report. They were asked to base this work on the perspectives of those most heavily affected in their communities. Even in this process, it became apparent how overstretched and underfunded women’s rights organisations and feminist activists already are just in helping their communities to survive, and we were mindful of their time in asking them to support the research.

Second, the report moves from critique to proposition, developing concrete lessons to inform decision-making beyond the countries studied. As recovery measures are designed and rolled out, feminists are demonstrating that alternatives are not just necessary – they are viable. Alongside our own findings, the report collates and amplifies some of the many alternative approaches to recovery planning put forward by feminists and women’s rights organisations around the world.

The findings

This report provides a snapshot of government responses and their impact on women in four countries: Argentina, India, the Philippines and Uganda. The choice of countries was made partly to represent different regions, national income levels and population sizes, but it also reflects the availability of consultants with capacity to undertake the work at a time when the pressure on women’s rights organisations is immense. The research includes interviews providing perspectives from women working in the



informal sector, domestic workers, community care coordinators, trade union leaders and women's rights organisers and activists from across the four countries.

The case studies reveal how women in the Indian informal sector were frequently excluded from social protection measures, and that the Ugandan government's rescue packages supported large companies rather than women-led small businesses. Recovery measures in the Philippines failed to understand or confront the barriers most women face, including the many overseas Filipina workers who send money back to their families. Even in Argentina, where the government was ostensibly pursuing progressive policies, care and domestic workers saw unemployment rise and their workloads soar.

Common experiences and lessons also emerged: all the case studies revealed problems including inadequate policy responses with uneven implementation, failure to address the care economy or the needs of informal workers, a reliance on women's rights organisations to supplement gaps in public services, and reluctance to include these organisations and other feminists in policymaking. Global macroeconomic policies also play a part in constraining governments' policy choices and fiscal space. Thus, structural inequalities and unequal power relations continue to shape and limit the potential impact that any government policy response can have, regardless of intent – thereby upholding inequalities in the absence of more transformative action.

Lessons for the future

The lessons from our research (see the diagram below) together with the growing body of feminist alternative proposals for Covid-19 recovery suggest a way forward. Our overarching message is that a **just and equitable Covid-19 economic recovery must centre care, wellbeing and sustainability with transformative policies that promote equity**. This requires local, national and international decision-makers to take the following actions:

- **Protect and promote democratic, participatory decision-making** ensuring the participation of feminists and women's rights organisations so the expertise of those most impacted is at the forefront of responses. This in turn provides the information and framework to:
- **Apply intersectional feminist analyses in policymaking** that centre women's lived realities and address the long-standing intersecting discriminations they face. This will highlight the need to:
- **Adopt alternative feminist economic proposals** that include progressive taxation to fund public services and social protection, recognition and reduction of unpaid care burdens and decent work with living wages and enforced labour protections.

