

# Making the case for macroeconomics in gender equality work

Around the world, the way women live and work is shaped by economic policies that dictate the kinds of employment, resources, benefits and decision-making power available to them. That said, we have yet to achieve an economic system that serves women's needs, recognises their contributions and facilitates their empowerment in every aspect of life.

## 1. Introduction

Women's economic empowerment (WEE) is experiencing a surge in attention among donors. Here, we contend that true empowerment begins with tackling the structural barriers that women face, and that this means turning our attention to macroeconomics and its impact on gender equality and women's rights. While WEE is the entry point for many working on gender equality and development, we want to go further and argue that **a different macroeconomic lens can build an enabling environment for all aspects of gender justice, not just economic equality**. At the heart of this briefing is the fact that, whatever the focus of your work on gender equality, economics underpins what you do and shapes your prospects for change. What is at stake is the realisation of *all* rights for women and girls – civil, social and political, as well as economic.

This briefing's purpose is first to outline the mutual dependency of gender and economics, before providing advocates from all areas of gender equality work with the conceptual background and tools to understand macroeconomics itself, feminist critiques of the current model and its impact, and the need to change the conversation about gender and economics. Macroeconomic policy and practice are well within the remit of research, advocacy and programming for gender equality – what remains is to increase the confidence of gender equality advocates everywhere to operate within this sphere.

## 2. Macroeconomic policy affects every aspect of gender equality

Macroeconomic policy (see Box 1) is the broad framework within which governments make spending and taxation decisions, but it has not always received much attention from gender equality advocates despite its central role in shaping the economic environment for achieving women's rights. Macroeconomic policy is the domain of

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things like rates of taxation, currency exchange rates, government borrowing and interest rates. As such, it also reflects social priorities through government spending, outlines the terms of inclusion in the labour market, and sets the upper limit for social spending in a given economy. All gender equality work stands to benefit from a stronger understanding of macroeconomic policy and practice: how it reproduces inequality, how it can be challenged and how it can be directed to promote gender justice.

## Which issues are economic issues?

For those working on WEE, the links to macroeconomic policy may already be apparent, but the same is true for violence against women and girls, social and political participation, sexual and reproductive health and rights, women's and girls' education and every other facet of gender equality work. Factors such as income levels, employment stability and labour rights can work to exclude women from public decision-making and influencing – because they lack the spare time and resources to participate, or even because they lack the social standing to be heard and respected in public forums.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, when women's work is underpaid, they remain financially dependent on spouses and families, and this lack of economic autonomy and access reinforces cycles of gender-based violence, compounds a lack of reproductive health services and choice, and bolsters stereotypes and repressive social norms.<sup>2</sup> The positioning of men as dominant both at home and at work is intimately linked to rates of violence against women.<sup>3</sup> The evidence also shows that, over the longer term, factors such as women's workplace participation and economic rights correlate to declining levels of intimate-partner violence.<sup>4</sup>

All of this means that women's presence, in the workplace and the broader public sphere, is known to change broadly-held perceptions of women's rightful place in the world. While the exact impact will depend on a woman's income, race, age, disability and so forth, it's clear that economic policies have a gendered impact across the board. In short, every facet of gender equality has an economic dimension – and each one also stands to gain from an enabling macroeconomic environment. The way our economies are designed and managed gets at the heart of structural inequality.

## Moving beyond individual opportunity

The gendered effects of economic policy may be most apparent in the field of WEE, but the conversation about **WEE often prioritises individual opportunities** – for things like microfinance, job training and work experience that help integrate women and girls into the economy – over other concerns. The problem with focusing on opportunities for individual women, one at a time, is that **it obscures the structures that create gendered economic inequality in the first place**, leaving untouched the economic power imbalances, social norms and interconnections that entrench gender-based discrimination across the economic, social and political worlds.<sup>5</sup>

For example, while there have been significant advances in girls' education, barriers persist that prevent women from accessing **decent work** – work that allows for dignity, equality, security and stability in employment; fair income, hours and social protection

at work; and rights to organise, negotiate the terms of employment, dialogue with employers and demand safe and secure work.<sup>6</sup> For some women the problem is economic exclusion that leaves them with no access to paid employment, but even those who are employed tend to face unfair terms of inclusion in the labour market. Every day, women everywhere confront workplace sexism including wage gaps, occupational segregation, workplace violence and restrictive norms about appropriate social roles for women.<sup>7</sup> When so many women are limited to informal, unskilled and low-paid forms of employment that do not give them stability or social security, real change will require a more systemic approach.<sup>8</sup>

True gender equality means going beyond individual opportunity to pursue aims like the fair distribution of resources, safe and fair conditions of work for all, and a strong hand for women in economic decision-making at every level – a face that we will discuss below.<sup>9</sup>

## Box 1: Micro versus macro – what's the difference?

**Microeconomics** examines individual markets within a broader economy, covering things like consumer behaviour, supply of and demand for goods, and labour in specific sectors. **Macroeconomics** looks at entire economies at the national, regional, and international levels, typically without any mention of gender, including aggregate issues such as:

- national output (GDP) and economic growth
- inflation, interest rates and currency exchange rates
- government borrowing, taxation and budgetary spending
- employment

The line between micro and macroeconomics is a blurry one, with many links and interdependencies between them, especially in areas like employment that have both micro and macro dimensions.

## Breaking down the social/economic divide

Conventional doctrine holds that macroeconomics is “**politics-free**”, **technocratic and gender-neutral** – and thus separate from the social sphere.<sup>10</sup> We know, though, that the barrier between the economic and social spheres is an artificial one. This division perpetuates the fallacy that economic policies are gender-neutral, denying their impact on gender inequality and their implication in problems like gendered wage gaps, women’s disproportionate burden of care work and the feminisation of poverty. It also masks how gender inequality actually underpins conventional economic policies with their reliance on women’s unpaid care work and the exploitation of their cheap labour. Macroeconomic policies have *social content* – they determine the resources available to fund social goals and set priorities for which programmes and projects will receive support.<sup>11</sup> For that reason, understanding and committing to progressive macroeconomic policy can strengthen all facets of gender equality work, whether that

means realising rights to education and health, eradicating violence, increasing women's political participation or any other gender equality goal.

At the heart of the problem lies the prevailing assumption that economic growth is the ultimate goal of economic and social activity, with the social subservient to the economic. A gender-responsive economic framework, argues Diane Perrons, is one that sees the “appropriate role of the economy as working for society, rather than vice versa” – and one that makes the economy, from the micro level to the macro, work for women.<sup>12</sup> **Macroeconomic policies can and should be harnessed in support of social objectives** like human rights, social justice, and gender equality; enabling macroeconomic policies are a basic requirement for progress in those same areas.<sup>13</sup> In fact, macroeconomic policy is already being put to use in pursuit of social goals in a number of areas, like taxes that discourage tobacco use and grants supporting sustainable energy production. There is no reason it cannot equally serve gender equality as a social good.

## 3. Macroeconomics for gender equality advocates: the basics

Macroeconomic policy can be a force for progressive or regressive aims depending on how it is used: what goals are prioritised, what consultation processes are put in place and what outcomes are measured, assessed and redressed. A few basic tools make up what feminist economist Stephanie Seguino calls the “**macroeconomist's tool kit**”, and each has profound gendered impacts.<sup>14</sup> These are the tools that determine rates of taxation, fund resources for social services, set the quantity and quality of employment and govern unpaid care work – with specific ramifications for women, whatever their income. They are put to use not only by national governments but also regional and international institutions like the European Union, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank (see Box 3). Used wisely, those same tools could equally be called into action to pursue gender equality.

Fundamentally, governments use macroeconomic policy to decide the distribution of resources in an economy using the twin mechanisms of **taxation** and **budgetary spending**. The amount of money that a government has available to spend depends primarily on how much revenue it raises through taxation – this is the domain of **fiscal policy** (see Box 2).<sup>15</sup> There are two central issues at play here: how much money is raised and, secondly, how it is raised. In all countries more could be done to increase the amount of revenue that is raised, or to expand what economists call our *fiscal space*; for example governments can choose to increase rates of taxation or to borrow more. Fiscal space is a function of political decisions, made by governments and based on the kind of economy they envision and the value attached to women, the work that women do and social justice goals like gender equality.

The way that tax revenues are raised is also important. Value-added (VAT) or goods and services taxes (GST) are **indirect forms of taxation**, which weigh heavily on

lower-income groups who spend most of their money on consumption items like food and clothing. Taxes like VAT are simple for governments to administer, but tend to impact negatively on lower-income individuals and families who spend a greater proportion of their income on VAT-taxed consumption items like clothing, items for children and even some foods. Given that women are disproportionately represented in those very lower income brackets and tend to be responsible for their family budgets, indirect taxes can be called regressive in terms of gender.<sup>16</sup> **Direct forms of tax** like income and property taxes can also carry gender biases, but they have the potential to be more progressive depending on how they are calculated and the legal setting in each country.<sup>17</sup> Just and progressive tax policies are thus a key rallying point for gender-sensitive macroeconomic policy.

## Box 2: Fiscal and monetary policy

**Fiscal policy** refers to government revenue and expenditure choices, as established in national budgets. Its main components are taxation and budgetary spending, but it also includes government borrowing, debt management and deficit spending. Taxes and borrowing allow governments to raise money to finance social programmes, infrastructure and other priorities. On a related note, **fiscal space** means the “room in a government’s budget that allows it to provide resources for a desired purpose without jeopardizing the sustainability of its financial position or the stability of the economy.”<sup>18</sup>

**Monetary policy** is the domain of central banks, using tools like interest rates and money supply to stimulate growth, manage inflation and control employment. The orthodox approach prioritises keeping inflation low, often by raising interest rates. This can slow the economy and cause job losses.<sup>19</sup>

This briefing focuses on fiscal policy, but a good primer on monetary policy can be found in UN Women’s recent briefing, **Why macroeconomic policy matters for gender equality**.

The flipside of taxation is **budgetary spending**, or the allocation of funding to everything from physical infrastructure to health and education programmes through national budgets. The gendered implications of this kind of resource distribution are vast, even if budgets are not always seen as a gender issue. Infrastructure projects like piped water and electricity in homes reduce the time and effort that women spend on domestic responsibilities like water collection, laundry, cooking and cleaning.<sup>20</sup> Safe and reliable public transport, footpaths, marketplaces and public facilities support women’s mobility to seek employment and participate in social and political life.<sup>21</sup> Public services and social protection measures like health care, education, childcare, income support and pensions help to ensure women’s quality of life, no matter their class, income, career or marital status.<sup>22</sup>

Services that target and benefit women – such as those aimed at reducing violence against women and girls, providing sexual and reproductive health services, or

supporting women's empowerment through care services and education – require sufficient funding from governments.<sup>23</sup> Public expenditure can also directly create employment for women, who disproportionately work in the public sector. With that in mind, a comprehensive and sustainable vision of gender equality relies on building consultative and **gender-responsive budget processes** like the ones undertaken in Nepal, Morocco, and the Philippines in the last few years (see Box 6).<sup>24</sup>

## 4. A feminist critique of the current model

Macroeconomic policy as we know it usually aims to keep inflation low and gross domestic product (GDP) growth high at a system-wide level, but this is **just one of many visions of how our economy could work**.<sup>25</sup> Far from merely technical, macroeconomic policy choices are actually highly political, with governments and international institutions deciding how resources are generated and distributed, often without reference to rights or equality. The current model, favoured by the vast majority of national governments and institutions like the World Bank and the IMF, advocates minimal government regulation of markets, high levels of economic growth and low inflation rates, amongst other things. This orthodox view, which is often known as *neoliberalism*, also takes a very conservative position on measuring and analysing economic activity, with key ramifications for women. Below we outline some of the major criticisms of this model from an alternative, feminist perspective.

### Box 3: World Bank and International Monetary Fund

These two institutions were founded in 1944 and were intended to help prevent crises like the Great Depression and the Second World War from recurring. The **World Bank** provides loans to developing countries to support areas like education, health, infrastructure, financial and private sector development, agriculture and natural resource management. The **International Monetary Fund** (IMF), on the other hand, works to maintain stability in the international financial and monetary systems. When countries face economic crises, the IMF can offer short-term assistance.

In both cases, the loans frequently come with conditions to bring recipient countries' social programmes, taxation and budgets into line with World Bank and IMF priorities. Since the 1980s, both institutions have been heavily criticised for (amongst other things) requiring countries to privatise public services, greatly reduce the provision of social programmes and benefits, and alter their tax models to benefit large companies and wealthy individuals. These conditionalities mean that IMF and World Bank involvement risks reducing the authority of states over their own economies and how their own money is generated and spent, with an immediate and drastic impact on social justice and wellbeing amongst their populations.<sup>26</sup>

## The reproductive economy

The unpaid care work that women do every day is key to understanding how women's time and labour is used to paper over the cracks of a faulty macroeconomic system. It is a crucial lynchpin in our economies, so much so that feminist economists call it the *reproductive economy* – a crucial mechanism on which our entire economic system depends. By keeping the current workforce fed and clothed while raising and educating future workers, unpaid care work quite literally enables our economies to reproduce themselves from one generation to the next. More fundamentally, unpaid care work fulfils social needs in terms of providing for the health and wellbeing of families and individuals – and thus it performs a role that otherwise falls to public services. Nonetheless, unpaid care is largely unrecognised and undervalued, both socially and economically. Women's position in the economic system is so taken for granted that we don't even measure the reproductive economy.

This undervaluation of care work is problematic on its own, but it also has a knock-on effect where paid care work like nursing and childcare, done predominately by women, is underpaid and public investment in care services and social infrastructure is woefully inadequate. Diane Perrons points to **the social norm of care as women's work as especially harmful** – and, in turn, responsible for the devaluation of paid care work. She writes, “low wages are rooted in gendered social norms which admire and treasure women's ‘natural’ talents, rather than recognising and rewarding their skills and material competencies.”<sup>27</sup>

In many ways, unpaid care work performed largely by women around the world is a vital lens for formulating a gender-responsive macroeconomic policy: recognising and appreciating its value, certainly, but also accounting for it in economic policies and measurements, and finding ways to reduce and redistribute responsibility for its provision – from women to men, but more importantly from families to the state.

## Whose work counts?

Orthodox economics does not **recognise all work as work**. Women do an enormous amount of work that is not paid and therefore not counted by standard economic measures. An estimate from a 2015 McKinsey report conservatively pegged unpaid work at \$10 trillion per year – roughly 13 per cent of global GDP – and women do two and a half times as much of it as men, thus reducing their capacity to undertake paid employment, engage in politics and enjoy leisure time.<sup>28</sup> Measured as a sector of the national economy, unpaid care in India is estimated to contribute as much as 39 per cent of GDP.<sup>29</sup> In Mexico, it makes up 21 per cent of GDP – more than manufacturing, commerce, real estate, mining, construction, or transport and storage.<sup>30</sup> UN Women calls this unpaid care a “time burden tax” levied against women.<sup>31</sup> Even so, economists continue by and large to leave unpaid care work out of their calculations.

The workload is even heavier for households in poverty, where women cannot afford to hire help or buy washing machines, refrigerators, cars or other time- and labour-saving items.<sup>32</sup> The former UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights,

Magdalena Sepúlveda Carmona, reported in 2013 that, “heavy and unequal care responsibilities are a major barrier to gender equality and to women’s equal enjoyment of human rights.”<sup>33</sup> Some countries like China and Singapore even legally oblige families to provide unpaid care for elderly family members, a burden that almost always falls to women in each household, instead of recognising it as a collective responsibility and funding care services.<sup>34</sup>

Closely related is a second problem: the orthodox model only sees **certain kinds of investment as investment**. Building physical infrastructure (bridges and hospitals) is accepted as investment and, to that end, is generally viewed as a legitimate reason to spend and borrow funds. On the other hand, social spending (staffing hospitals and providing childcare) is seen as consumption and so a drain on the economy. This is particularly problematic in times of recession, when orthodox economists encourage reducing social spending as part of austerity measures – even though education, health, childcare and empowerment initiatives are what build human capital and economic strength for the future.<sup>35</sup>

Methods like time-use surveys that can measure unpaid care work as a sector of national and international economies are extremely valuable tools for economists and gender experts alike. The unpaid work that many women do for their families’ businesses is already included in many national accounts. The International Conference of Labour Statisticians now **categorizes unpaid care as work** – this is a key first step, but a lot of ground remains to be covered in redressing the balance for women.<sup>36</sup>

## Box 4: Feminist economics

Feminist economics is a branch of the study of economics that is critical of patriarchal biases in the history, practice and methodology of economics. As far back as the 1960s, feminist economists have advocated a move from focusing on the market economy alone to one centred on human wellbeing, focusing on issues such as occupational segregation, the care economy, intra-household power structures and gender-responsive data collection.

Led by scholars like Marilyn Waring and Diane Elson, feminist economists broke new ground by looking at male bias in macroeconomics. This allowed them to show how economic structures are gendered, to question the division between productive and reproductive labour, and to challenge the unequal ways that women and men are treated in terms of employment options, pay, benefits, social services and beyond.<sup>37</sup>

## Prioritising funds for equality and women’s rights

By and large, the neoliberal economic model favours low taxes for large corporations and minimal tariffs for international trade. Oxfam reports that, as a result, a troubling global shift has taken place over the last 30 years that sees individuals and families



paying a greater share of taxes while transnational corporations and the richest people pay less and less, receiving tax breaks and hiding assets in tax havens.<sup>38</sup> Taxes are any country's single biggest and most reliable source of funding for social programmes, but this trend is diminishing the money available – and exacerbating the disproportionate burden on the poorest taxpayers, and especially marginalised women.<sup>39</sup> **Without tax justice, initiatives for gender equality can only continue to struggle.**

Likewise, changes to trade tariffs and regulation have an impact on the funding available to governments for social programmes. The neoliberal push to liberalise trade and open national economies to unrestricted imports means that governments cut trade tariffs and thus further reduce public revenue. Looking to attract large corporations and generate employment, many governments have also suspended some labour and trade laws and employee rights within specified export processing zones (EPZs). These EPZs often benefit industries like clothing and electronics manufacturing, which employ large numbers of women without the benefit of labour rights or unions.<sup>40</sup>

## Gendered norms affect economic decisions and outcomes

Orthodox approaches to economics fail to take into account the **different ways that men and women interact with the economy**, even though the significance of socially constructed gender roles has long been recognised. In the economic sphere, notions of the male breadwinner and female carer influence the way that women and men feel that they should behave in the workplace and legitimise unequal allocations of power. As we noted above, it also determines how society values and compensate caring professions like nursing and childcare, which are seen as women's work and thus less skilled and demanding – and therefore less well paid than other professions.

Conventional economics also fails to account for the way social norms shape individual and market behaviour. The orthodox view assumes that each individual always acts so as to achieve the greatest economic gain at all times, ignoring that women face expectations to give up paid employment and subordinate their own gain to family or social convention. Research from UN Women and elsewhere shows that these assumptions unfairly disadvantage women, who are more likely to hold informal, insecure and part-time work with interruptions for childbearing and other kinds of care work.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, when they assess the need for social protection programmes, economists and policymakers tend to assume that every individual will have lifelong, full-time, stable employment; sometimes they even make access to benefits dependent on that assumption, when pensions or unemployment insurance are conditional on workplace contributions.

Especially in times of crisis, economic policies aimed at stabilising the economy can retrench social hierarchies, moving a greater burden of unpaid care work onto women's shoulders with each cut to social spending, and thus intensifying stigma, gendered stereotypes and, consequently, violence against women.<sup>42</sup> Publicly funded care services, on the other hand, can help roll back inequality by disrupting norms about

women working outside the home and challenging stereotypes that restrict women's roles and options.<sup>43</sup> Thus, reducing women's care work and improving the resources available to them has the power to break down the segregation of women into lower-paid sectors, while governments can take action to stop employers from paying men and women differently. **Progressive macroeconomic policies open the door to transformative social change, so any effort to address repressive social norms can and should call for a gender-responsive economic system too.**

### Box 5: Economic crises and austerity

When the global financial crisis hit in 2008, many governments increased their spending through stimulus packages meant to kick-start their economies. By 2011, however, many had turned to drastic spending cuts and the belt-tightening rhetoric of austerity, a state of affairs that continues today.<sup>44</sup> Austerity measures only intensify our existing dependence on unpaid care and increase women's workloads as social programmes are cut.<sup>45</sup> "Women," argues a recent piece from AWID, "have become the safety nets of last resort to sustain their families and social structure."<sup>46</sup>

The policies that governments and international financial institutions use to counteract economic crises have a tendency to hit women especially hard, but the problems are not unique to crisis – they are systemic, built into our economic model and existing before, during and after our economies break down. In both good times and bad, women's unpaid care work is drawn upon to fill gaps in existing social protection programmes and absorb the impact of each new round of spending cuts. Crises merely draw our economic dependence on gender inequality into sharper focus.

### Economic decisions are highly political choices

Progressive economists of all kinds, including feminist economists (see Box 4), show us that the current economic model is not the only way that our global system could work. While agendas like structural adjustment and austerity may grab headlines with their catastrophic consequences for women and marginalised groups, **crises such as these only expose deeper problems that are already built into the orthodox macroeconomic model** (see Box 5).<sup>47</sup> The system is biased against and exploits women, who work every day within a framework that masks and erases its own injustices. It depends on women's undervalued and unacknowledged labour, whether that means low-paid work in global supply chains, unpaid care work that keeps the economy functioning, or sub-par social benefit structures that underserve women and perpetuate gendered inequality.

Neoliberal policies implemented by governments everywhere are reducing states' control of their own budgets and restricting public expenditure, all while promoting regressive forms of taxation, but **progressive economists demonstrate that these policies aren't a necessity – they're a choice.** A more progressive distribution of

economic resources can open up opportunities and possibilities for gender equality, but it isn't enough to ensure these services exist – they need to be conceived and managed in ways that make them accessible to women from all sectors of society, meet their diverse needs and account for their different positions within the economy. Policies that create an enabling environment for gender equality are those that redistribute care work through social programmes, recognise and support a variety of modes of work, and normalise perceptions of women in the workplace – thus allowing women to assume an equal social standing to their male colleagues, partners and family members. Employing a human rights lens to assess macroeconomic policy is a significant step towards harnessing economic activity for the achievement of gender equality and women's rights.

## 5. Women's voice in macroeconomic policy and decision-making

Public consultation on macroeconomic policy is generally limited, a state of affairs that is justified in part by its framing as technocratic and politically neutral, despite the grave impact that both monetary and fiscal policies can have on livelihoods. We know that women's political participation is limited in all areas of policy, but this is especially true for economic decision-making. UN Women also notes that women are particularly excluded from the formulation of monetary policy by central banks, which operate independently of governments and with even less public consultation than other departments.<sup>48</sup>

Women's priorities and needs are often side-lined when it comes to public spending, but consultation with women's organisations is absolutely crucial to forging a gender-sensitive macroeconomic policy. Hearing from women about the time burden and opportunity costs of water collection or childcare spotlights the benefit of public spending on water taps or childcare spaces. Similarly, an appreciation of unpaid care work exposes the fallacy of the supposed 'savings' that governments make through cuts in social services, which merely redistribute costs by increasing women's unpaid care work.

**When women's voices are left out of economic policy, even those well-meaning efforts that do exist to combat gender inequality can backfire.** An example of such unintended consequences is social transfer programmes, which target children in impoverished areas for payments of much-needed cash. When they are conditional on requirements like school attendance and health check-ups, these programmes can actually add to women's workloads and reinforce care as women's work.<sup>49</sup> Money is funnelled through mothers in each family, who must then ensure the conditions are met and face losing the transfers if they cannot – thus positioning women as fulfillers of children's needs.<sup>50</sup> Even unconditional social transfers, which are important for reducing inequality and have been shown to narrow gender gaps in at least 28 countries, may have the unintended effect of creating conflict over control of funds in the household if they are not designed in a gender-sensitive way.<sup>51</sup>

Using tools like gender impact analyses, gender-responsive budgeting and time-use surveys, women's groups like the UK Women's Budget Group and Tanzania's TGNP Mtandao assess macroeconomic policy in their own countries and support gender-sensitive change (see Box 6).<sup>52</sup> As always, it is important to avoid assuming that women in power will always make women-friendly decisions, or that all women share needs and interests despite differences of race, class, religion, age, or ability.<sup>53</sup> That said, **the presence of women's groups at the economic table is known to legitimise women's concerns on public agendas.**<sup>54</sup> A 2013 survey by the International Parliamentary Union in 2013 showed that, in 65 countries, 85 per cent of women politicians believed they held a "special responsibility to represent the needs and interests of women."<sup>55</sup>

### Box 6: Gender-responsive budgeting

The umbrella of gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) covers a variety of measures to assess whether government budgets promote gender justice. GRB includes methods such as gender audits of government ministries, gender assessments of specific policies, awareness-raising campaigns, and gender training programmes at all levels of government, amongst others.

In Nepal, for example, GRB has been a priority since 2007, with a GRB Committee housed in the Ministry of Finance with members from ministries working on women, children, planning, and development. The committee monitors budget allocations and public expenditures from a gender perspective; assesses the impact of policies on women and men; and provides ministries with guidelines for applying GRB.<sup>56</sup>

## 6. Changing the conversation on gender equality and economics

Bringing a gender lens to macroeconomic policy is essential to redressing *all* forms of gendered discrimination, inequality and violence. It is time for gender advocates to look to the "macroeconomist's tool kit" as a site rich in potential for gender equality work of all kinds. Measures like time-use surveys, gender audits of government departments and central banks, gender-responsive budgeting processes and analyses of policies and programmes' impact on gender are all needed to get the full picture of how macroeconomic policies shape women's lives and livelihoods, and therefore what needs to change.<sup>57</sup>

Gender-responsive macroeconomics has the power to go beyond individual opportunities for women to a more comprehensive vision of women's rights and gender equality – addressing structural inequalities and stopping harmful practices that undermine women's rights. Progressive change in this area would undoubtedly expand women's economic rights, but it would also create a ripple effect far beyond the economy and into other areas of life, giving women time and space for social and

political participation, fostering equal social standing in their communities, and empowering them to live without violence and subordination. That seismic multiplier effect of working through a macroeconomic prism has huge potential for gender advocacy in development that should be recognised and put to use by gender advocates everywhere.

Gender equality work has everything to gain from problematizing the goals (growth) and assumptions (gender neutrality) of macroeconomic thinking, policy and practice, all of which currently reproduce a model of inequality and injustice. Macroeconomic policy can be a powerful tool – no matter which facet of gender equality is at stake – to generate resources, elevate the standing of women and build economies and societies that value the contributions of all. **A progressive macroeconomic framework alone will not achieve gender equality, but it can create the space to make it possible.**

## 7. Learn more

- **Turning Promises into Progress: Gender Equality and Rights for Women and Girls – Lessons Learnt and Actions Needed**, by GADN, GAPS and UK SRHR Network, 2015 – **Chapter 6: Women’s Economic Equality and Empowerment (WEE)** and **Chapter 7: Unpaid Care**
- **Transforming Economies, Realizing Rights: Progress of the World’s Women 2015-2016**, by UN Women, 2015 – **Chapter 4: Macroeconomic Policy and Gender Equality**
- **Taxing Men and Women: Why Gender is Crucial for a Fair Tax System**, by Chiara Capraro (Christian Aid), 2014.
- **Gendering the Inequality Debate**, by Diane Perrons, in *Gender & Development* 23.2, 2015, pp. 207-222.
- **Why macroeconomic policy matters for gender equality**, UN Women policy brief no. 4, 2015.

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## Acknowledgements

This briefing was written by Megan Daigle, GADN Research Officer.

Input was received from Jessica Woodroffe (GADN), Sargon Nissan (Bretton Woods Project), Chiara Capraro (Christian Aid) and Emma Bürgisser (Bretton Woods Project). It is part of the Gender Equality and Macroeconomics (GEM) Project, a collaborative effort between GADN and the Bretton Woods Project that aims to expose and challenge the way current macroeconomic policies, and particularly those promoted by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, undermine gender equality. Working with allies globally, the GEM Project encourages decision-makers to promote better alternative policy.

The Gender & Development Network (GADN) brings together expert NGOs, consultants, academics and individuals committed to working on gender, development and women's rights issues. Our vision is of a world where social justice and gender equality prevail and where all women and girls are able to realise their rights free from discrimination. Our goal is to ensure that international development policy and practice promotes gender equality and women's and girls' rights. Our role is to support our members by sharing information and expertise, to undertake and disseminate research, and to provide expert advice and comment on government policies and projects.

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