

Open letter to the Co-Chairs of the High Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment

8/11/16

Dear President Solis and Ms Scarpaleggia

As the High Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment now moves towards implementing the recommendations of its first report, the UK Gender and Development Network would like to propose that an additional area of work should be considered in more depth. The Panel's first report *Leave no one behind: a call to action on gender equality and women's economic empowerment* lists seven drivers of women's economic empowerment (WEE).¹ We propose that 'enabling macro-economic environments' should be recognised as an eighth driver of women's economic empowerment, and that an eighth working group should be convened to explore this pivotal area.

In our initial response to the Panel's report we noted that some vital issues for achieving women's economic empowerment were identified.² Like others, we were pleased that unpaid care work and discriminatory social norms were put high on the political agenda, probably for the first time, and that collective voice and representation were clearly acknowledged to be part of the solution. However, we are concerned that progress in these, and many of the other seven 'driver' areas, will be held back if consideration is not given to policies governing the overall direction of the economy.

The presence of both the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund on the Panel provides a unique opportunity to further this agenda. Moreover, many panellists have covered this topic and would have valuable insights to contribute. UN Women's own flagship report, *Transforming economies, realising rights* provides a number of starting points that could be built upon if a working group on enabling macro-economic environments were to be created.³ A recent report by the ITUC has demonstrated the value of investing in social infrastructure.⁴ The Fund's work on gender

¹ UN Secretary General's High Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment (2016) *Leave no one behind: a call to action on gender equality and women's economic empowerment*. <http://www.womenseconomicempowerment.org/reports/>

² <http://gadnetwork.org/gadn-publications/#Positions>

³ UN Women (2015). *Progress of the world's women 2015-2016: transforming economies, realizing rights*. New York: UN Women. Available at: http://progress.unwomen.org/en/2015/pdf/UNW_progressreport.pdf (accessed 18 Apr 2016)

⁴ ITUC. 2016. *Investing in the care economy: a gender analysis of employment stimulus in seven OECD countries*. Brussels: ITUC. Available at: http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/care_economy_en.pdf (accessed 1 May 2016).

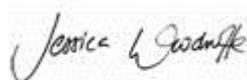
budgeting would be relevant.⁵ A number of ILO papers would also be of value, including *Women at Work* (2016).⁶

Particularly important will be discussion of how to create the necessary fiscal space to fund the measures identified in the report, alongside gender responsive budgeting, to ensure that the additional funds are well spent. As is recognised within the report, investment will be needed in the provision of care from the public sector.⁷ Meanwhile, welfare systems will need additional resources in the face of an aging population.⁸ As the report observes, any reductions in public spending are especially damaging for the women who have to fill the gaps in service provision.⁹ How these funds are raised will also have an impact - for example, social norms and assumptions around male breadwinners can be reinforced through particular taxation systems.¹⁰ Macro-economic policy making can also serve other goals, for example creating jobs in those areas most likely to increase quality female employment.

The current 'call to action' incites governments to 'adopt macroeconomic policies to boost short-term and long-term inclusive growth'.¹¹ How to achieve this in a way that promotes, rather than undermines, gender equality is the subject of much research and debate – lessons from which could make a valuable contribution to the ongoing work of the Panel.¹²

We suggest that unless ways to build an enabling macroeconomic environment are explored, the positive work of the Panel elsewhere may be undermined. We hope the Panel will pool its valuable resources to ensure progress around this central driver of WEE in the coming year.

Yours sincerely



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⁵ <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/wp/2016/wp16149.pdf>

⁶ http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_457317.pdf

⁷ UN (2016) Page 5 op cit

⁸ UN (2016) Page 48 ibid

⁹ UN (2016) Page 18 ibid

¹⁰ <http://www.christianaid.org.uk/images/taxing-men-and-women-gender-analysis-report-july-2014.pdf>

¹¹ UN (2016) Page 9 op cit

¹² See for example: Kabeer, N. and L. Natali. 2013. 'Gender equality and economic growth: is there a win-win?' Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, 38 and Elson, D. 2010. 'Gender and the global economic crisis in developing countries: a framework for analysis. Gender and development 18.2: 201-212. Available at:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13552074.2010.491321#.VKMn54qsWnQ> (accessed 4 May 2016). GADN has also made proposals to the HLP on WEE at <http://gadnetwork.org/gadn-resources/2016/7/7/breaking-down-the-barriers-macroeconomic-policies-that-promote-womens-economic-equality>.