

Action Coalition 2: Economic Justice and Rights

Interlinkages between the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda and the work of the Generation Equality Action Coalitions and the Compact for Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action

SUMMARY

The current global economic system of neoliberal capitalism directly inhibits sustainable development and peace by inhibiting equal access to and practice of economic, social, and cultural rights. This is exemplified by the fact that more than 50 per cent of global wealth is owned by 1 per cent of the world's population,¹ leaving the majority of the people in a cycle of perpetual poverty and economic insecurity. Economic policies are not neutral—their patriarchal, racist, and gendered design directly contribute to and perpetuate the marginalisation of communities. In other words, the denial of economic, social, and cultural rights is a result of and deepens structural inequalities. The violation of the right to food, sanitation, healthcare, and education, among others, can all act as root causes and drivers of conflict and political instability. Additionally, the pursuit of control over natural resources, markets, and labour, by both private and government actors, has driven war, violence, genocide, and the destruction of ecosystems. Socio-economic factors are therefore critical to understanding how armed conflicts emerge, persist, are resolved, and are experienced by people. Achieving gender equality and peace is impossible without dismantling unjust economic realities and priorities. In order to prevent conflict, realise the goal of women's meaningful participation in decision-making spaces, and end violence, we must democratise economic and political decision-making and reorient towards human security.

THE ISSUE

Background

A feminist political economy perspective exposes how harmful socio-economic policies disproportionately impact women and girls, as well as other marginalised populations, and how these often become drivers of conflict and instability. This perspective also allows for the design of economic systems that serve the needs and interests of all people. Economic justice - a fundamental rethinking of the way our economies are structured that is based on equitable distribution and access to resources - is critical to the realisation of human rights, and therefore the realisation of commitments to the Women, Peace, and Security agenda. Indeed, Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Resolution 2493 (2019) calls on all member states to promote the human rights of women and girls, including civil, political, and economic rights, while Resolutions 2106 (2013), 2122 (2013), and 2467 (2019) recognise the role that women's social, political, and economic empowerment can play in preventing violence and stabilising societies. These WPS resolutions build on

¹ Andy Hargreaves. 2020. "Austerity and Inequality; or Prosperity for All? *Educational Policy Directions Beyond the Pandemic.*" *Educational Research for Policy and Practice.* <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10671-020-09283-5>

and complement other international frameworks, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and underscore the centrality of human rights to realising economic justice as well as the centrality of gender equality to sustainable development and peace.

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What are the gendered impacts of mainstream economic policy and militarism?

Mainstream macroeconomic policies exacerbate racialised and gendered inequalities both within and between states. Deregulated labour markets reproduce and perpetuate these inequalities through the devaluation of women's work and wages, and lead to unequal gendered power relations, which contribute to violence, including against women and other marginalized populations. Austerity policies and privatisation undermine the integrity of social protection systems and the sustainability of universal public goods and infrastructure, including critical sectors such as health and education. By 2021, approximately 75 per cent of the world's population will be living in countries implementing austerity measures to the detriment of the most marginalised populations in these countries.² These cuts are particularly harmful in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has exacerbated social, economic, and gender inequality on a global scale. As the pandemic has also demonstrated, in the absence of strong public systems, women and girls, who also comprise the majority of the world's poor, fill the gaps with their unpaid labour. Globally, women spend two to ten times more time than men doing unpaid care work.³ The pandemic has not only increased women's unpaid care work, but also exacerbated their economic insecurity, jeopardising decades' worth of economic gains for women and placing more women at risk than men to be pushed into extreme poverty. By 2021, approximately 435 million women and girls will be living on less than \$1.90 USD a day.⁴ This alarming prediction demonstrates the urgent need for gender-responsive economic policies that invest in the safety and security of marginalised communities.

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Nevertheless, corporate capture and the persistence of militarism continue to directly undermine the ability to create a just and equitable world. In 2019, global military spending exceeded \$1.9 trillion USD. Some estimates indicate that potentially up to \$36 trillion USD is currently stashed in tax havens.⁵ In contrast, recent studies have estimated that completely ending world hunger by 2030 would cost \$330 billion USD in total - \$33 billion per year.⁶ Despite narratives of scarcity, it is clear that there are enough resources to create a world that upholds sustainability, peace, and human dignity and where these resources are invested in the social, environmental, and economic well-being of people and planet, and not for the benefit of the powerful, including the military-industrial complex. Together, capitalism and militarism not only redirect resources away from people and towards private corporations and weapons, but also harm both people and the environment—unsustainable consumption patterns and governments' and international corporations' exploitative relationship with nature have spurred on a climate crisis that threatens the habitability of the planet. Women are disproportionately impacted by climate change, as their lack of access to economic opportunities reduces their capacities to adapt to climate-related impacts.

2 Isabel Ortiz and Thomas Stubbs. 2019. "More Austerity for Developing Countries: It's Bad News, and It's Avoidable," November 25, 2019. <http://www.ipsnews.net/2019/11/austerity-developing-countries-bad-news-avoidable/>

3 Gaëlle Ferrant, Luca Maria Pesando and Keiko Nowacka. 2014. "Unpaid Care Work: The Missing Gap in the Analysis of Labor Outcomes." https://www.oecd.org/dev/development-gender/Unpaid_care_work.pdf

4 UN Women. 2020. "COVID-19 and Its Economic Impact Toll on Women: The Story behind the Numbers." <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/9/feature-covid-19-economic-impacts-on-women>

5 Nicholas Shaxson. 2019. "Tackling Tax Havens." <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/2019/09/tackling-global-tax-havens-shaxon.htm>

6 Ceres2030. n.d. "Donors Must Double Aid to End Hunger - and Spend it Wisely." https://ceres2030.org/shorthand_story/donors-must-double-aid-to-end-hunger-and-spend-it-wisely/

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How does economic injustice contribute to marginalisation and inhibit peace?

Uneven distribution of resources and opportunities have significant implications for women's ability to meaningfully participate in conflict prevention and peacebuilding as well. Patriarchal norms and inequalities have translated into unequal economic, educational, and political opportunities in the long-term, effectively blocking many women, as well as people of diverse gender identities and expressions, from accessing the same spaces and decision-making structures as men. Intersecting structural inequalities and barriers further compound this exclusion: the ability for women to participate in decision-making is influenced by a range of factors, including their socioeconomic status and access, racial, ethnic, and religious identities, language, and geographic location.

Furthermore, understanding how war negatively affects the ability of women, as well as other marginalised populations, to access decent work, healthcare, education, and natural resources, such as water, as well as their agency and influence over political and economic decision-making, is a prerequisite to be able to transform harmful economic impacts, and formulate gender-sensitive economic interventions. Women, Peace, and Security Resolution 2242 (2015) acknowledges the impacts of armed conflict on women's economic activity and opportunities, while Resolutions 1888 (2009), 1960 (2010), and 2467 (2019) call for the socio-economic reintegration of survivors. Nevertheless, in post-conflict contexts, despite these calls and the importance of strong public institutions to societal reconstruction, exclusionary peace processes have resulted in political and economic recovery programmes that increase the insecurity of women, girls, and other marginalised populations and further exacerbate the very inequalities and discriminatory structures that have contributed to political instability and conflict.

Who is prioritised by the hegemonic development system?

The global development system and international financial institutions have continued to impose economic policies that prioritise creating environments conducive to foreign investment and economic growth, to the disadvantage of communities facing greater income inequality and environmental protection, in particular women and girls. This is even true in contexts that especially require sustained investment in human rights and sustainable development, such as countries vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and countries experiencing armed conflict and fragility. A 2010 UNDP study that analysed gender priorities in peacebuilding budgets states that gender equality and concern for women's needs were not prioritised within the overall budgets of 12 post-conflict countries, while economic recovery and infrastructure received the least amount of attention in terms of gender-sensitive priorities. Furthermore, across four post-conflict countries (Kosovo, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, and Timor-Leste) that received economic reconstruction aid, gender equality and women's specific needs were mentioned in less than 5 percent of activities and 3 percent of budget lines in post-conflict need assessments.⁷ Yet, as recurring patterns of conflict have well demonstrated, sustainable peace cannot be built on systems that exclude the needs and priorities of the most marginalised communities.

⁷ Jacqui True. 2013. "Women, Peace, and Security in Post-Conflict and Peacebuilding Contexts." NOREF. http://www.peacewomen.org/assets/file/true_noref_unscr1325_feb_2013_final.pdf

What needs to change?

While grassroots women and civil society organisations are excluded from decision-making, in contrast, powerful multinational corporations and other private sector actors are increasingly being given space -- both in multilateral and national contexts -- to shape the policies that will determine the lives of people on behalf of whom decisions are being made, without their input, in the coming decades.

The Generation Equality Forum, the Action Coalitions and the Compact for Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action present an opportunity to focus momentum and implement commitments on the Women, Peace and Security agenda to shape a feminist future. We urge UN Women, Member States, Action Coalition leaders and other stakeholders to ensure that the Women, Peace, and Security agenda is reflected in the priorities of the coalitions and the compact for continued implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and its contribution towards the full realisation of human rights for all.

Priority actions

Dismantle unsustainable, extractive political economies of war and redirect military spending towards economies of care and social justice. This means redirecting investments from activities that are harmful to people and nature into systems and infrastructure that promote human security, provide and strengthen community and individual care and well-being, and are grounded on the just and equal distribution of power and resources.

Create economic systems capable of delivering sustainable development and a fair distribution of wealth, income, and resources. Leaving no one behind requires shifting the current neoliberal economic system away from a prioritisation of growth towards systems of social justice at the global level that protect economic, social, and cultural rights. This requires comprehensive measures, including, but not limited to: cancellation of international debt payments which redirect funds away from investing in people and towards debt servicing; land reform; ensuring Indigenous sovereignty and land rights; stopping illicit financial flows; closing tax havens; and implementing progressive, transparent, and accountable tax systems that redistribute wealth from the world's wealthiest people and corporations towards gender-equitable social investment.

Eliminate structures and norms that lead to women performing a disproportionate amount of informal, unpaid, and domestic care work and make gender-responsive budgeting central to their planning, and public services must be designed, funded, delivered, and managed around gender equality commitments.

Adopt a feminist political economy perspective among the principal mechanisms to inform all legal and policy frameworks, including in peace processes, post-conflict reconstruction and recovery planning, and crisis response mechanisms. Post-conflict economic planning must prioritise gender-equitable investments in universal social protection systems and public services as well as creating an environment conducive to reconciliation and meeting human needs, instead of shaping society for foreign direct investment and the needs of multinational corporations. Harmful austerity measures, trade liberalisation, labour market deregulation, and privatisation, which limit people's human rights and have been found to have substantial gendered impacts, must be avoided.

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