

BEYOND COVID-19:

A FEMINIST PLAN FOR SUSTAINABILITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE



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Feminist Ideas for a Post-COVID-19 World

To inform the Feminist Plan, a series of think pieces were produced, called Feminist Ideas for a Post-COVID-19 World. These are:

- Shahra Razavi: The social protection response to COVID-19 has failed women: Towards universal gender-responsive social protection systems
- Mignon Duffy: How can the COVID-19 crisis be harnessed to improve the rights and working conditions of paid care workers?
- Jennifer Piscopo: Pathways to building back better: Advancing feminist policies in COVID-19 response and recovery
- Juliana Franzoni and Veena Siddharth: Care after COVID-19: Time for a U-turn?
- Ilene Grabel: Enabling a permissive multilateralisms approach to global macroeconomic governance to support feminist plans for sustainability and social justice

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BEYOND COVID-19: THE IMPERATIVE FOR TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE



Since COVID-19 was declared a pandemic, 18 months ago, it has claimed more than 4 million lives¹, destroyed countless livelihoods and forced the global economy to its knees. With an end still out of sight, the crisis has already taken a disproportionate toll on women and girls. As countries locked down, rates of domestic abuse spiralled upwards. With more girls out of school, child marriage and female genital mutilation will likely rise. As the health crisis morphed into a full-blown economic recession, women bore the brunt of job losses, seeing their economic autonomy stifled and their poverty risk rise. As health systems have struggled to stem the onslaught of cases, and schools and care services have shut down, women have stepped in to provide support for families and communities, often at the expense of their own mental and physical health.

The virus has drawn attention to other, more long-standing crises that have held back progress on gender equality: a livelihoods crisis, which has pushed large swathes of people behind and increased their vulnerability to shocks; and a care crisis, which has left millions of children and care-dependent adults without support while imposing hard choices and enormous costs on women and girls.

At the same time, the pandemic has provided a warning about the looming environmental and climate crisis that, like the pandemic, is already erasing hard-won progress on gender equality. The pathway to achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030, based on the current trajectory, looks very rocky indeed.

This trio of interlocking crises is deeply rooted in an economic system that, despite significant cross-country variations, displays some critical features everywhere: it freerides on women's unpaid and underpaid labour, exploits the natural environment and has led to an extreme concentration of wealth and power among the few while causing a deep sense of insecurity among the many. This, in turn, has fuelled a range of unsettling political dynamics, including widespread disenchantment with mainstream politics, hostility towards 'elites' and rising nationalism, often fuelled by a backlash on gender equality and ideas of a return to an imagined, better past. But going back is not the

answer. Instead, a visionary agenda that places sustainability, social justice and gender equality at the centre of economic recovery and transformation, is urgently needed to pave the way towards a new social contract.

The Feminist Plan for Sustainability and Social Justice lays out such a vision, building on the vast array of feminist scholarship and activism that has long reimagined economies and societies (see Box 1.1). The Plan draws key lessons from the pandemic, discusses the building blocks of gender-responsive economic recovery and transformation and provides insights on the levers that will help achieve the vision.

Box 1.1 WHAT MAKES THIS A FEMINIST PLAN?

This Plan is inspired by diverse feminists who are calling for systemic change across the world. It recognizes the plurality of voices within progressive feminist movements, including Global South, Black and Indigenous activists who have long rejected the portrayal of the experiences of Global North, white, class-privileged women as universal. It embraces the concept of 'intersectionality', the idea that women's lived experiences are shaped by interlocking structures of inequality based on gender, class, and race/ethnicity, among others.² Each of these structures is influenced by legacies of colonialism which continue to violently shape economic and ethnic/racial relations, as well as imposing certain ideals on the Global South, including restrictive gender binaries that marginalize those with diverse gender identities that have always existed across the world.³

These insights have inspired the analytical approach of this Feminist Plan. This means going beyond describing intersecting inequalities as compounded 'disadvantages' that individuals or groups experience.⁴ Instead, it is necessary to focus on the historical, social and institutional mechanisms

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