

A Feminist Economic Recovery Plan for Wales:

Building Back Better from Covid-19

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INTRODUCTION

When crises hit, longer-term thinking can easily and understandably be cast as a distraction or a luxury, even when it relates to tackling critical issues like climate change, gender inequality or poverty. For those of us fortunate to be in positions of privilege where we can think longer term, it is our responsibility to do so. Working towards structural change can take a long time to come to fruition, but the longer we put it off, the harder it will be. If there had never had been an NHS, this crisis would have plunged Wales even further into entrenched inequality and division.

So rather than rush to rebuild the status quo of inequality we should encourage a deep structural transition to an economy that better values the work

we know is essential to sustaining us. We should address the crises in healthcare, social, economic and ecological policies that have been laid bare by this pandemic.

Those experiencing the structural inequalities that lead to poor health or poor access to the labour market will feel the health, social and economic costs of Covid 19 the hardest, and will have the least ability to 'recover'. If Wales' traditional ways of thinking about the economy won't work then we need to adopt some new approaches. We have to ask ourselves the question, are we brave enough to do anything differently? We set out the principles and actions for such an approach below, which need to be taken quickly.

PURPOSE

This paper sets out principles and top-line actions that we believe should be central to Wales' economic recovery post-Covid 19. The ideas outlined below will be further developed, and therefore this document should be treated as the starting point for a feminist economic recovery.



PRINCIPLES

1 COMMIT TO TAKING A FEMINIST ECONOMIC APPROACH TO RECOVERY:

This does not mean the recovery will focus on or only benefit women, but recognises that the economy is more than the production of things for the market. The survival and reproduction of people and society as a whole requires not only the production of material goods, but everything that people need to grow and flourish, including the provision of care.

2 BUILD OUR FUTURE ECONOMIC MODEL BASED ON THE UNIVERSAL VALUES OF BEING CARING HUMAN BEINGS:

Why would we fall back on old models of neo-liberal economics which have proven unsustainable for both humans and our ecology, when we have an opportunity to re-value what has been central to our survival throughout this pandemic.

3 WE LIVE IN A GENDERED SOCIETY AND THEREFORE NEED A THOUGHTFUL INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH:

Recognise that stimulus which are designed (or assumed) to be gender neutral are not. Public spending and budget re-shaping decisions around Wales' recovery and reset of the economy must integrate gender analysis across budgetary processes, using good data, which may require going beyond what we have today.

4 LEARN LESSONS AND TAKE STEPS TO REINFORCE POSITIVE BEHAVIOURS:

Relating to both behaviours learned through this current crisis, as well as previous crises including the 2008 banking crash and global recession. This current crisis has opened people and organisations' minds to alternative approaches, new forms of businesses and organisation, and decentralised business models.

5 RECOGNISE THE VALUE OF UNPAID CARE THAT HAS BEEN PROPPING UP THE ECONOMY AND REINFORCING GENDER STEREOTYPES FOR GENERATIONS:

We cannot and should not continue to assume that child, elder and other care will continue to be absorbed by unpaid citizens, predominantly women, at huge subsidy to the current economy and detriment to themselves.

6 PUT PEOPLE AND PLANET AT THE HEART OF DECISION-MAKING:

This requires a significant shift in representation in where power and influence is held meaning for example, ensuring including women in all levels of consultation, decision making and communication outreach.

7 VALUE WOMEN'S WORK:

For too long we have not valued the work in caring, cleaning, clerical, catering and retail roles, which are highly female dominated and have been perceived as low skilled. Throughout crisis we have recognised this work for what it is; essential.

8 A DIFFERENT MODEL REQUIRES DIFFERENT MEASURES:

We don't want a quick restoration of GDP growth but a focus instead on structural change that enables us to build better, more equal, more caring, greener and cleaner economy of the future. Make wellbeing a central measure of our economic success, not an add-on or 'nice to have'. Inclusive growth also needs to be concerned with the pattern of growth as well as the rate of growth; for example, gender segregation within different sectors and industries.

ACTIONS

1. **WELSH GOVERNMENT SHOULD MAKE CLEAR THAT THEY ARE TAKING A FEMINIST APPROACH TO RESPONDING TO COVID-19, WHICH IS IN LINE WITH THE RECOMMENDATIONS PREVIOUSLY ACCEPTED IN THE GENDER EQUALITY REVIEW:**
 - 1.1 A realisation of the vision for gender equality through a radical shift in how we do things to ensure that equalities is properly mainstreamed into the work of government (Vision and Principles for a Feminist Government in Appendix).
 - 1.2 Review current Economic Action plan and Economic Contract, particularly the five calls to action, to ensure they meet the objectives signed up to in the Gender Equality Review, particularly equality of outcome, and those further outlined below.
 - 1.3 Unleash hidden productivity of women which could make a significant contribution to Wales' economy.
2. **TO STIMULATE, DIVERSIFY AND RE-SHAPE THE ECONOMY WE MUST SHIFT FROM RELIANCE ON DIRTY, UNSUSTAINABLE AND PRECARIOUS INDUSTRIES:**
 - 2.1 Keep dirty industries closed or seriously strengthen measures to ensure they clean up much quicker and focus on sustainable growth that enhances the environment locally and globally.
 - 2.2 Review key sectors to be clear who they employ and what is the real contribution they make. Invest only where structural inequalities are addressed.
 - 2.3 Identify opportunities for more sustainable livelihoods focussing on Wales' strengths and assets.
 - 2.4 Have input from those impacted, essential sectors that employ majority women and organisations that serve women and girls.
 - 2.5 Use better intersectional and disaggregated data to make better decisions.
- 2.6 Support displaced workers via a Workers' Adjustment Fund for retraining and professional mobility, particularly focussed on short term highly vocational interventions that allow adults to move into different sectors.
- 2.7 Ensure women have access to green jobs and other emerging industries, particularly tech jobs, through stimulus packages that promote gender and racial equality.
3. **TO STIMULATE, DIVERSIFY AND RE-SHAPE THE ECONOMY WE MUST BUILD THE STATE INFRASTRUCTURE (CHILDCARE, HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE AND EDUCATION):**
 - 3.1 Which have been shown to be more effective at reducing public deficits and debt, and boosts employment, earnings, economic growth and gender equality.
4. **STRENGTHEN INFRASTRUCTURE FOR HOMEWORKING:**
 - 4.1 To reduce commuter traffic and create an enabling environment for flexible working, improving families' abilities to better balance home, care and work responsibilities. This must include providing appropriate IT, including broadband, for families who need it to home-school, who are looking for work, or whom otherwise would be unable to work. Put support in place for business and organisations transitioning to modern, low carbon more flexible working.
5. **REDRESS ECONOMIC INEQUALITIES TO PROMOTE WOMEN'S FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE:**
 - 5.1 **Enhance women's access to capital**, and start by understanding the gender breakdown of support offered thus far (for example through Economic Resilience Fund).

ACTIONS

- 5.2 Ensuring payment of **Living Wage** across the public sector and through all public procurement.
- 5.3 Investigate ways of piloting **Universal Basic Income** in Wales to level up access to the labour market.
- 6. MONITOR CLOSELY THE IMPACT OF DOMESTIC ABUSE AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE:**
- 6.1 Provide the necessary resources to support survivors.
- 7. CREATING A TRULY INCLUSIVE ECONOMY MEANS INVESTING IN A CARE ECONOMY:**
- 7.1 Recognise that care is as essential to our economy as steel, bricks and fibre optic cables.
- 7.2 Include the unpaid care economy in macro-economic policy and calculate the impact of any economic, and other, policy on the volume of paid and unpaid work of women and men.
- 8. REFORM TAX POLICY TO REINFORCE THE BEHAVIOURS THAT DELIVER THE ECONOMY WALES NEEDS:**
- 8.1 Incentivise local, sustainable consumption and energy use, through low carbon shopping and travel, reducing unnecessary waste and consumption through business rate reform, and reform of support for businesses via grants, loans including Development Bank and Business Wales.
- 9. DOUBLE INVESTMENT IN ADULT LIFELONG LEARNING:**
- 9.1 Address digital poverty for adults through digital inclusion to improve job prospects and well-being, including mental health.
- 9.2 Support further measures to mainstream social prescribing of lifelong learning.
- 10. EXPAND FREE OR SUBSIDISED CHILDCARE QUICKLY:**
- 10.1 To enable adults back to work, and expand it to include access for those re-training.
- 11. PRIORITISE FUNDING AND ECONOMIC SUPPORT:**
- 11.1 Including investment in infrastructure, for groups at high risk of further economic disadvantage, parents and caregivers and to support digital and IT access.
- 12. USE EDUCATION AS A LEVER TO ADDRESS INEQUALITY, AND GENDER SEGREGATION BY SECTORS AND INDUSTRIES:**
- 12.1 Putting clear targets in place for education providers, including all of post-16 education and work based learning, to ensure more women and girls access STEM subjects and vocational learning leading to jobs in emerging industries.
- 12.2 There has been too much lip service paid to this, and providers in receipt of public money should be held to account for the role they play in providing the pipeline of employees into the Welsh labour market.
- 13. ENSURE WOMEN ARE REPRESENTED IN DECISION MAKING AND CRITICAL RESEARCH, AND ANALYSIS:**
- 13.1 If women's voices are not in the room we will not address the prevailing inequalities that characterise so many decisions about public investment and intervention, which perpetuate the structural inequalities that this pandemic has laid bare.
- 14. SHOW LEADERSHIP BY CREATING AN ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING AGENCY:**
- 14.1 To oversee implementation of this radical agenda, which will take a generation to fully embed. Ensure this Agency is developed and headed up by a diverse team with fresh perspectives, rather than the usual suspects.

APPENDIX

DEEDS NOT WORDS: GENDER EQUALITY REVIEW

VISION STATEMENT:

A gender equal Wales means an equal sharing of power, resources and influence for all women, men and non-binary people. This is a vision where the government aims to create the conditions for equality of outcome for all. We want a Wales where:

- All women can have economic independence and paid and unpaid work is valued
- Diverse women are fairly represented in positions of influence and empowered to play a meaningful role in society
- All women are free from discrimination and free to live their lives as they choose
- Violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence stops
- Existing power structures that disadvantage women are challenged
- All women, men and non-binary people enjoy equal rights and protections and equality of outcome

A FEMINIST WELSH GOVERNMENT:

- Is committed to equality of outcome for all women, men and non-binary people and actively works to drive cultural and structural change;
- Pro-actively works to advance equality and remove the barriers against all women's participation in the economy, public and social life; 1 Chwarae Teg (2018) Rapid Review of Gender Equality Phase One July 2018 9
- Puts a gender perspective at the heart of decision-making, resource and budget allocation;
- Takes an intersectional approach to all of its work and ensures diversity of representation, participation and voice;
- Is people-focused and collaborative, ensuring that all communities are meaningfully engaged in its work;
- Is open, transparent and accountable and welcomes scrutiny through a gender lens;
- Makes use of policy development and analysis tools to embed gender equality into all of its work and actively monitors progress towards equality using a robust evidence base;
- Leads by example and supports other public bodies to take action to deliver equality.

