



"Until dignity becomes a habit" by @Marga.RH

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and exacerbated the inequalities embedded in our economic and legal systems, but has also provided the opportunity to rethink the values and logics governing these systems. Feminist activists and organisations across the world have contributed to this debate with various proposals to amplify the voices of those living at the margins of the economy, who have little or no power to influence policymaking, but who have been at the forefront of the fight against COVID-19. This policy brief outlines five key elements for post-pandemic feminist recovery plans and offers recommendations useful at national and transnational levels.

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Towards feminist recovery plans for COVID-19 and beyond

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GLOBE CENTRE FEBRUARY 2022

What is a feminist recovery plan?

Feminist recovery plans are developed with historical awareness of structural injustice and provide the basis to end long-term exploitative political economy. A feminist approach to policymaking differs from a mainstream economic recovery plan in three ways (see Table 1):

Table 1. The three main differences in economic plans

	Mainstream Economic Recovery Plan	Feminist Recovery Plan
Procedure	• Technocratic expertise • Top-down policymaking and implementation	• Grassroots expertise • Community-based open consultative process
Methodology	• Use of decontextualised quantitative data • Assumptions and arguments based on a rational, self-contained, neutral subject	• Use of quantitative and qualitative data, analysed with attention to local and global contexts and power relations • Assumptions and arguments consider the lived experience of marginalised and vulnerable subjects
Purpose	• Market-driven economic growth • Social objectives such as gender equality considered instrumental to the purpose of profit and economic growth	• Redistributive measures to address global injustice and achieve sustainable and long-term wellbeing for All, rather than immediate quantifiable results

The five key policy elements of feminist recovery plans

1. Work

The pandemic has increased job and income insecurity and social reproduction* responsibilities across gender, race, disability, socio-economic and migration status, exacerbating the vulnerability of workers at the lower end of the global income distribution.

Proposals

- Grant social protection measures to all workers and special funds for high-risk and marginalised workers such as street vendors and domestic, informal, migrant, rural, gig economy and sex workers.

- Ensure decent living wages for all by reducing wage inequality nationally and globally (minimum wage together with maximum wage and taxation of wealth for redistributive purposes).
- Set transnational labour standards with implementation and enforcement mechanisms that give voice and power to community and grassroots groups.
- Push for universal basic income regardless of employment and migration status (in addition to and NOT instead of labour law reforms), funded with wealth tax and colonial reparations. This would also contribute to addressing the gendered financial dependency that has exacerbated domestic violence during the pandemic.

* Social reproduction refers to the social relations, processes and unpaid work that go into the daily and generational maintenance of the population. It involves care, affective, emotional, community and solidarity labour, including activism; it is mainly unrewarded and/or devalued and it is disproportionately sustained by women and unequally distributed across race, class, disability, sexuality, migration status, coloniality and geopolitical location.

2. Social services and infrastructure

The pandemic has highlighted the importance of social rights and their collective implications, such as the right to health, food, sanitation, housing, education, and social security. Funding social services and social infrastructure would address many of the causes and consequences of structural injustice and socioeconomic inequality.

Examples of redistributive measures:

- Redistributing food to those in need
- Allocating empty houses and hotel rooms to those who are homeless, victims of domestic violence, LGBTQ+ marginalisation and abuse
- Provisioning of telemedicine to facilitate reproductive rights and safe abortion
- Access to free broadband and free public transports
- Universal vaccine distribution delinked from trade rules and market logics

Other social rights to be supported via redistributive measures include the provisioning of sanitation, education, childcare, eldercare and interventions to adjust able-body centred environments.

3. Debt

Government and household debt levels have been exacerbated by the pandemic. Government debt results in austerity measures and cuts to social services and programmes that affect primarily people at the lower end of the income distribution, often increasing their household debt.

In Argentina, COVID-19 income support measures have been used by households to repay debt, pushing them in an even more precarious condition while enriching lenders. [See this contribution](#) by Verónica Gago and Lucí Cavallero.**

** Gago, V. and Cavallero, L. (2021) 'Paradoxes of the Crisis: The Pandemic Has Generated an Explosion of Domestic Debts in Argentina'. Critical Times Journal. Available at: ctjournal.org/2021/01/12/paradoxes-of-the-crisis

Proposal

- Cancel developing countries' external debt - which has been built up from the Structural Adjustment Programmes via borrowing from International Financial Institutions - this recognises the asymmetries of power that debt embeds, and would be a form of reparation.

4. Land, food, environment

COVID-19 has amplified the negative impact of food commodification, mass production and the consequent unfair distribution of food and related profits. This problem has a colonial legacy in land grabbing and exploitation for business purposes with long-term environmental consequences.

Proposals

- Ensure food security by supporting small-scale farming and food self-sufficiency programmes.
- Promote land restitution to indigenous communities and land redistribution.
- Reform trade and investment legal systems by placing human dignity and environmental justice at the centre, instead of profit and accumulation.

5. Digital technology

Having played a central role in the pandemic to address issues of access and interaction, digital technology often serves the business logic of profit accumulation through fees/rent and data.

Proposal

- Reform and regulate digital technology to serve the reparative and redistributive measures of feminist recovery plans.

Funding the recovery

These problems have layers of power and wealth maldistribution, so the solutions need national and transnational dimensions. Funding, including colonial, economic and environmental reparations, are to be paid by richer countries and corporations to developing countries, and to indigenous and marginalised communities in the form of debt cancellation and monetary compensations, technology transfer, and the taxation of property, wealth and excess profits.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1

Advocate for an international minimum wage (combined with maximum wage and taxation of wealth) that would protect workers in different global value chains (from commodity chains and gig economy workers to domestic and sex workers) and an unconditional basic income to all people, regardless of employment and migration status to ensure the protection of their dignity as humans. Unpaid work, including care and community labour, should also be recognised and rewarded.

2

Address social injustice in access to basic services such as food, housing, sanitation, healthcare, education, childcare, eldercare, disability-care through public social provisioning.

3

Refocus rules of international economic and financial law to ensure a decent standard of living for all people instead of profit and accumulation.

4

Implement reparative measures, such as debt cancellation and land restitution, as well as binding redistributive measures around labour, social welfare, access to technology, environmental and economic justice, recognising the collective nature and consequent rightful share of global wealth.



Source

This policy brief is based on the project '*A feminist recovery plan for COVID-19 and beyond: Learning from grassroots activism*' coordinated by Serena Natile (Warwick Law School) and with insights from Khara Jabola-Carolus (Hawai'i Commission on the Status of Women), Felogene Anumo (AWID), Constanza Pauchulo (IWRAP Asia Pacific); Rachel Powell (Women's Policy Group Northern Ireland WRDA); Beatrice Karore (Wanawake Mashinani Initiative, Mathare, Kenya); Veronica Gago and Lucí Cavallero (Ni Una Menos collective, Argentina); Silvana Tapia Tapia and Walleska Pareja Díaz (Coalición Nacional de Mujeres del Ecuador); Enrica Rigo, Teresa Maisano and Michela Pizzicannella (Non Una di Meno Roma, Italy); Anita Gurumurthy (IT for Change, Bengaluru, India). To know more visit: warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/law/research/projects/feminist-recovery-plan/



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