

BRIEFING PAPER

The Intersectionalities of Gender Justice and Economic Justice

ACT Alliance

KEY MESSAGES

The current global economic system and its governance structures reinforce a vicious cycle of inequalities by keeping political and financial power in the hands of a small elite. Religious discourses have been used to justify these inequalities and perpetuate violence, systems of privileges and structural exclusion. Meanwhile, the unfairness of entrenched inequalities is not only felt by the economically marginalised, but increasingly shared by ordinary people across the globe.

Therefore, we would like to highlight the need to fundamentally transform the role of the economy to set a direct path towards gender equality, absolute poverty eradication, and inclusive economic benefits. States must move from an economy that exploits and invisibilises care¹. This is embodied in a faith narrative and shared commitment of caring for our common home together, with cooperation and solidarity rooted in justice, care and sustainability.

INTRODUCTION

Action by Churches Together (ACT) Alliance is a coalition of more than 147 faith-based working together in over 125 countries to create positive and sustainable change in the lives of poor and marginalized people regardless of their religion, politics, gender, race or nationality in keeping with the highest international codes and standards. ACT Alliance is faith-motivated, rights-based, impact focused, committed to working ecumenically and inter-religiously, with the communities we seek to serve and accompany at the center of our work.

We at ACT are deeply concerned by the growth of anti-gender movements and politics, the shrinking civic space, the increase in private sector power, the capture of multilateral/UN spaces by private power, the inadequate economic policies that feed off poverty and inequality, the rise of sexualized and gender based violence and an unequal digitalization that is currently leaving behind many women and girls, in all their diversity, as well as other historically marginalized populations. While education, work and access to public services have all gone online and are reliant on digital access (UNDP, 2021)², over 3.7 billion people globally are offline and half of them are women (UNWomen, 2021)³.

ACT Alliance adopts a transformational development approach and affirms the vision and the mandate of ecumenical diakonia, as faith-based and right-based action, underscoring advocacy as an integral dimension. Economic justice is about ensuring an Economy of Life that is founded on justice and dignity for all. ACT understands economic justice as a set of principles around which macro economic policies wherein the ultimate goal is to enable the realization of human rights and to create an equitable environment that ensures people and planet thrive. There is no economic justice without gender justice. Similarly, there is no transformative economic change if policies and actions are not human rights-based and/or connected and therefore mutually influencing macro (structural/global), meso (regional/national) and micro (local) levels/issues.

A GLOBAL ECONOMY BUILT ON EXPLOITATION AND INEQUALITY

Over the past 25 years, the world's richest 1 percent captured 38 percent of all of the world's growth in wealth, while the poorest 50 percent only captured 2 percent, illustrating the outrageous rise of global inequality and concentration of wealth at the very top⁴. Over the same period, the private sector has become significantly richer, while governments have become poorer relative to global growth with widespread tax injustice⁵. The pandemic caused further concentration of wealth in the hands of a few individuals - 573 people became new billionaires during the pandemic, at the rate of one every 30 hours⁶.

All of this is taking place in a complex geo-political background of a global recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, the worsening climate crisis and refusal of rich countries to pay for loss and damage⁷, the war in Ukraine sending ripple effects on food prices and inflation across the world, and one of the worst droughts in the last few decades

looming large in the Horn of Africa, which remains chronically under-funded.

Despite broad recognition from world leaders of the centrality of women's economic and social rights, their actions lag behind their rhetoric. National/global macro-economic policies (such as taxation, Special Economic Zones - SEZs) are gender blind and therefore systematically disadvantage women. International Financial Institutions (IFIs) and private lenders have pushed developing countries into a 'debt pandemic'⁸, leaving them with less resources and conditional repayment conditions to provide quality public infrastructure and services which disproportionately affect women, leaving them to use their own labour and time to subsidise the state. Worryingly, public debt levels in developing countries soared from 40.2 to 62.3% of GDP between 2011 and 2020⁹.

Women face several structural barriers in their pursuit of economic rights and justice. Around 92 percent of women in developing countries work in the informal sector without contracts, social security, and regular income as street vendors/traders, waste pickers, daily wagers, supply chain workers, sex workers, domestic or agricultural workers¹⁰. The tax system, in most cases, has been shown to disadvantage women because women are more likely to earn less in paid work, they are more likely to do greater amounts of unpaid care and household work, they are more likely to spend greater proportions of their income on consumption and care goods, and they are less likely to save for their old-age¹¹. COVID-19 has significantly worsened the situation¹². ACT Alliance's Briefing Paper on the Gender and Faith Perspectives on COVID-19 fleshed out the differentiated effects of the pandemic on women and girls, in all their diversity¹³.

The care economy is subsidizing the productive economy to the great disadvantage of women, marginalized groups and the environment. The rights of women in the Global South, as well as the environment and climate, have been readily

THE REALITY ON THE GROUND

Majority of the work women perform is not recognized as economically productive. For example, a vast majority of agricultural women work in their own farms and yet do not have formal land titles. In addition, in many countries, women lack access and control over economic resources (access to credit, capitals, and land) and cannot start a business or use income without husband's permission. Social and cultural norms continue to inhibit progressive legal reforms.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, for instance, more work is required to have regional, and national plans, legislations, policies, and strategies to improve economic justice. Interventions to increase income, build assets, wealth, and business leadership are lacking at regional and national levels.

There are still policy and regulatory barriers blocking active participation of women and girls in agriculture and trade, across value chains. This is a gap to achieving gender-equal benefits. Despite being relegated to a situation of vulnerability, women are actively resisting and creating alternatives and solutions.

Ecclesiastical courts have not acted to the best interest of women and girls throughout either; for they have been intertwined with deeply rooted socio-cultural discriminatory norms; which in turn, have created a fragmented system that places women, girls and their children at a disadvantage with regards to inheritance and their full marital financial rights. In particular, in the Global South. An example from the MENA region

is the remarkable work by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in 2015 for being able to distribute inheritance equally including movable and immovable rights, for the first time¹⁴.

MOVING TOWARDS CARING AND INCLUSIVE ECONOMIES

Transformational development and ecumenical diakonia guide ACT Alliance practices, and emphasize faith-based and right-based action, referring to the biblical concept of justice and unmasking systemic injustice, as well as defending human rights, especially of the people living in poverty, as central for a just society. Ecumenical diakonia is transforming action in response to the suffering produced by injustices. Strengthening a collective voice through advocacy, a faith voice for justice, is vital to reach economic and gender justice.

We must envision and advocate for an economic model that puts well-being of people and planet at its core and centers a feminist economic alternative. Economic justice will only be achieved when women and girls in all their diversities have a voice and choice in the work they do; have equal access and control over economic resources; where they have access to adequate social protection, are paid living and equal wages in safe and secure workplaces; and where they can be leaders and decision-makers in their world of work.

Macro-economic policies must be put in place to overcome discriminatory gender norms, roles and stereotypes as well as sexualized and gender based violence as an obstacle to women's autonomy. They must base all economic policy and decisions on human rights, gender and intersectional well being analysis to overcome the economic exclusion of women and marginalized groups. Global economic policy making must

recognize and address the role of colonization in shaping the economies in the Global South, which still continues in different shapes and forms through extractivism based economy dominated by a few powerful countries. Economic institutions at the global level, including the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the World Trade Organisation and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) must put people first in their responses and in the loans they provide to countries. The private sector must be held to account through formal global binding and non-binding business and human rights rules.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We believe that all States have a duty to transform their economies as a way to remove all barriers impeding the rise and development of women and girls, in all their diversity. This can be done by:

- Challenging the systemic economic hegemonies as perpetuated by IFIs and dismantling austerity policies that push more people, particularly women, into poverty by privatizing public services.
- Re-centering and re-valuing unpaid care and domestic work linked to a centering of human and environmental well-being over economic growth, capital accumulation and profit.
- Recognizing the contribution and importance of care work to the economy; including care into economic thinking, statistics and analysis; reducing care work through time saving measures and technologies (water availability, efficient stoves etc.); defying categories of productive and non-productive work, and the heteronormative male breadwinner-female caregiver household model; and redistributing care work not only between women and men and within families but to state funded provision.
- Changing narrow measures of progress and growth that focus solely on GDP and economic productivity, thereby perpetuating the invisibility of the social reproductive systems that sustain neoliberalism. Promoting alternative economic models such as Social and Solidarity Economies, as a strategy of social transformation, supporting community initiatives often led by women, with the aim of producing life, to protect, feed, shelter, heal, care and to meet human needs, sustaining the lives of the people and communities involved, based on a logic of solidarity and cooperation, in facing the adversities of the dominant neoliberal economic model.
- Advocating/adopting a feminist taxation system to generate sufficient public revenue, while ensuring that this revenue is fairly redistributed and focused on rebalancing economic and gender inequalities.
- Holding businesses to account to human rights standards such as supporting mandatory Human Rights Due Diligence and existing non-binding norms such as the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and its Gender Guidance; and ensuring timely and efficient access to remedy mechanisms and standards by actively working towards the UN Binding Treaty on Business and Human Rights.
- Ratifying the ILO Convention 190 as a way to eliminate violence and harassment in the world of work.
- Ensuring women's effective participation in sustainable alternatives and addressing the inequalities in financing environmental and climate-related programmes. Pushing for the reform of discriminatory policies around financial inclusion and asset/property ownership, especially ancestral and marital properties and their meaningful implementation in the ground.

- Developing the capabilities of the community and faith based organisations, through articulation between actors, economic support, circulation of knowledge, seeking to strengthen the capacities in the communities, so that they can continue developing their initiatives, guaranteeing the sustainability of the processes, based on transformational development and ecumenical diakonia.
- Addressing the exclusion of women in the digital economy by enacting laws that address the digital divide and also retracting restrictions on the internet and digital platforms which drive access to information and e-commerce.

RESOURCES

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[Roadmap for Congregations, Communities and Churches for an Economy of Life and Ecological Justice \(PDF for home printing\) | World Council of Churches \(oikoumene.org\)](#).

ENDNOTES

1 A caring economy is an economic system that shares and recognises care as an intricate part of the social fabric; promotes the wellness and development of people regardless of gender, class, race, or ability, while respecting and taking responsibility for the planet, addressing and overcoming structural inequality of patriarchy. It enables the realisation of human rights and moves away from the traditional Gross Domestic Product (GDP) oriented economic approaches

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3 UN Women, 2021. Addressing the digital gender divide in Africa through the African Girls Can Code Initiative, available at [Addressing the digital gender divide in Africa through the African Girls Can Code Initiative | UN Women – Africa](https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-gender-divide-in-africa).

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5 Ibid

6 Oxfam, 23 March 2022. Pandemic creates new billionaire every 30 hours — now a million people could fall into extreme poverty at same rate in 2022, available at <https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/pandemic-creates-new-billionaire-every-30-hours-now-million-people-could-fall>

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8 EURODADD, September 2021. A Debt Pandemic: Impact of the crisis in developing countries, available at <https://infogram.com/a-debt-pandemic-update-1h7z2l8x7yk5x6o>.

9 Ibid

10 UN Women, Progress of the World's Women 2015-2016. Chapter 2, p. 71, available at [Women in informal economy | UN Women – Headquarters](https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-gender-divide-in-africa).

11 See, for instance, Tax Justice Network, 2015. How tax wars affect women?, available at [How do tax wars affect women? - Tax Justice Network](https://www.taxjustice.network.org/en/press-releases/how-tax-wars-affect-women/).

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13 World Bank. 25 March 2019. Women in Half the World Still Denied Land, Property Rights Despite Laws, available at <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2019/03/25/women-in-half-the-world-still-denied-land-property-rights-despite-laws>.

14 See, for instance, "Discrimination in Personal Status Laws for Churches in Palestine" [The Evangelical Lutheran Church Experience: The Adoption of a Law Based on Equality](https://www.evangelical.org/faith-life/faith-life-articles/discrimination-in-personal-status-laws-for-churches-in-palestine).

About ACT Alliance

We are a global faith-based coalition organized in national and regional forums operating in more than 120 countries. Through our more than 140 members, we work on humanitarian aid, gender and climate justice, migration and displacement, and peace and security to support local communities.

Our goal is to promote a locally-led and coordinated approach to advocacy, humanitarian and developmental issues.

Basic Facts about the Alliance

ACT Alliance is composed of more than 140 faith-based member organisations working in long-term development, advocacy and humanitarian assistance.

- Our members work in more than 120 countries.
- Our members employ more than 30,000 staff and volunteers globally.
- Our members mobilise approximately more than \$ 2 billions each year.
- The alliance is supported by an international Secretariat of more than 25 staff based in Geneva, Bangkok, New York, Toronto, Amman, El Salvador, Nairobi and Brussels.
- ACT Alliance was established on 1 January 2010 by bringing together the vision, resources, the people of the organisations who have been working together since 1995 as ACT International and since 2003 as ACT Development.

Web

www.actalliance.org

Twitter

www.twitter.com/actalliance

ACT Alliance

150 Route de Ferney

1200 Geneva CH

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