



Rusiani and her son Habil in their shop in their shop in rural Indonesia (2010). Access to low-interest loans for small businesses is difficult, particularly for women. Photo: Suzi O'Keefe/Oxfam

THE G20 AND GENDER EQUALITY

How the G20 can advance women's rights in employment, social protection and fiscal policies

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Across G20 countries and beyond, women are paid less than men, do most of the unpaid labour, are over-represented in part-time work, and are discriminated against in the household, in markets and in institutions. In 2012 in the Los Cabos Declaration, G20 leaders committed to tackling the barriers to women's full economic and social participation and to expanding opportunities for women in their countries. Oxfam supports this commitment, and calls on the G20 to go further and assess its agenda and actions on women's rights and gender equality. During the Australian presidency, the G20 has the chance to make good its promises for truly inclusive growth – working to make women more resilient to economic crisis through gender-sensitive economic growth and gender-equal employment policies.

SUMMARY

In its 'World Development Report 2012: Gender Equality and Development', the World Bank asserted that gender equality was a core development objective in its own right and also 'smart economics'. The same year, in their Los Cabos Declaration, G20 leaders committed to tackling the barriers to women's full economic and social participation and to expanding opportunities for women in their countries. Oxfam supports this commitment, and calls on the G20 to go further and assess the entirety of their agenda and actions in the light of development and rights-based commitments to women's rights and gender equality.

Across G20 countries and beyond, women get paid less, do most of the unpaid labour, are over-represented in part-time work, and are discriminated against in the household, in markets, and in institutions. Their situation is worse when their gender identity intersects with other forms of social and economic power inequalities and marginalization based on, for example, race, class, or income. The G20 countries' commitment to gender equality and inclusive growth can only be realised if they take action to rectify the shortcomings of an economic system that excludes or devalues what matters most: the realization of the rights and dignity of all human beings and protection of the natural environment.

The effects of such a deeply gender-discriminatory system include women's poverty and, in many cases, their inability to live up to their full potential. Women's crucial contributions to economies and to society are under-recognized and limited because of gender discrimination that has the powerful effect of threatening their health and well-being, as well as those of their families. Women consistently make up the majority of the world's poorest citizens and of groups marginalized from economic decision making, and their unpaid contributions are largely invisible in a system that does not value the totality of their work.

The relationships between growth, economic inequality, and gender equality are complex. It is important to note that growth does not automatically lead to gender equality; however, inclusive growth cannot be achieved with gender-blind policies.

- Only one high-income country in the G20 – South Korea – has achieved greater income equality alongside economic growth since 1990.¹ However, this growth is built on gender inequality in wages and discriminatory practices: South Korea ranks worst among OECD countries on the gender wage gap.²
- It will take 75 years for the principle of equal pay for equal work to be realized³ at the current rate of decline in wage inequality between men and women.
- The monetary value of unpaid care work is estimated at anything from 10 percent to over 50 percent of GDP.⁴ An additional 20–60 percent of GDP would be added if the hidden contribution of unpaid work was recognized and valued.⁵
- If women's paid employment rates were the same as men's, the USA's GDP would increase by 9 percent, the Eurozone's by 13 percent, and Japan's by 16 percent. In 15 major developing economies, per capita income would rise by 14 percent by 2020 and 20 percent by 2030.⁶

Oxfam is concerned with gender equality and women's rights as ends in themselves and because their absence drives poverty, while their fulfilment has been shown to drive development. This paper argues that the G20's growth and development agenda can only be considered inclusive – and can only make a positive difference to real people – when women and men have equal opportunities to benefit, human rights are fulfilled, and sustainable development is pursued. These are not only 'women's issues' – they are systemic issues that determine the well-being of the whole planet.

Oxfam recommends that the G20:

Treats gender inequality as a systemic issue – including in governance and accountability mechanisms

The G20 can contribute to an enabling environment for women's economic and social rights by:

- Identifying gender differences in work that men and women do, including unpaid work, and addressing gender discrimination in opportunities and outcomes of macro-economic policies;
- Developing a mechanism that ensures inclusion of gender in macro-economic policy making processes, in accordance with UN and International Labour Organization (ILO) commitments;
- Developing meaningful engagement processes with civil society, including women's rights organizations, so that policies are more rooted in the reality of women's lives;
- Supporting an accountable post-2015 UN process and inclusion of stand-alone goals on extreme economic inequality, achieving gender equality and women's rights, and transformative targets to this end.

Promotes gender-equitable fiscal policy

The G20 can ensure gender-equitable fiscal policy by:

- Promoting financing of public services to reduce women's unpaid care work and to expand their job opportunities;
- Ensuring that taxation systems and policies recognize unequal gender roles and work to redistribute them;
- Promoting the elimination of gender bias in national budgets and tax codes;
- Engaging with women's groups to promote greater accountability of budget processes through gender-sensitive budget monitoring and gender budgeting.

Ensures decent work and social protection

The G20 can ensure decent work and social protection that benefit women by:

- Promoting a universal social protection floor that ensures protection for women;
- Pursuing data collection and analysis that recognize unpaid work and policies to redistribute it;
- Ending workplace gender discrimination and promoting family-friendly policies, such as increasing parental leave entitlements, access to care for children and the elderly, and social insurance;
- Targeting employment policies to create decent jobs for women, eliminate gender wage gaps and occupational segregation;
- Promoting labour legislation that improves the bargaining power and position of women.

NOTES

- 1 Oxfam (2012) 'Left Behind by the G20?: How inequality and environmental degradation threaten to exclude poor people from the benefits of economic growth', Oxfam Briefing Paper 157, <http://www.oxfam.org/en/policy/left-behind-by-g20>
- 2 South Korea slipped from 108th to 111th position on the World Economic Forum (WEF)'s Gender Gap Index due to declines in labour force participation and wage equality. Asia News Network (2013) 'Philippines best performer in Asia-Pacific in gender equality, says WEF', 25 October 2013.
- 3 ILO (2011): A new era of social justice, Report of the Director-General, Report I(A), International Labour Conference, 100th Session, Geneva, 2011.
http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_norm/@relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_155656.pdf
- 4 United Nations (2013) 'Report of the Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights'.
- 5 R. Antonopoulos (2008) 'The Unpaid Care Work – Paid Work Connection', Working Paper 541, Geneva: Levy Economics Institute/ILO.
- 6 <http://www.unwomen.org>

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