

Policy Recommendations to the CHOGM 2022

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Women’s Economic Empowerment - Priority Areas for the CHOGM

This year’s theme of the CHOGM ‘Delivering a Common Future: Connecting, Innovating, Transforming’ builds on the commitments adopted by the Commonwealth Heads of Governments in its 2018 communique ‘Towards a Common Future’. These include critical commitments to push for empowerment of all women and girls, including addressing systemic barriers to women’s full and equal participation in the economy and increasing the number and enhancement of the success rate of women-owned businesses, breaking down gender barriers in all sectors, and increase opportunities for women to trade internationally.

Implementing these commitments remains critical as the progress towards women’s economic empowerment and gender equality more widely ‘has slowed to a standstill and in some cases, reversed.’¹ The status of women’s economic empowerment remains concerning and much needs to be done to accelerate the efforts towards achieving economic gender justice.

- According to a World Economic Forum report published in 2021, it will take 268 years to close the gender gap in economic participation.
- On average, women have just three-quarters of the legal rights afforded to men² and currently 155 countries have at least one law that limits women’s economic opportunities.³

These facts illustrate that that progress towards gender equality is hard won but easily lost and implementing already existing women’s economic rights commitments and creating additional commitments are an urgent matter requiring swift action from the CHOGM.

¹ United Nations, “Secretary-General António Guterres, Remarks at the New School: ‘Women and Power’”, UNSG, 2020, <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2020-02-27/remarks-new-school-women-and-power>

² World Bank Group, “Women, Business and the Law 2021”, World Bank, 2021, https://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/sites/wbl/documents/2021/02/WBL2021_ENG_v2.pdf

³ World Bank Group, “Women, Business and the Law 2020”, World Bank, 2020, www.openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/32639/9781464815324.pdf

The Cherie Blair Foundation for Women recommends the CHOGM addresses the following priority areas:

1. Promoting and Resourcing Women's Entrepreneurship and Economic Empowerment

Even before the pandemic, there were fewer female entrepreneurs than there are male entrepreneurs in most countries. In 2020, for every 100 businesses started by men, only 73 were started by women.⁴ Globally, only 1 in 3 businesses are owned by women and in low-income countries only 1 in 4 businesses have any women owners.⁵

For women entrepreneurs, the pandemic has meant further reduced incomes, temporary and permanent business closures, dismissal of employees, missed business opportunities and reduced access to often already limited finance and capital. Women-owned firms face additional barriers to accessing government support, and are more likely to close, many citing difficulties with managing additional unpaid care work¹. Women-owned enterprises are overrepresented in sectors most vulnerable to the detrimental impacts of COVID-19 – such as retail, hospitality and tourism and services as well as in the textile industry.

Research from the Cherie Blair Foundation for Women based on responses from 125 women entrepreneurs in 32 low- and middle-income countries reveals critical insights on women entrepreneurs' experiences and challenges last year. Most (84%) women entrepreneurs responding to the survey reported that the pandemic has had a negative impact on their businesses, and nearly four in ten women (39%) responded that their business may have to close as a result.

Recommendations:

- Adopt strong policy commitments for the development and promotion of women's entrepreneurship and economic empowerment, including an increase in current spending and additional funding for addressing barriers to women's economic empowerment such as gender stereotypes and women's disproportionate unpaid care work.
- Put women entrepreneurs at the forefront of policy and COVID-19 recovery commitments and recognise the systemic challenges they face and the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on their businesses. It remains important to ensure that women entrepreneurs are able to survive and thrive through the COVID-19 pandemic through the creation of fiscal support packages designed specifically to support women-owned micro, small and medium sized enterprises (MSMEs). In addition, concrete commitments are required from the CHOGM members to ensure

⁴ The Credit Suisse Research Institute, "Gender 3000 in 2021: Broadening the Diversity Discussion", Credit Suisse, 2021, <https://www.credit-suisse.com/about-us-news/en/articles/media-releases/credit-suisse-gender-3000-report-shows-women-hold-almost-a-quart-202109.html>

⁵ Daniel Halim, "Women Entrepreneurs needed – stat!" World Bank, 2020, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/opendata/women-entrepreneurs-needed-stat>

women entrepreneurs have equal access to market opportunities such as through public procurement as well as access to finance.

- Support initiatives promoting women entrepreneurs' access to skills and education as well as strengthening their agency and leadership.

2. Tackling Gender Stereotypes affecting Women's Economic Empowerment and Entrepreneurship

Gender stereotypes undermine women's economic rights and opportunities in multiple ways. For instance, gender stereotypes significantly shape women's journeys to and through entrepreneurship by affecting their aspirations, sources of support, opportunities, access to resources, perceptions, and the wider entrepreneurial ecosystem. They impact different women in diverse and numerous ways, intersecting with other kind of stereotypes, including those relating to race, ethnicity, age or sexual orientation and gender identity.

Based on the detailed survey responses from 221 Women Entrepreneurs across 42 low and middle income countries, the report, 'Gender Stereotypes and their Impact on Women Entrepreneurs', published by the Cherie Blair Foundation for Women⁶ reveals that:

- Gender stereotypes are part of the social background for women entrepreneurs with 96% of respondents saying they had directly experienced them in their lives.
- Overall, the majority (70%) of respondents said that gender stereotypes have negatively affected their work as an entrepreneur.
- Nearly a quarter (23%) of the women entrepreneurs had experienced gender stereotypes or discriminatory remarks whilst trying to access finance for their business.
- 61% said they believe that gender stereotypes impact their business growth and affect how seriously they are taken as business owners (63%).

Recommendations

- Increase the understanding of how gender stereotypes shape women's lives, including entrepreneurship, economic participation, division of unpaid care work, and empowerment.
- Raise awareness about how gender stereotypes shape the realisation of rights and equal opportunities, such as those related to economic participation and entrepreneurship.
- Take concrete measures to prevent and eliminate gender stereotypes and their negative impacts, both in private and public spheres. The efforts could include:
 - a) Showcasing and celebrating successful women entrepreneurs and their work through media and other communication channels to increase the visibility of

⁶ Cherie Blair Foundation for Women, "Gender Stereotypes and their Impact on Women Entrepreneurs", Cherie Blair Foundation for Women, 2021, [Gender Stereotypes and Their Impact on Women Entrepreneurs - Cherie Blair Foundation for Women](#)

women entrepreneurs' contribution to the economy, their communities and families and to promote their rights.

- b) Ensuring educational materials are free from any stereotypes, and that children and young people are exposed to a diversity of roles for all genders and are actively encouraged to reject and challenge gender stereotypes. Put in place initiatives to engage with young people to promote diverse and progressive choices in career orientation and to encourage and support aspiring young women entrepreneurs in the early stages of their entrepreneurship careers.
- c) Gathering data disaggregated by gender and other intersecting factors that fuel discrimination in economic participation and entrepreneurship. Include questions about gender roles, gender stereotypes and biases as part of national data gathering. Use this data to increase understanding of how gender stereotypes and social norms shape entrepreneurship, to inform relevant policy-making processes, programmes and other initiatives. This means recognising that deconstructing gender stereotypes can take a long time, so it is important to ensure long-term commitment to this work.

3. Recognising and Redistributing Unpaid Care Work

Women face the 'double burden' of having to juggle work with unpaid care work consisting of childcare, caring of elderly or sick people, as well as providing basic care and provision of food in households. Before the pandemic, women already spent about three times as many hours on unpaid domestic work and care work as men.¹⁹ But the pandemic has increased the unpaid workloads – both for women and men – but it is women who are still doing the lion's share. This impacts the everyday lives of women in multiple ways, including undermining their economic rights and opportunities for instance to access and pursue education, formal employment, entrepreneurship and leadership.

For instance, the OECD⁷ reports that 'mothers were nearly three times as likely as fathers to report that they took on the majority or all of additional unpaid care work related to school or childcare facility closures' at the onset of the Government mandated lockdowns that occurred because of the pandemic.

Unpaid care work carried out by women is estimated to add nearly 11 trillion dollars to the global economy each year which adds around 9% of global GDP.⁸

Recommendations:

⁷ Valerie Frey and Lydia Alajääskö, "Caregiving in Crisis: Gender inequality in paid and unpaid work during COVID-19", OECD Policy Responses to Coronavirus (COVID-19), OECD, 2021, https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/view/?ref=1122_1122019-pxf57r6v6k&title=Caregiving-in-crisis-Gender-inequality-in-paid-and-unpaid-work-during-COVID-19

⁸ Economic Justice and Rights Action Coalition, "Care Manifesto", CARE International, 2021, <https://insights.careinternational.org.uk/publications/the-care-manifesto-a-joint-call-for-action-by-the-economic-justice-and-rights-action-coalition-civil-society-organisations-and-youth-group-leads>

- Address the unpaid care work burden disproportionately impacting women and ensure that national macroeconomic policies address the gender inequalities in unpaid care and other domestic responsibilities. Ensure that the importance of unpaid care work and its disproportionate shouldering by women is recognised in the final communique of the CHOGM.
- Recognise and redistribute women’s disproportionate share of unpaid care work through adoption of gender-transformative policies, social protection systems, public care services and investment in appropriate technology and infrastructure. Existing social security schemes and safety nets should be expanded to make them more inclusive and work towards Universal Social Protection.
- Support campaigns and programmes that seek to challenge stereotypes relating to domestic division of labour and unpaid care work and promote progressive and diverse participation and roles for women and men in both private and public spheres. Concrete policies and programmes to provide childcare to allow women to participate more effectively remain critical.
- Echoing the joint call for action by the Economic Justice and Rights Action Coalition⁹, we call on the CHOGM governments to build women’s and girls’ leadership in economies, societies, politics and the workplace. This means including women and girls in decision-making and leadership positions and investing in local women-led and women’s rights organisations.

About the Cherie Blair Foundation for Women

The Cherie Blair Foundation for Women works with women entrepreneurs in low and middle income countries. We work together to enable women entrepreneurs to reach their potential. We are committed to eliminating the global gender gap in entrepreneurship and creating a future where women entrepreneurs thrive.

Since our inception in 2008, we have supported more than 200,000 women to start and grow successful micro, small and medium-sized businesses in over 100 countries. Training, mentoring, networking, and collaboration are at the heart of our work, deploying technology innovatively to reach and connect with more women worldwide. Our approach opens doors for women entrepreneurs to networks, finance, new markets, investments and opportunities.

As a result, women create a future for themselves, their families, and their communities. In turn, they contribute to more robust economies, global gender equality and a thriving entrepreneurial sector.

www.cherieblairfoundation.org

⁹ Ibid.