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Women as “underutilized assets”

A critical review of IMF advice on female labour force participation and fiscal consolidation

Acknowledgments

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Women as “underutilized assets” – A critical review of IMF advice on female labour force participation and fiscal consolidation

ActionAid, October 2017

Cover photo: Women working in a garment factory in Bangladesh. ActionAid has set up a ‘Rights Café’ next to this factory, which provides a safe space for women workers to learn about their legal rights. Trainers at the cafés support women to demand that their rights are upheld.

Executive summary

This briefing focuses on the IMF's recent advice aimed at increasing female labour force participation. It calls on the IMF to consider female labour force participation in the context of the work women are doing in total, and highlights that the IMF needs to urgently address the impact of their prescribed macroeconomic policies on women's opportunities to access decent work, their disproportionate unpaid care burden and their ability to exercise choice over their economic contribution.

In the last four years the IMF has started to explore gender inequality as an “emerging issue”. The IMF's inclusion of gender in its monitoring of member countries' economic and financial policies – its country surveillance – has had an explicit focus on barriers to female labour force participation.

ActionAid's review of 124 IMF surveillance reports shows that the IMF has now recommended more than one in five member countries to take action to increase female labour force participation. Whilst the country specific advice provided by the IMF to countries recognises the need to address issues such as child care provision and education, it is not accompanied with recognition of the need for fiscal space to make these and other investments vital to address the structural barriers to women's full enjoyment of economic rights.

In fact, a large majority of the countries that were advised to increase female labour force participation were also told to start, increase or not deviate from plans on fiscal consolidation. The surveillance reports are

silent on the gendered impacts of the fiscal consolidation advice provided, though it's well-documented that austerity has more negative impacts on women than on men.

Deeply-embedded patriarchal norms mean that women have a dual role in the economy: productive and reproductive. This reality – and the failure of governments, businesses and institutions to recognise and address it – mean that women's unpaid labour is too often exploited or unrecognised, even as it provides a massive subsidy to states and economies.

Increasing women's labour force participation must be accompanied by policy change to address the structural causes of women's economic inequality. As a result of the disproportionate amount of unpaid care and domestic work that women do globally, they already work longer days than men in most countries. Fiscal policy needs contribute to redressing this injustice.

“If female labour force participation is pursued as an end in itself without addressing the structural causes of women's economic inequality, it runs the risk of entrenching or even worsening gender inequality.”

Gender inequality cannot be treated as a standalone topic; mainstream macroeconomic policy has greater gendered impacts than any separate advice can compensate for. In line with former work by Global Unions¹ and the Bretton Woods Project², ActionAid recommends the IMF to ensure that every aspect of its country surveillance, alongside its lending and technical assistance, contributes to the reduction of gender inequality and the realisation of human rights.

Setting the scene: women's current work situation

More than 70 countries maintain restrictions on the types of work that women can access.³ Despite significant gains in women's and men's rights to work, systematic disadvantages persist. Women are overrepresented in the least paid, insecure and vulnerable jobs, and have less opportunity and access to resources to start and develop their own businesses than men. When paid and unpaid work hours are counted, women already work longer hours than men in nearly all countries. Analysis and advice on getting more women into the workforce needs to address these structural injustices.

Unpaid care and domestic work

Our economies are built on the premise of life-long and largely uninterrupted employment, which fails to recognise or address the reproductive realities of our societies. Patriarchal structures uphold ideas of 'male breadwinners' and 'female carers', in which women are systematically socialised into taking on the additional care and domestic work. This is work that our societies fail to sufficiently recognise, reduce and redistribute.

Globally, women take on three times as much unpaid care work as men.¹⁰ This work includes caring for children, the sick and the elderly, taking care of household necessities such as cooking, collecting water and subsistence farming. This work not only contributes to the family unit; it also

Women's work in numbers:

- Women take on three times as much unpaid care work as men.⁴
- A young woman entering the job market today can expect to work four years more than her male peers over her lifetime, balancing paid work and unpaid care responsibilities.⁵
- Labour force participation rate for women is currently 49.4%. That's 26.7% below that of men.⁶
- Unemployment rate for women stands at 6.2%. That's 0.7% higher than that of men.⁷
- Gender segregation across sectors has increased between 1997 and 2017, from 15 percentage points to 20.5 percentage points.⁸
- Nearly 60% of women do not have a statutory right to maternity leave.⁹

All estimates are global averages.

subsidises the state and the private sector. As women and girls are more likely to fill the gap when public social services are absent, quality and availability of these services disproportionately impacts women's total workload.

Women's increasing entry into paid work has not been accompanied by a commensurate change in the gender division of unpaid labour in the care economy. Many women

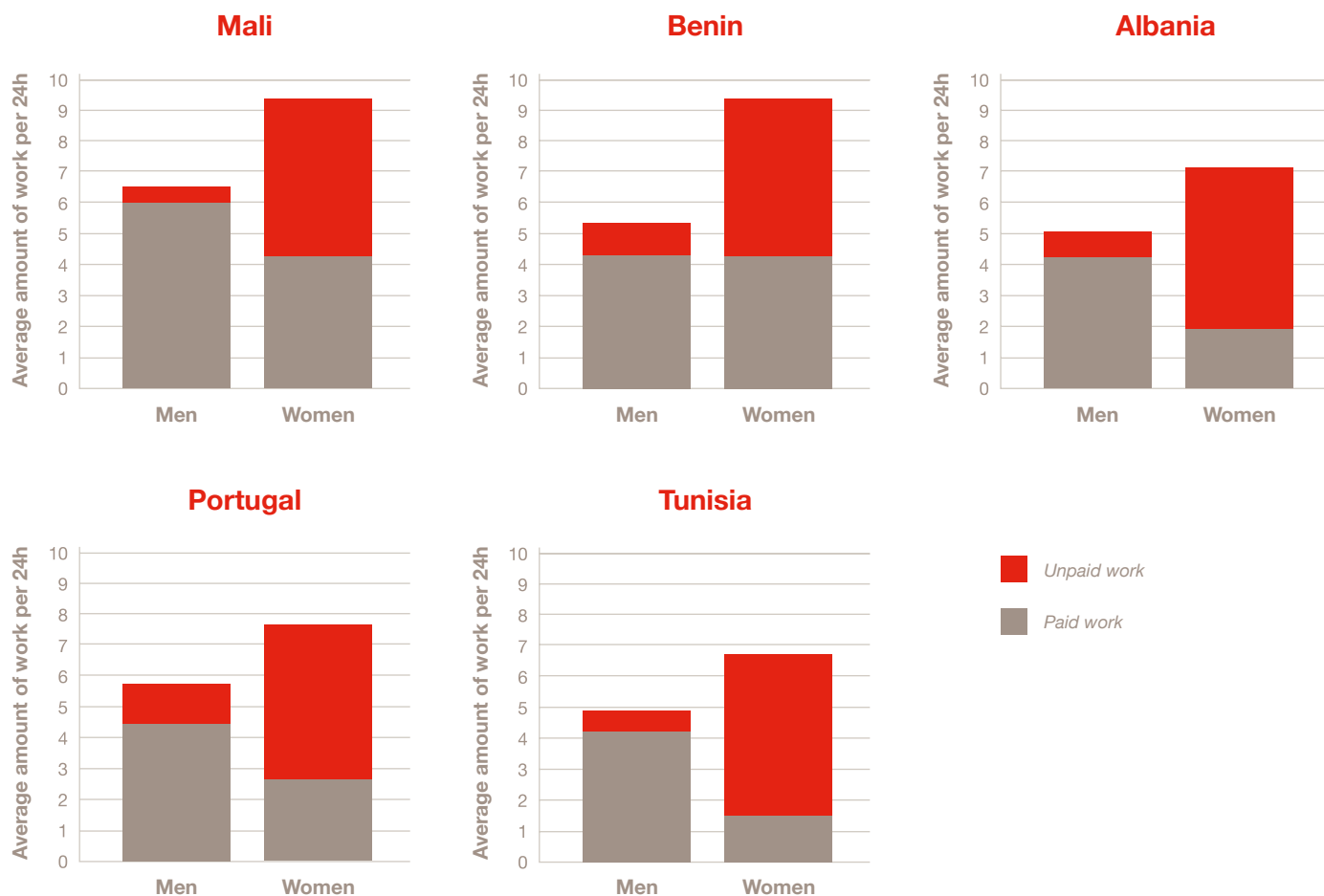
therefore face a ‘double burden’ which has negative health and well-being impacts. This also gives rise to the phenomenon of ‘time poverty’ and impacts on the type of paid work women can engage in. Feminist scholars and the women’s rights movement therefore call for unpaid care work to be recognised, reduced and redistributed.¹¹ Redistribution needs to take place at the household level, between men and women – as well as at the national level, between the household and the state.

When paid and unpaid work hours are combined, women currently work longer days than men in nearly all countries.¹² In 72 of the 83 countries for which UN Women have available data, women work more hours than men.¹³ However, men get paid for more hours of work than women in all countries but one in the study.¹⁴

Analysis and advice on getting more women into the workforce must also address women’s unpaid work. Whilst this is sometimes recognised in theory, it is a different story when it comes to formulation of government budgets. Reducing and redistributing unpaid care and domestic work involves public investment to challenge patriarchal structures and to meet our societies’ care needs. Without these actions, women are left further subsidising both the private sector and the state.

Gender segregation in employment distribution has increased in the last two decades, where education, health and social work are the sectors with the highest relative concentration of women globally.¹⁶ Public social spending, as well as cuts to this spending, therefore also has a very direct impact on women’s access to paid work.

Five of the countries where women work far more than men each day¹⁵



Vulnerable employment

Patriarchal norms not only affect women's ability to enter the workforce, but the terms on which they do so. When in the labour force, women continue to face higher unemployment, underemployment, vulnerable employment, informal employment and working poverty than men.¹⁷ Almost half of women and men in paid work are in 'vulnerable employment',¹⁸ trying to scrape a living from a range of activities, or working (often unpaid) for a relative's family business, mainly in agriculture or service provision. Most people in vulnerable employment are in informal employment; meaning their job is not sufficiently covered by labour law or social protection.¹⁹

There is gendered occupational segregation in vulnerable employment. Women tend to be more heavily represented in work where pay and conditions are the lowest. They are three times more likely than men to be in a subordinate role in a small family business.²⁰ Women are also overrepresented in employment that take place in private homes. One in every 25 female workers is a domestic worker, work which exposes them to high rates of human rights abuses, including sexual violence, and where they often work excessively long hours for very little pay.²¹

Women in vulnerable employment systematically lack social protection including sick pay, maternity pay and opportunity to unionize. Their work is temporary and volatile. To address these women's right to decent work, links also need to be rebuilt between economic policy and social policy, through improved work conditions and new decent work opportunities.²² World leaders unanimous commitment to equitable and universal access to social protection, as part of the Sustainable Development Goals' (SDGs),

is of particular importance to this group of women. In conflict with the unanimously adopted Goals, the IMF instead continues to push a minimalist agenda of targeted social assistance policies, to reconcile poverty reduction with fiscal austerity.²³ This policy approach risks excluding large segments of vulnerable populations.²⁴

Salaried employment

In developing countries, only 13.6% of women are in salaried employment, compared with 24.3% of men.²⁵ A significant growth area for female employment is in the production of ready-made garments, footwear and electronics. These industries have been offered lucrative tax cuts and deregulation by governments seeking to boost economic growth and exports.

Export-led development strategies have also been heavily subsidised by poor women's underpaid and unpaid labour. Profits are generated by dint of paying women low wages on the basis that their skills are 'natural' – for example that their fingers are more nimble at intricate work such as sewing or electronics assembly. Women – especially young women without formal education – are preferred as employees because of their supposed docility. Gender inequality in the labour market has thus served to maintain countries' 'comparative advantages' in a global market, whilst maximising corporate profits and narrowing policy space for countries to determine their own economic paths. The Rana Plaza disaster in Bangladesh in April 2013 was a stark reminder of the shocking conditions that workers, the majority of them young women, continue to face in the global value chains of international corporations.

The lack of transparency in global supply chains means that large multinational companies can source labour intensive work from countries where labour and inputs are comparatively cheap and can take advantage

of weak regulatory environments. Pressure to supply goods cheap, fast and ‘flexibly’ means that factory owners cut costs wherever they can. By joining global value chains, low and middle income countries have pursued a model of economic development that depends on the exploitation of millions of women, forced to work in terrible conditions for little pay.²⁶

The rights of women who face exploitation in global supply chains are not being upheld.

If workers are unpaid or suffer violations of any kind they have little legal recourse, as the parent company’s country is unlikely to have legal jurisdiction over the actions of a subsidiary in another country.²⁷ By increasing women’s participation in the labour force in these kinds of jobs without any attention to improving pay and conditions, economic growth is likely to be the direct result of women’s inequality in employment.



Hauwa, a single working parent in Nigeria

Hauwa, 30, is a teacher and lives with her two sons and parents in Jiwa, Nigeria. Since 2008, when she lost her husband, Hauwa has cared for her sons and her parents. She teaches at a government school and despite working full time she is responsible for all the housework, including her parents’ cooking, cleaning and laundry, which takes up most of her time. “I work as a teacher and when I come back, I have to start thinking of cooking, washing...it is very hectic” she said.

Hauwa says because she doesn’t have daughters she is expected to shoulder the burden of balancing her unpaid care work with her paid teaching work alone. “I don’t have daughters and as it’s taboo for boys to work, there’s no one else to do it.” However, she is challenging what is seen as ‘women’s work’ by teaching her sons to help around the house. She says, “We’re trying to let the younger ones know that things have to change. We don’t have to build on the tradition that it is a taboo for a man to do housework.”

IMF policy advice

Over the years, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has been expanding its mandate from monetary policy to macroeconomics and, most recently, social policy. The IMF's lending and surveillance activities influence and set the parameters for national policy both directly and indirectly. This briefing focuses on the recent gender inequality surveillance activities. The most important and complementary role that the IMF can take in support for women's rights and gender equality is likely to be supporting its member countries in identifying progressive ways to create the fiscal space needed for crucial reforms. As such, advice on fiscal space and fiscal consolidation is also reviewed.

IMF advice on female labour force participation

The representation of women in the paid workforce has not traditionally been an issue that the IMF has engaged on. However, in the last four years the IMF has started to explore gendered inequalities as an “emerging issue”, alongside income inequality and climate change. The main appeal of an increased number of women in the labour force to the IMF is that having more women in the workforce increases economic growth.²⁸ In the words of the IMF; it's macro-critical.

In 2013, the IMF published ‘Women, Work and the Economy; Macroeconomic Gains from Gender Equity’, which outlines the potential significant macroeconomic gains to be made from increasing female labour force

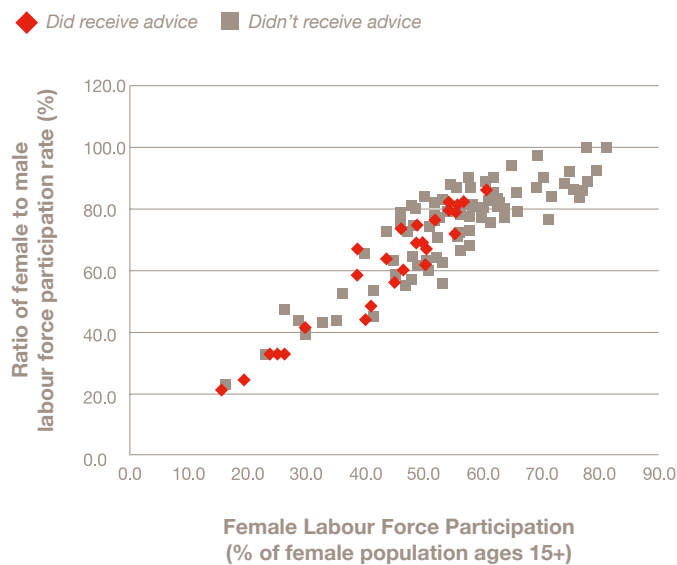
IMF country surveillance – what it is and why it matters

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) is an international organisation with a near-global membership of 189 countries. The IMF carries out monitoring of member countries' economic and financial policies; it lends money to member countries in severe financial trouble and it provides technical assistance. The IMF also carries out research and data gathering to support these three activities.

The IMF's monitoring of member countries is formally referred to as surveillance. It typically involves annual consultation in member countries carried out by IMF staff. The surveillance visits are also known as Article IV consultations, as this monitoring is obligatory to member countries under Article IV of the IMF's Articles of Agreement. IMF staff then produces a written report to the Executive Board, and the Board's views on the report are shared with the member country's authorities.³⁰

A key aspect of the IMF's surveillance is the policy advice provided. This advice has a major impact on countries' macroeconomic policies. Reviews of IMF surveillance indicate that a large share of low income countries and emerging markets rely on the IMF as their key external advisor on macro-policy decisions. For low income countries, no institution other than the World Bank comes close to that position.³¹

Figure 1. Labour force participation levels of jurisdictions that did and didn't receive advice to increase female labour force participation compared



Note: Estimates of each of the 124 countries' levels of female labour force participation and ratio of female to male labour force participation is displayed, where the colour of the indicator displays whether advice to increase female labour force participation was provided by the IMF in the 2016 surveillance reports. Data source: Author's analysis of publicly available Article IV 2016 reports and ILO data.

Figure 2. Gender inequality levels of jurisdictions that did and didn't receive advice to increase female labour force participation compared



Note: Estimates of each of the 124 countries' levels of gender inequality and gender development is displayed, where the colour of the indicator displays whether advice to increase female labour force participation was provided by the IMF in the 2016 surveillance reports. Data source: Author's analysis of publicly available Article IV 2016 reports and UNDP data.

participation. The following years the IMFs engagement with this topic deepened and culminated in the inclusion of “gender” in the 2015 Guidance Note for Surveillance, as one issue “staff may wish to consider” when developing country surveillance.²⁹

The IMF’s interest in different forms of inequalities’ impact on sustained economic growth, far from the rights-based approach to realising equality applied by other international institutions such as UN Women and the ILO.

The IMF’s inclusion of gender in its surveillance work has had an explicit focus on barriers to female labour force participation.³² Labour force participation analysis and advice has been included in selected surveillance reports since 2015, with an increasing number of reports covering this issue in 2016. ActionAid has reviewed the analysis and recommendations on female labour force participation provided by IMF staff to countries³³ in the 2016 surveillance reports. The 124 surveillance reports which have been made publicly available by the IMF are covered by the review.³⁴

Thirty seven of the 124 (30%) of the surveillance reports for 2016 document includes discussion on women’s participation in the work force. Twenty eight of the 124 countries (23%) were advised by the Fund to act to increase female labour force participation.³⁵ However, receiving this advice is not strongly connected to a country’s current level of female labour force participation, the share of women in its work force, or its estimated levels of gender equality (see figure 1 & figure 2).

Twenty three of the 37 countries where the IMF covered female labour force participation in the surveillance review received specific advice on how to increase participation. The most frequently occurring advice is

to improve childcare provision, women's opportunities for education and their fiscal incentives to work. Less frequently occurring advice include addressing discrimination issues, improving elderly care provision and facilitating flexible working.³⁶

It's not clearly apparent from country characteristics why some countries have been advised to carry out a specific reform, whilst others have not. None of the reports refer to consultations with domestic women's rights groups or union representatives on this topic. That no stakeholder dialogue appears to have been carried out before venturing into this policy space is especially surprising given how recently the IMF has started engaging on gender inequality.

Some of the policy advice provided risks negatively impacting on women's rights depending on how it is implemented. For example, Japan and South Korea have implemented flexible working schemes to bring women back into paid work after having children, though this has not resulted in decent working conditions or gender equal job opportunities for many of the women affected.³⁷

Whilst the economic argument for enabling more women to join the workforce is strongly made, no clear recognition of women's current levels of unpaid care and domestic work is present in the majority of the reports. The view of women as currently 'underutilised' is occasionally implicit, in other cases more explicit:

"Impact on growth. Marone (2016), specifically on the Cabo Verde case, estimates that closing the gender gap in labor force participation would increase the total labor force participation rate by 12.2 percent (26,428 workers) and could have a direct impact on the level of GDP between 7.4 to 12.2 percent. (...) These

results underline the fact that women tend to be one of the most "underutilized assets" in the economy."

Extract from the Cabo Verde 2016 surveillance report

IMF advice on fiscal consolidation

The IMF's advice on increasing female labour force participation goes as far as to recognise the importance of affordable, high-quality child care and ensure that women have access to high-quality education. Feminist economists go further, recommending provision of comprehensive health care, water and sanitation and other public services such as transport, to redistribute women's unpaid care burden and open up choice about how they engage in the wider economy. However, the IMF's advice on increasing female labour force participation is not accompanied with a recognition of the need for fiscal space to make such investments.

Twenty two of the 28 countries that were advised to increase female labour force participation were also told to start, increase or not deviate from plans on fiscal consolidation. The IMF's advice on how to achieve fiscal consolidation, a reduction in fiscal deficits and debt, is focused on cutting public spending and increasing revenues. Much of the advice is focused on austerity measures, where 'eliminating inefficiencies' or 'rationalising spending' are common framings. Specific advice to countries that were also to advised to work to increase female labour force participation included rationalizing of the public wage bill³⁸, further rationalizing food subsidies³⁹, elimination of generalized subsidies,⁴⁰ and achieving the same results with lower spending in health and education.⁴¹ The advice occasionally includes qualifying wording, such as

‘while preserving pro-growth and social spending’⁴² or ‘tilting spending to pro-growth infrastructure and education programs’.⁴³

The surveillance reports are silent on the impact of the proposed austerity measures on the ability to realise increased female labour force participation in a way which addresses societal care needs and respects women’s human rights, rather than increasing gendered exploitation. Similarly, there is no discussion on the gendered impacts of the fiscal consolidation advice provided more broadly, though the gendered impacts of austerity are well-documented.⁴⁴

Because of the economic inequality that women face, combined with their socially-ascribed roles as carers, the adverse effects of budget cuts are felt disproportionately by women. The impacts of budget cuts on women’s rights occur through direct losses in income, restricted access to services, and time poverty as a result of increased unpaid work.⁴⁵ For example, the UK Women’s Budget Group has assessed that from 2010-2015, the cumulative impact of tax and benefit changes were far more dramatic for women at every decile, amounting to losses of 50 per cent more than men in cash terms and twice as much as a proportion of income.⁴⁶

Some advice is aimed at creating fiscal space. In these instances, value added tax (VAT) recommendations⁴⁷ or wording on broadening the tax base⁴⁸ are common. Consumption taxes, usually in the form of VAT, are not a progressive way of raising revenue. VAT risks having a regressive impact, as all people pay the same rate of this tax regardless of their total income. People living in poverty spend a greater proportion of their income on consumable goods by necessity and without proper exemptions of basic goods the effects will be highly regressive and risk affecting people’s access to basic necessities. If regressive impacts and the impact on reproductive

consumption are not carefully analysed, VAT can have harmful indirect gender biases.⁴⁹

Similarly, when countries don’t raise personal income tax in a progressive manner, don’t tax income from investments, provide tax exemptions⁵⁰ to large businesses, or turn a blind eye to tax avoidance and evasion, a majority of the ‘savings’ are made by men. This is a result of men’s higher income and wealth levels, compared to those of women. One of the countries that were advised to increase female labour force participation was also advised to broaden the tax base by addressing tax exemptions. This recommendation draws on the IMF’s more progressive work. Critically assessing tax exemptions, including for their impact on job creation and employment, and cutting ineffective exemptions is likely to have a direct, positive impact on gender equality, in addition to the indirect impacts of increased fiscal space.

Another country was advised that ‘notable tax cuts on productive factors’⁵¹ would be good for economic growth. However, the surveillance reports are silent on societies’ reproductive needs. The reproductive economy, where women disproportionately take responsibility for unpaid care and domestic work, both sustains and subsidises the productive economy. Without recognising this duality, and assessing the impact of tax cuts in the productive economy on funding available to invest in the reproductive economy, fiscal policy consolidation advice risks continuing to intensify women’s unpaid care and domestic work.



Thum and Chantha, young migrant workers in Cambodia

Thum and Chantha are both garment workers who live in a rented room on the outskirts of Phnom Penh, Cambodia. They have concerns about their safety and security in living in the city. Thum said “Phnom Penh city is beautiful but sometimes it is not safe for women to walk at night.” Chantha added “I heard people talking a lot about women being raped in the city. I am so scared and I want police to do patrolling in my area every day.”

Around 500,000 workers are employed in garment factories in Cambodia, more than 80% are young women migrated from rural provinces. The majority of the young women are encouraged to be ‘dutiful daughters’ by moving away from home in search of work to earn an income for their family, often cutting short their education as a result.

Despite a strong movement for worker’s rights demanding better pay in Cambodian garment factories, workers’ pay in the country is still low and working conditions are poor. Workers are expected to earn a living in cramped rooms with many other people; eating low quality food; working long hours under short-term contracts; and living under fear of rape or robbery after leaving work late at night.

Discussion

Recent research and policy advice from the IMF recognises that macroeconomic policies play a key role in achieving gender inequality. However, recognition of the fiscal space required for these key public investments in social services and infrastructure is largely absent in that same policy advice and no gendered analysis of the fiscal advice is provided. This section discusses these findings from a human rights perspective, in light of the Sustainable Development Goals.

In a briefing note on the IMF and human rights, IMF's Special Representative to the United Nations state that:

“The IMF's activities indirectly promote human rights (in particular, social and economic rights) by helping create an economic and institutional environment in which human rights can flourish. Thus, our policy advice and financial assistance support economic growth and improvements in living standards in member countries, and foster critical institutional reforms that strengthen good economic governance and respect for the rule of law. Key examples in this regard include the IMF's work on gender equality (...)”⁵²

IMF has also recently expressed support for the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):

“Since the adoption of the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015, we at the IMF have supported countries to reach their

goals through policy advice, training, and financial support.”⁵³

IMF staff further states that the institution supports Goal 5 – achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls – by its work on gender equity and inclusion:

“Gender. Increasing women's paid work has a significant positive impact on economic growth. That is why the IMF supported Egypt, India, Jordan, and Mali in their efforts to encourage more women to enter the paid workforce. (...)”⁵⁴

Here it is important to note that neither increased female labour force participation nor economic growth necessarily translate into gender equality and realisation of the rights of women and girls; indeed, their pursuit has all too often been at the expense of women. Secondly, the SDGs are clearly focused on decent work, not just any participation in the labour force,⁵⁵ a focus which IMF should adopt. Thirdly, if the IMF wants to contribute to a reduction in gender inequality, it cannot be approached as a separate “emerging issue”; the full impact of IMF policies and conditionalities on gender inequality and women's human rights need to be addressed. We will expand on each of these points in turn.

It is true that some countries with high levels of female labour force participation also rank highly on other aspects of gender equality, but the relationship is not a given (see figure 3). Benin, Burkina Faso, Dem. Rep. Congo, The Gambia and Malawi all have estimated female labour force participation rates of 70% or higher, similar to these counties' male participation rates. However, vast gender gaps in secondary education and parliamentary representation,

Figure 3. No given link between female labour force participation and gender inequality more broadly



Source: ILO and UNDP data.

alongside unmet female reproductive health needs, places these countries among the 15 countries with the largest systemic disadvantages of women in the United Nations Development Programme's Gender Inequality Index (GII) ranking.

Similarly, the evidence to support that economic growth will translate into increased gender equality is patchy at best. It is now widely accepted that increasing female participation in the labour force can speed up economic growth and that gender equality can have a positive impact on economic growth. However, the evidence on whether economic growth promotes gender equality is, at best, mixed.⁵⁶ An example of this is Brazil which despite their economic growth still falls short on gender equality progress.⁵⁷

Secondly, a blind eye cannot be turned to the kind of jobs are women to entering the paid workforce are accessing. World leaders have unanimously adopted the Sustainable Development Goals, where the Goal 8 commits to decent work for all. Decent work is a broad undertaking, and spans across ensuring fair wages, social protection for families, rights at work, safety at the workplace and freedom of association.⁵⁸

As this briefing has illustrated, not all jobs women currently do are decent – far from it. There is plenty of scope for the IMF to critically assess the impact of their policies on women in employment, including those in vulnerable employment. Advice on targeting social spending and dismantling universal approaches are at odds both with the SDGs and broadly questioned by economists outside of the IMF.⁵⁹

Thirdly, the full impact of IMF policies and conditionalities on gender inequality and women's human rights needs to be addressed. Advice on how to give more women access to work does not mean much unless the costs of operationalisation are accounted for, both in budgetary and fiscal policy terms. This briefing has touched on why fiscal policy advice will impact on the realisation of gender equality and women's economic and social rights, including and beyond their access to decent work; evidence on this from other sources is also plentiful.⁶⁰ More fundamentally, it is impossible to address the most pressing ways in which the IMF impacts on gender inequality without examining the impact of previous and current IMF policies on women's productive and reproductive work.

Whilst there are positives in the IMF's theoretical work on gender equality, the implementation of those insights into surveillance has so far been patchy. What's far more concerning is the way gender equality is approached as a separate, "emerging issue". To successfully address gender justice, IMF advice on gender equality needs to start with the realisation that previous IMF policies have intensified women's unpaid care and domestic work and limited their ability to exercise choice over their economic lives, including their access to decent work. The IMF must start to recognise and address the fundamentally gendered nature of its fiscal policy prescriptions.



Dung, a migrant worker and mother in Vietnam

Dung works in a footwear factory in an industrial city in northern Vietnam. Normally she works from 7am to 5pm carrying out quality control of shoes for a major UK brand. Like many women workers in the city she migrated away from her hometown and her family in search of work. Dung is now married and lives with her husband, young daughter and baby son.

One of the biggest challenges for migrant workers like Dung and her husband, without the support of their extended family close by, is the added expense of private childcare. Free or subsidised public childcare services are unavailable. Their situation is exacerbated by their long and unpredictable work hours, often expected to work overtime at short notice.

Dung receives a basic salary plus a bonus for working every day of the month. As a result, she rarely takes a day off. While Dung is at work, her five-year-old daughter goes to a kindergarten and her baby son is now looked after by her mother-in-law who has moved to the city to help care for the children, so Dung can return to work.

Some factories in northern Vietnam allow their workers to leave earlier than 5pm to collect their children from school. To avoid loss of wages, staff are then expected to return to the factory, often with their children, to finish their working day. ActionAid's research found that workers in Vietnam's export manufacturing industries face challenges in job security, financial penalties that are imposed if they take days off for illness, and delays in receiving wages. When factories fail to obtain orders, the hours and wages of the staff are reduced as a result.

Recommendations

Gender inequality cannot be treated as a standalone topic; mainstream macroeconomic policy has greater gendered impacts than any separate advice can compensate for.

In line with former work by Global Unions⁶¹ and the Bretton Woods Project,⁶² ActionAid recommends the IMF to ensure that every aspect of its country surveillance, alongside its lending and technical assistance, contributes to the reduction of gender inequality and the realisation of human rights.

In country surveillance, initial actions should involve:

- Completing ex-ante gender and human rights impact assessments of economic reform, austerity and fiscal consolidation policy advice.
- Scaling up advice on progressive and sustainable generation of the fiscal space necessary to reduce gender inequality.
- Engaging in meaningful consultation with in-country women's and worker's rights organisations.

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33. 'Countries' in this section refers to units which receive IMF surveillance and advice. These are almost exclusively recognised states, though surveillance is also carried out for a small number of Special Administrative Regions, such as Hong Kong.
34. The IMF reports that it piloted gender analysis in eight of their surveillance reports for 2016; Austria, Cabo Verde, Guatemala, Iran, Italy, Niger, Nigeria and Poland (IMF 2017b, *op. cit.*). ActionAid's review of the 2016 Article IV reports found that several other reports also contain gender-specific surveillance and advice, so the analysis has therefore covered the full set of publicly available 2016 Article IV reports.
35. ActionAid has identified such language in the 2016 surveillance reports for Austria, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Estonia, Former Yugoslav Republic Of Macedonia, Germany, Guatemala, Hungary, India, Iran, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Latvia, Malta, Mexico, Morocco, Niger, Panama, Poland, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States and Uruguay.
36. ActionAid analysis identified the following IMF advice to countries on how to increase female labour force participation in the 2016 surveillance reports (the frequency of each advice in brackets): • Improve childcare provision (15/23) • Improve the quality and availability of education for women (9/23) • Improve fiscal incentives to work (7/23) • Address discrimination issues (5/23) • Improve elderly care provision (4/23) • Facilitate flexible working (4/23) • Ensure safe transport (3/23) • Target subsidies (2/23) • Increase the provision of paid parental leave (2/23) • Invest in infrastructure (2/23) • Address legal restrictions (2/23) • Financial inclusion (2/23) • Government recruitment of women (1/23) • Address labour market duality (1/23) • Promote female entrepreneurship (1/23) • Promote attitudinal change (1/23)
37. ActionAid (forthcoming)
38. IMF, Hungary Article IV 2016
39. IMF, India Article IV 2016
40. IMF, Hungary Article IV 2016
41. IMF, Former Yugoslav Republic Of Macedonia Article IV 2016
42. IMF, Morocco Article IV 2016
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International Registration number: 27264198

Website: www.actionaid.org
Telephone: +27 11 731 4500
Fax: +27 11 880 8082
Email: mailjhb@actionaid.org

ActionAid International Secretariat,
Postnet Suite 248, Private Bag X31,
Saxonwold 2132,
Johannesburg, South Africa.