

CLES – Gender equality, transformative policy and practice

1. Which policy and or practice has had a transformative impact on gender equality?

Community wealth building (CWB)

Community Wealth Building aims to reorganise and control the local economy so that wealth is not extracted but is instead broadly held and generative, rooted locally, so that income is recirculated, communities are put first and people are provided with opportunity, dignity and well-being. Through this process, we see a democratic, social and economic movement, which seeks to provide resilience where there is risk and local economic security where there is precarity.

Unsurprisingly, CWB has emerged as a powerful tool to democratise our economy and create wealth for all. From Barcelona and Bologna to Preston, Islington, and Kirklees, the movement is growing and helping communities take back control.

CLES' approach is based on the role of 'Anchor institutions' - large established organisations like local authorities, the NHS, schools and universities which are rooted to their local communities.

Our approach has been refined into five key strategies, which we encourage anchors to nourish:¹

1. Plural Ownership of the Economy - At the heart of CWB is the principle that wealth is broadly held. Cooperatives, mutually owned businesses, SMEs, municipally owned companies and local banks enable the wealth generated in a community to stay in that locality and play a vital role in counteracting the extraction of wealth. Anchors therefore have a key role to play in encouraging a diverse range of ownership models in their supply chains.
2. Making financial power work for local places - Ensuring that financial investments and pension funds are directed towards local investment priorities, bringing transformative capital to locally rooted enterprises.
3. Fair employment and just labour markets - Often the biggest employers in a place, the approach Anchors take to employment can have a defining effect on the employment prospects and incomes of local people. Recruitment from lower income areas, commitment to paying the living wage and building progression routes for workers are all examples of the actions Anchors can take to stimulate the local economy and bring social improvements to local communities.
4. Anchor purchasing - By adopting robust social value frameworks, tailored to local priorities, Anchors can make the best use of public pound, generating wider social and economic value from the procurement and commissioning process.
5. Socially productive use of land and property - By supporting equitable land development (through establishment of Community Land Trusts) and development of underutilised assets for community use.

2. What has happened as a result?

CWB impacts specifically on gender equality in the following way.

¹ <https://cles.org.uk/blog/rebuilding-the-local-economy-in-britains-seaside-towns/>

First, with respect to more plural ownership of the economy, evidence suggests that cooperatives for example have a positive effect on the livelihoods of women.²

As part of its approach to community wealth building, Preston have already established a food co-op that is currently supplying anchor institutions in the locality and have recently committed to developing a number of new cooperatives.³

In terms of other models of ownership, Wigan Council have recently supported the creation of over 100 community interest companies (CICs) to support the delivery personal care budgets.⁴ Whilst we do not have data to determine the direct impact on gender equality, we do know that care provision is often unpaid and undertaken by women.⁵ As such, the likelihood is that this shift in policy will have a positive impact.

Second, the pursuit of fair employment and just labour markets, particularly in terms of paying the living wage, has a positive gender equality.⁶ As part of their CWB programme, Preston City Council became the first city council in the north of England to become and accredited living wage employer.⁷

Moreover, a number of anchor institutions that CLES is currently working with have – as part of CWB activity - committed to employee mapping exercises to determine whether inequalities exist within their respective staff profiles. Whilst work to date has focused on mapping against areas of deprivation, this practice could be used to determine levels of gender equality and to redress any imbalances.

Third, generating wider social and economic value from the procurement and commissioning process could potentially be used as way to promote gender equality. The use of social value frameworks to encourage progress against reducing the gender pay gap and the underrepresentation of women in the workforce would be a fruitful exercise.

3. Was the policy or practice implemented at a local level?

CWB policy and practice is predominantly focused at the local level. However, with the Welsh Government's championing of the foundational economy⁸ and the establishment of a community wealth building unit by the labour party, avenues for the promotion of CWB at a national level are starting to emerge.

4. Could the policy or practice be supported in other contexts?

Stronger national legislation to promote social value would help to drive more CWB activity.⁹

² See for example, http://www.copac.coop/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/COPAC_PolicyBrief_CoopsWomen.pdf and also, <http://www.chcany.org/>.

³ CLES. (forthcoming 2019). How we build community wealth in Preston: achievements and lessons.

⁴ CLES. 2019. Unpublished research.

⁵ <https://www.carecooperatives.eu/blog/creating-decent-work-and-better-quality-services-in-the-care-sector-through-cooperatives/>

⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/money/2015/sep/03/more-than-3m-women-to-benefit-from-osbornes-national-living-wage>

⁷ CLES. (forthcoming 2019). How we build community wealth in Preston: achievements and lessons.

⁸ <https://www.walesonline.co.uk/business/business-news/its-being-championed-welsh-government-15833509>

⁹ https://cles.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Restoring-Public-Values-in-Public-Services-FINAL-03_12_18.pdf