Rethinking the global financial system for gender-equal economies

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1. *Where* is the world's money?

In 2020, Oxfam revealed that the 22 richest men in the world own more wealth than all the women in Africa combined and that the world's richest 1 per cent have more than twice as much wealth as 6.9 billion people.[1] It estimated that 82 per cent of all growth in global wealth in 2017 went to the richest 1 per cent, while the bottom half of humanity saw no increase at all – and that this concentration of global wealth at the very top is accelerating.[2] These realities are so consequential that they effectively rule out the creation of truly gender equal economies in every country, including in the UK.

A core driver of this global concentration of wealth is the vast expansion in size and importance of the financial sector in all areas of the economy since the 1980s, a process called 'financialisation'. Financialisation is marked by the financial sector playing a disproportionate role in the economy, and income increasingly transferring from the 'real economy' that produces and reproduces goods and services, to the financial sector.[3] For example, while global trade in goods and services has grown rapidly over the last 40 years, the total volume of trade in foreign currency exchange markets, a particular type of financial trading, is currently about 100 times larger than the total volume of global trade in goods and services.[4] The total volume of assets being traded today under derivative contracts, another type of financial trading, is estimated at about $640 trillion, equivalent to between 2 and 3 times the volume of all the other assets in the world.[5] In 2019, the private investment management corporation BlackRock alone managed $7.4 trillion in assets,[6] almost triple the amount estimated by the UN to be required to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the set of agreed global targets for ending poverty, reducing inequality and taking climate action by 2030.[7] Lending to non-financial business now amounts to less than 3 per cent of the total assets of British banks.[8] This advancement of the financial sector into a position of structural dominance stems from its ability to create credit and acquire financial assets largely without needing to reinvest its profits to stay competitive or create anything new of value for society – a type of economic activity described as 'rentierism'. It has been argued that, in addition to finance, other key scarce assets like land, intellectual property and infrastructure have all become structurally dominated by just a few major companies in a post-1970s 'rentierisation of the UK economy'.[9]

Financialisation, and by extension rentierism, has created an unstable economic system prone to crises, while at the same time lowering living standards and eroding public investment and social protection systems. Labour's share of income, the share of income going to those who earn money through wages for labour rather than receiving interest or rent from owning assets, has dramatically declined in most countries in the last 25 years.[10] Labour rights have been curbed while labour unions have been structurally undermined, creating increasingly precarious working conditions around the world. Women's labour, both unpaid and under-paid, in the market and in the home, has long been exploited or made invisible.[11] The current economic system further entrenches these patriarchal power structures as state capacity to provide vital services, like health, education, care and social security has diminished, pushing women to fill the gaps with their unpaid or under-paid labour. The policies that make up this model, detailed in section 2, and the structures and institutions that uphold it, detailed in section 3, overwhelmingly undermine gender equality and thus hinder the creation of gender-equal economies.[12]

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[1] Oxfam, *Time to Care*, 20 January 2020, p. 9.
[2] Oxfam, *Reward Work, Not Wealth*, 22 January 2018, p. 8.
[3] See for example, G. Blakeley, *Stolen: How to save the world from financialisation*, 2019.
[4] J. Kay, *Other People's Money,* 2015.
[5] Bank for International Settlements, *OTC derivatives statistics at end-June 2019*.
[6] Reuters, *BlackRock profit beats estimates as assets top $7 trillion*, 15 January 2020.
[7] United Nationals Conference on Trade and Development, *Developing countries face $2.5 trillion annual investment gap in key sustainable development sectors*, press release, 24 June 2014.
[8] J. Kay, *Other People's Money,* 2015.
[9] B. Christopher, *Rentier capitalism: the UK case*, University of Cambridge, Bennett Institute for Public Policy.
[10] S. Seguino, 'Financialisation and inequality' in G. Sen and M. Durano, *The Remaking of Social Contracts: Feminist in Fierce New World*, 2014, p.35-5.
[11] G. Sen and M. Durano, 'Social contracts revisited: the promise of human rights' in G. Sen and M. Durano, *The Remaking of Social Contracts: Feminist in Fierce New World*, 2014, p.15.
[12] See for example, L. Holland, Tax Justice Network, *Taking Panama to task: Women's rights trampled by financial secrecy*, July 2020; R. Saalbrink, Womankind Worldwide, *Working towards a just feminist economy: The role of decent work, public services, progressive taxation and corporate accountability in achieving women's rights*, March 2019; D. Musindarwezo and T. Jones, *Debt and gender equality: How debt-servicing conditions harm women in Africa*, April 2019.

After the Second World War, an international system for managing international flows of money was created, which put in place constraints on the ability of money to move freely around the world, in which a small financial sector was closely regulated. However, when a wave of new politicians came into power in the 1980s, most notably Ronald Reagan in the US and Margaret Thatcher in the UK, and a new system developed that effectively centred the international economy around finance and other types of rentierism, rather than production. That system was underpinned by an ideology that privileges private capital and property and prescribes a small to non-existent role for the state, commonly termed 'neoliberalism'. In a neoliberal economic system, the unhindered flow of money is critical but is also destabilising. Since the 1980s, the neoliberal model has come to dominate the entire global economic system and exponentially accelerated financialisation – directly culminating in the global financial crisis of 2008 Yet, instead of serving as a turning point towards a different economic model, the 2008 crisis did not lead to system change and ultimately only further entrenched major financial interests.

Now the world faces a different, but no less devastating, economic depression, as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Just like the 2008 crisis, the impact and responses to the Covid-19 crisis are deeply gendered, with women's incomes and security disproportionately affected and many of the policy responses not taking gendered differences into account. But unlike any crisis before, the pandemic has exposed the crucial role of care work, mainly conducted by women, in our societies.[13] Women and women's rights organisations have been at the forefront of the pandemic as frontline responders, while also filling gaps in reduced state service provision by caring for children and relatives at home. [14] The impact of the pandemic will set efforts to create gender-equal economies back decades unless there is a fundamental transformation of the policies and structures that make up the international financial system that addresses structural economic inequalities and patriarchal social hierarchies. The entrenchment of financialisaton is exacerbating the current crisis and will hinder attempts to deal with its devastating impacts across the world. Yet, perhaps there is also a new an opportunity to challenge financialisaton. Now is a critical moment to change direction, to rethink what we value and how to place the achievement of a gender-equal economy at the centre of this transformation.

2. *What* policies are hindering gender-equal economies?

From the 1980s onwards, the neoliberal economic model introduced a wave of a specific policies that allowed the financial sector to grow, while systematically hollowing out the public sector and weakening labour unions. This set of policy prescriptions was termed the 'Washington Consensus' in 1989 and typically included privatisation, deregulation and liberalisation, as well as austerity measures. Feminist economists and women's rights organisations have long argued that this specific set of policies not only privileges private sector interests, but is based on a set of gender biases that relies on women's non-market labour, while giving it no economic value, ultimately undermining gender equal economies.[15] Today, after decades of accelerating hyper-globalisation, these same policies have taken a variety of forms but continue to dominate the international economic system. This section sets out an overview of just some of these key policy trends and explains why they continue to be structural barriers to creating gender equal economies.

Rising debt costs for developing countries*:* Since the 2008 financial crisis, debt payments of developing countries have nearly doubled,[16] while 64 of the poorest countries spent more on debt payments than health in 2019.[17] Increasing debt servicing costs for developing countries has been one of the most consistent constraining factors to realising gender equal economies in the Global South, because it undermines developing countries' ability to pay for public services and social protections that are critical in reducing and redistributing unpaid care work and developing gender equal economies. Most developing countries cannot borrow in their own currency and have to borrow in foreign currencies, usually US dollars, and have to do so at higher rates of interest than are paid by rich countries, reflecting the view that it is riskier to lend to them. Whereas developing countries formerly obtained loans mainly from a small handful of other governments and international intergovernmental institutions, increasingly they have obtained finance from an array of private financial lenders such as hedge funds and commodity traders, as the financial sector has grown in size and influence. As a result, borrowing costs have become even higher for developing countries and that there is much more uncertainty and instability about what happens when these countries cannot pay their debts.[18]

[13] UN Women, *UN Secretary-General's policy brief: The impact of COVID-19 on women,* April 2020; Women Budget Group, *Crisis of care for women in England as lock down lifts,* July 2020.
[14] For feminist analysis of Covid-19 and its gendered implications, see for instance, Gender and Development Network, *Feminist responses to Covid-19,* April 2020, African Feminism, *African Feminist Covid-19 Recovery Statement*, July 2020, or feministcovidresponse.com.[15] Young, Bakker, Elson, *Questioning Financial Governance from a Feminist Perspective*, 2011.
[15] Young, Bakker, Elson, *Questioning Financial Governance from a Feminist Perspective*, 2011.
[16] Eurodad, *Out of service: How public services and human rights are being threatened by the growing debt crisis*, 17 February 2020, p. 4.
[17] Jubilee Debt Campaign, *Sixty-four countries spend more on debt payments than health*, 12 April 2020.
[18] Eurodad, *Out of service: How public services and human rights are being threatened by the growing debt crisis*, 17 February 2020, p. 22.

The Covid-19 pandemic has illustrated this issue exactly, as it placed additional strain on the budgets of already heavily indebted countries that now face acute financing crises. While the governments of some rich countries offered temporary debt relief to developing countries in April 2020, private creditors did not follow suit.[19] As these developing countries decide whether to continue to pay private creditors on the one hand, or doctors and nurses responding to Covid-19 on the other, many of them face potential multi-billion dollar lawsuits from these creditors, exemplifying the primacy of private financial interests over the public good that marks today's international financial system. Many of these cases would take place in London, because 90 per cent of the debt contracts owed by the poorest countries fall under English law.[20]

The UK government is not in the same position. Currently, it can borrow as much as it wants in its own currency at almost zero interest, enabling it to finance part of its economy through debt, as it did to finance responses to the Covid-19 pandemic.[21]

Tax dodging: While net profits of the world's largest companies have more than tripled over the last thirty years, the amount of taxes governments collect from corporations has not matched that increase.[22] Multinational companies being able to 'shift profits' to low-tax jurisdictions has been estimated to cost all governments collectively upwards of $500 billion per year. In addition, all governments collectively lose tax revenues worth an estimated $189 billion a year via hidden private offshore wealth.[23] An international framework called Base Erosion and Profit Shifting, or BEPS, set up by the OECD to combat this covered only a fraction of global tax evasion and avoidance and its initial outcome agreement was widely considered a failure (discussed further below).[24] Meanwhile, the *rates* at which corporations are taxed have also steadily fallen in what has been termed 'a global race to the bottom'.[25] While all states ultimately lose out to this system that leaks billions to private interests while leaving them drained of resources critical to realising gender-equal economies, developing countries are hit hardest, with some losing more in tax avoidance than they spend on health and education.[26] To make up a small part of these lost revenues, consumption taxes, like VAT, which often disproportionately impact women, have steadily increased over this same time period.[27]

Privatisation of development finance: As world leaders came together in 2015 to agree on a shared development agenda embodied by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a flagship UN report called for fundamental reforms of the international monetary and financial system.[28] It detailed that the current system threatens global stability and is driven by financial interests, calling for greater financial regulation as a prerequisite for financing the SDGs.[29] Yet, despite these warnings, the 2015 international conference on financing for development in Addis Ababa resulted in an entirely different approach.[30] Instead of regulating private investment and reinvigorating the role of the state in delivering development, it was agreed in the so-called 'Billions to Trillions agenda' that getting private financial actors to invest their vast assets in development, especially mega-infrastructure projects, was the primary means of addressing the development 'financing gap'.[31] This narrative was driven by private financial interests that were looking for new places to invest with high returns after interest rates were lowered in the Global North in response to the 2008 global financial crisis. It relegates the role of government to spending 'billions' in public finance to attract the 'trillions' held by private investors to development through so-called 'de-risking'.[32] This involves states creating more amenable conditions for private investors to invest by changing laws, policies and regulations so that financial risk is effectively shifted away from the investor and towards the public sector. This is done, for example, by offering public guarantees to investors and setting up public-private partnerships whereby private investors take any profits, but the public sector is on the hook for any losses. In this sense, financial risk is not decreased, it is transferred from the private to the public sphere, and ultimately to citizens.[33]

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[19] The Guardian, *$11.3bn in IMF Covid-19 money is being used to service debt, says group*, 16 July 2020.
[20] Jubilee Debt Campaign, *The UK's role in supporting the G20 debt suspension*, 4 May 2020.
[21] City A.M., *UK to raise £225bn from bond sales to fund coronavirus measures*, 23 April 2020.
[22] Oxfam, Tax Battles: The dangerous global Race to the Bottom on Corporate Tax, 12 December 2016.
[23] Tax Justice Network, *Tax avoidance and evasion – The scale of the problem*, November 2017.
[24] A. Cobham, *The US Treasury just declared tax war on Europe*, 24 August, 2017.
[25] Oxfam, *Tax Battles: The dangerous global Race to the Bottom on Corporate Tax*, 12 December 2016.
[26] Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, *Illicit Financial Flows Undermining Gender Justice*, December 2016.
[27] ActionAid, *Making tax work for women's rights*, 26 January 2018.
[28] UNCTAD, *Trade and Development Report 2015*, October 2015.
[29] Ibid.
[30] N. Alexander, *The Emerging Multi-Polar World Order: Its Unprecedented Consensus on a New Model for Financing Infrastructure Investment and Development*, Heinrich Böll Stiftung, November 2014.
[31] See *Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third Conference on Financing for Development*, July 2015.
[32] D. Gabor (Heinrich Boll Stiftung), *Securitisation for Sustainability: Does it achieve the Sustainable development Goals?*, October 2019.
[33] J. Griffiths and M José Romero (Eurodad), *Three compelling reasons why the G20's plan for an infrastructure asset class is fundamentally flawed*, July 2018.

Today, this approach is ubiquitous in the development arena, leading commentators to assert the world has moved "from the Washington Consensus to the Wall Street Consensus."[34] It has been embraced and further consolidated by the world's largest development actors (discussed further below), prescribing that social services and infrastructure that are critical to creating gender equal economies should be packaged into tradable securities to sell on financial markets, to make it easier for private actors to invest in areas historically financed through public investment. This 'securitisation' has not only been shown to have very limited success in 'leveraging' private finance,[35] but it converts meeting fundamental human rights into income streams for financial reward,[36] and orientates countries' economies around unstable capital markets.[37]

Deficient financial sector regulation*:* Despite the fact that lack of comprehensive and effective oversight of the financial sector was a major factor in causing the global financial crisis of 2008, the state of international financial regulation and oversight remains deeply inadequate today.[38] In 2009, the G20 established the Financial Stability Board (discussed further below) and directed it to enhance a global financial regulation framework known as the Basel Accords, in order to increase international banking oversight (discussed further below). Yet, the new framework, called Basel III, only covers a small part of the financial sector and continues to rely on the banks' own internal procedures. In addition, it relies on risk ratings produced by two private companies, Moody's and S&P, whose inconsistent and unreliable risk assessments were major contributors to the 2008 global financial crisis. Not only are the levels of capital required for banks to have in relation to risky investments still widely considered too low under Basel III, including by the former chairman of the UK Financial Services Authorities,[39] but Basel III has also been considered to further incentivise investors to seek even larger risks in investments that are not covered in the regulation framework.[40]

As the Covid-19 pandemic unfolded and many stock markets fell, fresh concerns were raised about those profiting from the crisis through so-called 'short-selling', whereby investors effectively bet against certain stocks or bonds, allowing them to make huge profits while exacerbating instability in the financial system. While six European countries introduced a ban on short-selling in March 2020 and calls emerged for a European-wide or even a global ban, the UK opted not to ban this type of speculative trading.[41] Many governments, including the UK, also relaxed financial market and bank regulations during the peak of the pandemic to support the financial sector, without requiring them to rely more on their own profits.[42] These developments have led to new concerns that those able to pay most will contribute least to the Covid-19 recovery.[43]

Restricting capital flow management: In the original system set up after WWII, governments were able to control how much money flowed in and out of their financial systems through a range of measures called 'capital controls'. Capital controls were a very important part of the system as it was set up, as it allowed governments to finance and stabilise their own economies, especially during times of financial crisis. Yet, the neoliberal policy prescriptions introduced in the 1980s promoted so-called 'capital account liberalisation', that allowed the financial sector to trade money more freely and led to most countries abolishing capital controls between the 1980s and 2009. As a result, in the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis, huge amounts of capital flowed into developing countries looking for investments that would pay higher interest rates, while nearly twice that amount, over £100 billion, flowed out of those same countries in the spring of 2020 as Covid-19 became a global pandemic.[44] These major uncontrolled financial flows are at the root of the instability in the international financial system that allows private capital to greatly exacerbate financial crises and significantly increases the cost of refinancing developing countries' debt held in foreign currencies, while pressuring rich countries to continue to adhere to policies that do not challenge the power of the rentiers in fear of capital flight and currency devaluation.

Austerity: Finally, as both a cause and an outcome of these neoliberal policy prescriptions, the consistent adherence to austerity policies has left states too hollowed out to fulfil their fundamental human rights obligations and tackle the runaway financial sector as the central impediment to creating fairer economies. Faced with increasing debts and strong pressure to avoid defaulting on them so as not to upset financial markets, developing countries in Africa and Latin America in particular implemented severe austerity measures in the 1980s. In many cases, this was a condition for receiving financial support from international financial institutions. The devastating

[34] R. Rowden, *From the Washington Consensus to the Wall Street Consensus*, Developing Economics, 2019.
[35] Overseas Development Institute, *Blended finance in the poorest countries: the need for a better approach*, April 2019.
[36] Gender and Development Network, Femnet, Akima Mama Africa, Bretton Woods Project and the Global Alliance for Tax Justice, *The impact of PPPs on gender equality and women's rights*, February 2020.
[37] Open letter, *The World Bank's MFD Agenda Brings Shadow Banking into International Development,* October 2018.
[38] See for example, *UN resources on the gender perspectives of the financial crisis,* at < https://bit.ly/3hWkhml>.
[39] B. Masters and T. Braithwaite, *Basel III capital rules too low, says Turner,* Financial Times, 16 March 2011.
[40] F. Salmon, *The biggest weakness of Basel III,* Reuters, 15 September, 2010.
[41] Bloomberg, *France, Italy, Spain ban short selling to curb market plunge*, 17 March, 2020.
[42] M. Vander Stichele, *Finance must serve society during the Covid-19 crisis – not disrupt it,* openDemocracy, 16 March 2020.
[43] Open letter, *Civil society background briefing: the IMF response to Covid-19,* April 2020 at <https://bit.ly/2DtoY8d>.
[44] Reuters, *IMF sees reversal in capital flows out of emerging markets*, 28 May 2020.

human cost of these measures was immense, as critical investments in health, education, social protection and infrastructure were cut back and job creation stifled for more than ten years.[45] The 1980s has since been referred to as 'the lost decade of development'.[46] At the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, Southern women's rights groups detailed the harmful impacts these 'structural adjustment' policies have on women in particular.[47]

Yet, this persistent dedication to austerity is being maintained today. A series of studies on global public expenditure plans conducted regularly since 2013 reveal that governments across the world are overwhelmingly on track to further reduce spending as a proportion of GDP. The latest edition of the study, predating Covid-19, projected this would continue until at least 2024 in what it termed 'austerity as the new normal'.[48] Some of these most common policy proposals include cuts to public sector wage bills, privatising state assets, and restricting spending on pensions and social protection, while keeping low inflation targets that can further limit how much money is being spent on key public services.[49] Inevitably, this leads to the deterioration of social and care services critical to achieving a gender equal economy, leaving women to make up the shortfall in service provision through unpaid care work.[50] Even in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic when there was broad consensus that spending was required to counteract the global economic standstill brought about by lockdowns, international finance institutions, such as the IMF, were already locking developing countries into yet another decade of austerity through conditional loan programmes that follow the now-familiar neoliberal policy prescriptions.[51]

3. *Who* is supposed to be in charge?

After WWII, an entire architecture of international governmental institutions was established under the umbrella of the United Nations (UN) for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples, whereby states are subjects of international human rights obligations and are to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom.[52] Over the last 75 years, governments have let this evolve into a broken system of international governance that both upholds and is held captive by private finance, akin to Dr. Frankenstein not being able to control the monster he created. This global architecture outlined in this section is not fit for purpose to regulate the enormous power of private financial interests, nor therefore to tackle any of the other critical challenges of our time, such as climate change or the critical task of establishing gender-equal economies.

The IMF and the World Bank: Founded in 1944 at an intergovernmental conference in Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD, now called the World Bank Group) were established to leave behind the turbulence of the competitive currency devaluations and trade wars considered to have triggered the Great Depression of the 1930s. To prevent this from happening again, the IMF was founded to allow countries that had trouble financing deficits in their balance of payments with other countries to temporarily borrow currencies from each other, while the IBRD would provide loans to aid countries' post-war reconstruction. The US and European powers designed the IMF and World Bank in a way that gave them the biggest share of votes on the executive boards, and therefore dominated their decision-making. Their original mission was focused on rebuilding Europe and their first loans were to the UK, Belgium and France in particular,[53] which maintained colonial rule over many countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. In this way, the IMF and World Bank were central in upholding European colonial powers at a time when they would have otherwise been substantially weakened.

Today, while both institutions count almost all countries as their members, their shareholder structures still reflect and uphold the power imbalances between the Global North and South in particular. Voting shares on the boards of the IMF and World Bank are based on a quota system related to the size and 'openness' of countries' economies, often referred to as the 'one dollar, one vote' system. This quota, assigned to each member country as they join the IMF, determines a country's share of votes on the board, the amount of finance it provides to the institutions, and the amount it can borrow.[54] Countries with greater quotas have their own executive directors, while those with smaller quotas are grouped together under one representative. The US has the largest voting share on the IMF board, giving it an effective veto power over major decisions (like reforming voting shares!). The UK has a significant 4.03 per cent voting share and its own executive director on the IMF board, who falls under the

[45] G. Sen and C. Grown, *Development, Crises, and Alternative Visions Third World Women's Perspectives*, 1987; Association for Women's Rights in Development, *The World Bank and Women's Rights in Development*, 2002; Asia Pacific Forum for Women, Law and Development, *Seven Reasons Why Feminists Say No to the IMF and the World Bank,* 2018.
[46] Singer H.W, The 1980s: A Lost Decade — Development in Reverse?, in Growth and External Debt Management, 1989.
[47] Gender and Development Network, *Macroeconomic policy and the Beijing+25 process*, January 2020.
[48] I. Ortiz, M. Cummins, *Austerity: The New Normal; A Renewed Washington Consensus 2010-24*, October 2019.
[49] ActionAid, *Who cares for the future: Finance Gender Responsive Public Services!*, April 2020.
[50] K. Donald and N. Lusiani, *The IMF , Gender Equality and Expenditure Policy*, Bretton Woods Project, September 2017.
[51] BWP, *The IMF and World Bank-led Covid-19 recovery: 'Building back better' or locking in broken policies?*, Observer Summer 2020.
[52] United Nations Charter.
[53] E. Touissant, Committee of Abolishing Illegitimate Debt, The first years of the World Bank : 1946—1962
[54] IMF, *Factsheet IMF Quotas*, at <https://www.imf.org/~/media/Files/Factsheets/English/quotas.ashx>.

responsibility of HM Treasury.[55] To put this in perspective, the 47 sub-Saharan African countries have a 4.71 per cent share in total, the majority of which are represented by just two executive directors. The World Bank Group is made up of five major institutions. The International Development Association (IDA) lends to low-income countries through concessional loans or grants, while the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) lends to middle-income countries. The International Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA) and the International Finance Corporation (IFC) finance the private sector either by providing insurance or loans to companies investing in developing countries. The International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID) is an arbitration institution for legal disputes between international investors and states. Each of these five institutions have their own shareholding structure that slightly differ, but with similar power dynamics to those at the IMF. The UK is the third largest shareholder of the International Development Association (IDA).

The IMF sits at the centre of the international debt system because it has been appointed as 'lender of last resort' for countries that are unable to service their debts. It does so by providing loans with stringent conditions. However, there is no agreed international system for how countries can default on or restructure their debts when considered unsustainable or illegitimate, leaving an *ad hoc* process that relies on the voluntary agreement of creditors and privileges financial interests. A key tool used by creditors for assessing the debt sustainability of poor countries is also maintained by the IMF, who is among the world's largest creditors to developing countries.[56] In this sense, it plays the role of both creditor and 'insolvency judge', meaning it has a direct influence on the recoverability of its own claims, revealing an inherently biased system.[57]

The IMF has also garnered criticism for exacerbating debt crises by incentivising reckless lending based on geopolitical concerns to effectively insolvent states, most recently with its largest-ever loan to Argentina in 2019 under the previous right-wing government led by President Macri.[58] This unequal system international debt management is considered a means of debt enslavement that makes up a part of the neo-colonial legacy enabling the Global North to continue to structurally dominate the Global South. It has led Southern justice movements to assert the debts of their governments to the North as illegitimate and immoral.[59] As a function of this unique position in the international financial architecture, the IMF wields significant power and influence over countries' macroeconomic policies, made up of fiscal policies (how (much) they raise and spend money) and monetary policies (what rate of interest is set by the Central Bank and whether it promotes an expansion or a contraction of credit). The IMF still does so directly through policy conditions attached to its loans, but also through a process called 'surveillance', in which it provides influential economic policy advice to all countries every year, as well as regional and global economic analysis, and 'technical assistance' to developing countries to enhance specific economic policymaking skills. Through all these channels, despite its recent rhetoric trying to show the 'softer face' of the institution, including a concern for gender equality, the IMF continues to promote policies that uphold private financial interests over those of the people living in a country and exacerbate gender inequality, while its governance structures make it impermeable to change.[60]

Similar to the IMF being considered the 'expert institution' on macroeconomic policy, the World Bank is often considered the leading international 'thought-leader' on development finance. While the volume of its lending now faces competition with China,[61] and it has had to contend with the rise of regional development banks in recent years, its norms and frameworks around development are still used as universal benchmarks and shape development policy around the world.[62] It now claims to focus its policy advice and lending to governments and the private sector on "eliminating extreme poverty" and promoting "shared prosperity". Since the 1980s, it has maintained a distinctly private sector-first approach to development. By playing a leading role in the 2015 Addis Ababa conference that shifted development finance firmly in favour of private financial interests, the World Bank was key in creating the so-called 'Wall Street Consensus', whereby private institutional investors are considered the leading means by which to finance the Sustainable Development Goals. The World Bank launched its Maximizing Finance for Development approach in 2017, which dictates that public sector provision should only be a last resort, relegating the role of the state in development to taking on financial risks on behalf of private interests to create 'enabling business environments'. In its role as both a so-called "Knowledge Bank"[63] and lender, it integrated this approach into its influence over country-level development planning through its project

[55] IMF, *IMF Executive Directors and Voting Power,* 4 August 2020, at <https://www.imf.org/external/np/sec/memdir/eds.aspx>.
[56] Open submission, *Civil society position on the IMF and World Bank Debt Sustainability Framework Review*, June 2016.
[57] J. Kaiser, *Resolving Sovereign Debt Crises*, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, October 2013.
[58] Bretton Woods Project, *Why did the IMF fail to take pre-emptive measures in Argentina?*, Observer Autumn 2019.
[59] M. Buenaventura, *Struggle and resistance against the IMF and World Bank at 75*, Bretton Woods at 75, BWP, October 2019.
[60] S. Donnan, *Christine Lagarde wants softer, kinder IMF to face populist anger*, Financial Times July 13 2016.
[61] For more analysis, see Center for Global Development. *Chinese and World Bank Lending Terms: A Systematic Comparison Across 157 Countries and 15 Years*, April 2020.
[62] R. Kamal and K. P. Gallagher, *China goes global with development banks*, Bretton Woods Observer Spring 2016.
[63] E. Van Waeyenberge, *The World Bank as a Knowledge Bank: beyond Deaton*, School of Oriental and African Studies.

financing or attached as conditions in policy financing.[64] This often takes the form of public-private partnerships or deregulatory reforms, as well as championing large-scale infrastructure finance, that are highly problematic from the perspective of creating gender equal economies.[65] The World Bank places its work on 'women's economic empowerment' firmly within this approach, focusing on women entrepreneurs and women's access to finance, as yet another incarnation of how the financial sector has crept into every segment of women's lives .[66]

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development*:* The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is a body of 36 member countries, including the UK, founded in 1961 in Paris. Commonly known as the 'rich countries club' representing mostly the US and European countries, but also includes Mexico, South Korea, Chile, Colombia, and Turkey, the OECD is a particularly influential international actor on the issue of tax dodging. In 2013, under direction of the G20 (see below), the OECD positioned itself as international standard-setter for global tax and transparency rules to curb these practices. Yet, like the IMF and the World Bank, this institution, which also plays a critical role in the international financial system, structurally underrepresents developing countries. Its 2016 BEPS process to address tax dodging was widely considered a failure because it excluded over 100 developing countries from the decision-making process, despite the issue necessarily requiring all countries to cooperate to negate 'first mover' fears, whereby countries don't tackle tax evasion and avoidance in fear of losing businesses and wealthy individuals to more advantageous jurisdictions. The OECD was ultimately forced to rebrand the effort as an 'Inclusive Framework' in 2019 to try to bring in more countries into the initiative. Yet, in order to join, countries must first commit to the original outcomes already agreed among a minority of wealthy countries, effectively continuing country participation on unequal footing.[67] Two-thirds of developing countries are not part of the 'Inclusive Framework' today, while ten UK territories and crown dependencies, many of which are tax havens, are represented.

The Group of Seven: The Group of Seven, or G7, was formed throughout the 1970s as a forum for a group of seven major economies: Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the UK and the US. It members are made up of the seven wealthiest countries in the world that the IMF considers having 'advanced economies'. While China is generally considered to have the second largest economy in the world, it is not classified as 'an advanced economy' by the IMF. Together, the seven countries represented 58 per cent of global net wealth[68] and 32 per cent of global GDP in 2018.[69] The heads of government of these seven countries meet annually, while their finance ministers meet up to four times a year at stand-alone meetings to discuss shared macroeconomic initiatives, such as the joint debt relief initiative undertaken in 1996 for the 42 most heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC). At its annual summit in 1999 in Berlin, the G7 established the Group of 20 and the Financial Stability Forum.

The Group of 20: The Group of 20, or G20, is based on the structure of the G7 as a larger informal group of governments that meet annually. The majority of its members are major creditor countries, including the UK, that account for almost 90 per cent of global production and 80 per cent of international trade. While the G20 is more inclusive than the G7 and includes India, Indonesia, South Africa, South Korea and Mexico, it remains unrepresentative of 90 per cent of UN member states.[70] During the 2008 global financial crisis and its aftermath, the G20 acted as the central international decision-making forum responding to the crisis, as part of a deliberate US policy to counterweigh UN-level decision-making processes, where many more countries would have been represented.[71] Ever since, its status has been elevated and its work has expanded from international financial stability to global economic, social and development issues. Today, the G20 stands at the apex of several of the institutions and systems described in this paper in practice, despite being an unofficial entity with no formally recognised decision-making powers. As a result, it acts as a *de facto* decision-making forum for some of the most powerful countries and in particular the US, to then be carried out by the official institutions whose boards are controlled by G20 countries, like the IMF, World Bank, OECD and Financial Stability Board. Its decisions shaped the global financial landscape in the decade since and paved the way for further financialisation, most notably through its 2018 Roadmap to Infrastructure as an Asset Class, which argued for 'securitising' critical development infrastructure into financial assets to be traded on global financial markets. In 2010, a former Norwegian foreign minister called the G20 "one of the greatest setbacks since World War II," arguing its existence undermines the legitimacy of the international system set-up under the umbrella of the United Nations in the aftermath of WWI.[72]

[64] M. José Romero, *Development finance in times of Covid-19: Time for a rethink at the World Bank*, Eurodad, June 2020.
[65] Bretton Woods Project, *The World Bank and gender equality: Development Policy Financing*, 2019.
[66] Bretton Woods Project, *The World Bank's role in crafting a neoliberal hegemony with a feminist face,* 2018; Bretton Woods Project, *World Bank's women entrepreneur initiatives just "smoke and mirrors"*, Summer 2019.
[67] T. Ryding, *Eurodad response to today's statement by the Inclusive Framework on BEPS,* 31 January 2020.
[68] Credit Suisse, *Global Wealth Databook 2018*, Research Institute, October 2018.
[69] IMF, *Report for Selected Countries and Subjects,* World Economic Outlook Database, April 2018.
[70] G20 Foundation, *What is the G20 at* <https://www.g20foundation.org/g20/what-is-the-g20>.
[71] S. Prato, *Global Processes and the Future of Humanity,* Women's Working Group on FfD, webinar, 12 August 2020.
[72] Jonas Gahr Støre, *Norway takes Aim at G-20,* Der Spiegel, 22 June 2010.

In one of the most consequential recent examples of how states' capacity to create gender equal economies is constrained by the current international financial system, the G20's power was once again flexed in April 2020, when it failed to come to an agreement on Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic.[73] SDRs are an international reserve currency maintained by the IMF that can be exchanged by countries for five major currencies; the US dollar, pound sterling, the Japanese yen, euro and Chinese yuan. While increasing SDRs *should* officially be discussed and decided amongst the board of the IMF, in practice, the G20 announced in its 2009 London communiqué that *its* members had reached an agreement to expand SDRs by roughly ten-fold to provide developing countries with the substantial financing needed to respond to the 2008 global financial crisis.[74] The global recession caused by the economic lockdowns of the Covid-19 pandemic and the amount of additional finance that is now urgently needed by governments to respond is much greater than in 2008, in large part due to major financial flows leaving developing countries at an unprecedented speed.[75] The fastest way to address this is by making a new SDR allocation that would effectively provide additional finance to all governments with the stroke of a pen, which is why urgent calls from around the world for new SDR allocations became ubiquitous in the spring of 2020.[76] Yet, as the issue was negotiated in April by the G20, it announced in a footnote of its communique that they had failed to reach a consensus on the issue.[77] The decision lacked support of the 'America First' US administration.[78] Subsequently, having effective veto power on the IMF board over major decisions, the US was able to block the IMF from making a new allocation of SDRs, confirmed by IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva after an IMF board meeting a day after the G20 meeting.[79] The very system that is meant to support countries when additional finance is needed proved inadequate and dogged by geopolitical decision-making. As a result of this dysfunctional system where only the richest country is really in charge, every country now faces a more constrained economic policy menu for combating the devastating impacts of Covid-19, including restrictions of fiscal space that are so crucial for delivering gender-equal economies.

Financial Stability Board: In response to the 2008 global financial crisis, the G20 upgraded the Financial Stability Forum established by the G7 in 1999 to the Financial Stability Board (FSB) tasked with safeguarding stability in the global financial system, yet it lacked legal form and any formal power – reducing it to an advisory body hosted by the Bank for International Settlements in Basel, Switzerland. The FSB was upgraded again in 2011 when it gained legal status as an association under Swiss law, rather than an intergovernmental organisational established by international treaty. Its Secretariat counts 33 staff members. The Basel financial regulation framework described above that is supposed to regulate the entire global banking system was developed by one of the FSB's bodies, the Basel Committee on Banking Supervision, which ultimately reports to the central bank governors of a so-called Group of 10 countries; Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, the UK, and the US.

Who is really pulling the strings? This deficient, undemocratic, outdated system of international governance has not just left the door open for the financial sector to influence decision-making, but rather warmly invited it into the house and politely asked it to take over. Some of the most notable organisations that do that work on behalf of the financial and corporate sectors include the Institute of International Finance, the leading global association of private financial institutions, and the International Chamber of Commerce, the world's largest business association. Both have been found to exert a high degree of influence over the G20 and its discourse,[80] while the 'big four' accountancy firms are notoriously embedded in tax avoidance policies.[81] Lobbying and mobilisation of political influence is pervasive throughout the international institutions that are meant to regulate financial companies.[82] As one of the countries that maintains the most powerful positions within these institutions, the UK comes second only to Switzerland for the number of people moving through the "revolving door" between the finance sector and government, while hedge funders, financiers and private equity made up over a quarter of Conservative Party funding in 2011.[83]

Other multilateral institutions: A ray of hope? Finally, these actors and fora outlined above do not operate in a complete vacuum. Rather, they act as important but limited components of a broader system of international

[73] Bretton Woods Project, *Spring Meetings 2020 wrap-up: Will this change everything? Apparently not..,* Dispatch April 2020.
[74] G20, *London Summit – Leaders' Statement,* 2 April 2009.
[75] A. Prat Gay, 'A cost-effective way to help emerging markets fight Covid-19', *Financial Times,* March 2020.
[76] See for example, K. P. Gallagher, J. A. Ocampo, U. Volz, *IMF Special Drawing Rights: A key tool for attacking a Covid-19 financial fallout in developing countries,* Brookings, 26 March 2020.
[77] G20, *Virtual Meeting of the G20 finance ministers and central bank governors Communiqué,* Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, 15 April 2020.
[78] US Treasury Department, *US Treasury Secretary Steven T. Mnuchin's Joint IMFC and Development Committee Statement,* 16 April 2020.
[79] K. Georgieva, *IMFC Press Conference,* 16 April 2020.
[80] J. Martens, *Corporate Influence on the G20,* Global Policy Forum and Heinrich Böll Stiftung, 2017.
[81] N. Fowler, Accounting for influence: how the Big Four are embedded in EU tax avoidance policy, Tax Justice Network, 10 July 2018.
[82] Corporate Europe Observatory, *Lobby Planet: Our guide to the murky world of corporate EU lobbying,* 2017. L. Drutman, The Atlantic, 'How Corporate Lobbyists Conquered American Democracy', 2017; *The Guardian*, 'The truth about lobbying: 10 ways big business controls government', 2014; G. Monbiot, *The Guardian*, 'How corporate dark money is taking power on both sides of the Atlantic', 2017.
[83] T. Cave, *More than a lobby: finance in the UK,* OpenDemocracy UK, 26 September 2013.

cooperation, or multilateralism. Most notably, many multilateral decision-making bodies under the United Nations operate on the more inclusive basis of 'one country, one vote', while some of its agencies and bodies act as important counterweights to dominant neoliberal mantras and financial sector interests as rights-based institutions.[84] While sometimes considered weak talk-shops without the power to bend governments to their will, or worse, as spaces that are also becoming increasingly encroached upon by private financial interests,[85] their power is ultimately decided by the states that make them up. The fact that some of the UN organisations that have fought back hardest against neoliberal policy prescriptions and financialisation have been undermined and underfunded for decades is only evidence of the transformative strength of their ideas that threaten these vested interests.

4. *How* do we fix it?

Two decades into the 21st century, our global governance systems still come down to a handful of the most powerful financial interests exploiting and oppressing everybody else, in which the achievement of truly gender equal economies remains elusive. This section makes the case that each of the policy issues outlined in this paper can be tackled but require a feminist, solidarity-based multilateralism to shift power away from major financial interests and restore it to the '*peoples of the United Nations'*.[86]

Proposals to tackle these challenges and reform the global financial system abound. In the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis that revealed the destructive power of the financial sector for instance, the President of the UN General Assembly at the time, the Nicaraguan diplomat Miguel D'Escoto Brockmann, convened a Commission of experts on reforming the international monetary and financial system. The Commission came out with a report that blamed the crisis on flawed policies (the Washington consensus) and unsound economic philosophies (neoliberalism), outlining myriad suggestions. This included significant shareholding reforms of the IMF and World Bank, a new global reserve system that would end dependence on the dollar or SDRs, and a global economic coordination council that would be more inclusive and democratic than the G20.[87] Rather than take up the UN Commission's report, in 2017 the G20 established an 'Eminent Persons Group' to consider global financial governance, which includes chairmen of major private banks and companies.[88] Unsurprisingly, the group came out with a particularly unremarkable report that failed to identify obstacles to reform and lacked novel proposals.[89]

Most recently, in 2019 UNCTAD (a UN agency that works on trade and development and finance) set forth a comprehensive proposal to finance a Global Green New Deal in which it squarely took on financialisation as the central impediment to progress of our time and outlined myriad recommendations for making debt, private capital and banks work for development, including stringent financial regulation.[90] Among all these and many more proposals on the table, three in particular stand out that have been championed by civil society, including prominent Southern feminist thinkers and women's rights organisations, as potentially significantly contributing to shifting power dynamics on the international stage, including in the context of the Covid-19 crisis.

The first is a **sovereign debt restructuring mechanism** that can ensure a country can restructure its entire debt stock in one place in a procedure that involves all creditors that is in line with international human rights law and international commitments, and critically, independent from creditors.[91] The second is an **intergovernmental UN tax body** that operates on the basis of equal participation of all countries as the only way to break through the 'first mover' fear that currently paralyses progress on global tax evasion and avoidance.[92] Finally, to facilitate the realisation of these objectives and others such as financial regulation and reigning in the privatisation of development, a proposal has been put forward for the UN to once again promote global transformation, as it did 75 years ago, for the UN General Assembly to agree an **International Economic Reconstruction and Systemic Reform Summit** is organised under its auspices in response to the crises triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic.[93]

While local-level, decentralised decision-making processes are becoming increasingly important for sustainable, feminist ways of living,[94] these complex global issues inherently require multilateral approaches whereby alliances of peoples can pursue common global goals. Shifting power away from private financial interests

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84 See for example, BWP, *UN holds Pakistan to account for IMF programme impacts on women*, Observer Spring 2020.
85 Transnational Institute, *End the United Nations/World Economic Forum Partnership Agreement*, Open Letter, 25 September 2019.
86 United Nations Charter.
87 J. Stiglitz, *The Stiglitz Report: Reforming the international monetary and financial systems in the wake of the global crisis,* 2011.
88 Global Financial Governance, *About the EPG: Members*, at <https://www.globalfinancialgovernance.org/about-g20-epg/epg-members/>.
89 M. Callaghan, *Biding Time: the G20 Eminent Persons Group on financial governance*, The Interpreter, 17 April 2018.
90 UN Conference on Trade and Development, *Trade and Development Report 2019: Financial a Global Green New Deal*, 2019.
91 M. Perera, *Eurodad reacts to UN calls for a global mechanism for sovereign debt restructurings*, Eurodad, 23 April 2020.
92 Global Alliance for Tax Justice, *The world needs a United Nations Global Tax Body now*, 18 April 2016.
93 Women's Working Group on FfD and Civil Society FfD Group, *Time for a UN Economic Reconstruction and Systemic Reform Summit,* available at < https://csoforffd.files.wordpress.com/2020/07/un-economic-reconstruction-summit-2-pager-1.pdf>.
94 See for example the work of the Feminisms and Degrowth Alliance (FaDa).

empowered by neoliberalism towards a feminist multilateralism rooted in solidarity and human rights is a pre-requisite for realising gender equal economies – and must be pursued.

Recommendations for a UK context:
As the hub of the world's leading financial centre and highest net exporter of financial services by far,[95] the UK has and continues to play a central role in creating and upholding the current global financial system through its prominent positions within multilateral institutions, as well as the G7 and G20, as a major development actor, and particularly as the hub of a vast offshore financial network.[96] Infamously known as "the spider's web", the UK's creation of a network of tax havens of its former colonies and territories after WWII continues to make up a central component of the system of international tax dodging that thwarts the creation of gender equal economies worldwide.[97] If treated as a single entity, the UK spider's web consistently comes first on the Global Financial Secrecy Index, which ranks jurisdictions according to their secrecy and scale of offshore financial activities. The 2020 Index found that the UK had "increased its secrecy score more than any other country."[98]

While propelled by neoliberal thought, the facilitation of financialisation has been perpetrated by British governments of all parties, with some officials personally profiting, while others fear cracking down on the City's financiers will move them and their money overseas and depreciate the pound sterling. Some of the policy proposals on the table would help ameliorate the costs of tackling the UK's financial sector, from the use of capital controls to limit how much capital can leave the UK overnight, to enhanced international tax cooperation that would disincentivise finance to move elsewhere and relieve so-called 'first mover' pressure.

Ultimately however, it requires a British government that fully understands and is politically brave enough to act on the reality that the financialisation of the British economy and society does much more damage than good. Even the IMF, the institution often considered the world's bastion of neoliberalism, has recently conceded that large financial sectors are associated with greater inequality and called for regulatory policies to curb the 'excessive growth' of the financial sector.[99] In what has been termed 'the finance curse', the UK finance sector has been estimated to cost the UK £4.5 trillion in lost economic output between 1995 and 2015, equivalent to 30 years of current UK spending on health services.[100]

"The City of London likes to describe itself as the goose that lays Britain's golden eggs, contributing jobs and tax revenues and export surpluses. But in reality, the costs of an oversized financial sector overwhelm these benefits. The City is in fact a different bird: a cuckoo in the nest, crowding out and killing other sectors which could have made Britain more prosperous."
Nicholas Shaxson, author of The Finance Curse: How Global Finance is Making Us All Poorer

Just as the UK has played a central role in creating and maintaining the structural dominance of the financial sector, it can play a critical role in dismantling it. As one of the very few countries in the world with significant shareholding or decision-making positions within the institutions that make up the international financial system, the UK's backing of critical proposals for reform could be transformative in delivering systems that facilitate gender equal economies everywhere.

As a starting point therefore, the UK should immediately call for and financially support an International Economic Reconstruction and Systemic Reform Summit in response to the Covid-19 pandemic under the auspices of the UN, in which it should unambiguously support:

- The UNCTAD proposal for Financing a Global Green New Deal
- The establishment of a sovereign debt workout mechanism and international bankruptcy code
- The establishment of an intergovernmental UN tax body

Additionally, some of the most urgent or transformative policy measures the UK should take include:

***Confronting rising debt levels*:**

- Offer permanent cancellation of sovereign debt held by the UK of low- and middle-income countries until a sovereign debt workout mechanism is created and urge the G20, IMF and World Bank to do the same;
- Insist bilateral and multilateral debt relief are conditional upon private creditor participation;[101]

[95] The UK 's financial services export generated an industry trade surplus of £68bn, nearly equal to the next three leading net exporting countries combined (the US, Switzerland, and Luxembourg), TheCityUK, *Key facts about the UK as an international financial centre*, 2018.
[96] N. Fowler, Tax Justice Network, *Let's shrink the City of London finance sector, for prosperity's sake*, October 2019.
[97] Tax Justice Network, *The Spider's Web: Britain's Second Empire*, documentary film, July 2017.
[98] Tax Justice Network, *Financial Secrecy Index 2020 reports progress on global transparency – but backsliding from US, Cayman and UK prompts call for sanctions*, 18 February 2020.
[99] IMF, *Finance and Inequality,* 17 January 2020.
[100] N. Shaxson, The Finance Curse: How Global Finance is Making Us All Poorer, 2018.
[101] Jubilee Debt Campaign, *G20 failures, and our next steps,* July 2020.

- Pass an Act of Parliament similar to the 2010 Debt Relief Act to prevent private creditors from suing countries for non-payment of debt due to the coronavirus crisis in English courts;[102]

Taxing wealth and addressing tax dodging:

- Introduce progressive UK tax policies by ensuring that income from wealth is taxed at least as much as income from work and raise the corporate tax rates;[103]
- Promote international tax cooperation on an equal footing, supporting the allocation of taxing rights that reflect real economic activity and a minimum global corporate tax rate;[104]
- Clamp down on tax secrecy by establishing public registers of companies and trusts in all overseas territories and Crown dependencies and undertake independent, participatory and periodic impact assessments of the national and extraterritorial effects of its financial secrecy and corporate tax policies on the rights of women, as recommended by CEDAW Committee;[105]

***Capital flow management*:**

- On the occasion of the evaluation of the IMF's Independent Evaluation Office on capital controls scheduled to be released in the summer of 2020, the UK representative on the IMF executive board should unambiguously support the IMF relax its stance on capital controls to ameliorate capital flight from developing countries during crises, particularly in the current Covid-19 context;[106]

Rethinking the privatisation of development finance:

- Work with various institutions to develop *ex-ante* gender and human rights impact assessments on the use of UK Overseas Development Assistance for private sector investment, including the CDC, formerly the Commonwealth Development Corporation, and the World Bank's private sector arm, the International Finance Corporation;[107]
- Ensure these procedures are considered for the use of ODA spending for private investment by the forthcoming Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office.

Financial sector regulation:

- Tighten financial regulation and ensure that the financial sector services production and jobs, including more closely regulating exchange rate and credit creation management, subjecting bank mergers to financial stability reviews, increasing bank capital requirements, and further UNCTAD recommendations.

Austerity:

- Support the systematic rollout of *ex-ante* gender and human rights impact assessments of IMF and World Bank macroeconomic policy prescriptions, consistent with the Guiding Principles on Human Rights Impact Assessments of Economic Reform Programmes adopted by UN Human Rights Council resolution A/HRC/40/L13. This includes the IMF and World Bank conducting assessments of their own policy prescriptions themselves, as well as supporting these institutions to take the assessments of governments, national human rights institutions, UN agencies and civil society into account in their policy development.
- Challenge the continued use of restrictive fiscal consolidation targets in IMF loan programmes;[108]
- Champion the issuance of Special Drawing Rights to respond to the Covid-19 crisis as well as IMF gold reserve sales, and reconsider alternative options for an international currency reserve.[109]

Finally, UK-based feminist economists, advocates and activists, working in solidarity with women's groups and feminist thinkers in the global South, are uniquely positioned to advance these recommendations at the national level, holding the UK government to account for the role it plays on the international stage. It is critical to directly engage with the UK board members of the IMF and World Bank, parliamentarians, and UK officials involved in preparing the London G7 2021 Summit, where the UK government will hold the G7 presidency and critical issues like the global economic recovery from Covid-19 is likely to be on the table. It is also critical to press for safeguarding women's rights in the DFID/FCO merger discussions. Shadow reporting to UN treaty bodies, such as the CEDAW Committee, in a way that highlights the UK's extraterritorial human rights obligations stemming from its role in the international financial system is another way of working to hold the UK to account. However, civil society also plays a vital role in raising awareness amongst the public of the UK's position in the international financial system and building capacity among feminists and women's rights groups to challenge this. Continuing

[102] Jubilee Debt Campaign, *G20 debt suspension request: 90% of bonds governed by English law*, 4 May 2020.
[103] Tax Justice UK, *Progressive groups call for tax reform post-Covid*, June 2020.
[104] A. Cobham, *US blows up global project to tax multinational corporations. What now?*, July 2020, Tax Justice Network; Independent Commission for the Reform of International Corporate Taxation, *A Roadmap to improve rules for taxing multinational*, February 2018.
[105] CEDAW Committee, *Concluding observations on the eighth periodic report of the UK*, March 2019.
[106] IEO*, IMF Advice of Capital Flows: Draft Issues Paper for an Evaluation by the Independent Evaluation Office,* June 2019.
[107] Examples for guidance on impact assessments include the Equality and Human Rights Commission's guidance.
[108] BWP, *The IMF and World Bank-led Covid-19 recovery: 'Building back better' or locking in broken policies?* July 2020.
[109] For alternative proposals, see for example J.E. Stiglitz and members of the UN Commission of Financial Experts, *The Stiglitz Report: Reforming the International Monetary and Financial Systems in the wake of the global financial crisis*, 2010.

to explain and point out the ways in which the international financial system hinders the achievement of a gender equal economy is incredibly valuable, as is reaching out to and supporting global feminist initiatives and campaigns on tax, debt, trade, corporate accountability and development finance, especially in a Covid-19 context.