

Achieving Gender Equality: Economic Empowerment of Women, Policy Gaps and Blind Spot

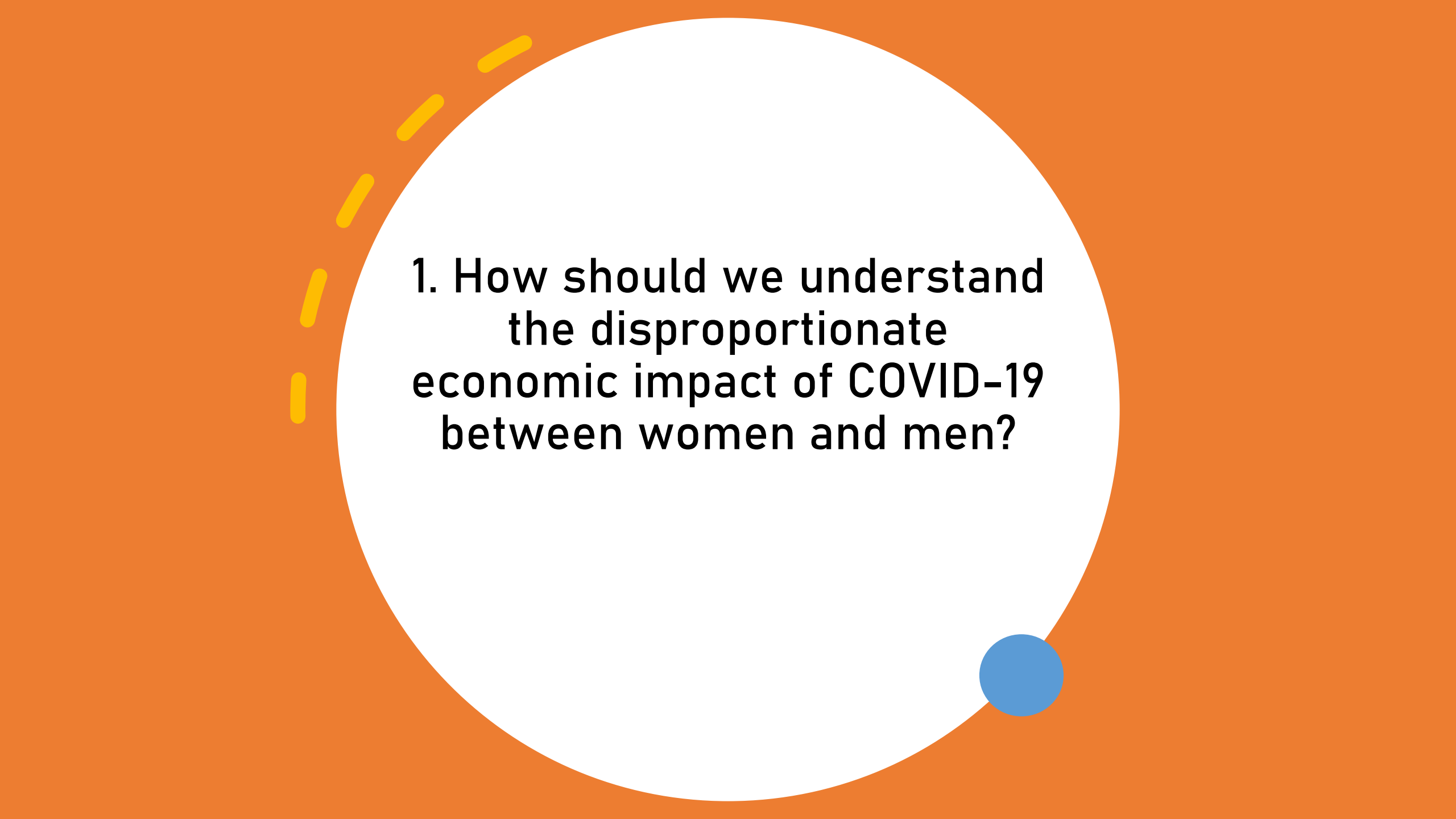
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- I would like to start my presentation with two questions.
 1. The first is “How should we, as a policymaker, understand the disproportionate economic impacts of the COVID-19 between women and men?”
 2. The second is “How can we address policy gap and blind spot to realize gender inclusive build back better?”

- While the COVID-19 crisis affects everyone, women and girls face specific and often disproportionate economic, health, and social risks due to deeply entrenched inequalities, social norms, and unequal power relations.
- Understanding the gender-differentiated impacts of the COVID-19 crisis through sex disaggregated data is fundamental to designing policy responses that reduce vulnerable conditions and strengthen women's agency, placing gender equality at their center. This is not just about rectifying longstanding inequalities but also about building a more just and resilient world.



**1. How should we understand
the disproportionate
economic impact of COVID-19
between women and men?**

The disproportionate economic impact of COVID-19 between women and men


- Some of the consequences of COVID-19 have had a greater impact on some countries and groups within countries, as pre-existing horizontal inequalities can magnify the effects of the crisis. Across social, economic, and political dimensions, women and girls are disproportionately affected by the crisis simply because of their sex. The immediate effects of COVID-19 on gender inequality are already showing themselves in health and education, on the burden of unpaid care work and gender-based violence.
- In many countries, women are overrepresented in the accommodation and food services, real estate, administrative activities, manufacturing such as garment sector, and the wholesale/retail trade sectors. These have been identified as among the sectors to be most heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The disproportionate economic impact of COVID-19 between women and men?

- Widespread lockdowns around the world mean many women are being asked to stay home and isolate in a space that is supposed to be safe, but many households are not prepared to provide this safety to women and girls. These measures have important implications over food security, the division of unpaid care work, and increased risks for gender-based violence. At the household level, gender inequalities can persist through a vicious cycle of powerlessness, often rooted in gender social norms that force women to face heavily restricted or even "tragic choices."
- Due to the division of unpaid care work, globally, women spend, on average, 3.2 more hours on unpaid care and domestic work than men.
- With quarantine measures, the workload in caring for children, the sick, and the elderly, as well as household tasks have increase.

The disproportionate economic impact of COVID-19 between women and men?

- The pandemic's economic impacts that have left no country or population unharmed, and women are, again, disproportionately affected. Compared to men, women have less capacity to absorb economic shocks because they have lower earnings, savings, and job security, and they are over-represented in the informal sector: 740 million women worldwide, and over 70 percent of women in informal employment in developing economies.
- Due to the nature of the informal work, women are less likely to have protection against dismissals, paid sick leave, and other worker rights if their employment is affected by the crisis.
- Moreover, many women in high-risk sectors own micro or small enterprises or are self-employed. They are now facing increased risks of bankruptcy due to gaps in financing, which translate to women having less access to capital and loans: 80 percent of women-owned enterprises with credit needs are either unserved or under-served.
- Furthermore, the gradual reopening will pose additional challenges for women as it could push them out of the labor force or into part-time jobs while increasing their responsibilities at home, and this pressure intensifies for single mothers.



2. How can we address policy gap and blind spot to realize gender inclusive building back better?

Recognizing Policy Gap and Blind Spot: Women's burden of care work

- Around the world, women continue to be at the forefront of the battle against the pandemic (OECD, 2020c). Women make up two-thirds of the health workforce worldwide, for instance, including 85% of nurses and midwives (Boniol et al., 2019); across OECD countries, they also account for 90% of long-term care workers (OECD, 2020b). This exposes women to greater risk of infection; at the same time, women are under-represented in leadership in the health care sector, and often lack a seat at the table when decisions are being made.
- Therefore, during the recovery phase, men's employment improved more quickly than that of women (Perivier, 2014). In this regards, the policies needed to reduce risks of increasing gender inequalities and support the labor market participation of women, both in general and for vulnerable groups during the pandemic, are not fundamentally different from those needed before the pandemic.
- For example, the pandemic has provided further proof of how important it is for working parents to be able to access affordable quality childcare. During the pandemic, many OECD countries including Republic of Korea assisted parents by providing additional paid or unpaid leave, cash benefits and emergency childcare facilities for essential service workers. But in countries where childcare is more often privately rather than publicly provided, such as Australia and the United States, many childcare facilities closed and there is now a supply shortage (The New York Times, 2021; Jackson, 2021).

Recognizing Policy Gap and Blind Spot: Women's burden of unpaid work

- The pandemic has also increased the burden of unpaid work. Increased caregiving can have an immediate impact as caregivers – typically women – might drop out of the labour market to take care of children and elderly relatives. But there is also a longer-term negative impact on gender equality. As caregivers, i.e. mostly women, reduce their working hours or switch to jobs which may have more flexibility and shorter commuting times, they may also limit their potential of increasing their earnings over time. This is due to a more limited pool of jobs meeting these criteria, possibly weaker bargaining power and fewer opportunities for career development compared to full-time workers. These effects of the pandemic might become apparent over the longer term and be felt for many years (OECD, 2021c).
- Even before the pandemic, unpaid work was disproportionately taken on by women. There is not a single OECD country in which men do the same or more unpaid work as women. Across the OECD on average, at just over four hours per day, women systematically spend around two hours per day more on unpaid work than men (OECD, n.d.; OECD, 2021a). Gender gaps in unpaid work are largest in Japan and Korea (2.5 hours) and Turkey (four hours per day), where traditional norms on gender roles prevail. However, even in Denmark, Norway and Sweden – countries that express strong and progressive attitudes towards gender equality – gender gaps in unpaid work still amount to about one hour per day.

Recognizing Policy Gap and Blind Spot: **Increased contribution of men to unpaid work**

- Due to the COVID-19 crisis, according to early evidence, women have often been taking on much of the additional unpaid work caused by school and child-care closures. And this has been happening even when both parents were confined to the home and a more equal distribution of additional care and non-care household work would have been possible.
- Despite the increased burden on women in many countries, men have increased their contribution to household chores during the pandemic, despite their generally low contribution. In the long term, this may shift gender norms around unpaid work as men have become more exposed to the burden of domestic work and primary caregiving (Alon et al., 2020; Hupkau and Petrongolo, 2020).

Recognizing Policy Gap and Blind Spot:
Finding leverage for more equitable gender norms

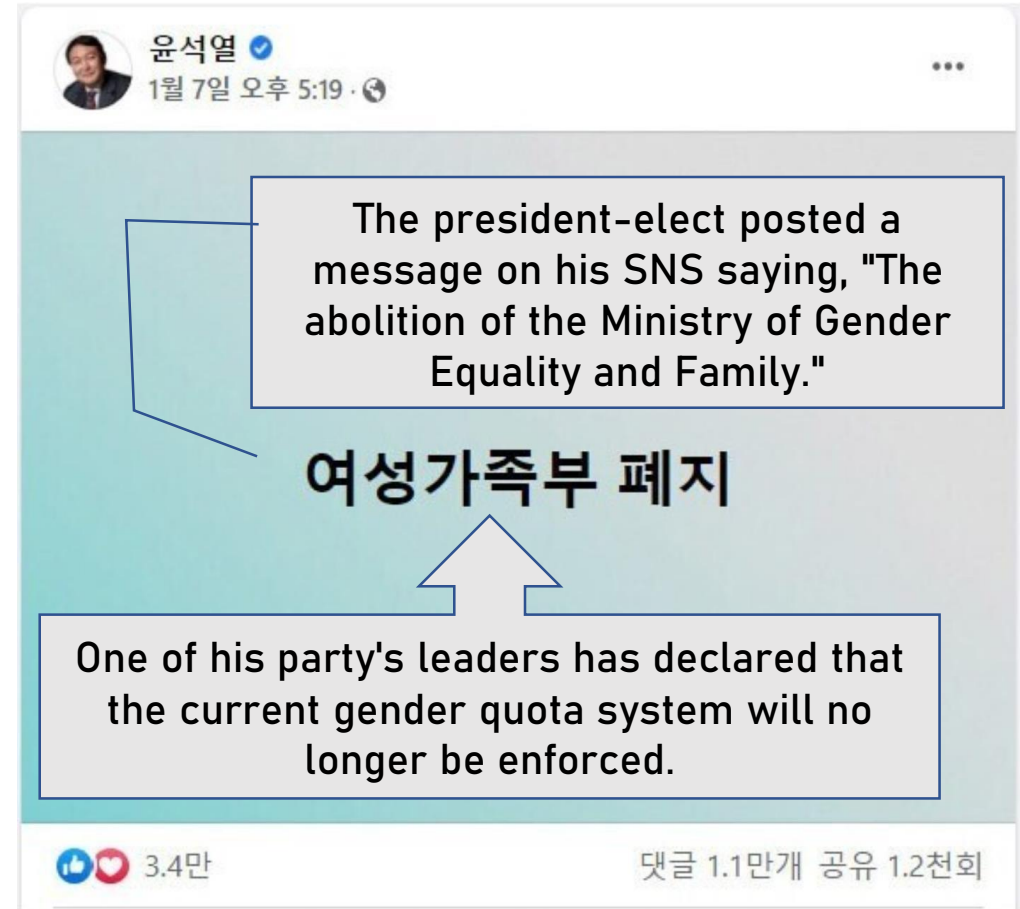
- Based on the Findings from the literature review about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on gender norms in the Philippines, Indonesia and Vietnam show that the pandemic has a significant economic impact on women and girls in Indonesia. In the Philippines, women face increased care burdens, while Vietnamese women experience reduced work hours due to the pandemic. The report also shows that there is increased gender-based violence during the pandemic.
- Despite the negative economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on women and girls, the report finds that there are opportunities that different stakeholders can leverage to shift towards more equitable gender norms.



**3. Way to go: Low Road and
High Road on building back
better after COVID-19**

Low road to building back better: Avoiding structural gender inequality and disproportionate burden on women in Korea

- Building back better depends not just on resources, but on priorities that govern the use of those resources. In this regard, it can be said that Korea's gender governance on the road to build back better is close to the level of disaster.
- In South Korea, a new policy direction has emerged to abolish MoGEF and Gender Quotas pushed by the upcoming new government that denies structural gender inequality.
- And strong resistance from Korean women to the upcoming anti-feminist backlash led by the new government is now raging.



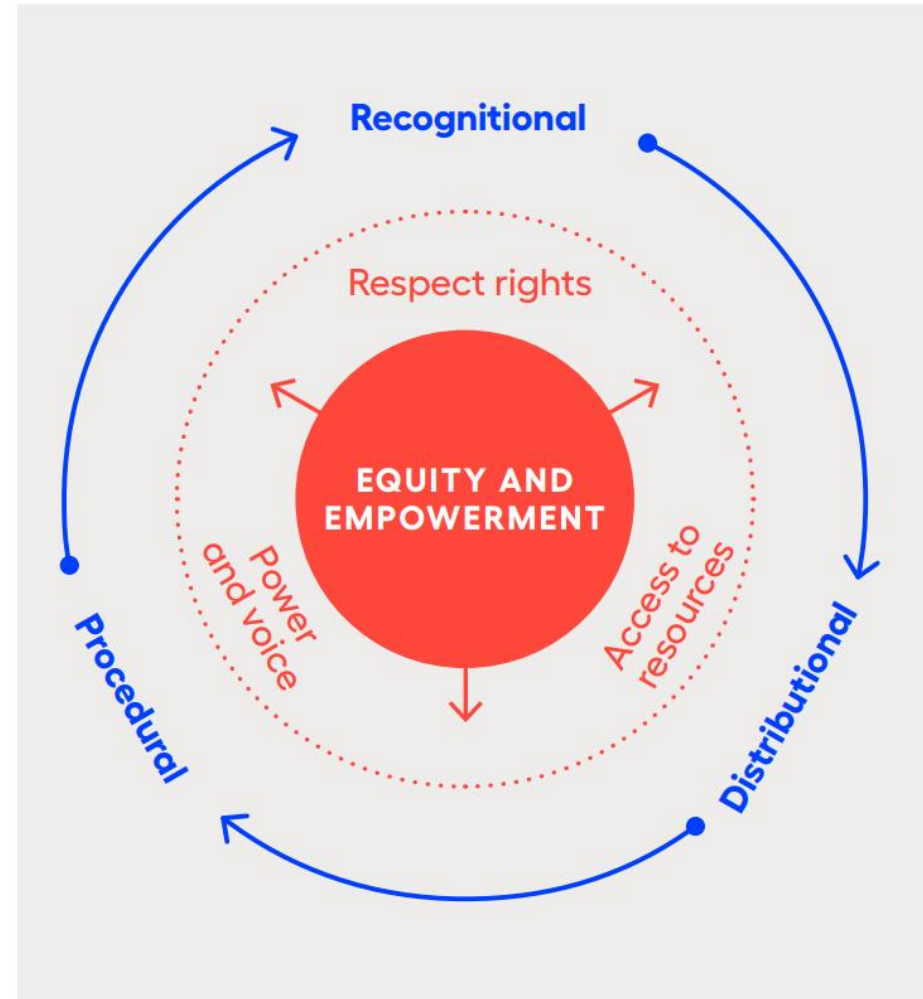
High road to building back better: Policy networks with access to high-level decision-makers in Canada

- The first national feminist economic recovery plan appeared in Canada. Many of the ideas related to building back better were flagged early in the pandemic, as Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's experts advised him, April 2020, that economic recovery included addressing what they called the "she-cession", meaning an economic recession shaped largely by women's exit from the labor force. And addressing funding childcare as a measure of 'she-cession'.
- Through collaboration between feminist groups and governments, the funds include additional funding beyond child-care to realize a NAP for responding to national investigations of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. And the women's groups were very proud that they were able to reflect the voices of indigenous peoples and LGBTQIA.
- In September 2020, Trudeau's Speech echoed much of the language used in the plan and committed to a feminist economic recovery, but then progress stalled. Finally, in November 2020, Minister of Finance presented the Fall Economic Statement, which billed itself as "a feminist plan" and stated, "our recovery must be feminist and intersectional". At last, in April 2021 when presenting the 2021 budget to the Canadian Parliament the Prime Minister's commitment into a reality.

Listening to women's voices and recognizing the disproportionate burden on women is an entry point on the high road to building back better after COVID-19

1. Individual level: Do you think structural gender inequality still remains in your country?
2. National level: Through what institutionalization does your country hear the women's voices to eradicate structural inequality?
3. Global level: Does your country's gender policy meet globally agreed gender equality norms and standards? (CEDAW, BPfA, UNSCR 1325, SDGs, etc.)

Figure 2.12 Links between equity and empowerment



Source: Human Development Report Office based on Leach and others (2018).



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