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# Not just lip service:

advancing women's economic  
justice in industrialisation





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## Executive summary

Women all over the world endure discrimination, poverty and violence simply because they are women. Despite having the right to participate in economic life without discrimination, patriarchal norms underpinning state, social and family dynamics block them from doing so. Because current economic models are part and parcel of this patriarchal system, there is very little recognition of the contribution that women make to the economy through their unpaid care and domestic work and how this huge contribution is a barrier for women's access to more and better jobs, leadership positions and equal pay. Global and country specific efforts to end women's economic inequality must therefore tackle the problem through many fronts and reshape economic models so they work for women.

As part of their commitment to sustainable development, countries are increasingly embarking on economic transformation paths that create jobs and grow green industrial sectors. Encouragingly, closing the gender gap is high on their priorities too. Yet approaches to industrial development and gender equality are still "siloed", thus failing to make economic models gender transformative. Our analysis of Vietnam's industrial policy and gender equality strategy confirms this.

History shows that the type of industrial policy used by East Asian countries 50 years ago can be a useful instrument for today's industrial development and job creation. Vietnam's industrial development in particular resembles Korea's in that it relies on State Owned Enterprises (SoEs) to develop key manufacturing sectors to turn the country into a regional player within specific value chains. But Japan, Korea and Taiwan chose to pursue economic growth without considering how their strategies would impact gender equality, possibly assuming negative impacts could be mitigated and addressed at a later stage. These countries' economic growth was subsidised by women's back-breaking labour, yet women were largely underpaid and undervalued.<sup>1</sup> Decades later, these countries have some of the biggest gender gaps among OECD members: Korea is

first and Japan comes third;<sup>2</sup> which shows that economic growth, unless carefully and purposely designed to be gender just, does not automatically bring gender equality. Policy makers in developing countries should aim to design and implement progressive industrial policies that respect women's rights, and workers' rights, as well as the environment, from the start.

Industrial policy needs to be part of an overarching state-led strategy that not only aims to change the nature of the economy but also be gender just. A gender just industrial policy should:

- Explicitly aim to provide more and better jobs and economic opportunities for women and improve women's access to them
- Commit to building good quality public services to address women's unpaid care burden
- Break siloes between social and economic policies, while mainstreaming gender policies.

The latter point is where most countries have failed in the past. This is the key barrier to gender just industrial policies. Tackling this challenge will require policy makers and other relevant actors in the social and economic sphere to acknowledge that women's economic inequality stems from patriarchy and that only radical changes will bring meaningful change.

Because most industrial policy instruments are gender neutral, we believe that a focus on gender transformative policy change would be most effective at the intersection between industrial policy (as a key component of structural transformation), macroeconomic (and fiscal) policy and social policies (including but not exclusively labour, health and education). In other words, at the point where states decide how to generate and spend income and how to shape and regulate the labour market.



# ActionAid's recommendations

## **Governments should:**

- Recognise women's contributions to society and the economy through unpaid work by including it as part of GDP, as well as rolling out programmes and policies to reduce women's unpaid care burden through gender responsive public services.<sup>3</sup>
- Make meaningful changes to budget planning and allocation to apply gender analysis to how public income is raised and spent; ensure fiscal and economic policies do not covertly or inadvertently perpetuate gender inequality.
- Ensure that the ministries and agencies leading on gender just policies are meaningfully accountable to women.
- The international community should stop imposing policy reforms on developing countries that negatively impact women's rights including:
- Tax or trade treaties or chapters that prioritise foreign investors over human and women's rights and the environment;
- Economic growth models underpinned by GDP growth targets as a measure of progress instead of progress made on environmental, social and gender justice;

## **Civil Society and trade unions should:**

- Monitor implementation and outcomes of gender just policies, putting pressure on governments to deliver women's rights.
- Continue supporting women's collective action and increase the proportion of women in leadership positions in unions.

## **Companies should:**

- Recognise that women face particular disadvantages and discrimination and therefore develop and publish a gender policy that allows them to address the systemic problems faced by women.
- Guarantee a living wage for all workers.
- Guarantee paid maternity leave for all workers and make childcare provisions in the workplace.
- Offer gender-transformative training, mentoring and leadership and development opportunities for women.

# 1. Setting the scene: an economic transformation that is gender just

## **Bringing feminist analysis to economic development is an urgent task**

Development modalities pursued all over the world have not tackled the roots of gender inequality. The growing body of scholarly literature and development practitioners' evidence have documented this at length.<sup>4</sup> Most of the women we work with around the world endure discrimination, poverty and violence simply because they are women.<sup>5</sup>

Social norms dictate a set of gender roles and responsibilities that permeate social, family, professional and public life. These roles and responsibilities place women in a subordinate position in society, perpetuating inequality – and in turn reinforcing discrimination and violence against women. This system, known as patriarchy, puts men in a dominant position with regards to women in physical, social, cultural and economic terms. It plays out in all arenas and spaces: it dictates behaviour in governments, local communities as well as within families, limiting women and girls' opportunities and skewing the 'playing field' in favour of men and boys.<sup>6</sup>

Most economic systems and the policies that underpin them are patriarchal. Unless proactively designed as gender just, labour markets and industrial development strategies replicate societal discrimination, trapping women into precarious, low-skilled and low-paid jobs often in informal economic sectors.

Developing countries' commitment to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) includes taking action on a wide range of issues, including job creation (Goal 8), industrial development (Goal 9) and gender equality (mainly Goal 5 but also included in others). Since the SDGs were adopted in September 2015, a series of plans and pathways to advance women's rights have followed, including the 2016 High Level

Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment's report highlighting women's economic inequality as the top barrier to delivering the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.<sup>7</sup> The organisations setting the global agenda for macroeconomic policies – including the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB) – have set up programmes looking at gender inequality too. But so far they have failed to recognise and address the fact that redressing women's economic injustice means rethinking their advice to developing countries on fiscal and economic policies.<sup>8</sup>

Against this backdrop, this report sets out an alternative for economic transformation underpinned by a rights-based, progressive version of industrial policy that respects and advances women's rights. While it offers the experience of industrialisation of East Asian countries as a case study, it cautions policy makers against following in the footsteps of Japan, Korea and Taiwan by worrying first about economic growth at any cost and addressing gender inequality later. Today these countries still face the economic, political and social consequences of gender unequal labour markets.

Through case study research on Vietnam, we look at the potential for countries at an earlier stage of industrial development to take a different path. Vietnam's current industrial strategy resembles that of South Korea and Taiwan, in that it has successfully set itself up as a manufacturing hub over the last three decades. Interestingly, the country has a series of laws and strategies to close the gender gap, with explicit targets to tackle women's economic inequality. We shall thus analyse the extent to which Vietnam's industrial policy is gender just and make specific recommendations on ways of breaking silos between economic development policies and gender equality policies.

## Closing the gender gap

Patriarchal norms shape the rules, behaviours and politics of workplaces, policies and the very same institutions that should tackle gender discrimination.<sup>9</sup> This has determined, to a large extent, the fate of women workers around the world, including creating conditions for exploitation and abuse of women workers in South Korea, Taiwan and more recently Bangladesh.

Industrial policy and job creation have risen on donors' agendas;<sup>10</sup> as has gender equality. SDG 5 (on gender equality) and more recent commitments to improve women's lives are testament to the determination of the global women's movement to bring about significant changes in favour of gender equality, though most still fail to tackle gender equality at the root.<sup>11</sup>

### Some recent examples include:

- In 2016 the then UN General Secretary Ban Ki Moon appointed a High Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment to find ways of closing the gender gap fast and for good.<sup>12</sup>
- In April 2017 the IMF announced that it is bringing research ideas on tackling gender inequality into its operational work.<sup>13</sup>
- In 2016 the World Bank began implementing its first Gender Equality Strategy (2016-2023).<sup>14</sup>

While there has been a positive shift in the international community's mindset, policy makers and agenda setters continue to treat gender inequality as a standalone or side topic, mitigating the effects of some individual policy measures - which misses the point. Because the global macroeconomic framework - largely shaped by the IMF but equally embedded in World Bank programmes and other international players - is systematically biased against women, only radical, structural change will bring transformative effects.<sup>15</sup>

Acknowledging that women have been left behind and wanting to do something about it is driven by different motivations across national governments

and international organisations. Solutions to the problem and the causes attributed to it are equally varied, but they all fit under the umbrella term "feminism", broadly defined as "a theory that problematizes the subordination of women"<sup>16</sup> and which offers just and comprehensive actions to the root causes of gender inequality.

Responding to pressure from the global women's movement, the UN and other multilateral organisations have adopted terms like women's empowerment, gender mainstreaming, gender sensitive policies and intersectionality. Perhaps the most widely used term is empowerment, after it repeatedly appeared in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 1995, yet it is the most ambiguous of them all. This makes it difficult to determine the impact of policies which aim to empower women and make sense of indicators of change.<sup>17</sup>

In an effort to improve policy outcomes, leading feminist scholars have sought to define empowerment in ways that help mainstream policy better understand feminist insights. For the purposes of this report we will use Naila Kabeer's definition of empowerment as: "The processes through which women gained the capacity for exercising strategic forms of agency in relation to their own lives as well as in relation to the larger structures of constraint that positioned them as subordinate to men...It touches on women's sense of self-worth and social identity; their willingness and ability to question their subordinate status and identity; their capacity to exercise strategic control over their own lives and to renegotiate their relationships with others who matter to them; and their ability to participate on equal terms with men in reshaping the societies in which they live in ways that contribute to a more just and democratic distribution of power and possibilities."<sup>18</sup>

Since the 2000s, mainstream policy efforts to empower women have been particularly focused on economic indicators such as employment, access to public services, productive resources and an independent income. For instance, in 2006 the World Bank released a Gender Action Plan to advance women's economic empowerment.<sup>19</sup> The IMF has developed research and databases on

the impact of gender responsive budgeting (GRB) on gender equality and regards women's labour force participation (FLFP) as a priority.<sup>20</sup>

But most of these policy approaches are instrumentalist in that they see the need to economically empower women to maximise the potential for economic growth. That is, bringing women into the labour force and the economy more generally is not about women realising their economic right, but rather about tapping into an "underused" pool of resources. Women are expected to fit into markets and institutions as they are, without making fundamental changes necessary for women to exercise their full agency.<sup>21</sup>

The 2015-2016 UN Women Flagship report 'Women of the World' "offers a more gender just economic agenda, one firmly rooted in the human rights framework, and brings rights – the right of all women to a good job, with equal pay and safe working conditions; the right to an adequate pension; the right to healthcare, and water and sanitation – into economic policymaking."<sup>22</sup>

ActionAid believes that women have a right to participate in economic life and enjoy its results without discrimination. Not only is it their right to choose to be economic agents, workers, entrepreneurs or producers, but also actively play a key role in re-shaping the economic system and institutions in a way that tackles gender inequality at the core.<sup>23</sup> We align with the feminist stream calling for women's economic justice<sup>24</sup> and structural transformation of current economic models, proposing economic alternatives that have gender equality at the centre and recognise the contribution that women's unpaid care and domestic work brings to the economy.

## Tackling jobless growth

For many decades, economic growth has been the top priority for most developing countries, largely following advice from multilateral institutions and donors. Sustained growth rates of 6 or 7 per cent are viewed by economists as the primary marker of progress and good macroeconomic health, so much so that the

Sustainable Development Goals have set a target of "at least 7 per cent GDP growth".<sup>25</sup> But more recently, donors have realised that growth alone is not enough to end poverty. Their expert advice and support programmes now go one step further and call for the pursuit of an economic transformation capable of creating jobs: "Economic growth has the power to transform societies, boost incomes, and enable citizens to thrive, but growth alone is not enough. To reduce poverty and ensure shared prosperity, growth that creates... more, better, and inclusive jobs is needed... Economic transformation is about changing the nature of jobs, of changing what people do, where they do it and how they do it. The jobs diagnostics undertaken by the World Bank clearly show that the degree of economic transformation determines how widespread job creation will be and the extent of productivity and income gains."<sup>26</sup>

Developing countries acknowledge that job creation must be a priority and that developing an industry sector can help, even if developing an industrial sector eventually leads to jobs being lost to automation. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have explicitly included creating jobs as Goal 8 and industry development as Goal 9.<sup>27</sup> But simply creating jobs and investing in industry is not a silver bullet. What will ultimately make a difference to people's lives is the quality of the jobs created and, therefore, the types of industries needed to open up new employment opportunities. What is needed is a progressive industrial policy, or industrial policy version 2.0.<sup>28</sup>

For ActionAid, the most crucial consideration is how to make sure these jobs are equally accessible for women and ensuring that female workers receive the same wages and employment conditions as men, while also avoiding segregating women into a limited pool of jobs labelled as 'women's jobs'. Prioritising industrialisation without ensuring it is gender just – and effectively leaving gender equality as a problem to deal with later on – makes it much more difficult to redress long – term injustices and inequities. This becomes particularly evident when automation of production line processes leaves high number of women unemployed. Unskilled



and undervalued, laid off factory workers find it almost impossible to re-enter the formal workforce.

South Korea, Taiwan and Japan spent most of the post-World War II years securing their place in history as economic miracles, and setting high standards for developing countries seeking to follow in their footsteps. But though gender inequality was a major problem in these societies it was dealt with as an afterthought. As we discuss later on in this report, gender inequality still undermines these countries' efforts to maximise their contribution to sustainable development.

Patriarchal norms – discriminatory behaviours, attitudes and practices – have influenced the way in which jobs are distributed among workers. Men are perceived as better leaders and therefore more likely to get managerial positions; women, seen as docile and attentive to details are thought to be a better fit for manufacturing work where they can exploit their supposedly 'natural' abilities.<sup>29</sup>

Many developing countries are pursuing a model of economic transformation which relies on gender inequality. Trapped in poorly paid, dangerous jobs such as manufacturing garments and electronics while shouldering the burden of unpaid care, women workers across Asia and the Americas remain poor, undervalued and deskilled.<sup>30</sup>

Instead of prioritising investment in new highly productive sectors, developing countries have often been forced to follow international advice to join global value chains, where local firms stick to low-value added segments even if these mean lower profits. This has serious consequences for economic development and, most worryingly, for women workers' rights. As developing countries compete against each other to offer the same products and assembly services, they create downward pressure on wages, insurance and working conditions, which, combined with the weakening bargaining power of workers makes assembly line jobs extremely precarious and exploitative.<sup>31</sup> Because governments generally prioritise the development of these export-oriented sectors through tax breaks, investment and international promotion, they truncate the development of alternative sectors

that could help diversify the economy and open up other job opportunities for women.

The majority of jobs in garments, footwear, electronics, food processing and horticulture – all low-value added, export oriented sectors which often span across the formal and informal – are taken up by women, many of whom migrate from remote rural areas looking for a stable income and new horizons. In Vietnam, 78.5 % of workers in footwear and textiles are women; women make up 66.8% of workers in the food manufacturing and processing industry.<sup>32</sup> Contracts are known to be insecure and in the garment industry factory owners often subcontract informal workers who sew clothes from home, which adds an additional layer of precariousness to women workers.<sup>33</sup> Unable to access health services and at risk of violence and harassment, these women have few alternatives.<sup>34</sup>



Photo: Fyfe Strachan/AFV

Ms. Le Thi Thuong is 34 years old and lives in Haiphong, Vietnam. She works at a footwear company and hopes that in the future women will have more job opportunities in sectors outside garments and footwear.

The same model which encouraged exploitation of cheap labour in Bangladesh, Mexico and elsewhere is currently being rolled out in other developing countries looking to build their industrial sector, and similarly relies on patriarchal norms and values. For example, garment factories are booming in Ethiopia and Myanmar, with the same gendered patterns of employment and consistent reports of exploitative conditions.<sup>35</sup>

Meanwhile, unable to generate substantial levels of employment and growth within the small, low-value added niches that developing countries occupy within value chains, some are moving into services much more quickly than in the past. Developing countries with a small manufacturing sector struggle to compete with established suppliers. It is the services sector that often provides work for a large proportion of the population and makes a substantial contribution to GDP.<sup>36</sup>

This has led opinion formers to argue that the industrialisation path that today's developed countries have followed is no longer available to developing countries. Instead, they claim, a focus on developing modern services like transport, finance and telecommunications can deliver the same type of long term economic transformation as manufacturing did in the past.<sup>37</sup>

ActionAid disagrees with this view. Well-paid jobs in the service sector are few and wages in the sector depend on how much other people in the society earn and therefore how much they can pay for services they value highly.<sup>38</sup> The gig economy and its exploitative effects on workers in retail, care and transport has made many headlines in developed countries over the last year.<sup>39</sup>

### **Gender just industrial policy as a tool for economic transformation**

Rather than repeating the mistakes of the past, developing countries need to move towards more equitable and progressive models of economic development. Instead of relying on their comparative advantage (what they already have, like low-cost labour), they should build up competitive advantages (what they can develop, like expertise in certain high-value production processes). Taking this path requires time,

determination and a long-term vision, designed and implemented in the form of an industrial policy.

An industrial policy is a government-led strategy to shape and develop “a robust manufacturing sector”.<sup>40</sup> It includes instruments like import substitutions, local content requirements and targeting specific industries and types of firms. Governments in Japan, USA, Taiwan and Korea have successfully used industrial policies to set up industries like automobiles and electronics, opening a large pool of manufacturing jobs available to people who were otherwise employed in agriculture.<sup>41</sup> But as we will explain later, many of the factory floor jobs were taken by women under conditions of low pay, long hours and no support to exercise their economic rights.

#### **Box 1. Industrial policy at work in South Korea and Taiwan<sup>42</sup>**

**South Korea's** industrialisation was led by large firms with quasi-monopolistic rights. From the 1960s on, Korea protected textiles and later heavy industries from competition by putting in place tariffs, quotas, export subsidies, credit, and other measures. Price controls were used to curb monopoly power and harsh capital controls played a role in preventing capital flight. Subsidies were subject to performance, notably against export targets.

Export targets were agreed at monthly meetings between government and business, which the President attended – these meetings helped bureaucrats learn about and address the problems that prevented businesses from exporting more. Firms that responded to performance-based incentives received further support. In contrast, if a targeted firm was a poor performer, it ceased being subsidised. If a firm went bankrupt, the state simply refused to bail it out.

**Taiwan's** manufacturing sector is made up of lots of smaller firms working together and with foreign investors. Success was built on strong linkages between domestic firms and

foreign investors, who were able to take advantage of the export opportunities offered by international trade. The 150 engineers in Taiwan's Industrial Development Bureau worked closely with domestic firms to help them improve the quality and reduce the price of their products. But they also worked to incentivise investors to source inputs from Taiwan.

The Bureau worked with the foreign investment board to ensure that applications to import glass for television sets by Phillips' Taiwanese subsidiary were subject to significant delays. This was sufficiently inconvenient to prompt Phillips to explore the potential of sourcing from local suppliers, which gave Taiwanese firms enough confidence to invest in improving production. After two Taiwanese glassmakers demonstrated that they were able to produce high quality glass at competitive prices, Phillips stopped importing and sourced from these firms instead.

After the 2008 financial crisis, industrial policy was used to mitigate negative impacts in developed economies like the US, even if it was not openly referred to as industrial policy. Countries can have industrial policies without conceptualising or terming them as such.<sup>43</sup> Since 2009, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act has not only helped the country deal with post-crisis recovery, but also seeks to strengthen domestic manufacturing sector in the US to better withstand competition.<sup>44</sup> It allocated funds to restart the production of advanced batteries (like those used in electric vehicles), hoping to increase its global production from 2% in 2009 to 40% in 2015.<sup>45</sup>

The US government continues to invest heavily in specific firms and products as well as upstream research and development. For instance, technological breakthroughs that catapulted Apple's phones, music players and tablets to global success were initially funded by the US government.<sup>46</sup> Industrial policy has been back in the political agenda in the UK in the last year.<sup>47</sup>

As set out in our 2016 report<sup>48</sup>, ActionAid believes that the use of industrial policy, accompanied by an agricultural development policy to tackle poverty in rural areas (partly by guaranteeing women's access to productive resources including land) can put developing countries on a positive cycle of growth, fuelled by job creation in and outside manufacturing.

By helping firms upgrade to higher-value added activities they could unlock higher profits, which allows firms to pay better wages and generate more taxes for the state. A better funded state is in turn able to create more jobs for the carers, teachers, doctors and nurses who are so vital to society as well as creating the conditions for further development. A virtuous circle can be created.

As countries move up the production chain, out of low-skilled activities and into more productive or technologically more advanced ones, new and potentially higher skilled types of employment come about. This brings new labour force requirements and therefore exciting opportunities for women and men. But if the structural transformation that countries undergo to get to that more advanced stage is underpinned by discriminatory practices in and beyond the workplace, then the benefits of a more complex economy will be enjoyed by the privileged few and accrue more to men than to women.

States are responsible for setting living wages and periodically adjusting them to match changes in inflation rates. They are also responsible for making sure that employers stick to labour laws and meet their obligations to pay living wages and social insurance contributions. Therefore, planning and seeing progressive structural transformations through is largely down to national governments.

## 2. Missing bridges: Vietnam's gender and industrialisation strategies are separate silos

Vietnam is a successful example of relatively stable economic growth achieved through a process of structural transformation and diversification of its economy. The latter involved reallocating resources from agriculture to the industry sector.<sup>49</sup> Growth rates have remained pretty much stable and over 6% from the late 1980s onwards – except for a short period after the Asian financial crisis of 1997.<sup>50</sup> But because this macroeconomic growth has not been equitably distributed, in part due to insufficient or ineffective investment in social services, Vietnam has not fully realised all its potential. Income inequality has grown in recent decades – with Vietnam's score on the Palma ratio (which measures the ratio of the income share of the richest 10% to that of the poorest 40%) increasing by 17% between 1992 and 2012.<sup>51</sup> Poverty reduction has been unevenly spread, with more than half of some ethnic minority groups living below the poverty line.<sup>52</sup> Ethnic minority women and girls are particularly disadvantaged with maternal mortality rates up to four times as high as the majority Kinh ethnic group, lower rates of education and land ownership, and lower participation in waged employment.<sup>53</sup>

Vietnam's strategy has relied on opening up the economy to global trade and investment. It gained access to the WTO in 2007 and has signed and participated in ten FTAs. Six of these are regional agreements – ASEAN Trade in Goods Agreement (ATIGA), ASEAN-China FTA, ASEAN-Korea FTA, ASEAN-Japan FTA, ASEAN-India and ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand. Three are bilateral FTAs – with Japan, Chile and Korea and the Eurasian Economic Union. Vietnam has also negotiated the EFTA (including Switzerland, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein) and the FTA between Vietnam and the European Union (EVFTA) is expected to be finalised by the end of 2017. Vietnam was also

part of the negotiations for the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP), set to include 12 countries. However, after President Donald Trump pulled out the US the remaining 11 countries have been trying to re-start negotiations with new sets of rules.<sup>54</sup>

In 2012 the Vietnamese government launched a 9 year National Strategy for Gender Equality, tasked with guaranteeing “substantive equality between men and women [...] in opportunity, participation and benefits in the political, economic, cultural and social domains, contributing to fast and sustainable national development.”<sup>55</sup> Implemented through reviews and amendments of various laws as well as national projects, the strategy would appear to set out a gender transformative path towards greater equality. The Women's Union and the Gender Equality Department within the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA) acknowledge that it has been a positive contribution to spark discussions around gender mainstreaming and closing the gender gap. But they and other local actors also acknowledge that outcomes have yet to be significantly improved.

And from our perspective it is not mainstreamed wide and far enough to make the industrial strategy gender just.

### **Industrial development strategy, jobs and growth**

Vietnam's industrial strategy has focused on turning the country into a manufacturing hub for the region – and it has succeeded. Relying mainly on State Owned Enterprises (SOEs) but also on attracting large foreign companies to invest in the country, the government has drawn an industrialisation strategy cemented on opening up the economy to the world. SMEs, which make up



around 90% of firms, have been left largely unsupported,<sup>56</sup> though this could improve once the new law to support SMEs comes into effect in January 2018.<sup>57</sup>

### Box 2. The goal of Vietnam's industrial development strategy<sup>58</sup>

“To effectively mobilize all resources from domestic economic sectors and external resources to develop and restructure the industrial sector towards modernity; to focus on training skilled, disciplined and innovative workforce for the industrial sector; to prioritize the development and transfer of technologies in the industrial sub-sectors and fields with competitive advantages and modern and advanced technologies such as agricultural, forestry and fishery product processing, electronics, telecommunications, new and renewable energy, mechanical engineering, and pharmaceutical chemistry; to rearrange the allocation of industrial space in order to promote the combined strength of sub-sectors, regions and localities for deep participation into the global value chain.”

The country's industrial policy resembles that of South Korea, in that it relied on quasi-monopolistic firms – SoEs – to develop key manufacturing sectors capable of turning the country into a regional player within specific value chains. But unlike South Korea, Vietnam has been unable to develop linkage industries capable of increasing local content production on a large scale. The motorcycle industry has been the only exception: up to 42% of components are produced nationally.<sup>59</sup> More importantly, the in-country supporting industry sector is relatively non-existent. Without these linkage industries it will be difficult to convince foreign investors to source products and services from the country, reducing its chances of moving into higher value added activities within global supply chains. Barriers imposed by global trade rules and agreements signed by Vietnam with other countries and regions is making it difficult for Vietnam to follow South Korea's path.

### The industrial strategy prioritises three sectors:

- processing and manufacturing (including automobile and mechanical spare parts; garments, leather, textile and footwear);
- electronics and communications;
- new energy and renewable energy.

Its implementation plan is outlined as a set of four main groups of implementation solutions: institutional renewal for industrial development; improving and upgrading the operational efficiency of the private sector; development of human resources; and technological upgrading.

In the past every sector was required to produce a Master Plan every five years, outlining the direction of travel as well as goals and strategies to achieve them. But as the private sector takes on a more prominent role in many sectors, there are fewer Master Plans and therefore a reduced oversight of the State on how markets develop.<sup>60</sup> While this might mean that industrial upgrading can more easily respond to actual market demands and therefore increase productivity, it makes it more difficult for the state to monitor and steer firms' staff recruitment, retention and development practices to secure workers' (and particularly women's) rights.

Though the industrial strategy's main aim has been to catalyse and maintain stable growth rates – increasing the annual growth rate of industrial added value by almost two percentage points by 2035, up from 9.923% in 2010<sup>61</sup> – it has triggered a change in employment opportunities across the country. Rural areas previously dependent on subsistence agriculture have been transformed into industrial areas, host to garment or electronic assembly factories. As women give up their farmland, they take up jobs in the factories.<sup>62</sup>

The strategy's rationale repeatedly highlights the importance of developing a skilled workforce for hitting targets.

Developing human resources, the industrial policy states, requires four key actions:

1. Plans on how best to develop a workforce for each phase of development of priority industries.

2. Creating and delivering training systems aligned to international standards.
3. Updating vocational training programmes and encouraging cooperation between firms and training facilities to optimise results.
4. Improving the labour market and job placement services.<sup>63</sup>

The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that labour-force participation of the 15–64-year-old population has remained between 81 and 85% since the 1990s, comparatively higher than in China and Thailand.<sup>64</sup> Unemployment has remained at 2.2%,<sup>65</sup> which is seemingly low for a developing country. But looking more closely at these figures it becomes clear that high labour participation rates and low levels of unemployment actually mean that many Vietnamese workers are either underemployed or in precarious jobs.<sup>66</sup> 22% of employed women are in unpaid family work rather than waged work – compared to only 11% of men.<sup>67</sup>

The growth of exports in textiles/garments and electronics – both low-skilled assembly sectors – has exponentially increased the numbers of young female workers who are paid extremely low wages

and work in substandard conditions.<sup>68</sup> Companies regularly lay off women workers once they turn 35, citing workers' poor health and lack of adaptability.<sup>69</sup> As Vietnam signs trade and investment agreements to further open up its economy to global companies from the European Union, garments, textiles, leather and footwear will become the fastest growing manufacturing sectors,<sup>70</sup> further consolidating the trend of feminisation of the labour force in sub-optimal conditions.

Rules of origin set in the EVFTA mean that Vietnam will have to increase the local manufacturing content of garment exports to European countries. Experts predict that textile production will get a huge boost, which will open up low skilled jobs that are likely to be taken up by women. While experts also believe that Vietnam's emerging fashion design sector will use the EVFTA to its advantage and help increase higher value-added to the garment industry (by creating designs in country instead of leaving this to other parts of the supply chain traditionally based in the Global North), this is unlikely to bring upgrades at a large enough scale to move the whole industry up the value chain.<sup>71</sup> Overall, for Vietnam to make the most out of the EVFTA, it will have to remain

### From medical student to dessert saleswoman

Ms Nguyen Thuy Dung is 33 years old and lives in Uong Bi with her husband and two sons aged four and seven. Despite having completed one year of medical school she works in the local market selling traditional desserts from 7 am to 6 pm. After dropping out of medical school, Ms Dung worked in her cousin's pharmacy and then in a footwear company, but with her husband working long hours in an electricity joint stock company she needed flexible working hours to take care of her sons.

She has been running her market stall for six years, making 5 to 6 million VND a month. Her husband's income amounts to 3 million VND a month, and together they have bought a small piece of land so they could stop



paying expensive housing rents. Ms Dung hopes for economic stability to maintain steady desserts sales – when there have been economic downturns she has struggled to sell much in the market. She hopes for good health to continue working for 20 or 30 years more, build a house on her plot and fund her children's education.

competitive with regards to neighbouring countries the way it has been doing it so far: maintaining low production costs and wages, which impacts women disproportionately. Textile manufacturing also brings a very high potential of environmental pollution, too. And this again, is totally absent from the Government's calculation on the opportunity costs that women workers will have to absorb when working in the sector.

There is a stronger tradition of workers' rights and more equal gender relations in Vietnam than

elsewhere in Asia, in spite of restrictions on independent trade unions. But labour rights have seen a steady erosion as the country has opened up.<sup>72</sup> The minimum wage, originally set at a living wage level, has been overtaken by inflation, and the bargaining power of state-sponsored unions has been weakened. Conditions in long-established, often state-sponsored factories are reported to be better than those in newer, private factories.<sup>73</sup>

### Box. 3 Changes to the retirement age in Vietnam further disadvantage women

Currently, the retirement age in Vietnam is 55 years for women and 60 years for men. Vietnam has been considering changes to its retirement age for several years, to address concerns around the ability of the social insurance fund to pay pensions. In 2014, the Social Insurance Law was amended to gradually increase the number of years a worker needs to contribute to social insurance in order to draw a pension at the full rate of 75% of their average salary.<sup>74</sup> A draft revision of the Labour Law now proposes to increase the retirement age to 60 years for women and 62 years for men.<sup>75</sup>

Seemingly neutral changes to pension rules can disproportionately impact women workers, as women have lower salaries and fewer years of working life due to their reproductive roles and discrimination in hiring, promotion and dismissal. While an ageing population poses challenges for retirement regimes, it is also important that changes do not exacerbate women's existing disadvantage in this area.

A report by the Vietnam Institute for Economic and Policy Research (VEPR) and Japanese economic experts released in September 2017 argued that, while the minimum wage has increased in the last eight years, labour productivity has not. Claiming that this disparity undermines the economy's competitiveness and could put investors off from settling in Vietnam, the report suggests replacing minimum wages with other social protection mechanisms that could also better reach informal workers.<sup>76</sup> Were this recommendation to go ahead, workers' rights and wellbeing would be sacrificed on the altar of profit margins. Living wages and social protection for all should be complementary, not interchangeable.

Overall, Vietnam's industrial strategy is geared towards economic growth and opening up new market opportunities for the country's production. While there is reference to skilling up a workforce capable of leading the country down this

transformative path, there is no mention of how workers' wellbeing will be protected and improved.

Vietnam's industrial strategy lacks a gender analysis of the policies and guidelines it sets out. It also fails to examine how the income it raises will advance gender equality, making it hard to label as a gender just industrial policy. This is not new. Women's rights have been consistently absent from national economic action plans. And when Vietnam joined the WTO in 2007, their action plan to align the country with global trade mechanisms failed to mention gender equality once.<sup>77</sup>

Crucially, there is a gap between transformation and inclusion in Vietnam's strategy. Leaving this gap unaddressed risks making transformation pointless in the fight against poverty and gender inequality.

## Vietnam's Gender Equality Strategy: less than a sum of its parts?

Since its independence, Vietnam has had a strong history of promoting women's rights and gender equality. Vietnam's first constitution in 1946 stipulated that "women and men have equal rights in all areas". Vietnam was one of the first signatories of CEDAW and ratified it in 1982. However, UN agencies in the early 2000s were worried that, despite having ratified CEDAW in 1981, Vietnam would struggle to implement policies adopted to advance and protect women's rights. In 2006, Vietnam passed the Law on Gender Equality leading to the establishment of the Gender Equality Department within MOLISA. A Law on the Prevention and Control of Domestic Violence followed in 2007.

In 2012, the Prime Minister approved a National Strategy on Gender Equality, valid for the period 2011-2020, stressing the government's commitment to closing the gender gap. The Strategy sets 7 objectives, including one on women's economic empowerment and jobs. A detailed outline of solutions is offered for each objective:

1. Close the gender gap in the political field by getting more women into leadership and managerial positions. This is where the Strategy has been most successful: 24.4% of parliamentary seats are held by women, higher than the regional average of 18.7%. Yet this success is limited, as we illustrate in Box 4.
2. Narrow the gender gap in the economy and labour market, specifically increasing access of rural poor women to economic resources and jobs.
3. Improve the quality of female human resources, gradually ensuring equal gender participation in education and training.
4. Guarantee gender equality in access to healthcare services.
5. Increase public awareness of gender equality and reduce cultural acceptance of discrimination against women.
6. Reducing gender based violence and ensuring gender equality in the household.

7. Enhance the state's capacity to deliver on gender equality.

Despite progress made in the early 2000s, in 2012 women still faced serious challenges in their daily lives. Poverty, barriers to access higher education and employment as well as discriminatory attitudes and behaviours were everyday challenges – and they still are.

Institutions across the whole country struggled to educate and raise awareness; gender analysis, collection of disaggregated data by gender, reporting and monitoring were also a challenge.<sup>79</sup>

The Ministry responsible for leading the Strategy's implementation is MOLISA, in coordination with the Ministry of Planning and Investment, the Ministry of Finance, relevant ministries and sectors, the Women's Union Central Committee and socio-political organizations and provincial-level People's Committees.<sup>80</sup> As well as releasing the strategy, in 2016 MOLISA launched an annual Action Month on Violence Against Women, to take place from mid-November to mid-December each year as a mechanism to focus national policy and public attention on women's rights issues.

Despite these positive developments, some experts and UN agencies argue that results have been limited. Vietnam's rank in the Gender Gap Index of the World Economic Forum fell from 42<sup>nd</sup> in 2007 to 83<sup>rd</sup> in 2015 (although it rose to 65<sup>th</sup> in the latest report). As countries around the world have improved their performance on gender equality, Vietnam's performance on the indicators that make up the Index – including wage equality between men and women – has remained static, with consistently low scores on women's political participation and participation as legislators, senior officials and managers.<sup>81</sup> While many good laws and policies came into place, implementation has been a major challenge. In fact, only four out of 22 targets of the National Strategy for Gender Equality were met during the 2011-2015 period, according to the report of the National Assembly Committee of Social Affairs.<sup>82</sup> Progress on gender equality has hit structural barriers, including deeply held social norms and beliefs around gender roles and gender biases in existing power structures.



#### Box 4. Women in Vietnam's National Assembly

Vietnam's Gender Equality Strategy aimed to achieve a minimum of 30% female representation in Vietnam's National Assembly and a minimum of 35% from 2016-2020. However, the number and proportion of women members actually dropped in the two terms following introduction of the strategy and still have not reached pre-strategy levels.<sup>83</sup> Deeper analysis finds that women are nominated at lower rates than men, are less likely to be nominated by central institutions, and fare worse than men at the polls.<sup>84</sup> This highlights the way that entrenched patriarchal norms within institutions and society inhibit the implementation of the progressive goals in the Gender Equality Strategy.

| Term      | Proportion of members who are women |
|-----------|-------------------------------------|
| 2016-2021 | 26.7%                               |
| 2011-2016 | 24.4%                               |
| 2007-2011 | 25.8%                               |
| 2002-2007 | 27.3%                               |

A senior official from MOLISA acknowledged in a 2017 media interview that advancing women's rights is a challenge due to culture and tradition. A huge awareness raising campaign on unpaid care, along with the provision of necessary public services to lessen women's burden, he said, are a strong step forward.<sup>85</sup>

Inequality in the world of paid work has proved resistant to change. Gender segregation is present in new, higher-value added sectors, like software work. A 2007 scholarly article looking at the gender distribution of well paid jobs in the still emerging software sector found that women were concentrated in jobs considered as requiring lower skills, such as testing. It was men who were in charge of programming and systems design – jobs considered higher skilled and therefore better paid. This gender segregation led to a gender gap in pay and training, and marginalised women in the field of technological design.<sup>86</sup>

In traditional manufacturing and service sectors, women above the age of 30 are rarely hired because they are seen as “expensive”. As women accumulate years of work experience within a company, there is pressure to increase their salaries; employer insurance fees rise and a larger unpaid care burden as well as health problems often force women to take time off work, which firms see as costly.<sup>87</sup> The usual gender segregation in jobs exists, where women are slotted into jobs seemingly requiring manual dexterity and attention to detail. Even a project run by the Women's Union to support rural women in getting new skills for better jobs falls into this gender segregating pattern.<sup>88</sup>



Ms Huyen and Ms Thuy, workers at an electronics firm in Northern Vietnam

Photo: Fyfe Strachan/AFV

## Working on the factory line

Ms Huyen and Ms Thuy\*, 34 and 32 respectively, work on the production line at an electronics assembly firm in Northern Vietnam. The technical department employs mostly men while in the production department only 0.03% of workers are men. In total the company is 80-90% women, though the managers are mostly male. Men working in the technical area have mechanical training while women are hired to work on the production line because of their attention to detail. Yet Ms Huyen studied a 2 year electrics course at a local college.

Initially, the majority of the company's women employees were 18-35 years old, but with increasing demand, the company has been hiring women as old as 40. Some employees are 42-45 years old. Conditions in the factory are good – it is clean and orderly. But Ms Huyen and Ms Thuy, like all production line workers, stand for many hours and only have a 40 minute lunch break, plus two five minute breaks so that they can go to the toilet. It is difficult to stop at other times when on the production line. Ms Huyen is tired at the end of the day and just wants to sleep when she gets home but Ms Thuy has found time and energy to study traditional medicine at her nearest vocational training college at the weekend. She hopes to leave the factory and set up her own clinic in 2018.

*\* Names have been changed*

Overall, while the Gender Equality Strategy has set ambitious targets to close the gender gap and done some legwork towards achieving them, a closer look at the results and current experiences of women workers reveals there is much work to

be done. Successes – like getting more women into decision-making positions – are piecemeal and hardly add up to the overarching, transformational change needed to challenge patriarchy at its core.

## Worlds apart: Gender Equality and Industrial Policy are completely separate policies

In August 2017 ActionAid carried out interviews with government officials and experts from the business, think tanks and CSO sectors to gather first-hand information on the impact of economic growth and industrial strategy on the lives of women in Vietnam. We also explored the results of the Gender Equality Strategy to date, looking for ways in which it might be able to influence industrial policy going forward. Our findings suggest that there is still a long way to go.

Interviewees pointed to several positive impacts of the Gender Equality Strategy – for example, the rate of women’s membership of commune, district, and provincial People’s Councils has risen since the strategy came into place and there have been increases in the number of women in management positions at local level government offices.<sup>89</sup> However, compared to other countries in the region, rates are still low.<sup>90</sup> Specific programs have been put in place at local level to implement the strategy, for example, the Uong Bi Department of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs supports 64 self-managed women’s livelihoods groups.<sup>91</sup>

However, all our interviewees agreed that implementation of the Strategy has been incredibly challenging, partly due to the complexity of government structures at national and provincial levels that make sanctions difficult to apply, but also due to lack of funding. Contradictions between the Strategy and various pieces of legislation make it hard to change formal and informal rules banning women’s access to work. For instance, the labour law includes a list of occupations deemed unsuitable for women, including working on offshore oil rigs, working on seagoing ships (except waiters in restaurants, housekeepers and receptionists in tourist ships) and conducting autopsies.<sup>92</sup>

Legal enforcement along with monitoring and evaluation of the Gender Equality Strategy’s impact is weak. Some interviewees suggested hiring more labour inspectors and training them to apply a gender lens and approach to their work could be one way of improving outcomes.<sup>93</sup>

Another key to improving gender equality in the workplace is ensuring there are effective mechanisms to record and address cases of

violence and harassment. Currently these cases are often dealt with using “soft measures” – e.g. direct negotiations between victims and employers around compensation to victims. But this makes it difficult to observe patterns of workplace harassment or encourage survivors to speak out about their experiences, thus raising awareness among fellow workers. What is needed is a combination of “hard measures” like legal instruments and agencies that deal with cases appropriately and soft measures that guarantee the best outcomes for victims.<sup>94</sup>

The Women’s Union has traditionally been at the forefront of fighting for gender equality and has thus played a huge role in delivering direct gender outcomes. Maternity leave for four months was written into the Labour Code adopted in 1994 thanks to the Union’s pressure<sup>95</sup> (it was then extended to six months in 2012).<sup>96</sup> But as The Women’s Union has been weakened, they are unable to fully protect women worker’s rights.

Tasking NGOs with taking the lead in awareness raising cannot mean that government officials and agencies should step back. Awareness raising and changes in public perceptions is key, but these need to be reflected in progressive and gender just policies, legislation and institutions. NGOs and their funders need to see direct impact of their work to do more and do it better.<sup>97</sup>

With the private sector rapidly taking on the leading role in various manufacturing sectors, it is becoming increasingly hard for the government to insist on non-discriminatory practices for hiring and promoting women. The economic development path chosen by the government for the long run means a large proportion of jobs will be created in the export oriented private sector. It is therefore important to find ways of ensuring that women have access to more and better jobs. One way of doing so is to protect women through gender transformative labour laws and Active Labour Market Programmes (ALMPs). But firms also need to change their practices. Interviewees proposed, for instance, appealing to firms’ social responsibility, or convincing them that happier workers are more productive.<sup>98</sup> Raising awareness among workers of their rights is also key – collective action and freedom of association are powerful drivers of change.

Overall, Vietnam’s industrial strategy is not leading to greater gender justice in the world of work. The

jobs created in those sectors deemed a priority are gender segregating; public income raised and spent as a result of a productive national economy is not often enough being allocated with a gender perspective. While the 2006 Gender Equality Law and the Strategy that followed in 2012 did include a commitment towards mainstreaming gender equality, these strategies have not gone as far as they could have. For example, there are insufficient Gender Responsive Budgeting tools in place and no effective mechanisms for dealing with violence and harassment – in public places or at the workplace.<sup>99</sup>

ActionAid Vietnam's 2016 study found that, while there are measures in place to protect women in public spaces, weak law enforcement has delayed substantial results.<sup>100</sup> 51.1% of women and girls feel anxious in public places like buses and bus stops.<sup>101</sup>

Continuing the improvement of gender responsive public services (GRPS) will be key. GRPS guarantee equal access, use and control of public services between men and women, while increasing awareness of the need for sufficient public investment to meet practical and strategic gender needs as well as the priorities of women.<sup>102</sup> In 2015 ActionAid made a series of recommendations for improving the collection of gender disaggregated data on health and education, while also calling for specific improvements in education and health programmes and resources to advance women's access and educate the population on the importance of gender equality.<sup>103</sup> It will be important to monitor the progress of these recommendations over the next 10 years.

Breaking silos between industrial development and gender equality is possible, but will require engagement from multiple actors. For instance, spaces for meaningful multi-party conversations where women themselves can voice their concerns and tell their stories ought to be created.<sup>104</sup>

A common instrument of industrial policy to give incentives to firms for productivity and expansion. As Vietnam continues to attract foreign investors to the country, it should add incentives to diversify their labour force by appointing women to managerial positions, supporting skills development and training for women recruits and

employees and hiring women over the age of 35. Adequate mechanisms for impact evaluation would need to be put in place.<sup>105</sup>

Companies already get tax incentives if they hire more women so amending the programme to fit these additional requirements should be possible. And MOLISA has openly stated that job creation targets are key for the industrial strategy going forward.<sup>106</sup> Making tax breaks and other incentives easily available for firms is equally important; firms currently eligible to claim tax breaks when they employ 70% women find the process of claiming this benefit far too complicated, so are disincentivised to hit the target.<sup>107</sup>

The Government of Vietnam should invest in economic opportunities for women, including: developing a scheme to support women-owned household businesses and SMEs, to provide work options for women after factory work but before retirement; and increase public kindergarten places for children aged 6-36 months.<sup>108</sup>

Critics have pointed out that gender equality measures have only effectively been addressed and included in Vietnam's national planning when their absence could block national production goals.<sup>109</sup> Perhaps this tone could be used by women, activists and stakeholders like the Women's Union to steer industrial development towards a gender just stance.

### Box 5. Spending on gender equality

Vietnam's Gender Equality Strategy has been accompanied by budget commitments to carry out the strategy. For example, in 2011, the government enacted the National Programme on Gender Equality 2011-2015 (Decision No. 1241/QD-TTg dated 22 July 2011) with five component projects and a total committed budget of USD \$50 million. However, a government report released in 2013 found that three years into this five year program only USD\$4.7 million (or 10% of the committed budget) had actually been spent.<sup>110</sup>



### 3. Jobs for the boys? How East Asia's economic miracle failed women

South Korea, Taiwan and Japan are the most recent examples of countries where industrial policy has brought about long-term economic transformation – and they have useful lessons for today's developing countries. Though Vietnam is unable to fully grasp opportunities for technological upgrading and industry development, it has certainly been inspired by the history of these nations. Even though they took place at a time when there were fewer restrictions on countries' policy space to protect domestic industries from foreign investors and trade, South Korea, Taiwan and Japan are good examples of successful collaborations between the state and the private sector enabling industries to break into higher-value-added manufacturing.<sup>111</sup> But they should also be seen as key examples where growth in the industrial sector – and thus in the wider economy – was underpinned by occupational segregation and wide gender pay gaps which still prevail today.<sup>112</sup>

#### How women's exploitation powered East Asia's economic boom

South Korea's export led growth is widely recognised as one of the most successful cases in recent history. From 1972 to 1990, annual GDP growth rates averaged 9%<sup>113</sup> while today countries undergoing a similar transformative process struggle to hit 6%. Exports grew at an average annual rate of 15%<sup>114</sup> in contrast to figures of around 2.1% in 2016. The state played a key role in this huge success: it “carefully constructed [a] set of policies which served to create a favourable climate for business, at the same time disciplining both business and labour in order to achieve the state's investment and export targets.”<sup>115</sup>

But Korea has the largest gender pay gap in the OECD,<sup>116</sup> showing that the above policies and the growth they facilitated had mixed impacts on women. First, it trapped women in low-skilled,

low-paid, exploitative jobs – also referred to as gender segregated employment.<sup>117</sup> “Historically, the manufacture of certain export-oriented goods, such as garments and electronics, both inside and outside EPZs and SEZs, has been predominantly carried out by women. Many feminist activists and scholars have drawn attention to the ways in which the global market's need for cheap labour has been met by women, with unequal gender relations exploited to maintain low wages and poor working conditions.”<sup>118</sup>

Second, despite the strong demand for women's labour, the female-male wage gap has barely narrowed in the last few decades.<sup>119</sup> In fact, the improvement in women's relative earnings stalled after the Asian financial crisis.<sup>120</sup> In 2015, women earned 37.2% of the male median wage.<sup>121</sup> This is a consequence of deeply entrenched gender stereotypes and discriminatory norms that extend to the workplace, where they are reinforced to drive down wages and conditions, and limit opportunities for women.<sup>122</sup>

The growth model that propelled South Korea to success relied on the state putting pressure on firms to deliver large export volumes which would bring in the cash needed to fund investments and technology imports in capital-intensive industries. These export industries – which relied heavily on women's labour – were also under pressure to keep labour costs down, resulting in low wages and harsh conditions for women workers.

State and private sector policies have kept the wage inequality mostly unchanged. To keep production going at the speed and quality required by foreign buyers the Korean state sought to limit worker-management conflict by repressing trade union activity.<sup>123</sup> In-company unions were allowed but their fragmentation and heavy company intervention has seen their power diluted.<sup>124</sup>

Suppression of effective collective action was complemented with state-run ideological

campaigns to convince workers that they were key frontline fighters of a “patriotic war against poverty” and the positives of having a friendly relationship with capital.<sup>125</sup>

And when Korea moved into higher value added manufacturing in the 1980s and 1990s, women were crowded out of better paid jobs. Private sector job training programmes for workers to be able to move into higher-skilled positions crowded women into ‘women’s jobs’ (on the production line) and out of ‘men’s’ occupations such as metal processing, transportation, construction and food processing.<sup>126</sup> State-funded programmes were even more discriminating: only 6.8% of slots went to women in 1990, compared to 18.2% for private firms.<sup>127</sup>

Research has found that there was a widespread use of discriminatory hiring procedures, like gender-based restrictions on job applications and even a ‘rule of exclusion’ of women from managerial and supervisory positions.<sup>128</sup> Gender differences in maximum-age limits for job applicants have also been documented, often at 25 for women and 30 for men. Women were very often required to quit their jobs when they got married, a widespread practice known as the “marriage bar”.<sup>129</sup>

Despite the marriage bar and the societal emphasis on women’s responsibilities as wives, mothers and daughters-in-law, married women are socially expected to contribute to family income. This has pushed Korean women into informal sector employment, where wages are substantially lower and work is insecure. A 2016 OECD survey found that the labour market remains segmented into regular and irregular workers. The latter earn 62% of the hourly wages that regular workers get and women are overrepresented in the group.<sup>130</sup>

Women’s disproportionate burden of unpaid care – including childcare and domestic responsibilities – has held women back from getting and keeping paid jobs. The employment rate of women in South Korea in 2014 was 21% lower than that of men. Despite being entitled to 90 days paid maternity leave, the majority of Korean women leave the workforce when they become mothers: only 26.3% of new mothers took maternity leave

in 2014. Just 4.5% of fathers made use of their entitlement.<sup>131</sup>

The above shows how women have been consistently and systematically deprived of the skills and opportunities to get jobs that pay higher wages and offer better conditions. Overall, the Korean economic system leaves no room for women to access more and better jobs which might explain why the gender wage gap remains unchanged.

South Korea is not alone in facing gender wage differentials and employment segregation post-economic growth. Between 1970 and 1990 Taiwan also moved into high-skilled manufacturing and saw a surge in employment in the service sector, which was associated with “rising earnings differentials, even after controlling for gender differences in education and experience.”<sup>132</sup>

As in South Korea, during its early industrialisation Taiwan’s principal source of cheap labour for Export Processing Zones (EPZ) was young, rural women. 80 to 85% percent of EPZ workers were women.<sup>133</sup> Starting wages for women in EPZ were fixed at 10 to 30% below those of men doing comparable work. Taiwan’s government justified this practice by saying that women’s main responsibilities were in the home and therefore they did not need high wages and their earnings were supplementary.<sup>134</sup> More than two decades later, the gender pay gap remains: in 2016 the Taiwanese Labour Ministry estimated that women must work 52 more days than men to earn the same amount.<sup>135</sup>

In the 1970s and 1980s, young Taiwanese women saw more opportunities to pursue education, while a decline in fertility rates meant that married women without children could supply much-needed manufacturing labour. The government sponsored programmes for married women to take up home based work or be employed in neighbourhood workshops. Factories were smaller in comparison to South Korea and were therefore more accessible for women to combine their housework with paid work. But the Taiwanese women working in these factories endured long hours for little pay, exhausting schedules and a lack of recognition as workers with equal rights.<sup>136</sup>

As Taiwan's industry upgraded technologically and the country liberalised its economy from the 1980s and 1990s, a good proportion of manufacturing jobs were cut. Between 1986 and 2002, the share of non-agricultural employment in Taiwan declined from 59% to 43%. Women, who were mostly employed as production workers, were the hardest hit. Between 1980 and 2004, women's share of manufacturing employment declined from 50% to 41%.<sup>137</sup>

Women workers flooded the retail and service sectors, where they took up more than half the jobs available. Clerical and service/sales jobs quickly became 'women's' occupations. In 2000, Taiwanese women comprised 77% and 55% of these jobs respectively. Some women managed to break into professional/technical jobs and even into higher-paying administrator/manager jobs. In 2000, 14% of administrators/managers and 43% of professional/technician jobs were held by women.<sup>138</sup>

The above figures might suggest that women have not fared too badly in Taiwan – at least in comparison to women workers in South Korea. But in reality, women are still perceived as the main caregivers in the family while being paid lower wages than men with the same occupation.<sup>139</sup> And the jobs they took were more often than not unskilled administrative tasks, yet again seen as women's jobs requiring nimble fingers and attention to detail. "When they leave their jobs after marriage or due to a lack of adequate help with childcare, their chances of gaining work experience and the potential for wage increases are reduced. Upon re-entry into the labour market, these women earn lower wages than women without family responsibilities and are more vulnerable to being laid off."<sup>140</sup>

Japan's industrialisation process took place much earlier than that of Taiwan and South Korea and was motivated by the country's "renewed sense of national purpose"<sup>141</sup> after World War II. Because the country had no natural resources to rely on for economic growth, leaders placed a huge emphasis on developing a highly educated labour force, a careful sectoral strategy based on very long term planning which made it capable of conquering international markets. By 1987, manufacturing contributed 20% of GDP.<sup>142</sup>

Despite an economic slowdown in the 1990s and huge reconstruction challenges after the 2012 earthquake and tsunami Japan has remained an influential player in the international economy; indeed, in 2013 it was the second largest supplier of capital to the World Bank.<sup>143</sup>

Yet in 2015 the gender wage gap in Japan was 25.7%, the third largest in the OECD.<sup>144</sup> Women's participation in politics is extremely limited and very few women occupy leadership positions.

In 1985 Japan's government made its first real effort to recognise and address the discriminatory hiring and promotion practices by passing The Equal Employment Opportunity Law. While today Japan's women are increasingly better educated and remain in formal jobs for longer, they have not managed to advance into positions of power. With only 40% of their wages paid if they go on maternity leave and limited places in public childcare facilities (only 22% of children under 3 got a place in the early 2000s) women struggle to combine family life with paid work.<sup>145</sup> When women return to work after becoming mothers, they are unable to pick up their careers where they left them. The only type of work available to them is part time work, defined not by the number of hours worked but for their insecurity, lack of opportunities for career progression or other benefits.<sup>146</sup> In 2015 two-thirds of non-regular workers in Japan were women.<sup>147</sup>

Therefore highly qualified women can still end up in substandard employment simply for choosing to have a family. Across the country, women are seen as inferior to men and their unpaid care responsibilities make it impossible to put in the long working hours required to achieve promotion and pay rises. There is limited union representation, restricting the power of collective bargaining to bring about significant improvements.<sup>148</sup>

Closing the pay gap and providing women with more and better jobs in South Korea, Taiwan and Japan will only happen if governments make a wholehearted policy effort to tackle discrimination at its core. Some useful legislation and policies have already been adopted. The challenge now lies in their implementation. The key to gender equality is to use women's groups, unions and civil society to put pressure on governments to ensure

equality in the workplace. Unions' involvement will be particularly important to ensure that the workers' right to collective action is respected and creates meaningful and long-lasting change.

### **Moving towards gender transformative industrial policies**

If developing countries today are to begin using industrial policy as a tool for long-term economic transformation it is vital that they tackle gender discrimination early on. Japan, Korea and Taiwan chose to focus on growth without considering

how their strategies could impact gender equality, possibly assuming negative impacts could be mitigated and addressed at a later stage. But the data quoted in preceding pages proves that addressing women's economic justice as an afterthought is problematic. Vietnam is still in time to make important changes.

Policy makers in developing countries should aim to design and implement progressive industrial policies that respect women's rights, workers' rights as well as the environment from the start. See Box 6.

#### **Box 6 – Progressive industrial policy<sup>149</sup>**

**There are two conventional principles of industrial policy:**

- 1) Achieving static efficiency – i.e. that in a short-term perspective, existing resources are efficiently used.
- 2) Achieving dynamic efficiency – i.e. how best to expand existing resources through research, innovation, investment, education and acquiring new competences and skills so there can be resources for the long term.

**Progressive industrial policy additionally includes six principles to make sure that new economic activities that emerge are people centred:<sup>150</sup>**

- 1) Practicing democracy and diffusing power so that workers can deliberate on how economic activities should be reshaped.
- 2) Designing appropriate technologies so that they are environmentally sustainable and employment friendly as well as expanding open access knowledge-sharing.
- 3) Limiting the power of finance in order to reduce inequality gaps.
- 4) Supporting employment to protect workers, avoid excessive job losses as a result of the transition, reallocate workers affected and ensure living wages and social protection. Strong trade unions and collective bargaining rights are key to achieving this.
- 5) Improving environmental sustainability.
- 6) Assuring a fair distribution of benefits – both between domestic and foreign firms but also among workers and citizens in general.



But even if industrial policy gets a progressive makeover it will be unable on its own to deliver gender transformative change. The most common instruments of industrial policy are: sector specific subsidies (including import substitution and tariffs); investment-related performance requirements; direct support for sectoral innovation and learning (including local content requirements, national innovation systems, and improvements in education and vocational training).<sup>151</sup> Most of these instruments are gender neutral, primarily focused on upgrading firms and economic sectors at a structural level and with productivity increase as the ultimate goal.

As firms and sectors engage with this structural transformation, patriarchal norms are most likely to affect their actions and outcomes – such as the

jobs they create, who they go to or the taxes they pay and the way these are spent. This is where radical changes should happen first and foremost.

Industrial policy therefore needs to be part of an overarching state-led strategy that not only aims to change the nature of the economy. Such a strategy should:

- Explicitly aim to provide more and better jobs for women and men.
- Commit to building good quality public services to address women's unpaid care burden.<sup>152</sup>
- Break siloes between social and economic policies, while mainstreaming gender priorities.

## 4. Locking in gender transformative policies

States are responsible for building an economy that guarantees women's equitable access to productive resources, jobs, living wages and secure sources of income. These factors make it easier for women to negotiate at home for an equitable distribution of resources and unpaid care work, among other things. Meeting these obligations involves designing, approving and implementing policies and legislation that guarantee women's well-being including health, education, parental leave, childcare provision and the right to collective bargaining.<sup>153</sup>

Governments will therefore need to “enforce anti-discrimination legislation and pursue policies that help women balance their family responsibilities and paid work, train women for a broader range of well-paying jobs and increase their old-age security.”<sup>154</sup>

Governments around the world have already put in place a series of useful policies that tackle some of these requirements. But real change will not come about unless a systematic, streamlined approach replaces siloed, tokenistic efforts. As discussed in previous sections with examples from Vietnam, Korea and Taiwan, simply bringing women into the labour market does not automatically translate into gender equality or challenge patriarchal gender relations in the long term.

In researching women's work in Bangladesh, Kabeer, Mahmud and Tasneem discovered that one solution to the gender pay gap is to improve the nature of paid work that women take up, rather than simply getting more women into jobs. But even working in formal jobs with better pay brings costs to women's health and physical safety due to patriarchal norms in wider society. Gender division of labour in unpaid care and domestic work has not moved at par with growing participation of women in the labour force, and women are not necessarily more able to participate in “the collective affairs of the community or in public protests against injustice.”<sup>155</sup>

In 2017 ActionAid research found that women's over-representation in poorly paid, vulnerable forms of work is a threat to their physical and mental wellbeing. More importantly, in the long run, it has an impact on the overall power balance between women and their male peers and relatives.

We looked at low-income country-level data on reported intimate partner violence and the numbers of women in more or less secure forms of employment and found that the quality and type of work available to women can affect their exposure to certain types of violence. For example, intimate partner violence may be greater for women who are in self-employed, vulnerable work because the low wages they earn puts them in a vulnerable and disadvantaged position to bargain within households. Low wages can also act as a barrier for them to leave an abusive relationship.<sup>156</sup>

What concrete rules, laws, policies, processes and tools could help governments make sustainable progress towards women's access to more and better jobs and, ultimately, economic justice? Because most industrial policy instruments are gender neutral, we believe that a focus on gender transformative policy change would be most effective at the intersection between industrial policy (as a key component of structural transformation), macroeconomic and fiscal policy and social policies (including but not exclusively labour, health and education). In other words, at the point where states decide how to generate and spend income and how to shape and regulate the labour market.

Budgets are the most important element for state planning. They ultimately determine what will be the social and economic priorities for a given period of time because policy implementation – including tackling gender inequality – to achieve set outcomes cannot realistically happen without sufficient funding. Budgets can also indirectly set the balance of responsibility of care and

reproductive work in a society between the family unit and the state; because women shoulder the largest share of unpaid care, budgets can perpetuate gender inequality. Delivering commitments towards gender equality requires incorporating a gender perspective in planning and budgeting frameworks and concrete investment in addressing gender gaps. Adopting gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) helps identify effective interventions for implementing policies and laws that advance women's rights.<sup>157</sup>

But budgetary considerations are not the only barrier to gender justice. There are many obstacles in women's daily lives that governments ought to address. Below we identify three main thematic subsets of barriers and enablers to women's access to more and better jobs and policies or tools that states should plan for.

### Breaking barriers to women's use of time and their wellbeing

The first – and most important – obstacle to women's "pathways to better jobs" is the time

they have available to devote to paid work. Women carry a disproportionate burden of unpaid care: societal norms often expect women to care for children, elderly relatives and provide fuel, water, cooked meals, washed clothes and clean homes. This dictates societal expectations of women's role in the workforce.

ActionAid's 2013 multi-country survey of the number of hours that women spend on unpaid care showed just how little time they have left for themselves – time they could invest in leisure, education, skilling up to access better paid jobs or taking part in community activities. Women recorded spending most of their time on housework: 209 hours in Uganda, 268 in Nepal and 222 hours in Kenya. Nigerian women spend more time caring for children (256 hours) than on housework (205 hours), compared to 89 childcare hours recorded in Kenya, 71 in Nepal and 186 in Uganda. Women's time diaries showed that fuel and water collection took up huge amounts of time too, the most number of hours recorded in Kenya (99) and the lowest in Nepal (39).<sup>158</sup>



Elizabeth Dakurah, 24 years, does the laundry whilst her 2 year old daughter, Caroline, leans into her in their home in Tizza in the Upper West region of Ghana.

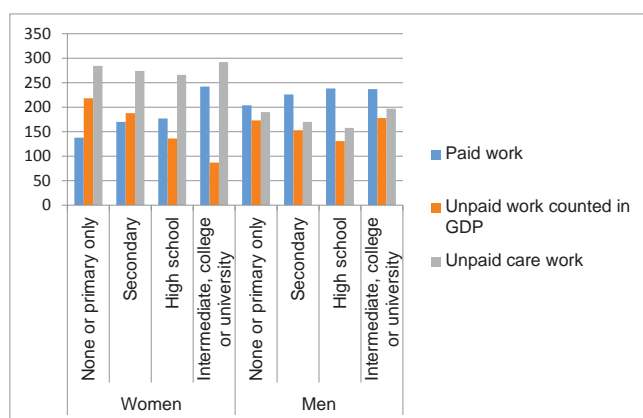
Photo: Deborah Lomotey/ActionAid



Preliminary results for 2016 from ActionAid’s Power Project show that women in Ghana spent on average two hours a day cooking, compared to 9.6 minutes recorded by men. Across all the other domestic tasks recorded in participants’ time diaries, including collection of water and fuel, caring for adults and children and general house work, women’s contribution was between three and fifteen times bigger than that of men.<sup>159</sup>

Research carried out by ActionAid Vietnam in 2016 and 2017 found that women spend 4.5 to 5 hours per day on unpaid care work, close to 2 hours per day more than men. Ethnic minority women bear a heavier burden - for example, in the H’mong ethnic group women spend 7 hours per day on unpaid care work. The research also found that having a higher education level does not reduce the amount of unpaid care work that women do, even as time spent on paid work increases. See Figure 1.<sup>160</sup>

**Figure 1. Paid and unpaid work by education level, Vietnam**



Source: ActionAid Vietnam (2016) *How much does it cost women for men to be the family’s backbone?*

Without the subsidy women’s work provides, both in and outside the home, the world economy would not function. Yet it is undervalued and largely invisible. ActionAid’s calculations show that “US\$9 trillion is the cost that women in developing countries bear each year due to unequal wages and the fact that women have less access than men to paid jobs.”<sup>162</sup> ActionAid Vietnam has also calculated that women’s unpaid care work subsidizes the country’s economy by USD\$44 billion per year. Gender global employment participation and pay gap between

women and men is US\$ 17 trillion. Closing both the gaps could increase women’s income up to 76%.<sup>163</sup>

As illustrated by accounts from Korea, Taiwan and Japan earlier in this report, women were practically forced to quit their jobs when they got married and/or had children. This partly responds to gender discriminatory practices in recruitment and retention of women workers. But it also reflects the lack of state support and provision of services around childcare, paid maternity and paternity leave and availability of parental leave. Lack of publicly-funded kindergartens is a barrier for Vietnamese women too.

Women need to know that their jobs are secure and that they can return to work after having children without being penalised for taking time off or work flexibly to plug gaps in childcare. Denmark is one of the best countries in the world for working mothers – and fathers – with children. Every child is guaranteed an affordable nursery place from the age of one and up to the age of six, when they start school. Parents are generally entitled to 52 weeks paid leave after the birth or adoption between them, and this can be taken flexibly. Societal norms have broken away from a patriarchal system that sees mothers as the natural and only carer for young children.<sup>164</sup>

In the developing world, programmes and schemes trialled in some countries have shown that supporting working age mothers with childcare or school meals for their kids has a positive effect on their careers and wellbeing. In Mexico, the Estancias programme, run by the government and four UN agencies, provides childcare for at least eight hours a day, five days a week, with good staff ratios, nutritious food and an education programme. Up to 90% of the cost is covered by the programme. Women sending their children to the centres have increased their hours of work by an average of six hours a day.<sup>165</sup>

As women juggle paid work with family duties, their health is likely to suffer. Robust and easily accessible healthcare for women is a necessary foundation to their wellbeing. This is a challenge for women both in the Global North and South. Scholars looking at the implications of caregiving for women’s health in the US found that they are significantly more likely to be in poor health and



to have experienced problems getting care.<sup>166</sup> Universal access to good quality healthcare (including elderly care) is equally important so that women can rely on professional carers to look after their sick and elderly relatives – should they wish to – instead of having to carry the burden themselves. And building a professional, publicly financed care economy helps create jobs too.<sup>167</sup>

As women join workplaces and take public transport to get to and from work and caregiving responsibilities, they are also at risk of violence and harassment. ActionAid found over 90% of women in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, felt at risk of rape, verbal abuse and harassment by men outside garment factories, especially when dark. Worryingly, Cambodia's Ministry of Women's Affairs found that 87% of rape survivors did not seek help.<sup>168</sup> Safe public transport, decent street lighting and trained and specialist police and support services are needed.

### Empowerment through access to knowledge, skills and better jobs

It has been proven over and over again that education has a huge impact on women's ability to access better forms of paid, formal work.

Educational qualifications are a necessary credential rather than a proxy for how productive women can be.<sup>169</sup> A 2008 study across 14 countries in Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia and Central Europe found a positive relationship between education and participation of women in more productive forms of rural wage employment. With every additional year of education women increased their participation in the labour force in a higher proportion than that of men, proving that education has a bigger impact on women's employment opportunities than it has on men's.<sup>170</sup>

Recognising the importance of education, governments have included commitments to get more girls in school in their national development plans. As shown by evaluation indicators from the Millennium Development Goals, this is particularly true for primary and secondary education. Bangladesh, hailed as a huge MDG success story on several indicators, reported in 2015 that girls outnumbered boys in school; by 2011 only 6% of girls aged 7-16 had never been to school.<sup>171</sup> As a whole, Southern Asia has increased the ratio of primary school enrolment for girls from 74 girls for every 100 boys in 1990 to 103 girls for every 100 boys in 2015.<sup>172</sup>

Selina, 12 years old, is studying with other girls in a school in Sapahar, Bangladesh.

Photo: ActionAid



Yet young women and girls are dropping out of school. Faced with high levels of unemployment and claims from the private sector about the lack of a qualified labour force to recruit from, countries are now looking at ways to keep young women enrolled in technical, college and university-level education. Bangladesh's 2012 National Skills Development Policy, promotes women's skills development and recognises that special efforts are needed to correct the gender imbalance of the formal training system. The Policy commits to including women in "non-traditional" sectors.<sup>173</sup>

Donors like the Asian Development Bank are helping countries like Bangladesh skill up workers to take up jobs in current industries. But just one look at the catalogues and performance reports reveals how gendered these programmes are. Women are channelled to sewing machine operator courses, while men are trained to become machine operators in the light engineering industry.<sup>174</sup> Public training programmes in Argentina showed similar trends: women made up 100% of the take up of short-term sewing and hairdressing courses, while roughly 90% and 100% of the students of the respective electronics and vehicle repair and electrical mechanics courses were men.<sup>175</sup>

This gendered division of training programmes reinforces the existing gendered division of labour referred to earlier in this report.<sup>176</sup> Ending employment discrimination should go hand in hand with making sure that vocational training programmes are equally accessible by men and women and that gender transformative vocational training is demanded.

Skills and education policies ought to result in more and better jobs. Scholars have widely documented that active labour market programmes (ALMPs) – social programmes aimed at increasing employment for job seekers – improve matching between jobs and workers and foster new opportunities for those with fewest chances in the job market – can improve employment outcomes for women.<sup>177</sup> Training programmes are a widely used type of ALMP and while their results are overall mixed in terms of

closing the gender gap, there is evidence that Mexico's BECATE benefited women the most.<sup>178</sup>

But for these programmes to have a long term and transformative impact, they need to be complemented with other types of programming, including social norms, to achieve gender parity in employment and transform broader gender roles. Along those lines, with support from the ILO skills programme, Bangladesh opened up a new programme to support hundreds of women into non-traditional occupations including: carpentry, furniture making, food processing and hospitality. To maximise success of the programme, it encourages the involvement of family members, society, training providers, employers and government.<sup>179</sup>

Bringing the local industry as early as possible on board technical and vocational education and training (TVET) programmes is key to making sure there is a steady increase of job placements at the end of all programmes. With this in mind, a key part of the Vietnamese-German cooperation programme to reform TVET in Vietnam is to grant TVET centres the autonomy to offer employment-relevant training in cooperation with the business sector.<sup>180</sup>

Perhaps a way to begin curbing employment discrimination - and therefore gender segregation in vocational and educational training - is to force gender quotas on employers for managerial roles or other positions that are traditionally seen as "male jobs". Though a slightly different case in itself, within the debate in European countries around fixing quotas for women in company boards, a 2013 "analysis of nearly 6,000 companies across 45 countries carried out by GMI Ratings showed that percentages of female directors were highest in Nordic countries, where legislation has enabled women to occupy nearly a third of seats on corporate boards."<sup>181</sup> Quotas have worked best where accompanied by tough enforcement mechanisms: threat of fines for non-compliance (Italy), threat of dissolution of companies (Norway), and withholding fees from the directors of non-compliant boards (France).<sup>182</sup>



## Protecting women workers' rights and autonomy

A third important subset of policies and processes essential to further women's economic justice are those that guarantee that the jobs women get and keep for the long run are economically and personally rewarding. These are best defined by the ILO's decent work concept and include: fair wages, social protection (pensions), rights at work, safety at the workplace and freedom of association.

"Decent work sums up the aspirations of people in their working lives. It involves opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men."<sup>183</sup>

Minimum wages, while widely used by governments all over the world, often do not pay workers enough to support themselves and their families. The Asia Floor Wage Alliance has found that in all the countries where they work, minimum wages are not enough to cover all basic needs and put money aside for emergencies. What is needed instead are living wages, enough for each worker to afford food, clothes, housing, education and health costs for themselves and two to four dependents depending on their age. Their income should also allow them to keep a discretionary amount each month to devote to entertainment, savings or a pension.<sup>184</sup>

Neoliberal opinion formers have argued that social protection mechanisms can have a negative impact on the labour market, discouraging workers from seeking work and firms from hiring.<sup>185</sup> But there is ample evidence that they can have positive impacts on women's lives. Studies in South Africa and Latin America have shown that survivor's pensions, pension credits for carers and child benefits help reduce the vulnerability of working women and their families.<sup>186</sup> Women are

more likely to invest in the welfare of their families and other women than male recipients of social protection mechanisms.<sup>187</sup>

Guaranteeing freedom of association and collective action is particularly important. Feminist scholars have repeatedly come to the conclusion that a key precondition for women to really achieve empowerment is their active and open participation in voicing injustice and shaping fairer institutions and processes for them to be part of. For example, the waste pickers union in India "lobbied to get the municipal government to issue them with identity cards and extend the right to basic social security, bringing them into the formal arena."<sup>188</sup>



Rights Café women marching down the street in Bangladesh.

Photo: Nicola Bailey/ ActionAid

History shows that challenges to the implementation of laws that foster and protect workers' rights can be overcome through a combination of mass protest and pressure from domestic and international groups. Some of the gains achieved in Bangladesh's garment sector came about in this way.<sup>139</sup> International partnerships to skill up and promote women to leadership positions are key in tackling patriarchal gender norms that block union strength and formation.<sup>190</sup>

When women workers' collective succeed, the effects can reach far beyond than the lives of the individuals that fought for them. Some scholars of International Development argue that workers can go beyond waiting for pro-labour policies to come about. They can initiate a process – known as labour-led development – where “labouring class collective actions directly generate meaningful improvements to their and their communities' livelihoods.”<sup>191</sup> Because collective action is a democratic process, scholars argue that the changes it achieves in the use and generation of resources are more democratic, participatory and liberating for workers than top-down change. This makes changes achieved by collective action more durable and difficult to revert.<sup>192</sup> This is the type of transformational change women's movements should keep fighting for.

Pressure from women's rights organisations and movements has also brought about better mechanisms to protect women against violence. In response to pressure from Ugandan women's rights organisations and movements over many years, the Ugandan government ratified instruments like CEDAW and in 2016 passed the National Policy and Action Plan to Eliminate Gender Based Violence.<sup>193</sup>

### **Challenges to policy implementation and how to overcome them**

Approval and adoption of progressive policies, while a huge achievement signalling political commitment to justice, should not be seen as the last point of a transformative journey. Scholars in the field of policy implementation have concluded that “what occurs after a policy is formally adopted by government can short circuit the original intent of the formal policy statement.”<sup>194</sup>

State and non-state actors must set out and deliver a range of policy decisions and activities to make change happen, while gathering the necessary data to evaluate impact and outcomes. Policy implementation is generally where problems come about because institutions and governance mechanisms are nested within a patriarchal system.<sup>195</sup>

Because gender just policies seek to fundamentally change the status quo of gender relations, governments and institutions may not be willing to go through with their implementation.<sup>196</sup> Gender reforms easily become symbolic gestures as opposed to concrete activities for actual change.<sup>197</sup>

Setting and monitoring clear performance standards, success rates as well as direct and indirect outcomes is key to figuring out if policies are indeed being implemented. Direct outcomes of gender just policies would be the solution to women's needs (childcare support, access to better jobs, etc.) while indirect outcomes – which are equally important – should include long term changes in public opinion, attitudes, values and norms.<sup>198</sup>

One way to monitor the implementation and success of gender just policies and locate blockages which need to be addressed is to draw a map of all the actors who need to mobilise to bring about change, how they engage with the process and how they could obtain the best results. This includes state and non-state actors, legal actors, implementing agencies, compliant groups and target groups.

Because gender just policies aim to advance women's rights, it is vital that the government agencies leading on their implementation are meaningfully accountable to women. Government officials need to hear first-hand from women, either directly or through representatives of women's movements and respond to their demands.<sup>199</sup> Engagement channels for this exercise should be available and easily and regularly accessible for all.

Coordination among government agencies is vital. Yet this is one of the most difficult tasks. The preceding sub-sections have shown that advancing women's economic justice will require



tackling various policy fronts: from labour policy to a wide range of social policies including education, health and social protection. A united front requires clear and regular communication, perhaps best achieved with a lead agency or body in charge of oversight.<sup>200</sup>

Through ActionAid's 2017 engagement with businesses, workers and government officials in Bangladesh regarding the progress of the country's Five Year Plan, we learned that a lack of financial resources for all ministries involved has been perhaps the biggest challenge.<sup>201</sup> Interviews with various stakeholders in Vietnam in August 2017 highlighted similar constraints with regards to better implementing the country's Gender Equality Strategy.<sup>202</sup>

Labour laws requiring employers to pay for maternity or paternity leave will have financial implications for businesses, making them less supportive of gender just policies and reticent to hire women of childbearing age. States have the responsibility to launch support programmes to help foot the bill. Similarly they have the responsibility to fund childcare centres or vouchers for working mothers to access.

Large public investments will be necessary and adequate budget allocations must be provided. Earlier in this report we discussed the importance of GRB to ensure gender equality is planned for and financed. Scholars have documented that the biggest shortfall in gender mainstreaming efforts in various countries is due to a lack of budget planning capacity.<sup>203</sup> Clarity on how much money is needed, what for and how to access official

budget documents to work with is what gender advocates within government agencies need to prioritise. In the past few decades South Africa, Canada, Australia, Uganda and Tanzania have developed useful techniques in gender sensitive budget analysis and planning.<sup>204</sup>

But gender analysis and planning of budgets is half of the problem. Finding the resources to allocate is the other – complex – task for policy makers. Most of this financing ought to come from taxes raised and it is important to acknowledge that macroeconomic and fiscal policy choices affect budget envelopes available to underpin change. A complementary source of financing for a gender just economic transformation could come from public development banks (PDBs).

PDBs are mandated to “deliver on public policy objectives that support the economic development of a country or region.”<sup>205</sup> Two of their main roles are: to direct finance – or provide it on better-than-market terms – to sectors or regions that are important for a national development plan; and to build the financial sector, either by filling gaps in the supply of credit (lending to households or businesses that cannot access credit from commercial banks), or by helping to create demand (helping businesses or other customers to develop bankable projects).<sup>206</sup> Donor support channelled through PDBs could help finance a gender just economic transformation. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) around gender targets could also help ensure financing serves women's economic empowerment.

## 5. Conclusion and recommendations

Without a serious challenge to patriarchal norms, gender inequality will continue to hold women back from a fair and fulfilling life. If developing countries are serious about achieving steady economic growth underpinned by the creation of more and better jobs while closing the gender gap, change will need to happen at every level. Women's bargaining power to create and take better opportunities for themselves is affected by state, market and household dynamics.

As industrial development regains importance as a tool required for long-term planning, it is key that policy makers learn lessons from past industrialisation experiences to ensure that people's needs – especially women's needs – come first. Economic development can no longer be subsidised by poorly paid women workers with little access to better employment. It will be up to government officials in charge of budget planning, fiscal policies, labour laws, public services (including health, education, care of the young and the elderly) and accountability mechanisms to sow the seeds of deliverable and measurable change. Civil society, NGOs, unions, grassroots movements, women and girls will play a key role in voicing concerns and ensuring that these are heard and acted upon.

Long lasting change will not come quickly or easily which is why gender just economic transformations cannot wait. Recognising that they will be complex processes to design and deliver, we offer the following recommendations to all of those involved.

### **Governments should:**

- Recognise unpaid care work and include women's contributions to society and the economy as primary care givers by including it as part of GDP. This must be done while also rolling out programmes and policies to reduce women's unpaid care burden through gender responsive public services like kindergarten facilities.
- Make meaningful changes to budget planning in order to apply gender analysis to how public income is raised and spent; gather gender differentiated data; map the impacts of economic and social policies on women, making necessary adjustments to mitigate risks and negative effects. If necessary, radical changes to fiscal and economic policies should be made to ensure budgets do not perpetuate gender inequality.
- Uphold women's rights to decent work and end the exploitation of women's work, both paid and unpaid, in the formal and informal sector, and protect their sexual and reproductive health and rights.
- Raise public awareness of harmful social norms which perpetuate gender discrimination and how these harm everyone in society.
- End discrimination against women at the workplace as well as in technical and vocational education and training programmes and Active Labour Market Programmes, by supporting and encouraging women's access to jobs and sectors traditionally seen as "male". This will require reviewing outdated labour laws that determine which jobs women can and cannot do. As countries like Vietnam continue to open up to foreign investors, governments ought to consider setting quotas for recruitment of women into higher skilled and decision-making jobs.
- As part of a plan to create decent jobs, governments should assist, not hinder, the formation of trade unions.
- Ensure that the ministries and agencies leading on gender just policies are meaningfully accountable to women, particularly those that are disadvantaged. Government officials need to hear first-hand from women, either directly or through representatives of women's movements and respond to their demands.

- Improve the monitoring of implementation by setting and monitoring clear performance standards, success rates and direct and indirect outcomes.
- Develop, enact, and regularly update a comprehensive National Action Plan on business and human rights as part of the state responsibility to disseminate and implement the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPR), fully integrating and prioritising gender equality and women's rights. Plans should include strong regulatory frameworks, combined with gender sensitive human rights and address the barriers women face when accessing justice.
- Regulate international companies to ensure due diligence across their supply chain and insist that they participate in the negotiations to elaborate a UN Treaty on Business and Human Rights.

### **Trade Unions and Civil Society should:**

### **The international community should:**

- Stop imposing reforms to developing countries' policies that negatively impact women's rights, including:
  - o Investor protection treaties or chapters that prioritise foreign investors' protection over that of human and women's rights and the environment. A deep reform of the investors-state dispute settlement mechanisms is urgently needed, that goes beyond procedural aspects to clarify the relationship between investors rights and human rights.
  - o Trade agreements constraining economic and fiscal policy space. In order to do this, countries need to carry out gender-sensitive impact assessments for all trade agreements being negotiated, and use the findings to inform trade negotiations.
  - o Consumption and production models based on women's exploitation in the Global South. Governments should instead promote and adopt more research by feminist economists.
  - o Economic growth models underpinned by GDP growth targets as a measure of progress instead of accounting for progress made on environmental, social and gender commitments.
- Create opportunities for women living in poverty to define economic alternatives.
- Apply the same standards of equality, opportunity and dignity to their own internal workforce and workplace environments – engaging in positive discrimination practices, particularly for women who have experienced multiple barriers to formal education.
- Trade unions should diversify their membership and move towards at least 50% female leadership positions. International partnerships should also skill up and promote women to leadership positions within unions.
- Civil society organisations should monitor implementation and outcomes of gender just policies, putting pressure on governments to deliver women's rights. For example this could be done by including and enforcing relevant provisions on respect for workers' rights in trade agreements and domestic economic development strategies.
- INGOs should engage with and support existing networks of women's rights organisations at the local level.

### **Companies should:**

- Develop and publish a business and human rights policy as part of their responsibility to respect human rights, as defined in the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.
- Recognise that women face particular disadvantages and discrimination, by developing and publishing a gender policy, addressing the systemic problems faced by women.

- Contribute to ensuring effective access to remedy for victims of human rights violations, which are disproportionately women.
- Leverage influence to positive ends, by publicly calling on governments to respect women's rights and address gender inequalities, and provide an enabling environment for responsible business conduct and women's empowerment and equality.
- Truly progressive companies wishing to play a positive and proactive role in meaningfully addressing women's rights issues should:
  - o Guarantee a living wage for all workers - including in their supply chain.
  - o Guarantee paid maternity leave for all workers with care responsibilities and make childcare provisions in the workplace for workers with care responsibilities.
  - o Offer gender-transformative training, mentoring and opportunities for advancement of women.
  - o Ensure that women workers, especially temporary and informal workers, are represented and listened to in collective bargaining about pay and conditions.

### **All actors should**

- Support and resource the full and meaningful leadership and collective participation of women in economic decision-making from local to global level.



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