

POLICY BRIEF



Gender-Responsive Policies for Post-Crisis Achievement of SDGs

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Solidarity for the
Achievement
of the SDGs



Abstract

The Russia–Ukraine war, an essential driver of the current polycrisis, has exacerbated food, energy, and economic insecurity, disproportionately affecting women in Southern countries. Disrupted trade and rising costs have deepened gender inequality in African countries. Women, primarily employed in informal sectors with limited protections, face job losses, food insecurity, and reduced access to basic services. Existing economic policies often overlook gender-specific impacts, failing to address women's roles in unpaid care, agriculture, and the informal economy. Gender-responsive policies can be more effective and cost-efficient than policies that do not consider the local gender-specific impacts and socio-economic situation of women. Gender-sensitive responses are essential to achieving multiple sustainable development goals (SDGs) (eg., poverty, inequality, hunger). Evidence-based, data-informed policy design is essential to ensuring women's resilience and empowerment in crisis response and recovery, supporting the broader SDGs.

Keywords: Gender Targeted Policies, Polycrisis, Gender Inequality, Poverty, Hunger, SDG.

Diagnosis

Crisis Impacts on Women

The Russia–Ukraine war has significantly increased global prices for fuel, food, and fertilisers, with complex and gender-differentiated impacts, particularly in Africa. Since February 2022, the conflict has disrupted global markets and affected countries differently, based on their production and trade structures.¹ These price hikes have disproportionately impacted poorer populations, who face increasing poverty (SDG 1), hunger (SDG 2), inequality (SDG 5 & 10) and deteriorating access to affordable energy (SDG 7). Women, especially, still affected by the COVID-19 crisis,² are disproportionately impacted by the worsening of these SDGs.

Women's vulnerabilities stem from their socio-economic situation, for example, limited access to resources, education, decent jobs, and the burden of unpaid care and domestic work, which results in time poverty.³ The economic disruptions caused by the Russia–Ukraine war have had varied effects in different countries, with women in the low-income economies and in low-income households bearing the greatest impacts.⁴

In the Global South, many women work in informal sectors, with little social protection and often as contributing family workers.⁵ They bear the brunt of unpaid domestic and caregiving work and are seen as the household safety net during crises.⁶ During recent crises, women have experienced greater job losses

¹ C. Amdt et al., 'The Ukraine War and Rising Commodity Prices: Implications for Developing Countries', *Global Food Security* 36 (1 March 2023): 100680, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gfs.2023.100680>; C. Cororaton et al., 'The Impact of the War in Ukraine: Estimating the Economic and Welfare Losses in Africa Using a Global CGE Model', *PEP Policy Brief*, 2023.

² Z. Deng et al., 'The Russia–Ukraine War Disproportionately Threatens the Nutrition Security of Developing Countries', *Discover Sustainability* 3, no. 1 (17 November 2022): 40, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43621-022-00112-8>.

³ D. Elson, 'Gender and the Global Economic Crisis in Developing Countries: A Framework for Analysis', *Gender & Development* 18, no. 2 (1 July 2010): 201–12, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13552074.2010.491321>.

⁴ P. Papadavid, 'Gender-Sensitive Macroeconomic Policies in Low- and Middle-Income Economies: Gender-Differentiated Shocks and Associated Macroeconomic Levers', *ODI Global Briefing Paper*, 2025, <https://odi.org/en/publications/gendersensitive-macroeconomic-policies-in-low-and-middle-incomeeconomies>.

⁵ M.C. Lo Bue et al., 'Gender and Vulnerable Employment in the Developing World: Evidence from Global Microdata', *World Development* 159, no. 106010 (2022).

⁶ C. Krafft et al., 'The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Women's Care Work and Employment in the Middle East and North Africa', *ILO/ERF Working Paper. SWP 2022-5*, 2022.

than men, and recovery has been slow since late 2021.⁷ Gender disparities in employment are more pronounced in the informal sector, and female youth unemployment remains high in Arab states and sub-Saharan Africa.⁸ Conventional policies such as inflation control, subsidies, and foreign direct investment fail to address the specific needs of women. Particularly, women entrepreneurs face challenges accessing the same financial support as their male counterparts.⁹ Even with fiscal stimulus implemented during COVID-19, many countries overlooked the needs of women and girls.¹⁰

Impacts and Policies in Three African Countries

For example, in Egypt, Kenya, and South Africa, the impacts of the Russia–Ukraine war have triggered a rise in gendered poverty and inequality through various channels. The crisis has exacerbated food insecurity, particularly among women in the poorest households.¹¹ In Egypt, the reliance on the petroleum sector has helped mitigate some of the impacts of rising fuel and fertiliser costs, though local consumers, particularly women, face higher food prices. Trade disruptions have disproportionately affected female-headed households, exacerbating food insecurity.¹² Women in Egypt face low labour force participation (below 20%) and high youth unemployment. Most women work informally or in public sectors such as education and administration, with many in unpaid care roles.¹³ Social norms also limit women's employment opportunities, especially for married women and mothers.¹⁴

⁷ M. Sieverding et al., 'Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Subjective Wellbeing in the Middle East and North Africa: A Gender Analysis', *PLoS ONE* 18, no. 5 (2023): e0286405.

⁸ C. Krafft, 'Are Labor Markets in the Middle East and North Africa Recovering from the COVID-19 Pandemic?', *IZA Journal of Development and Migration* 14(1): 2–68., no. 1 (2023): 2–68.

⁹ Elson, 'Gender and the Global Economic Crisis in Developing Countries'; E. Braunstein and J. Heintz, 'Gender Bias and Central Bank Policy: Employment and Inflation Reduction', *International Review of Applied Economics* 22, no. 2 (1 March 2008): 173–86, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02692170801889643>.

¹⁰ UN Women, 'Women and Girls Left behind: Glaring Gaps in Pandemic Responses', *UN Women Report*, 2021.

¹¹ Ayaz et al., 'Gender-Specific Effects of Russia–Ukraine Conflict - Evidence from South Africa'; Davalos et al., 'Impact of the Russia–Ukraine War on Two African Economies – Egypt and Kenya: A Gendered Macro-Micro Modelling Assessment'.

¹² J. Davalos et al., 'Impact of the Russia–Ukraine War on Two African Economies – Egypt and Kenya: A Gendered Macro-Micro Modelling Assessment', *PEP Working Paper*, 2024.

¹³ C. Krafft and R. Assaad, eds., 'The Egyptian Labor Market: A Focus on Gender and Economic Vulnerability', *Oxford University Press*, 2022.

In Kenya, rising prices of petroleum and fertilisers have increased production costs in the dominant agricultural sector, leading to reduced demand for labour and a decline in real household consumption. This has particularly affected women working in agriculture, limiting their access to essential domestic energy sources (such as those needed for cooking). Most Kenyan women are employed in agriculture or informal sectors, often in precarious and vulnerable jobs.¹⁵ Although female labour force participation is culturally supported in Kenya, women still face pay gaps and do five times more unpaid work than men.¹⁶

South Africa has faced inflation and reduced investment, negatively impacting production and employment in both the industrial and service sectors.¹⁷ Many women in South Africa's service sector have lost their jobs. Rising prices for energy, transport, agricultural inputs, and food have made basic goods less affordable, especially for poor and rural households. Women earn less on average, making them more vulnerable to poverty and food insecurity. Despite having lower food insecurity than neighbouring countries, 15% of South Africans face inadequate food access, with rural and female-headed households being the most affected.¹⁸

¹⁴ R. Assaad et al., 'The Impact of Marriage on Women's Employment in the Middle East and North Africa', *Feminist Economics* 28 (2022): 247–79, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13545701.2021.2007415>.

¹⁵ UN Women, 'Why Women Earn Less Gender Pay Gap and Labour Market Inequalities in Kenya', *UN Women Report*, 2023.

¹⁶ KNBS, 'Kenya Time Use Survey Report', *Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS)*, 2023, https://africa.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-10/report_of_the_first_kenya_time_use_survey_19.10.2023.pdf; UN Women, 'Why Women Earn Less Gender Pay Gap and Labour Market Inequalities in Kenya', *UN Women Report*, 2023.

¹⁷ UNDP, 'The Impact of the Ukraine War on the South African Economy', *UNDP Policy Brief*, no. 2/2022 (2022), <https://www.undp.org/south-africa/publications/policy-brief-impact-ukraine-war-south-african-economy>.

¹⁸ M. Ayaz et al., 'Gender-Specific Effects of Russia–Ukraine Conflict - Evidence from South Africa', *HAL Preprint*, 2024, hal-04535835.

Recommendations

Gendered Policies for Sustainable Growth

Supporting women is crucial to achieving multiple SDGs, including gender equality, poverty reduction, and food security. Numerous T20 Policy Briefs emphasise the need for gender-responsive policies across different issues, indicating the relevance for the G20 agenda. Particularly, in Southern countries, gender-responsive policies are investments in human capital¹⁹ and short- and long-term sustainable economic growth. Here, women play a central economic role in agriculture, tourism and the care sector.²⁰ Women's contributions extend to long-term development through care work, education, and nutrition, directly impacting the health and productivity of future generations. Gender-responsive policies are both ethical and strategic, boosting human capital and sustainable growth.²¹ Public investments in social infrastructure can support recovery and even create fiscal space.²² Gender-sensitive taxation and targeted social spending can also mobilise resources and promote gender equality.²³

Gender-responsive policies are essential during and after crises to reduce the unequal impact on women and build resilience. In an era of overlapping crises, including the post-COVID-19 recovery, Russia–Ukraine war, other ongoing conflicts (for example, Gaza war), the global food and energy crisis, and

¹⁹ UN Women, 'Why Macroeconomic Policy Matters for Gender Equality. Policy Brief No 4.', 2015, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2015/12/macroeconomic-policy-matters-for-gender-equality> ; C. McDougall et al., 'Beyond Gender Inequality: How the G20 Can Support a Gender Equitable Future and Accelerate the SDGs', *T20 Policy Brief*, 2023; N. Mohan Khemka et al., 'Tackling Multidimensional Gender Inequality in G20 Countries', *T20 Policy Brief*, 2023.

²⁰ SOFA Team and Cheryl Doss, 'The Role of Women in Agriculture', *ESA Working Paper*, no. 11–02 (2011).

²¹ Davalos et al., 'Impact of the Russia–Ukraine War on Two African Economies – Egypt and Kenya: A Gendered Macro-Micro Modelling Assessment'.

²² S. Seguino, 'Macroeconomic Policy Tools to Finance Gender Equality', *Development Policy Review* 37, no. 4 (2019): 504–25, <https://doi.org/10.1111/dpr.12396> ; J. Heintz, 'Public Investments and Human Investments: Rethinking Macroeconomic Relationships from a Gender Perspective', in *Gender Equality and Inclusive Growth: Economic Policies to Achieve Sustainable Development*, ed. D. Elson and A. Seth (UN Women, 2019), 107–22, <http://www.unwomen.org/digital-library/publications/2019/01/gender-equality-and-inclusive-growth> .

²³ Seguino, 'Macroeconomic Policy Tools to Finance Gender Equality'; Papadavid, 'Gender-Sensitive Macroeconomic Policies in Low- and Middle-Income Economies: Gender-Differentiated Shocks and Associated Macroeconomic Levers'.

escalating trade tensions with the United States, governments face increasing fiscal constraints. To ensure effective and efficient responses, crisis mitigation strategies must be tailored to women's specific needs and socio-economic conditions.²⁴ Such targeted policies are critical to promoting inclusive recovery and long-term stability.

Tailored Policies²⁵

Policies that are not gender responsive can undermine efforts to reduce inequality.²⁶ In Egypt and Kenya, broad-based subsidies on food and energy have only marginally reduced poverty and often disproportionately benefit wealthier households.²⁷ In South Africa, rising prices and a weakening labour market highlight the urgent need for gender-responsive social protection – particularly for rural women, who are frequently among the most vulnerable and overlooked.²⁸ Redirecting subsidies towards targeted support for the poorest women would be a more effective and equitable strategy to combat inequality and food insecurity.²⁹

Social Programmes

Gender-responsive social programmes and cash transfer programmes can enhance resilience against crisis.³⁰ But they must consider women's multiple roles.³¹ Cash transfer should focus on women in the poorest households to effectively

²⁴ Davalos et al., 'Impact of the Russia–Ukraine War on Two African Economies – Egypt and Kenya: A Gendered Macro-Micro Modelling Assessment'.

²⁵ UN Women, 'Why Macroeconomic Policy Matters for Gender Equality. Policy Brief No 4.'.

²⁶ M. Fernandez Erlauer et al., 'Expanding Fiscal Space towards Gender Equity: The Role of Tax Policy in Securing SDG 5', *T20 Policy Brief*, 2024.

²⁷ Davalos et al., 'Impact of the Russia–Ukraine War on Two African Economies – Egypt and Kenya: A Gendered Macro-Micro Modelling Assessment'.

²⁸ Ayaz et al., 'Gender-Specific Effects of Russia–Ukraine Conflict - Evidence from South Africa'.

²⁹ Davalos et al., 'Impact of the Russia–Ukraine War on Two African Economies – Egypt and Kenya: A Gendered Macro-Micro Modelling Assessment'.

³⁰ D. Chopra et al., 'Care-Integral and Gender Differentiated Social Protection Assistance Programmes in Addressing Nutrition Food Security Challenges', *T20 Policy Brief*, 2024.

³¹ Papadavid, 'Gender-Sensitive Macroeconomic Policies in Low- and Middle-Income Economies: Gender-Differentiated Shocks and Associated Macroeconomic Levers'.

reduce poverty without increasing inequality.

Labour Market Support

Labour market policies should address wage gaps and support sectors with high female employment.³² Governments must prioritise sectors with high job creation potential and with high female labour participation such as in agriculture³³ or the care economy.³⁴ Investment in care-related infrastructure is key, as many women work in health, education, and caregiving. Expanding these services could create quality jobs for women and support their participation in paid work, decision making, and training.³⁵ Also, diversifying the economy towards sectors such as information and communication technology and green energy could enhance women's participation in the workforce and enhance resilience.³⁶

In-Kind and Voucher-Based Assistance

In-kind and voucher-based support targeted at women-headed households could be a gendered approach to improving access to essential goods for vulnerable women. While food vouchers could help to mitigate food insecurity, support with clean cooking kits could improve access to clean and affordable energy.³⁷

³² S. Ketkar et al., 'Bridging the Gender Pay Gap', *T20 Policy Brief*, 2023; A Thorat-Shah, 'Improving Female Labour Force Participation through Outcomes-Based Financing', *T20 Policy Brief*, 2023.

³³ B. Agarwal, 'Equality in Access to Land and Assets: The Transformative Potential of Group Farming', *T20 Policy Brief*, 2023; G Balla and M. H. Paul, 'Synergies between Social Protection and Rural Development Programmes for Inclusive Food Systems', *T20 Policy Brief*, 2024.

³⁴ V. S. Dszouza et al., 'Advancing Gender Equality in Global Health: A Way Forward through the G20 Care Economy Framework.', *T20 Policy Brief*, 2024; A. Conconi et al., 'Rethinking the Care Economy and Promoting Gender Equality for All Ages by Reducing and Redistributing Unpaid Care and Domestic Work', *T20 Policy Brief*, 2024.

³⁵ Heintz, 'Public Investments and Human Investments: Rethinking Macroeconomic Relationships from a Gender Perspective'.

³⁶ R. Assaad and C. Krafft, 'Identifying and Describing Green Occupations in Egypt', *Special Policy Research Report No. 2024_I SPRR2024_I*. ERF Network, 2024.

³⁷ CARE, 'Gender Sensitive Cash and Voucher Assistance - CARE'; UN Women, 'Good Practices Brochure'; D Jeong and I Trako, 'Cash and In-Kind Transfers in Humanitarian Settings : A Review of Evidence and Knowledge Gaps', *Policy Research Working Paper*, 2022; Vogel, Tschunkert, and Schläpfer, 'The Social Meaning of Money'.

Access to Basic Services

Access to basic services such as health³⁸ and education³⁹ must be provided to poor women as a base for empowerment and resilience. Integrating the measures for future empowerment during the crisis creates the chance to recover after the crisis with reduced gendered inequalities and poverty.⁴⁰

Consider Complexity

Gender-responsive policies require more targeted design than broad measures. Country-specific, gender-disaggregated data are essential for understanding economic impacts and designing effective responses.⁴¹ Effective policy design of gender-responsive policies benefits from ex-ante impact analysis to optimise public fund allocation and can provide immediate relief while fostering long-term economic empowerment.⁴² Model-based assessments can help governments evaluate ex-post the impact on vulnerable populations in a timely manner and at low costs. Therefore, investing in evidence-based, gender-informed planning is critical to achieving sustainable development regarding gender equality particularly in and after crisis.

³⁸ C. Abreu Lopes et al., 'Beyond the Tyranny of the Urgent: Long-Term Systemic and Intersectoral Reforms on Gender-Related Health Barriers in COVID-19 Recovery', *T20 Policy Brief*, 2021.

³⁹ B. Brodjonegoro et al., 'Scaling Up Women's Empowerment During the Pandemic and Beyond: Lessons from Indonesia's "Kartu Prakerja" Programme', *T20 Policy Brief*, 2023.

⁴⁰ S. Razavi et al., 'Making Social Protection Work for Gender Equality: What Does It Look like? How Do We Get There? | International Labour Organization', *ILO Working Paper 132* (4 December 2024), <https://www.ilo.org/publications/making-social-protection-work-gender-equality-what-does-it-look-how-do-we>.

⁴¹ C. Perera et al., 'Impact of Social Protection on Gender Equality in Low- and Middle-Income Countries: A Systematic Review of Reviews', *Campbell Systematic Reviews* 18, no. 2 (2022): e1240, <https://doi.org/10.1002/cl2.1240>.

⁴² Davalos et al., 'Impact of the Russia-Ukraine War on Two African Economies – Egypt and Kenya: A Gendered Macro-Micro Modelling Assessment'.

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