Concept Note

**Gender Equality and Macroeconomics at the World Bank**

**Format:** One day CSO workshop  
**Organisers:** Bretton Woods Project, Eurodad, ActionAid International, Women in Development Europe+ and Kvinna till Kvinna  
**Date/Time:** 10.30am-6pm on Monday 4th May  
**Location:** Athena room, La maison Amazone, Rue du Meridien 10, B-1210, Brussels, Belgium.

**Description:** An international workshop to provide a space to inform, discuss ideas and strategise around challenging the ways in which the World Bank Group can undermine women’s rights in its role as a macroeconomic policy norm setter. This workshop aims to facilitate information-sharing and strategising on the World Bank, women’s rights and macroeconomics across organisations working in international advocacy on women’s economic justice and/or the World Bank.

**Context:** The World Bank has been working on ‘women in development’ since the 1970s. In recent years, this has taken the form of the ‘gender equality as smart economics’ approach, where the Bank has expanded its gender work to promote what some feminist scholars have called ‘neoliberalism with a feminist face’ through ‘leveraging’ investments in women’s ‘human capital’, family planning and women’s access to markets, consolidated in its 2016-2023 gender strategy. The Bank’s Maximising Finance for Development (MFD) approach, which establishes a private sector-first strategy to crowd private investment into infrastructure and social services provision, significantly shapes the World Bank’s macroeconomic policy work. The Bank does not apply a human rights-based approach to its gender work nor does it more broadly apply feminist thinking in considering its own neoliberal macroeconomic policy positions as structural barriers to gender equality and women’s rights.

Reports from the UN Independent Expert on debt and human rights and the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights are two recent high-profile examples that demonstrate how the negative impacts of economic reforms and privatisation promoted by the World Bank disproportionately fall on the shoulders of women.

Women’s organisations have long identified the Bank’s role vis-a-vis macroeconomic policy-making as a structural concern, leading critical engagement with structural adjustment programs, ‘Poverty Reduction Strategies’ and later development policy loans in the 1990s and 2000s. More recent examples include the Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation’s report on engaging international financial institutions (IFIs) on gender equality, a Development Alternatives With Women for New Era-hosted conference on public-private partnerships (PPPs) and women’s rights in Africa and a report from the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom on the role of the IFIs, particularly the World Bank, in the economic reform agenda in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Several economic justice groups that regularly engage with the Bank are also increasingly including gender perspectives within their work. Recently, the European Network for Debt and Development worked with African women’s rights network Femnet and the UK-based Gender and Development Network on a paper on PPPs and women’s rights, while various INGOs have made efforts to strengthen the connections between their economic and gender work streams in recent years.

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This workshop aims to connect these various efforts, share information and jointly strategise on future advocacy work, particularly with the aim of bringing together women’s rights organisations and economic justice groups, and those already bridging these two areas, to learn from each other’s experiences and knowledge.

**Participants:** This workshop is for organisations working on/interested in international advocacy around the World Bank and/or women’s economic justice at the macroeconomic level. Participants do not need to have an in-depth knowledge of the structure and functioning of the World Bank, or a deep understanding of the women’s rights movement or feminist macroeconomics. The emphasis will be on joint learning and strategising. It will be a workshop of 20-30 participants.

**Objectives:**
- Provide space for information sharing on the World Bank’s role in undermining women’s rights and gender equality through macroeconomic policy - what do we already know and what has been done? What are the key lessons learned from advocacy thus far?
- Jointly strategise and coordinate advocacy around macroeconomics and women’s rights with the World Bank, from ideas on long-term, big-picture objectives to upcoming, timely opportunities for collaboration.
- Reflect on and learn from how civil society is organising on this issue and related topics: What are the shared obstacles to overcome and how can we make the most out of all of our efforts?

**Travel:** Participation for this workshop is largely self-funded, however there is limited financial support for some participants. For those who would like to find out about support, please email ehopkins@brettonwoodsproject.org