Gender & Economic Justice: Realising a More Gendered Approach to Rebuilding the Economy.

November 2020
Economic Justice Network (EJN) and Ecumenical Service for Socio-Economic Transformation (ESSET) in partnership with ACT Ubumbano hosted a four-part series of conversations titled: Gender & Economic Justice: Realising a More Gendered Approach to Rebuilding the Economy.

The webinar series was based on a critical analysis of the disproportionate economic justice impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on women and girls. In recognition that historically, the fallout from health, political and economic crises has fallen squarely on the shoulders of women. Women bear the brunt of holding society together and later rebuilding society as frontline workers and caregivers in both their professional and personal capacities. Despite this, economic justice often excludes and marginalizes women and girls, who continue to face structural barriers such as lower wages, discrimination, and unequal opportunities in the workplace.

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has once again highlighted how women and girls are subjected to unjust economic policy conditions and the impacts this has on all aspects of life. Constituting over 70 per cent of the healthcare workforce globally, women are on the frontlines of the fight against this pandemic. Women and girl’s unpaid care work have increased as pandemic responses in the form of lockdowns resulted in economic and social fallout. The latter has become most evident in the shadow pandemics of gender-based violence and hunger, both of which impact women and girls directly. The former manifest in the state’s inability to address the structural challenges on their fiscus and worsened by endemic corruption, looting, misappropriation and illicit financial flows.

“WOMEN BEAR THE BRUNT OF HOLDING SOCIETY TOGETHER AND LATER REBUILDING SOCIETY AS FRONTLINE WORKERS AND CAREGIVERS IN BOTH THEIR PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL CAPACITIES.”

Most of the reactionary budgetary relief programmes enacted by African governments have ignore the increased burdens on women and perpetuated old patterns of exclusion. Furthermore, these relief efforts are almost exclusively for the formal economy, ignoring the crucial role of the informal economy in the region. In SADC women’s informal cross border trade economy, with an estimated value of $20 billion annually, has ground to a halt impacting the livelihoods of many.

Despite these challenges women and girls have found ways to cope and hold communities together socially and economically during this health pandemic. The webinar series aimed to give voice to women and girls to unpack their experiences and learnings. It provided space for examining new policy demands in the context and reimagining new economic justice approaches. Additionally, it provided space for reflecting on the role of the church with the aim of generating recommendations for the three hosting partners.

This policy brief draws from the wealth of experiences and insights shared during the webinar series to make clear recommendations at both the level of policy and within faith-based economic justice sector.
Women form 43% of the agricultural labour force. During the Covid-19 pandemic they have faced the double blow of being defined essential workers in informal/seasonal jobs. This means they risk their health to work, have no job and income security and have no access to government employment relief schemes.

Seminar 1 of the series unpacked the social and economic impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on women and girls. The panel also outlined the shifts in analysis and approach that are necessary to reimagine an economy, society, political system and faith community that is more responsive to the needs of women and girls.

A gendered economic and political analysis demonstrates that “normal is the problem”. Economics and researcher, Sonia Phalatse unpacked the structural problems of the economy that have been perpetuated by the Covid-19 pandemic including: inequality and marginalization, unemployment and precarious livelihoods, and the continued subsidization of the state by women who provide unrecognized social reproductive and care work. She argued that inadequate responses from the state, corruption and a continued austerity push have left women with no choice but to devise feminist alternative and strategies.

Rebecca Mort of Women on Farms, deepened the gendered social and political analysis, talking to the particular vulnerability of women in rural communities. In this context the structural problems and failures are made visible in the lived realities of women. Infra-structural failures have limited digital access and access to public services contributing to the marginalization of rural communities. This was most evident through the implementation of inaccessible pandemic responses - from food relief, to job relief, to education responses. Women in rural areas have thus faced the brunt of food and income insecurity, mental health challenges and gender-based violence.

Theologian Dr Nontando Hadebe examined the various economic, social and political issues from the perspective of the faith community. Encouraging deep reflection based on lessons from the HIV/AIDS pandemic, she pointed out the problems of exclusion from decision-making, the medicalization of pandemic responses and the invisibilization of particular groups (youth, children, the elderly, migrants, LGBTI persons, the homeless and people living with disabilities) in responses. The key lesson for church and state is to redefine its role by recognizing the social and economic impacts of the pandemic and ensuring inclusive responses.

State responses have been inadequate because they have focused on maintaining the status quo. There is a need for radical, sustainable and innovative change; in particular a reimagining of new economies and futures. This looks like re-defining work and quality of life; building responsive, accountable and capable government; and enabling civil society to generate sustainable, innovative responses and partake in decision-making processes.

Only 1.7% of rural households have access to internet at home. 3 million jobs were lost in the first two months of the South African lockdown, 2/3 of these jobs belonged to women.
Webinar 2 focused on the informal economy and delved into the experiences of waste reclaimers, domestic workers, gig economy workers and cross-border traders. The panel illustrated the structural challenges to accessing state responses and outlined different coping mechanisms that they have had access to. Speakers provided key insights on what solidarity looks like for marginalized communities.

Eva Mokoena, chairperson of the Johannesburg based African Reclaimers Organisation outlined the many challenges waste reclaimers faced when they were locked out their livelihoods by the lockdown. Reclaimers were unable to access permits to continue their work, and those who did found a scarcity of waste as household began to suffer food insecurity. This means it took months to collect enough waste to be profitable, leading a reclaimers to the next hurdle of finding an open recycle centre to purchase the waste and negotiating prices in a context where unit prices have fallen. With precarious and limited income, waste reclaimers simply did not have the reserves to face a lockdown and provide for their families. As a result many quickly faced starvation, yet many struggled to access food relief responses because of their migrant status. Limited access to cellphones, data and electricity impacted communications as the sector rallied to provide responses for its members.

Despite these challenges, waste reclaimers supported and assisted each other, and looked long-standing partnerships to provide support for a food security response. Partnerships with the City of Johannesburg, the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forests, and academics at the University of the Witwatersrand supported food parcel distributions. Once the lockdown was reduced to level 4, the Brixton Church community began providing hot meals. While waste reclaimers developed coping mechanisms and are rebuilding their livelihoods, there is a need to show solidarity to this sector and support them in developing resilience against future shocks.

THE INFORMAL ECONOMY WORKFORCE RANGES FROM 35-65% IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA. 70% OF THIS WORKFORCE ARE WOMEN.

70% OF WOMEN IN INFORMAL SELF-EMPLOYMENT WERE LOCKED OUT OF INCOME IN THE FIRST 2 MONTHS OF THE LOCKDOWN. 50% LOST THEIR MAIN SOURCE OF INCOME. 60% WERE UNABLE TO MEET THEIR FOOD NEEDS.
INFORMAL ECONOMY

Informal Crossborder trade makes up 30-40% of intra-regional trade in SADC and contributes $20 Billion per annum.
Up to 70% of these traders are women

Theresa Nyoni, a member of Izwe Domestic Workers Alliance, outlined the challenges that domestic workers faced during the lockdown. Many domestic workers were unable to work because lockdown regulations and the fact the employers lost jobs or were furloughed. Some were in the fortunate situation of receiving some income from employers, but few received full salaries. Other supplementary sources of income like plaiting hair were also impacted by the lockdown as clients did not feel safe or have spare sources for such services. A large number of domestic workers are migrant workers whose children reside with family in rural areas or other SADC countries. Such workers found themselves unable to provide for themselves in terms of food and rent, and unable to provide for the needs of children in terms of food and education. When the lockdown regulations enabled a return to work, domestic worker were faced with massive debts and a new stigma related to fears of employers that they would spread coronavirus.

Advocacy for a basic minimum wage and access to employment benefits increased during the lockdown. Domestic worker unions won a constitutional court case on their right to access occupational injury and death benefits. These gains did not however assist in meeting their very real food security needs and living expenses faced by domestic workers and their often distant families. They were unable to access labour relief schemes through UIF because of widespread lack of registration and were locked out of food relief schemes as a largely non-national population. Domestic workers need social solidarity in building employment security and developing resilience against future shocks.

Pauline Sibanda, vice president of the Zimbabwe Crossborder Traders Association outlined the challenges faced by artisanal traders. This is a sector in which 70% of traders are women who face a number of gender-specific risks and corruption to earn their livelihoods. They often enter the sector because of failed markets and opportunities in their own country. The blanket closure of borders as a covid-19 restrictive measure simply thwarted all economic activity. There has been no access to relief in domestic countries, nor measures of relief from importing countries that benefit from taxes paid at borders. The impacts have been devastating in terms of food security and survival for these trader and their families. It has also been difficult to organize and advocate for conducive policy responses, in particular informal cross-border traders have limited digital access for engaging decision-makers.

These challenges have demonstrated that need for policy changes and for solidarity with artisanal traders who do not easily have access to decision-making platforms. Advocacy at regional level is required to ensure these livelihoods survive Covid-19 restrictions, to build mechanisms for resilience against future shocks and transform trade regimes to enable long term access and safety.

By mid June only 35,374 of the 1.3 million domestic workers had received unemployment benefits.
Maphokoane Serobanyane, also known as DJ Puggy, shared their perspectives about informal workers in the gig economy and informal traders. As a gig economy worker she lost income from bookings during the lockdown, but still had to pay rent and buy food. Her coping strategy was to partner with a friend in establishing an informal food stall, she noted that it was not easy to gather startup capital and the business has small margins. As a result she was unable to join the webinar and submitted a recording.

Sonto Magwaza, responding with the perspectives of faith communities, shared some of the initiatives undertaken by churches. The greatest response was to the immense need for food and emergency relief where the church community partnered with NGOs to provide food parcels to informal traders who were not permitted to trade. As the lockdown proceeded another long term response was providing land for a community food garden. Churches also provided safe spaces for victims of gender-based violence to meet and seek support, physically in churches and through WhatsApp groups. While many innovative responses emerged from faith communities, there is an important solidarity role to play going forward.

State relief schemes were largely inaccessible for women in the informal economy. Yet these are vulnerable and marginalized women who do not have access to policy developers and decision-makers. Solidarity plays an essential role in ensuring that these voices are heard and relevant responses implemented. Long term resilience requires shifting social perspectives on the nature and value of informal sector work, providing equal access to social safety nets, as well providing education and empowerment for the informal labour force.

**SOLIDARITY IS:**

1. **FIGHTING STIGMA**
2. **ADVOCATING FOR EQUAL ACCESS TO SOCIAL SECURITY**
3. **EMPOWERMENT & RESILIENCE BUILDING**
Care work and the care economy can be defined as the system of activities and relationships involved in meeting the physical, emotional and psychological aspects of care - examples include childcare, medical care, care for the elderly or community care. While this work can be paid, it is more often unpaid or underpaid with women and girls subsidizing the state with their labour for social reproductive and care work. The covid-19 pandemic has increased this burden with lockdown restrictions resulting in more childcare, household and educational responsibilities. The care burden has also been aggravated by increased rates of gender-based violence, food and income insecurity and limited access to sexual and reproductive health services. Webinar 3 examined the broad economic issues related to the care economy; delved into the experiences of girl children and essential care workers; before examining what opportunities there are for faith communities to address challenges.

Oxfam South Africa’s Kwezilomso Mbandazayo, provided a globalized perspective based on the advocacy report Time to Care. Challenging the social narratives that allow us to frame unpaid care as a “labour of love”, she shared the bare statistics. With an estimated annual value of $10.8 trillion contributed by women and girls over the age of 15, women in rural communities and low-income countries work up to 14 hours a day on care work. The consequences include 42% of women of being outside the paid labour force because of unpaid care responsibilities, while girls with such responsibilities have lower school attendance rates. This care work burden thus perpetuates inequality.

The covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of care work for the economy, including demonstrating the significant amount of care work undertaken by teachers in the course of their duties. State responses have been inadequate, from ineffective food pricing measures to education measures that failed to consider the need for care and digital access. This has demonstrated the need for reimagining an economy that cares and ensuring that the women and girls most impacted are involved in decision-making and policy processes.

“We must stop seeing care work as a labour of love and focus on building economies that care”
Fikile Dikolomela-Lengene, a trade unionist representing the #Care4Carers campaign, unpacked the way the state health response failed nurses as frontline workers. She detailed how nurses were expected to work without adequate personal protective equipment; facing long hours dealing with patient deaths and the death of colleagues, as well as the constant risk of exposure, nurse were not provided with adequate mental health support. Efforts to do their jobs well were stymied by corruption in the health system and ineffective policies, an example is the policy of returning to work in the window period between testing for corona virus and receiving a positive result. Nurses were left with the burden of carrying the risk of infection home to their families and communities. In this context, it is important to build an economy that cares and to ensure that frontline workers participate in the development of policies and responses.

It is estimated that 20 million secondary school girls will not return to school after the Covid-19 crisis

Matric learner, Sithabile Khumalo, shared her experiences of the lockdown as a girl child. The deepest impacts were felt in terms of accessing education, as learners strived to complete matric and access tertiary education. An education response built largely on digital access excluded learners from township and rural communities. In these communities access to devices for school work and data are limited; similarly lessons broadcast on radio and paid-television stations were also not accessible. Additionally teachers in these communities were unfamiliar with how to optimize digital platforms for teaching and learning, thus learners were often left on their own to learn content. Once schools re-opened, learners were exposed to corona virus outbreaks because protective equipment was not adequately provided nor were mechanisms for social distancing enforced; this constituted both physical and mental health risks. Sithabile was deeply conscious of how inequalities were entrenched by these circumstances, noting that children in the private school and model C systems did not face similar challenges and were able to learn properly during the lockdown period.

Reflecting on care work, Sithabile outlined the increased responsibilities she held in her home and how this impacted her ability to focus on school work. These challenges were aggravated when her father, who provided the families only income, was retrenched. The work of looking after you get siblings and her ill mother was much harder when considering how to keep food supplies throughout the month. Sithabile’s child support grant was withdrawn in February when she turned 18, her parents were unable to access the employment relief grant and the Covid-19 relief grant, the family survived the lockdown on her younger sibling’s grant. They were able to access food parcels because they know the local councilor, and Sithabile noted an awareness of the corruption surrounding this food relief.
Despite a significant increase in care work for women and girls, by June 2020, two-thirds of grant recipients were men. Grant requirements effectively excluded women who were already recipients of child support, old age or foster grants. Yet older girls who provided significant care work were excluded from child support grants in turning 18.

In responding from the perspective of faith communities, international advocacy advisor Abena Afari emphasized why church responses are important. With 80% of the global population subscribing to some form of religious practice, faith communities have significant impact on belief systems and behaviours. While which influence may be wielded negatively, faith communities have focused on harnessing this influence for good under the leadership of the World Council of Churches. Through focused advocacy programmes, faith communities have tackled gender justice, economic justice and gender-based violence while providing safe inclusive spaces during the Ebola pandemic. This positive influence as change agents, mediators and service providers has seen faith communities recognized with permanent observer status at the African Union and amongst different UN Bodies. Thus faith communities are well placed to provide solidarity and access to decision-making platforms.

Despite a commitment to economic and gender justice, faith communities have not grappled with the care economy both within churches and in society broadly. This understanding of the care economy needs to reflect in the daily working of the church, and in its economic empowerment and livelihood interventions, as well as in global advocacy work.

State responses have failed to consider the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on the care economy, in as much as they have failed to consider the impacts of the care economy on women and girls. Adequate policy changes require a significant transformation of the economy and the participation of women and girls in policy making processes. Faith communities can provide important solidarity and advocacy support once they have generated the capacity to implement economies that care.
FOOD SECURITY

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic 14 million South Africans faced food insecurity and government provided support through food vouchers and food parcels to approximately 37% of them. With pandemic lockdown restrictions local food systems were disrupted, household incomes were affected by job losses and the National School Nutrition Programme which caters for over 9 million learners was suspended. By April nearly 50% of South Africans were reporting hunger. Confirming these statistics, food insecurity has been a consistent theme throughout the webinar series. Webinar 4 examined food security issues from the perspective of the girl-child, smallholder farmers, academics and civil society formations. The panelists unpacked experiences and shared different responses and relief efforts, before making concrete suggestions for policy changes and interventions by the church.

It is estimated that 50% of South Africans suffer some form of food insecurity. DSD food parcels reached 12% of those in need during the 2020 Covid pandemic.

Refiloe Joala, a researcher at the Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies (PLAAS), analyzed the South African food system arguing that the country is considered food secure nationally. This effectively means that we produce enough food to feed our population. Yet significant levels of food insecurity are reported, demonstrating that the food system is not efficient. The food systems is characterized by inequality with a highly corporatized production and retail sector on one end, and an informal production and retail sector on the other hand. The informal sector is over-regulated, while the powerful formal sector operates with little oversight. This systemic inefficiency became starkly visible when Covid-19 regulations restricted the informal sector, a crucial source of food and livelihoods for the majority of South Africans. This problem has been aggravated by a rise in food prices as lockdown price capping agreements lapsed at level 4, yet the Competition Commission has been slow to prosecute complaints because of the complexity of such cases.

Addressing these food system weaknesses will improve food security in South Africa. Proposed measures include extending the list of critical products in the household basket, conducting a competition inquiry into price setting by major retailers and increasing the capacity of StatsSA to monitor food prices. This closer regulation of the formal food system will make food more affordable and accessible for those who are able to purchase it.
FOOD SECURITY

Maureen Seshoka, a smallholder farmer representing Makopane Women Farmers shed light on the experiences of women smallholder farmers during the Covid-19 lockdown. These farmers did not have access to markets to sell their products and they struggled to access permits to travel to distribute their produce. Aspirations to grow for export were thwarted by border closures. As farmers in the informal sector, smallholders struggled to access agricultural relief schemes and were told they do not qualify for other grants. Circumstances for women and girls in rural communities were very difficult as they were unable to access contraception and sanitary pads through the conventional channels. With joblessness many depended on food relief, yet very few families were provided with food parcels. This left community leaders with the difficult choice of deciding which families were most in need and weighing up vulnerabilities.

Siphiwe Sithole a small scale farmer from support organization African Marmalade was also unable to attend the webinar and submitted a video. She confirmed the experiences discussed by Maureen Seshoka, outlining that small scale farmers were ill-prepared for the lockdown and the new distribution channels it required. These farmers had to find ways to work together, sharing skills and competencies to increase production and meet the high demand. In this circumstance the resilience of indigenous seed was evident and small scale farmers became advocates of household subsistence farming using indigenous seed.

A discussion was held with 14 girls from the Ntethelelo Foundation, based in informal settlement Tshwetla on the outskirts of Alexandra township. The girls wise unable participate in the webinar because bandwidth is so unstable in the settlement. They discussed their lockdown experiences regarding schooling, gender-based violence, digital access, food security, access to health services and covid prevention in the informal settlement, and access to relief schemes.

Detailing their food security experiences, the girls explained that many parents were furloughed during the early stages of the lockdown. With no income, many families depended on grant income for food, yet this was not sufficient to feed the family for the whole month. Families often practiced “shielding” (where adults forgo meals so that children can eat), to the extent that the girls would forgo meals so younger siblings can eat. An additional coping mechanism was provided when the Foundation managed to fundraise and provide food parcels. State food parcels were highly contested in the community, one had to know the counselor and have the right political affiliations; otherwise food parcels were lost to corruption. The girls reported that hunger caused tension and violence in their homes; they also witnessed hunger being a driver of transactional relationships for young women. They reported that there has been little improvement in circumstances since the lockdown eased, parents are still not earning full salaries and now they face hunger while going to school.

The practice of "shielding":

In households that experienced hunger, nearly half (42%) managed to "shield" children from that hunger, despite adults going hungry.
The C19 Coalition’s Gauteng Food Security Working Group’s Nandi Msezane outlined its food security response based on keeping local food systems active and mobilizing communities to generate long term responses rooted in social solidarity and mutual aid. To this end the working group coordinates district-level clusters comprising small scale farmers, distributors (charities, soup kitchens, small logistics enterprises and other initiatives) and community organizers. This emergency response saw the working group distribute R2.79 million worth of food relief and sustain livelihoods and local food systems. As the food security crisis has eased, the working group is focusing on medium to longterm interventions including the provision of agricultural inputs, planting instructions and training; while advocating for the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development’s Disaster Relief Fund to respond to the immediate and long term needs of household producers and smallholder farmers.

The response from the faith community was provided by Pastor Wilemina Mutane of HolyLife Christian Ministry. She spoke about how immensely challenging the lockdown was for faith leaders because their congregants looked to them for emotional and material support, while government limited their ability to serve with lockdown restrictions. At the same time government response were not adequate, when food parcels were delivered there were always questions from those who did not receive. Similarly, GBV responses did not recognize that women and children were locked down with their abusers. This forced churches to become more creative and to see themselves as safe spaces. In her church, land was allocated for planting

When it came to food security, state responses were largely inadequate from the gender perspective. From the supply side women farmers were not provided with adequate resources to get food production to market, nor were women in rural and peri-urban communities provided with adequate services in particular sexual reproductive and health services. COVID-19 response grants for farmers were not easily accessible for women farmers.

In terms of providing a food security response, the state’s focus on providing food parcels and the COVID-19 assistance grant was inadequate. Indeed food parcel provision was wrought with corruption and did not provide a steady supply, while emergency grants were equally unaccessible and did provide adequate resources to provide food security for families.

In an unfriendly food system that favours corporatised suppliers, farmers, faith communities and NGOs had to develop their own responses. This has seen a greater awareness of the inequalities of the food system and of the importance of building mores sustainable livelihoods and food systems in communities.
The Four-part online series provided space for stakeholders to share their stories and engage on what solutions they considered most important from the state and the church. Each session also had a speaker from the church community who examined the challenges and opportunities churches experienced in trying to respond during the COVID-19 lockdowns. Below are the key recommendations that emerged from each session.

**GENDERED IMPACTS OF COVID-19**

1. Support land expropriation and distribution urgently as a mean for rural women to develop sustainable livelihoods and sovereignty.
2. Support the call for a universal social grant and an increase in social expenditure.
3. Support efforts to address corruption.
4. Support calls for the recognition of social reproductive and care work.
5. Access fiscal and economic decision-making spaces to ensure that policies and response are relevant, inclusive and accessible to the most marginalized.
6. Advocate for equitable digital access, particularly the development of adequate infrastructure in rural communities and provision of data to the most marginalized.
7. Advocate for equitable provision of mental health care, particularly in rural communities.
8. Build solidarity spaces where women, marginalized groups and civil society can reclaim power and reimage new economies and new future.

**Faith Community Recommendations**

1. Redefine the church as a liberatory space
2. Redefine the mission of the faith community: See, Judge, Act
3. Transform the status of women in faith communities
4. Transform theological instruction
5. Innovate new contextual theologies

**INFORMAL ECONOMY**

1. Support initiatives to educate communities about recycling and the valuable work that waste reclaimers do.
2. Support education and training for waste reclaimers on literacy, numeracy and managing waste reclamation as a business.
3. Support initiatives to secure a minimum wage for domestic workers.
4. Support initiatives to educate domestic workers and their employers about legislated rights and responsibilities.
5. Support initiatives to provide savings and investment schemes for domestic workers.
6. Supporting initiatives that provide financial support and services for informal cross-border traders.
7. Support initiatives that educate and empower informal cross-border traders.
8. Advocate for the reform of the unemployment insurance system to include informal workers.
9. Advocate for simplified trade regimes and free trade spaces in SADC.
10. Build solidarity spaces where artisanal traders can connect with communities to raise awareness of the sector and generate support for policies that protect the sector and build resilience.
11. Showing solidarity by providing spaces for waste reclaimers to connect with communities and for communities to respond to the needs of waste reclaimers.
CARE ECONOMY

(1) Advocate for a gender-responsive education response that includes expanding digital access and providing essentials like meals and sanitary towels. With regards to the former, this includes providing access to devices, data and digital skills for both teachers and learners. Such measures will keep girls from dropping out.

(2) Advocate for interdepartmental cooperation in developing gendered plans for school enrolments. Such plans should include addressing infra-structural barriers like access to sanitation and water, and policy barriers like the exclusion of pregnant learners that disproportionately impact girls. Furthermore, adequate corona virus protection measures will protect the health of learners and their families.

(3) Advocate for adequate funding to support the above responses.

(4) Invest in national care systems to address the disproportionate responsibility for care work done by women and girls: Governments must invest in cross- governmental national care systems, in addition to investing in and transforming existing public services and infrastructure. National care systems must include the provision of universal access to safe water, sanitation and domestic energy systems, and investments to deliver universal childcare, eldercare and care for people with disabilities. These should also include access to quality healthcare and education, as well as the provision of universal social protection, such as pensions and child benefits.

(5) Legislate to protect the rights of all carers and secure living wages for paid care workers: As part of their national care systems, governments must ensure legal, economic and labour market policies are in place to protect the rights of all carers and paid care workers, in both formal and informal sectors and monitor their implementation. This must include ratifying ILO Convention 189 on the protection of domestic workers and policy to ensure that all care workers are paid a living wage and working towards the elimination of gender wage gaps.

(6) Ensure that carers have influence on decision-making processes: Governments must facilitate the participation of unpaid carers and care workers in policy-making fora and processes at all levels, and invest resources into collecting comprehensive data that can better inform policy making and evaluate the impact of policies on carers. This should be alongside consulting women’s rights actors, feminist economists and civil society experts on care issues, and increased funding for women’s organizations and movements working to enable their participation in decision-making processes. These measures are important building blocks of national care systems.

(7) Challenge harmful norms and sexist beliefs: Harmful norms and sexist beliefs that see care work as the responsibility of women and girls lead to an unequal gendered distribution of care work, and perpetuate economic and gender inequality. As part of their national care systems governments need to invest resources to challenge these harmful norms and sexist beliefs including through advertising, public communication and legislation. Further, men need to step up to equally fulfil their responsibilities on care work to address the disproportionate amount of care done by women within households and communities.

(8) Advocate for a universal care wage

(9) Advocate for adequate PPE and support for frontline health care workers. Show solidarity for frontline workers by ensuring they are participating in policy asking platforms.

(10) Build the capacity of faith communities to advocate for the recognition of care economies, the generation of economies that care and equitable distribution of care work.
1) Mobilise to save lives and livelihood with attention

2) Strengthen social protection systems for nutrition

3) Invest in the sustainable future

4) Communities need to start growing their own food like understanding the importance and power held there at having your own food in your back garden.

5) Corporates like checkers and shoprite were the only winners and as they were able to make over 60million during the pandemic so it is important time for us to take back our power.

6) Adopting a right to food is critical as it provides opportunities for sustainability.

7) The department of agriculture implemented a programme was not inclusive to small scale farmers

8) Government should play a stronger role in monitoring and regulating the food sector starting with expanding the critical foods list to include brown bread, fresh vegetables, eggs and sugar beans amongst other products.
The Gender Justice webinar series provided a unique opportunity to examine the impacts of COVID-19 and the national lockdown on the lives of women and girls from their own perspectives. It provided a platform for them to unpack their experiences and put forward ideas of how the state could respond to improve their circumstances and build resilience for future shocks. The key lesson here was the value of having women and girls engage with policy issues and develop policy solutions that are responsive to their lived realities. This was not as easy as anticipated, in part because the pandemic has forced most engagement onto the online space and yet access to this space remains limited for marginal communities that do not have the technology, cannot afford the data and often do not have adequate infra-structure to provide bandwidth and network. What remains undeniable, is that state responses were inadequate and it was the innovation and courage of women, girls and NGOs that provided the answers for surviving the gendered impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

While a number of recommendations were provided by participants, due regard must be given to the key role that each of the partners play to define how best to work with these proposals:

Act Ubumbano as a network of organisations that accompany church communities should focus on recommendations on how to strengthen the role of the church in building community solutions, ensuring sustainable livelihoods and inculcating the equality of women and girls.

Ecumenical Service for Socio-Economic Transformation (ESSET) in its work with marginalised community formations including domestic workers, informal traders and cross-border artisanal traders has a role to play in building the capacity of these communities and their formations.

Economic Justice Network (EJN) as a high-level advocacy body is best placed to build partnerships that enable lobbying and advocacy on the key issues raised during the seminars. This entails building partnerships with organisations that are doing such advocacy work at the regional and national level in order to amplify the perspectives of women and girls.

The partners would benefit from continued collaboration on transforming the perspective and approach of the church community on gender justice including economic justice issues. This includes encouraging churches to take more progressive action in terms of gender equality and socio-economic justice, as well as utilising their immense influence to change community perspectives and policy responses.

In short, the COVID-19 pandemic has offered an opportunity for the partner organisations and the church community they serve to re-examine its role, revitalise its work and build collaborations that enable community voices to influence policy responses.
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