

Towards a Feminist Green New Deal

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http://www.euromemo.eu/annual_workshops/2020_online/online_workshops_papers/index.html

The proposed [European Green Deal](#) has sparked an important debate around the urgent work needed to confront the global climate crisis. In this moment, where the Covid-19 crisis has broken onto the global scenery, critical feminist and climate justice voices must step up to offer an intersectional and feminist perspective to the policy discussion.

To truly address the root causes, as well as the scope and scale of the climate (and Covid-19) crisis, the Green New Deal (GND) must be cross-cutting in its approach, steadfast in feminist principles, and strive to combat historical oppressions. There is a need for bottom-up transformation, with specific mention of constituencies (such as women, migrants, LGBTQI people, youth, elders, disabled people, etc.) for ensuring meaningful grassroots participation. **This absence of inclusive civil society engagement could in part explain the invisibility of gender in existing GND plans.**

Many proposals argue for decentralization and democratic control of local economies. They call for new forms of ownership in the form of co-operatives, worker/community-owned enterprises, public/municipal enterprises and more. These changes could benefit women by increasing female participation and power within decision-making processes and embedding gender equality from the start. To ensure the best access possible, these would need to go hand in hand with the provision of necessary support to participate (e.g., childcare, accessible spaces).

The climate crisis has emerged from interlocking systems of capitalism, resource extraction, labour exploitation, the commodification of nature, imperialism, and militarism. It has roots in the exploitation of enslaved people,¹ whose labour created wealth in the Global North, and of the continuing systemic racism that deepens and institutionalizes global inequity.

To confront this crisis, we need coherence across policy sectors, from trade to military spending to development, to confront these interconnections. We must recommit to multilateralism and a democratic rule of law to build a policy architecture that can stabilize the planet and secure a just transition to post-exploitative economies.

There is an increasing involvement of feminist economics in drafting a GND that will reform national economies while dramatically reducing CO2 emissions. As a result of efforts by feminist environmentalists, there is growing scrutiny about how a GND could be good for gender justice if feminist environmental goals were incorporated.

Two principles are relevant for an eco-feminist analytical economic framework:²

- to recognize paid and unpaid care work as central components of both the economy

¹ Mezzadri, A. (2019). 'On the Value of Social Reproduction: Informal Labour, the Majority World and the Need for Inclusive Theories and Politics'. *Radical Philosophy*, 2(4), pp. 33–41.

² Elson, D. (2017). 'Recognize, reduce, and redistribute unpaid care work: How to close the gender gap'. *New Labor Forum*, 26(2), pp. 52–61.

and eco-systems;

- to reduce the social and ecological costs of privatized social reproduction by distributing it fairly within society and by organizing it in ways that enable efficient use of time and material resources, and minimal waste.

Feminist ecological economics recognizes connections between the exploitation of feminized care work and the exploitation of the Earth's resources.³ It sees ecological/climate emergency and the crisis of social reproduction (often referred to simply as *care*)⁴ as interlinked and mutually sustaining, arising from the overburdening of those who carry responsibility for social reproduction - the vast majority of whom are women-, who are also increasingly shouldering the costs ensuing from the ecological crisis as well as measures to redress it.

The performance of unpaid care and domestic labour by women in individual households is not only a free subsidy that enables continual capitalist growth in rich countries, it also makes possible a consumer culture that is widely recognized as having exceeded the biophysical limits of a finite planet.

It is entirely possible to create a post-carbon economy whilst simultaneously doing nothing to address the unfair intra-household division of social reproductive work between men and women.

To address social inequality, plans for a GND need to explicitly focus on the gendered outcomes of any proposed policy. For example, in a city without cars, how will a GND address the increased time and labour now involved in shopping for a family? Who will wash the glasses and nappies when plastic no longer offers the convenience of disposables? Questions like this must be answered in a way that promotes gender equality rather than increasing women's share of work and responsibility.

Privatization of care and other forms of social reproduction in individual households has not only been a driver of women's inequality, but they are also resource intensive and wasteful. It is a feature of capitalism that facilitates over-consumption, over-indebtedness, environmental degradation, and climate change.

GND plans currently do not make this connection, focusing instead on how to make private houses more energy efficient and how to get individuals to engage in sustainable practices such as water and energy conservation and waste recycling. There is no consideration of how everyday life practices could be made more resource efficient or how living spaces could be designed to maximize eco-efficiency at the same time as reducing the time required to carry them out. While the transition to a decarbonized economy offers great potential to rethink a vast range of normalized features of daily life, insights from feminist

³ Back in September 2019 a coalition of women's rights and climate activists in the USA including WEDO (Women's Environment and Development Organization), launched a Feminist Agenda for a Green New Deal. [The Feminist Green New Deal Principles](#) call for advancing reproductive justice, the creation of regenerative economies centred on feminist analysis and understanding of the care economy, a shift from exploitative and unsustainable production patterns and a rejection of false solutions to the climate crisis.

Quite recently, the Women's Budget Group has presented a 'Feminist Green New Deal for the UK', available at: <https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Feminist-Green-New-Deal.pdf>

⁴ For a comprehensive definition of care, which includes both paid and unpaid care work and explains it as fundamental to economic, social and political systems, see Tronto, J. (2013). *Caring Democracy: Markets, Equality and Justice*, NYU Press.

architects, town planners and transport planners have not found their way into existing GND plans yet.

Principles for Engagement

As policymakers, advocates, and communities we are called to shape actions and values, in line with those proposed by the [Feminist Agenda for a Green New Deal](#).

Require intersectional gender analysis across all actions. In our deeply unequal society, gender interacts with sexuality, race, national origin, class, disability, and other identities to shape people's access to power and resources, leaving some disproportionately impacted by and vulnerable to climate disruption. A Green New Deal must be part of a just transition that addresses how people are impacted differently based on systemic exclusion and exploitation, and that ensures policies, plans and actions across all sectors are transformative to challenge inequity and offer reparation for harm. A just transition requires that women are actively brought in and benefit from green jobs and social policies, including pay equity, paid family leave and free child-care.

Recognize that there is no such thing as domestic climate policy. More than ever, we must understand the links between domestic and foreign policy. We can only avert climate catastrophe if the EU works with the rest of the world to mitigate climate change and advance a feminist foreign policy that serves people and their communities, and is not co-opted by corporate, militarized or exploitative agendas.

Confront institutional patriarchy and racism. These systemic oppressions show up throughout our communities, movements, and policymaking spaces. Unless we tackle these systems head-on, they will continue to undermine the climate solutions we seek. We must fight for a true, participatory democracy. We cannot call on people to use their voice to confront the climate crisis when we know marginalized people's voices are systematically oppressed. We must challenge unequal power dynamics and demand accountability from each other and from policymakers.

Systemically confront exploitative and unsustainable production patterns. The roots of the climate crisis lie in an economic system that encourages corporate greed, unsustainable production, and profit-seeking over the well-being of people and the planet. Globally, this system further entrenches neo-colonial patterns of power and production between North and South countries. This endless pursuit of material growth empowers the fossil fuel, mining, and polluting industries most responsible for climate change. Tackling these patterns systemically requires engaged citizenship, movement building, public education, and organizing with labour. In discussing **the eco limits of capitalist production patterns there is indeed a need of discussing measures like Universal Basic Income, Universal Basic Services, and Universal Basic Infrastructure.** UBI claims to offer new routes for subsistence. But UBS is a proposal to take the provision of certain necessities out of the commodity sphere and provide them free of charge to anyone who needs or wants them: social housing at zero rent, free meals for households in food insecurity, free bus pass scheme to people of all ages, and phone, internet and TV licence free for all.⁵

⁵ Lombardozzi, L. and Pitts, F. H. (2019). 'Social form, social reproduction and social policy: basic income, basic services, basic infrastructure'. *Capital and Class*, pp. 1-22; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309816819873323>

Ensure democratically controlled, community-led solutions. Through the leadership of women's groups and local movements in creating local and global climate policy, the outcomes will be more democratic, stronger, and longer-lasting. Crucially, the solutions offered by the Green New Deal must be community-owned and community-led, including inclusive financing and equitable distribution of energy and the development of just housing and education policies. It must also draw from, uplift, and support existing women and community-led solutions to the climate crisis, in the EU and globally.

Create regenerative economies that centre systemic, feminist alternatives. A just transition must address inequalities in power and wealth while transitioning from fossil fuels to renewable energy. This means transforming an extractive, unjust status quo into new, socially just and environmentally sustainable economies that respect and balance nature's regenerative capacity. We must shift from the privatization and commodification of nature to sustainable, equitable production and resource use. This includes understanding that GDP is an insufficient and detrimental economic indicator and that alternatives are required that measure quality of life and well-being rather than production.

Working together, according to these values, we have the capacity to create the change demanded of us now by generations to come.