

Plenary Session 2: Overcoming Women's Poverty and Achieving Economic Independence

Dr Mary P. Murphy, Lecturer in Irish Politics and Society, Maynooth University and Member of Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission

IHREC presently preparing Ireland's Third Periodic Report under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights for June 2015 and today is a really useful start for us in ensuring we have strong gendered relection on this important process.

I have three rules of thumb when I talk about poverty.

Never talk about poverty without talking about wealth.

Starting point is that social and economic rights are international rights, global position of women in poverty and Irish women in poverty. Oxfam draw attention to the 80 people who own over 50% of the global wealth. high income and wealth inequalities also gendered – the top 50 stock broker hedge fund earners are all male, most of the 1% are male –in Ireland 7/300 richest are men. Making the world more equal will also address gender pay and pension gaps, offers new alliances and coalitions and win-win scenarios.

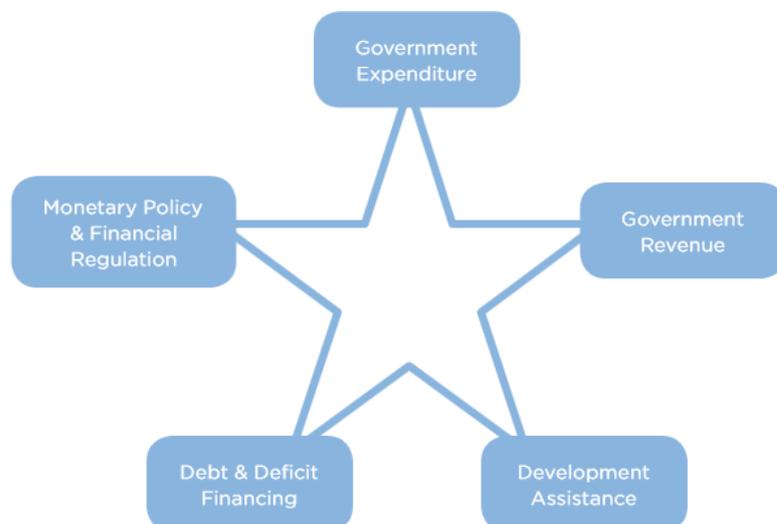
2 Never talk about poverty without talking about power and the reality that the unfair burden on unpaid care work means women have less access to economic resources and power. We need to do three things

- Redefining what we value as society, paid and unpaid work, 'careful' to value care, child, family and community.
- Redistribute unpaid care work between men and women , maternity paternity and parental leave WLB policy
- Resource child care. Ireland is like an ostritch if it thinks it can be the best little country in the world to do business in while being the most expensise country out of 34 to purchase childcare

recognising and measuring unpaid care work;. redistributing and reducing the inequalities and intensities of unpaid care through gender-sensitive public services and infrastructure; applying a care perspective in policymaking

The third rule is never talk about poverty without talking about economics

Women are comfortable talking about and stretching household economics but we need to 'macro it up' to talk about national political economy policy choices. Human rights means holding government to account about maximum use of available resources. The Centre of Women's Global Leadership 2011 MAR STAR shows how we can bring human rights into macroeconomic policy and gendering political economy



Austerity is a place to start – any strategy and policy that chooses to reduce public expenditure is going to be gendered in its impact, more women depend on social welfare, work in public services and rely on public services. Barry and Conroy and ERSI/EA research women in couples experienced a 14% drop in income compared with 9% of men during the recession.

Commitment means no retrogression without full consideration of all alternatives and without participation of those impacted, fails on both principles

Women comprise 52% of those in different forms of poverty

	At risk of poverty rate		Deprivation rate ¹		Consistent poverty rate	
	2012 %	2013 %	2012 %	2013 %	2012 %	2013 %
State	16.5	15.2	26.9	30.5	7.7	8.2
Sex²						
Male	16.3	15.1	26.4	29.6	7.8	8.0
Female	16.7	15.4	27.4	31.4	7.6	8.5
Age group²						
0-17	18.8	17.9	32.3	37.3	9.9	11.7
18-64	16.4	15.3	27.2	30.5	7.8	8.0
65+	12.1	9.2	13.5	16.1	2.6	1.9

Changes to social protection system, can enable individualisation and economic independence, the right not only to individual social income but to access quality education and training as essential steps to secure decent paid work, however what we do not need are more conditionality and sanctions.

A human Rights and quality approach means a special focus as Article 9 infers on the Adequacy of Social Security for Groups experiencing Multiple Discrimination. Three groups merit specific attention

Lone parents, suffered multiple cumulative welfare cuts, are in 63% deprivation, the cuts have left them with less dignity and also means they are less likely to be able to afford to work in paid employment. There is no evidence that making lone parent work in paid employment reduces child poverty.

Asylum seekers in Direct Provision still have to live on 19.10 per week, this had bene the case since the early 2000's and changing this has to be a priority for the government working group reviewing. The impacts of the Habitual Residence Condition is also generating new vulnerable groups.

The discriminatory practice of disproportionate impacts of cuts and spending decisions is inconsistent with a government that values principles of human rights and equality. Women with disabilities often have a double burden of care and lack of progress on addressing care and the cost of disability leaves them frozen out of the labour market and in high levels of poverty nd inequality as well as deprivation .

Right to Work if often championed, Minister best route out of poverty is a job, but a life churning between low pay and no pay is a guarantee of poverty not just in working life but also in old age. Both migrants and lone parents alongside young people are statistically likely to churn between low paid and no pay. Recent figures from the CSO tell us that 50% of all women workers are now earning €20,000 or less, Mandate Dunnes Research shows 76% of workers on part time flexible contracts and 98% want more stable hours. Minimum hours as important as minimum pay, home helps important victory in this regard .

I will end by emphasising the link between income inequality and power inequality, national parliament but also civil society and economic actors. The human rights principle of participation and voice requires sustainable government funding of women's groups and vulnerable marginalised communities. Even before austerity government cuts and privatisation strategies have hugely reduced damaged such capacity. Such cuts need to be reversed and multi-annual funding guaranteed.

They have not stopped women's voices. We need to celebrate women's agency, trade unions, lone parents, women in direct provision and homeless women deserve our commendation and respect for their determined action to protect their rights, most of all they need our solidarity.