

# WHAT IS FEMINISM, REALLY?

How gender inequality  
makes our world unjust



**OXFAM**  
Australia

# WHAT ARE FEMINISM AND GENDER INEQUALITY?

## Feminism fights for a world free from gender inequality.

Feminism is a movement for fairness. For things to be fair, people of all genders must have the same rights and opportunities as men.

### Feminism is not a movement against men.

The fight for equal rights, opportunities and respect for people of all genders continues, even today. At home, at work, in education and in public life.

At its core, feminism challenges the idea that access to power, your value and the opportunities you have should be decided by your gender.

Gender inequality is not accidental; it is shaped by social systems, cultural norms and long-standing power imbalances.

**HARMFUL NORMS  
REINFORCE INEQUALITY,  
INCLUDING BELIEFS THAT MEN  
ARE ENTITLED TO CONTROL  
WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' BODIES.**



Across the world, men are more likely to hold positions of political and economic power.

Meanwhile, women and people of diverse genders are more likely to be shut out of these spheres of influence. They experience more poverty and violence, more barriers to education and fewer opportunities to influence the decisions that affect their lives.

Inequalities are reinforced by expectations around roles, such as unpaid care and domestic work. These roles often fall mostly to women, restricting their economic independence and access to the resources they need.

Importantly, gender inequality does not exist in isolation. It intersects with other forms of discrimination, including those based on race, class, disability, age, sexuality and location. This means some individuals face multiple, overlapping barriers that limit their access to safety, resources and rights.

## Gender equality means people of all genders and sexual orientations can fully exercise their rights.

They are free to make choices about their lives and participate equally in society.

Reaching true equality takes more than individual change, though. To get there, we need to demand that structures, attitudes and systems that sustain inequality transform for the better.

To ensure gender equality truly represents everyone, people of all genders and sexual orientations should be involved in the decisions that impact them. In parliaments, in boardrooms, in communities and in their homes.

Feminism is not only about naming injustice. It is about transforming the systems and attitudes that sustain inequality. These unequal systems were created by people in society to hold power over others. And now, people are fighting to change them.

# GLOBAL AND LOCAL PERSPECTIVES

## Gender inequality in Australia and overseas

Gender equality doesn't look the same everywhere. It is shaped by history, law, culture, economics and conflict.

Yet there's a common pattern: women and girls often face greater risk, do more unpaid work and have less power.

In Australia, women have the freedom to gain an education, work or participate in politics, as legal protections exist. However, gaps remain, including pay inequality, underrepresentation in leadership and a higher incidence of family and sexual violence.

Intersectional issues affecting Indigenous women, people with disabilities and LGBTQIA+ Australians show that laws alone cannot remove layered inequalities.

In many countries, gender inequality is deeper and more complex. Women and girls often have limited access to education, healthcare and political participation. Cultural norms, poverty and conflict reinforce rigid roles and restrict opportunity.



Sekota, Ethiopia: Mebrit sits with two of her children in the home she expanded through her self-help group, which has helped her build a more secure future for her family. Photo: Petterik Wiggers/Oxfam.

**Climate emergencies, conflict and poverty further intensify these gender barriers. Women often sustain families during these crises but still have less access to land, income, safety, transport and decision-making.**

Across the world, similar patterns emerge. These include male entitlement, control over women's bodies, rigid power dynamics and beliefs that falsely justify violence.

In 30 countries in Africa, the Middle East and Asia, there are 230 million girls and women who have undergone female genital mutilation (FGM). FGM is internationally recognised as a human rights violation and is a practice that has no health benefits but is enforced by entrenched views of women's sexuality.<sup>1</sup>

In Solomon Islands, two out of three women<sup>2</sup> experience family and sexual violence from an intimate partner. In this predominantly patriarchal society, violence is often normalised and reinforced by strict social hierarchies.<sup>3</sup>

Women and girls who challenge gender norms are frequently blamed for the sexual and family violence perpetrated against them. Widows, divorced women and LGBTQIA+ people, face even greater risks.

**Despite different contexts, the drivers of inequality remain similar. Patriarchal systems everywhere control resources, decision-making and safety.**

Achieving gender equality requires legal protections and social transformation. This ensures women, gender-diverse people and people experiencing marginalisation can exercise rights, access opportunities and participate fully in leadership and community life.

1. Female genital mutilation fact sheet, World Health Organisation, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/female-genital-mutilation>. 2. Oxfam, Where we work: Solomon Islands, <https://www.oxfam.org.au/our-impact/countries-where-we-work/solomon-islands>. 3. 'Transforming Harmful Gender Norms in Solomon Islands: A study of the Oxfam Safe Families Program, Oxfam, <https://www.oxfam.org.au/pdf/Transforming-Gender-Norms-Report-FINAL.pdf>.

# GENDER AND POVERTY

## Poverty is not gender neutral

If feminism asks who has power, poverty shows what happens when power is denied. The two are deeply connected.

**Women do not experience poverty more because they work less. They experience poverty more because economies often value their labour less, protect it less and pay it less.**

Poverty is also more than low income. It is a shortage of time, safety, options, rest and control over daily life.

## The hidden weight of unpaid labour

Many women carry the unpaid work that keeps families alive. They cook, clean, fetch water, care for children and support older or sick relatives.

That labour is essential, yet it is rarely counted as economic contribution. Because of that, women often have less time for study, paid work or leadership.

## Barriers that keep women poorer

Gender norms also restrict where women can go and what work they can do. In some

places, safety concerns or social rules limit travel, training or paid employment.

Women may also have less access to land, savings, credit, phones, transport and information. Without those tools, earning a stable income becomes much harder.

This creates a dangerous pattern. Women carry more responsibility for survival, while holding fewer of the resources that build security.

## Why inequality deepens in crisis

When crisis hits, the pressure grows. Drought, conflict, rising prices and climate emergencies can force women to stretch fewer resources across greater need.

Girls may leave school to help at home. Women may skip meals, take unsafe work or accept harmful conditions to protect their families.

That is why gender inequality does not sit beside poverty as a separate issue. It helps shape who faces poverty first, hardest and longest. →





**FOR EVERY \$1 A MAN  
EARNS, A WOMAN  
EARNS JUST  
78 CENTS**

The pay gap is not just a workplace issue. It affects savings, security, retirement and the ability to leave unsafe situations.<sup>4</sup>

Rural Damascus, Syria: Layla works on her farm, determined to rebuild her life and support her two children despite drought, conflict and profound personal loss. Photo: Dania Kareh/Oxfam.

4. Gender pay gap data, Workplace Gender Equality Agency, <https://www.wgea.gov.au/pay-and-gender/gender-pay-gap-data>.

## How inequality compounds over time

Gender inequality drives poverty through systems, not isolated setbacks. A woman can work hard and still be blocked at every stage.

If childcare is unaffordable, paid work becomes harder to keep. If travelling on public transport puts her safety at risk, training and jobs can become harder to reach.

If healthcare is distant, poor or costly, women often carry the burden first. If violence is normalised, daily life becomes more dangerous and more constrained.

These pressures do not stay separate for long. They combine and grow, narrowing choices over time.

## Why one setback can change everything

When money is scarce, choices shrink. Lower income can limit a woman's power to make decisions at home, leave unsafe situations, access services or plan for the future.

And poverty isn't only about money. It's also about time. When women carry more unpaid caregiving and domestic work, there are fewer hours left to study, earn, rest, seek support or build a different path. That leaves little room for something to go wrong. Without savings, secure work, land or other safety nets, one emergency—a flood, illness,

conflict or failed harvest—can wipe out years of effort and push a family deeper into hardship.

## The ripple effects on families and children

Children are affected by these pressures too. Their food, schooling, health and safety are shaped by the inequality around their mothers and carers.

This is how poverty becomes intergenerational. Gender inequality today can limit a child's future tomorrow.

## What lasting change really requires

Reducing poverty takes more than short-term help. It requires fair wages, decent work, safe housing, healthcare, education and social protection for every gender.

It also requires recognising caregiving as essential work. When caregiving is ignored, women absorb the cost with their time, bodies and futures.

Real change also depends on women's leadership. Women closest to poverty often know which solutions are practical, trusted and likely to last.

When women gain resources, voice and decision-making power, the impact reaches beyond one person. It can strengthen households, communities and future generations.



Moulvibazar, Bangladesh: Munni works in a tea garden, earning just 170 taka (AUD \$1.90) a day. After attending training with Oxfam partner Breaking the Silence, Munni says she has gained courage. Photo: Fabeha Monir/Oxfam. Oxfam acknowledges the support of the European Union in this program.

# THE NUMBERS BEHIND GENDER INEQUALITY

Feminism matters because inequality has consequences. It shapes who eats last, earns less, risks more and whose voices are heard.

Gender inequality is not one issue. It shows up in access to money, safety, healthcare, education, leadership and the daily work of survival.



**435 MILLION**

**WOMEN AND GIRLS LIVE ON  
LESS THAN \$1.90 A DAY**

Poverty is deeply gendered. It becomes even harsher during conflict, climate emergencies and rising living costs.<sup>6</sup>



**9+ HOURS MORE**

**UNPAID DOMESTIC LABOUR  
EACH WEEK IN AUSTRALIA**

In Australia, women still do far more unpaid care and domestic work than men. That reduces time, income and independence.<sup>8</sup>



**1 IN 3 WOMEN**

**GLOBALLY EXPERIENCE  
INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE**

Violence against women is widespread, not rare. It is both a human rights issue and a driver of poverty.<sup>10</sup>



**145.5 YEARS**

**TO REACH GENDER  
EQUALITY IN POLITICS**

Power still sits overwhelmingly with men. That shapes which issues are funded, prioritised or ignored.<sup>7</sup>



**17.3%**

**OF THE WORLD'S ADULT  
WOMEN ARE ILLITERATE**

Education shapes income, confidence, safety and power. When girls and women miss out, inequality deepens across generations.<sup>9</sup>



**250 YEARS**

**TO REACH  
ECONOMIC EQUALITY**

At the current pace, women will wait centuries for economic equality. That is not slow progress. It is structural failure.<sup>11</sup>

6,11. 'From Insight to Action: Gender Equality in the wake of COVID-19', UN Women.

7,9. Global Gender Gap Report 2021: Insight Report, World Economic Forum, [https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GGGR\\_2021.pdf](https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2021.pdf).

8. Status of women report card 2025, Australian Government, <https://genderequality.gov.au/status-women-report-cards/2025-report-card>.

10. Violence against women fact sheet, World Health Organisation, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women>.

# UNEQUAL ACCESS TO POSITIONS OF POWER

## Women still lack opportunities to hold influence

### Power is not only political

Women's exclusion from power is not accidental. It is built into systems that decide whose voice carries the most weight.

Power is not only found in parliament. It also sits in boardrooms, courts, media, communities and the institutions that shape everyday life.

When women are missing from these spaces, decisions are made without the full experience of the communities they affect. **Only 1 in 7 countries is led by a woman.** Global political power remains largely dominated by men and **101 countries have still never had a woman head of state or government.**<sup>12</sup>

### Representation shapes priorities

Representation matters because power shapes priorities. It influences who controls resources, whose work is valued and which problems are treated as urgent.

Progress is possible. In Australia, women made up **50% of federal parliamentarians** at the opening of parliament in 2025, up from 26% in 2004.<sup>13</sup>

But progress remains uneven. Around the world, **women still hold just 22.4% of cabinet positions and 27.5% of parliamentary seats.** Women are also often concentrated in portfolios linked to

family, children and gender equality, while men continue to dominate areas such as defence, justice, economic affairs and governance.<sup>14</sup>

### The pattern repeats at work

The same pattern appears in workplaces. Women are present across the workforce, but far fewer reach the most senior roles.

**In Australian workplaces, only 22% of CEOs are women. Women hold 33% of board roles and 43% of manager roles.**<sup>15</sup>

That gap is significant. Leaders shape culture, pay, hiring, promotion, safety and whose ideas are taken seriously.

### Change is possible through leadership

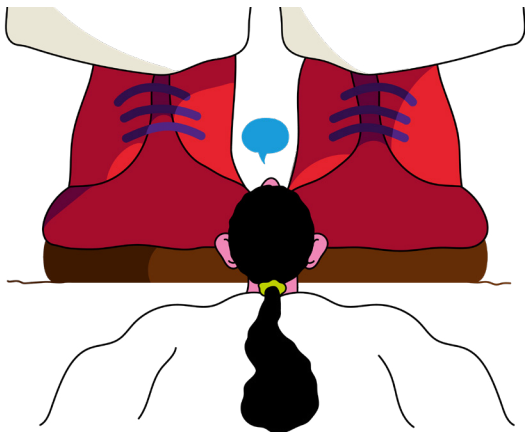
When women have equal power, public life becomes more representative and more responsive.

Women in leadership can help bring overlooked issues into the centre of decision-making: childcare, paid and unpaid work, safety, healthcare, poverty, education and gender-based violence.

They can also help change the systems that keep inequality in place by backing fairer laws, safer workplaces, more inclusive budgets, stronger services and better pathways for the next generation of women leaders.

Higher rates of women's political representation are linked with more inclusive and gender-equal legislation, while gender-balanced leadership helps institutions better reflect the communities they serve.<sup>16</sup>

Equality means opening the door wider – not for a few women, but for women from all backgrounds. Because when women have power, everyone benefits from decisions that are fairer, fuller and more connected to real life.



12, 14. Press release: Only 1 in 7 countries is led by a woman as global political power remains dominated by men, Inter-Parliamentary Union, <https://www.ipu.org/news/press-releases/2026-03/only-1-in-7-countries-led-woman-global-political-power-remains-dominated-men>. 13. Representation in parliament, Australian Bureau of Statistics, <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/measuring-what-matters/measuring-what-matters-themes-and-indicators/cohesive/representation-parliament>. 15. Employee Gender Pay Gaps Report, Workplace Gender Equality Agency, <https://www.wgea.gov.au/publications/employer-gender-pay-gaps-report>. 16. Representation Matters: How women's political representation can accelerate global economic growth, World Bank Group, <https://www.oliverwymanforum.com/content/dam/oliver-wyman/ow-forum/equal-societies/Representation-Matters-Report-2025.pdf>.

# WOMEN WHO TAKE CHARGE IN EMERGENCIES

## Female leaders in crisis settings

When a crisis hits, women are not only affected by it, they are often among the first to understand what is changing, who is at risk and what their community needs most.

Their role goes far beyond caregiving. Women lead local organisations, share trusted information, deliver relief and support health and protection services. They rebuild livelihoods, advocate for safer conditions, prepare communities for future shocks and help shape peace.

That leadership matters from the beginning. Women should be consulted before emergency plans are made — helping to shape risk assessments, decisions, budgets, delivery and recovery.

### Emergencies are never gender neutral

A flood, drought, conflict or cyclone does not arrive in an equal world. It hits people already living with unequal access to money, transport, safety, healthcare and power.

Women and girls can face greater danger in a crisis. Some may struggle to evacuate because they are caring for others, cannot travel safely, or do not receive information in time.

Risks of sexual exploitation, abuse and gender-based violence can also rise. This is especially the case where displacement shelters, toilets, water points, transport or access to essentials are unsafe or poorly managed.

### The burden grows when systems fail

In a crisis, girls are 2.5 times more likely to be pulled out of school than girls not living in a crisis.<sup>17</sup>

This can be due to safety concerns, with schools often damaged or destroyed during conflict. Family financial pressures deepened by crises can also result in girls' education being deprioritised.<sup>18</sup> They may be kept at home to help with housework, earn money or be married for financial reasons.

Women's livelihoods also disappear in an emergency. Healthcare, including sexual and reproductive healthcare, can become harder to reach when it is needed most.

Women are expected to keep families going, even when the systems around them are breaking down. That pressure is rarely recognised, even though it is central to survival.

### Women also shape recovery

The answer is not to ignore women, but to recognise their leadership, unique capacity building and include women early on in humanitarian responses.

When women are involved from the start, recovery efforts are accelerated, resilience grows and future crises are prevented.

Studies show that peace deals are also stronger and more likely to be implemented when women are involved. For example, when women's participation in conflict prevention rose from 5% to 20% in Mali and Niger's border zones, 100 conflicts over local natural resources were resolved, because when women help shape crisis response, the benefits reach whole communities.<sup>19</sup>

**60%**

of preventable maternal deaths take place in emergency settings.<sup>5</sup>

**14x**

When disaster strikes, women and children are 14 times more likely than men to die.

**200,000\***

\*Approx

women provide frontline care during emergencies, wars and disasters around the world.

17. Accessing essential health services in fragile, conflict-affected and vulnerable settings, World Health Organisation, <https://www.who.int/activities/accessing-essential-health-services-in-fragile-conflict-affected-and-vulnerable-settings>. 18. 'The Impact of Conflict: Women and Girls' Education', Women for Women International, <https://womenforwomen.org.uk/conflict-women-girls-education-illiteracy>. 19. Facts and figures: Women, peace, and security, UN Women, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/articles/facts-and-figures/facts-and-figures-women-peace-and-security>.

## GALMO

Marsabit County, Kenya

Communities in Marsabit County know what crises can take away.

Recurring droughts and floods have devastated livestock, emptied food stores and left families exposed to future shocks. But Galmo and the Mifugo ni Mali Women Group are helping to show what recovery looks like when communities lead it themselves.

With support from Australian Aid and Oxfam in Kenya, community-managed groups across Marsabit received grants to build resilience against drought and other shocks.

Galmo chairs the Mifugo ni Mali Women Group. The group chose goat restocking because it was practical, locally rooted and shaped by the realities of pastoralist women.

The women bought goats, sold them for profit, reinvested in more animals and began building a stronger income base.

Their herd has grown and milk is adding to their earnings.

**"With this business, we do not have to walk long distances. This is our life now and we will keep going."**

This is a humanitarian response that goes beyond the first emergency. It helps communities recover, rebuild livelihoods and prepare for the next drought before it arrives.

For Galmo's group, recovery has already reached the next generation too.

**"We have supported our children with school supplies—books, pens, and sanitary pads for our girls."**

Their story shows why women's leadership matters in crisis response. When women shape recovery, support can become practical, local and built to last through the droughts to come.

# WOMEN WHO CHANGE THE RULES

## The role of women in advocacy and campaigning

Advocacy begins with a refusal to be silent in the face of inequality and injustice. Campaigning turns that refusal into pressure, visibility and change.

Women have always pushed history forward in this way. They have organised, spoken out, documented harm, built movements and demanded better from those in power.

In 1902, Australia was the first nation to grant white women the dual right to vote and stand in federal elections. This was the result of decades of campaigning by thousands of women. But it wouldn't be until 1962 that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and men would be granted the right to enrol and vote.<sup>20</sup>

These trailblazers for political citizenship inspired and provided a practical template for the British suffrage campaign. Their struggles were vital because inequality is not self-correcting. Systems rarely change just because they are unfair.

### Private harm becomes public truth

Change happens when people name injustice clearly and keep pushing until it can no longer be ignored. That is what advocacy and campaigning do.

They make private harm visible in public life. They turn issues once dismissed as personal into issues recognised as political.

That includes violence, unpaid care, pay inequality, reproductive rights, climate justice, racism and women's exclusion from leadership. These are not separate struggles.

They are all shaped by power. They are all connected to whose needs are heard, funded and acted on.

### Movements are built in many ways

Campaigning can look loud from the outside. Marches, speeches, media, petitions and public pressure all matter.

But advocacy also happens in quieter ways. It happens in community rooms, support networks, local meetings and conversations where women finally feel safe to speak.

**That is often where real change begins. Not with one heroic voice, but with many women recognising they are stronger together.**

### Feminism becomes action here

When women organise, they do more than ask to be included. They challenge the rules that made exclusion seem normal.

That is why advocacy is not a side story to feminism. It is one of the clearest ways in which feminism becomes action.



20. Women's Suffrage in Australia, Parliament of Australia, [https://www.aph.gov.au/Visit\\_Parliament/Art/Stories/Womens\\_Suffrage\\_in\\_Australia](https://www.aph.gov.au/Visit_Parliament/Art/Stories/Womens_Suffrage_in_Australia).



## CAMPAIGNING AND ADVOCACY

# TIEIN

Kiribati, Oceania

For Tien, climate change is not a distant issue. It is something reshaping the place she calls home.

Tien serves as vice president of Tungaru Youth Action, a youth-led organisation working with young people on climate issues, employment and skills.

Her advocacy begins with lived experience.

**“I believe we as Pacific Islanders, we are Wayfinders. Our livelihood is very much dependent on the ocean and its resources. We are connected, really interconnected with the ocean.”**

That connection makes climate change impossible to ignore. Tien speaks about rising seas, coastal erosion, hotter temperatures, pressure on crops and the growing strain on everyday life.

But her work is not only about telling people what is happening. It is about moving them to act.

**“I feel like just telling stories is not enough.”**

Tien has taken her message to international platforms, calling on people in high-income countries to better understand what communities like hers are experiencing.

**“I believe that if people were really in our shoes ... maybe they’ll be moved to do actions.”**

Through Tungaru Youth Action, she is also helping young people build confidence, skills and resources to take action in their own communities.

Her story shows what advocacy can look like in a climate emergency: speaking from lived experience, building collective power and turning awareness into action.

# WOMEN WHO BUILD FUTURES

## The role of women in long-term development

Long-term development is about building the conditions for a safer, fairer future.

**That future cannot be built without women.**

When women gain resources, skills, networks and decision-making power, the effects travel far beyond one person.

They reach children, households, local economies and community life. They can also reshape what becomes possible after a crisis.

### Poverty is shaped by instability

Poverty is not only about a lack of money. It is also about unstable livelihoods, weak services, unequal power and constant exposure to shocks.

Women often carry the consequences of all of these at once. Yet they are also central to solving them.

Across communities, women are building income through farming, trade, small business and collective enterprise. They are planning for drought, supporting children and creating new forms of resilience.

### Livelihoods can change more than income

Development at its strongest is practical, rooted in and shaped by lived experience.

It is also rarely individual. Women's long-term development work often strengthens whole communities, not just one household.

Income can become school supplies, healthcare, transport, savings or better food security. A livelihood can become a safety net.

A group can become a platform for mutual support. A small enterprise can become the start of broader community change.

### Power must be part of development

**Gender equality is not an optional extra to development work.** It shapes who gets access to land, loans, training, markets and leadership. When that shift in power happens, futures become more secure, more equal and more resilient.

In the West Bank, two women-led enterprises have created practical support that ripples outward.

One mother, Thuraya, started Al-Thuraya, a humble small-batch lemon juice business. But with support from Oxfam, it has become a thriving enterprise that produces over 7,000 bottles a year and provides financial security to many other women.

Similarly, the members of the Qabalan Women's Cooperative produce somasa dough while gaining skills, experience and self-belief, showing what can happen when women work collectively.

This is what's possible when women have access to practical support, markets and technical skills.<sup>21</sup>

**WHEN WOMEN  
BUILD LIVELIHOODS,  
THEY BUILD STABILITY  
FOR MANY OTHERS TOO.**



21. Women's economic empowerment: supporting women-led business, Oxfam, <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/womens-economic-empowerment-supporting-women-led-business-620615>.

## LONG-TERM DEVELOPMENT

# KORUNA

Satkhira, Bangladesh

Koruna is the only woman honey farmer in Bangladesh. Her work is demanding, highly skilled and traditionally male-dominated.

**"I am the only woman honey farmer in the whole of Bangladesh and people recognise me by name. This is a matter of huge pride for me."**

Koruna's livelihood is closely connected to the Sundarbans (mangroves), where her family and community have depended on the forest for generations. But environmental pressures and changing conditions have made that work less predictable.

**"The honey in the Sundarbans can only be found in one season. But I collect all kinds of honey throughout the year from all over Bangladesh."**

That ability to adapt is central to long-term development. Koruna has built a livelihood that is more stable, more sustainable and more connected to the future.

Through training, she learned about green business, organic cultivation, vermicompost, marketing, pricing, processing and better ways to store honey. That knowledge helped her strengthen the business and protect the quality of her product.

Koruna's business has changed what is possible at home too.

**"I have built a house here from this business. It is wholly made from the money I get from my business."**

She now sells honey with her daughter's help, bringing the next generation into the business.

Koruna's story shows that long-term development is not abstract. It can mean skills, income, confidence, environmental care, family stability and power that lasts.



# LONG-TERM DEVELOPMENT MEANS POWER THAT LASTS

## Women's economic resilience and community change

A livelihood can change more than a bank balance. It can change who has choices, who has confidence and who has room to plan ahead.

More than 2.7 billion women worldwide are barred from certain jobs by law, with global participation in the labour market showing a 30% gender gap. But when women work, economies grow.<sup>21</sup>

**Women's economic power matters deeply in driving sustainable development.** Income can create breathing room where there was once only pressure. It can help cover food, school costs, transport, healthcare and emergencies. It can also increase a woman's say in household and community decisions, prepare for the future and open up access to social protections like pensions or maternity protection.

## Stability matters as much as income

Long-term development isn't just about earning more. It's about making income more stable, more sustainable and more connected to the future. Informal and vulnerable employment makes up nearly 60% of women's employment globally. Women are also overrepresented in seasonal, part-time and low-wage work.<sup>22</sup>

Combatting this might mean training, safer working conditions, new markets, climate-resilient methods or stronger community networks. It might mean turning local knowledge into lasting enterprise.

## Women work against unequal systems

We need to recognise the barriers women face. Many women do unpaid care, have less access to capital and work in settings where they are underestimated or excluded.

So, when women build successful livelihoods, they are often doing more than starting a business. They are pushing against systems that expected less from them.

## Economic power shapes the next generation

That shift matters across generations. A woman's income may support a child's education, a family's housing or a household's recovery after crisis.

It may also open the way for other women. Success can be practical, but it can also be symbolic.

It can show girls what is possible. It can show communities that leadership and expertise do not belong to men alone.

## This is feminist change in everyday life

A livelihood can become safety, confidence and a wider future. When women build economic power, communities become more resilient, too. Estimates show that closing the gender gap could add a USD \$7 trillion boost to the global economy. Companies also benefit from increased organisational effectiveness and growth when they employ more women and appoint them to leadership roles.<sup>23</sup>

This is why long-term development should not be seen as the quiet part of feminism. It is one of the clearest ways feminist change becomes visible in daily life.



# MANDELA

Kimberley, Australia

Mandela is a Yawuru Bunuba woman from the Kimberley. She speaks about how important it is for Aboriginal women to have support that is built for their region, their realities and their leadership.

Through the Kimberley Aboriginal Women's Council (KAWC), women across the region are creating pathways for leadership, connection and collective action. The focus is on strengthening women and girls, supporting sisterhood, sharing stories and making sure Kimberley Aboriginal women can shape the decisions that affect their lives.

For Mandela, that work is about collective strength.

**"It's not just based on someone's agenda, an individual agenda. It's a shared vision, a shared voice."**

That shared voice matters. Mandela speaks about the responsibilities many Aboriginal women carry from a young age, through family, community, culture, work and leadership.

**"We don't tend to put ourselves first, but it's not being selfish, it's looking after yourself to become a better leader or a better role model in your community."**

This is what makes a First Peoples' program lens important. The focus is not only on representation. It is self-determination, safety, trust and women shaping what support should look like for themselves and their communities.

For Mandela, being heard is central.

**"I feel safe to speak up ... You're speaking from the heart and you're being heard."**

That kind of space can change what leadership feels like. It helps women build confidence, strengthen each other and recognise the value of their own voices.

Mandela's story shows Aboriginal women leading sustainable change on their own terms, in their own communities, through shared strength.



# HOW TO BE PART OF A MORE EQUAL WORLD

Feminism for everyone, everywhere, is not only something to agree with. It is something to practise.

Gender inequality is not abstract. It shows up in money, safety, power and work. And it decides whose futures are worth protecting.

If this eBook has a single message, it is this: inequality is made by systems, but it is sustained by choices too. That means change also requires everyday action from each of us.

## SO, WHAT CAN WE DO?

### LEARN DEEPLY

Start by learning more. Read beyond the basics and listen to women and people of all genders, especially those living closest to inequality and poverty.

Let their experiences challenge easy assumptions. Let them deepen your understanding of what justice really requires.

### SHARE POWER

Look at your own life. Who does the unpaid care in your home, your family, or your workplace?

Who gets interrupted, doubted or overlooked? Who is expected to carry more and receive less?

### SPEAK UP

Speak up when sexism is treated as normal. Support women's leadership, not only in theory, but in real decisions, real rooms and real opportunities.

If you have influence, use it. Challenge harmful norms, share caregiving more fairly and make sure equality is not left to women alone.

### GIVE FOR LONG-TERM CHANGE

If you have money or time to give, contribute in ways that shift power. Back work that supports women's safety, voice, livelihoods and leadership over the long term.

Feminism asks more of all of us. Not perfection, but participation.

Because a fairer world will not arrive on its own. It has to be built, defended and demanded again and again.





**OXFAM**  
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**The future is equal**

Learn more about how Oxfam Australia  
is fighting for gender equality at [oxfam.org.au](https://oxfam.org.au)



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