**Constructing Gender-responsive COVID-19 SME Recovery Measures:**

**An Entrepreneurial Feminist Perspective**

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**Abstract**

The pandemic has unveiled fragilities of economic gains that women have achieved, in part, because policies have not yet recognized the particular needs of women entrepreneurs. Accordingly, this research identifies parameters associated with good practices of gender-responsive entrepreneurship policy. The parameters are then applied to an analysis of three published feminist pandemic recovery plans that seek to support gender-responsive recovery measures. The study also employs entrepreneurial feminism as a theoretical framework for examining this issue. The analysis identifies the extent to which the parameters are embodied within these initiatives. A framework of feminist entrepreneurship policy is constructed to help guide policy development and implementation.

# 1.0 Introduction

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has forecast that the COVID-19 pandemic “threatens to roll back gains in women’s economic opportunities, widening gender gaps that persist despite 30 years of progress” (Georgieva, 2020, n.p.). McKinsey Global Institute (2020, n.p.) estimates that “a gender-regressive scenario in which no action is taken to counter effects of the pandemic will dilute $1 trillion in global GDP” and that, in contrast, taking immediate action to advance gender equality will contribute $13 trillion in U.S. dollars to the global GDP in 2030 (McKinsey Global Institute, 2020). Relief measures to offset the economic ramifications of the pandemic have been criticized for the failure to address the particular needs of women and girls (UN Women 2020; WE Empower 2020; OECD 2020a).

The fragility in the gains that women entrepreneurs have achieved are, in part, due to a lack of gender-responsive policy supports across institutions including governments. Scholars have observed that the underlying assumptions of most women’s enterprise policies are that women are underutilized economic resources (Marlow et al., 2008; Ahl & Nelson 2015; Foss et al., 2019), “in need of fixing”, or “best able to make unique (‘womanly’) contributions” (Pettersson et al., 2017, p. 52). Gender asymmetries within entrepreneurial ecosystems persist (Brush et al., 2009). Few policy strategies seek to address systemic gender biases within entrepreneurial ecosystems (Henry et al., 2018; Coleman et al., 2019). In response, this study examines the research question: *What are the parameters of gender-inclusive COVID-19 pandemic small- and medium-sized enterprise (SME) recovery measures?*

To inform the research question, the study proceeds in several steps. To situate the study, the research drew on a delineation of feminist perspectives cited in the entrepreneurship literature. Calás et al. (2009) describe two paradigms of entrepreneurship based on multiple feminist theories: (a) entrepreneurship as a positive economic activity, and (b) entrepreneurship as a means of social change (Calás et al., 2009). The intersection of these two paradigms is consistent with *entrepreneurial feminism* (Orser & Elliott, 2015; Coleman et al., 2019). To elaborate on entrepreneurial feminism in the context of public policy and pandemic recovery measures, first the research reviewed the entrepreneurship literature to identify key parameters consistent with good practices to support women entrepreneurs. Second, parameters advanced in the first step of the analysis were sorted and organized into logical policy themes. The third step of this research entailed assessment of the extent to which three feminist pandemic recovery plans that seek to support gender-responsive recovery measures embodied the proposed parameters. The assessment surfaced gaps between the parameters of feminist entrepreneurship policy and initiatives to support gender-responsive pandemic recovery measures. Building on these insights, a *conceptual framework of feminist entrepreneurship policy* was constructed. Boundary conditions for when and how the study insights are applicable, study limitations, and the implications for future research are also considered. In doing so, this study contributes to the entrepreneurship policy literature in several ways.

The work bridges insights drawn from academe, civil society, and feminist collective action. Mobilizing knowledge within these domains strengthens gender-responsive SME recovery measures through theory-driven and grassroots recommendations. For over 30 years SME policies have been framed through the experiences and expectations of men (Campbell, 1988; Walker & Joyner, 1999; Ljunggren & Alsos, 2012). Within the literature, women are often assumed to be a homogenous group (Mirchandani, 1999; Ahl & Marlowe, 2012; Hughes et al., 2012). Yet, intersectional influences are evidenced among women entrepreneurs who identify as immigrants and newcomers (Chreim et al., 2018), women with different abilities (UN Human Rights, 2020), Indigenous (Agarwal et al., 2020); or women who are Black or other persons of colour (Forson, 2006, 2007). The study constructs a conceptual framework to inform inclusive SME recovery measures.

Calás et al. (2009, p. 554) argue that “more rather than fewer theoretical frameworks are needed for exploring the varieties of social change that entrepreneurship may bring about, as well as for underscoring who and what are attended to in each case.” The study identifies parameters to address a limitation cited in the literature about the need to understand further the conceptual basis for feminist policy arguments (Marlow et al., 2008; Coleman et al., 2018). Feminist-value driven parameters inform the design and implementation of SME policies.

Many terms employed in this study will be familiar to scholars whose research focuses on gender and entrepreneurship. For those readers who are less familiar with the terms: gender, inclusion, intersectional, feminism, feminist policy, women-focused policies, and gender mainstream policies, a synopsis of each term is presented in Appendix A. To illustrate the application of the key parameters advanced in this work, an assessment of Canada’s *Women Entrepreneurship Strategy* (2018) is presented in Appendix B. [Appendix A and B are included as supplementary materials to the journal article.]

# 2.0 Literature review

2.1 Pandemic SME relief measures

Most governments have introduced relief measures for SMEs (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) 2020b; UN Women 2020). The need to conceptualize gender-responsive recovery measures is underscored by relief policies that fail to address gender-related differences among SMEs and market mechanisms that impede women (OECD, 2020a; WE Empower, 2020; W(omen)20, 2020). Compared to men-owned enterprises, women-owned SMEs are, on average, younger, smaller in size, retain less capital to buffer economic shock, and more likely to operate in sectors hardest hit by loss of revenue compared to men-owned SMEs (OECD, 2020a). Women entrepreneurs are more likely to manage the consequences of school closures and “to be juggling primary care-giving and homemaking, while they are scrambling to save their businesses” (Manolova et al., 2020, p.384). Yet, many women-owned SMEs do not qualify for relief funds due to program eligibility criteria (e.g., revenue or payroll thresholds, contractor or self-employment status) (Chatham House, 2020). Some women are reluctant to incur debt, during a period of declining customer demand (Ranade, 2020; Canadian Women’s Chamber of Commerce, 2020). To inform gender-inclusive SME recovery measures, the following section describes the theoretical underpinning of this study.

2.2 *Feminist theories and entrepreneurship policy*

Critical feminist perspectives inform the literature by challenging assumed objectivity of research while emphasizing biases within entrepreneurial ecosystems that disadvantage women (Nelson, 1995; Ahl & Nelson, 2014; Harcourt, 2016; Pettersson et al., 2017). To “reframe entrepreneurship” Calás et al. (2009, p. 554) collate feminist perspectives into two paradigms: entrepreneurship as positive economic activity; and entrepreneurship as social change. The first paradigm, entrepreneurship as positive economic activity, incorporates liberal, psychoanalytic, and radical feminist theories (Calás et al., 2009). Within this paradigm, the assumed purposes of intervention are to enhance productivity and economic growth, often by increasing women-owned start-ups and investing in scalable and innovative women-owned businesses (Henry et al., 2018; Coleman et al., 2019). McKinsey & Company (Albaz, 2020, n.p.), for example, describe the characteristics of “well-performing” SME ecosystems as those: “boosting the business confidence of SMEs, enabling the growth of SMEs—in general and for high performers—and increasing the competitiveness of SMEs… Establishing these three characteristics requires a segmented execution approach.” From this paradigm, segmented interventions (such as, women-focused policies), are predicated on economic outcomes for firms and the economy. In the context of the pandemic, this infers measures that recognize that women entrepreneurs are suffering a disproportionate share of economic loss. Gender-inclusive policies are therefore relevant and an impetus for fiscal relief in the form of government funding.

Entrepreneurship as social change encompasses socialist, post-structuralist, and transnational feminist perspectives (Calás et al., 2009). Within this paradigm, policy interventions are predicated on transforming social norms, cultural conditions, and economic structures that perpetuate women’s subordination (Petterson et al., 2017; Orser et al., 2019). This perspective infers gender-inclusive SME policies must extend to measures that address the broader well-being of girls and women.

Both of these paradigms implicitly include economic outcomes, but in different ways. Entrepreneurship as positive economic activity considers the firm and economy. Entrepreneurship as social change aligns with the commitments of 193 signatory countries to the UN Sustainable Development Goal 5 (UN SDG 5) to enhance women’s economic empowerment and gender equality. Overlaps provide a gateway for entrepreneurial feminism, an emergent theoretical perspective which focuses on enacting social change, and in doing so, creating social and economic benefits for women. The theoretical perspective builds upon and blends what we have experienced and learned from each of the two approaches.

2.2.1 *Entrepreneurial feminism*[[1]](#footnote-1)

Entrepreneurial feminism assumes that the goals of gender equality and women’s economic empowerment must underlie all SME policies. Entrepreneurial feminism differs from other feminist perspectives through a focus on *enacting* social change. Entrepreneurial feminism views women as active proponents of change, and not as the victims of gendered entrepreneurial ecosystems. Entrepreneurial feminists enact change by re-creating and redefining rules of the marketplace through firm governance, resource acquisition, relationship building and market positioning (Elliott & Orser, 2018).

Entrepreneurial feminism also challenges the notion of an idealized or feminized role model for entrepreneurs (Lewis, 2014). Some entrepreneurs do so by synthesizing masculinity and femininity attributes and behaviors (Koen, 1984; Maier, 2001; Dunham, 2010). As Nelson (2014) argues, entrepreneurs inhabit both masculine and feminine realms and thus juggle the “doing” of both masculinity and femininity. This involves performing and embodying feminine characteristics of nurturing, emotion, passivity, and attractiveness alongside masculine (individualized) traits of economic and emotional independence, assertiveness, rationality, and autonomy (Carlson, 2011). Entrepreneurial feminism, therefore, incorporates diverse gendered identities (Lewis, 2014) and feminist values through gendered venture creation processes. Policy interventions predicated on entrepreneurial feminism should therefore lend to multiple outcomes, such as social, economic, and perceptual change (Mayoux, 2000). Building on these principles, the next section summarizes insights drawn from the literature from the perspective of entrepreneurial feminism.

## 2.3 Gender and entrepreneurship policy

Within entrepreneurial ecosystems, few policy frameworks seek to address root causes of gender inequality (Ahl & Nelson, 2015; Pettersson et al., 2017). Most SME policies fail to considered gendered implications of intervention. When policies are assessed, criteria tend to focus on design and effectiveness rather than “the context of life opportunities and equality” (Richard, 2020, p. 84). Assessment practices sustain masculine cultures within enterprise support intermediaries (Alsos et al., 2013; Jones & Warhuus, 2018), homophily situated within capital markets (Harrison & Mason, 2007; Coleman & Robb, 2016), an absence of gender-based analysis of SME policies, and a lack of sex and gender disaggregated data to monitor women entrepreneurs’ economic and social status. The lack of gender disaggregated data leads to the “invisibility of women official indictors and measures of entrepreneurship and business ownership” (Marlow et al., 2008, p. 336).

Scholars also report that most policy SME frameworks are atheoretical, an approach that is not without consequence. Wilson et al. (2004) observed that in their review of the United Kingdom’s (UK) 2003 *Strategic Framework for Women’s Enterprise*, the lack of theory about women’s enterprise policy limited decision-making about who benefitted, from what type of intervention, and what types of program assistance were required. Wilson et al. (2004) attribute the decision to support gender mainstreaming versus segmented or women-focused interventions to the lack of gender-disaggregated data, concluding that SME policies place the onus of change on individuals rather than gendered and racist institutional structures. These observations suggest that SME recovery policies must be redirected from placing the burden of change on women entrepreneurs to changes needed to support gender-inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystems.

Consultation processes to enact change through gender-inclusive SME policies are also described as problematic. In informing SME policies, for example, governments tend to award research and advisory contracts to large consultancies (Henry et al., 2018). These practices circumvent feminist and grassroots advocates who have called for policy reforms. While global consultancies provide political credibility, recommendations tend to reinforce the status quo by employing apolitical and ahistorical lenses to inform on response measures, and without consideration of intersectional influences that reinforce women’s subordination (Rao & Sandler, 2016). Even when grassroots stakeholders help governments to establish policy goals, they are often poorly resourced, lack clout to hold governments accountable, and are rarely included in structures that oversee policy reforms (UN Women, 2018).

Mukhopadhyay (2016, p. 86) observes that SME policies then evade structural issues, substituting focus about gender equality and women’s economic empowerment with “a plethora of frameworks, tools and checklists” to aid bureaucrat processes. A lack of consultation privileges men and white, middle class, heterosexual women over other ethnic, racialized or non-heterosexual identities (Coleman et al., 2019). To inform gender-responsive SME policies, advocates and scholars have called for broad and transparent consultations, as small business policy expertise does not necessarily coincide with gender or feminist expertise. It is also important to avoid conflating feminist and gender experts (Rao & Sandler, 2016; Sandler, 2015). Engagement with grassroot organisations also creates opportunities to build ‘by women, for women’ SME policy expertise.

Similar arguments have been advanced about gendered innovation policies that waste intellectual resources (Berglund et al., 2010; Alsos et al., 2013) and diminish women’s innovative and economic contributions (Ljunggren & Aksos, 2010). Multi-country studies report, for example, that women are less likely to engage in the use of small business and innovation support intermediaries, such as accelerators and incubators compared to men (Davidson & Hume, 2020; International Finance Corporation, 2020). This discussion is relevant as such intermediaries are often conduits of SME policies and sources of technical, financial, and psychological support for struggling entrepreneurs during the pandemic.

Yet across countries studies indicate that women entrepreneurs experience fewer benefits from publicly-funded small business and innovation assistance programs (Aspen Network of Development Entrepreneurs, 2019). Investment favor larger and older companies “the companies least likely to be in need of support” (Dalziel et al., 2014, p. 7). Gendered differentials are evidenced in innovation funding targeted at industry clusters (Institute for Competitiveness and Prosperity, 2019) and digital technology adoption programs (Orser et al., 2019) outside of where most women-owned businesses. The European Commission (EC) (2013) documents the implications of not employing a gender lens in policy design. Illustrative impacts included errors in machine translation, in basic research (e.g., failure to use samples of male and female cells that yield faulty research results) and in medical innovations (EC, 2013).

In responding to the low engagement of women compared to men in assistance programs, leaders in the United States convey that they would like to become more inclusive but “are unsure of how to do so effectively” (J.P. Morgan Chase & Co., 2016, p. 1). Similarly, Canadian leaders cite limited knowledge about the ways that women entrepreneurs can be better engaged (Orser et al., 2019).

Evidence of gender biases in assumptions to underlie SME policies does not bode well for the ability of governments to meet commitments to ‘build back better ‘through inclusive recovery measures. This point is exemplified in perceptions of strategies to mitigate the absence of women as beneficiaries of innovation policy. Rowe (2018) reports, in a cross-cultural study of Canadian and Swedish innovation policies, on a widely held perception among policymakers that gendered exclusion is voluntary rather than the product of systemic factors. In both countries, men policymakers and academics were more likely to attribute gender disparities to a lack of interest among women participants. Conversely, women were more likely to attribute structural inequalities as a contributing cause. To achieve parity, men participants favored incremental change while women favored structural change and measures such as quotas. These findings reveal assumptions that underlie gendered policies and measures that target women rather than institutional structures (Foss et al., 2019; Coleman et al., 2019). To address bias in policy, The Institute for Competitiveness and Prosperity (2019) has called for standing advisory councils and private, public, and civil society partnerships with a recognition of feminist, equity, sector, and trade expertise.

Optimism about the ability of governments to undertake *policy process innovations* is, however, warranted. At the outset of the pandemic, procurement officers worked diligently to modify rules-based contracting protocols to secure urgently needed products and services. Agile SMEs produced vital goods, such as personal protective equipment and sanitizers. Procurement practices demonstrate the opportunity for policy process innovations with respect to recovery (UN WE Empower 2020; W20, 2020). Process innovations demonstrate that procedural reforms that stymie women-focused SME contracting or supplier diversity initiatives have less to do with legal and trade restrictions enacted through multi-lateral trade agreements and other policy restrictions (rationales used to dismiss reforms to support women-owned SMEs) than with a lack of urgency, bureaucratic priority, and political will. Strategic SME procurement holds promise as a means to support women entrepreneurs (Chatham House, 2020; WE Empower 2020; W20 2020).

A related entrepreneurship policy domain is sectoral feminist policies. Sectoral feminist policies associated with women’s entrepreneurship include *feminist international assistance* and *feminist trade policy*. Enacted by Sweden (in 2014), Canada (in 2017), and Mexico (in 2020),[[2]](#footnote-2) feminist international assistance targets funding to benefit girls and women (Thompson & Clement, 2019). This includes women-owned SMEs, women-led businesses and self-employed women. Underscoring these measures is the objective to address gender inequalities within households, communities, institutions, legal systems, and markets (Thomson, 2020). Canadian international assistance policy, for example, is based on principles of treating women’s economic empowerment as an end in itself, supporting women’s agency and inclusive decision-making, investing in feminist collective organizations, incorporating intersectionality, recognizing intersectionality of economic inequality, and ensuring data collection and accountability (Tiessen, 2019). Under current provisions, 95% of Canadian international assistance investments must integrate gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls by 2021.

*Feminist trade policies* enacted by Sweden (in 2019) and Canada (2021) seek to enhance market access, adjust tariffs that tend to be disproportionately higher on goods consumed by women compared to goods consumed by men, create gender-balanced trade activities (e.g., export promotion and delegations), and mandate gender-based assessment of trade agreements (Government of Offices of Sweden, 2019).

At this time, feminist trade and international assistance policies remain aspirational. Scholars report on deficiencies, such as vague terms of what constitutes ‘feminist’ within policy, ambiguous investment criteria, and the use of the binary definition of gender negating gender-diverse people (Tiessen, 2019). Again, lack of consultation is reported, “input and advice from local organizations that are aware of marginalization, as well as from individuals who have lived the experience of inequality and understand its local context” (Tiessen, 2019, n.p.).

To encapsulate the lessons learned, the next section describes the structure employed in this study to identify and demarcate the initial inventory of entrepreneurial feminist policy parameters identified in the literature.

## 2.4 Parameters of feminist entrepreneurship policy

To clarify elements of policy, Kilty (2014) advances three themes of feminist policies: *positionality* (defined as recognizing differences among women and the situatedness of their oppressions); *politics* (defined as politicizing social, economic, scientific, and legal issues through deliberate action); and *praxis* (defined as working to enact social change regarding the politicized social, economic, scientific, and legal issues). To inform the research question, good practices identified in the entrepreneurship literature that characterize each of the three themes are now advanced.

### 2.4.1 Positionality

*Positionality* (P1) identifies intersectional influences among genders, gendered processes of business ownership (Calás et al., 2007; 2009), and masculinization and feminization of venture creation (Bird & Brush, 2002; Bruni et al., 2004; Neergaard et al., 2011). This infers *repositioning* gender in the design of policy to “get back the political project” (Mukhopadhyay, 2016, p. 86). Positionality is evidenced in the situatedness of oppression and hence, the need to engage multiple policy domains (such as, innovation, trade, finance, and broadband), employing broad definitions of innovation, and honouring innovations important to women and women’s innovative contributions (Ljunggren & Aksos, 2010; Rowe, 2018). Positionality also infers centering gender equality, women’s economic empowerment and LGBTQ2+ rights as underlying elements of entrepreneurship policy, acknowledging intersectional influences that situate subordination (Koen, 1984; Oxfam, 2010; Ahl & Nelson, 2014; Pettersson et al., 2017).

To do so necessitates acknowledgement of power differentials (Manolova et al., 2020), and strategies to redress power differentials within entrepreneurial ecosystems, including social norms, political, and economic structures and cultural conditions that perpetuate inequalities (Institute for Competitiveness & Prosperity, 2019; IFC, 2020; Harcourt, 2016).

These characteristics of good practice build upon arguments about gendered processes within venture creation and occupational stereotypes that impact opportunity recognition and enterprise performance, including the 5Ms: markets, money, management, motherhood, and meso/macro environments (Bird & Brush, 2002; Brush et al., 2009, 2010; Lewis, 2014). This lends to leveraging opportunities to influence multiple policy outcomes, including individual, material, perceptual, contextual and relational impacts, recognising women’s economic empowerment is an end in itself (Mayoux, 2000; Ahl & Nelson, 2010; Nelson, 2014; Oxfam, 2019).

## 2.4.2 Politics

Action is a hallmark of entrepreneurial feminism. Politics reflects the politicizing of social, economic, scientific, and legal issues through *deliberate action*.This includes feminist actions that are evidenced through endeavors that respect women’s experience as a valid knowledge base ‘in its own right’ (Calás & Smircich, 1989, p. 7) and consortia activities and reporting to inform policy. *Politics* calls for transparent and inclusive consultation processes to inform policy strategies (Cirera & Qursum, 2014). Politics is echoed in the assertion of ‘Nothing about us without us’ (Weber, 2016; Herbert, 2017).

Key parameters identified in the literature that reflect good practice actions include: policies/legislation to promote gender equality and empowerment of women and girls, such as mandated use of gender/sex-disaggregated data to report on the status of UN SDGs Goal 5; and enhanced access to economic resources. Reporting using gender disaggregated data links to holding intermediaries accountable for engaging diverse women entrepreneurs (Marlow et al., 2008; Tiessen, 2019; UN Women, 2018; UN WE Empower 2020; W20 2020). Actions benefit from coherent and integrated policy frameworks across all domains that impact women-identified entrepreneurs, including small businesses, innovation, trade, income protection, healthcare, gender-based violence, financial/digital literacy, public procurement, and caregiving (Oxfam, 2018; Chatham House, 2020; WE Empower 2020).

## 2.4.3 Praxis

*Praxis* is defined as working to *enact* social change. Social change is a product of advocacy and building communities of interest such as women-focused capital funds and women-focused mentoring programs. Two key parameters were identified with the literature that align with this theme. One is the need to fund ecosystem intermediaries including women-focused small business and innovation intermediaries: feminist, grassroots, collective, co-operative, and social enterprises that target marginalised entrepreneurs (Rao & Sander, 2016; Oxfam, 2018; Henry et al., 2018; Coleman et al., 2019). The second is the need to create mechanisms that enable women to act as change agents and to re-create rules of marketplaces. Support market exchanges predicated on economic, social and utilitarian outcomes, including co-operatives, social enterprises, non-profits, and hybrid enterprises (Nelson, 2014; Orser & Elliott, 2015; Lewis, 2014; Harquail, 2019).

Under each of the three themes (or Ps), Table 1 summarizes the key parameters associated with gender-responsive SME measures identified in the entrepreneurship literature. Having completed this second step of the research, the next section outlines the qualitative analysis employed to assess the extent to which each of three feminist pandemic recovery plans embody the proposed parameters of gender-inclusive entrepreneurship policy.

[INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

# 3.0 Qualitative analyses

To examine the extent to which feminist pandemic recovery plans embody the parameters identified in second step of this study, the research design employed thematic assessment of three feminist grassroots recovery plans that seek to support gender-responsive recovery measures. Selection criteria included all ‘feminist recovery plans’ identified in North America during this third step of this study (April to October 2020). None of the plans were used to generate the parameters of feminist policy identified above. The geo-political focus of North America provided the opportunity to contrast policy recommendations targeted at two extremely different conservative (United States) and liberal (Canada) governments.

Recovery plan 1 (C1) was published by the United States Hawai’i State Commission: *Building bridges, not walking on backs* (2020). Recovery plan 2 (C2) was published by the YWCA (Young Women’s Christian’s Association) and the University of Toronto, *A feminist economic recovery plan for Canada: Making the economy work for everyone* (Sultana & Ravanera, 2020). Recovery plan 3 (C3) was published by Feminists Deliver, a grassroots coalition in British Columbia (Canada), *This economic labour hurts the arch of our backs: A feminist economic recovery plan for COVID-19* (2020). The first plan was therefore produced by a state government body, the second by a non-profit and a university, and the third by a feminist grassroots collaboration. It was expected that the three feminist recovery plans would offer a broad range of SME policy recommendations.

## 3.1 Coding process

Thematic content analysis was employed as an efficient and non-intrusive means to access “individual and collective structures such as values, intentions, attitudes, and cognitions” (Kabanoff et al. (1995) as cited in Duriau et al., 2007, p. 6). Coding entailed one experienced coder who adhered to guidelines specified by Harding and Whitehead (2013). Specifically, each of the three recovery plans was reviewed in the thematic context of the parameters advanced in the second step of this study. Analysis entailed dividing the data into abstract codes to identify and label recurrent words, themes and concepts: “scanning paragraphs for units of meaning relevant to answering the research question which are then denoted (or abstracted) into descriptive codes (Harding and Whitehead, 2013, p. 133). The manual first cycle coding process included phrases, full sentences, and single paragraph blocks of text. Following line-by-line coding and scanning of paragraphs, the abstracted codes were grouped or categorized and a tentative label allocated. Subsequent coding cycles broke down content into smaller bodies of texts. Keywords of text content were used to compare alignment with the ten parameters identified in the broader entrepreneurship literature. Third order domains, second order themes, and first order illustrative verbatim statements were identified. Refinement of the feminist principles and processes was ongoing. Having completed this phase of the qualitative analysis, cross-case comparisons were undertaken to identify differences and similarities or generalizations among the three recovery plans and two geographic contexts. This required the researcher to return to the data for further iterative analysis until meaning-making occurs.

The thematic analytical technique employed is deemed “particularly useful for certain specific approaches, such as phenomenology” where the researcher is encouraged to use this style ‘free-form’ to guide analysis (Harding and Whitehead, 2013). The analysis was undertaken between June 2020 and October 2020. Findings of the qualitative analysis are presented in Table 2 in chronological reference to the principles of entrepreneurial feminism specified in Table 1. Summative insights follow.

INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

# 3.2 *Analyses*

*Parameter 1. Center policy on equity, inclusion and empowerment*

Rationales for feminist COVID-19 policy recommendations identified in the recovery plans differed from insights drawn from the broader entrepreneurship literature. Root causes of gender inequality cited in the feminist recovery plans were more expansive. Causes were attributed to colonization, sexism, ableism, patriarchy, homophobia, bi phobia, queer phobia, White supremacy, systemic racism, colonialism, capitalism, heteronormativity, and forms of structural discrimination and violence. Motives for reporting differed across the recovery plans. C1 sought to address gendered omissions in previously published economic recovery plans: *Hawai’i economic and community recovery & resiliency plan*, and an unspecified report by the University of Hawaii Economic Research Organization. Neither plan was seen to incorporate the concerns of women and girls. The motive of C2 was to “support policies which enable the decolonization and Indigenizing of COVID-19 recovery efforts.” C3 was motived by the release of C1 and a complementary feminist anthology.[[3]](#footnote-3) All recovery plans identified the need to ‘re-value’ (C1) and address ‘de-valuing’ of women’s work (C2) with social well-being as the economic priority (C1). None sought to ‘return to normal’ as per the United Nations (UN) (2020) recommendation to build more equal, inclusive and sustainable economies.

## Parameter 2. Redress power differentials

Within the recovery plans, marginalized and disadvantaged women were identified as particularly vulnerable to the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic. Disproportionate effects were attributed to high rates of employment in essential services, such as, the “5Cs: caring, cashiering, catering, cleaning and clerical functions” (C2, p. 1); employment in sectors characterized by mass layoffs and job loss; increase incidences of gender-based violence, sex trafficking, sexual harassment, and coercion by landlords; and less access to shelter and healthcare (e.g., maternal, neo-natal, family planning), safe housing due to gender-based violence, healthy food and clean water (C2).

## Parameter 3. Recognize gendered processes in venture creation

Policy recommendations of the three feminist recovery plans clustered under seven themes: importance of addressing root causes of inequality; need to invest in social and economic outcomes; economic security; enhancing access to economic resources; investment in infrastructure; inclusive decision-making; and the need for gender disaggregated data to inform policy. Policy recommendations associated with self-employment and small businesses focused primarily on: provision of emergency relief funding; education, training and skills development; investment in “women-majority” sectors (e.g., caregiving, essential work) and social value ventures; and public SME procurement. C2 (Canada), for example, recommended “minimum set-asides in public procurement spending (e.g., 15%) towards businesses led by women, racialized people, and other equity-seeking groups” (p. 24). In C1 (situated in the State of Hawai’i) recommended 20% pro rata share of the COVID-19-response funds in trust for their express recovery needs, “which would help lift Native Hawaiian women.” All feminist recovery plans emphasized the need for stakeholder consultations and specified funding to support Indigenous peoples. Policy domains to assist in recovery were therefore more expansive than those identified in the literature.

## Parameter 4. Honour innovations important to women

Policy priorities with the feminist recovery plans reflected between country differences, such as investment in different sectors and affordable healthcare. C1, for example, emphasized divesting away from military, tourism and luxury accommodation, and increasing investment in childhood education, healthcare (e.g., midwifery, maternal, and neo-natal care), eldercare, shelter, and access to digital technology. C2 (Canada) emphasized investment in essential and care work, funding to address gender-based violence, and the need to bolster small businesses and strengthen social infrastructure. C3 focused on energy and trade, key sectors of Western Canada. Only one recovery plan made reference to innovation policy. Consistent with Principle 4 (Table 1) C3 noted, “Many *innovations* have been led by women and by Black, Indigenous and People of Colour, who have been demonstrating sustainable models for a more inclusive economy for many years.”

## Parameter 5. Support non-economic impacts of policy

The feminist recovery plans sought multiple social and economic outcomes from policy intervention, reflected in perceptual, contextual, and relational outcomes. This is consistent with parameter 5.

## Parameter 6. Monitor policy using gender-disaggregated data

Consistent with the approach employed in this study, the three recovery plans called for more gender disaggregated data, including “intersectional social identities” (C2). To guide data collection and reporting, several commissions and advisory bodies were referenced. C1 cited state obligations to Native Hawaiians (known as the Kanaka Maoli) (*Public land trust revenue guidelines*). C2 cited obligations under *Truth and reconciliation commission of Canada*: *Calls to action* (2015) and UN assertions of colonisation and genocide. C3 cited the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. Calls to Action* and the *United Nations declaration on the rights of Indigenous People* (UNDRIP).

## Parameter 7. Construct coherent policy frameworks

Feminist recovery recommendations incorporated education, health, ecology, health, childcare, employment insurance, sick days and family leave, and skills development and training. No reference was made to international assistance or foreign trade policies.

## Parameter 8. Facilitate change as a collective process

Lack of consultation with marginalized and disadvantaged groups in the provision of early COVID-19 relief measures was described as inequitable and discriminatory. C1 called for gender balance in economic recovery task forces and need to establish a Gender Advisory Council.

## Parameter 9. Leverage feminist, gender, women’s enterprise policy expertise

Legitimacy to speak on behalf of women was signalled in the description of the consolation processes, the size and scope of the commissioning agency (e.g., C2: YWCA and University of Toronto, Institute for Gender and the Economy) and lists of contributors (C3). Investment recommendations targeted organisations that advance gender equity, intersectional feminism, women’s rights, gender-based violence, child/eldercare, and mental and maternal health care.

## Parameter 10. Create mechanisms for women to be change agents

Enhancing *economic security* was associated with access to unemployment relief benefits, credentialization of newcomers and migrant workers, and tax schemes that amortize personal and household earnings. Recommendations included lowering employment insurance eligibility criteria, job protection for disabled workers, increasing minimum wage rates, recognition of migrants’ foreign credentials, and employment benefits, such as paid sick days and family leave. Tax regulations focused on the need to adjust after-tax earnings, as tax schedules were deemed to be discriminatory to women and particularly, low-income earners (e.g., restructuring tax rates to adjust for after-tax income “for all but the richest 10%” (C2, p. 10)).

All three feminist recovery plans emphasized business and market exchange models predicated on social value, such as cooperatives, social value enterprises, non-profits, and hybrid enterprises. C1 (State of Hawai’i, 2020) recommended that displaced workers be reemployed in “worker-owned cooperatives and other methods to share income generated more equitably” (p. 3). C2 recommended funding to: (a) increase awareness of cooperative business models; (b) create tools to convert businesses [assumed for-profit] to cooperatives; and (c) empower the Business Development Bank of Canada [a crown corporation focusing on SMEs] to “support co-operative conversions” (p. 24). C3 recommended investment in self-entrepreneurship, “social entrepreneurs,” and cooperative enterprises.

# 4. Discussion of findings

The qualitative step of this research identifies gaps between the parameters of entrepreneurial feminism advanced in this study and policy priorities cited in the recovery plans. Interestingly, while all three feminist recovery plans emphasized economic and social security within paid employment, few policy recommendations sought to address loss of self-employment earnings, particularly among women who own for-profit enterprises. Parameters of entrepreneurial feminism aligned with self-employment status received nominal focus, including: acknowledging gendered processes within venture creation, innovation, engineering, and R&D, and occupational stereotypes that impact opportunity recognition and enterprise performance (Brush et al., 2009); employing inclusive definitions of innovation, honoring innovations important to women and women’s innovative contributions; and constructing coherent and integrated policy frameworks across all domains that impact women-identified entrepreneurs, including: small business; innovation; trade; income protection; healthcare; gender-based violence; financial and digital literacy; procurement; and caregiving. Only one recovery plan (C2) included a section titled “Bolstering small business.” While the recovery plans emphasized historically marginalized groups of entrepreneurs, few recommendations focused on established SMEs. It was not made clear how the needs of communities of women differ (e.g., immigrant, Indigenous women, and women who are Black).

The dearth of measures for self-employed women in the feminist recovery plans may be a product of the consultations process as there appeared to be limited engagement with for-profit women small business owners or leaders of women’s enterprise support organizations. Absence may reflect perceptions about capitalism as a mechanism that undermines gender equality. C1 illustrates this point: “Social capital of interpersonal relationships, a shared sense of identity, a shared understanding, shared norms, shared values, trust, cooperation, and reciprocity must form the heart of our new economic system beyond capitalism.” It may be that feminist collectives are unfamiliar with entrepreneurial feminism or that feminist policies are an emergent area of expertise. As such, recommendations about *how* recovery policies can support women entrepreneurs were weak. These observations provide further evidence that diverse women entrepreneurs need a seat at *all* tables when formulating SME recovery and other entrepreneurship policies.

It appears that *social value models* of enterprise are the de facto model of entrepreneurship within the feminist recovery plans. Omission of policy recommendations to support for-profit women-owned SMEs and self-employed women is not without consequence. The absence of policy recommendations overlooks a large cadre of women who are affected by the pandemic. Policy focus to encourage business start-up and the transformation of for-profit to cooperative or social enterprises is worthy of consultation. Such directives fail to recognize the precarious nature of start-ups, particularly among vulnerable groups of people. Research also finds that individuals with prosocial motivations are less likely to evolve their ideas to operational status compared to conventional, for-profit entrepreneurs (Renko, 2012). Encouraging women to transform from for-profit to non-profit ventures is inconsistent with arguments that criticize the ‘warehousing’ of women in non-profit and social sectors while leaving the for-profit sectors to men. The approach leads to lower levels of influence and economic empowerment for women. As such, caution is warranted in driving recovery through measures predicated on increasing the number of self-employed women or investing in social enterprises without advisement about the liabilities of newness and rates of discontinuance or bankruptcy due to the pandemic. SME recovery policies must also be sensitive to program qualifying criteria (e.g., size of firm), and types of enterprise (e.g., inclusion of both social value and for-profit).

Given the low engagement of women compared to men in innovation intermediaries, it is not surprising that all three recovery plans called for targeted funding to women-focused enterprise organizations. The recovery plans also cited need to account for historic devaluation of caregiving through the provision for quality and affordable daycare, eldercare, sick days, and maternal healthcare. Recommendations to embed *motherhood* (e.g., maternal, neonatal healthcare); *parenting* (e.g., leave, home schooling); and *family* (e.g., child, eldercare) mirror recommendations advanced by UN Women (2020), UN WE Empower (2020), and W20 (2020) and earlier by scholars (Bird & Brush, 2002; Aldrich & Cliff, 2003; Brush et al., 2009, 2010). These recommendations align with the literature that identifies domestic responsibilities facing women entrepreneurs during the pandemic (Manolova et al., 2020).

The regional contexts of entrepreneurship (Welter, 2011), including sector, temporal, historical (e.g., colonization) and regulatory influences were evidenced within each plan. C1 (State of Hawai’i) emphasized the presence of military, tourism, and luxury real estate, and access to affordable healthcare (e.g., midwifery, maternal, and neo-natal). C3 emphasized energy and trade, leading sectors in Western Canada. C2 referenced Indigenous Services Canada water advisories notifications on Indigenous reserves, noting issues of sanitation and housing insecurity that have become particularly acute during the pandemic. Few references were made to healthcare in C2 and C3 compared to C1, likely a function of universal healthcare in Canada.

The analysis presented evidence that information sharing is needed to increase solidarity, clarify policy jurisdictions and enhance understanding about the roles and contributions of stakeholders within entrepreneurial ecosystems. Ideological differences that reflect legitimacy to speak on behalf of women entrepreneurs were noted. Collectively, insights drawn from the entrepreneurship literature and qualitative content analysis inform the conceptualization of a Feminist entrepreneurship policy framework.

# 4.1 *Feminist entrepreneurship policy framework*

The feminist entrepreneurship policy framework (Figure 1) integrates insights advanced in this study to inform gender-responsive SME recovery. Aligned with the UN Women (2020) recommendation to position women’s economic lives at the center of recovery interventions, framework recognizes overlapping identity factors that constrain women. The parameters that demarcate entrepreneurial feminist policies are incorporated. Illustrative SME recovery measures are listed. Social, economic, material, and perceptual outcomes are also identified. Aligned with entrepreneurial feminism, prioritized measures include provision to increase access to economic resources (such as, financial capital, Internet, and ICT software), facilitate access to markets via trade promotion, strategic SME contracting, and investment to strengthen knowledge about the gendered nature of venture. Provisions to support care work acknowledges the association among well-being, business performance and access to education, healthcare and child/eldercare. Investment priorities target women-focused and feminist centers, networks, accelerators, and incubators.

The purpose of the framework is to guide the process and design of gender-inclusive SME recovery measures. The framework can also be used to help assess mainstream and women’s enterprise policies and programs, presenting a robust inventory of feminist value-driven SME policy options. The listed options may motivate discussions about opportunities to move beyond recovery measures predicated on ‘entrepreneurship as positive economic activity’ and assumptions of ‘one size fits all’ measures to support diverse women entrepreneurs.

Boundaries of the conceptual framework are notable. While the parameters of *positionality* (recognizing gendered contexts of oppression), *politics* (change through deliberate actions to drive policy reforms), and *praxis* (enacting social change) have universal relevance to the UN (2020) call for gender-responsive policies, prioritization of specific policies or interventions will differ across geo-political and cultural contexts. The profile of historically disadvantaged women differ across countries and between regions. Cultural nuances will also impact recovery investment priorities. For example, the perceived value of publicly funded child and eldercare may differ across cultural context. In some societies, caregiving is viewed as solely a family rather than government responsibility. Types of enterprises and scale of investments will differ, from petty traders who require micro-finance to women who operate SMEs that require substantial capital. The perceive value of strategic SME procurement likely depends on levels of corruption among procurement officers.

To illustrate the relevance of the parameters and conceptual framework, an assessment of Canada’s *Women Entrepreneurship Strategy* is presented in the appendix [upon peer-review, supplementary materials]. Canada was selected as the government is described as progressive with respect to women’s enterprise policy. The structure serves to also illustrate how feminist-driven recovery measures differ from women’s enterprise policies predicated on entrepreneurship as economic growth (Calás, et al., 2007).

## 4.2 Study limitations

Several study limitations are noted. The study design employed did not capture bureaucratic boundary patrolling practices that stymie policy design (Lamont & Molnár, 2002), such as the lack of government accountability, absence of gender-based analysis, and limited consultation to identify intersectional influences within SME policy design. The study design does not incorporate the experiences or intentions of policymakers. At times, the literature review positions women against men as the dominant group (e.g., level of engagement of women compared to men in innovation support intermediaries). Such comparisons subjugate women-identified entrepreneurs to secondary status against men and masculine norms, support “othering” of women (Richard, 2020) lending to “boundary maintenance” where “durable inequality most often results from cumulative, individual, and often unnoticed organisational processes” (Lamont and Molnár, 2002, p. 176). The analyses was limited to three recovery plans from two countries. Applicability of the parameters likely differ across geographic, political, cultural, language, and other contexts. Interpreter bias in the reporting of findings cannot be ruled out (Van de Ven & Johnson, 2006). To address these limitations opportunities for future research are considered.

4.3 *Implications for future research*

Scholars note that research focusing on feminism and enterprise policy is an emergent area of academic inquiry (Henry et al., 2018; Foss et al., 2019; Coleman et al., 2019). Research is needed to examine further system-level barriers that hamper women entrepreneurs’ economic empowerment and gender equality. This study identifies several areas for consideration. The parameters of entrepreneurial feminism require examination in different policy, cultural, and geo-political contexts. Research is needed to investigate the gendered nature of ecosystem infrastructure. Research about caregiving and enterprise performance—a gendered association evidenced in the impacts of pandemic on women entrepreneurs—is also needed. The findings suggest that attention might focus on advisory processes of governments to inform policy design, particularly measures that seek to address gender-regressive impacts of the pandemic. Attention is warranted in demarcating the parameters of trade, international assistance and other policy domains situated within alternative feminist perspectives.

5. Conclusion

The study findings demonstrate that supplanting ‘feminist’ for ‘women’ in SME policies, without specifications of *how* parameters differ, dilute efforts to achieve the UN SDG 5 goals of gender quality and women’s economic empowerment. The review of literature provides evidence that most entrepreneurship policies do not yet incorporate theory. SME policies tend to be framed by men or by decision-making bodies dominated and controlled by men. Within SME recovery policies, it is not surprising that the particular needs of women are not evidenced in theory or practice. Development of pandemic recovery measures offers a significant opportunity to make palpable socio-economic changes in society. Recognizing this opportunity, the United Nations (UN), in April 2020, reported on the gendered impacts of the pandemic and has called for measures “to build more equal, inclusive and sustainable economies and societies. …This includes gender-responsive economic and social policies and placing women’s economic lives at the heart of the pandemic response and recovery plans” (UN, 2020a, p. 5). Women-owned SMEs and other marginalized groups of entrepreneurs are the canaries in a coal mine within government mandates to ‘build back better.’

Purpose-built measures that position women at the “heart” of recovery policies are the litmus test of the abilities of governments to move beyond policies that privilege some stakeholders or that are predicated on dated stereotypes and misperceptions about women entrepreneurs. To inform recovery SME policies, the *feminist entrepreneurship policy framework* challenges the epistemological orientation of relief measures, including SME policies predicted solely on economic outcomes. Policymakers, scholars, and advocates can employ the parameters of good practice and conceptual framework identified in this study to guide policy development and to ensure that recovery measures effect outcomes that align with the UN SDG 5 goals of women economic empowerment and gender equality.

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Table 1. Parameters of feminist entrepreneurship policy

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | |  | |  |
| Elements of feminist policya | | Parameters of good practice with respect to  gender-responsive SME policies | | Illustrative sources | | |
| **Positionality** Recognise gendered contexts of oppression | | P1. Centre gender equality, women’s economic empowerment and LGBTQ2+ rights as underlying elements of entrepreneurship policy, acknowledging intersectional influences that situate subordination. | | Koen, 1984; Oxfam, 2010; Ahl & Nelson, 2014; Pettersson et al., 2017 | |
| P2. Redress power differentials within entrepreneurial ecosystems, including social norms, political, and economic structures and cultural conditions that perpetuate inequalities. | | Institute for Competitiveness & Prosperity, 2019; IFC, 2020; Harcourt, 2016 | |
| P3. Acknowledge gendered processes within venture creation and occupational stereotypes that impact opportunity recognition and enterprise performance, including the 5Ms: markets, money,  management, motherhood, and meso/macro environments. | | Bird & Brush, 2002; Brush et al., 2009, 2010; Lewis, 2014; Orser & Elliott, 2015 | |
|  | | P4. Employ broad and inclusive definitions of innovation, honouring innovations important to women and women’s innovative contributions. | | Ljunggren & Aksos, 2010; Rowe, 2018 | |
|  | | P5. Leverage opportunities to influence multiple policy outcomes, including individual, material, perceptual, contextual and relational impacts, recognising women’s economic empowerment is an end in itself. | | Mayoux, 2000; Ahl & Nelson, 2010; Nelson, 2014; Oxfam, 2019 | |
| **Politics** Politicking through deliberate actions to drive policy reform | | P6. Mandate gender/sex-disaggregated data to enable reporting on UN SDGs Goal 5: equal access to economic resources, digital technologies and policies/legislation to promote gender equality and empowerment of women and girls, including holding small business intermediaries accountable for engaging diverse women entrepreneurs. | | Marlow et al., 2008; EU, 2013; Tiessen, 2019; UN Women, 2018; UN WE Empower 2020; W20 2020 | |
| P7. Construct coherent and integrated policy frameworks across all domains that impact women-identified entrepreneurs, including small businesses, innovation, trade, income protection, healthcare, gender-based violence, financial/digital literacy, public procurement, and caregiving. | | Oxfam, 2018; Chatham House, 2020; WE Empower 2020 | |
| P8. Facilitate broad and meaningful consultations: policy reform must be collective process to understand multiple contexts of subordination. Leverage feminist, gender, women’s enterprise and policy expertise in policy design and funding decisions: “Nothing about us, without us.” | | Cirera & Qursum, 2014; Weber, 2016; Herbert, 2017 | |
| **Praxis**  Enacting social change for others | | P9. Fund ecosystem intermediaries including women-focused small business and innovation intermediaries: feminist, grassroots, collective, co-operative, and social enterprises that target marginalised entrepreneurs. | | Rao & Sander, 2016; Oxfam, 2018; Henry et al., 2018; Coleman et al., 2019 | |
| P10: Create mechanisms that enable women to act as change agents and to re-create rules of marketplaces. Support market exchanges predicated on economic, social and utilitarian outcomes, including co-operatives, social enterprises, non-profits, and hybrid enterprises. | | Nelson, 2014; Orser & Elliott, 2015; Lewis, 2014; Harquail, 2019 | |

1. Elements adapted from Kilty (2014) and Kilty and Crépault (2016).

Table 2. Gender-responsive pandemic recovery measures

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **First order: verbatim statements** | **2nd order: Subthemes** | **3rd order: Domains** |
| ... implement recovery strategies rooted in intersectional feminism, anti-oppression and decolonisation (C3) | Recognise root causes of oppression | Intersectional influences |
| Increase awareness of different business models such as co-operative enterprises which privilege voluntary and open membership; democratic member control and member economic participation. (C1) | Alternative business models | Invest in social and economic outcomes |
| Increased support and investment in social entrepreneurs, social cooperatives, and social enterprises (C3) | Shared value enterprises |  |
| Lower the uniform national eligibility requirement of Employment Insurance to 360 hours and increase the benefit rate from 55% to 85% of earnings for low-income earners. (C1) | Criteria for unemployment insurance eligibility | Economic security |
| Raise the minimum wage...improve income assistance rates; respond to the demands for migrants’ rights including recognising foreign credentials, full status for all, providing paid sick days and paid family leave. | Minimum wages, foreign credentials |  |
| Targeted support to business owners from underrepresented groups...in the form of emergency funding, as well as skills training and mentorship. (C1) | Targeted relief funding |  |
| Legislate at least 14 paid sick days and paid family leave for all workers. (C1) | Benefits: sick days, parental leave |  |
| Direct funding to businesses in women-majority sectors. (C1) | Targeted sector funding |  |
| Legislate job protection for individuals with disabilities who are unable to fulfill job duties due to the risk of contracting COVID-19 as well as systemic barriers such as lack of access to accessible transportation. (C1) | Job protection for disabled |  |
| Create minimum set-asides in public procurement spending (e.g., 15%) towards businesses led by women… | Access to markets | Access to economic resources |
| Equitable access to jobs, training, and education opportunities, and that they gain long-term sustainable benefits from economic development projects. (C1) | Access to jobs, training and education |  |
| Pay for retraining and professional development across sectors for those who have experienced job loss through EI. For people who are not eligible for EI, create other pathways to financially support re-skilling and re-training with greater incentives for workers in care-economy based sectors such as child care and elder care (C1) | Reskilling, professional development |  |
| Address the digital divide in Canada with meaningful subsidies and commit to realising 100% national broadband access, especially in rural, remote, and Northern communities. (C1) | Access to Internet |  |
| Enhance women, sexual and gender minorities’ access to capital outside the commercial sex industry and women’s access to jobs in male-dominated industries: green-technologies and trade jobs. (C3) | Access to financial capital |  |
| **First order: verbatim statements** | **2nd order: Subthemes** | **3rd order: Domains** |
| Invest in organisations that advance gender equity, intersectional feminism, and women’s rights in Canada through investments in core multi-year funding. (C1) | Capacity building among women’s organisations | Infrastructure support |
| An investment in care supports not only children and families, but also economic development overall. | Support for caregiving |  |
| Shifting and adjusting funds for re-training in sustainable sectors such as green jobs, trades, and self-entrepreneurship. (C3) | Investment in retraining |  |
| Core funding needs to be allocated to community-based organisations which play a crucial role in the prevention and intervention of ending violence. (C3) | Address gender-based violence |  |
| No cuts to social services, including services for domestic violence and for maternal, sexual, reproductive, mental health, and child care. (C3) | Sustain social, child and healthcare services |  |
| Restructuring domestic tax rates and tax paying units. (C1) | Restructure tax regimes |  |
| Increase awareness of co-operative business models and create tools to support businesses that want to convert to this model including empowering the Business Development Bank of Canada to support co-operative conversions. (C1) | Mandate development bank to support collective and social enterprises |  |
| Gender balance in national COVID-19 economic recovery task forces, and establishing a Gender Advisory Council. (C1) | Engage women in consultation | Inclusive decision-making |
| Mandate the collection of disaggregated data on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic along these multiple dimensions of social identities. (C1) | Disaggregated data | Evidence-based policy |



**[Supplementary materials to journal article]**

**Appendix A. Definitions of key terms**

*Gender* refers to a culturally entrenched understanding of behavior, role expectations, conventions, and norms. This study uses an inclusive definition of gender, including individuals who are cis, femme, non-binary and Two-Spirit people (that is people who embody male and female and sometimes intersex qualities). The definition responds to a shortcoming in the literature when gender is proxied by binary variables predicated on sex (Ahl & Nelson, 2010). *Inclusion* means achieving equity and ensuring self-worth and sense of belonging” (Cerna, 2020, n.p.).

*Intersectional* refers to identities, structures and context that lend to discrimination, a metaphor to enhance understanding about how aspects of a person’s social and political identities create unique modes of discrimination, oppression and privilege (Crenshaw, 1989). Historically, intersectionality was used to describe the ways in which women who are Black were segregated from employment of Black men’s jobs and white women’s jobs, and then excluded as plaintiffs that sought to broaden race and gender employment claims (Crenshaw, 2016, n.p.). The metaphor has been adapted to discussions about feminism, anti-poverty, anti-aggression, gender-based violence, social justice, etc. For the purpose of this study, intersectionality considers the ways in which policies fail to consider the impacts of the pandemic on women entrepreneurs.

For the purposes of this study, *feminism* is defined as the recognition of “unequal conditions and the desire to change them” (Ahl, 2004, p. 16). Feminist scholarship focuses on structural, institutional, and interpersonal elements of oppression with a focus on action that is “rooted in an ethical and moral commitment to social justice” (Kilty & Crépault, 2016, p. 616). *Feminist policy* is defined as: “a political framework centred around the wellbeing of marginalised people and invokes processes of self-reflection regarding foreign policy’s hierarchical global systems. …It is a multidimensional policy framework that aims to elevate women’s and marginalised groups’ experiences and agency to scrutinise the destructive forces of patriarchy, colonisation, heteronormativity, capitalism, racism, imperialism, and militarism” (Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy, 2020).

Women-centric or *women-focused policies* are predicated on gender-based interventions that are targeted at entrepreneurs who identify as women. *Gender mainstreaming* refers to “the integration of gender equality concerns in the analyses and formulation of policies, programming and projects” (Mukhopdhyay, 2016, p. 77). Gender mainstreaming, concerns whether policy supports for women are provided through women-only or mixed gender mainstreamed programming (Wilson et al., 2004).

**Appendix B. Application of Feminist Entrepreneurship Policy Framework**

To illustrate the relevance and application of the proposed parameters of feminist entrepreneurship policy and Feminist Entrepreneurship Policy Framework, this appendix provides an assessment of a *Women Entrepreneurship Strategy* (Canada, 2018). To situate this assessment, the evolution of women’s enterprise policies in Canada follows. Limitations are noted. Table 1 contrasts women’s enterprise policies predicated on entrepreneurship as a means to support economic growth and SME policies as a means to effect social change (Calás et al., 2009). Recommendations to inform gender-inclusive SME measures are advanced.

B1. *Context*

Canada is described as progressive with women’s entrepreneurship and feminist policies. *Global Entrepreneurship Monitor* describes Canada as supportive of women entrepreneurs (Elam et al., 2019). Canada is the sole economy to advance a cross-federal *Women Entrepreneurship S*trategy (Government of Canada, 2018). Federal policies and budgets must undergo gender-based analysis plus (GBA+) (Status of Women Canada, 2020). Since 1982, gender equality has been enshrined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Canada is also recognized as a leader in advancing legislation to protect the rights of LGBTQ2+ individuals. Since 2016, Canada has integrated equality, women’s economic empowerment and LGBTQ2+ rights as elements in its domestic and foreign policies. To date, feminist measures include *Feminist international assistance policy*, *Trade diversification strategy*, and *Gender and Trade Advisory Committee* (2020).

B2.  *Evolution of women’s enterprise policies*

Following decades of advocacy (Orser, 2017), in March 2015, the federal government announced the *Action plan for women entrepreneurs* spearheaded by [the then] Status of Women Canada. Launched in a joint meeting of The Honourable Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and President Donald Trump, in March 2017, the government announced that the Business Council of Canada would manage a *Canada-United States* *council for advancement of women entrepreneurs and business leaders* (herein referred to as the Council). Women entrepreneurs were represented by women who led large businesses. The Council did not include gender or feminist enterprise experts, including contributors to the taskforces or reports that called for market intervention. McKinsey & Company (2017) was contracted to write a series of related reports. None offered criticism of SME policies nor evidence of engagement with feminist and grassroots leaders. The resulting impacts were negligible.

In 2018, the government announced the *Women Entrepreneurship Strategy* (WES). The now $5 billion (CDN, 2020) investment incorporated four pillars: (1) a women entrepreneurship fund; (2) an ecosystem fund to strengthen capacity within the entrepreneurial ecosystem; (3) Women’s Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub; and (4) Expert Advisory Panel. The federal government subsequently committed to increase the participation of businesses led by Canadians from under-represented groups, including women, in the government marketplace (OECD, 2020a).

In March 2020, the government introduced relief measures including funding targeted specifically at SMEs (OECD, 2020b). Provisions included salaries and wages subsidies, emergency rent subsidies and mortgage support, and credit support. The *Canada Emergency Business Account* (CEBA), for example, has provided over 790,000 small businesses and non-profits with partially forgivable interest-free loans (Government of Canada, 2020).

In July 2020, the government announced $15 million (CDN) targeted at women enterprise support organizations. Funding was, in part, delivered through four Western Women Enterprise Initiative centres that had loan adjudication capacity. These regional loan adjudication capabilities offset centralist (e.g., Toronto-centric) investments. In September 2020the *Black Entrepreneurship Program* was announced. Similar to the pillars of the Women Entrepreneurship Strategy, the initiative includes national ecosystem funding, a Black entrepreneur loan fund, and a Black entrepreneurship knowledge hub. The government has also committed to increasing Black entrepreneurs’ access to federal contracts (CBC.ca, 2020).

In December 2020, the government announced within an economic statement a ‘feminist’ recovery plan under the refrain to “build back better” to address structural challenges that impede inclusive economic progress. The economic statement specified that policies and investments are to be evaluated and tracked based on how measures affect women, men, youth, members of the LGBTQ2+ community, persons with disabilities, racialized Canadians, and Indigenous peoples. The report also introduced a *gender-results framework* that prioritizes: education and skills development; equal and full participation in the economy; gender-based violence and harassment; security of person and access to justice; poverty and health outcomes; gender equality around the world; and gender equality in leadership (Government of Canada, 2020, p. xi).

Gender differences in uptake of relief measures were also reported. As of fall 2020, half (54%) of businesses in Canada had applied for and received relief CEBA funding. Women-owned were less likely to apply for CEBA funds relative to other under-represented groups of entrepreneurs: “Businesses that were majority owned by Indigenous persons (56 per cent), immigrants (61 percent), members of LGBTQ2+ communities (57 percent) and visible minorities (61 per cent) were more likely to report applying for and receiving the CEBA than those that were majority-owned by women (50 per cent) and persons with a disability (49 per cent).” (Government of Canada, 2020, p. 28).

Policy recommendations to strengthen Canadian recovery measures are summarized in Table B1. The left column lists the key parameters of entrepreneurial feminist policy advanced in this study. The middle column identifies elements of the Women’s Entrepreneurship Policy (WES, Canada, 2018) that align with each of the ten parameters. The WES framework is predicated on the paradigm of entrepreneurship as a positive economic activity (Calas et al., 2009). The table enables readers to differentiate two theoretical approaches and implications of women’s enterprise versus feminist SME policies.

Table 1 indicates that the Women Entrepreneurship Strategy (Canada, 2018) is predicated on neo-liberal feminism or a “deficiency model” of enterprise policy. The theoretical underpinning is neo-liberal feminist perspective (Ahl, 2006). This perspective assumes that entrepreneurship as the product of individual opportunity recognition, often driven by the desire to maximize personal wealth (Calás, Smircich, & Bourne 2009). The perspective assumes that, “women’s entrepreneurship is akin to venture creation and individual choice.” (Coleman et al., p. 5). The right column contrasts SME policies predicated on entrepreneurial feminist theory. The principles of entrepreneurial feminism are described in the journal article. Suggested modifications to the WES strategy that align with feminist entrepreneurship policy are reported in the right column. The table indicates that SME policy measures predicated on the two perspectives differ with respect to mandate, focus of inclusion and extent to which interventions seek to redress power differentials within entrepreneurial ecosystems.

Table 1. Canada Women Entrepreneurship Strategy: Comparison of neo-liberal and entrepreneurial feminist SME recovery policies

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Paradigm | Neo-liberal feminism | Entrepreneurial feminism |
| Government of Canada  Women Entrepreneurship Strategy (2018) | Gender-responsive  COVID-19 recovery measures |
| P1. Centre policies on gender equality, women’s economic empowerment and LGBTQ2+ rights | Women defined in binary terms. No provisions for LBBTQ2+ or Indigenous entrepreneurs. No recognition about liabilities of newness in start-up among nascent women entrepreneurs, particularly among vulnerable groups. | * Specify women’s economic empowerment as a policy objective not artifact of economic growth. * Recognise that market investments do not automatically enhance gender equality. * Weight assessment to benefit historically under-representative groups of women. |
| P2. Redress power differentials | Emphasis on high-growth, women-owned and women-led firms benefits privileged women. Limited consultations among under-represented women entrepreneurs and across geographic regions. | * Engage in ongoing consultations to tweak policies/funding (e.g., adjust unanticipated exclusions, such as gig and contract workers). * Recognise gendered power differentials within the ecosystem, including in financial, education, and economic development intermediaries. |
| P3. Acknowledge gendered processes within venture creation and occupational stereotypes | Reinforcement of stereotypical entrepreneur as profit-seeking, growth-oriented ‘captains of industry’ who prioritize wealth over social outcomes. Biased towards applicants who best project ‘hockey stick’ estimates of revenue growth (e.g., gazelles) versus sustainable, small firms, self-employed and applicants more characteristics of women-owned SMEs. Eligibility encourage firms to promote women to C-suite to meet criteria. | * Hold innovation/small business support intermediaries accountable for engagement of women entrepreneurs. * Mandate gender-inclusive programs, curricula, role models, innovations, client selection and investment criteria. * National strategy and funding to support care and essential work (e.g., child care, elder care, salary supplements). * Focus on women-owned versus women-led firms, with provision for cases of diluted ownership via investment (e.g., certification, supplier diversity programs). |
| P4. Employ broad and inclusive definitions of innovation | Lack of integration with federal ($950 million CDN) Innovation Superclusters Initiative providing non-repayable contributions to five industry-led consortia. No alignment of funding to sectors in which women are disproportionately represented. No effort to recognise innovation by and important to women. | * Target funding to all types of innovation: process, marketing, organisational and product/services, avoiding bias to technologies that preference men-owned SME. Recognise women innovators, innovations important to women. * Fund gender-based analysis of engineering processes to identify biases. * Fund communications to inform leaders about gendered innovation systems. |
| P5. Leverage opportunities to influence multiple policy outcomes, recognising women’s economic empowerment is an end in itself. | Policy predicated on economic growth: “The full and equal participation of women in the economy is not just the right thing to do; it’s also good for the bottom line. …investment that seeks to double the …advancing gender equality and women’s participation in the economy, Canada could add up to $150 billion in GDP.” | * Predicate policies on economic and social outcomes. * Establish targets for recovery fund uptake among women, including quotas based on representation of women-owned SMEs. * Specify and monitor economic and social impacts of investment. |
| P6. Mandate gender/sex-disaggregated | Lack of gender disaggregated data. Lack of adjudication transparency, lack of reporting on impacts of funding using comparative cohorts (non/funded SMEs and ecosystem support organisations). | * Establish non-threatening protocols for stakeholders to volunteer self-identification. * Mandate and fund collection/reporting using gender/sex-disaggregated data. |
| P7. Construct coherent and integrated policy frameworks | WES strategy is informed by cross-federal committee of senior bureaucrats. Policies focus solely on economic outcomes. No targets or mandated reporting on status of women-owned SMEs (e.g., federal SME contracting re: bid and success rates). | * Integrate policy domains within recovery policies, including provision for family care, affordable healthcare, gender-based violence. |
| P8. Facilitate broad and meaningful consultations: “Nothing about us, without us” | Expert Advisory Panel limited to 7 members and 3 ex-officio members. | * Mandate ongoing consultations with groups of women stakeholders. * Ensure transparency in access to consultation processes * Establish consultation performance benchmarks and reporting. |
| P9. Fund ecosystem intermediaries | Funding to women’s enterprise organizations were provided. Grant and contribution versus standard procurement adjudication lacked transparency lending to the potential political influence. | * Ongoing, multi-year funding support of women’s enterprise, feminist and grassroots SME organisations. * Ease burden of reporting associated with small, multi-year contracts. |
| P10: Create mechanisms that enable women to act as change | Funding to one women-focused capital fund (SheEO) with few recipient firms. No funding to feminist disruptive organizations. Loan fund did not prioritise entrepreneurial feminists, defined as business owners who employ enterprise to effect change for women and girls. | * Communicate funding prioritise entrepreneurs and enterprises with multiple bottom-lines (e.g., people, profit, planet). * Role models of hybrid enterprises with demonstrated capabilities to engage many, diverse women entrepreneurs. |

1. The term entrepreneurial feminism was coined by Orser and Leck (2010), and expanded on by Orser and Elliott (2015). The foundational case is Dr. Elaine Jolly, Professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology, University of Ottawa and Founding Director of the Shirley E. Greenberg Women’s Health Centre, The Ottawa Hospital, Canada. It is fitting that the theoretical underpinning of this study is predicated on an exemplary feminist medical role model. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. France, Luxembourg, and the United Kingdom have announced intention to adopt similar policies (Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy, 2020). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. C1 (p. 1) states: “The document is inspired by *The bridge called my back: Writings by radical women of colour*, a feminist anthology edited by Cherrie Moraga and Gloria E. Anzalua in 1981.” [↑](#footnote-ref-3)