



# What if women's equality was at the heart of an inclusive economic approach to place?

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To mark International Women's Day, CLES hosted a webinar jointly with the Women's Budget Group which posed the question: What if women's equality was at the heart of an inclusive economy? The event was attended by feminists with an interest in local economics and local economic development practitioners with an interest in feminism. The attendees came from a broad range of backgrounds within local government, civil society and academia, with several specifically interested in the intersection between feminist economics and the climate crisis.

We heard opening remarks from Sara Reis of the Women's Budget Group, as well as CLES's Sarah Longlands. We built from the starting point which was laid out in our recent blog, [Gender inequality and community wealth building: where are we now?](#)

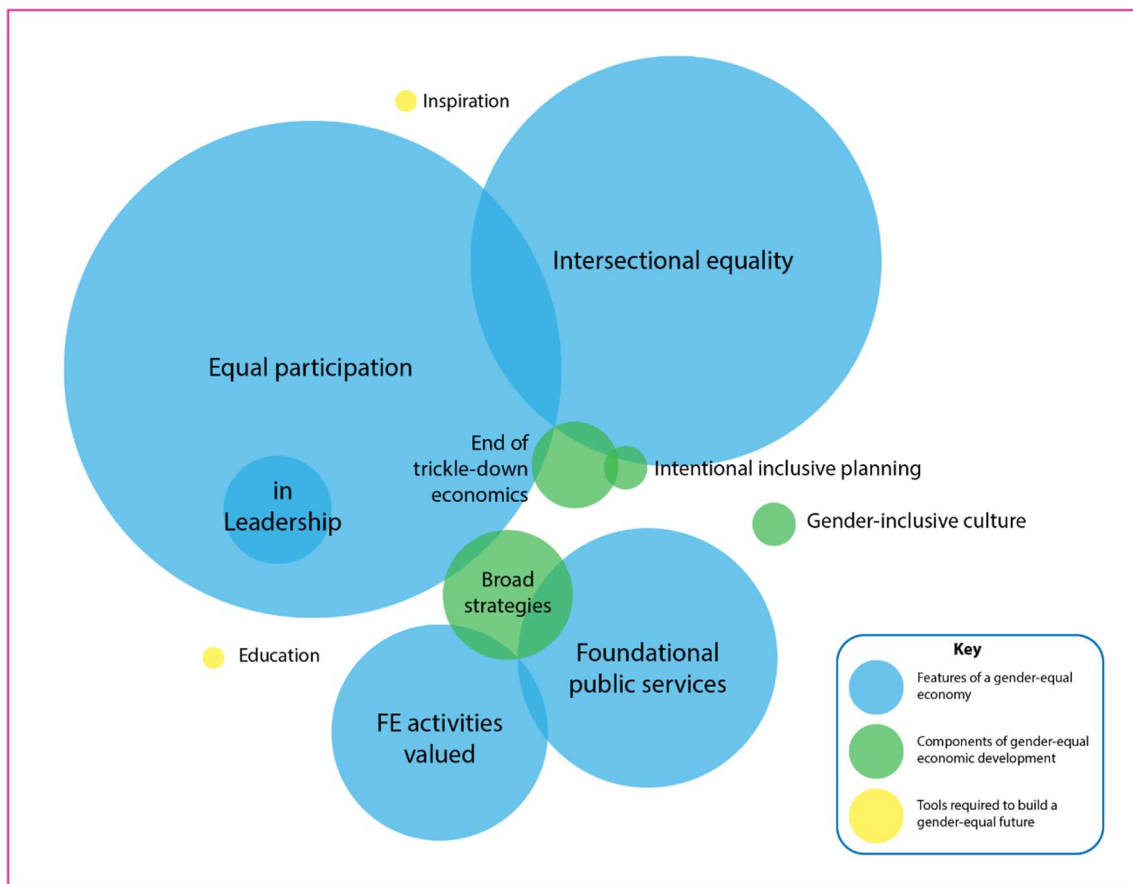
## Purpose

The purpose of the event was to collectively envision a more gender-balanced economy and identify steps to reorientate economic development strategy and practice in that direction. We also wanted to identify topics to cover in future sessions on this theme, and ways of working together.

## Results

Throughout the event we used an online flipchart to enable everyone to share their thoughts on the topics being discussed. Below we've harvested some of the themes which emerged from our exploration.

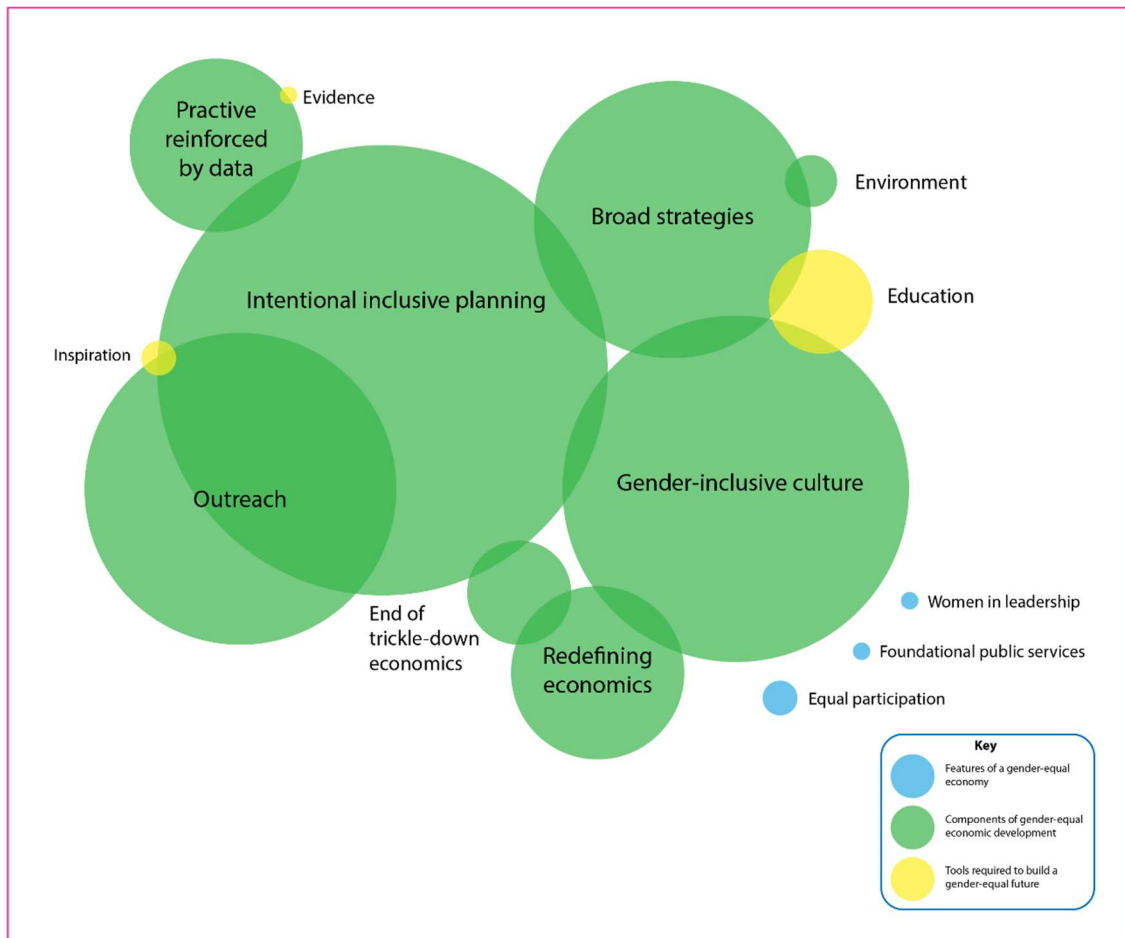
## What a gender equal economy would look like



- Equal participation of men and women in paid employment, care, leadership and decision making:
  - “It's normal to have equal numbers of women in decision-making forums and as leaders”
  - “There are no gendered jobs”
  - “Men and women are earning the same - the local wage gap has gone!”
- Intersectional equality
  - “Understanding that ‘women’s’ experience is multi-faceted and varied, and isn’t just ‘has kids’ and ‘caring responsibilities’”
- Well-funded, universal foundational public services
  - “Care is seen as an essential public service and there is universal access to good quality care”
- Activities within the foundational economy are valued:
  - “Equal value of caring and paid work translates to flexible, local job opportunities”

## What economic development would look like in a gender equal economy

We then moved on to explore how economic development needs to change if it is to help build this vision. Again, here are just some of the themes that emerged from that discussion.

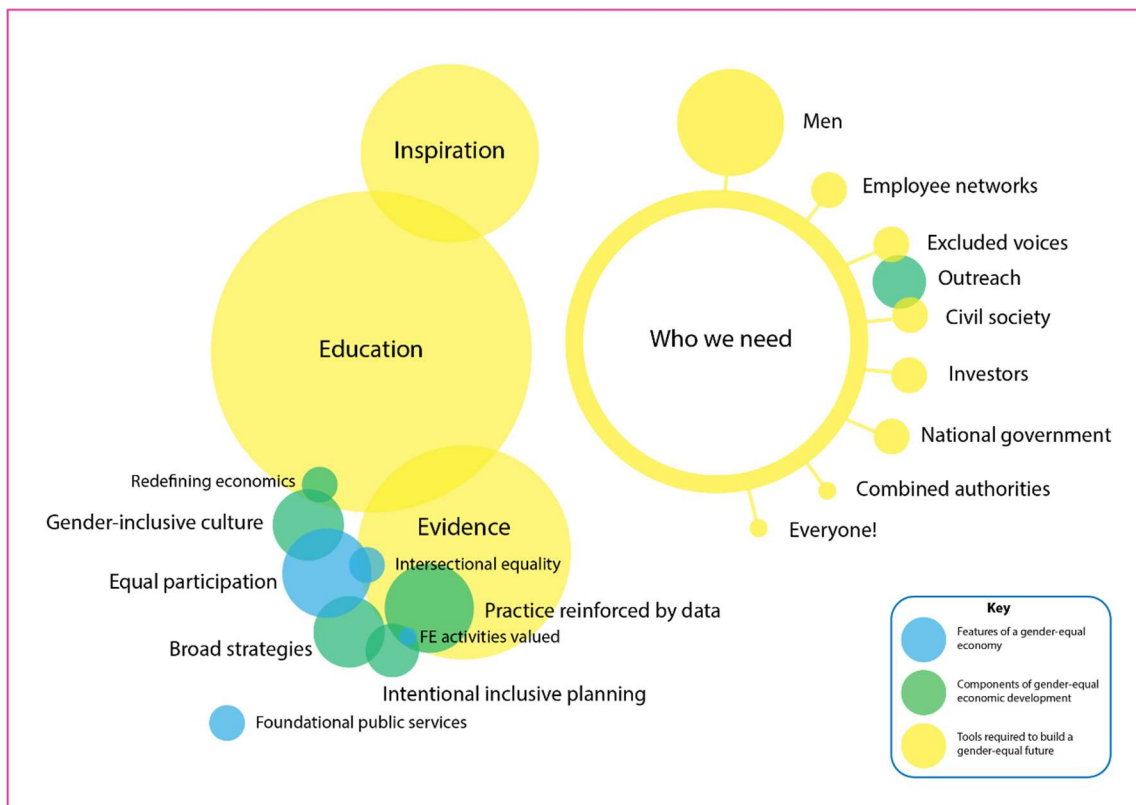


- Planning will be inclusive by intent, seeking out the voices not usually heard:
  - “Where the economic default is not the ‘straight, able-bodied, cis, white male’”
  - “Meeting people where they are - in homes, in community centres, in schools”
- The culture of economic development is gender inclusive:
  - “You’re not seen as ‘awkward/difficult’ asking the gender question in a meeting”
  - “Where women’s experiences aren’t seen as ‘awkward’ or ‘other’ in general”
  - “We call out really cr\*p policies that don’t work for women”
  - “Thinking harder about intersectionality, how we achieve inclusive economies for all (not just white women)”
- A wider range of strategies are employed to build more inclusive local economies:
  - “Inward investment and “hard hat” strategies no longer dominate economic development activity”
  - “There is a focus on improving working conditions in the foundational economy”
  - “Let’s get more women in those ‘hard hat’ roles!”
  - “Regen and investment schemes proofed for equality in planning stages”

- Redefining the scope of 'economics'
  - “Broader conception of what we understand by 'economic' that it's as much about social policy as traditional forecasting”
- Practice is reinforced by data
  - “Data, lots of data to inform decision making”
  - “Disaggregated data that demonstrates the differential impact, outcomes”
- The end of trickle-down economics!
  - “Not assuming that economic growth will trickle down - especially to women”
  - “Changing perceptions on what's traditionally been seen as a 'high value' job or sector”
- Climate / environmental breakdown....
  - “Thinking about the gendered implications for green policies, e.g. banning single use plastics”

### Taking the conversation forward

We then shifted our attention to how we might bring these changes about.



We shared thoughts about who needs to be involved:

- “Everyone!”
- “Solidarity and an intersectional approach”
- “Men to champion gender equality”

"Train men in power so they actually 'get it' (even those who are supposed to often don't)"

"Men - how do we get them to engage meaningfully?"

"Internal employees networks, such as women network can spread the conversation"

"Voices and experience of women that are not being heard"

"People who are missing: those with disabilities, refugees, English as a second language, ex-offenders"

"Local women's civil society and infrastructure that is invested in to bring women's voices, be expert and engage in the 'constant battle'"

"Community leaders - they might not be the obvious people you think of, their work may be made invisible e.g. care, faith, family work"

"Banks/investors on this so they turn down investment proposals that are not gender-aware"

"UK and Devolved governments need to lead by example"

"Combined Authorities - shift in economic strategies"

"Willing and motivated people within organisations"

Finally we talked about what we need as a movement to bring about this change:

- Evidence and tools to help us reframe the debate

"Narrative/data to highlight how gender imbalanced economies disadvantage men as well as women"

"Change the questions we ask to investigate economic development/economic growth"

- Education

"Training and awareness about inclusion and service design"

"Use tools like Doughnut Co-benefits tool, CWB approaches"

"Teach us all economics! we are not taught it at school as a matter of course"

- Inspiration!

"Examples of places/policies that have considered women's experience in their policy making"

"Showcase women led businesses and organisations"

## Next steps

There was a lot of energy and enthusiasm from the group to deepen these discussions and explore together how we can mobilise the ideas that emerged during the session in practice. Many of us really enjoyed the participatory approach, using collaborative tools that enabled everyone to contribute to discussions in real time.

On the back of this CLES and WBG are going to hold a further two sessions in the autumn, based on themes which emerged from the session. These sessions are open to all and are intended to both deepen our understanding of the nature of inequality in current economic development practice and share inspiration and practical actions to change it. We will use the outcome of these sessions to develop a proposal for a future collaborative project between CLES and WBG.

- Participation and intersectionality: Seeking out the voices not usually heard to create economic development that is inclusive by intent
- Beyond hard hats: Redefining the scope of economic development to build more inclusive local economies.

### **Resources recommended by participants**

[Economics: The User's Guide by Ha-Joon Chang](#)

[Doughnut Economics: Seven Ways to Think Like a 21st-Century Economist by Kate Raworth](#)

[Women4Climate report: Gender inclusive climate action in cities | Women for climate \(w4c.org\)](#)

[Caring for the earth, caring for each other: an industrial strategy for adult social care \(common-wealth.co.uk\)](#)