

Scottish Women's Convention  
response to the Scottish  
Government's consultation on:

# Community Wealth Building



May 2023

## **Premise**

In the Scottish Government's Programme for Government 2021-22, they outlined their plan to adopt a Community Wealth Building (CWB) approach to economic development, as a way to make progress towards realising their aim of becoming a wellbeing economy. CWB was created to tackle long-standing economic challenges, by considering how the public sector can interact with private, third and community sectors to create more wealth within localities.

During the Scottish Government's 2022-23 Programme for Government, they committed to holding a consultation to understanding the public's views on CWB, and how it could positively/negatively impact local economies. They have focused this consultation on key 'pillars' which are the foundation of CWB, ranging from the workforce to land development. After the Scottish Government have received all consultation responses, they shall consider alterations that are required and rectify their plan accordingly – incorporating suggestions made.



## **The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC)**

The SWC is funded to engage with women across Scotland to ensure that their views are represented in policy and decision-making processes. The SWC uses the views of women to respond to a variety of parliamentary, governmental, and organisational consultation papers at Scottish, UK and international levels.

The SWC gathers information using different methods, including roadshows, thematic conferences, surveys, and both in-person and online roundtable events. This submission presents the views of a range of women, reflecting their opinions, ideas and lived experience. Working together with many other equalities organisations and community groups, we use our broad network to ensure that women from a range of backgrounds are heard and acknowledged. We are continually reviewing innovative ways of engaging with women and developing our trauma-informed and culturally sensitive practice to support vital contributions from as many women as possible.

## Our Response

### **Are there other non-legislative measures that you believe are required to accelerate the implementation of the Community Wealth Building approach in Scotland?**

Yes

A key barrier to implementing Community Wealth Building (CWB) across Scotland is the lack of trust felt between government and rural communities. Women from these areas have stated that due to the increase in centralised services, many rural towns and villages have been left with insufficient amenities. Some have attempted to vocalise this to local government, as well as central government, but feel that their voices have been lost or ignored. It is therefore questionable whether CWB will be fully accepted within these areas when trust levels are low.

- “...we’ve brought issues to the highest level of Scottish Government...we just don’t feel like they’re listening.”

The Scottish Government must also consider the viability of CWB within rural communities, with this aforementioned centralisation removing many key services such as healthcare, which has been highlighted as an ‘anchor’ in CWB planning. Rural women have explained that they would rather see services return to remote areas, and as such, CWB must integrate with large-scale decentralisation.

- “...to echo what has been said before, that centralisation has been very bad for the area.”
- “...I think we would hate to see anymore centralisation; we just want to see things coming back to us...I think we certainly did have a much better healthcare system, much better roads, and much better ownership of our local infrastructure.”

Rural communities do provide great opportunities with regards to CWB. Many carry out community-focused economics already, with community shops acting as stores, tourist information locations, job providers and anchors for local people. However, during our visits to Scottish islands, women have stated that they do not always feel supported by their local governments to continue this work, and instead feel actively discouraged. Some island communities also have community-owned energy sources, such as solar panels and wind turbines. They have stated however, that they are heavily reliant on professionals from the mainland carrying out maintenance, due to a lack of educational opportunities to learn the skills required on the islands. Women have called for a broader range of opportunities for young people on the islands, which would assist in reducing the risk of depopulation and go some way to increase community engagement. We therefore recommend engaging with rural communities to understand the intricacies at play, while also working to improve knowledge of decision-makers around this new policy so that it can be properly implemented at a local and national level.

## Spending Pillar

### **Are there ways in which the law could be changed to advance the spending pillar of Community Wealth Building?**

Yes

Despite large-scale commitments to move towards a wellbeing economy, which would align well with the proposals set out in the CWB policy, the Scottish budget is still set in relatively traditional economic terms. Wider criticisms of CWB highlight that due to the capitalist nature of global markets, it can lack impact. This can be measured in Preston, UK, where despite some positive change, it has lacked substantial effect and the reliance on multi-national companies resulted in a weakened influence. In order for Community Wealth Building to properly integrate into Scottish society, major commitments must be made towards a wellbeing economy, with the proof being in future Scottish budgets. This would also go further in engraining CWB as a long-term plan which local communities can properly embrace, with some women stating that they feel many Scottish Government solutions tend to be short-term, limiting their impact.

- “...it’s across the board, this short-term resourcing...it just creates a whole lake of problems”

## Workforce Pillar

### **Employment law is reserved to the UK Parliament. Are there other devolved areas where the law could be changed to advance the workforce pillar of Community Wealth Building?**

Yes

Aims included within the ‘workforce pillar’ state that groups which are often excluded from the labour market will be targeted, ensuring that a diverse workforce is integral to CWB. However, unless women’s experiences are at the centre of this new policy it will fail to achieve the desired effect. By attempting to challenge traditional workplace structures, the Scottish Government has a unique opportunity to engrain family friendly work practice into the employment culture of Scotland, such as improved childcare and workshares. This would also allow Scottish workplaces to move away from top-down management, which could contribute to a wider sense of community-led approaches. The current system does not adequately cater to women’s needs and so, it would be highly beneficial to ensure CWB workplaces fully commit to Fair Work procedures.

A further way in which to keep women’s voices at the centre of development would be to include women within the CWB steering group. Currently, the steering group does have a good gender split, however there is a lack of non-professionals and community groups. These omissions put into question the validity of statements made that this project will better the lives of people from the community as there is poor representation of community members. By incorporating these groups, it would go further to delivering on promises to include those excluded from the labour market, with women being often absent from decision-making processes. This is particularly important for women who experience intersectional disadvantage, as they often come up against complex barriers when expressing their opinions. In the development of this policy, it is highly important that the Scottish Government considers the creation of a stakeholder group which has a diverse range of experience to ensure that CWB works for the majority of people in Scotland.

This also links with the potential role asylum seekers and refugees can play in contributing to the development of CWB. Despite immigration law being controlled by Westminster, we theorise that these groups could assist in alternative ways, such as volunteering. Due to the insecure nature of refugee and asylum seekers settlement status, volunteering can be a positive way in

which they can begin to build a network of support in their local community, while also utilising their skills. By carrying out this form of work, divides that exist between these groups and local Scots could be lessened, with some asylum seeking women and refugees experiencing significant levels of discrimination and trepidation from local people. Some refugee and asylum seeking women have explained that they would like the opportunity to take part in community groups to build better relationships and battle the stereotypes many hold against them, and that this work can be more successful than reporting racist abuse to the police.

- “Their experience of reporting [antisocial behaviour] hasn't been very helpful...I think for them, to help prevent it, is kind of a more cross-party work at a community level.”
- “I think when we've got new Scots coming in, we're just dumping them, we're not thinking about how to integrate them into the community, but also how we can integrate the community with them, and how we can make them feel safer.”
- “I think the benefit of the women's approach, is that it does create that space that's really welcoming, it doesn't do the us vs. them thing, it's more about welcoming and showing what they're bringing, and how they can connect with new people.”

## Land and Property Pillar

### **Are there ways in which the law could be changed which are not already covered in the proposals for the Land Reform Bill to advance the land and property pillar of Community Wealth Building?**

Yes

When speaking with women from Scottish Islands, they have stated that there are major issues with crofts. These women explained that a large amount of land is dedicated to crofting, and that many of these crofts are unused and derelict. This has created a lack of land and housing issues across the islands. Some women explained that there needs to be better cooperation with the Crofters Commission to free up land, which could allow for new developments. This lack of land could create problems for CWB expansion, and as such it would be valuable for the Scottish Government to consider how land is split within rural communities in comparison to the mainland.

- “But actually, if crofting got itself sorted that would help...the crofters commission really need to rein it in because that would release so much land and people could get grants and loans to build houses.”

## Conclusion

Having listened to women, our three key recommendations on this topic are:

- Currently, the CWB proposals are being heavily dictated by professionals, with community members being left out of the loop. A revaluation of the steering board is required, alongside the creation of a lived experience group to rectify this.
- Take this opportunity of economic renewal to fully engrain feminist work policy throughout.
- Engage with rural communities to understand what is already working within community-led economies and work to reduce the impact of centralisation.

The SWC is grateful for the opportunity to respond to the Scottish Government's consultation on **Community Wealth Building**. As an organisation, we will continue to work with women from across Scotland to gather voices and experiences relating to this topic and its effects on women's equality.

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