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## **Women as Stakeholders: A Gendered Analysis of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act in New York City**

Approximately 8,400,000 people call New York City home. Among these, 4,370,426 are women. Every borough is home to a majority of women, ranging from 52% of the population in Queens to 55% of the population in the Bronx. In 2000, New York City was home to 1,940,269 persons who were under the age of 18<sup>1</sup>, a number larger than the population of all but the next three largest American cities. In regards to economic stability of New York City, women and families comprise a portion of the population that is too large to ignore.

The recession is having a distressing affect on community, family, and individual security. Women across socioeconomic lines bear the burden of an unstable economy. Women are more likely than men to hold subprime mortgages. They are more likely to raise children as single heads of household, and are therefore more likely to experience food insecurity and to survive on the edge of poverty and economic stability. Women's wages are lower than men's in both white and blue collar industries. Most women make 77 cents to a man's dollar for comparable work.

Despite recent growth in women's employment, women are less than half of New York City's workforce and more than half of its minimum wage earners. Vulnerable constituencies, including immigrant women and women of color, typically have fewer assets and lower savings rates, increasing their susceptibility to economic hardship during recessions. Finally, valuable life lines, such as Unemployment Insurance and COBRA, a medical insurance program for the unemployed, are difficult for many women to obtain as they may be employed in the shadow economy and comprise 2 out of every 3 members of the part-time workforce nationally.

Even before the recession, women, particularly women from poor, underrepresented groups, lagged behind the employment and economic stability curve. With unemployment projected to stabilize at 10% this year, women and families need the assistance of an equitable and transparent recovery.

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<sup>1</sup> New York City Census, 2000. Summary Population and Housing Characteristics: [www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/census/nyc20002.pdf](http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/census/nyc20002.pdf).

Furthermore women – often perceived as community caretakers – suffer from community and individual violence. Intimate partner violence (IPV) increases during recessions, meaning lost productivity due to missed work hours as well as excessive hospital bills and trauma. Women are equal victims of community violence when recessions exacerbate high neighborhood foreclosure rates and decrease new prospects for capitalization, affecting neighborhood stability.

As a response to the negative effects of recession, Congress approved the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) on February 13, 2009. ARRA, also known as the Recovery Act, allocated \$787 billion to the US recovery effort. September 20, 2010 will mark the end of the second Federal Fiscal Year of stimulus funding apportionment. It is also the official end date for the stimulus package.

ARRA provides funding for grants, programs, and States to support entitlement and other programs. ARRA also funds significant outlays for tax breaks. Approximately 26.7 billion dollars in stimulus funds were marked for allocation directly to New York State over the life of ARRA. These funds continue to be allocated both in set formulas and through a competitive application process.

Transparency of funding distribution has been a key goal of ARRA. However, in New York and other States, transparency has proven difficult to achieve. For example, not all stimulus money invested in New York State touches the State Treasury. Some funds are sent directly to specific programs, traveling from the Federal Government to quasi-governmental Authorities. Funds allocated to Authorities (such as the New York City Housing Authority for example) lives outside of standard State and City oversight mechanisms because these Authorities operate independently of the State and City budgets. Funds are only recorded in the budget of that Authority.

In New York, stimulus dollars are tracked at the State and City level through their respective treasuries. However, if stimulus funds do not reach the State or City treasuries, they are not recorded. Therefore, oversight apparatuses at the State and City level do not work for all investments.

New York City receives stimulus funds both from the State of New York and directly from the Federal Government. As of October 2009, the Mayor's Office reported that over 5.6 billion dollars of ARRA money had been approved for spending within the City. The amount of money that has actually been spent varies drastically by program type. At the close of the September 2009

reporting period, a majority of programs, particularly those related to infrastructure and energy efficiency, had not begun. Though funding had been approved for these projects, work had not started. Data on these projects was first available on October 9, 2009. The last deadline for States and Localities to make corrections and publish data was October 30, 2009. New York City published the majority of its data at this time.

Only one fiscal year into the stimulus package, the Mayor's projection for the amount of funds New York City would receive had already been surpassed. The City continues to apply for competitive grants: grants funded by the Federal Government with stimulus dollars on a discretionary basis. This suggests that the potential for more dollars to be funneled to New York City exists, although an exact amount is difficult to determine.

ARRA includes requirements for an unprecedented national effort at tracking. To receive stimulus money, New York City, along with all recipients of stimulus dollars, must comply with federally mandated tracking requirements. New York City surpasses many states and localities in terms of its effort to post all data collected online. For simplification purposes, the Mayor's Office designated eight subheadings into which stimulus funding can be categorized. These are:

- Energy Efficiency – to promote the efficient use of energy and save money
- Economic and Workforce Development – to provide job training and employment
- Neighborhood Stabilization – to increase quality of life and save buildings from disrepair
- Public Safety – to increase security and safety, and to strengthen criminal justice operations.
- Health and Social Support – to enhance services for citizens needing public support.
- Education – to close budget gaps and improve educational standards.
- Infrastructure – to rebuild in areas like transit, public housing, and the City's water supply.
- Medicaid Relief – to maintain services threatened by the City's budget crisis.

Most of the ARRA funds provided to New York City fall into these categories, with the exception of tax breaks and unemployment insurance.

The building blocks of a successful recovery may be stacked in many ways. Policy makers, private sector employers, publicly funded training programs, special interest groups, and many others hold a vested interest in the shape of the stimulus plan. In New York State and City, several watchdog

groups agree that transparency is vital.\* Objectives of a transparent recovery include: to determine where money has been allocated, to understand how decisions are being made, and to make recommendations where discretion and public input is still possible.

Data collection plays an integral role in transparency. Different data offers different conclusions thereby shaping and limiting the public discourse. For example: with data that is not collected with regard to sex, it is difficult to evaluate or make recommendations. A more thorough effort at tracking would allow for the collection of data that is both more useful and more honest. Particularly in terms of tracking jobs created and saved, women are left out because data is not collected according to sex.

Data collection of this type is not impossible. Vermont has currently set the precedent for tracking women's benefits from ARRA funds. As of April 2009, they had drafted a recommendation to track job numbers according to sex. The legislation passed. However, no conversation regarding similar measures exists at the national level.

Women are latecomers to the political game. According to the policy theory of Anne Schneider and Helen Ingram, this means that they must fight to present so-called "women's issues" as legitimate within the policy discourse. ARRA may support this hypothesis, as women seem subsumed (Stivers 2002) rather than present in recovery funding tracking efforts. Despite women's importance as candidates for employment, the tracking of data by sex remains outside the male standard of normal. Therefore, advocacy for this measure has been left to women's groups. The only successful coalition of which is currently limited to Vermont.

The critical turn in feminist evaluation of public policy, which came after the bulk of Ingram's writing during the second generation of policy analysis, also posits the tendency of public policy to ignore women unless explicitly directed at this group. Critical theorists center their analysis on power, policy making and women's access. Critical feminism builds on Ingram's work by suggesting that as "others", women are outsiders who do not yet dominate the upper echelons of the policy making (Guy 1993, Stivers 2002) sector. Therefore, women are left out as "insiders in policy debates are creating the master narrative, so that the analyst (an outsider) must identify the value-laden and various interpretations of those insiders"<sup>2</sup>

Woman centered policy, including employment data collected with regard to sex, would require a group of policy makers who feel this information is significant. According to the current standard of what equals transparency in

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\* See the Project on Government Oversight, New York State Stimulus Alliance, and Propublica for some examples.

<sup>2</sup> Burnier, DeLysa . "Reinventing Government from a Feminist Perspective: Feminist Theory and Administrative Reality", The Forum Magazine Fall: 1995 and Marshall, Catherine Critical Feminist Policy Analysis: Toward Demanding and Disrupting Policy Analyses. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (San Diego, CA, April 13-17, 1998).

Recovery Act reporting, data disaggregated by sex does not have the prestige of relevance.

Furthermore, the branding of this recession as “a man’s recession” delegitimizes the need for a gendered dialogue. The public discourse is not supportive of gendered data collection as a national initiative.

As in other recessions, women’s employment actually experienced a brief uptick at the beginning of the economic downturn<sup>3</sup>. However, women’s gains occurred when unemployment was still comparatively low and ended as the recession increased in severity. Though a short increase in women’s employment is similar to what has been seen in other recessions, the accelerating pace of women’s job losses during this recession indicates that it is irresponsible to assume that women will fare better than men during this economic crisis. Mass media reporting has focused on the severity of the recession amongst men, painting an inaccurate picture of the recession’s affect on women and families.

Increases in unemployment have been particularly threatening for female-heads of household. By May 2009, the Bureau of Labor and Statistics found that the number of female-headed households who were unemployed grew in all demographic groups.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, female-headed households were already unemployed at a rate higher than the national average and were living at a poverty rate of 41% in New York City.<sup>5</sup> Even before the recession, the Ford Foundation reported that for every \$1 of net worth held by male-headed households women-headed households had 59 cents.

Given the labeling of this recession as a “man’s recession”, these facts were considered secondary. Early data from the Bureau of Labor and Statistics indicated that men were losing jobs at higher rates than women. This is due to the fact that many of the initial jobs lost were lost in construction and manufacturing – two male dominated fields. However, women’s job losses have begun to accumulate. Women have lost more jobs than men in financial services, hospitality and leisure industries.<sup>6</sup> Although women represent an increasing share of a smaller workforce of breadwinners, they have not been exempted from job loss and face a trend that may be worsening.

In times of long-term economic downturn, single mothers are particularly vulnerable. As of November 2009, single female-headed households were reported to have an unemployment rate of 12.6 percent<sup>7</sup>, more than 2 percentage points higher than the national average. Single female-headed

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<sup>3</sup> U.S. Congress. Joint Economic Committee. *Women in the Recession Working Mothers Face High Rates of Unemployment*: 2009. 111<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 2009. Committee Print, 1-8.

<sup>4</sup> Bureau of Labor and Statistics, 2000. *Current Population Survey*. Unpublished tables.

<sup>5</sup> The Commission for Economic Opportunity. *Increasing Opportunity and Reducing Poverty in New York City*. New York: Commission for Economic Opportunity, 2006.

<sup>6</sup> Boushey, Heather. *The Recession Bring Higher Unemployment for Women*. Washington, D.C.: Center for American Progress, 2009

<sup>7</sup> Boushey, Heather. *The Recession Bring Higher Unemployment for Women*. Washington, D.C.: Center for American Progress, 2009

households exist at the confluence of several employment trends. Single mothers are typically younger, and whether male or female, younger persons have a higher unemployment rate. Unemployment trends also vary by ethnic group. Therefore the employability of Latina and African American female-heads of household may be particularly threatened. A recent Congressional study found that all female-heads of household face a difficult employment situation in 2010.

It is important that New York City and other localities target recovery dollars where they are most needed. Stimulus funds should assist women across the board, not solely in the few sectors that they happen to dominate. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act does not have to be a blunt instrument of indiscriminate job creation, budget saving money, and tax breaks. The stimulus is a chance to begin the kind of economic recovery that prepares all segments of the American population for the new economy and encourages long-term revitalization.

### **Data Collection and Transparency in New York City**

The Mayor's Office of Operations NYC Stimulus Tracker website is commendable in its attempt to serve the objective of a transparent recovery. The City has a history of releasing data to the public; beginning with the Mayor's Management Report (MMR) and was therefore better prepared for ARRA tracking than many localities. The City should continue to build upon its infrastructure to advance efforts at transparency. Whereas some States and localities lack precedent for the public release of data, particularly online, New York City has the system in place to surpass goals set by the Federal Government. For example, the City implemented the Citywide Performance Reporting system (CPR) in 2008. The CRP is focused on the public distribution of institutional data using an online platform.

With swift moving inflows of money and an objective of rapid implementation, the flaws exhibited by data collected at the close of the first reporting period were somewhat expected. Missed opportunities should be discussed so that new ideas can be implemented in the future and so that lessons can be better connected to changes in policy. An enhanced mechanism for receiving public feedback generates more productive improvements.

Women have yet to be given the opportunity to view their progress as separate from the progress of the job market as a whole. Though, in terms of employment, women continue to dominate different sectors, are paid at different rates, and face a unique employment crisis: an invisible one.

Public information at the federal level currently includes detailed maps containing the location of all stimulus funded projects. While important, these maps miss valuable indicators needed to evaluate the recovery. Job creation numbers should be broken down by home zip code of the employee hired, gender, race and/or stability of the job – none of which are currently tracked. This author joins other voices in suggesting that all levels of government rethink their current method of data collection in order to do more to ensure a transparent and fair recovery.

While the difficulty of compiling another set of data is recognized, as is the failure by the Federal Government to require that certain data be tracked, the potentially far reaching benefit to women and underserved groups suggests that the City should step in to fill the gaps in data collection. If policy design affects democracy, as Schneider and Ingram assert, the ARRA tracking policy is not currently sufficient.

### **Counting Jobs Created in the Construction Sector**

A brief snapshot of recovery-funded projects in New York City illustrates the need for data collection by sex. Several concerns are particularly salient with regard to infrastructure projects. The first is the lack of women employed in the construction industry. Construction jobs are dominated by men. A preponderance of stimulus funded infrastructure projects equals unevenly distributed job creation between women and men. The Energy Efficiency, and Economic and Workforce Development funding buckets, which are receiving particular attention in New York City, are dominated by training programs and construction related “green jobs”. A focus on training and hiring under-represented groups is the key to ensuring equitable job creation.

The Bureau of Labor and Statistics expects construction fields related to green jobs to remain growth industries for all of 2010. Connecting green jobs to training programs could equal new jobs for the unemployed. Since women are not traditionally employed in the fields encompassed by green jobs, they risk exclusion. Counting women trained and hired would help women’s groups set a policy agenda and call for changes to exclusionary policies. Women are left out of stimulus narrative because no gendered data is available.

The attention given to infrastructure somewhat belies the true prevalence of construction projects as jobs in this sector can actually be found inside many of the funding buckets. For instance, much of the Neighborhood Stabilization bucket is actually comprised of construction or demolition projects. Where construction is the prevailing mode of job creation, women are at risk of



endemic underrepresentation. Although, they may benefit from the project itself, they do not achieve self-sufficiency through quality job creation and skill building.

Women's exclusion from the stimulus package master narrative is exposed as data collection and transparency methods are examined. So long as popular discourse suggests that this is a "man's recession", women will continue to face barriers as they attempt to set a new policy agenda. ARRA may be viewed as a chance to encourage women's participation in traditionally male-dominated fields thereby lifting single-earner families, which are traditionally female-headed, out of poverty. That job data is not even disaggregated by sex, asserts the difficulty that women's groups face when attempting to make their case. Critical gender theory offers insights into the seeming invisibility of women despite unprecedented transparency.