Feisty Women is a Dundee-based charity that is addressing the important issue of equality and economic justice for women over the age of 60. The voice of older women is often absent from national debates about discrimination and inequality. After a lifetime of sex discrimination, and now age discrimination, we are pleased to be given the opportunity to contribute our hard-won knowledge to the budget scrutiny process.

Feisty Women would like to comment in particular about the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 5 of the National Performance Framework, Gender Equality.

Key public policy areas where protected groups are struggling to access their rights

Women’s Unpaid Care Labour

The report Is Scotland Fairer?, published in 2018 by the Equalities and Human Rights Commission, describes inequality for women and girls in Scotland today as ‘stark’.

Feisty Women takes the view that theories of discrimination based on complicated ideas about gender rather than the material reality of sex are prohibiting solutions that fit the problem. For example, the Scottish Budget 2019-2020 Equality and Fairer Scotland Statement comments about the protected characteristic of sex in the following way:

‘The Scottish Budget 2019-20 builds on a range of policies and legislation seeking to address inequality between men and women. The Act states sex as the protected characteristic but for any data collection where people are asked to self-identify it tends to be the social construct of ‘gender’ rather than biological sex that is being collected.’

This meaning of this statement is not clear.

Feisty Women suggests it is time to get back to basics. The single most important cause of inequality and financial disadvantage for women is our unpaid work as mothers and carers.

Women born in the 1950s were the first generation to experience what economists call the ‘double burden’. Many of us went out to work on a larger scale than ever before but we also shouldered a disproportionate share of domestic work and unpaid caring responsibilities. We were pioneering in our attempts to combine motherhood and a working life. To this day, we are both providers and care-givers.
This experiment did not work out well for older women. Our double burden has resulted in fragmented working lives, poorer paid jobs, part-time jobs, little opportunity to pay into occupational pension schemes, long hours detrimental to the health of many and discrimination in the workplace. The intensity of our paid and unpaid labour has had a damaging impact on our health and economic well-being. Older women are in worse health and are significantly poorer than men the same age.

Very little has changed for young women today. Increasingly, with the rise of theories of discrimination based on ideas about gender, childbirth and looking after a family are treated as niche, incidental activities. However, young women still shoulder 70% of unpaid caring labour and domestic work. In addition, the Institute of Fiscal Studies reported in 2018 that the pay gap for women increases to 33% in the first 12 years of a child’s life.

Feisty Women notes that a 2019 review of the National Performance Framework recommends there should be a systematic focus on time spent by women on unpaid domestic and care labour because there is a dearth of data.

Feisty Women recommends that future investment in equalities work focuses on women’s unpaid care and domestic labour, the most important cause of inequality for women.

**Are there public funding challenges for the third sector?**

**Urgent need for investment in innovation and new theories of discrimination**

Feisty Women understands there are many competing causes deserving of public funds and difficult decisions have to be made. However, our observation is that investment in third sector organisations can be driven by trends and the expert lobbying power of larger organisations.

In Scotland today there is an emerging grass-roots women’s movement offering new, innovative solutions. These organisations, including Feisty Women, have fresh ideas and insights based on the reality of women’s lives. New knowledge is the lifeblood of innovation. If we keep on applying the same solution type, then equality outcomes for women will not change.

Feisty Women recommends that evidence of innovation and new knowledge informs budget allocation decisions.