



**COMMONWELATH WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIANS (CWP) WORKSHOP:**

**PARLIAMENTARIANS AS DRIVERS OF WOMENS' ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT**

28 April – 4 May 2025;  
Nassau, The Bahamas

**Report by Sioned Williams MS**



It was a privilege to represent Senedd Cymru (the Welsh Parliament) at the recent CWP workshop in Nassau, the Bahamas held during 28 April - 2 May 2025.

The theme of the workshop was parliamentarians as drivers of women's economic empowerment and there were timely and useful presentations and discussions over four full days, from some 60 representatives of parliaments across the Commonwealth and from policy experts. Common themes such as a lack of female democratic representation, unconscious bias in the media and within legislation, and misogynistic elements within cultures that hinder the development of women's economic potential were explored. The unique perspective of the different regions and nations represented was also presented, discussing the opportunities within sub-state cultures and structures to challenge mainstream narratives and discourse. Delegates were also given the opportunity to visit businesses in Nassau that were supported by a business initiative that promotes economic opportunities for women, and network with local representatives in a series of events at the Parliament of the Bahamas, and watch them at work.

I contributed a paper on the situation in Wales in terms of the economic position of women and efforts past and present to try to tackle policy shortcomings that create and deepen inequality. Drawing on my professional experience as a former journalist, I explored the question of how we could use one of the most powerful national and cultural tools - the media - to communicate and promote women's economic empowerment. The main points of discussion in my paper were to present examples of using culture and language to localise and enrich narratives about women's economic empowerment and equality more generally; the importance of funding and supporting media training, media projects and women-led storytelling; emphasising alternative economic models — co-ops, social enterprises, informal economies and challenging Western, capitalist definitions, which focus mainly on corporate models of economic success. My argument was that economic empowerment does not have to mean imitating Silicon Valley. It can mean investing in care, community wealth, circular economies—and storytelling—because changing who tells the story can change the ending. So we as representatives must look for success stories in our communities and share them, in order to highlight female entrepreneurs, innovators and leaders across our nations—especially those from under-represented backgrounds.

One of the most valuable sessions in terms of creating a better understanding of how to go about achieving better economic empowerment was the presentation which looked specifically at how to improve the capacity of laws and the legislative process—in particular the session on post-legislative scrutiny. This highly valuable workshop concluded with presentations by and discussion with female members of the youth parliament of the Bahamas. They were very interested in the work being

done in Wales in terms of the Youth Parliament and I offered to help foster a closer relationship and an opportunity to learn from each other.

I am extremely pleased to have been offered to publish my paper in The Parliamentarian Magazine (Annex A), and look forward to using what I have learnt in my own work as an elected member, and spreading that knowledge among my fellow MSs in Wales.



**Sioned Williams AS – erthygl ar gyfer The Parliamentarian**

[Sioned Williams' article "Women's Economic Empowerment in Wales" in Volume 106 \(Issue Two\) of the Parliamentarian.](#)

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I contributed a paper on the situation in Wales in terms of the economic position of women and efforts past and present to try to tackle policy shortcomings that create and deepen gender inequality. Drawing on my professional experience as a former journalist, I explored the question of how we could use one of the most powerful national and cultural tools - the media - to communicate and promote women's economic empowerment.

Wales is a small nation which has been called England's first colony, a historic nation with a rich and unique culture, two official languages, one of which - the Welsh Language is one of the oldest living languages in Europe, and a stated ambition to become a fairer, more equal country, - able in many areas of devolved competence, but not always politically willing to do things differently from the rest of the UK to achieve that aim.

We know that the simple truth is that when women thrive, economies thrive. In the UK, including Wales, it has been estimated that closing the gender pay gap could boost the economy by £150 billion by 2030. Wales' economy underperforms - it is one of the poorest parts of the UK - so this work is of course critical. Women generally are underrepresented in entrepreneurship and overrepresented in low-paid sectors like social care and retail. Only 20% of Welsh SMEs are owned by women. Yet,

we know that when women are given the opportunity and support, they don't just contribute to the economy—they redefine it.

A report by Chwarae Teg, for three decades one of Wales' leading gender equality organisations, whose lack of funding unfortunately forced them to close in 2023, found that one in four women in Wales are economically inactive. That's due to a combination of care responsibilities, health conditions, and lack of flexible work. In nearly all local authority areas in Wales men on average earn more than women, but the picture varies widely and the post industrial area of Merthyr Tydfil has the highest gender pay gap among people working in Wales at triple the country's average, with men earning 18.7% more than the women working in Wales.

The Chwarae Teg report showed that while Welsh women are held back by structural inequalities, they are also hampered by persistent cultural narratives about what women's work is "worth".

So how to use one of our greatest national tools—media—to communicate and advance women's economic empowerment? Unique to Wales, we have a law that requires public bodies to think about long-term impacts—including gender equality—in decision-making - The Well Being of Future Generations Act 2016, which is ten years old this year. It makes 'A more equal Wales' a national goal. It defines this as 'a society that enables people to fulfil their potential no matter what their background or circumstances (including their socio-economic background and circumstances)'.

I think the Act has definitely helped in increasing awareness of inequality but has it resulted in change? Not in the way many had hoped perhaps - and that's evident in the findings of the Chwarae Teg report.

The Equality Act 2010 introduced the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) across the UK. The Welsh Government has made its own regulations setting out some Wales specific duties that bodies listed in the Act need to follow to meet the PSED. Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) are intended to help public bodies assess the equalities impact of their policies and practices, but there has been mounting evidence that they are not being effectively utilised. A 2022 review by Audit Wales found that many Welsh public bodies are not using EIAs to their full potential and similarly, a 2023 report by the Senedd's Equality and Social Justice Committee on which I sit, recommended a new 'gender equality test' for all policy and legislative proposals. This underscores the failure of current EIAs to drive real change.

Because while policies matter of course, it's *stories* that move people and can create support for ensuring policy aims become reality. Stories change perceptions. Stories foster understanding and can create societal change. And stories—told well—can

also transform systems. The following is a quotation from BBC Media Action who took part in on an event called Shifting the Story, at the UN Women's 69th session of the Commission on the Status of Women in March, which I think should be at the heart of this matter:

"Media, when harnessed creatively and sensitively, can help to rewrite this narrative [gender equality] - clarifying rights, igniting discussion, and addressing norms that sustain inequality. It provides not just visibility but possibility. A girl hearing her struggles echoed in a radio drama, a father rethinking his daughter's future after a radio debate, a community shifting its stance on gender roles as they engage in television discussion shows – media has the power to both reflect the world and help to reshape it."

A recent report by the Federation of Small Businesses Wales report showed that women-led businesses are more likely to be community-rooted, innovative, and socially responsible, but these women's stories are often invisible. That's why media matters, because if people don't see it, they don't believe it, and if they don't believe it, they don't value it, and if they don't value it, they don't invest in it. The way we talk about work, value, and success—on the news, in political campaigns, on social media—shapes the economic landscape just as much as policy does. Too often, the dominant narrative says "real work" happens in boardrooms, not in care homes. Entrepreneurs look a certain way. Economic power is masculine by default. An Oxfam Cymru report, *The Cost of Inequality*, made this point clearly: the work women do—especially unpaid and undervalued work—is fundamental to the economy, but often ignored in both policy and media.

That invisibility is not a coincidence. It's a consequence of power—of who controls the narrative. In Wales we are tied to UK media which too often doesn't see Wales, its Senedd and its culture, *let alone* its women and their stories. But as a small nation with devolved powers and a distinct political culture and history, we have a unique opportunity to do things differently. In Wales, we can actively work to reframe dominant economic narratives—not by replicating global or UK models, but by centring our own values: community, care, cooperation. We have an extremely weak Welsh national media with most people in Wales consuming solely London based media - but the Welsh Language for instance gives us an opportunity to tell our own stories in our own way with more autonomy. Public service broadcasters like S4C and BBC Cymru, and independent online news platforms like Golwg360 and Nation Cymru, which receive some Welsh Government funding, allow us to tell stories that might never make it onto the UK or international agenda. Devolving broadcasting fully, which is a call by my party, Plaid Cymru, would enable us to take even bolder steps.

Social Media campaigns can be used to highlight female entrepreneurs, carers, engineers, and activists who are often overlooked in mainstream discourse. And smaller nations like Wales can show that economic empowerment isn't about women fitting into a broken model. It's about women shaping a better one. So how can we use media to shift mindsets and unlock potential?

First, we need to tell real, relatable stories, then we'll see the impact of sharing women's economic journeys through local and national media. For example the story of a female refugee in Cardiff who started her own food business through a microloan scheme, shared through community radio can reach other women who might not see themselves as "economic actors." Like the story of a single mother in the Rhondda Valleys who launched a tech startup and now mentors others. Her story can change not just how people see her, but how they see single mothers, rural tech, and women in leadership. These types of stories challenge the old narrative and offer a new one: ordinary and diverse Welsh Women as economic leaders, not exceptions.

Second, we must invest in media training for women, from business owners to carers, so they can speak on panels, give interviews, run podcasts, and lead campaigns. We must support women to tell their own stories by investing in media training, communications coaching, and leadership visibility programmes. In Wales, Equal Power Equal Voice is a Government backed mentoring programme which aims to increase diversity of representation in public and political life in Wales. From my involvement in this programme, I have seen how, across Wales, there exists massive social and intellectual capital that is untapped and intersectionally excluded from our public and political systems. The Equal Power Equal Voice programme strengthens the knowledge and skills of those that aspire to be in positions of power, influence and authority, whilst learning from and being supported by those who have achieved this in the face of these challenges. These types of programmes are absolutely key as a pipeline for better communication of women's economic empowerment.

We're also seeing growth in community-based storytelling platforms like grassroots podcasts and independent hyperlocal digital channels, which are essential for reaching women outside traditional political or economic spheres. They can also provide a safer environment than the traditional media for women and again can reflect different societal values. The fostering of this decentralised media is vital. These types of media can then be shared on wider platforms. As has been said many times - representation isn't just about being featured, it's about owning the mic.

Third, we must use social media campaigns to reach women directly, especially those in rural areas, younger women, and women who have protected characteristics. Platforms like X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, and TikTok are powerful for quick,

impactful messaging. We can seek out and partner with influencers, community leaders, and organisations to amplify content.

Fourth, elected representatives must work with journalists to challenge who gets quoted in economic reporting. Why are CEOs the default voice, but not care workers or part-time entrepreneurs?

And finally, we must embed communications into policy design. Following the Gender Equality Review—Deeds Not Words—commissioned by the Welsh Government in 2019, there is a commitment to now plan how every new policy will be explained, humanised, and owned by the people it's meant to serve. So when we design policies for childcare, employment, or enterprise, we also plan how they'll be communicated—whose stories we'll share, and through which platforms.

As a small nation Wales has agility. We can spotlight diverse voices. We can rethink who gets to define "economic value." This is something Wales and other small nations and substate parliaments can absolutely achieve with the right political will. Economic empowerment doesn't have to mean mimicking Silicon Valley. It can mean investing in care, community wealth, circular economies - and storytelling. Because changing who tells the story can change the ending. So we must seek out and share success stories and stories which highlight potential - those women entrepreneurs, innovators, and leaders across our nations, especially those from underrepresented backgrounds.

Media humanises data and brings policies to life. I would appeal to all to make a point of finding those women who are making strides. An internationally successful brewery in the region I represent is owned and run by two amazing women and highlighting stories like theirs to journalists, in parliamentary debates and questions, and in committee work, can help get the story out there in to the press, onto social media and into the community. Sharing their example in a male dominated field like brewing can change attitudes and also use the pride felt locally regarding their success as a Welsh owned brand, can help build the support we need to shore up a shared mission of creating a Wales—and a world—where women are fully empowered economically.

If we want to build economies that work for women, we must tell stories that centre women—in all their diversity, complexity, and power. Let's use media not just to reflect the world as it is, but to imagine the world as it could be. In Wales, though we are not independent, our democracy can in the great Welsh intellectual Raymond Williams' words ensure "independence of mind" - challenging established norms and ideas rather than passively accepting the dominant social and economic ideologies of dominant nations.

We can do this by using culture and language to localise and enrich our narratives around women's economic inequality; funding and support women-led media and storytelling projects; celebrating alternative economic models such as co-ops, social enterprises, and informal economies and challenging dominant Western, corporate-centric definitions of success.

This is what can help us make women's economic lives visible, valuable and unmissable.

