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MAPUTO WOMANIFESTO

A PAN-AFRICAN FEMINIST CALL FOR DEBT CANCELLATION IN AFRICA

Preamble

We, the young women and youth of Africa, gathered at the 4th African Conference on Debt and Development (AfCoDD IV) in Maputo, Mozambique, from August 28-30, 2024, declare our unified call for the immediate cancellation of Africa's debt. This urgent declaration highlights the disproportionate burden debt places on women and youth, emphasizing the need to examine debt policies through a feminist lens. Recognizing that youth make up most of Africa's population and reflecting on the AfCoDD IV theme – Africa's Debt Crisis: Pan Africa Feminist Perspectives and Alternatives, we recognize the critical link between debt, tax and austerity. Our call also aligns with aspirations of feminist movements and women's rights organizations in Africa, as presented in the keynote presentation made on Day 1 by Dinah Musindarwezo highlighting the key pillars to feminist alternatives to the current debt crisis emphasizing on the need for a decolonial systems change, re-organization of care work, interrogating the role of the state and ensuring meaningful participation of marginalized groups.

Pan-African Feminist Perspective of macro-economic policies and the African Debt Crisis

This declaration is made at a critical moment when most countries in Africa are confronting crises on multiple fronts, including gendered labor disparities, economic downturns, particularly the debt crisis, and climate change among others. At this juncture of urgency, young women, youth and our allies, are fully aware that the prevailing macroeconomic framework, neoliberalism, is at the heart of the African debt crisis. This framework disproportionately affects public revenue generation and utilization, exacerbating gender inequalities and economic vulnerabilities. These policies have trapped many African countries in a cycle of debt due to unfavourable trade terms, conditionalities of the debt agreements and fluctuating commodity prices, limiting their ability to invest in social services that support women's empowerment and equality. Economic liberalization has exposed these economies to global market volatility, while austerity measures required as conditionality for debt often result in social unrest and further instability, disproportionately affecting marginalized groups including women and youth. These policies have perpetuated a form of neocolonialism, keeping African countries dependent on Western financial institutions and markets, thus limiting our ability to pursue independent economic policies and contributing to ongoing debt and underdevelopment, with women bearing the brunt of these economic hardships.

Neoliberalism continues to aggressively promote regressive taxation, undermining public revenue generation in African states. Regressive taxes place a heavier burden on lower-income individuals, disproportionately affecting women and marginalized groups. These taxes reduce the overall progressivity of the tax system, limiting the ability of governments to generate sufficient revenue for public services and social programs. For instance, Africa Union countries are losing over \$8 billion every year in potential tax revenue, largely owing to aggressive tax avoidance by the wealthiest companies and individuals. This is almost certainly an under-estimate rather than an overestimate as much of the data is under-reported. These losses result in countries failing to meet the minimum investment of 20% of budget to education thus breaching their commitments to the Education for All (EFA) Dakar Framework adopted in 2000





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On the other hand, between 2011 and 2019, public debt in sub-Saharan Africa increased by an average of 27% of GDP. In 2023, 32 African governments spent more on debt repayments than on healthcare, and 25 spent more on debt than on education. The shift from concessional loans to market-based loans with higher interest rates and shorter maturities has increased the debt burden. As a result, many African countries are now facing renewed cycles of debt crises, with elevated risks of economic disruption and social instability. This dependency on external financing has limited their policy autonomy, forcing them to adhere to neoliberal economic prescriptions that often prioritize debt repayment over social and economic development, further marginalizing women and vulnerable populations. Debt restricts access to education, healthcare, and housing, which are fundamental to personal and professional growth. The debt crisis exacerbates economic instability, hindering young feminists from achieving financial goals and accessing resources for economic empowerment. Women are disproportionately burdened by unpaid care work and are often pushed into the informal economy due to a lack of services. Many countries face severe foreign exchange shortages as they grapple with debt, further limiting economic opportunities.

Our Call to Action

Considering these challenges, we unapologetically call for the cancellation of Africa's debt and present the following feminist alternatives to build more feminist, just and sustainable economies. We believe that these alternatives are crucial for a forward-looking Africa with socio-economic policies that work for Africa, prioritizing people over profit and upholding feminist principles and the African philosophy of Ubuntu. These alternatives are crucial for creating a more just and equitable society where all individuals, particularly women and marginalized communities succeed. By doing so, we can alleviate the profound economic and social impacts of debt on our nations and pave the way for a more sustainable and inclusive future.

- **Dismantle the current macroeconomic order and rebuild new Economic and Financial systems that prioritize people over profit:** We call for the complete overhaul of the current neoliberal macroeconomic order and adoption of pan African feminist economies. This begins with the immediate cancellation of Africa's debt to alleviate the profound economic and social impacts on our nations. The burden of debt repayment has stifled development efforts of most African governments, disproportionately affecting women and girls who are often the most vulnerable in times of economic hardship. Debt cancellation is not just an economic necessity but a moral imperative to ensure that women and marginalized communities can thrive.
- **Progressive Taxation:** We call for the strengthening of the revenue base for financing gender-responsive public services through progressive taxation and supporting the enactment of the UN Tax Convention. African countries are losing significant potential tax revenue due to aggressive tax avoidance by wealthy companies and individuals as. This tax avoidance is also perpetuated by tax havens utilized by the wealthy corporates and individuals. By implementing progressive tax policies and supporting the enactment of the UN Tax Convention, we can ensure that those who have the most contribute their fair share, allowing for increased investment in public services that support women's empowerment and equality.





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- **Centering economies on care:** We urge African governments to adopt economies that are centred on care by increasing investments in public services such as education, healthcare and economic empowerment to safeguard the rights of women affected by the current crises. Furthermore, we advocate for the implementation of robust social protection measures to safeguard the rights of women affected by the current crisis. Social protection systems must be designed to address the specific needs of women, including maternity benefits, childcare support, and protections for informal economy workers. These measures are crucial for reducing poverty and inequality and ensuring that women can participate fully in economic life. Our research, [Transforming Education Financing in Africa report.pdf \(actionaid.org\)](#), shows that African governments will have adequate resources to support gender transformative public services such as health, childcare, education and social security. We call for increased
- **Transparency in Debt Acquisition and Management:** Additionally, we demand greater transparency in debt acquisition and management to ensure that future borrowing is conducted in a manner that prioritizes the well-being of all citizens. Women and marginalized communities must be at the center of these decisions, ensuring that debt is managed in a way that promotes social and economic justice. Transparent processes will help prevent corruption and ensure that borrowed funds are used effectively to benefit the entire population.
- **Inclusion of Young People in Debt Management:** Finally, we emphasize the need for the effective inclusion of young people in debt management and the adoption of a gender-centered approach. Young women and men must have a voice in the decisions that affect their futures. A gender-centered approach to debt management will ensure that policies are designed to address the challenges faced by women, promoting gender equality and empowering the next generation of leaders.

Our calls to action are not just economic reforms but essential steps towards achieving social justice and human rights. We urge policymakers, international financial institutions, and all stakeholders to take immediate and decisive action to implement these recommendations. By addressing these issues through a feminist lens, we can create a more just and equitable society where all individuals could succeed.

