

MAPUTO MANIFESTO 2024

Reclaiming Africa's Future
Through a Feminist Lens on
Debt and Development



AFRICAN FORUM AND NETWORK
ON DEBT AND DEVELOPMENT





PREAMBLE

Gathered in Maputo, from 28 to 30 August 2024, for the 4th African Conference on Debt and Development (AfCoDD IV), we acknowledge a critical moment in Africa's history. The debt crisis continues to exert an oppressive grip on our economies, deepening inequalities and disproportionately affecting women and girls across the continent. This reality leads us to recognize the urgency of a collective and transformative response.

AfCoDD IV was shaped by the need to build a feminist debt agenda, which deconstructs conventional macroeconomic thinking, offers feminist principles to address the debt and development dilemma, and breaks the power asymmetries that marginalize women.

*Therefore, we, the undersigned, present the **Maputo Manifesto 2024** — a commitment to adopt a feminist lens on debt and development, recognizing that the fight against debt is intrinsically linked to the fight for gender equality and social justice.*



CONTEXT AND URGENCY

Challenges continually exacerbated by overlapping crises—from COVID-19, geopolitical conflicts, and the climate crisis, to intrinsic challenges in national contexts—have deepened the systemic inequalities faced by African nations. The current global financial architecture, which prioritizes profits over lives, is inadequate to meet the needs of populations. Mounting debt burdens, coupled with restrictive lending conditions imposed by private lenders, have severely limited the ability of African governments to invest in public services, perpetuating cycles of poverty and inequality.

Austerity measures, public spending cuts and regressive taxation impose a disproportionate burden on women, who make up nearly 90% of informal employment in Africa. These women face unfair wages, exploitation and the absence of basic labour rights such as pensions and maternity leave. Despite representing the majority in the public sector and being the backbone of our economies and communities, they continue to be marginalised.

In this context, the debt crisis in Africa is not just an economic issue; it is a profound feminist concern, which exposes the intersectionality of debt and gender. For this reason, at the current conference, we have deliberately chosen to approach this crisis through a feminist lens that exposes and challenges the structural inequalities embedded in the current economic and financial system.

HIGHLIGHTED CHALLENGES

During the discussions, the following critical issues were highlighted:

1. Between 2010 and 2021, interest payments on debt in Africa increased by an alarming [132%](#), crowding out critical spending on education, healthcare, and public investment. Today, nearly [half of African countries](#) allocate more funds to servicing debt than on critical sectors such as education, health, and public investment.
2. Cuts in budget allocation for health and education in Africa has a disproportionate impact on women, who make up [nearly 90%](#) of the informal sector and often serve as primary caregivers and educators within their families. This decline in funding leads to poorer health outcomes, increased school dropout rates for girls, and a general decline in community well-being.
3. Long-term underspending on education, driven by debt burdens, has led to the continued neglect of women's education in Africa, resulting in high rates of illiteracy and early marriages. Cultural norms, economic barriers, and inadequate educational infrastructure also contribute to these challenges.
4. Women are often excluded from financial allocations, with [only 37%](#) of them with bank account in sub-Saharan Africa.
5. Austerity measures often restrict women's access to essential resources like shelters, counseling, and legal aid, which are vital for escaping abusive situations. The reduction of these support systems increases women's vulnerability and isolation, creating significant barriers to reporting incidents of gender-based violence.
6. The lack of gender-sensitive budgeting and data on women's economic contributions and tax payments disaggregated by gender, hinders accountability and makes it challenging to align policies with social needs.
7. The Global Financial Architecture, established post-World War II to serve the interests of industrialized nations, has not evolved to meet the needs of developing countries, leading to systemic inequities that favor wealthier countries.

FEMINIST ALTERNATIVES AND PATHS

We propose a radical shift in the way debt and development are addressed in Africa, adopting a feminist economic model that prioritizes social justice, equity and the well-being of all citizens. Our key recommendations and policy proposals include:

1. Invest in female leadership and ensure that women's stories and contributions are recognized and preserved.
2. African women must continue to have space and resources to tell their stories. We need to remember and not erase women's contribution to Africa's economy. Understanding the contributions of women in the past is essential for avoiding the pitfalls of modeling political and economic systems solely on male-dominated frameworks.
3. Increasing women's representation in political and economic decision-making, particularly in negotiations on debt and development policies. Recognize that representation alone is insufficient; prioritize the inclusion of women with feminist values in leadership positions.
4. Promoting inclusive electoral systems by encouraging political parties to demonstrate meaningful commitment to female representation and elevating this responsibility to voters who should demand female candidates from their parties.
5. Reforming tax and fiscal systems to create fairer and more equitable policies that address gender inequalities and promote social justice.
6. Promoting economies of care by developing economic frameworks that address structural inequalities and ensure equitable access to resources, opportunities, and benefits for women. This involves dismantling patriarchal and neocolonial structures that perpetuate gender-based discrimination.

7. Moving beyond a narrow focus on economic empowerment alone, which can be distracting. Emphasize social protection systems, investments in labor markets, and the creation of employment opportunities with robust social safety nets.
8. Advocate for debt cancellation and restructuring that considers the social and gender impacts of debt repayment, ensuring that African nations can invest in health, education and social protection systems.
9. African governments should form a unified front in international negotiations, demanding fairer terms in debt and financial agreements that prioritize the well-being of their citizens, particularly women and girls. By working together, African nations can leverage their collective power and resources to challenge the dominance of the Global North and create more equitable and sustainable economic relationships.
10. Urge the adoption of policies that dismantle patriarchal and neocolonial structures, ensuring that economic decisions are made with the full participation of women and marginalized groups. This involves challenging the dominant economic paradigm that prioritizes profit over people and the planet and advocating for alternative models that prioritize social and environmental justice.
11. Support the establishment of robust regional institutions that can lead Africa's financial independence and ensure transparency, accountability and inclusiveness in all economic policies.
12. African countries are not less powerful than developed nations; they possess the resources necessary for continued growth. Africa holds significant potential and must assert its role as a rule maker in the global economy.

During the event, the following short-term actions were also identified:

1. Gather disaggregated data and conduct targeted gender-specific research to understand the factors that drive or hinder women's progress. This includes evaluating the effectiveness of current laws and identifying cultural barriers that may impede advancement
2. Launch a campaign aimed at abolishing laws and cultural practices that sustain gender inequality and disadvantage women. Addressing harmful cultural norms is critical to fostering an environment where women can thrive.
3. To ensure coherent global engagement, there must be a clear and well-defined transformative agenda for local, national, and regional levels. This agenda should incorporate a strong economic foundation and a feminist vision. It is essential to move beyond aspirational goals and articulate a concrete pathway for implementation.
4. Establish a Working Group to propose and implement a measurable action plan, allowing for the evaluation of progress at each annual forum based on the findings from this event and supported by existing research. This initiative aims to ensure the implementation of concrete measures between each annual forum.



COMMITMENT

As we conclude AfCoDD IV, we pledge the following commitments to guide our work on debt and economic justice:

I. Identity and Afro-Feminism

We commit to creating and promoting African feminist theories and discourses that reflect the continent's diverse realities. We will reclaim Africa's rich history of resistance against all forms of discrimination—whether based on patriarchy, race, class, or global imperialism.

II. Decolonization

We pledge to actively work towards dismantling colonial structures and influences in economic, cultural, and political spheres. Our Pan-African feminism is inherently decolonial, aiming to liberate our nations and people from all forms of colonization.

III. Memory and History

We commit to preserving and learning from Africa's history, ensuring that future generations have the knowledge of past achievements and struggles. We will honor this memory as the foundation for building our future.

IV. Resistance and Reconstruction

We will resist exploitative economic practices and rethink economic systems to prioritize the well-being of all citizens. This includes rejecting neoliberal capitalist practices that commodify labor and life, and instead, promoting economies of care and life.

V. Reclaiming Values

We pledge to reclaim Africa's humanity, dignity, autonomy, and interconnectedness. We are committed to healing, sisterhood, and joy, and we will honor the sacredness of the ecosystem in which we live.

CALL TO ACTION

We call on all stakeholders — African citizens, government leaders, civil society and international organizations — to come together in a shared commitment to transform the debt crisis into an opportunity to advance gender equality and sustainable development. We invite all stakeholders across Africa to endorse and sign this manifesto within a three-month period, solidifying our collective resolve to reclaim Africa's future and ensure that our continent becomes a rule-maker rather than a rule-taker in the global financial system.



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