AFRICAN FORUM AND NETWORK
ON DEBT AND DEVELOPMENT

Concept Note

4th Edition of the Debt and Development Academy (DaDA IV)

1st-3rd July 2026, Nairobi, Kenya.

I. Introduction

The Debt and Development Academy (DaDA) is the African Forum and Network on Debt and Development (AFRODAD's) third flagship project under its 2021-2025 strategic plan. DaDA is designed to be a dedicated civil society organisation (CSO) capacity building programme that seeks to build current and future capacity of CSOs, advocates and activists to promote the idea of 'Africa the Rule Maker' on Climate, Economic, and Social Justice issues in Africa.

DaDA was conceptualised as a collective action across struggles that challenges the orthodoxy and proposes alternatives to address the contemporary challenges facing Africa. It is ideologically positioned to challenge the notion of market-based, private sector led, and neo-liberal leaning interventions that have long failed to transform Africa and her people, but instead deepened poverty, inequality, keeping the continent in a vicious cycle of dependency. DaDA espouses the Pan-African spirit of Ubuntu and advancing a Pan-African alternative with a feminist macroeconomic principles and framework.

DaDA is Swahili for "sister" and its significance to AFRODAD's third flagship represents what sisters epitomise in our culture and society. Sisters are carers, protectors, supporters, and providers during the childhood. They are also most often the sacrificial lambs when tough decisions need to be made. And despite all this, sisters demonstrate resilience, loyalty, and dedication to very family unit that can sometime stifle them. It is for this reason DaDA was selected as the name of AFRODAD's capacity building programme.

II. Context

The fourth edition of the Debt and Development Academy will run under the theme: ***Asserting African Agency in an Unravelling Global Order: Mobilising Collective Action for Debt, Economic and Digital Justice.*** This seeks to centre discussions on the trajectory of Africa's development amidst the currently unravelling global order. 2026 for Africa seems to be a moment of extremely critical convergence and as these events continue to unfold, democratic retreat, unsustainable debt, climate shocks and prolonged wars are on collision course with a rapidly shifting global order. With the recent developments, power politics rather than rules define the new international order. This begs the question as to whether the world's rules-based order is ruptured[1].

[1] Africa in 2026 and Beyond: 7 Strategic Inflection Points for the Continent's Future. https://assodesire.com/2026/01/04/africa-in-2026-and-beyond-7-strategic-inflection-points-for-the-continents-future/

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Why is this issue important?

While all these is unfolding, Africa is becoming even more central to the world's future given it hosts around 60% of world's best solar resources and a commanding share of minerals essential for just transition and AI. Whereas this is a reality yet to unravel, the continent is presently wading through a strife between two futures: one that is driven by impunity, kleptocracy, force and an indented rhetoric of sovereignty and the other fabricated by collective intelligence, democratic substance and broad social coalitions led by the youth, women and the citizenry in general. The outcome of this strife is currently not fated but in the coming years this will take shape hence the need for a deliberate, concrete, intentional and decisive collaborative action as a continent to tackle the issues currently ailing our continent. Our trajectory as a continent in 2026 and beyond must be shaped by both local dynamics and a currently less predictable international order and the interplay between global uncertainty and domestic policy choices will be critical. The weakening of multilateral norms, split international leadership and the extended or rather intensified great and middle power competition have created a more indulgent global environment where external accountability has become trivial to transactional interest[2]. The response by Africa to US actions in Venezuela for instance illuminated the growing concerns over the corrosion of sovereignty protections and the precedent it sets especially for Africa[3].

Key Issues for Africa in 2026

The Economic Outlook: Multipolar Opportunity

The African Development Bank[4] has projected Africa's average GDP growth in 2026 at 4.3%. Despite this projection, Africa's economic outlook persists to be frail. This is attributed to high debt burdens, inflationary pressures, tight and unfair global credit conditions and the dwindling official development assistance (ODA)[5] that inhibit growth despite growing demand for infrastructure, energy and jobs.

On the issue of debt, Africa's public debt crisis is often misdiagnosed. The prevailing crisis is more of a systemic failure of the current Global Financial Architecture than it is about liquidity. Africa's public debt in 2022 reached USD1.8 trillion according to an UNCTAD report and has increased by 183% since 2010, a rate approximately four times higher than its GDP growth rate in dollar terms.

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[2] Africa in 2026: Global uncertainty demands regional leadership
https://www.chathamhouse.org/2026/01/africa-2026-global-uncertainty-demands-regional-leadership

[3] Communiqué on the Situation in Venezuela
https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20260103/communique-situation-venezuela

[4] African Development Bank forecasts improved growth for Africa, driven by buoyant private consumption spending, accommodative monetary policy and a weaker US dollar
https://www.afdb.org/en/news-and-events/press-releases/african-development-bank-forecasts-improved-growth-africa-driven-buoyant-private-consumption-spending-accommodative-monetary-policy-and-weaker-us-dollar-88846

[5] The Role of Official Development Assistance In Realising Agenda 2063
https://www.afrodad.org/sites/default/files/publications/The-Role-of-Official-Development-Assistance-in-Realising-Agenda-2063.pdf

This inordinate rise in debt has impeded growth and hampered many African countries' ability to cope with future crises or invest for development[6]. Besides this, Africa's external debt service payments have increased substantially in the past decade, in part due to higher interest payments on private loans[7]. In 2025, over 20 African countries spent more on debt servicing than on health or education while Climate-vulnerable African states pay an estimated USD 30-40 billion annually in excess interest due to risk premiums[8]. Without reform of credit rating agencies, liquidity access, and multilateral lending rules, Africa will remain locked in a cycle where growth fuels repayment, not development.

On matters trade, the disintegration of the US trade parity despite the prospects of a three-year extension of the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) that was overwhelmingly approved by the US House of Representatives[9], the Trump administration's-imposed tariffs and the USAID shutdown, are escalating African efforts to diversify trade, development and security partnerships. With these unfolding, China remains an important and valuable partner for largescale financing, infrastructure development, industrial partnerships and resource-for-investment models, buttressed by the announcement for a significant expansion of market access for 53 African countries by eliminating tariffs on all imports[10]. This marked a pivotal development in China-Africa trade relations.

Gulf states, notably the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, have expanded investments in logistics, agriculture and renewable energy while the EU is also repositioning itself via its Global Gateway strategy, green transition financing and critical minerals partnerships though rarely matching the scale of Gulf or Chinese capital whereas India and Turkey continue to deepen engagement through defence and technology transfer. These engagements provide African governments with financing alternatives and negotiating leverage, even amid rising debt concerns. However, although access to bilateral financing or security guarantees can only offer short-term relief, without accompanying institutional reforms it can deepen long-term dependency and debt.

Democracy Under Siege: Elections, Coups, and the Collapse of Legitimacy

Elections in Africa have been a highly defining stress test for African governance over the past decade or so. The elections in Tanzania in 2025 for instance displayed the entrenched political systems in East Africa while Ghana's peaceful transition ratified its prominence as a regional democratic anchor.

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[6] World of Debt
https://unctad.org/publication/world-of-debt/regional-stories
[7] African Debt
https://data.one.org/analysis/african-debt
[8] Landscape of Climate Finance in Africa
https://academic.oup.com/ooec/article/doi/10.1093/ooec/odaf003/8236479
[9] US House passes 3-year AGOA extension, but South Africa's inclusion is unclear
https://www.africanews.com/2026/01/13/us-house-passes-3-year-agoa-extension-but-south-africas-inclusion-is-unclear/
[10] China courts Africa with tariff-free access: a new era of trade, or just the first step?
https://odi.org/en/insights/china-courts-africa-with-tariff-free-access-a-new-era-of-trade-or-just-the-first-step/

On the other hand, the re-election of 92-year-old President Paul Biya in Cameroon highlighted the persistence of gerontocratic rule[11]. By the end of 2025, more than half of African countries were classified as “not free” or only “partly free” by global democracy indices. Since 2010, the world has seen a significant resurgence in military coups, particularly across Africa's "coup belt". After a decade of relative decline (2010–2019), the period since 2020 has been marked by what the United Nations has called a "coup epidemic"[12]. In the period between 2020-2024, at least 10 successful coups have taken place in Africa, and over 20 constitutions have been amended to weaken term limits. Civic space has closed sharply, with the work of journalists, activists, and opposition leaders increasingly criminalised[13].

In 2026 alone, Africa faces over 20 national elections it is intriguing that many were or are already in contexts already marked by repression, insecurity, or economic crisis[14]. Rather than renewing legitimacy, several of these elections risk deepening political alienation. The jeopardy is not only in the flawed elections but the normalisation of democratic fraud, forging fertile ground for coups, insurgencies, and social explosions.

The new moment: AI, Digitalisation and Data Governance

Africa is once again at the centre of a global power contestation however this time round it is for data and not gold, oil or rubber. With every biometric enrolment, social media post, mobile payment or satellite image, it is the digital empires of the Silicon Valley, Shenzhen and other power centres that are enriched. Despite this being a new moment, it is already creating a hauntingly familiar pattern where Africa supplies the raw inputs but the wealth it generates flows elsewhere. With the new wave, the stakes are higher as data is not just a new oil; it is memory, intelligence and power that shape how governments deliver services, how companies build products and how societies imagine the future. Africa must therefore act swiftly lest the economic and political dispossession of the colonial era will repeat itself albeit encoded in algorithms and cloud platforms instead of shipping contracts and gunboats[15].

The continent's immense demographic potential presents significant opportunities for various actors to engage and influence both the continental and global online spaces. Its large and growing pool of potential users of digital technologies also presents significant opportunities for investment in digital infrastructure and tech startups.

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[11] Suppression of post-election protests in Cameroon will not solve the country's looming succession crisis
https://www.chathamhouse.org/2025/10/suppression-post-election-protests-cameroon-will-not-solve-countrys-looming-succession

[12] Coups in Africa – Why They Happen, and What Can (Not) Be Done about Them
https://www.swp-berlin.org/en/publication/mta-joint-futures-05-coups-in-africa#:~:text=A%20New%20Epidemic%20of%20Coups,more%20likely%20to%20do%20so.

[13] Number of Successful or Failed Coups in Africa
https://africacenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/08-Ouedraogo-EN.pdf

[14] Election Calendar
https://www.eisa.org/election-calendar/

[15] Africa at the digital crossroads: Why Ghana must lead a sovereign AI future
https://shorturl.at/lBAj1

In addition to its human capital, Africa also hosts majority of the world's reserves of critical minerals that will be necessary to drive global technological development. These minerals include cobalt, lithium, and rare earth elements that are necessary to produce batteries, electric vehicles, and other high-tech devices are in immense demand from both governments and companies in the Global North as well as rising powers in the East. Besides these, Africa's central location between the East and West has also meant it is an attractive location for digital infrastructure development and surveillance. The continent is a major transit point for submarine cables, which carry most of the world's internet traffic. This makes Africa a strategic location for countries that want to monitor and control the flow of information.

Despite these vast opportunities, there are core challenges that the continent is currently grappling with. There is a significant gap in physical infrastructure that includes reliable power, data centres and fibreoptic networks which results in majority of Africa's data storage and processing taking place outside the continent. The continent is struggling with digital connectivity, an important component in AI adoption. Despite the digital revolution being well underway in Africa, only 38% of the continent's population is using the internet, a statistic way below the global average of 68%. Besides this, around 600 million people in Africa still lack reliable access to electricity which nearly half the continents population and more than 80% of the global electricity access gap. Digital sovereignty and dependency are also an issue as much of Africa's digital infrastructure and services are owned and governed by foreign entities such as Google, Microsoft among others thus raising concerns about data sovereignty. Besides these, inclusion and governance are also a challenge as a wide digital divide persists between rural and urban areas and between genders.

Conflict and Fragility: Symptoms of Deeper Governance Failure

Conflicts in Africa remain moot as the global attention, mediation and political capital are progressively stretched. The persistent war in Sudan continues to splinter the state and deepen the humanitarian crisis and despite there being intermittent ceasefire efforts, cutthroat regional interests have impeded meaningful progress towards mediation. The Quad roadmap, comprising Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and the US, offers limited hope for 2026, albeit constrained by divergent Arab priorities and weak enforcement. Despite increased US engagement in late 2025, international attention remains focused on Ukraine, Gaza, recent events in Venezuela and now the war in Iran. Sudanese civilians remain neglected, with frontline responders left to carry the burden of providing humanitarian support[16]. Meanwhile the warring parties continue to fortify themselves, sabotaging prospects for a civilian transition. The wider Horn of Africa also remains acutely frail. Insecurity in Ethiopia lingers despite the 2022 Pretoria Agreement while tension with Eritrea have spiked over maritime access and sovereignty concerns.

[16] Sudan grassroots aid groups awarded 2025 Chatham House Prize https://www.chathamhouse.org/2025/11/sudan-grassroots-aid-groups-awarded-2025-chatham-house-prize

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, peace initiatives have failed to dismantle armed groups or address regional interference. Despite US and Qatari-backed talks and the December 2025 agreement in Washington, hostilities continue[17]. More than 6 million people remain internally displaced in the DRC, the largest displacement crisis in Africa. As long as mineral wealth coexists with impunity, violence will remain economically rational. The Sahel region has over the years become one of Africa's most acute and rapidly deepening conflict theatres, where insurgency, state fragility, and humanitarian collapse intersect. As of late 2025, over 3.3 million people have been forced from their homes within the Central Sahel alone, and broader estimates place the total displaced, including refugees and internally displaced persons, at nearly 5.9 million, alongside roughly 2.2 million refugees hosted across neighbouring countries. The human toll is compounded by economic collapse, food insecurity, and erosion of governance, making the Sahel both a security and humanitarian priority that, without decisive regional action and sustained investment in protection, risks becoming a chronic area of instability with cross-continental implications[18].

While all this is unfolding, the future of human rights in Africa is at acute pitfall. The civic space is shrinking, journalists and human-rights defenders are criminalised, the judiciary systems captured, and emergency laws are normalized in the name of security and stability. Elections increasingly coexist with repression; conflicts persist alongside mass displacement and atrocity crimes; and digital surveillance is being weaponised to silence dissent.

Africa's Leadership Test

As the world's external attention crumbles and tolerance for instability soars, Africa can no longer entrust episodic and anecdotal international engagement to insure peace, democracy and economic elasticity. Persistent conflicts and awry elections risk becoming regiment unless African institutions move beyond disunion and proclaim unified leadership[19]. A split African Union has depleted its integrity and validity at precisely the occasion when coordinated regional action is most needed to address crises that are to a greater extent interconnected and transnational. Civic actors have stepped in to ensure electoral integrity but are no substitute for political leadership.

Africa must rebuild democratic substance; it must do so together, understanding that democratic regression in one country undermines and the legitimacy and security of all.

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[17] Joint Statement on Peace Talks between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Republic of Rwanda, mediated by the United States and Observed by the State of Qatar
https://www.state.gov/releases/office-of-the-spokesperson/2025/06/joint-statement-on-peace-talks-between-the-democratic-republic-of-the-congo-and-the-republic-of-rwanda-mediated-by-the-united-states-and-observed-by-the-state-of-qatar
[18] Sahel Crisis
https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/sahelcrisis
[19] Africa must strengthen continental unity to boost its global influence
https://www.chathamhouse.org/2025/09/africa-must-strengthen-continental-unity-boost-its-global-influence

The continent must supplant selective silence with active African solidarity, enforcing authentic and solid political and economic consequences for coups, war crimes, constitutional manipulation, and repression, regardless of the country or the identity of those in power. This requires stronger, credible regional and continental institutions, an African Union, and regional economic communities that are empowered, adequately resourced, and willing to hold member states accountable, not merely issue communiqués. Africa must also act as one on global finance, coordinating positions on debt treatment, correcting the structural bias that shores up the cost of capital, accelerating the creation of an African Credit Rating Agency, and negotiating as a bloc to prevent fragmentation and exploitation.

Besides this, Africa must act in disciplined solidarity to turn its critical minerals and natural resources into lasting power, not fleeting rents. The continent holds an extraordinary share of the inputs driving the global energy transition, cobalt, lithium, manganese, graphite, copper, platinum group metals, yet it too often captures the least value, absorbs the most environmental damage, and bears the political risk of extraction. Fragmented national deals and opaque contracts weaken Africa's bargaining position and lock countries into dependence on raw exports. Working together through common standards, coordinated licensing and taxation, shared infrastructure corridors, and regional value chains, Africa can shift from price-taker to rule-shaper.

DaDA IV seeks to connect debt, as one of Africa's biggest challenges, connecting it to Africa's development trajectory in the wake of an unravelling global order through the various modules undertaken at the capacity building workshop. The modules are:

- **Democracy and Governance**
  Understanding elections as a source of political legitimacy. Examining the rule of law and its connection to current governance context in the continent amidst repression, insecurity and economic crisis. Provide a framing of how austerity measures as a cause of public dissatisfaction, civic space crackdowns and governance failures. **Diana Wabwire-PALU**

- **Geopolitics: Systemic Determinants of Borrowing and Its Inequitable Conditions**
  Understanding the current geopolitical landscape and war economy with a deep dive into its implications on borrowing and the prevailing debt crisis in Africa. **Stefano Prato -SID**

- **Political Economy of Debt**
  Understanding current affairs and new development around debt and debt relief initiatives. Examine Africa's debt toolkits that forward best practices for prudential debt management, transparency and accountability and legitimate governance. An analysis of the Common African Position on Debt and FFD4 outcome Document's (Compromiso de Sevilla) key paragraphs on debt. Understanding the path of fiscal sovereignty as an alternative for economic sustainability. **John Oduk- AFRODAD**

- **Debt and Development in the era of Globalisation**
  Examining global dominant political role of international financial institutions – also through 'economic-interest based forums' (G20, G-7, Paris Club). Exposing contemporary challenges on debt. **Afshin Nazir- AFRODAD**

- **Digital transformation and Data Governance.**
  Understanding the political economy of AI and digital transformation in Africa, how Africa positions itself within the global AI race, and the role that critical minerals play in these dynamics. Understanding how structural extractive patterns are replicated within digital transformation discourse and practice and how the constrained fiscal space is impacting development of digital infrastructure which might lead to exploitative "infrastructure-for-data" or "infrastructure-for-minerals" deals with tech giants. **Pendo Manjele- Ubuntu AI**.

- **Tax Governance and Critical Minerals in Africa**
  Analysing the UN Tax Convention's potential and its implications for Africa's tax governance. Examining challenges in revenue mobilisation especially through the mining industry in the continent. Make a case on how resource extraction can be leveraged explicitly to break the debt cycle and shift to building sovereign wealth. Understanding the political economy of illicit financial flows (IFFs). **Ishmael Zulu-TJNA**

- **The Role of Critical African institutions**
  Understanding the role of critical African institutions in creating consensus and African-led cooperation as the most viable pathway to stability, agency and long-term resilience in the context of a more fickle and erratic global order with fewer rules. How is indebtedness affecting leadership and democratic governance on the continent? **Joab Okanda- GGON**

- **The Global Trade Architecture:** Understanding Africa's trade status quo and challenges within the current global economic order. Examining the linkage between the unequal trade relations to balance-of-payment deficits that ultimately create the need for sovereign borrowing. **Jane Nalunga- SEATINI UGANDA**

DaDA is delivered as an in-person session using a modular approach preceded by a virtual learning phase. AFRODAD's partners and Convenors of DaDA IV are NAWI-Afrifem Macroeconomic Collective; Stop the Bleeding Campaign; Tax Justice Network Africa; Pan-African Lawyers Union; Centre for Trade Policy and Development; Southern and Eastern Africa Trade Information and Negotiations Institute (SEATINI) Uganda; Okoa Uchumi Coalition; Society for International Development (SID) Global Gas and Oil Network and Ubuntu AI Community.

III. Structure and Delivery of DaDA

DaDA IV takes several formats and incorporates pre and post learning schedules to ensure continued learning, engagement, and application of the learning to everyday advocacy and activism.

The structure:

- Selection of Participants: participants will be nominated by partner organisations and will be expected to be performing roles in policy, research, advocacy, campaigns, and communications.
- Pre-reads/listens/watches: a folder with pre-DaDA materials will be provided to all participants as part of their orientation to DaDA. This folder will have reading, listening, and watching material for all modules.

IV. Objectives of DaDA

- Contribute to building stakeholders' capacity for a solid Pan African ideation on issues related to prudent debt management and related development finance mechanisms.
- Highlight the initiatives and mechanisms that African countries may utilise to prudently manage their debts for the benefits of its citizens; and
- To contribute to strengthening an African debt movement that can influence the international debt landscape for the benefit of African people.

V. Expected Outcomes

- A more knowledgeable, engaged, and active citizenry on public debt management and public finance management issues.
- Civil Society organisations that advocate their national governments and advocate for improved debt management and effective utilisation of borrowed funds; and
- Power holders that have the capacity to make policy decisions from an informed position.

VI. Dates and Venue

1st – 3rd July 2026
Small World Country Club
(Nairobi, Kenya)