**Podcast –**

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**Radio Host - Berta Madime**

More than 1.3 billion people live in poverty in the world and the burden has now been very heavy not only on men, but also women and children. Only In Mozambique, more than 70% people appointed to be in the situation of poverty, with 63% of them being below poverty line and living under one U.S. dollar a day. This in Mozambique specifically includes also girls which appointed by the United Nations as those that are being on the front line of this poverty. Most of them appointed to never reach grade 6 and many times to become victims of violence. To understand more about this topic, I interviewed Attiya Waris, professor of Fiscal law and policy and also a UN independent expert on foreign debt and human rights. She was talking to me in Maputo city during the African conference on Debt and Development (AfCoDD IV). We'll talk about this right after the interfere with Prof. Attiya.

**Attiya Waris – Professor of Fiscal Law at the Faculty of Law, University of Nairobi in Kenya and UN Independent Expert on Foreign Debt and Human Rights**

Public debt is money that has been taken usually to build the infrastructure of a country if properly absorbed. If it is not used properly, you then have a problem. In my October report to the General Assembly this year, I talk about something that is well, I've developed this concept called the life cycle approach. Three months before a woman becomes pregnant, she will take prenatal supplements, right? Then she will become pregnant. Then for nine months she has to eat good food, have nutrition, and then hopefully the child will be born healthy.

If your country has taken on debt or uses its finances properly, what starts to happen is the nutritional supplements will be free. She will stay healthy; her child will be born healthy and very important. If there is money for a caesarean section for the maternity wing in the hospital, that woman will not die giving birth to a child. As the child continues to grow, the child needs nutritional supplements. If a mother doesn't have enough food, she gives it to her child. She then becomes weaker; she undermines her health, and these different markers are what you start to see affecting women in their daily lives. So, the question then is where does the debt connection come? If you're taking on debt properly, then you're building the hospital properly. Then you're making sure there are doctors in the hospital who will check the child, make sure the child is OK, because if the child is OK, then the mother will look after herself. Then this is now the child growing up. Now if this is a girl child, the girl child, if she cannot go to school, if there is no free education or support for poor children that need to go to school, then sometimes you have problems like early teen pregnancies, dropping out of schools. Sometimes young girls don't even afford sanitary pads. Now when you're taking on debt, the whole purpose of the money is to build your economy. When you build your economy, you generate more tax revenue. When you generate more tax revenue, your government has more money to spend on you. For me, the biggest question is who is the most vulnerable in that society and how do we make sure they are a little bit less vulnerable? But if your currency drops by 400% in a year and a half, I don't know how you're surviving.

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As you might have understood, the situation of women in the plight is quite complicated when understood that women are fighting towards empowerment. AFRODAD and many other organisations are coming together in Mozambique, specifically the African Forum and Network on Debt and Development is coordinating with the CDD in Mozambique. They're working towards the conference empowering women. And in the city of Maputo event is going to take place up until tomorrow, Friday. Also, the conversation is a little bit about some success stories that AFRIDAD has been holding towards the goal of empowering women. And for that, we interviewed a member of the Board of trustees of AFRODAD and she explained to us what goals are being followed by the organization.

**Barbara Kalima-Phiri – Chairperson, AFRODAD Board of Trustees**

My name is Barbara Kalima Piri, I am the chair of the Board of Trustees for AFRODAD. This conference that we are at today is very important because it's looking at what are some of the alternatives around debt, how can we resolve the issue of debt. And for many years the analysis and the strategies that have been developed have missed the role of women in it. Women and boys and girls are central to the success of development goals or development plans. And so, when you look at the, the debt strategies, the impact of, you know, the debt servicing and the cost of debt servicing is disproportionately very high on women and girls. We want to bring the realities and the plight of women to the centre of the conversation so that even when policies are designed, when strategies are designed, they look at the impact that it has on women. We're tired of saying women should be included, women should be given space. We don't need permission anymore. We need to take that power and, and identify those spaces ourselves as women and bring, you know, the value that women have, you know, on the table. Spaces that are available, for example in parliament, we need more women in parliament, we need more women in strategic decision making and governance structures. We need more women in boards. We need more women in all the spaces where strategic decisions are being made. Women should not just be seen as a mother selling cashew nuts on the road. They have value, they can contribute even in the community where they're the women's groups, working with the men in the community. We want the women to be at the centre of the decision making as well, because anything you, you, you discuss, all the police have got a big impact on them. When you look at the African continent, we have 50% of the population of women and yet, you know, they don't have a voice. Yeah, we should change that. We need to shift that.

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How do we introduce policies or things that can change the scenario in societies that are mostly male dominated?

**Barbara Kalima-Phiri – Chairperson, AFRODAD Board of Trustees**

In most countries, should I say, all countries have got constitutions that allows for freedom of speech, freedom of participation and so on. When we we talk about everyone having that freedom, sometimes that freedom is limited to people with power, people with money and so on. The woman who's on the ground would not have that space. How do we make policy to make sure that women at the centre, we need to make sure that women are also involved, invited to meetings like this so that they can speak, create spaces where women even within the communities themselves, you know, those village banks, you know, the credit Microcredit Associations, we can have policy that allows for women to participate in Parliament as well. We have most parliament have got the, the, the policy that says that we need to have a 50 or plus representation for women. So it's using those policies to make sure that women, you know, can take their rightful place in society.

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Do we have any success stories of what AFRODAD is advocating for? Can you share with us some stories that can inspire people to go towards that goal?

**Barbara Kalima-Phiri – Chairperson, AFRODAD Board of Trustees**

Yes, more recently, AFRODAD working with the Zimbabwe Coalition on Debt and Development, we worked on a litigation around debt and managed to make sure that the resources, in particular the social services actually go to particular services. So, they took the government of Zimbabwe to court and they did litigation and won the case.

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You're listening to Maputo Corridor, the English service of Radio Mozambique. As we told you in Mozambique alone, more than 70% people appointed to be living in poverty and more than 63% under the line of poverty, which means that they're using less than $1.00 per day. Women and girls are suffering the burden of this and as Professor Attiya explained to us, these make the society each time poorer and more complicated. Solutions appointed by AFRODAD and the Centre for Democracy and Human Rights (CDD) in Mozambique as they explained that work must be done towards empowerment of women. The executive director of AFRODAD, Jason Braganza, explains that this is a fight that started long ago and still has many steps. Women in Mozambique and in the world are still in the centre of poverty and this is going to be a challenge to be tackled.

**Jason R. Braganza – Executive Director, AFRODAD**

The current population in Africa, more than 50% of the population are women, yet they are access to public services, their access to education, their access to economic activity is not there. Their access to political spaces is not there, their access to resources is not there. And so, this year the conference is about talking and interrogating. Why is this the case? Why do we need to have this discussion and make sure we press those who are in politics, we press those who are in power to promote and implement the provisions of the protocol (Maputo).

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Is there any work that effort that has been doing specifically in the area of women and the debt?

**Jason R. Braganza – Executive Director, AFRODAD**

Yes, we've been looking at how the impact of debt effects women. We look at it from a point of access to public services. As I mentioned in my press conference, you have close to 27 African countries that are spending more in depth service than they are in health and education. This has a direct impact on women because they are the ones who are not able to access these services. They are the ones who are not able to advance themselves economically and socially.

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This is actually the second conference taking place in Mozambique. AFRODAD, also held another conference early this year to discuss also the situation of debt in Mozambique and in Africa, and once again, they come together up until tomorrow in the city of Maputo (30 Aug 2024) to discuss the topic of debt when it comes to women.