

Feminist Foreign Policy & Debt



Prioritizing Debt Justice in Feminist Foreign Policy

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In 2014, Sweden made history by adopting the world's first feminist foreign policy (FFP), setting a precedent that inspired other nations, including Mexico, the first country from the Global South to follow suit. This wave of feminist diplomacy promised a more equitable and just global order. However, the same decade has also been marked by profound geopolitical upheavals.

The world has grappled with escalating militarism and conflicts, the relentless onslaught of climate change, the devastating COVID-19 pandemic, shrinking civic spaces, and a surge in anti-gender movements and fundamentalism. The economic landscape has been equally turbulent, with the Global South, particularly Africa, facing a mounting debt crisis. This financial strain has resurrected austerity measures and structural adjustment programs, exacerbating distress and unrest in many nations. As we reflect on the dual narratives of progress and crisis, the journey of feminist foreign policy stands as a beacon of hope amidst a backdrop of global challenges.

Debt is intricately woven into a colonial and extractive framework that underpins the global financial system, systematically entrapping the Global South and former colonies in a relentless cycle of borrowing with little or no alternatives. This oppressive structure forces nations in debt distress to prioritize repayments over education, health, social security and well-being of their citizens, all while facing the harsh realities of predatory credit ratings agencies that are both vicious and unforgiving. This cycle perpetuates inequality and undermines the sovereignty and dignity of these nations, highlighting the urgent need for a feminist reimagining of global economic justice.

The prevailing global neoliberal and neo-colonial approaches advocate for austerity measures, prescribing privatization, and implementation of complex financing models, including climate financing. These actions lead to reductions in public funding and extensive privatization, often lacking transparency and driven by profit motives. Consequently, they overlook the needs and priorities of the citizens they purport to serve. This systemic and structural cycle is unjust, oppressive, and deeply rooted in a colonial extractivist agenda. The analysis provided in this paper acknowledges how the current global landscape is complex, with geopolitical forces intersecting with economic imperatives, it also recognises the diverse colonial experiences. As such, FFP becomes a critical lens that can challenge conventional economic systems and advocate for gender equity and equality in international relations and the global financial architecture.

Debt is undignified full stop and should not be used as a disguise for the extension of the neocolonial agenda in the form of false solutions. The clarion call is to use feminist tools and frameworks to dismantle oppressive systems that are violent and boldly call for debt cancelation, responsible and transparent debt management systems that espouse the FFP underlying principles. A generation that ushers in FFP should go beyond proclamations but be brave in challenging systemic and structural injustices and pushing for alternatives that centre human rights, care and wellbeing economies.

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About this Paper

This paper serves as an introductory background document, aiming to provide contextual and historical information on feminist foreign policy (FFP) and debt with a specific focus on Global South initiatives in this area. It aims to offer a Pan-African feminist perspective to enhance understanding of FFP. The paper therefore provides an introductory guide to FFP, with the aim of facilitating future analysis of its efficacy as a tool for promoting gender equity and equality.

This paper traces the historical roots of FFP, examining its evolution from early feminist movements to contemporary policy frameworks. Since sovereign debt is critical in shaping international relations, this analysis situates FFP within the broader context of debt dynamics, emphasising the interplay between economic indebtedness and gender justice. This paper is also informed by iterations, consultations which were conducted at the Women Deliver Conference in Rwanda in 2023 under the theme 'Framing Debt in the Feminist Foreign Policy Discourse' and the CSW68 hosted in New York in March 2024.

The paper further looks at some of the initiatives undertaken by the Global South, exploring how FFP intersects with debt relief, sustainable development, and social justice.

Our purpose with this analytical paper is to go beyond an introductory guide. We specifically invite the Global South women's movement, feminists, social justice activists, and academia to critically examine FFP's efficacy, assess its impact, and consider recalibrating its course towards achieving sustainable development and gender justice.

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ACRONYMS

AFIP Collective	African Feminist Collective on Feminist Informed Policies
AFRODAD	African Forum and Network on Debt and Development
APMDD	Asian People's Movement on Debt and Development
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women
COVID 19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
FFP	Feminist Foreign Policy
DSSI	Debt Service Suspension Initiative
FEMNET	African Women's Development and Communication Network
IFFs	Illicit Financial Flows
IFIs	International Financial Institutions
ITUC Africa	International Trade Union Confederation Africa
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
ICRWG	International Centre for Research on Women and Girls
IMF	International Monetary Fund
LGBTQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Community
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
PALU	Pan African Lawyers Union
LICs	Low Income Countries
SAPs	Structural Adjustment Programmes
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SDR	Special Drawing Rights
TA	Trust Africa
TJNA	Tax Justice Network Africa
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UNSCR1325	United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325
WPS	Women, Peace and Security
ZERB	Zambia Energy Regulation Board

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP) concept has emerged as a revolutionary approach to international relations, disrupting conventional paradigms and promoting gender equality and women's and girls' rights worldwide. It is a state policy that promotes peace, gender equality, and environmental integrity in its interactions with other states and non-state actors. FFP aims to uphold and defend human rights for all, challenge colonial legacies and racist, patriarchal, and male-dominated power dynamics, and allocate substantial resources, including research, to realise these goals. FFP is consistent in its approach across all its channels of influence, based on the application of those ideals domestically and developed in collaboration with feminist activists, organisations, and social movements locally and globally.¹ Contrary to conventional foreign policies that focus on government interests and structures of power. It acknowledges the importance of sustainable peace, security, and development being achieved through inclusive and gender-responsive policies that support the full inclusion and autonomy of all individuals, irrespective of gender identity or expression.

The 5R Framework of Feminist Policy

In March 2020, In response to stakeholder demands for a universal concept of FFP and guidance on how to develop it, the International Centre for Research on Women and Girls (ICRWG) with its partners published a framework for feminist foreign policy.² The framework provides a blueprint for nations interested in developing their feminist foreign strategies; it is a policy-level instrument to assist governments and activists in promoting this approach. The five principles of an all-rounded FFP are:



Rights FFP is dedicated to safeguarding and advancing human rights, specifically focusing on women's and girls' rights. It aims to reinforce legislative frameworks and global norms and standards, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and Girls (CEDAW, 1979), the UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 (2000), regional instruments such as The Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women and girls (Belem do Para Convention, 1994), Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women and Girls in Africa (Maputo Protocol, 2005), The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and girls and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention, 2014), the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR, 1948), and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDGs, 2015) especially SDG 5 on gender equality amongst others. These global and regional frameworks protect the rights of women and girls and marginalised populations, while ensuring their equitable access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. FFP aims to eliminate structural barriers and discriminatory practices to enable women and girls to freely exercise their rights and live without violence, discrimination, or coercion.

Resources FFP encourages equity in the distribution of resources and economic opportunities, acknowledging the correlation between gender equality and sustainable development. By increasing investment in local and foreign affairs financing and staffing, utilising flexible funds,¹ and implementing gender transformative budgeting,² FFP advocates for meaningful and sustainable investments in women's and girls' advancement in all spheres of life. This will help bridge the gender gap in resource distribution and utilisation as well as decision-making, resulting in the improvement economic prosperity and social well-being for all women and girls in their diversity. Across various regions, capitalist and neo-liberal power dynamics largely contribute to limiting women's access to resources and personal autonomy and enforcing societal norms through accepted acts of all forms of violence or the potential for such violence. Even in nations where overt gender disparity is not apparent, women nonetheless possess less power in economic, political, and other influential establishments compared to men.

Representation FFP stresses the significance of gender-inclusive representation and participation in decision-making processes at all governance, administration, and diplomacy levels. It aims to confront and address gender stereotypes, norms and prejudices in political institutions, peace negotiations, and international organisations by promoting an increase in the representation of women and girls, LGBTQ+ individuals, and other marginalised groups in leadership positions. By promoting gender equality at all staff levels, calling for co-creation with feminist civil society, social movements, women and girls' rights organisations and marginalised populations in policy development, realisation, and evaluation, and growing the representation of minorities³ in leadership positions across social, economic, and political spheres, diverse voices and perspectives will be enhanced. This will bolster democracy, legitimacy, and accountability in global governance structures.

Reach FFP aims to broaden the scope and influence of gender equality efforts by collaborating across different sectors and advocating for change. It facilitates collaborations among governments, civil society organisations, and social movements to mobilise resources, share best practices, and scale up interventions that advance sustainable gender equality and women and girls' empowerment. Through harnessing collective effort and a common cause, incorporating intersectionality in particular domains and strategies, the efficiency and longevity of initiatives aimed at tackling gender-related issues, spanning from conflict and crisis resolution to climate change measures and actions can be enhanced.

Research & Reporting FFP prioritises evidence-based policymaking and transparent reporting mechanisms to evaluate progress, pinpoint gaps, and ensure stakeholders are accountable for their gender equality obligations. It encourages the production of quality gender-disaggregated data and research, as well as monitoring and evaluating the adoption and impact of internal regulations and the effects of policies on various communities. This is to ensure that solutions are customised to the unique requirements and circumstances of local contexts. By advancing a continuous learning and accountability culture, FFP enhances the foundation for gender-inclusive programming and policy fulfilment.

Ultimately, FFP provides an innovative framework for promoting gender equality and human rights in the field of international relations. It interrogates deep-rooted and normalised inequalities ingrained in neoliberal, patriarchal and extractivist governance models and promotes inclusive and sustainable development globally by focusing on the five Rs, namely Rights, Resources, Representation, Reach, Research and Reporting. With the rising adoption of FFP principles by governments, civil society actors, and multilateral institutions, there is a noticeable shift towards reshaping diplomacy, security, and development to focus on the dignity, agency, and well-being of all individuals, irrespective of gender identity and expression, class, race, religion and nationality.



**FFP provides an innovative framework
for promoting gender equality and human rights in
the field of international relations**



¹ Flexible funds cede decision-making power to the grantee on a trust basis, giving them the agility to utilize funds in whichever way they deem best unlike traditional project-based funding which limits the grantee's use of funds to the donor's specified projects.

² Current economic models and budgets can lead to bias fiscal policies that do not consider women's needs creating the unintended negative consequences. Hence, gender transformative budgeting puts gender at the heart of public policy, planning and budgeting to foster an inclusive society ensuring fair distribution of resources, equitable development and economic growth.

³ According to the UN Human Rights Office, all countries in the world include persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, enriching the diversity of their societies. For the purposes of this paper, the term 'minorities' denotes persons who face multiple forms of discrimination resulting in marginalization and exclusion.

DEBT AS A HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUE

... addressing debt through a human rights framework is essential for fostering equitable and sustainable development for all.

Debt is commonly analysed from an economic perspective, emphasising fiscal accountability, cost of borrowing, interest rates and repayment plans. However, framing debt solely within this paradigm overlooks its profound implications on human rights, especially for women and girls. In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of debt as a multifaceted issue intersecting with various dimensions of social justice, including climate justice, economic justice, gender justice, and racial justice. This section explores these intersections and argues that addressing debt through a human rights framework is essential for fostering equitable and sustainable development for all.

Developing economies worldwide,⁴ have been grappling with significantly excessive and unsustainable amounts of debt. Countries in the Global South have been beholden to powerful entities for numerous generations owing to the colonial history of inequities. The debt owed by these countries is both a colonial legacy and is being used as a neo-colonial tool by the Global North to loot their wealth and expand their control.³ Over the last decades, countries in the Global South have suffered devastating outcomes due to unsustainable and unjust debt. Due to high debt burdens, countries in the Global South have been left with very little to no resources needed to build and enhance key public services. For example as of January 2024, it was reported that Nigeria was going to spend 30 percent of its 2024 budget on debt servicing.⁴

In 1885, Belgium took control of the present-day Democratic Republic of Congo (the Congo), initiating a harsh system of resource exploitation and widespread killings. Belgium accumulated significant debts while exploiting the Congo. The debts comprised a \$120 million loan from the World Bank, mostly utilised for purchasing goods manufactured in Belgium. Zaire obtained independence in 1960 but inherited Belgium's debt, which covered the expenses of its previous exploitation. This greatly weakened the country's capacity to finance essential services for its population. Despite its abundance of mineral riches, the Congo is currently one of the world's most impoverished nations.⁵ European nations subverted the economies of colonised territories they governed, taking advantage of the eighties financial crisis to further dominate developing countries. They gained significant benefits by entering southern markets without regard for the impact this would have on the local population.

⁴ Including many formerly colonized countries in Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean, the Middle East and Asia.

⁵ According to the World Bank Group, after peaking at 8.9% in 2022, real GDP growth in the DRC remained robust at 7.8% in 2023, supported by a strong mining sector, which grew by 15.4% contributing around 70% to overall growth in 2023.

However, colonial debt extends beyond that point as debt can no longer be viewed separately from other multiple intersecting injustices such as the negative impacts of climate change, gender inequality and racial inequality. Debt has become a significant factor in fuelling these injustices. To date, countries in the global north and corporations are primarily accountable for the climate crisis, while states in the global south such as Zambia and Sri Lanka, as seen in the coming sections, are bearing the brunt of its most severe consequences. Climate change exacerbates debt burdens, particularly for vulnerable nations already grappling with economic challenges as seen recently in Zambia where the country is experiencing its worst drought in the last forty years. As such, developed countries are responsible for addressing the harm they have inflicted, yet they are reluctant to fulfil their obligations. Due to this, countries in the global south are increasingly accumulating debt to address the challenges posed by the climate crisis. This perpetuates a cycle of debt dependency, disproportionately affecting marginalised communities that bear the brunt of climate impacts. Acknowledging debt as a human rights issue involves recognising the unequal burden on these communities and focusing on debt cancellation strategies that enhance climate resilience and adaptation.

Over the years, this has resulted in governments repeatedly taking out loans to repay previous commitments to affluent creditors and cover present-day costs, including servicing and maintaining essential public amenities such as health, education, and social protection. Between 1970 and 2022, governments in the global south have paid an astonishing \$2.5 trillion in interest rates to lenders, resulting in significant returns for lending institutions.⁷ There has also been a surge in financing to low-income economies by private creditors who are making substantial financial returns from sovereign bonds issued by these countries in foreign currencies.

There is a wealth of research indicating that high levels of debt can hinder the socioeconomic growth of developing countries and reduce their ability to establish the conditions needed for the full realisation of human rights, particularly economic, social, and cultural rights. It has been reported that African countries often borrow at interest rates that are four times higher than the United States and eight times higher than Germany.⁸ High interest rates hinder growing economies from financing crucial investments, thereby impeding viable debt levels and advancements in sustainable growth. During the COVID 19 pandemic, productivity levels decreased, leading to a major rise in debt levels. As a result, countries with existing debt opted to borrow additional funds and implement stricter austerity measures, significantly burdening their citizenry with debt. Currently, 3.3 billion individuals are living in nations where the budget for interest payments surpasses that of health and education combined.⁹

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According to [international human rights law](#),¹⁰ states must ensure that the international standards and norms are domesticated through their respective national constitutions, laws and policies and that all individuals under their jurisdiction have access to fundamental human rights including healthcare, education, food, clean drinking water, and suitable housing. Governments, therefore, must not be hindered in guaranteeing the fulfilment of fundamental human rights due to overwhelming debt obligations.

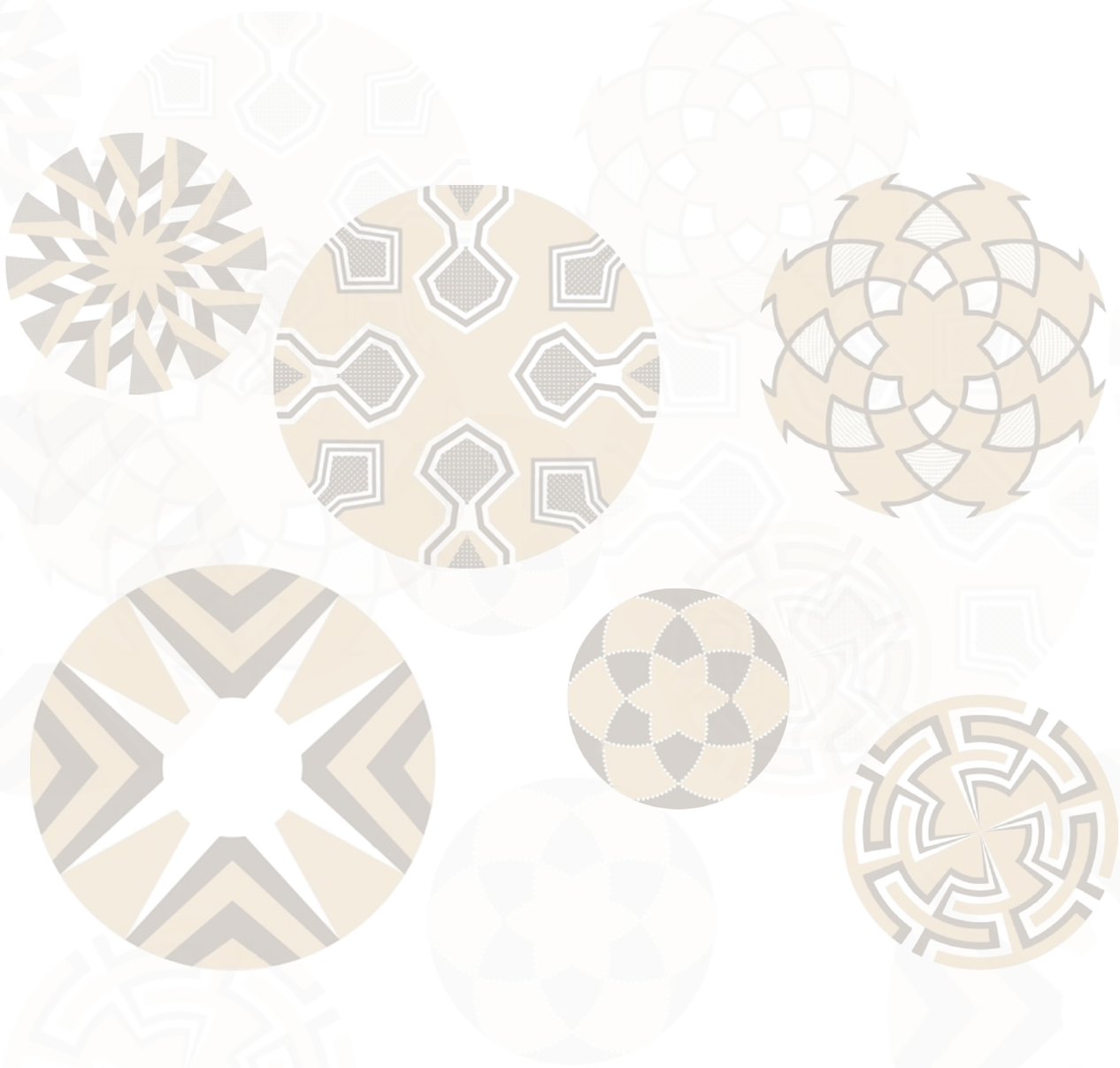
In the International Monetary Fund (IMF) report [Bandage on a Bullet Wound: IMF Social Spending Floors and the Covid-19 Pandemic](#), Human Rights Watch examines 39 IMF loan programmes that were approved between March 2020 and March 2023 under three lending facilities with conditionalities to evaluate the IMF's response to the ongoing crisis and its adherence to global human rights principles, norms and values. Several IMF conditionalities, often known as austerity measures, require modifications to core fiscal policies, potentially weakening countries' capacity to achieve human rights. It is the responsibility of governments to "respect, protect, and fulfil" the rights of their citizens without any form of discrimination based on various factors, including but not limited to race, gender, age, nationality and disability. This ensures that public services are provided in a way that is inclusive, readily accessible, satisfactory, and versatile. Therefore, countries must exercise caution to prevent debt servicing from compromising their commitments to uphold human rights and to avoid any form of direct or indirect discrimination.

CEDAW – the Convention does not explicitly mention debt public spending; however as seen in article 2 of the Convention, it requires country members to undertake all necessary steps to end "discrimination against women and girls in all its forms... pursue by all appropriate means and without delay a policy of eliminating discrimination against CEDAW women and girls..." It is evident that if the state fails to commit sufficient funds to public services, it hinders the proper execution of the Convention, leading to non-compliance. Article 13 of CEDAW mandates the promotion of gender equality across all economic aspects, which is complementary to Articles 10 on education, 11 on employment, and 12 on health. These should be interpreted alongside Article 2(1) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) which emphasises that countries should provide the "maximum available resources" to achieve economic, social, and cultural rights in line with the principles of international human rights law. This is also seen in the African context, where Article 26(2) of the Maputo Protocol states that state parties must take all required actions, including allocating financial and other amenities, to enforce the fundamental rights of African women and girls fully and effectively. Upon analysing member states' approach to the Maputo Protocol and the management and oversight bodies in funding women and girls' rights initiatives, Article 26(2) is seldom used or misapplied by state parties. Without a doubt, a thorough debt sustainability review should include prioritising women and girls' human rights. Existing debt restructuring processes fail to consider the public spending required to gradually achieve the fundamental freedoms of the indebted country's citizens, particularly women and girls.

Women and girls experience greater negative impacts from debt and associated conditions compared to men. For instance, when there are shortfalls in essential medical care or other types of social services, women and girls often fill the gap by taking on the caregiving responsibility. For girls, this frequently comes at the cost of their academic pursuits. Women, girls and children as the primary users of medical services and amenities, are disproportionately affected by cuts in healthcare funding during budget restructuring. Privatising water distribution networks also limits accessibility to water by raising rates and consumer costs for customers. This escalates the labour for women and girls, who usually shoulder the task of getting water. Furthermore, women and girls are frequently marginalised and systematically left out of the decision-making cycle across all levels of society, often without full autonomy over land and other productive resources. Busi Sibeko (2022) argues that the social reproductive work carried out mainly by women and girls is often perceived as being unpaid and boundless. Considering impending budget cuts,

governments may view social reproductive work and sectors as dispensable, potentially reducing programmes that can be shifted to households. Therefore, social reproductive activities have been strengthened as a buffer in the capitalist economy, shifting the debt burden to households.

In 2015, all United Nations Member States unanimously endorsed the [*2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*](#), which serves as a collective strategy for achieving peace and prosperity for humanity and the environment. The core of the initiative consists of the seventeen (17) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs - Agenda 2030), that serve as a pressing demand for action from all countries in a worldwide collaboration. The SDGs simultaneously address poverty and other forms of deprivation, alongside implementing initiatives to enhance health and education, diminish inequality, and stimulate economic growth. With only 6 years left to attain Agenda 2030, the dedication to achieving the SDGs, especially SDG 5 on gender equality, is often compromised when developing nations are forced to make difficult decisions to repay their debts. Policy solutions that neglect to incorporate this pillar of SDGs may result in more protracted and arduous debt recovery endeavours. It is imperative to use this approach as it is also consistent with the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, which advocates for the establishment of a gender debt facility that would assist nations in achieving the targets that are most pertinent to their efforts in promoting gender equality and women and girls' empowerment, as outlined in the [*Addis Ababa Action Plan on Transformative Financing*](#). This helps to decrease the magnitude of debt in the long run, as women and girls establish themselves as contributors to the economy through taxes and investments.





DO FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICIES RESPOND TO DEBT?

By late 2023, approximately sixteen governments, including Canada, Chile, Colombia, France, Germany, Liberia, Libya, Luxembourg, Argentina, Mexico, the Netherlands, Scotland, Mongolia, Slovenia and Spain, had adopted or shown interest in implementing FFPs.¹¹ Sweden, until October 2022, was also part of this group but confirmed it would cease to classify its foreign policy as feminist. The Minister for Foreign Affairs stated that; gender equality is still a fundamental value in Sweden. However, to label the foreign policy as “feminist” has a tendency of obscuring its contents and further, competes with the primacy of Swedish values and interests.¹² These governments aim to incorporate gender equality, women's and girls' rights, and empowerment principles into various areas of foreign policy, such as diplomacy, development aid, trade, and security.

In the African context, Liberia has pledged to prioritise integrating gender perspectives. In April 2021, Liberian Foreign Minister H E Dee-Maxwell Saah Kemayah Sr announced that President George Manneh Weah of Liberia emphasised the need to develop and implement policies and programmes to increase women and girls' involvement in national leadership. The goal is to involve the women and girls of Liberia in every aspect of public life. Liberia has been continuously seeking understanding and refining its strategy regarding FFP with the support of the Swedish government. However, Sweden's decision to discontinue its long-standing FFP makes it unclear who Liberia's new mentor is on FFPs. However, Minister Saydee-Tarr highlighted Liberia's commitment to a progressive foreign policy that focuses on promoting gender equality and empowering women and girls. The core areas of emphasis include promoting women and girls' participation in peace and security efforts and advancing their economic rights. Joseph Boakai, the newly elected president of Liberia as of January 2024, is expected to prioritise the advancement of Liberia's interests in FFP. All attention will be focused on how he plans to address this issue during his tenure. Given Liberia's ongoing FFP development, there is a tremendous opportunity to realise this through its design. This, of course, will be determined by whether they opt to consult civil society, and if it is rooted in African feminist principles and acknowledges the influence of colonial legacies on African knowledge systems. An Afro-feminist perspective will allow for a decolonised FFP that prioritises the experiences of Liberian women and girls.

On the other hand, Libya's intention of having an FFP centres on alignment with important United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions that advocate for a women and girls, peace, and security (WPS) agenda, such as Resolutions 1325 and 2467, and the broader WPS agenda. However, there has been a noticeable increase in political strife throughout the country, including within the executive branch. The current political unrest, opposition to women and girls' rights, and suppression of human rights activists directly contradict Libya's supposed dedication to an FFP.

Like other Global South FFPs, the current FFP models advocate for advancing women and girls' economic empowerment. Mexico took the lead in Latin America by adopting the Declaration on Feminist Foreign Policy for Latin America and the Caribbean (the Declaration) in March 2024. The announcement was jointly put forward by Chile and Colombia, and garnered support from Bolivia, Brazil, the Dominican Republic, and Ecuador.¹³ The region's foreign policy is focused on promoting gender equality, guided by the principles of gender equality. The Declaration explicitly advocates for the active involvement and guidance of women in the region, with the aim of diminishing gender disparities and fostering the empowerment

and economic autonomy of women from all backgrounds. It also aims to tackle the underlying factors that give rise to inequality, such as discrimination, violence, and poverty, at the regional level. However, these FFPs tend to neglect to address or challenge the neoliberal and patriarchal systems perpetuating disparities in gender and inequalities. In addition, although many FFPs recognise climate change as a pressing issue, they overlook the reality that climate anarchy is a result of imperialism and capitalist appropriation. States focusing on FFP have not uniformly utilised a rights-based, intersectional perspective when responding to feminist demands to combat austerity or tackle the entirety of the debt epidemic. Highlighting the ongoing impact of European colonialism is essential, and any feminist foreign policy must acknowledge the historical impact and address the lasting effects of colonial legacies. FFPs will only truly embody feminist principles when they address the decolonisation of multiple domains, including funding, trade, debt relief, etc, while also recognising the importance of reparations.

It is evident that this emerging trend of FFP could disrupt the global financial architecture by questioning our understanding of foreign affairs, offering new avenues for reimagining, and demonstrating the potential for revolutionary transformation in tackling debt. This is critical for the effectiveness of feminist foreign policy as it significantly affects the economic advancement of women and girls, access to and ownership of resources as well as public services. An FFP that does not consider debt would not effectively tackle the underlying injustices and constraints that impede gender equality.



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HOW FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICIES CAN ADDRESS DEBT

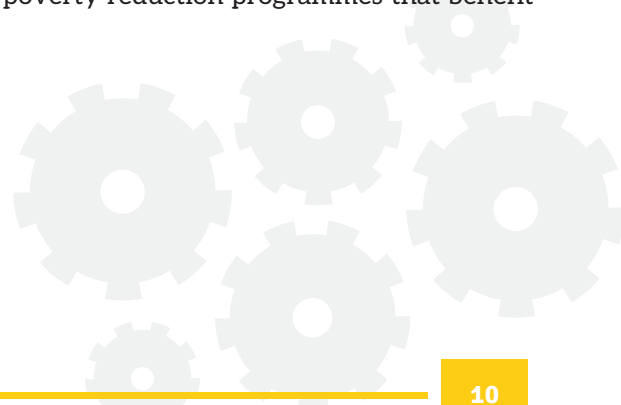


A feminist approach to foreign policy can support increased transparency and accountability in debt-related procedures



Debt Transparency and Accountability It is essential to have transparency and accountability mechanisms in place to prevent the accumulation of illegitimate debt, including debts from illicit transactions, odious loans or initiatives that negatively impact women and girls and marginalised communities. Advocating for transparency and accountability in debt-related transactions can assist in ensuring that creditors and borrowers are held responsible for their actions and can further play a role in protecting women and girls from exploitation. A feminist approach to foreign policy can support increased transparency and accountability in debt-related procedures, such as debt contracting, negotiation, and repayment. This will guarantee that women and girls' perspectives are considered in formulating decisions concerning debt management and that debt-related policies do not worsen gender disparities.

Gender-Responsive Budgeting Debt servicing responsibilities may redirect resources from expenditures in essential social services crucial for women and girls' welfare and prosperity. Gender-responsive budgeting plays a crucial role in addressing debt-related challenges by promoting fair resource distribution, improving public spending efficiency, enhancing accountability and transparency, supporting sustainable development, and advancing gender mainstreaming in policy. FFP can promote gender-responsive budgeting within debtor nations to ensure that debt repayment and fiscal policies prioritise investments in gender equality, social services, and poverty reduction programmes that benefit women and girls and marginalised groups.



Debt cancellation, Debt reform and removal of Austerity measures and Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs)

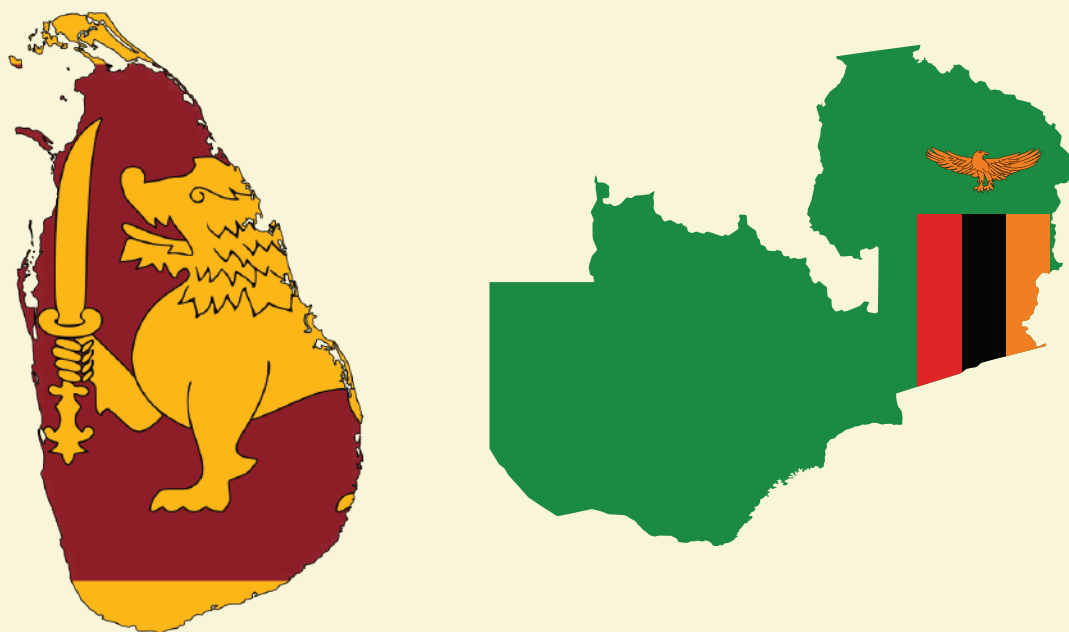
The excessive amount of debt in many nations has a greater impact on women and girls, who frequently face the consequences of austerity measures and budget reductions aimed at repaying debt. A feminist approach to foreign policy should involve pushing for changes in international financial institutions and debt repayment structures to focus on social well-being and gender equity and equality. This can involve promoting equitable conditions for debt repayment, providing debt relief for countries with unsustainable debt burdens, and ensuring that structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) do not unfairly impact women and girls and marginalised groups. FFP provides an opportunity to challenge the antidote prescribed by IFIs of austerity measures as a solution to debt restructuring and call for debt cancellation and removal of austerity measures.

Addressing Structural and Systemic Inequalities

FFP can address the structural inequalities that underpin debt crises, such as disparities in resource allocation, discriminatory legal and social norms, economic exploitation, and global power dynamics. This could include supporting feminist trade policies and tackling issues such as tax evasion and harmful lending practices that worsen debt reliance. By addressing these root causes, feminist foreign policy can help prevent future debt crises, fostering inclusive and sustainable development for all.



SRI LANKA AND ZAMBIA



While Sri Lanka and Zambia share similarities in facing gender inequalities, the specific contexts, cultural norms, legal frameworks, and socio-economic factors contribute to distinct challenges in each country. These two countries face glaring gender gaps in education, particularly at higher levels. In both countries, women and girls are underrepresented in economic and political leadership roles. In the last election, Sri Lanka only had 5 percent of women and girls elected into parliament, while the Zambia 2021 polls only achieved a 15 per cent representation of women and girls in the legislature.¹⁶ This has ultimately limited women and girls' participation in governance issues, including both countries' debt crises. Most women and girls in both countries are concentrated in the informal sector with less job security and lower wages compared to men.¹⁷ In terms of access to sexual and reproductive health and rights, maternal mortality in both countries remains a concern.¹⁸ Access to quality maternal healthcare services, especially in rural areas, is a challenge that affects women and girls' health outcomes. Girls in both countries face challenges such as child, early and forced marriages and other harmful practices, cultural norms favouring boys' education, and limited access to quality education. All these factors make girls and women more vulnerable to the economic and social effects of unsustainable debt.

Currently, both countries are engaged in restructuring their public debts through creating sustainable repayment plans. To do so, they have engaged with creditors and international financial institutions to negotiate debt relief and restructuring programmes. In February 2021, Zambia became the second country after Chad to apply to the Common Framework for debt treatment beyond the debt service suspension initiative (DSSI -Common Framework). This initiative was endorsed by the G20 together with the Paris Club in 2020, to support, in a structural manner, low-income countries with unsustainable debt. Through this initiative,¹⁹ debt treatment is considered case-by-case through requests from eligible countries in debt. After a country requests a Creditor Committee, negotiations are convened, and negotiations are supported by the IMF and the World Bank, including through their Debt Sustainability Analysis.

Zambia is a key test case of the Common Framework,²⁰ which, in theory, should help countries quickly return to economic sustainability. The World Bank has concluded that 60 per cent²¹ of low-income countries (LICs) are in debt distress or high risk, and an efficient debt restructuring process is critical to avoid economic catastrophe. However, the Common Framework has proved to be a minimalist approach and insufficient.²² The International Monetary Fund (IMF),²³ World Bank, and G20⁶ have all declared an intent to reform it, drawing from the Zambian experience in particular. On the other hand, Sri Lanka, as a middle-income country, does not qualify for the Common Framework, so it is in debt restructuring talks with a range of its creditors, including its single largest creditor, China. In 2023, the country secured a \$2.9 billion IMF bailout conditional on a debt deal that satisfies foreign creditors. The processes for both countries have faced many challenges and delays that have come with dire consequences for the most vulnerable citizens, as the cost of living has skyrocketed over the last few years.

The debt crises in both countries have caused serious implications on the provision of social services because of the austerity measures being implemented to meet debt obligations. Reductions in social spending have affected healthcare, education, and other essential services, impacting the most vulnerable populations, including women and girls²⁴ thereby exacerbating inequalities. Furthermore, reductions on social spending due to debt have significant implications for women's unpaid care work and labour. Despite its critical role in sustaining households and communities, unpaid work is invisible in national accounting systems thereby undervaluing women's contribution to the economy. It is also not adequately factored into policy decisions and resource allocation.

The austerity measures are causing severe damage to the economies of both countries, pushing many into poverty especially women and girls, and robbing citizens of their basic human rights.²⁵ In 2023, ActionAid Zambia warned that the IMF Programme will have significant social and economic effects on the country. The report also noted that women and girls, especially those already living in poverty, will be disproportionately affected as they are paid less, have little to no savings and are most likely to be affected by subsidy cuts. In Sri Lanka, millions of people can no longer afford basic necessities such as food and medicine. Research done by the Medical Research Institute of Sri Lanka estimates that acute

malnutrition will likely **rise from 13 per cent to 20 per cent, while the number of severely malnourished children is expected to double from 35,000 to 70,000.**²⁶

In May, the Zambia Energy Regulation Board (ZERB) announced a second hike in 2024 in the country's retail prices of petroleum products. This is one of the several hikes announced since December 2021, which have seen the price of petroleum products double in just 2 years; an unprecedented occurrence for Zambia.²⁷ Critically, women and girls, children, the elderly, and people with disabilities are often disproportionately affected by cuts to social services resulting from debt restructuring.²⁸

The experiences of Sri Lanka and Zambia highlight the challenges being faced by women and girls in the Global South as the debt crisis continues to increase their vulnerabilities, reduce access to essential services, and increase risks of exploitation. Addressing the gendered impacts of this debt crisis requires efforts to protect women and girls' rights, prioritise social spending, promote women and girls' economic empowerment, and ensure women and girls' participation in decision-making structures, processes and mechanisms. By recognising and addressing these intersections, governments in the Global South going through the same challenge can work towards building more equitable and resilient societies.

FFPs can enhance restructuring processes by advocating for gender-responsive policies and approaches. Debt restructuring can become more equitable, sustainable, and inclusive by prioritising women and girls' rights, economic empowerment, social protection, and meaningful participation. This approach benefits women and girls and contributes to the overall development and stability of countries in the Global South. The FFP can be used to advocate for the inclusion of gender impact assessments in debt restructuring processes. Such an assessment would analyse how debt policies and austerity measures affect women and girls, men and boys differently. Additionally, the government can ensure that the impact assessment considers the disproportionate effects on women and girls, particularly regarding access to social services, healthcare, education, and economic opportunities.

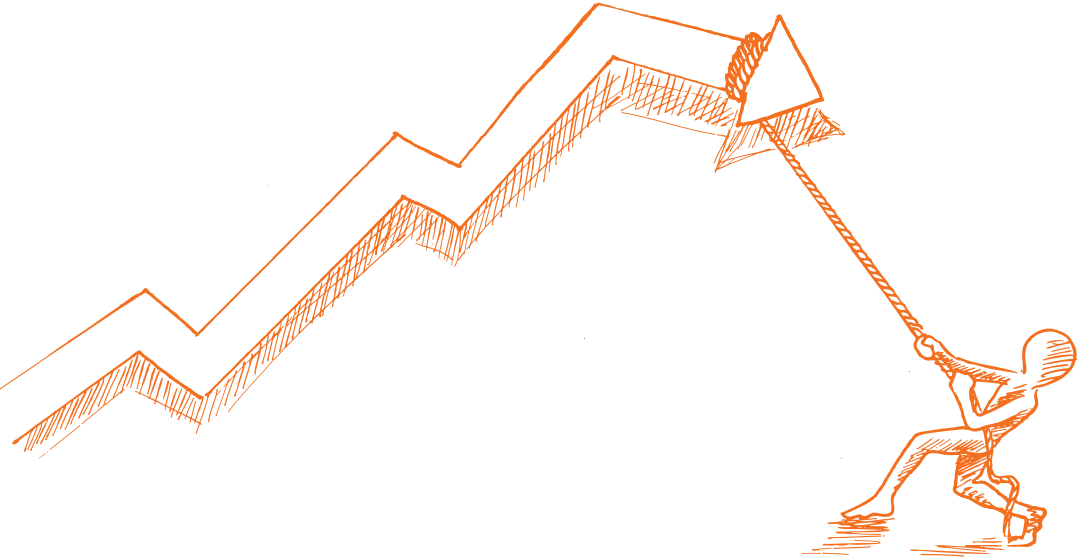
Civil society in the Global South has long pushed for participation in the debt restructuring process. As such, adopting an FFP approach will ensure the meaningful participation of women and girls in the debt restructuring negotiations and decision-making processes by pushing for the inclusion of women and girls' organisations, gender experts, and civil society groups to ensure diverse perspectives are considered.

Debt restructuring can become more equitable, sustainable, and inclusive by prioritising women and girls' rights, economic empowerment, social protection, and meaningful participation.



CLIMATE AND DEVELOPMENT CRISES

INITIATIVES CALLING FOR STRUCTURAL TRANSFORMATION, INCLUSIVE AND JUST MECHANISMS AND SUSTAINABLE FINANCE



Bridgetown Initiative

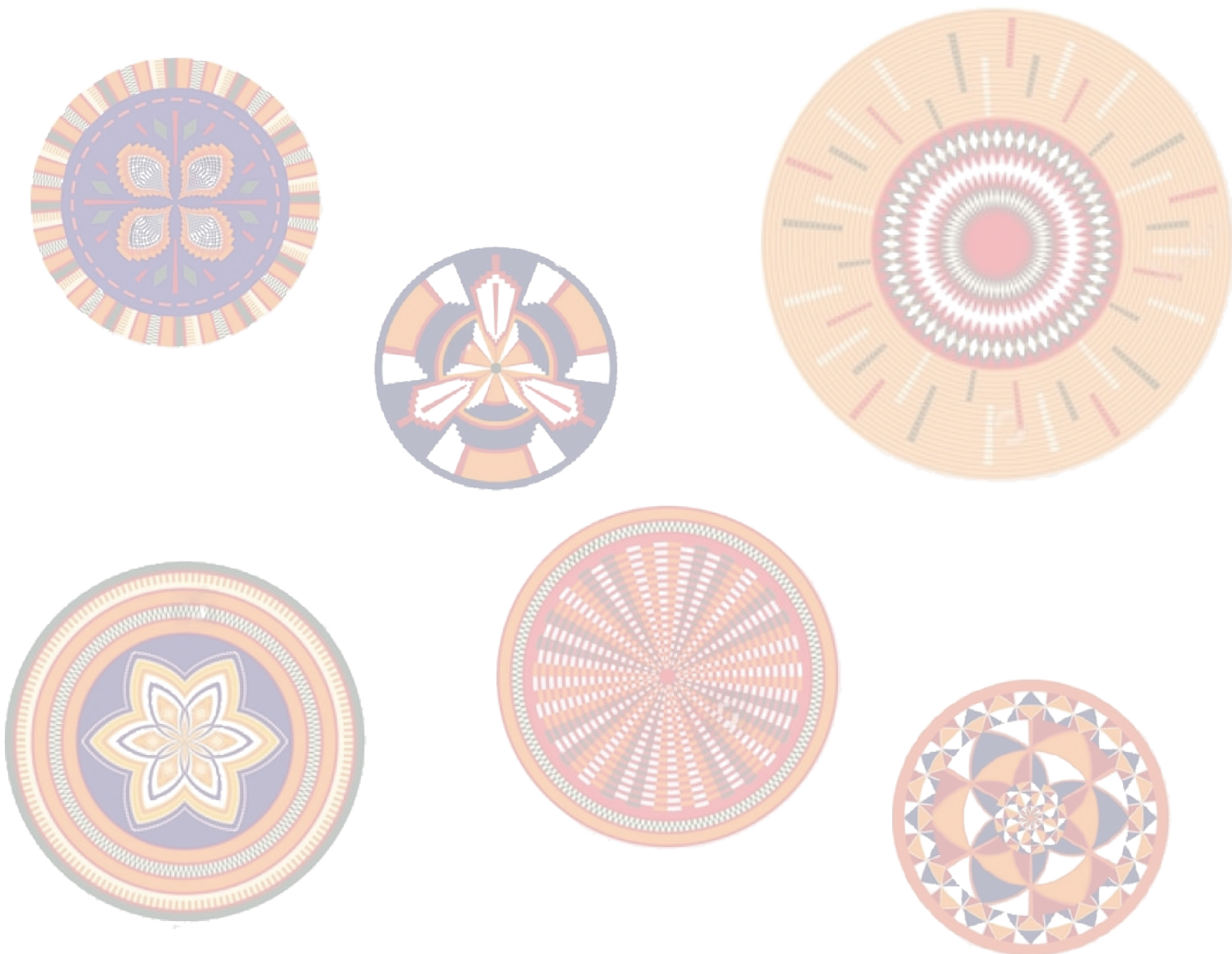
The Bridgetown Initiative, proposed by Barbados' Prime Minister Mia Mottley in 2022 at the UN²⁹ Climate Change Conference COP27 makes a bold call for changes and new mechanisms that would provide inclusive, resilient finance to address the climate and development crises. The initiative is particularly relevant for countries in the Global South, especially in addressing the pressing challenges of climate change and debt sustainability. This proposal aims to reform the global financial system to fully respond to the needs of developing countries, particularly small island developing states (SIDS) and other vulnerable nations, by providing them with more accessible financing for climate action and sustainable development.

The Bridgetown Initiative proposes³⁰ mechanisms to lower interest rates for climate-vulnerable countries, making it cheaper to finance climate adaptation and mitigation projects, providing innovative approaches to debt relief and restructuring for countries overburdened by debt, linking debt sustainability to climate vulnerability and action. Furthermore, it advocates for a reallocation of Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) from wealthier nations to developing countries, providing them with much-needed liquidity without adding to their debt burdens and proposes climate disaster clauses in sovereign debt instruments. This would allow for debt payment suspensions in the aftermath of climate-related disasters, providing fiscal space for recovery efforts without exacerbating debt distress.

The Bridgetown Initiative provides an opportunity for systemic changes to the international financial architecture to help the Global South combat climate change, pursue sustainable development, and achieve economic stability. While the Bridgetown Initiative does not explicitly identify itself as a feminist approach to deal with the twin crises of debt and climate change, it, however, seeks to provide better access to climate finance and support for resilience and adaptation projects; it indirectly benefits women by potentially alleviating some of the climate-related pressures they face. This is especially important for the Global South, where women are often primarily responsible for household water and food security.

The financial reforms and increased access to financing that it proposes, if carried out using a feminist approach, can empower women economically by offering better opportunities for female entrepreneurs and women-led businesses, particularly in sustainable and green economy sectors. This economic empowerment is crucial for promoting gender equality and improving the overall well-being of Global South economies.

To effectively address gender disparities prevalent in the Global South, the Bridgetown Initiative must ensure women participate in decision-making at all levels, including the design and implementation of climate projects, to make them responsive to women's and men's needs. Additionally, the initiative could promote financial services and products that are specifically designed to fully respond to the needs of women, such as microfinance and credit facilities that support women's entrepreneurship in the green economy. This approach recognizes the barriers women often face in accessing finance due to systemic issues such as lack of collateral and existing gender bias. The Bridgetown Initiative's emphasis on debt restructuring and financial sustainability holds the potential to enhance social protection systems, benefiting vulnerable populations, especially women and girls. The proposal to incorporate gender disaster clauses in debt instruments can offer important post-disaster support, which acknowledges the disproportionate impact on women and girls, including higher risks of gender-based violence and livelihood loss. These measures aim to ensure inclusive and equitable recovery efforts and as countries reduce their national debt burdens, they end up with more resources for women-focused social services such as healthcare and education.



POLITICAL DECLARATION ON FEMINIST APPROACHES TO FOREIGN POLICY

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The Declaration does not directly address the current debt crisis; however, its principles and actions can contribute to a more inclusive approach to tackling the underlying challenges Global South countries face. It emphasises the empowerment and autonomy of women and girls, including their access to resources. In many countries in the Global South, women and girls are essential contributors to the economy, especially in sectors such as agriculture and the care economy.³¹ Empowering them economically can boost overall economic growth and resilience, contributing to managing and overcoming debt challenges. Furthermore, integrating feminist principles into foreign policies can include advocating for gender-responsive budgeting within Global South countries. This, in turn, ensures that budget allocations consider the needs and priorities of women and girls and marginalised groups, potentially leading to more effective social spending and poverty reduction strategies. The commitment to ensuring all women and girls' human rights are realised, and political representation is enhanced, can lead to policies that address inequalities in access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. By promoting social and economic inclusion, Global South countries can build more resilient societies better equipped to manage debt-related challenges.

By promoting social and economic inclusion, Global South countries can build more resilient societies better equipped to manage debt-related challenges.



The Declaration fits squarely into the Sustainable Development Goals agenda, especially goals 5 and 10 and gender indicators across other goals that seek to promote gender equality. Any progress made towards achieving these goals has the potential to create a more stable and prosperous environment for economic development, potentially reducing reliance on debt. Collaboration within the UN system and other multilateral contexts can support efforts to improve governance and transparency. Transparent governance structures are crucial for effective debt management, reducing corruption, and ensuring that borrowed funds are used for their intended purposes.

The commitment to working closely with feminist civil society and movements will empower grassroots organisations that often advocate for better governance, accountability, and social justice. Engaging local communities in decision-making processes, including those related to debt management and spending priorities, is one way to achieve sustainable and people-centred solutions. In many Global South countries, issues such as unequal trade relationships, extractive industries, and lack of investment in social services contribute to debt crises. Addressing these root causes through an FFP principle provides a pathway for more sustainable and equitable economic development. Collaborative efforts within various FFP movement, initiatives and other international partners can lay the ground for shared solutions and best practices for managing debt crises. This collaboration can also involve advocating for fairer debt restructuring processes, debt relief, and support for developing countries facing debt challenges.

THE UNITED NATIONS FRAMEWORK CONVENTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE (UNFCCC)

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is an international environmental treaty to combat climate change by reducing greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere. It was established in 1992 and has led to major agreements, such as the Kyoto Protocol (1997) and the Paris Agreement (2015). Linking the UNFCCC with debt and feminist foreign policy recognises the interconnectedness of environmental sustainability, economic conditions and gender equality. Global South countries face significant debt burdens limiting their ability to invest in climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies. Yet, these countries are frequently the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change despite contributing the least to global emissions. Debt relief and financial mechanisms within frameworks like the UNFCCC can enable these countries to allocate more resources toward sustainable development and climate resilience.

FFP acknowledges the disproportionate impacts of climate change on women and girls, who often bear the brunt of climate-induced hardships, such as food insecurity and water scarcity. Integrating a feminist perspective into climate policy, including initiatives under the UNFCCC, advocates for gender-responsive climate action. This entails ensuring women and girls' participation in decision-making processes, addressing gender-specific vulnerabilities, and leveraging the role of women and girls as leaders in sustainability and climate resilience efforts. As such, integrating debt-addressing by adopting an FFP approach within the framework of the UNFCCC can contribute to more equitable, sustainable, and effective climate action. This will ensure acknowledging and addressing the structural inequalities that exacerbate climate vulnerability and ensuring that climate policies are inclusive and equitable considering the needs and contributions of all segments of society, especially those of women and girls and marginalised communities in developing nations.



CAMPAIGNS BY HUMAN RIGHTS AND SOCIAL JUSTICE GROUPS

AFRICAN FORUM AND NETWORK ON DEBT AND DEVELOPMENT

In 2021, through the leadership of the African Forum and Network on Debt and Development (AFRODAD) at the inaugural Africa Conference on Debt, delegates adopted the Harare Declaration (the Declaration). Specific to the needs of youths, women and girls, and other vulnerable groups, the Declaration notes that the current debt and financial architecture are not working for the people of Africa. It further notes that the current architecture entrenches patriarchal tendencies that result in deepening inequality and marginalisation of women and girls, thus disproportionately exposing them to the shocks of economic and social crises.

The Declaration also highlights that “(t)he African youth bulge as an engine for the continent’s structural transformation agenda is at risk of being a missed opportunity due to being saddled with debt accumulated today, while potentially being locked out of accessing finance that is desperately needed to invest in their future - especially grant and concessional finance for infrastructure deficits, stimulating regional value chains, jobs in manufacturing and more. The youth will bear the brunt of the burden of a mortgaged future and that of an overtaxed group to pay this debt burden.” Since 2021 AFRODAD has held the annual debt conference, which is creating a space for African leaders and citizens to share best practices and develop inclusive and sustainable solutions to the debt crisis.

THE LATIN AMERICAN NETWORK FOR ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Over the years, the Latin American Network for Economic and Social Justice (Latindad) has done significant work on the nexus between sovereign debt and gender.³³ In a study entitled “Women and Girls, Debt and Gender Inequalities” Latindad explored the gendered effects of indebtedness in Latin America,³⁴ especially after the Covid-19 pandemic. Other studies conducted by Latindad highlight how policies aimed at guaranteeing debt sustainability, such as those seeking “austerity”, generate economic crises that affect employment and labour income. Further, they create restrictions in the public budget, directly affecting the population and especially women and girls.³⁵

Key advocacy asks:

- **Abolish Austerity Measures:** Austerity measures often lead to cuts in social spending, disproportionately affecting women and girls. Instead, governments should prioritise social investment and the provision of public services.
- **Promote Gender Equality:** Adopt policies that promote gender equality and women and girls’ economic empowerment. This includes addressing gender wage gaps, promoting women and girls’ participation in the labour market, and ensuring equal access to social services.
- **Debt Sustainability:** Policies aimed at guaranteeing debt sustainability should not lead to economic crises that affect employment and labour income and create restrictions in the public budget that directly affect citizens, especially women and girls.

- **Fair Tax Policies:** In the context of tax inequity, public debt often ends up being paid by sectors that benefited the least from the debt disbursements. Therefore, fair tax policies should be implemented to ensure that the burden of debt repayment is equitably distributed.
- **Human Rights Approach:** Debt repayment should not be done by limiting human rights or hindering actions to reduce inequalities. Governments should adopt a human rights-based approach to debt repayment, ensuring that the rights of all citizens, particularly women and girls, are protected.

In 2020, Mexico became the first country in Latin America to adopt an FFP.³⁶ At that time, the policy signalled the country's commitment to gender equality and building a just, peaceful and inclusive society. Chile followed suit in 2023,³⁷ prioritising climate change, economic cooperation, and comprehensive care. Colombia has expressed commitment to an FFP with a special focus on resisting heteronormative stereotypes around defined gender roles.

These Latin American FFPs serve as platforms for political and institutional transformation. They promote gender-focused policies such as diplomacy, budgets, multilateral negotiations, trade, and mediation processes. **The recognition of FFPs needing to challenge unequal systemic power is increasing.** Yet this Western-led initiative may also reproduce dominant global hierarchies that existed initially.

As such, FFPs should continue to be intersectional, recognising the interconnectedness of gender with other forms of discrimination. They should ensure coherence across different policy areas in alignment with national and international goals. Most importantly, they should involve diverse perspectives, including civil society in policy development and implementation.

ASIAN PEOPLES' MOVEMENT ON DEBT AND DEVELOPMENT

In Asia, the Asian Peoples' Movement on Debt and Development (APMDD) which is a regional alliance of peoples' movements, community organisations, coalitions, NGOs, and networks has been advancing a campaign on reforms to the international financial architecture.

APMDD has, in the last few years, led a campaign for tax and gender justice. The campaign aims to reform deeply entrenched patriarchal systems, structures, social norms and practices that underpin the current tax and fiscal systems.³⁸ This is based on APMDD's experience in the Global South, where the financial architecture frequently does not recognise women and girls as economic agents; unpaid work is not recognised or captured in tax and fiscal policies. In 2019, APPMD led a campaign called "Make Taxes Work for Women and Girls". This campaign feeds into the broader efforts to reform the global financial systems to make them more just and equitable.³⁹

STOP THE BLEED CAMPAIGN

In 2021, a collective of seven Pan-African civil society organisations (CSOs) – [Africa Forum and Network on Debt and Development \(AFRODAD\)](#); [Africa Women and Girls' Development and Communication Network \(FEMNET\)](#); [International Trade Union Confederation Africa \(ITUC Africa\)](#); [Pan African Lawyers Union \(PALU\)](#); [Tax Justice Network Africa \(TJNA\)](#); [Nawi - Afrifem Macroeconomics Collective \(Nawi Collective\)](#); and [Trust Africa \(TA\)](#) came together to launch an African Debt Campaign, under the auspices of [The Stop the Bleeding Campaign \('Stop the Bleeding'\)](#).

Since 2022 'Stop the Bleeding' has been mobilising, organising, and re-awakening advocacy on debt and influencing policymakers at country and regional levels on prudent debt management and equitable investment in public services. The campaign advocates that outside of full debt cancellation, debt crisis risks are being postponed rather than fundamentally tackled through a suspension of payments. Without comprehensive cancellation involving all creditors African countries will be diverting freed-up resources to external (private creditors and commercial) debt servicing. This is because, to the campaigners, the debt crisis directly impacts the continent's young people more generally and girls more specifically.

'Stop the Bleeding' notes that debt and illicit financial flows (IFFs) harm vertical equity and the progressiveness of tax systems that negatively affect women and girls. Women and girls' economic empowerment is more than the ability to compete equally; it is about access to and control over financial resources, access to decent work, control over their own time, and meaningful participation in economic decision-making at all levels, from the household to international institutions and policy spaces.

'Stop the Bleeding' has taken a feminist approach to addressing the debt crisis by acknowledging the importance of replacing the patriarchal systems and institutions that entrench inequality. As such, the campaign seeks to redress the power imbalances not just for sovereigns but also for citizens who are often marginalised and disproportionately impacted by the decisions of a few.

The Bridgetown Initiative is a key initiative for countries in the Global South because it directly addresses the twin crises⁴⁰ of climate change and debt vulnerability. Most of these countries have been affected by the effects of climate change, such as the increased frequency and severity of natural disasters, rising sea levels, and changing agricultural conditions. Yet their contribution to global greenhouse gas emissions is very minimal. At the same time, most of them are in debt distress or on the verge of debt distress, which limits their ability to invest in the necessary climate resilience and sustainable development projects.

AFRICA UNION AGENDA 2063

The African Union's Agenda 2063 provides a comprehensive architecture for Africa's⁴¹ development, emphasising gender equality and women and girls' empowerment. When combined with FPP principles and sustainable debt management strategies, there is a significant opportunity to address the triple challenge of debt, gender inequality, and economic development.

Through integrating gender perspectives into debt policies, promoting sustainable financing for women and girls' empowerment, ensuring women and girls' participation in decision-making processes, and addressing issues such as gender-based violence and healthcare rights, Africa can advance towards a more inclusive, equitable, and prosperous future for all its citizens by 2063. This requires a concerted effort from governments, civil society, international organisations, and the private sector to prioritise gender equality and women and girls' empowerment.

FEMINIST RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

We acknowledge the objections surrounding the widespread use of the term 'Feminist Foreign Policy' with respect to its utilisation in Africa. African feminists have raised their objections based on the dominance of Global North countries in the current FFP discourse, limited engagement with African feminists, and lack of deep interrogation of Global South histories. Our viewpoint is that while there is room to improve FFP, it should be made more all-embracing and democratic by taking account of the varied experiences and interests of women and girls, particularly those in Africa. We acknowledge the trailblazers who are leading the way in dismantling the concept of colonisation, such as the African Feminist Collective on Feminist Informed Policies (AFIP Collective). African feminists persist in championing a decolonial perspective on national and foreign policy, rooted in a comprehensive vision of a novel FFP that opposes imperialism.

As such, FFP must incorporate African feminist theory (ies), the African Feminist Charter, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, and the Maputo Protocol as crucial foundations. We argue that this fundamental basis is essential to guarantee that feminist foreign policy incorporates African ideals that fiercely challenge existing global power inequalities. We contend that the existing neoliberal economic model fundamentally opposes the objectives of transformative policy reforms guided by African feminism. Against this backdrop, FFP can endeavour to address debt in the Global South, particularly in Africa, as seen in the paper.

... the existing neoliberal economic model fundamentally opposes the objectives of transformative policy reforms guided by African feminism.



Putting off addressing the issue of debt distress within FFPs incurs significant costs for borrowing countries, as demonstrated by the history of a perpetual debt cycle in the Global South. Without an effective global framework for managing foreign debt, creditors and debtors persist in postponing the resolution of this issue. This leads to reductions in funding for public services and more marginalisation of women and girls, placing them in increasingly vulnerable situations across all aspects of their lives. This problem has endured for a considerable time and has frequently led to squandered decades of advancement and avoidable human suffering. The current situation is also exacerbated by the more severe consequences of the present-day climate change crisis.

Against this backdrop, we present our feminist recommendations for specific interventions and opportunities that FFP can offer to promote women and girls' economic rights:

AFIP Collective

Countries should promote FFPs that are not only feminist in name but also take feminist actions and address the specific challenges women and girls face in various countries. This can be achieved through engaging in open and inclusive dialogues with feminist movements, women and girls' rights organisations, gender experts and civil society groups from different parts of the continent with diverse backgrounds. Additionally, it will be important to establish partnerships with community grassroots groups that work on gender issues in Africa. These organisations can provide valuable insights and contribute to developing a more nuanced and inclusive FFP.

Countries should promote FFPs that are not only feminist in name but also take feminist actions and address the specific challenges women and girls face in various countries.



International Financial Institutions (IFIs).

FFPs should advocate for comprehensive changes in international financial institutions (IFI) policies and structures to accomplish substantive feminist objectives. This will pave the path towards equitable and efficient debt servicing mechanisms and tax regulations that empower developing nations to adequately finance public services and social protection, particularly women and girls.

FFPs should amplify calls for the reform of the IFI where countries in the Global North have significant power over their peers in the Global South. A legacy of colonialism which has resulted in entrenched power dynamics.

Governments

When developing FFPs, it's important that governments ensure the process is transparent and inclusive and that consultations are carried out with all relevant stakeholders. It's particularly important to prioritise the concerns of women and girls and marginalised groups, considering their diverse identities, at every stage of the drafting process. The aim should be to prioritise support, protection, and development for the most marginalised, as they initially committed to do under the international and regional human rights agreements they have ratified. This approach ensures that the policies represent and effectively promote gender equality and social justice.

Governments should closely observe and assess existing development and gender equality frameworks such as Agenda 2030, Generation Equality Forum pledges,⁴² and human rights instruments. This will help them learn from past experiences and avoid incorporating ineffective strategies into their FFPs. It is vital that we actively prioritise the use of existing frameworks that can support sustainable development and gender equality. This involves building upon or addressing areas where these frameworks may have been overlooked or lacked support due to low adoption.

Actively encourage a thorough comprehension of the historical consequences of colonisation, particularly in terms of marginalisation and its influence on the debt crisis. This understanding should cover the complex aspects of the issue rather than simplifying it into a binary concept. FFPs should advocate for meaningful dialogues with developing countries to address the significant impact of exploitative colonialism on the current wealth of European countries. This will assist in the process of decolonising FFPs and customising them to the specific needs of foreign policy, especially those originating from Africa.

**FFPs should advocate for meaningful dialogues
with developing countries
to address the significant impact of exploitative colonialism
on the current wealth of European countries.**



The current macroeconomic approach is based on the neo-liberal paradigm, which aims to promote economic growth by reducing fiscal deficits primarily through enacting spending cuts. The understanding and implementation of human rights principles - both globally and by governing bodies - carry substantial influence in confronting existing societal practices that marginalise women and girls. FFPs should apply women and girls' human rights standards and principles, such as CEDAW, the Istanbul Convention (2014), and the Maputo Protocol, to continuously develop and ensure that FFPs effectively fulfil treaty obligations and address the main actors responsible for violating CEDAW obligations in macroeconomic policies.

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