

End Austerity Activism Festival

Sat, Oct 7 2023, 9am - 6:30pm

Cadi Ayyad University Club Marrakesh

Register to attend: <https://forms.gle/zADLVqmp2RfXX7gX8>

9-10 - Welcome & Opening Remarks

10-11:15 - The Hushed Struggle: Tax, Debt, and the Hidden Costs of Austerity on Women in Africa

Making the link between tax, debt and austerity, this session will discuss and showcase through an art gallery display the gendered impact of austerity measures on women and girls in Africa and explore innovative strategies for equitable revenue generation and prudent debt management.

Moderator: Faith Lumonya – Akina Mama wa Afrika

Speakers:

- Kamal Ramburuth - Institute for Economic Justice
- Wangari Kinoti - Action Aid
- Chenai Mukumba – Tax Justice Network Africa
- Shem Joshua Otieno - AFRODAD
- Grace Namugambe - SEATINI Uganda

11:15-11:45 - Creative break & energizers

11:45-1 - Austerity impacts on public services and stories of young urban women from the African continent

This session will illustrate the impact of IMF driven austerity on women across Africa and explore successful examples of organizing for alternatives.

It will include stories, data and cases from Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Zambia & Zimbabwe

Speakers:

- Ucizi Ngulube - ActionAid Zambia
- TBC - Representative from the Feminist Macroeconomic Alliance Malawi
- Niri Goyit - Action Aid Nigeria
- Celestine Okwudili ODO - ActionAid Nigeria

1-2 - Lunch

2-3:15 - Reconstructing the Global Financial Architecture: Feminist Alternatives for Just Futures

With two seasoned speakers and a visual artist, this session will explore strategies to foster awareness, understanding, and incorporation of feminist macroeconomics within policy and practical implementation across Africa.

Facilitators:

- Dr Lyla Latif - UNDP / Tax Justice Network
- Irene Ovonji Odida - ICRICT

3:15-3:45 - Creative break & energizers

4-5:15 - Austerity & Inclusive Recovery: Bridging the Divide

This session will take stock of the impacts of the post-pandemic austerity-led economic "recovery" on the African continent, with a particular focus on privatization of public goods and services and on developing new visions for an inclusive recovery.

Speakers:

- Lays Ushirobira & Riska Koopman - Global Alliance for Tax Justice
- Jenny Ricks - Fight Inequality Movement
- Jennifer Lipenga - Akina Mama wa Afrika
- Mukasiri Sibanda - Stop the Bleeding Campaign
- TBC - FEMNET

5:15-5:30 - Coffee break

5:30-6:30 - Reflection & Mobilizing

In closing the festival, we will come together to reflect on the discussions of the day, and discuss political strategies in our joint advocacy against austerity going forward.

Facilitator:

- Emilia Reyes - Equidad de Genero

Detailed Agenda

10-11:15 am The Hushed Struggle: Tax, Debt, and the Hidden Costs of Austerity on Women in Africa

Africa is a continent of immense diversity and potential. Within recent years, Africa's average economic growth has remained stable despite facing multiple crises including the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, disruptions to global supply chains due to the Russia-Ukraine war, tightening global financing conditions, frequent extreme weather events, and political instability; causing increased vulnerability and an urgent need for government response. These challenges have caused pressure on the already limited revenue that African governments possess to finance their continuously emerging development needs. Faced with this reality, African governments have had to face the daunting task of balancing between sourcing resources to meet their population's urgent need to address this poly crises, and implementing various measures set by International Financial Institutions (IFIs) as the condition to access these resources to subsidize their low revenue baskets.

While taxation has often been thought of as the most sustainable tool for financing development, leakages that exist within revenue systems have consistently hindered efforts of African countries to maximise their revenue collection potential. The regressive nature of many African government's tax systems has meant that tax is collected from a proportion of the population with the least capacity to pay. As a result, countries often turn to International Financial Institutions (IFIs) to seek additional financing in the form of loans and grants to close their revenue gaps.

Conversely, this approach has only further narrowed the fiscal space of these countries as these loans and grants often come with conditions such as to adopt austerity measures as a means to achieve fiscal consolidation with the expectation that this will enable them raise sufficient resources through taxation and reduce reliance on debt. Some of the measures include regressive taxes such as Value Added Tax as well as a cut back on expenditure in critical sectors such as health, education, water and sanitation.

It is important to note, however, that austerity measures despite saving the government resources, affect the most vulnerable groups; women and girls and can in the long run cost governments as levels of poverty and inequality are exacerbated.

The objectives of the session are to:

- Understand the link between tax, debt and austerity.
- Discuss and showcase the gendered impact of austerity measures on women and girls in Africa.
- Explore innovative strategies for equitable revenue generation, prudent debt management to curb the gendered impact of austerity measures.

11:45 - 1pm Austerity impacts on public services and stories of young urban women from the African continent

This mix of panel discussion and artistic presentation will feature a group of young women from across the African continent to discuss:

- IMF driven austerity and its impact on young urban women, with cases from Malawi, South Africa, Ghana and Kenya
- The impacts of IMF advised public wage bill cuts in Africa, with data from Sierra Leone, Ghana, Senegal, Zambia, Malawi, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Nigeria, Tanzania and Uganda
- Alternatives to austerity with lessons from the Tax and Education Alliance work in Zambia and Senegal

1-2 pm Lunch

2-3:15 pm Reconstructing the Global Financial Architecture: Feminist Alternatives for Just Futures

Akina Mama wa Afrika will launch the *'Fostering Feminist Macro-economic Policy Alternatives in Africa'* alongside a scoping study report. The study offers insights into the ways in which macroeconomic policies have affected women, gender-expansive persons, and other minoritized groups in Africa. It further provides details around the level of awareness, understanding, perspective, and incorporation of feminist macroeconomics within policy and practical implementation across Africa.

To draw everything together, we will have a visual artist and a writer present, collaborating to visually depict the array of stories that will be shared.

3:15-3:45 pm Creative break & energizers

4-5:15 pm Austerity & Inclusive Recovery: Bridging the Divide (GATJ)

Whilst the global health pandemic brought to the fore the deep inequalities in and between countries, countries in the Global South had long been suffering from the negative impacts of austerity. Structural adjustment policies designed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank (WB) have been the framework for economic and social policy in most of the South since the early 1980s, having devastating effects such as increase and feminization of poverty. Overall, these policies in the form of various packages such as the Stabilisation Package, sought to limit the role of government in the economy whilst promoting private sector operations in favour of a market-led economy. This however has largely failed.

The privatisation of critical public goods and services such as infrastructure, water, education, and health has had far-reaching and long-lasting negative impacts, especially on women, girls, and communities in the Global South. Criticism of IMF & World Bank austerity-led policies has been well documented to date. "Scaling down social protection programs for women, children, the elderly and other vulnerable people, cutting or capping wages of teachers and healthcare workers, privatization or commercializing public services such as energy, water, and public transportation" are some of the measures implemented under austerity or fiscal consolidation. The implications of decades-long austerity in many developing countries have long been evident, reflected in their increase in private and public debt and more regressive tax policies.

The public healthcare system as well as social safety nets crumbled under the pressures of the global health pandemic. Millions were pushed further into hunger and poverty, as national budgets were redirected toward health care whilst many developmental goals were being eroded. The very sectors which IMF & World Bank promoted such as extractives and privatized health care profited immensely during this period. According to Global Witness, the world's biggest five oil companies shared profits of \$195 billion in 2022, and twenty of the world's biggest food corporations, in the grain fertilizer, meat, and dairy sectors, paid out \$53,5 bn to their shareholders in the last two financial years. Civil society calls to impose wealth and windfall taxes have fallen largely on deaf ears. The United Nations estimates that it needs \$51.5 billion to provide life-saving support to 230 million people who are deemed most at risk globally. Moreover, according to Oxfam by 2025, 75% of the global population, 129 countries could be living under austerity measures. Where government's role is reduced, and the general population is unable to accrue goods and services from the private sector, women and girls more than often have to step in due to social, cultural, economic, and religious norms. This unpaid care work has increased sharply during the pandemic. Christa Wichterich explains that care extractivism allows the state to withdraw from providing free or subsidised essential services. Structural Adjustment policies, austerity, and fiscal consolidation measures have in many ways crippled the state, inclusive recovery has been centred as a key measure to "build-back-better" by both the World Bank and the IMF. Civil society actors and activists have offered multiple alternatives such as stopping the bleeding of illicit financial flows from Africa, and other Global South countries, overhaul of global tax rules, climate & environmental justice

propositions, as well as reparations. Disappointingly, it has been business as usual for these and other (private) international financial institutions over the past two years.

The World Bank & IMF return to Africa after more than 50 years, it is the appropriate time to take stock of the realities of austerity for the African continent and beyond as well as to put forward new visions for an inclusive recovery.

This session aims to take stock of the impacts of austerity-led economic policy on the African continent, lessons of privatized public goods and services, and new visions for inclusive recovery.

5:15-5:30 pm Break

5:30-6:30 pm Reflection, mobilizing & close

In closing the festival, we will come together to reflect on the discussions of the day, and discuss political strategies in our joint advocacy against austerity going forward.

