



The African Women's
Development and
Communication Network

An African Feminist Perspective on FfD4



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An African Feminist Perspective on FfD4

The Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development (FfD4) is poised to be a pivotal platform for rethinking and reforming the global financial framework. The Financing for Development (FfD) framework established by the United Nations can potentially restructure global economic governance and economic systems to support better progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals and fully realise human rights for all, especially those most marginalised by the present system. However, its practical outcomes often fail to address gendered structural inequalities adequately. These inequities are particularly conspicuous in Africa, where the lingering effects of colonialism and neoliberal economics converge to affect African women and girls adversely. FfD4 is taking place when the global geo-political context is in a complex socio-economic and climate crisis. Recognising these intersecting injustices requires employing African feminist perspectives as a guiding lens for FfD4.

[Postcolonial feminist scholars](#) assert that deconstructing inherited colonial power structures and challenging the contemporary neoliberal finance system is not only theoretical; its urgency is manifested in tangible, gendered injustices. In Africa's export zones, women receive as little as [US\\$ \\$2 daily for sewing garments for international brands](#). Likewise, women working in artisanal mining extract ore across the continent's mineral-rich regions without protective rights or decent pay. Work on [feminist decolonial discourse](#) elucidates the intersection of colonial legacies and patriarchal norms in shaping development paradigms that frequently [overlook women's rights](#) and lived realities. By analysing these interactions through the frameworks of postcolonial feminist thought and gender theory, we may interrogate the concept of "development," questioning whose interests it genuinely serves.

The foundation of the FFD framework is the [Addis Ababa Action Agenda](#) (AAAA), which emphasises the importance of **domestic resource mobilisation, private finance, trade, debt sustainability, international development cooperation and systemic issues influencing global development**. While the framework explicitly incorporates gender equality, its emphasis on market-driven solutions and partnerships with the private sector undermines its capacity to address structural disparities. Policies prioritising narrow economic growth over societal equality risk reinforcing power imbalances that systematically marginalise African women and girls.

Neoliberalism significantly influenced the FfD framework by advocating for foreign direct investment (FDI), privatisation, and cost-recovery strategies. Policies that privilege FDI-led liberalisation and privatisation have seldom delivered the projected growth dividends; even periods labelled as "macroeconomic stability" often conceal recessions triggered by

shrinking aggregate demand. Whatever modest gains emerge rarely reach women living and working in subsistence economies. These approaches often [commodify rights-based services](#), particularly healthcare, education, water, and sanitation, which are vital for advancing the rights of African women and girls, hence perpetuating existing inequalities and entrenching poverty.

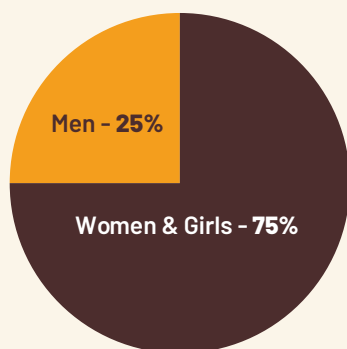
Market-oriented strategies, such as carbon trading, financial transaction taxes, and pay-for-performance models, may enhance resource mobilisation but are rarely tailored to the unique challenges of African women. In the absence of progressive taxes and [gender-responsive budgeting](#) that allocates resources for social justice, such as specific funding for maternity healthcare or girls' education, these processes may unintentionally exacerbate inequalities in development results. From an African feminist perspective, egalitarianism should be integrated into economic governance in the planning process rather than as an epilogue.

Official Development Assistance (ODA) remains a crucial financial resource for several African countries. [Most OECD-DAC donors have still not reached the long-promised 0.7 % of GNI target](#), and in this FfD4 year, several have even scaled back or re-labelled commitments, further eroding predictable funding. Meanwhile, [women's rights organisations \(WROs\) worldwide receive less than 1 % of total ODA](#), with African WROs among the least served. These shortfalls compound longstanding critiques of ODA's inadequacy, volatility, and tendency to prioritise donor interests over the necessities of beneficiaries. In humanitarian disasters or post-conflict reconstruction, ODA can influence girls' lives and women's economic futures. In the absence of a feminist ethic of care and inclusion, it risks reinforcing patriarchal standards. African feminists advocate for the allocation of ODA to [prioritise social protection initiatives](#), especially care initiatives. This reallocation of funds might significantly influence women's empowerment by supplying direct resources to projects that augment their social capital. It also contends that ODA must transition from a charity-based perspective to a rights-based one that acknowledges African women's intrinsic autonomy and sovereignty. The opaqueness of ODA allocations may mask the actual amount of financing that effectively reaches and aids African women and girls. As a result, it is imperative to call for open reporting mechanisms, the engagement of local women's networks in the supervision of Official Development Assistance (ODA), flexibility and simplification in the accessibility of ODA funds and thorough examinations of the alignment of ODA funds with gender-related goals to guarantee accountability. Without these safeguards, ODA may reinforce hierarchical narratives that marginalise regional and national capacities and priorities.

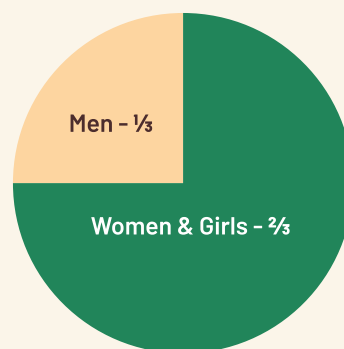
Many African countries shoulder [persistent debt burdens](#), directly compromising women and girls' well-being. Debt repayment demands frequently overshadow development imperatives for African nations and impact social expenditures, limiting essential services like healthcare, education, and social security, significantly benefiting women and girls. The FFD framework's current methods for **debt sustainability** mostly rely on minimal relief measures, debt swaps or refinancing, overlooking more substantial demands for comprehensive debt cancellation or reparative justice. From an African feminist viewpoint, authentic debt justice is essential for confronting the systemic inequities that have historically afflicted African countries. It starts with whole or significant debt cancellation for financially distressed countries, providing respite from the debilitating fiscal obligations perpetuating poverty and reliance cycles in several African countries. This debt cancellation is regarded as financial aid and an essential measure for self-determination and sovereignty. Ultimately, strategies to avert future debt reliance are vital. Debt elimination alone is inadequate; systemic reforms are necessary to safeguard African states against recurring pitfalls (such as debt swaps or climate debt disguised as solutions) and promote sustainable development, equitable trade, and economic independence.

The demand for **reparations and reparative justice** is equally significant, acknowledging the past and ongoing exploitation of Africa via colonisation, slavery, and natural resource extraction and conflicts, but also the climate damage carried out by high-emitting nations that now magnifies droughts, floods, climate-induced migration and food insecurity across the continent. Therefore, reparations are framed as [climate and historical justice finance](#) that redresses accumulated ecological and economic debts while enabling African nations to restore their dignity, replenish depleted resources and invest in low-carbon, gender-just development pathways. This is particularly relevant to FfD4 and adds to calls to reform global economic governance to not only enable repair for past exploitation but also stop the ongoing exploitation and extraction.

[Over 75% of unpaid care labour and two-thirds of paid care employment globally are performed by women and girls.](#)



Global Unpaid Care Labour



Global Paid Care Labour

The global economy receives approximately US\$10.8 trillion annually from unpaid caring, accounting for 12.5 billion hours daily. **Care and social reproduction** are fundamental to the well-being of any society. However, if systems fail to acknowledge or redistribute these responsibilities, women and girls disproportionately bear the burden without the necessary support to attain their other rights, including, but not limited to, health, education, and decent employment. For African women and girls, the barriers to their participation in the economy do not solely stem from care and social-reproduction work, but from a systemic disregard for its value. There is a pressing need to redistribute this work across genders and between households and public services, ensuring that workplaces and education systems are attuned to these essential realities.

Notwithstanding its importance, care work remains predominantly unrecognised in macroeconomic planning and policymaking. This neglect is particularly detrimental when **climate change** exacerbates vulnerabilities related to water availability, energy, and food production, thus heightening caregiving obligations. Integrating the FfD framework with African feminist perspectives requires a direct focus on financing care services and reorganising economies to centre care and well-being. Investments in renewable energy for cooking, water infrastructure, and climate-resilient agriculture may significantly alleviate the unpaid care burden on women and girls. Furthermore, climate finance mechanisms under FfD4 should emphasise women-led adaptation methods, recognising that African women are not mere victims but proactive contributors to climate solutions.

The [taxation element of the FfD agenda](#) is a crucial instrument for economic autonomy. The feminist agenda supports the UN-established Framework Convention on International **Tax** Cooperation. The Convention can extend beyond limiting profit-shifting to serve as a definitive tool for gender equality. By eliminating loopholes and curtailing the [US\\$ \\$88 billion lost each year to illicit financial flows](#), the Convention would recover funds for public expenditure that fulfils the rights of women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals. A feminist structural perspective connects global regulations to local circumstances, such as women in mining host communities advocating for equitable resource tax distribution, or carers in informal settlements whose unpaid work supports underfunded healthcare systems. These calls for action aim to reallocate rule-making authority from elitist institutions like the OECD and IMF to inclusive, rights-based forums that empower African women to allocate resources towards climate-resilient public goods and a feminist, people-centred economy.

The FfD framework operates within a multilateral system that reproduces colonial hierarchies and global power imbalances, with the Global North maintaining disproportionate influence over financial and unjust **trade policies** that affect African economies. Yet Africa itself is generating counter currents: in February 2024, the African Union formally adopted the [AfCFTA Protocol on Women and Youth in Trade](#), providing evidence that feminist economic

governance is now being legislated at the continental level. The protocol signals a political commitment to reengineer tariffs, financing, and dispute-settlement mechanisms so that they work for women traders and young entrepreneurs. Nonetheless, as global rule-making continues to be dominated by creditor-led institutions such as WTO, OECD, IMF etc the existing governance frameworks are likely to sustain gendered power imbalances; without a significant transformation in these domains, the colonial frameworks that underpin global trade will persist in undermining the very benefits the protocol aims to secure. African women and girls advocate for abolishing oppressive trade agreements and financial structures that sustain reliance on the Global North. This encompasses arduous intellectual property frameworks restricting access to essential technology and promoting equitable trade policies that advantage African producers, especially women in agriculture and small-scale enterprises.

The persistent underrepresentation of **African women in decision-making arenas**, both at local and international levels, continues to be a significant issue. Significantly involving African women in FfD processes would improve financial policies by better representing their lived experiences. This transcends superficial inclusion; it entails establishing enduring procedures that [recognise and incorporate women's knowledge](#) throughout all phases of policy formulation, execution, and assessment.

An African feminist perspective on FfD4 advocates for a transformational paradigm that transcends neoliberal doctrines. **A decolonial and rights-based framework** grounded on the [African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights](#) (ACHPR) and the [Maputo Protocol](#) is crucial for rectifying these injustices. The Maputo Protocol explicitly recognises women's rights to social welfare, health, environmental and economic empowerment, mandating state parties to allocate resources to areas that enhance women's well-being. By prioritising the ACHPR's focus on human dignity and socio-economic rights, governments can withstand foreign financial influences and agendas that diminish the voices of African women and girls.






Achieving genuinely inclusive and sustainable development through the FfD process begins with placing African women and girls at the decision-making table not as symbols, but as feminist actors keenly aware of, and prepared to challenge, the structural constraints that shape economic governance. When such substantive representation drives the agenda, it can realign ODA flows, secure debt and trade justice, expand investment in care economies, and dismantle colonial frameworks that still dictate Africa's place in global finance. This justice-centred approach also requires multilateral, state and civil-society partners to cede space and follow the leadership of those most affected. Only through locally owned priorities, equitable resource distribution, and an uncompromising commitment to social justice will the Financing for Development framework deliver on its promise—an Africa where present and future generations of women and girls thrive free of historic and institutional subjugation.







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