

**POSITIONING ECONOMIC
JUSTICE IN THE CONTEXT OF
FEMINISM AND FINANCIAL
AGENCY FOR AFRICAN WOMEN**

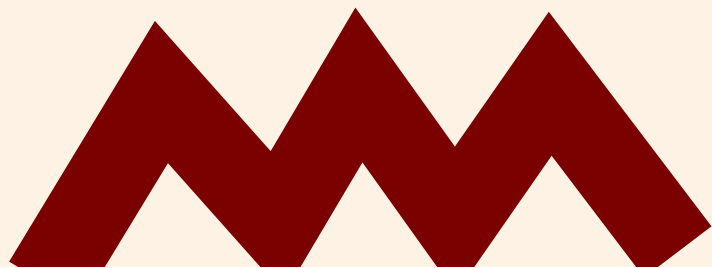
**URGENT
ACTION
FUND +
AFRICA**
FOR WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS



**RE-THINKING ECONOMIC ALTERNATIVES
AND CLOSING THE GAPS**

Who we are

Urgent Action Fund-Africa is a feminist, pan African, rapid response Fund, committed to transforming power relations through resourcing African feminists and womn human rights defenders and their formations as an act of solidarity. We are a part of the ecosystem of feminist and womn's movements in Africa and globally. In character we are bold and courageous, proactive and responsive, creative and rigorous, curious, alert and agile, imaginative and grounded, consistent and reliable.



Re-thinking Economic Alternatives and Closing the Gaps

Economic Justice is the belief that equitable distribution of resources and shared prosperity are ultimately a benefit to society. As part of a broader movement and network of feminists and women's organisations, UAF-Africa has been doing work in this area – amongst others – for more than a decade. Years of work has allowed us to gain understanding regarding the effectiveness of grant making and the political, historical and economic contexts where grantees and potential grantees are situated. In assessing that landscape, it is crucial to note that amongst the poorest in world, are African women who often have no access to productive resources and collateral such as viable land and financial capital. In addition these women often bear the burden of care work and because of a neo-liberal system that determines what work has value and what does not, their labour often goes unpaid further exacerbating their capacity to exercise agency.



**BRIDGE
THE
GAP**



In Kenya , 60% of womn remain unbanked as a result of inaccessibility while at least 38% of Egyptian, Moroccan and Tunisian womn have no bank accounts.

In Zimbabwe only 3.52% of the loans provided by the banking industry (for any purposes) were advanced to womn due to the vast majority not meeting the requirements for a (large) loan. Part of what fuels the economic precarity of womn is the high reliance on informal labour.

Whereas globally 75% of womn engage in informal labour, in Tanzania, Nigeria and Egypt that figure is 83%, 95% and 79% respectively.

Through this assessment UAF-Africa has chosen an approach that is more holistic, considering the structural and more transformative construct of economic justice. We recognise Economic Empowerment (such as income generation activities, village savings and loans associations, womn's entrepreneurship) as a surface based solution. And choose to lean rather towards Economic Justice, which entails ensuring that the benefits of economic growth accrue to 'the people' rather than to profit driven corporates or their patriarchal state allies, inclined more towards closing gendered economic gaps. For example; it is not enough to look at just trying to get women into the labor force or supporting entrepreneurship or skills building, without addressing the barriers, economic and legal structures, rights, and social norms that infringe womn's economic agency. We believe that it is only through addressing the systemic issues that perpetuate the inequality that long lasting deeper impacts can be achieved. Ultimately bringing noticeable change to womn's economic justice requires advocating for economic inclusion and addressing redistribution of power, resources, and voice.

Economic Justice – A Pinpoint for Radical Change

Based on the above assessment of the landscape and considering the statistics, within the Economic Justice frame, UAF-Africa has chosen four broad areas of focus - Labour Justice; Access to productive resources, specifically Land Justice and Financial Inclusion; Unpaid care work and the care crisis; and Tax & Trade Justice. While this segmentation is a necessity to facilitate and administer efficient use of our attention and resources, it is imperative to understand that these focus areas are not silos, operating neatly in parallel. Rather, UAF-Africa keeps applying an intersectional and systemic approach, understanding the ways in which these focus areas interlink to form a context that, unchallenged, perpetuates existing patriarchal power dynamics and norms.



Land Justice and Financial Inclusion

Many African women depend on land for food, shelter, livelihood, and often their identity, but lack legal control over this source of their survival. Access to, control, and ownership of land remain the domain of male privilege reflecting patriarchal and societal power relations, some of which are constructed by historical as well as current control over resources, community, history, culture, tradition, and in many communities, by the feudal authorities of kings. Land also affords social status and access to political power. The exclusion of African women from this crucial resource means they are often unable to leverage capital in exchange for bank loans or start-up funds.



Instead, all their efforts go to survival, and they remain locked in a cycle of poverty without the time or headspace to fully engage in politics or make meaningful communal contributions, leaving them at the mercy of the decisions made by the men with the means and privilege to participate.

While some might say it is this fate of exclusion that the self-organizing grassroots microfinance movement of the 1970s set to address, UAF-Africa provides a decolonised critique of a model that has been accused of pumping debt down indigent people's throats. Microfinance Institutions are an example of empowerment versus justice and often ignore the geo-political context in which the debt is given, including scenarios where women are coerced by society and/or partners to take out over-extended loans, a proliferation of high unethical interest rates and an undermining of indigenous practices such as collectivity and extended kinship ties that are essential for survival.

Labour Justice; Unpaid Care Work and the Care Crisis

In simple terms the Care Crisis can be understood as the growing gap between care needs and the resources made available to meet them. In this regard, care means “all the supporting activities that take place to make, remake, maintain, contain, and repair the world we live in and the physical, emotional and intellectual capacities required to do so in the private and public domain”. Much of the crisis within this form of labour, comes from the ways in which capitalism and neoliberalism avoid, ignore, and deny how crucial Care is. Therefore, it's important for UAF-Africa to ask questions such as, who determines work, who gets to do what work and who gets paid how much – who decides.

The issue of remuneration is particularly pertinent because patriarchy and capitalism thrive based on unpaid work as well as social productive and reproductive roles. These roles – often heaped on women – notably contribute to the market economy and the gross domestic product calculations of many countries

And yet the system benefitting from these roles insists on ignoring or refusing to name these forms of work as legitimate labour which goes a long way to ensuring it remains unpaid. Instead care work is often framed as being a good will offering which is an endless gift to capitalism that womn should be happy to give (as part of their socially ascribed roles) instead of a series of activities and obligations that 'require skill, dedication, insight, persistence and organizing.'

In addition to advocating around Care Work, Labour Justice for womn in the workplace is critical. Issues regarding sexual abuse, gender wage gap and problematic working conditions – for example in the gig economy or so-called informal sector – create precarity for womn already stretched in a society that does not acknowledge the unpaid family responsibilities which they carry.



Tax & Trade Justice:

The tax base on the continent is fairly low due to the precarity of work and the peripheral nature of work that nearly 80% of the population undertake. The forms and sources of taxes have also been overly narrow. The current state debates on tax are often steeped in a capitalist poverty shaming discourse from the state with the suggestion that people need to pay more taxes. The four Rs of taxation – revenue, redistribution, repricing and representation – form part of a model that moves away from community-centered living and push the notion of individualized “survival of the fittest”. The system is often deeply racist, capitalist, structurally violent, and untrue where rather than alleviating it further marginalizes women and people on the margin of community/ people living in poverty.

UAF-Africa positions its work, then, within the context of progressive tax justice. This approach appreciates that everybody pays a form of tax whether buying bread, petrol or paraffin. Both the unwaged and waged are liable for VAT regardless of income.



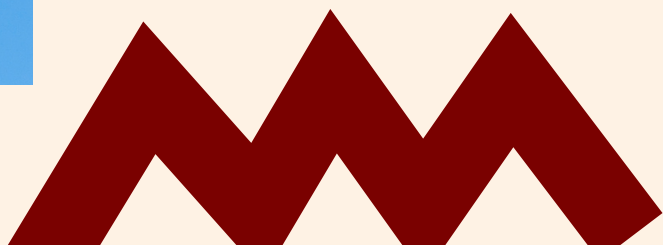
There are in fact multiple taxes (e.g. Pink Tax) that women often pay to participate in the market economy or sometimes pay on behalf of others despite their exclusion from participating in the market economy.

As always, our work is also about naming and framing. To this end we encourage an understanding of “tax” in not only monetary terms but also in terms of time and issues of access – we cannot think of tax without understanding how it relates to issues of inequity. If the poor must take twice as long, travel twice as far, as the wealthy to access the same resources is that journey not already a form of tax?

Visioning an Economic Future for African Womn

Due to the nature of our work involving rapid response, we maintain flexibility as to how we operate in the field, while keeping a sense of the kind of work that lies ahead to accomplish the goals we are committed to within the movement. So much of the condition of womn exists in narrative and so the work is as much about policy as it is about history and tradition. To this end we wish to clarify feminist visions; promote thought leadership and enhance public conscientization.

Our focus on feminists and womn human rights defenders, movements, coalitions and networks has not changed, and we add to that a specific focus on groups that have attention on advocacy issues regarding Land justice and rights.



We want to increase the number of womn in leadership positions in land decision-making sectors as well as micro and macro-economic policymaking. We look to protect womn land defenders and resource land justice feminist movements across Africa to build collective voice and resist multilateral globalist, capitalist and neoliberalist co-operations, including extractive industries.

For womn workers, advocacy for a living wage is an area of great potential impact as well as issues of access, for example, to the digital economy. Policy discussions on care should include analysis of social infrastructure including accessible childcare, domestic help, reliable safe and affordable transport in order to support working womn. In addition, we want to address the precarity of the gig economy and informal sector by supporting grass roots women's movements such as sex and domestic workers formations, progressive trade unions, women health workers, co-ops and partner with and support cross sectoral alliances.

Ultimately, we envisage a time when womn are truly free to participate and the enmeshed systems that oppress are loosened and finally broken. Our co-mission is to transform power relations for womn in all bodies and realities, ultimately making it possible for womn to thrive in society, engaged powerfully with people and the planet.





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