Four years after the UN International Conference on Financing for Development (FfD) in Addis Ababa, the world faces financing challenges larger in scale than ever before. Continuing on the same path will ensure governments do not meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. Despite these warning, governments went about their meetings at the Financing for Development Forum in a brain fog of business as usual. It is clear that those impacted the most by inaction as the world confronts the multiple crises forecasted for the future, financial crisis, crises of debt, climate, and trust in the UN and multilateral system, are those at the bottom of structural inequality gaps: women and girls.

As the Women’s Working Group on Financing for Development *(WWG on FfD)*, we underscore that the commitments to gender equality, women’s human rights and women’s empowerment have yet to enter the mainstream of macroeconomic policymaking and financing for development. Women’s Rights and gender equality language are explicitly recognized in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, which is a cornerstone to creating an equitable and responsive global economic governance system, underlying the pillars of FfD.

In contrast, we note with grave concern that the FfD narratives on gender equality and women’s empowerment have been manipulated to justify current neoliberal economic and financial system, which is sustained by the exploitation of women’s unpaid domestic and care work, informal and underpaid labour. Instead, we must see a shift of this perspective and establish concrete measures to shift power relations that recognizes, shares and redistribute unpaid domestic and care work, guarantee women human rights, and center the wellbeing of persons in economic and fiscal policies and shape a sustainable and just future. Other relations of power, such as class and race/ethnicity, and particularly the expanding power of capital over labor, must be brought to bear on the way that women are disingenuously being instrumentalized to save the crisis-ridden system of neoliberalism.

We underscore the following issues on the FfD agenda and strongly urge governments and the UN to take heed of our recommendations:

**Tax:**
We invite states to recall the Addis Ababa Action Agenda which states that “the mobilization and effective use of domestic resources,... are central to achieving the SDGs”. In line with this, countries should be committed to act on various tax-related issues, from adopting progressive tax policies and ensuring effective public spending, to engaging efforts in international tax cooperation to curb illicit financial flows and end tax dodging by multinational corporations. But persistent gaps and slow progress in the face of urgent development needs give cause for concern.

Furthermore, trade and investment agreements act as a structural barrier to ending structural inequalities between rich and poor and between women and men. In addition, progressive taxation policies remain deficient. In recent years, at least 24 countries faced investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) tax suits.

We call attention to the revenue-eroding effects of tax competition, as expressed in a race-to-the-bottom towards offering the lowest corporate taxes and evermore generous tax incentives to investors, while, at the same time, low income countries have continued to increase reliance on regressive consumption taxes while mobilizing domestic revenues.

We further highlight the massive scale and impact of illicit financial flows which includes unlawful tax avoidance and other abusive tax behaviour by corporations and wealthy individuals. The erosion of revenues, facilitated by financial secrecy and tax havens, keeps countries dependent on debt and aid, and also justifies the shift towards regressive taxes on consumption that unfairly burden the poor and discriminate against women.

We encourage states to address the policy coherence as an urgent matter and review the impact of Investor-State Dispute Settlements (ISDS) clauses on policies of public interest; and conduct human rights, gender and environmental impact and risk assessments of economic and fiscal policy reforms.

Finally, we urge states to implement progressive taxation as a vital means of supporting the realisation of human rights, including for women to enjoy the right to health, education and economic opportunity. It also provides a means for reducing inequalities and building more equitable societies through the redistribution of assets and resources.

**Domestic Resource Mobilisation:**

The basis of domestic resource mobilisation is determined by the current international tax rules. However, widening consensus deem these rules no longer fit for purpose and urgently need radical reform. Establishing an intergovernmental tax commission under the auspices of the UN, is a step in this direction, and one that continues to be supported by a majority of UN member-states.

We call on states to exercise the required political will to realize this global commission which can usher in a fairer world, where women and the poor are not unduly burdened by regressive taxes, where developing countries are not pitted against each other, and citizens have a voice and a say in the sourcing and spending of financial resources.
Trade:

We have noted the current and sudden concern for gender and trade. Women have suffered from the deep and wide impacts of current trade liberalisation embodied in numerous trade agreements, especially across the global South. Women’s Rights Groups have been calling attention to this issue for a long time. However, the approach of the current drive reflects a hijacking of very real concerns to push newer forms of anti-development liberalisation, and does not point to a genuine interest to discuss the several ways women have been impacted by the overall approach and content of neoliberal globalisation and specific agreements. That is why the gender and trade initiative was rejected by over 200 women’s rights groups and allies. The Women’s Working Group and the Civil Society Organizations on FfD Group (CSO on FfD), a coalition of allies in the FfD follow-up process, would like to recommend comprehensive impact assessments of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) from a gender perspective and see a genuine effort to rectify the totality of current trade rules so that these can work for women.

Debt:

Reports of a new wave of a global debt crises was highlighted at the 2019 launch of the Financing for Sustainable Development Report by a UN task force of international agencies, including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. 40% of low income countries have severe debt problems, and private and public debt levels of richer countries are soaring. Following insufficient levels of tax revenue and development aid, debt-creating finance has been used to raise money creating a combustible mix which will ensure the poorest countries will be hit the hardest.

Moreover, the current debt crisis in Puerto Rico, and other countries island states in a similar situation, strongly impacts vulnerable populations, as is the case with women and girls. Results are an increased violence against women and girls, lack of access to public services, in particular crucial access to health, lack of continued education. The result is impoverishment and the loss of women’s human rights.

It will be impossible to reach the SDG’s and a sustainable economy under a colonial system, as is the case of Puerto Rico. The colonial system has encouraged the negative practices of odious lending, and make the repayment of the ensuing illegitimate and odious debt result in privatized services, unscrupulous acquisition of public goods and services, selling natural resources, and depopulation.

On Systemic issues and climate finance:

Equally important is the issue of the care economy and the “care debt”, which is the time and work women have devoted to unpaid domestic and care tasks, sustaining the impact of the current global economic system, and making the functioning of the capitalist and patriarchal system viable.
The increasing push to leverage private sector funding for climate change does not absolve countries from both fulfilling their commitments and furthermore paying their fair shares to achieve transformative change in line with a 1.5 degree pathway. Realizing rights-based, participative, and gender-responsive climate action requires substantial ratcheting up of financing able to meet the needs of national mitigation and adaptation plans with increased ambition.

States must eliminate subsidies for and investment in fossil fuels; de-militarize to unlock funds and provide the foundation for a peaceful world compatible with climate justice; provide adequate funding for adaptation as well as loss and damage; ensure women and girls have access to education, health, and economic opportunities and access; and provide funding for scaling and replicating local-level solutions.

The push for women’s deeper market and financial inclusion as a means to their economic empowerment must be exposed as completely false. We have seen that this direction has only led to intensifying the exploitation of women's time, knowledge and bodies by capital, and increasing the profitability and power of finance.

Protecting, promoting and realizing women’s rights is already states’ legal obligation of several decades standing. We must not allow any retrogression in this regard.

* WWG on FfD is an alliance of women’s organizations and networks who advocate for the advancement of gender equality, women’s rights and women’s empowerment in the Financing for Development related UN processes. The WWG on FfD is a member of the Civil Society Addis Ababa Coordination Group on Financing for Development (CSO on FfD).

** Special thanks to the Global Alliance for Tax Justice Tax and Gender Working Group for their contributions in the Tax and inputs in other sections.
*** Special thanks to members of the Gender and Trade Coalition for their contributions in the Trade section and inputs in other sections.

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