Women in Asia continue to bear the brunt of multiple crises, as the goal of gender equality is reckoned at a distant 168 years to fully achieve. In a period of crises, gender discrimination and inequality further intensify, imposing more layers of unpaid work on women, deepening their economic deprivations, and heightening gender-based violence.

Women expend more labor time filing in the gaps of gravely inadequate public services at the expense of their health and rights, while lenders push more debt-creating solutions and governments prioritize debt service payments. Already discriminated by low wages and insecure livelihoods, they part with meager earnings as governments source more taxes from ordinary people, while privileging corporations, billionaires and elites. Women already face deeply embedded inequalities, and are thus even more at risk in dealing with the climate emergency. Access to renewable energy remains far from their grasp, keeping them and their environments exposed to health-endangering fossil fuels. Yet women in the Global South and in Asia persist as the faces of economic, climate and energy injustices, of unequal decision-making spaces, of violence and discrimination, of inequitable access to and control over the broad range of resources vital to the full enjoyment of human rights.

But this is changing, as we fight on all fronts for economic, climate and energy justice. It is important that we spotlight the gendered ways women are unfairly hit by multiple crises but we also mark the 8th of March, International Women’s Day throughout the world, in solidarity and as a celebration and salute to millions of women who stay the course, aware that the fulfillment of human rights and their emancipation is a struggle they must lead.

Make Taxes Work for Women, Wealth Tax for Gender Justice Now!

In the guise of “economic recovery,” governments have resorted to austerity measures that cut down spending on public services that respond to women’s needs and instead proposed the expansion of regressive tax measures, like cracking down on micro and small businesses in the informal sector, to expand the tax base.

Governments are not implementing progressive reforms in tax systems and thus failing in using taxes to address inequality and poverty, in closing gaps in domestic resource mobilization, and, in providing badly needed social services, including for health care, education and housing.

With Asia’s increasing reliance on indirect tax policies such as Value-Added Taxes, Goods and Services Taxes, and excise taxes in revenue mobilization, the prices of goods and services have risen to unprecedented levels – up to 16% in Myanmar and 44.8% in Sri Lanka in September 2022. These regressive taxes significantly erode the incomes of the working poor, especially women who disproportionately carry the unpaid burdens of managing family expenditures, even as they stand at the bottom rung of the wealth inequality pyramid.

As millions of women struggle to make ends meet, the world’s elite individuals and corporations have been amassing and hoarding wealth like never before. In its new report, *Survival of the Richest*, Oxfam points out that the “spectacular rise of wealth and income” for the very few at the top has happened simultaneously with a “collapse in taxes on the richest 1%.” There is clearly a link between the fundamental flaws in tax systems with their elite and gender biases and the worsening wealth and gender inequality in the world today. This unjust situation is untenable and needs to be addressed with urgent policy reforms. These measures should include the immediate adoption of progressive tax policies that fairly and sharply tax the wealth and income of elites and corporations, and that are responsive to the needs and rights of women and other marginalized communities.

Cancel the debt, shift debt payments to women’s needs and rights!

Coming from the borrowing spike in the last two years of COVID19 and previous decades of debt accumulation, borrowing countries in Asia face an even greater debt catastrophe. Public debt now accounts for over 74% of GDP from 67.53% in 2020. External public debts alone in the East and South Asia subregions reached $1.33 trillion in 2021.
The weight of unsustainable debt burdens falls heavily on peoples of the South, and bears down even harder on women and girls, as shown acutely in Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Bangladesh, and several other Asian countries such as the Philippines and Indonesia. Through multiple burdens, much of it unpaid, they fill up the gaps of public service provision as governments prioritize debt service payments. They also face rollbacks in gender equality programs towards ending VAW and promoting reproductive health, for example, as governments continue their debt dependence and submit to lenders’ belt-tightening or austerity conditionalities that require big cuts in social spending.

Up to $139.65 billion paid in 2021 by Southern governments for external debt service should have been spent on peoples’ survival, and particularly, the services and support that women need to alleviate their daily labors.

This worsening debt situation exposes as hollow and false, the solutions peddled by the IMF, the World Bank, the Paris Club and the Group of 20 (G20) of the world’s biggest economies. Debt cancellation is a concrete step towards moving funds to support more urgent needs, and must start with questionable and illegitimate debts that wrecked environments, contributed to the climate crisis, violated human rights and enriched corrupt officials.

Women demand gender justice and just energy transition!

Forced displacement due to climate change, which has been impacting millions of people around the world, especially in the Global South, impacts women more than men. It is estimated that 80 percent of people displaced by climate change are women, who suffer health risks and disease outbreaks and experience increased gender-based violence.

As climate change intensifies, women take on the heaviest burden not only because of gender norms that tie them to domestic care work, such as gathering food, water, and firewood, but also because they have little choice when the survival of their families is at stake. Women also frequently lose part of their already lower earnings because women’s livelihoods are linked to natural resources that are adversely impacted by climate change.

But despite having vital roles in local food systems as food producers, women remain unable to earn enough to meet their basic needs from health and water to adequate and nutritious food. In many cultures, women ensure the well-being of kin first and often eat last and consume the least. It is estimated that 60 percent of those chronically hungry are women and girls.

Moreover, in the world’s poorest communities, millions of people suffer from household air pollution due to lack of access to clean technologies and fuel for cooking. This leads to premature deaths of which 60 percent are women and children.

The continued social and economic marginalization of women not only exacerbates women’s vulnerability to the negative impacts of the climate crisis, but also jeopardizes current efforts towards climate actions. We call on governments to address gender-based inequalities and discrimination in advancing climate action. We call on governments to be responsive in addressing women’s access to resources and information, and implement gender-responsive policies and programs aimed to empower women to adapt and create more equitable and effective solutions to the global climate crisis.

We likewise call on governments to adequately meet the needs of women for a just energy transition. The world must phase out fossil fuels production and use within this decade and make substantial progress towards a clean energy transition. But the clean energy transition must be done in a way that is just for people and communities, including women.

Wealth tax for women’s rights!
Cancel all illegitimate debts! Shift debt service payments to women’s rights!
No climate justice without gender justice! Defend our rights to food, land and water!
Women call for rapid and just transition to 100% renewable energy!

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