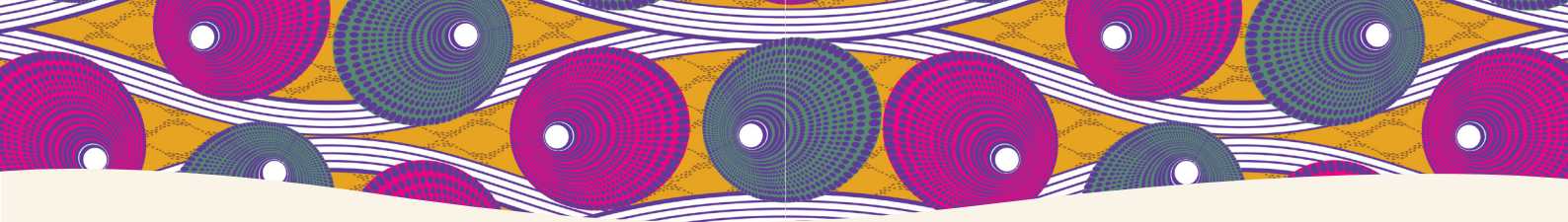




SPARE US THE
BUZZWORDS:
WHAT AFRICAN FEMINISTS ARE
ASKING FOR WHEN THEY
SAY “INVEST IN WOMEN”

If we are to be honest, “Invest in Women” a political term that used to carry strategies towards liberation, justice and dignity for the women’s movement has been stripped of its essence and reduced to a toothless buzzword.

The culprit behind this depoliticization is none other than the usual suspect; insatiable imperialist profit-minded entities that nurse the dream of converting women and girls into a mining ground for labor and a desperate consumer market that will mint money for them while they sleep.



As African radical feminists we are far from fooled by the cosmetic “investment efforts” done within this neocolonial, capitalist and imperialist den. Our radical decolonial and intersectional lens enables us to see that there are no permanent gains to be harvested from investment efforts that gloss over rather than tear down the oppressive systemic structures like Patriarchy, Capitalism, Racism, Neoliberalism, Neocolonialism, inter alia. We know that as long as these systems exist, they will keep minting the problems that keep women as the face of poverty and the poster child of every oppression.

Therefore, as we commemorate this year’s International Women’s Day under the theme: “Invest in Women,” we invite you all to a deep and honest examination of what “investing in women” truly means and the kind of work it will take.

Above the din drummed up by greedy profit driven entities making vacuous declarations of their desire to invest in women, here are feminist approaches to investing in women from an economic, political leadership and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights front.



ON THE ECONOMIC FRONT

IN ORDER TO HAVE A DIGNIFIED AND FULFILLING EXISTENCE
FREE OF POVERTY, THIS IS WHAT WE PROPOSE

1. BUT FIRST WE NEED TO MAKE A FEW THINGS CLEAR

There is a consistent increase of women’s employment in export-based industrial sectors in developing countries, specifically in textiles and garments, leather, food processing and marine products which has been linked to women’s empowerment. However, while women have been hired, it has been on adverse terms. The work is mainly informal, with increased casualisation all over the developing world. Women’s employment remains volatile with significant wage disparities and job segregation which has meant that women are often the first to be laid off in times of crisis and emergency situations. Working conditions have been kept adverse, with minimum investment in providing better work conditions. Often no leave is given to female employees and workers often inhale material with severe adverse impacts on health (as is the case in the production of textiles, garments, tobacco and chemicals). Therefore, while women have been ascribed the credit for the gain in exports, it is because they have been exploited and have been used as necessary adjusters in a situation of volatile trade. Such conditions are not a fallout but a natural driver of this kind of competitiveness, with women used as pawns in this game of competition. Such conditions are being perpetuated as they are key to developing countries continuing to gain from trade. Simultaneously, there has been an increase in unpaid work and self-employment.

2. Women have been and continue to be propelled towards micro-financing with a promise of financial inclusion and alleviation from poverty. Because most women are typically low-income individuals with limited to no access to resources such as land, they are often excluded from traditional banking services. Micro Financing institutions trap women and other structurally disadvantaged people in a vicious cycle of indebtedness as they have to take on even more unfairly compensated and unsafe work such as sex work in order to repay these loans. These non-banking financial companies and micro-finance institutions also charge extortionate interest rates that dig poor women further into poverty and burden them with more work.

3. Decades of IMF pushed austerity measures have also disproportionately impacted women's economic and social position in the world. Huge cuts in public spending have reduced government-funded provision of care services, leaving women to make up the shortfall through their unpaid care work. This reduces women's time for paid employment, political participation or leisure and puts further pressure on women's health. This time poverty is compounded by women's roles as household and community managers, having to make ends meet as prices for basic necessities rise and household incomes drop. A feminist and human-rights based approach to economic policy requires investing in robust, permanent and universal social protection systems that provide adequate and comprehensive coverage to every person through times of adversity such as climate change, a pandemic or an economic crisis.

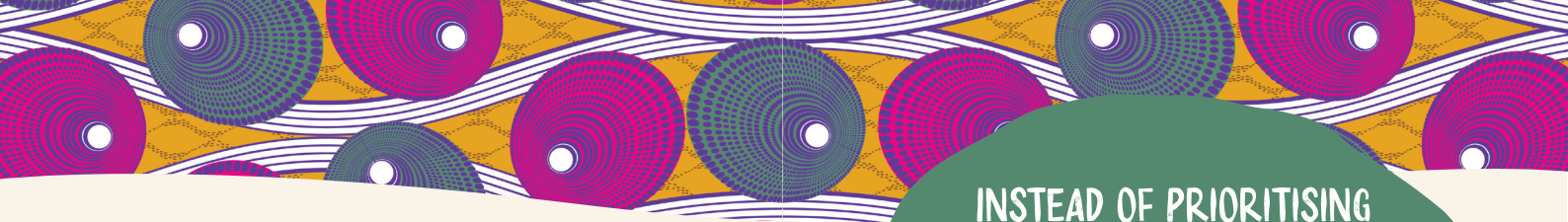
BECAUSE MOST WOMEN ARE TYPICALLY LOW-INCOME INDIVIDUALS WITH LIMITED TO NO ACCESS TO RESOURCES SUCH AS LAND, THEY ARE OFTEN EXCLUDED FROM TRADITIONAL BANKING SERVICES.





THIS IS WHAT WE RECOMMEND

1. A feminist transformative approach to investing in women begins with committing to transforming the current global economic architecture we currently live in which is steeped in neoliberalism and upheld by colonial and patriarchal-capitalist institutions. This requires us to reimagine economies through a Pan African and global South feminist perspective, taking into account the differences between diverse gender identities, class, caste, social roles, and economic statuses, as well as the multiple roles that women play in the economy, often in parallel.
2. Women and other structurally marginalised people should have real agency and power over their own lives, as well as control over the terms on which they engage with social, political, and economic structures. This includes real capacity and powers to determine their macroeconomic policies – whether trade, taxation, investment, and so forth. It also involves decision-making over natural resources – land, waters, seeds, and traditional knowledge, as well as decisions around the kind of systems of production and consumption – from what food to grow and eat to what development actually means to them.
3. Recognize and promote public investments in the care economy as a key part of social protection systems that can support economic development. Care and care work should be made central to the economy and for governments to shift towards a care-based economy. Care work is often underpaid, undervalued, and largely performed by women. It is often ignored by the economic system served by today's trade and investment agreements, even though the economy of scale, mass production, and profit could not exist without it. Recognise care work as critical to the survival of the economy and society, and promote means to ease the burden of care work (e.g., by providing public services/sourcing of healthcare, education, energy, water).
4. Rethink care within the development and economic paradigm. A feminist and transformative approach to investment means adopting policies that value, support, and redistribute care work through the provision of public services and infrastructures, and the revaluation of the informal sector. This also means governments being able to carry out progressive trade and tax reforms to generate necessary state revenues, without being subjected to a "race to the bottom" for liberalisation, privatisation, and deregulation of market, public services, tariffs and taxes.
5. Governments must move away from the emphasis on Gross Domestic Product (GDP), economic growth, and profit as the central objective of their economic and development strategies. Instead of prioritising GDP, governments have the chance to shift towards a more equitable and sustainable economic model that prioritises people – particularly women and structurally marginalised communities – as well as life and the planet. This shift would embrace a just and sustainable economic system that centres human rights as its foundation and prioritises the care, well-being and welfare of people and the planet.



6. A shift towards centering people, life, and planet would also mean moving away from the economic models of growth and scale. This model sees corporations making profits through increased productions, and not actually in response to peoples' – especially women's – needs or demands. This shift in focus envisions a world where women, communities, and countries have their own localised and domestic capacities to produce their own food and products, instead of being forced to liberalise their markets and remove tariffs to receive the same goods being produced by multinational corporations in another country. It envisions shorter and more localised value chains, and less reliance on the global value chains.

INSTEAD OF PRIORITISING GDP, GOVERNMENTS HAVE THE CHANCE TO SHIFT TOWARDS A MORE EQUITABLE AND SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC MODEL THAT PRIORITISES PEOPLE PARTICULARLY WOMEN AND STRUCTURALLY MARGINALISED COMMUNITIES

7. Invest in principles and models of decision-making and leadership that are inclusive, collaborative, accountable, and democratic. Feminist approaches towards sharing and transforming power should be applied in decision-making at multiple levels – from the home to the community, to local governance, to national governance, between states and institutions, and at the multilateral/global level. trade and investment policies should be created in a democratic manner. This includes informed involvement and consent from groups that would be most affected by these policies – including women farmers, women workers, rural and Indigenous women. This means a fundamental re-think of how all policies are made and negotiated. recognizes and recalls that women and Indigenous and local communities, farmers, fisherfolks, grassroots and rural communities, are actually the real “experts” of their own lives and of the policies that they need.

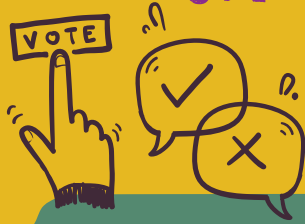
8. Value women's knowledge and expertise. Investing in women means adopting trade and investment approaches based on consultations and conversations involving and listening to women and other structurally marginalized people from the global South who are currently excluded from discussions, even though they are adversely impacted by the current trade system. Adopt policies that offer systemic solutions for the current power imbalance between corporations and communities, women, youth, (female) small-scale farmers, indigenous peoples. When it comes to trade and investment policies, this means addressing areas that go well beyond women's entrepreneurship to include addressing power imbalances that underlie gender inequality.

9. Gender budgeting is critical to investing in women. Central to this approach is having the necessary budgets and revenues available to finance public services. It also means developing trade and investment programmes that promote gender equality and human rights, as well as promoting inclusive and sustainable growth; ensuring that the removal of trade tariffs through trade and investment agreements does not negatively impact on state revenues for countries in the global South and therefore on their ability to fund gender-responsive and quality public services.

10. Decolonization. The global North must acknowledge the history of colonisation and its role and contribution to the wealth and development of many countries. Building upon that, it also involves working towards addressing the historical responsibilities through reparations, debt cancellation, and principles of common but differentiated responsibilities. Part of this includes reforms within multilateral institutions such as the WTO to ensure greater representation and democratic decision-making power for formerly colonised nations and countries in the global South.



ON THE WOMEN'S POLITICAL LEADERSHIP FRONT

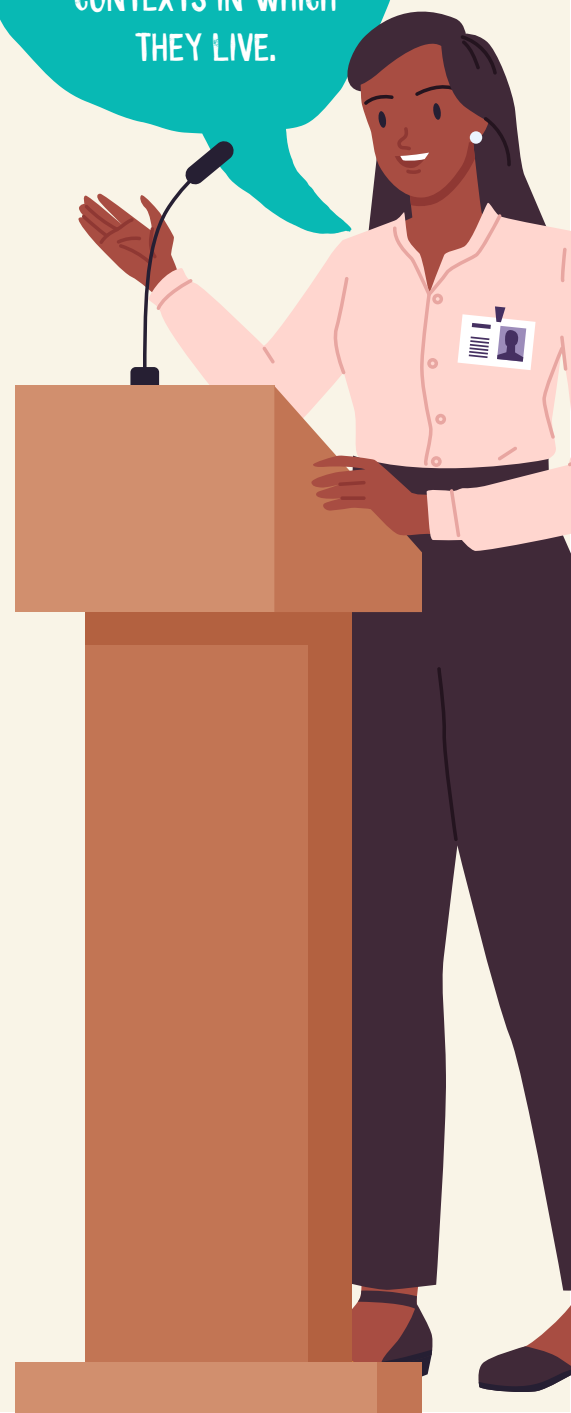


THIS IS WHAT IT WILL TAKE TO ADVANCE WOMEN'S POLITICAL AGENCY AND ENABLE MEANINGFUL POLITICAL PARTICIPATION FROM WOMEN.

1. Address systems of oppression against women in politics. The question of power and control of politics and decision making is still a contested sphere, which continues to be male dominated. Women's experiences of abuse in politics are shaped by the social and cultural contexts in which they live. Recognition of the complex ways in which culture and systems of oppression interact, creating qualitatively different abuse experiences, is important nursing knowledge. Of particular concern are the ways in which women in politics are constrained in their efforts to combat abuse as they experience the harsh and alienating effects of racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of social injustice. An understanding of the ways in which race and ethnicity, class, language and citizenship, religion, and culture intersect and shape women's experiences of abuse is critical to achieve gender parity in politics.
2. Inclusivity beyond numbers, demographic markers and regional representation of women and girls in their diversity, gender-expansive persons and persons with disabilities in decision-making. The status of women's access to power and political inclusion on the continent generally mirrors the world. The tokenistic, and descriptive representation of women in decision-making and political spaces calls for a radical political transformation in the hegemonic structures, systems and societal norms if women are to lead and thrive in public leadership, especially in visible spaces such as politics. As the numbers of women in politics increase in many parts of the world, it has become more evident than ever that the strategy of getting women into formal political spaces is only part of what it takes to transform political decision-making. We must look beyond the often-asked question of how to increase the number of women in decision-making spaces and move towards presenting examples and experiences of how women can impact the political process.
3. Building a consciousness on the political agenda must involve liberating the women's movement from its debilitating disease of "ticking boxes". While there are enormous inhibitions that block women's sustained efforts to make a difference in political leadership, there are a range of possible actions for the women's movement and women political leaders to turn around the situation. There is a need for a clear political agenda that takes on the broad issues of governance and their gendered nature in a more consistent manner. The feminist cause must be legitimised and to achieve this, we must build a vibrant, unified feminist movement that is functional, routinely planned, and well-coordinated as a social movement, with stronger leadership and feedback mechanisms to act as a collective not as individual NGOs/CSOs.

4. Developing capacities for feminist leadership within and outside feminist movements. Understanding women's political engagement requires that we pay closer attention to the other spaces including 'new' democratic spaces and more 'traditional' arenas outside the domain of formal politics in which women participate as political and social actors. Some of these critical spaces include the women's movement that brings together experienced feminists, civil and political leaders, gender justice advocates and women's rights activists who all have a vital role to play in a women's movement. There is a need to facilitate mentorship connections and circles where young women are supported on how they can navigate leadership and the public sphere and eventually demonstrate crucial capabilities and new perspectives.
5. Addressing the patriarchal obstacles in electoral culture that prevent meaningful participation of women in politics such as violence against women in politics, a form of gender-based violence which targets women and girls participating in politics at all levels. There is a need to develop a robust monitoring and reporting system for violence against women in politics, making it safe for women and other vulnerable groups to report and break the silence. Evidence gathering and research is a crucial early step in addressing violence. It helps document women's experiences, determine the magnitude of violence, types of violence, victims, perpetrators, and locations, as well as indicate what contexts pose greater risk to women.
6. Enhanced implementation of existing policy and legal frameworks. Gains in legal and policy frameworks have been curtailed by limited implementation and a disabling environment for civil society to hold states accountable. Strengthening the civic capacity of citizens to play a role in public participation and work with political parties to address existing gaps within their frameworks is critical. Further still, it is important to hold political parties to both their own commitments and different legislations that speak to gender equality processes and inclusiveness.
7. Fully embrace the principals and ideals of Pan Africanism and Feminism. Today the continental mainstream Pan-African agenda is dominated by powerful men who are mostly concerned about using conservative pan-African rhetoric to the service of their often-anti-democratic purposes. Transforming the face of Pan Africanism on the continent should take action to dismantle gender hierarchies in Africa, seek to redress injustice and inequality in its content and design by exploring to strengthen the African feminist agenda for a just and inclusive Pan African continent.
8. Address institutional obstacles in political institutions and political parties including glass ceilings, glass cliffs and sticky floors that prevent women from succeeding in politics through working with political parties.

THE QUESTION OF POWER AND CONTROL OF POLITICS AND DECISION MAKING IS STILL A CONTESTED SPHERE, WHICH CONTINUES TO BE MALE DOMINATED. WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES OF ABUSE IN POLITICS ARE SHAPED BY THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXTS IN WHICH THEY LIVE.





ON THE SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS FRONT

WHAT KIND OF INVESTMENT DO WE NEED TO ENSURE THAT WOMEN AND GIRLS ENJOY THEIR SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS

1. Governments, scholars and activists should invest in creating positive linkages between cultures' positive aspects and the realization of SRHR for all women and gender expansive persons regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Traditional values and practices have the potential if creatively employed, to overcome patriarchal control which is a notorious hindrance to the realization of Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights. "For many African Women the sustainable solutions to their oppression, exploitation and subordination hardly lies in vague alien legal rights, but in careful and creative deployment of familiar cultural norms and values', according to Sylvia Tamale. Love for example is a key tenet of Ubuntu, an African Philosophy, and it should guide us to uphold the SRHR of one another without heed to differences.
2. Invest in creating and sustaining local avenues for health resources to overcome the consequences of over dependence on externally funded health budgets. We recall the Global Gag Rule when the USA restricted foreign NGOs receiving USAID family planning assistance from using any other funds to support abortion related services or advocacy resulting in the closure of many SRHR facilities in Africa. SRHR in Africa and globally has been politicized and we have witnessed a growing movement of anti rights and anti gender crusaders who stall the realization of safe abortion rights, comprehensive sexuality education, the rights of sex workers and the rights of minorities sexual orientations and gender identities. Politicization refers to the process by which a social phenomenon becomes the basis of mobilization by societal and political actors, who turn it into an issue of major political significance, as a subject of heated public argument, mobilization, and conflict.
3. Investing in women's health is an investment in development hence an investment in the future. The investment will only be effective if there is concurrent investment in women's education and other initiatives designed to encourage the socio economic empowerment of women and gender expansive persons. With insight on women's economic inequality, we should reject the notion of profits over people and push for radical transition to an equitable and sustainable global economic design that puts the well being of people and the planet at its core.
4. Black feminists argue that healing should take place in community with other Black women, and their modalities of healing (i.e., writing, poetry, body movement) acknowledge the interconnected systems between their minds, bodies, and spirits by creating space for them to reconnect. The creation of this space is necessary because in a western society, we are taught these entities must be separated to maintain professionalism, economic advancement, and distinct job opportunities.



Do you want to learn more about African feminist theories and strategies towards the liberation of women and girls?

WE HAVE PREPARED FOR YOU A READING RESOURCE PACK THAT YOU CAN ACCESS HERE BY SCANNING THIS CODE.



ABOUT



AKINA MAMA
WA AFRIKA

Akina Mama wa Afrika (AMwA) is a regional feminist Pan-African leadership development organization with headquarters in Kampala, Uganda. Our work is rooted in feminist principles and beliefs guided by the Charter of Feminist Principles for African Feminists which informs all our programming and movement-building activities. We envision a dignified and equitable feminist society for African women, girls, and gender-expansive persons. AMwA provides strategic direction in key Pan-African networks including NGO CSW Africa, Solidarity for African Women's Rights, and the Gender Is My Agenda Campaign. AMwA also has consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council and Observer Status at the African Commission on Human and People's Rights.

AMwA's work relentlessly focuses on uprooting all forms of deeply entrenched patriarchal structures and systems which use power and privilege to oppress, exclude and exploit women. We do this by building women's individual and collective power to influence policy and social change. Our flagship program - the African Women's Leadership Institute (AWLI), is recognized as a pioneer in feminist leadership development on the African continent. For over 25 years it has raised a cadre of feminist leaders with enhanced political consciousness, and contributed to a strong community of feminist leaders who are championing a progressive gender justice agenda in different parts of Africa. We currently do this across 3 thematic focus areas: Women's Political Leadership, Economic Justice, and Climate Action, Sexual and Reproductive Health, and Rights.

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