African youth having their future auctioned and aborted

With about 200 million people aged between 15-24, the United Nations (UN) recognizes Africa as the youngest continent in the world. However, deliberations on the second day of the SADC Debt Conference show that young people continue to be marginalized from discussions on developmental issues despite their future.

Speaking on a panel tackling the question of youth and debt, Michael Ndweni, Executive Director of Bulawayo Vendors and Traders Association (BVTA) summarized African youth’s experience of debt as a “double edged sword”. Focusing on informal workers, he indicated that young people are adversely impacted not only by the reduction of fiscal space for social issues such as health, education and social security, but also by debt repayment policies such as the shrinking of public service, all of which drive youth unemployment and further compromise youth livelihoods.

Arlene Agneroh, Founder of Kukula Group in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) echoed Ndweni’s sentiments adding that “we need to address the youth question as they are the majority. The decision to acquire debt needs to be a unanimous one”. She particularly stressed the importance of representation of young women in these discussions.

Flaida Macheze, Gender Officer for the National Farmers Union (UNAC) in Mozambique, observed that in some cases, governments have treated those who have been at the forefront of exposing the hidden debt and demanding accountability as national enemies and spies. “In Mozambique, we have cases where the youth have managed to challenge the secrecy and legitimacy of illicitly contracted loans and they have been met with political prosecution,” Macheze said.

Boniface Massah, Country Director of Standing Voice, stressed that young people with disabilities are paying the cost of illicitly acquired loans despite being more likely to live and die in poverty as well as facing higher risks when considering coping strategies. “As a young person with albinism, migrating from Malawi to Tanzania or Mozambique only increases the risk of suffering an attack given what has been happening recently,” he lamented.

The panel advocated for a reinvigoration of spaces for young people, particularly disabled youth and women to engage in issues of debt. They challenged the audience to consider questions of accessibility of discussion and emphasized the importance of consulting the youth about acquiring public debt, insisting, “nothing about us, without us”.

#SADCDebtConference

“I was great” - Pinkie Mothibedi

“I learnt so much yesterday” - Dambu Masaccova

“Following the discussion from Nairobi” - Arin Masiams

Additionally, they went on to champion a real estate bubble which burst in 2008 which has further exposed South Africa.

As #SADCDebtConference concludes, it is clear that the human rights, debt & development submissions made, incorporating strong gendered & alternative thinking probably signals genuine rebirth of a stronger debt movement uniting varied groups & movements in Africa.

- @MuziMasuku

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OSISA recently commissioned an investigative study with the aim of answering one question: what is the nature of the debt crisis in southern Africa? Four separate investigations were conducted in Angola (Carlos Rosado de Carvalho), Mozambique (Estacio Valadão), Zambia (Charles Mati) and Zimbabwe (Brezhnev Malaba). We spoke to the lead investigator, Brezhnev Malaba.

1. Why investigative work on debt in southern Africa?

The objective of the investigation was to establish the nature and genesis of the debt crisis in southern Africa, with particular reference to four SADC countries, Angola, Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

2. Why did you focus on these four countries?

These countries’ economies are quite fragile and we wanted to establish what the problems are in terms of structural and governance issues pertaining to the debt problem. We asked how they ended up with that level of debt and what can be done to address the problem.

There are both commonalities and disparities between these countries. We have extracted observations in our investigation one of them being that, these countries all depend on raw materials. Some might even say that they are overly dependent on these natural resources. Angola is dependent on oil, Zambia is dependent on copper, Zimbabwe is dependent on a basket of different resources and Mozambique is dependent on gas and coal. Should there be fluctuations in commodity prices, these countries suffer and as a result, their levels of indebtedness rise.  

3. Please paint a picture of the current situation in these countries?

Citizens are suffering. For example, Angola – Africa’s second biggest oil exporter – has one of the world’s highest child and infant mortality rates. Children shouldn’t be dying because the global and ruling elites have siphoned oil revenues. In the other countries, poverty is a big problem yet in terms of resources and minerals, this region is the richest in the world. Evidently, there are contradictions.

4. What are citizens saying or doing in reaction to the emerging issues on debt?

Citizens are very worried about this and when we talked to them in this research, they spoke openly although in Angola, for example, there was some hesitation to talk directly to the debt crises. Inadequate state capacity in social provision, education, health, infrastructure and so on is a symptom of these crises.

5. Who should read the report?

Everybody! Citizens who are suffering from poverty, governments – so that they come up with better policies; civil society to conscientise the people on their rights. Debt is, after all, a human rights issue.

*The study on southern Africa’s debt conundrum will launch soon. Please check www.osisa.org for updates.

In the fight against debt, is Revolution the solution?

Pursuing reform of existing political and electoral systems will only deal with the symptoms without addressing the fundamental issues that have plunged Africa into a suffocating debt crisis. Only a revolution will work! It will upset the prevailing governance architecture, which is an extension of the colonial and apartheid era, and will help address some of the debt problems bedevilling African countries. This was the consensus arrived at by panelists interrogating the nexus between democracy and debt as well as citizen agency in one of the breakaway sessions of the OSISA-convened Southern Africa’s regional conference on debt.

Although the continent has strong Constitutions with strong constitutions and governance systems, which control and benefit from the economy for political patronage and personal expediency, “As long as there is one dominant party that can give big deals to influential people within the same ruling party, that country will never have a functional democracy. The democracy that matters to such parties is not democracy between the party and citizens but rather internal systems that are embedded in self-interest,” argued investigative journalist Khadija Sharife.

“People that control the finance ministry will always want to control the purse strings and political parties will always want to control the purse strings,” Matine warned, “we have the monopoly to decide on debt, interest rates, who to give money, among other things.”

She added that because of the immense power the financial and banking sector has, they softened regional revolutions who then continued to have too much to former colonial regimes during post-colonial transitions, leaving privileges of corporates intact decades after independence.

“We fight not only against illegal debt, but against principalities of looting”

Socio-economic rights were the centre of discussion at the just-ended SADC debt conference, held in Johannesburg, South Africa between 2-3 July. Speaking at the conference stakeholders pointed to the critical importance of ensuring that the pursuit of debt repayment does not override state responsibilities to deliver social economic entitlements.

Juan Pablo Bohoslavsky, the United Nations (UN) Independent Expert on Debt and Human Rights stated: “sustainable debt analysis is still based on the narrow understanding of sustainability, focusing primarily on the ability of the state to pay back its public debt with the requisite exceptional financing or major policy adjustment. The result is that sometimes, a stock of debt may be considered sustainable even if its servicing entails the state’s failure to comply with its human rights obligations because the resources necessary for servicing the debt deprive it of financial means to realise human rights.”

Concurring with Bohoslavsky, Kenyan activist, Boaz Waruku emphasised the need for Domestic Resource Mobilisation (DRM) to ensure sustainable financing for the delivery of rights and entitlements. “In as much as we are servicing these debts”, he argued, “we need to think of how we can provide basic rights. Domestic resource mobilisation is where the rubber meets the road. The frameworks that help this are legislative and administrative frameworks for tax collections.”

Jorge Matine, a Mozambican human rights advocate and researcher, indicated that while DRM is one of the options for generating resources to finance social economic rights, governments are reluctant to mobilise these resources in progressive ways. As African citizens, Matine warned, “we are not only fighting illegal debt, but against a very strong culture of looting led by political elites”. As such, Matine defended, there is need to interrogate our political and governance systems to ensure that democracy works to deliver social economic rights to the people.

In Investigating Southern Africa’s Debt Conundrum: an interview with Brezhnev Malaba

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Death by Debt: the human cost of debt in southern Africa

By Velaphi Mamba

I recently visited a cousin from Swaziland (eSwatini) at Charlotte Maxeke Johannes- burg Academic Hospital. She was seriously ill with Stage 4 breast cancer, having been diagnosed in 2016. Swaziland does not have an oncology unit. The doctors at Charlotte Maxeke delivered the terrible news that nothing more could be done to save her life. I was devastated. The news shattered that iota of hope that we, as a family, had held on dearly, hoping for a better outcome. Amidst the shock and numbness, I had the unfortunate task of convinc- ing my bedridden cousin that it was time for her to go back home.

Hardly two weeks after getting back to Swaziland, she passed on. The first week upon her return, we took her to Hlatikulu government hospital, where we hoped some palliative care would be provided. We were turned back and told that the hospi- tal could not admit her because there was no food for patients, no drugs, nothing. We took her back home, to wait for the inevi- table. The situation at Hlatikulu, government hospital depressingly replicates itself across the kingdom, with stock-outs of vital drugs such as antiretrovi- rals, medications, diabetes, painkillers, anti-venom and others. Nurses and other health professionals recently staged a massive march to petition a debt-ridden and cash strapped government, sitting at Hospital Hill, Mbabane. The irony of it all: Yet, nobody in authority has listened, and people continue to die – many from avoidable, preventable or manageable diseases.

In Zimbabwe, the healthcare system and infrastructure has gone bust and is virtually non-existent. Doctors, nurses and other support healthcare providers find it impossible to work and save lives. In the distant community of Mibie, Mashonaland Central, where the Doma Indigenous people are found, women either have to give birth at home, or cross the Zambezi into Zambia for maternal and medical care. This is a community that predominantly uses barter trading, given its semi-nomadic lifestyle. The hospitals and schools in the area are under-resourced, few and far between. There is no ambulance to cater for medical emergencies. If one suffers a snake bite, they are condemned to die – just like that. Zimbabwe is one of the “hot potatoes” of the region in debt terms, a melting pot and example of how things can really go terribly wrong. The unfortunate confluence of political, economic and social forces has seen the decimation of the region’s previously shining beacon, at least in terms of its education system and food security. How the mighty have fallen! But, Zimbabwe shows us that corruption, avarice and freely sell maize to each other, bread is a luxury and electricity black-outs are ubiquitous. In such a state, fellow Zimbabweans are condemned to either leave the country, or die in its death-trap hospitals.

Now, these examples are part with retrenchments across key economic sectors and a swelling unemployment problem that exacerbates historically ingrained inequalities. It is a mess. However, the kernel of the debt and economic crises appears to lie in the gross socio-economic circum- stances for the people they lead, is a pointer to just how detached the political elites are from reality. That our people’s lived experiences bear the hallmarks of dehu- manizing pain and suffering is perhaps an understatement. When hospitals run out of drugs and medicines due to poor economic policy choices, the blame and call for accountability must be placed squarely and solely at the feet of those who govern. After all, has not, all been said and done, our leaders are dehumanizing us, and the time must come when they are held to account for these actions – actions that should rightfully be classified as crimes against humanity.

My cousin had hopes, dreams and aspirations. I can’t help but wonder what the situation would have been like had she been able to access quality healthcare services in eSwatini. Perhaps I should ask the king, he know!

SADC is a region in turmoil and may implode rather soon under a debt burden and economic crises...

Zimbabweans cannot man of any across southern Africa – from Angola to Mad- agascar, from Mozambique, Zambia to Zimbabwe and Swaziland, SADC is a region in turmoil and may implode rather soon under a debt burden and economic crises. Their penchant for all things grand, access to the best medical treatment overseas and expensive top quality education for their children in foreign countries in the face of massive deleterious

insolence, poor governance, impunity and grand corrupti- tion by those entrusted with the levers of power and lead- ership of states in the region. Their penchant for all things grand, access to the best medical treatment overseas and expensive top quality education for their children in foreign countries in the face of massive deleterious
The two-day regional conference on debt came to an end with a commitment to building a vibrant debt movement across southern Africa. In his closing remarks Percy Makombe (Team Leader: Democracy and Governance) at OSISA reiterated the institution’s vision and plan for advancing work on debt. The conference, Makombe said, was designed with the aim of improving visibility, promoting alternative thinking and amplifying alternative voices in southern Africa and the rest of the continent. He further emphasised the need to continuously create spaces for regular thinking and dialogue in an effort to decolonise and democratised development.

In her remarks, OSISA Board Chairperson, Chilufya Chileshe urged the conference participants to stand together, act swiftly and broaden participation of youth, women and people with disabilities in all efforts aimed at addressing debt. She said the debt issue remained one of deep concern as had been stated throughout the conference duration. OSISA’s Team Leader (Economic and Social Justice), Velaphi Mamba encouraged participants to continue pursuing the spirit of Umunthu (the equivalent of Ubuntu), which inspires the name of his newsletter. He further echoed Chileshe’s sentiments that the SADC debt conundrum was no longer an emerging issue, but cause for deep concern, which requires the sum effort of African citizens to be successfully tackled.

For more information about the OSISA regional debt conference, please see: www.osisa.org/debtconference

What Is Your Take On The Conference Thus Far?

Thus far I think the initiative is good, I am just a little bit worried about what the overall take away will be. It is nice to meet in hotels but that doesn’t change the debt issue. It doesn’t change the fact that Africa is increasing in debt daily. I’m just hoping from these discussions it goes further than the hotel and straight to people’s homes, their communities and anywhere as long as it gets deeper in the continent and spreads awareness to the people.

– Temashengu Tshabalala

What would you like to see OSISA do more moving forward with regards to the debt conundrum?

I think there is a need to continue with this process though I am not sure what the way forward would be. But I think the support that has been given to different groups to have a better understanding of the debt issues in their countries should be in a more rigorous way understanding where the debt is coming from, what the amounts are and how it has been contracted. Some of it is new debt some of it is old debt and who are the players, the debt as one perspective of raising questions about human, social and economic development in SADC and in Africa.

– Luis Nhachote

What would you like to see OSISA do more moving forward with regards to the debt conundrum?

Civil society organisations must be in coalition as we face up to challenges that we have similar issues and are more or less affected by them.

– Nelisiwe Nhlabatsi

What would you like to see OSISA do more moving forward with regards to the debt conundrum?

Moving forward OSISA needs to work more with SADC, ECOWAS and other big organisations and engage more in those platforms as most African countries are members there.

– Redclive Khlabali

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Debt, Gender and Power

“Who has power and who doesn’t have it determines what works and what doesn’t!” This powerful remark by activist Nancy Kachingwe captures the essence of the session on the implications of debt for women. Which took place on the second day of OSI SA’s regional conference on debt.

The panel concurred that the region is in turmoil as a result of priority areas being placed at the periphery of political agendas, with women’s voices being side-lined. It was noted, in particular, that the implementation of austerity measures as a result of public debt has detrimentally affected women and children the most.

All four panelists stressed that the increase in socio-economic inequity has implications for gender disparities. Women often bear the brunt of reduced economic opportunities as well as inadequate education and healthcare provision that result from the indebtedness. The reduction of social investments by states in Southern Africa in favour of servicing debt have driven an increase in unpaid labour that is overwhelmingly shouldecred by women and girls. It was agreed by consensus that debt is reinforcing exclusion on the basis of gender, race and class.

In addition, despite the fact that about 80% of the food in Africa is produced by women, the priorities in acquiring debt for agriculture is geared towards large agribusiness investments instead of support for small-scale women farmers.

Reflecting on how these issues compound on the patriarchal oppression women face, Kachingwe remarked that “women are the ones owed by both lenders and borrowers.”

The key recommendation from the panel called for the discourse on debt to be revisited. There is need for a feminist driven narrative on debt that caters for and includes women. It is important for feminist groups to not work in silos but rather to approach the discourse on debt collectively. Additionally, there is a pressing need Pan-African perspectives to debt that include the voices of women not just in advocacy but also in positions of power.

[Um concurso Público] para os jornalistas e artistas criativos Moçambicanos

A Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa convida a todos os Jornalistas de Investigação e Artistas Criativos a explorar novas formas de narração sobre corrupção.

PRAZO: 19 de Julho de 2019

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[Open Call] to Mozambican journalists and creative artists

The Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa is inviting Investigative Journalists AND Creative Artists to explore new ways of storytelling about corruption.

DEADLINE: July 19, 2019

for more please visit our website: http://osisa.org/open-call-mozambique-eng/

CALL FOR ARTICLES

The 2019 Issue of BUWA! is focusing on Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs). Across the globe, continent and much more recently in Southern Africa there are increased reports of political violence, arbitrary detentions, systematic attacks on human rights and pro-democracy activists. We are alive to the fact that while all HRDs have increasingly faced tougher operating conditions in the past decade, WHRDs have faced even more multiple layers of the brunt in such a context – given the manner in which patriarchy often colludes with other oppressive systems that characterise the field in which HRDs work.

We are inviting critical analyses and referenced articles (2000-2500 words); case studies (of around 2000 words), opinion pieces (1500-2000 words); poems; videos; video stories; photo essays; cartoons; and more! We pay a prorated honorarium of up to US$500 for accepted pieces only.

If you are interested in writing for our readers and being part of the great minds interrogating please contact buwa@osisa.org as soon as possible. The Deadline for submitting articles is 31 July 2019.

To download Issue 9 (The Future of Women’s Work in Africa), CLICK HERE

“Who has power and who doesn’t have it determines what works and what doesn’t.”

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Here’s what we captured through our lenses

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IT'S A WRAP!

OSISA thanks all the participants, speakers, panelists and logistics personnel who contributed to the success of our #SADCDebtConference. We are most grateful.

For more information about the conference and OSISA, please visit our website at www.osisa.org