

To Meet the Agenda 2063 Targets, African States Must Prioritize Quality Public Services

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We commemorate this #PublicServiceDay in difficult times. With the COVID 19 pandemic still raging and the rising cost of essential goods and services, African governments are facing unprecedented demands for social protection and public social services. This dire situation is forcing people particularly, the poor and disadvantaged, to skip meals, fore-go access to basic education and healthcare.

According to a teacher at Kamwenge Secondary School, public schools continue to grapple with poor state of infrastructure and furniture, overcrowding and low literacy levels.

“We believe that quality public social services are fundamental to promoting people-centered development, reduce inequities, build public trust, which all accelerate fulfillment of the social contract between State and People.”- says Mr. Denis Bukenya, Director at Human Rights Research Documentation Centre (HURIC).

The current failure to provide quality public services is an assault on the social contract between the States and their people. It has generated highly skewed outcomes, widened social and economic inequities, worsened poverty and risks undermining Africa’s progress towards [Agenda 2063](#).

Ms. Namusoby Salima, Executive Director of the Initiative for Social and Economic Rights (ISER) in Uganda, recommends that, *“rather than present resource constraints as a key challenge to adequate investment in public services, governments should devise measures to curb illicit financial flows and corruption in order to salvage the much-needed resources.”* For instance, the [Hiding in Plain Sight, 2002-2011](#) report finds that, “over 33.9% of Africa’s trade is lost through trade misinvoicing- money that could fund public services.”

The extremely rich and politically well-connected segments are paying little, if at all any taxes. The undersigned members reiterate that, corruption undermines access to public services, and corrodes gains to development, hitting the poor and vulnerable hardest.

“We urge African governments to robustly invest in public services which are a common good and to commit to fairness, and social justice for all”, remarks Johnstone Shisanya, The East African Centre for Human Rights in Kenya.

As a result of missing tax revenues and leakages, Africa’s rising debt burden threatens the future availability of public services as debt repayment will increasingly take the lion share of budget funds. Africa is facing its highest debt burden in a decade with the World Bank noting an increase to \$702 billion in 2020. Its Debt-to-GNI ratio which has risen by nearly 20% in a decade to 44% indicates debt much higher than income which poses repayment challenges.

Pat Raolaneo from MPR International notes that, *“Once Africa realizes that tax incentives and concessions constitute huge tax expenditures and revenue leakages, it will immediately implement tools and systems to improve domestic revenue mobilization and management”*.

COVID-19 presents a perfect point of reflection and provides a unique opportunity to strengthen and revamp public social services as the foundation for addressing existing structural and systemic inequalities.

“The time is Now! We cannot wait any longer” according to Ms. Joy Kirunga who expressed the urgent need to reclaim public social services for all persons regardless of social status.

We therefore demand that African governments robustly invest in public social services which are the first point of call for the poor and most vulnerable through the following measures:

- Public social services must be financed through progressive taxation.
- Curbing leakages like Illicit Financial Flows.
- Decisively deal with corruption.
- Ensure meaningful participation of the populace in designing and monitoring public social services.
- Refrain from commercialising and privatising essential public social services like health, water, electricity and education through Public Private Partnerships or commercial private involvement in social service delivery and instead devote maximum available resources to ensure quality social public services.

