

Joint Statement

The Africa We Want: Why African Governments must adequately finance quality public services

[Kampala, 23 June 2023] - These are difficult times for Africa. Amidst the cost of living crisis precipitated by the Russia Ukraine war, uncertain economic outlook, debt burdens, unequal recovery from Covid 19, climate change, and inequality has risen more than ever. As the world observes UN Public Service Day this 23 June 2023, we continue to call for adequate financing of quality public services in order to address Africa's pressing challenges such as the dysfunctional public healthcare sector, educational disparities and the lack of social protection for vulnerable populations.

It is disheartening to note that public services in Africa are repeatedly underfinanced, leading to inequities across different social strata. Rising debt burdens and inadequate domestic resource mobilisation, partly contribute to this dire situation, leaving governments with limited means to finance public services effectively. Africa is facing its highest debt burden in a decade and debt is increasingly taking the lion share of budget funds, with most countries spending more on debt than health, education and other public services.

Amidst this, international financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have insisted African countries undertake veiled austerity under the guise of fiscal consolidation which has often undermined financing for public services. For example, in Uganda, these austerity measures have negatively impacted financing for education, health and freezing the hiring public sector health workers and teachers, undermining public services delivery.

Governments must not only make declarations to increase funding for public services but actually do so. They must deal with vices such corruption, illicit financial flows and embezzlement within African systems that bleed the continent of money that could be used to finance health, education etc.

African leaders must boldly challenge the dominant narrative propagated by private actors that falsely emphasises a financing gap. This narrative aims to open up the market for their profit-driven engagement in the provision of public services, ultimately undermining progress toward achieving just and equitable access for all. Instead, we call upon African governments to take decisive action by prioritising financing public services as a fundamental pillar of their development and economic agendas.

Recalling the state's obligation in the provision of public services under the African Commission's landmark [General Comment No.7](#), we call upon African leaders to, among others, regulate private provision of public services, enhance community engagement in the provision of quality public services, and strengthen transparency and accountability.

We are seeing a growing movement to reclaim public services from Uganda to Kenya to the global. In Uganda, citizens have put out a [Peoples Manifesto to Reclaim Public Services](#) in

Uganda¹. In Kenya, there have been strong calls against privatizing health. Civil society under the Our Water Our Right Africa Coalition hosted an African Week of Action Against Water Privatization. Globally over 236 organisations including ISER developed [The Future is Public Global Manifesto For Public Services](#), a blue print demanding for climate saving, gender transformative and democratic public services. The outcome document of the influential global [Santiago conference](#) on our #OurFutureIsPublic endorsed by over 200 organisations including ISER reinforces the pressing need to prioritise adequate financing for public services. The Declaration calls for quality, gender-transformative and equitable public services.

As Africans we must define the Africa We Want. The AFRICA WE WANT is one where public services are adequately financed, affordable, and accessible to every individual, irrespective of their socio-economic status. An Africa where governments are intentional on curbing illicit financial flows, corruption, and ensuring the rich pay their fair share of tax to finance quality public services. As part of a just, inclusive, green, economic recovery and to realise the Sustainable Development Goals and Africa agenda 2063 we want, universal access to quality public services must be prioritized.

We are building a movement to reclaim public services in Africa. **Join us!**

This statement was jointly endorsed by individuals as well as the following organisations; Initiative for Social and Economic Rights (ISER) | Youth Concerns on Environment and Development (YCED – Ntungamo) | Madhira Institute | Centre for Human Rights and Development | Uganda Society for Disabled Children (USDC) | Uganda Society for Disabled Children | Rashtriya Mazdoor Sangh India (National Workers Union) | East African Centre for Human Rights (EACHRights) | Good Health Community Programmes | Bunyoro Choice Uganda Masindi (BCU Masindi) | Nakawa Home Based Caregivers Alliance | Association for Promotion Sustainable Development | Society for Development and Care (SODECA) |

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¹ https://iser-uganda.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Reclaiming_public_social_services_A_Peoples_Manifesto.pdf