

Press Release

ENSURE QUALITY PUBLIC SERVICES REMAIN A POLITICAL PRIORITY!

Africa Coalition on Public Services calls on policy makers and UN ahead of 2024 UN Civil Society Conference

Nairobi, 7 May 2024.

Ahead of the [2024 UN Civil Society Conference](#) in Nairobi happening 9 - 10 May which will lead up to the UN Summit of the Future in September 2024, the [African Coalition on Public Services](#), coordinated by the [Initiative for Social and Economic Rights \(ISER\)](#), engaged Kenyan policy makers and strategized with civil society on ensuring public services remain a political priority and to push back against the commercialisation of public services.

“Member states are spending more servicing debt than on health, education, social protection. Exponentially rising debt burdens draw away resources meant for public services toward debt repayment and have perpetuated the commercialisation of public services,” noted Allana Kembabazi, while presenting ISER’s latest report, “[The Human Rights Impact of Commercialisation of Public Services in East Africa](#)” released ahead of the UN CSO Summit. “We need to see bold and intentional political will from all member states. This includes redefining the international tax architecture by supporting the UN Tax Convention, shifting from regressive to progressive tax regimes, and replacing tax exemptions and holidays with fair taxation of the rich and wealthy to fund public services.”

“If we can look at some of our policies we can handle some of these things,” said Salome Tetah, Ministry of Education, Kenya

“We hope to find an African solution to the health inequities in our region, and that requires looking beyond the private-focused health care that international agencies impose on our governments” said Ravi Ram, Peoples Health Movement Kenya. “In Kenya, public private partnerships like the medical equipment scheme have increased the debt burden and failed to deliver healthcare to the people.”

“It is meaningless for a mother trying to bring life into the world to be told in a public hospital to go look for money to go buy drugs. As we talk about public services, we are talking about quality public services” said Jackie Nalubega, Public Services International. “Doctors are not just fighting for better salaries but they are fighting for better public services.”

“We must continue prioritising public healthcare delivery that benefits everyone,” said Mary Nyachae, National Health Insurance Fund, Kenya.

“We make the budgets,” said Dr. Moses Kiarie, Director from Directorate of Quality Assurance Ministry of Education, Kenya but notes financial constraints result in budget cuts.

“We can finance public services in Africa. Our latest joint research, [Transforming Education Financing in Africa](#), shows that concerted action for fair and progressive taxation, sealing loopholes for illicit financial flows and tax abuse can avail \$146 billion every year! Just 20% of this can transform education in Africa, and leave enough to support healthcare, social security and the climate response.” Ashina Mtsumi, ActionAid.

“We must ensure that progressive taxation, more specifically wealth taxation, is adequately addressed within the UN Tax Convention and this should adequately finance gender transformative public services in health, education, water, sanitation and care infrastructure” Jennifer Lipenga, Akiina Mama Wa Afrika.

Civil society like Nairobi Water Justice Working Group expressed concern about the push for privatization of water in Africa. “In Kenya we are told to privatise, that it is working well in Cape Town, but that is not the case.”

“Privatisation of water is making it expensive, it is hitting the poor, the most vulnerable.” Boaz Waruku, of Africa Network Campaign on Education for All (ANCEFA).

“General Comment 7 by the African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights provides detailed guidance that African states should heed to effectively regulate private actors involved in public services,” noted Roselyne Onyango, Associate Programme Officer - Africa, Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (GI-ESCR). “Human rights law mandates states to provide and finance public education and other services essential for the realisation of human rights.”

Johnstone Shisanya from EACHRights noted that Covid 19 underscored how African states should invest in public services. “During Covid 19, the public schools were functioning while the private schools were closing to do other business.”

The devastating climate crisis Africa is facing and how it is impacting public services has come to the fore as a key priority. Kenya, which is hosting the UN Civil Society Conference, has been ravaged by floods. “Today as we speak floods have washed away schools.” Dr. Moses Kiarie, Director from Directorate of Quality Assurance Ministry of Education, Kenya

“Africa is bearing the brunt of the climate crisis yet we contributed least to it. In the Africa Manifesto on Public Services, we demand reparations and not more debt.” Atori Elizabeth, Initiative for Social and Economic Rights (ISER).

“We need to see more global south involvement in the restructuring of the global finance system.” Bulimo Peter, a youth climate advocate.

“At the heart of this growing movement to [#ReclaimPublicServices](#) lies a fundamental principle; states must finance quality public services, mobilise more resources through progressive taxation. This is essential to realising the Africa we want and the Sustainable Development Goals.” Labila Sumaya Musoke, Initiative for Social and Economic Rights (ISER).

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