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E-PAPER

# Shaping the Future of Multilateralism

Feminist, decolonial  
economic solutions to  
address interconnected  
global crises

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# Feminist, decolonial economic solutions to address interconnected global crises

**The undeniable connections among the multiple crises that humanity faces today – climate change, biodiversity loss, inequality, poverty, and the Covid-19 pandemic – demand interconnected, rather than segmented, macro solutions. Responses must be systemic and address the structural dynamics and shortcomings of governance, economics and finance. A feminist and decolonial framing provides a lens for proposed reforms. That perspective would acknowledge the centrality of women’s paid and unpaid care work for global prosperity, and it would recognize how the Global North continues to drain resources and withhold decision-making power from the Global South. A potential way forward would combine rejuvenation of the United Nations system, cancellation of debt, a focus on tax justice, reform of the financial sector, and elimination of extraterritoriality that shields public and private actors from accountability for human rights violations and environmental degradation.**

The threats to survival that humanity and its ecosystems are facing today are manifold, and no country can solve them on its own. Nor can systemic issues be addressed individually in an isolated or siloed manner, although the specificity of each challenge deserves proper attention. These crises are all interconnected, with pervasive and mutually reinforcing effects that have their origin in a neoliberal economic system that is exploitative and extractivist in nature and that focuses on growth and profit maximization while externalizing negative impacts on people and the planet, thereby creating dangerous feedback loops. However, many policymakers and technocrats working to overcome global challenges continue to ignore core structural linkages.

In response to the interrelated nature of the multiple crises, and spurred by the momentum and need to radically rethink existing structures in light of the Covid-19 pandemic, a number of civil society groups and social, economic, and environmental justice movements from all over the world have rallied together to advocate jointly for the elements required to achieve lasting systems change. This [Campaign of Campaigns](#) focuses on a number of core macro demands, such as a new global economic architecture working for people and the planet, with debt cancellation and redistributive tax justice under a new U.N. Tax Convention. It also calls for systemic risk assessments for the financial sector, and for rejection of the extraterritoriality claims of public- and private-sector actors to protect and promote the universality of human rights. The campaign was conceived and is coordinated by the Civil Society Group on Financing for Development (FfD) and the Women’s Working Group on Financing for Development.<sup>1</sup> Using a feminist

**1** An alliance of women’s organizations and networks that advocates for the advancement of women’s human rights and gender equality in U.N. processes related to Financing for Development.

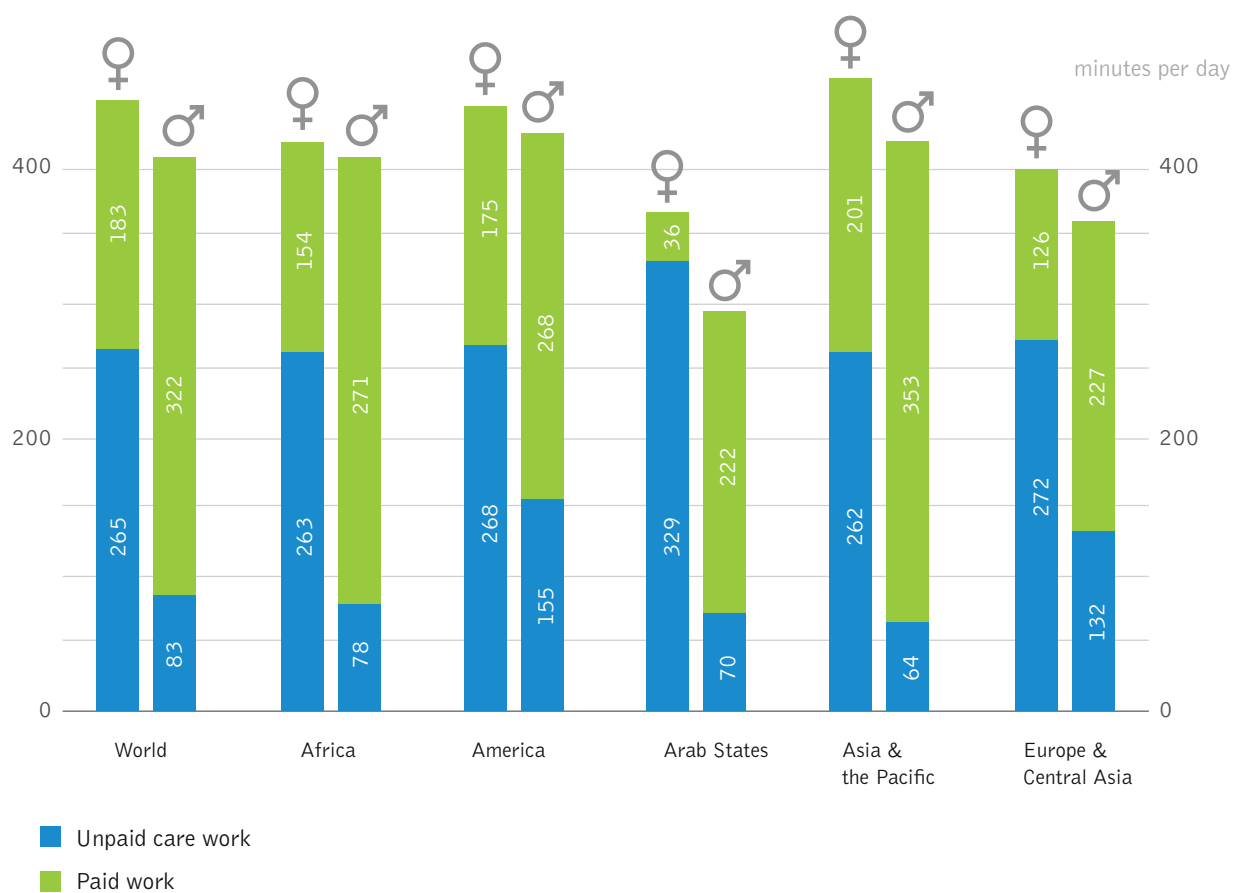
and decolonial lens, the joint campaign of movements and civil society proposes solutions to broader systemic weaknesses in global governance of economics, finance, and trade, which are the core focus of the United Nation's FfD process.

## Why a feminist approach is essential

Rather than being discussed in the abstract, the macro dimension of multiple intersecting crises needs to be articulated with a human focus. At the core of a decolonial, feminist analysis is an understanding of the macro-economic dimension of gender inequalities. Such inequities reflect the sexual division of labor and the assigning of different economic activities – and therefore opportunities and spaces in life – for women and men. Women have been tasked with unpaid domestic and care work, a type of labor that is not recognized nor valued in traditional economic theory. Feminist economists [estimate](#) that the value generated by unpaid domestic and care work, the so-called care economy, amounts to two thirds of the value that circulates in the world, including both monetized and non-monetized value; if valued in terms of minimum wage, it can add up to 60 percent to a country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).<sup>2</sup> While traditional economic theory calls this type of work "reproductive" – as opposed to the "productive" work that generates market value – feminist economists (for example at the [International Labour Organisation \(ILO\)](#)) have demonstrated that there is no "reproductive" work, as all generates value, including the work that occurs in the private sphere. In 2020, [OXFAM estimated](#) the monetary value of unpaid care work globally for women aged 15 and over to be at least US\$10.8 trillion annually – three times the size of the world's tech industry. The implications are extraordinary: women subsidize the entire economy. This is why gender – acknowledging the diversity of interests and needs and the intersectionality of gender with other socio-economic factors – is a structural starting point for analyzing inequalities.

- 2** Figures of the value generated by unpaid domestic and care work around the world still rely on studies of costing, which are paired with data obtained by time surveys and satellite accounts. In general, it is estimated that women perform around 70 percent of all unpaid domestic and care work globally; this aggregation must, however, take into account that multidimensional discrimination results in greater divergence of time use among women, i.e. indigenous and rural women undertake more hours and tasks than urban women. Most official studies base costing estimates as shares of gross domestic product (GDP), the assumption being that this type of work would receive at least a minimum wage. But costing estimates linking direct remuneration for different activities paid at value market show that the value generated by unpaid domestic and care work could amount to more than the money currently circulating in the world (this is why there is a reference to such an estimate including monetized and non-monetized value). This would mean there is not enough money to pay for the value generated by unpaid domestic and care work. The value calculated greatly depends on the methodology used.

A focus on labor rather than on employment, therefore, is much more useful to analyze the economic drive and potential of an economy. In that sense, labor can be analyzed not only based on whether it is paid or unpaid, but also depending on whether it occurs in the formal or informal sectors. Women’s labor is more likely to be unpaid and informal, placing them in particularly precarious positions in terms of human rights, opportunities, income, social protection, and wellbeing. Thus, the world cannot eradicate gender inequalities without addressing these gender gaps in economic sectors alongside issues of time use and the sexual division of labor. These must be core considerations, for example, in promoting a just transition of the global economy away from fossil fuel dependency. New job opportunities must not be offered only to men who are predominantly employed in sectors with high carbon emissions, for instance. And a just transition to a greener economy also requires care systems with co-responsibilities between government, the private sector, communities, and families – and, importantly, between men and women.



### Time in minutes spent daily in unpaid care work, paid work and total work, by sex and region

Source: ILO (2018). Care work and care jobs for the future of decent work / International Labour Office, Figure 2, p.31.

The Covid-19 crisis has shown the extent to which our societies rely on women's unpaid domestic and care work, in the process setting back gains in women's human rights by decades. For example, women's labor-force participation in many countries [declined substantially](#) during the pandemic; in addition to losing more jobs than men due to women's disproportionate employment in the service and informal jobs that were hit hardest by the crisis, a lack of child care and required home schooling also [forced many working mothers to leave paid employment](#) to prioritize care responsibilities at home. Women also have been crucial as first responders and on the other frontlines of the impacts, from hospitals to grocery checkout counters. At the same time, [gender-based violence](#) has increased and access to sexual and reproductive services and rights has declined during the pandemic.

All this shows the intrinsic connections between the impacts of crises and the ways and extent to which societies rely on women as "shock absorbers" due to the "elasticity" of the time-value-work dynamic involving women. This "go-to mechanism" for societies – relying on women's unpaid or underpaid work – was apparent, even before the pandemic, in the [context of austerity measures](#) in developing countries, where the required contraction of public expenditure often leads to cuts in the provision of basic social services and safety nets, including in health care or education. Cuts to social services often intensify the demand for unpaid care work, which is disproportionately carried out by women and girls (notably in poor households) and, thus, forcing them to fill the gaps – for example by caring for the sick or elderly at home. These clearly documented realities reinforce why multilateral economic reforms that address multiple intersecting crises must mainstream gender and use a feminist lens to push for gender-transformative outcomes that challenge – and overcome – existing power relationships, norms, and stereotypes.

## How a decolonial framing shapes solutions

Decoloniality is a perspective or thought process for analysis predicated on an understanding of the cruelty of colonialization and oppression of people, including by subjugating them to established social hierarchies and ideologies central to the colonizers' interests. [Decoloniality](#) is a way to explore colonialization, settler-colonialism, racial capitalism, modernity, and, most recently, neoliberalism, and the ways in which they have displaced an array of modes of living, thinking, and being, and engaging with the natural environment. A decolonial framing views the global division of labor in terms of one part of the world exploiting, extracting from, and preying upon people and resources in the other part. In thinking about macro demands for a "package of solutions" as conveyed in the Campaign of Campaigns, one must acknowledge the extent to which a colonial

dynamic is still at work today. The Global South essentially subsidizes – in an unwanted and imposed manner – the Global North at the expense of the wellbeing of its own population and the depletion of its ecosystems, and even at the cost of planetary survival writ large, due to the historical responsibility of developed countries for the carbon emissions that have caused the climate crisis.

This global division of labor, in turn, is linked to a governance system that promotes white supremacy, as well as an oligarchic and non-democratic structure of decision-making. Such a system of exploitation thrives in non-democratic spaces; the rise of nationalistic and/or fascist, oppressive regimes is connected with the accelerating concentration of wealth; overt exploitation of workers; an increase in human rights violations and attacks against environmentalists and human rights defenders; and the dangerous weakening of ecosystems. The abuse of collective rights as well as the criminalization of dissent or any notion of alterity (identities different from others)<sup>3</sup> are also inherent elements in this formula, dividing populations with fear, hate, and violence.

The notion of the Global North, of course, is not a literal or geographical concept, but rather denotes those countries that have benefited from economic, financial, and trade frameworks and dynamics throughout history and that have imposed their will on and exploited others, at home and abroad. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the need for full recognition and guarantees of Indigenous Peoples' collective rights. Indigenous Peoples, while only 6.2 percent of the global population, [protect 80 percent of global biodiversity](#). It is their stewardship that keeps planet earth alive. A decolonial approach must include political recognition and historical reparations, while recognizing the multiple solutions that Indigenous Peoples bring to the table, such as alternatives to contemporary patterns of unsustainable consumption and production and to the paradigm of limitless economic growth.

An example of the way coloniality shapes our current world lies in the [relationship between the climate emergency and the debt agenda](#). Developed countries have an ecological and climate debt to the peoples of the Global South, as clearly delineated in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Paris Agreement and associated mechanisms. But these wealthy countries fail to pay their fair share and deliver on their financial commitments under these accords, which obligate them to ensure developing countries have the resources and capacity to mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change. This is especially critical for Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and Least Developed Countries (LDCs), which already are the most severely impacted by global warming even though they themselves generate minimal greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

**3** Whether by profiling based on race or ethnic belonging; sexual orientation, gender identity or expression; disability; religion; geographic condition; age; socio-economic condition; or any other human condition of diversity.



At the same time, the intersection of the environmental emergency, the debt crisis, and the overall global financial and health crises will prevent developing countries from recovery, let alone achieve the more inclusive and greener recovery needed. Until 2018, [as much as 74.4 percent of public climate finance](#) was delivered in the form of loans, therefore increasing the debt burden of the poorest countries that are already suffering the harshest climate impacts. Social movements have emphasized, therefore, that developed countries must provide financial support primarily in the forms of grants rather than loans, without conditions and transparently disbursed and accounted for, to avoid double-counting towards both development and climate-finance commitments.

In addition, a larger conversation is to be had in multilateral climate negotiations under the UNFCCC regarding the need for finance to address unavoidable loss and damage in developing countries. Such financing should include developed countries offering suspension, restructuring, and cancellation of debt payments in the aftermath of a climate-related disaster, as a compensatory measure for historical responsibility for GHG emissions.

The criticality of macro and structural solutions versus superficial ones is clear: many approaches have proven limited in their reach, precisely because they lack a structural focus and instead transfer the responsibility for actions to address climate change and securing related outcomes to individuals or communities. Examples of this counterproductive pattern of pushing off responsibility include not only austerity measures, but also much-touted micro-finance schemes and [direct cash transfers](#) without corresponding social protection floors.<sup>4</sup>

For instance, [research highlights](#) that conditional cash transfers are usually too low to overcome the economic dependency of women on other members of the household, and that they increase women's unpaid care burden and prevent them from seeking paid employment on equal footing with men, including by perpetuating gender stereotypes that place women at the center of care work. Likewise, microcredit [can increase](#) women's workload due to responsibility for loan repayment (often with high interest rates), while male family members might control financial decision-making. In addition, differences in literacy, property rights, and social attitudes about women might limit impact outside of the immediate household. These tools often are applied based on a [misguided and too-narrow understanding of empowerment](#).<sup>5</sup>

- 4 Without universal social protection floors, direct cash transfers are not transformative, as conditional cash transfers can add an extra burden on women by increasing unpaid domestic and care work.
- 5 Although genuine "empowerment" always involves changing unequal power relations, donors and investors tend to favor an apolitical use of the term, in which power relations may actually remain wholly or virtually untouched. When used in this way, it becomes "empowerment without power". (Esquivel 2016, p.6)

Placing responsibility on individuals and communities for actions and for securing outcomes obscures the duty of States to act in accordance with existing human rights frameworks, and to promote gender equality, environmental integrity, and democratic processes in a participatory and transparent manner. Macro demands articulate ways to reform economic, financial, and trade frameworks and dynamics, as well as the international financial architecture as a whole. Thus, the role of States is crucial to address these interconnected measures, some of which will be explored in greater detail below.

## **Interconnections: global democratic governance**

In the present multilateral crisis, the United Nations (U.N.) itself is not exempt from internal tumult. Without proper political and financial support from member states, private funding and [corporate influence](#) is growing within the body, and without public countermeasures, might become irreversible. And yet, the U.N. is in itself the only legitimate multilateral, democratic space with the mandate of human rights at its core and that is structured in a way intended to ensure equitable governance that gives each member State an equal voice in decision-making. That means that, contrary to voting rights in multilateral development banks (MDBs), for example, a majority of the votes in the U.N. General Assembly go to developing countries, which also host the majority of the world's populations and natural resources.

However, the influence of the U.N., especially on economic and financial decision-making, has waned over the decades. Global decision-making has become dominated either by 1) industrialized countries or alliances of the powerful, in elitist clubs such as the Group of 7 (G7), the Group of 20 (G20), and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), or by 2) technocrats with an agenda that financializes every development intervention, via international financial institutions (IFI's) such as the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund (IMF). (Financialization refers to the increase in [influence of financial markets](#), financial institutions, and financial elites over economic policy and policy outcomes. A lack of sufficient regulation of rules and returns of the financial sector affects the interests of the broader public and the state by for example driving inequality.)

Broad civil society coalitions like the Campaign of Campaigns, however, are challenging this trend. They advocate for an independent review of the development outcomes of public-private partnerships (PPPs) and of private-sector engagement by the IFIs. The coalitions also urge a moratorium on support for PPPs until such a review is completed, and instead advocate a renewed emphasis on public policies and public investments. A criticism of such “private finance first” approaches is echoed in a [2018 report](#) from U.N. Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights Philip Alston. He highlighted that, while privatization is generally presented as a technical solution for managing resources and reducing fiscal deficits, it is in fact an integral part of an economic and social philosophy of governance that often systematically eliminates human rights protections and further marginalizes low-income earners and those living in poverty.<sup>6</sup>

Rather than promoting global solidarity in response to these multiple intersecting challenges to humanity, the multilateral system has reinforced nationalistic responses that, in turn, are often based on persistent colonial dynamics. As a result, developed countries seeking to overcome crises prioritize their own interests, as in the case of “[digital capitalism](#)”<sup>7</sup> or in the unwillingness to suspend intellectual property rights on medical treatment, medical technology, and vaccines.

This mindset is also evident in measures such as austerity conditions on loans and the reduction of the policy space and fiscal floor that poorer countries are forced to accept to receive support for Covid-19 recovery packages. This includes “green conditionalities” supported by some environmental groups. Historically, going back to the 1980s and structural adjustment policies by the IMF and World Bank in response to economic and fiscal crisis, loan conditions have reduced sovereign policy space and have often resulted in a net outflow of financial resources from the Global South to the Global North (such as through pressure to provide tax incentives and deregulation for foreign direct investments or through the privatization of basic services for water, education, or health).

In this context, the Campaign of Campaigns demands significant structural reform to the global economic and financial system by calling for a new economic architecture that works for people and planet to be established under the auspices of the U.N. An International Economic Reconstruction and Systemic Reform Summit convened by the U.N. would allow governments to comprehensively address interconnected issues holistically, in contrast to the current segmented, unconnected policy processes.

**6** See also the commentary of a collective of human rights rapporteurs on the matter: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2zXjzg00yCY>

**7** The term ‘digital capitalism’ describes an advanced stage of capitalism in which a few individuals and corporations that have default ownership and control over network and data resources enjoy inordinate economic power.

Such a reform-oriented governance summit would reinstate the U.N. as the legitimate and democratic space for deliberation among all countries, including those most impoverished and impacted by the multiple unfolding crises of this era. Addressing global governance reform under U.N. auspices would also ensure more meaningful, participatory engagement by hearing a plurality of voices on the most crucial challenges of humanity. Calling for such a comprehensive summit is not without precedent; the U.N. Financing for Development process promoted a similar convening in the past. It could be the space to jumpstart the comprehensive reform of the world's financial architecture and provide the opportunity to establish new global financial-governance structures, such as by establishing an International Debt Workout Mechanism or a U.N. Tax Convention.

## Interconnections: enhancing fiscal floors and sovereign policy space

A core focus of international governance reform must be on actions and reform processes that expand the fiscal and policy space of governments at the regional, national, and local level. The aim would be for these governments to be able to address and promote human rights, gender equality (for example through gender-responsive budgeting<sup>8</sup>), and the wellbeing of their populations, while at the same time addressing the environmental emergency.

Two illustrative examples are the issues related to debt sustainability and tax justice – and thus the ability of governments to raise revenue by taxation or through loans from public or private lenders. These two issues have been the focus of many governance-reform discussions and [collective civil society demands](#). When governments have sufficient fiscal space, they can pursue urgent policy priorities that can transform the lives and livelihoods of millions of people. Such policies could include social protection floors (a set of basic social security guarantees that are accordance with universal minimum standards and principles), financing for systems of care (for children, the elderly or general health), ensuring or the environmental integrity of investment measures including paying for a just transition away from carbon-intensive sectors with new and decent paying jobs in greener sectors.

- 8** Feminists have pushed for Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) for at least two decades. GRB is aiming at redistributing government expenditure in line with recognizing the differentiated needs and interests of women and men.

Take, for instance, the growing problem of [unsustainable debt levels](#), which increase developing countries' economic instability through high debt-servicing costs for borrowers and where the power balance is tilted in favor of the lenders. Servicing debts is often prioritized over spending for social and environmental programs. That reduces the population's access to essential goods and services. Furthermore, this dismantling of essential services and simultaneous environmental degradation disproportionately affect women by increasing their unpaid domestic and care work, because they are forced to absorb the services and tasks that are no longer publicly provided. Climate change and environmental degradation, with their different impacts on men and women, exacerbate this dynamic further, as the provision of basic services for families and communities (such as food, water, or care for children, elderly, or the sick) is predominantly taken up by women.

The status of the lender is crucial in the search for comprehensive solutions: a public lender (such as an IFI) may impose new conditions as well as a readjustment program to renegotiate the debt, which could undermine the capacity of a government to set own priorities even further. Globally, civil society coalitions have called for comprehensive debt cancellation for developing countries, critiquing some of the proposed debt-relief measures by IFIs as not going far enough. For example, [the Jubilee Debt Campaign](#) called on the IMF in 2020 to sell its stockpile of gold to cover debt payments owed by the world's poorest countries throughout 2021. The call for an International Debt Workout Mechanism, [while not new](#), is more relevant than ever to deal with these issues in a collective manner under agreed principles and in accordance with existing human rights frameworks. It would have to include a window to address private debt, since private lenders have been operating under their own rules. In the wake of the ongoing pandemic-induced economic recession, debtor countries the world see international arbitration rules as favoring the private sector and fear lawsuits by private creditors over these governments' inability to service debt.<sup>9</sup>

Taxation is another focus of global calls for redistributive justice for the wellbeing of people and the planet. While taxation generally refers to the domestic capacity of government to raise revenue to fund budgetary priorities, it has an international dimension, especially in relation to offshore corporate tax evasion and tax abuse, which deprive the Global South of urgently needed revenue and hit their budgets harder proportionately. According to tax justice advocates, lower-income countries' tax losses are equivalent to nearly 52 percent of their combined public-health budgets. The tax justice movement, in [a 2020 report](#), demonstrated that higher-income countries are responsible for facilitating 98 percent of all global tax losses, while lower-income

**9** Under so-called Investor State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) rules, which often apply to debt servicing as well as trade agreements, a private-sector actor may file a lawsuit against a government demanding compensatory payments. The lawsuit is dealt with under international arbitration. ISDS cases have been used against governments' application of human rights, labor rights, environmental protection, accessibility of public services, and other policy frameworks seen as impeding private-sector opportunities and investment returns.

countries are responsible for less than 2 percent. As the report notes, “Enabling corporate tax abuse deprives governments around the world of public funding, favouring multinationals, wealthy individuals and tax havens.” All five jurisdictions most responsible for countries’ tax losses are in the Global North, thus showcasing that there is a colonial dynamic to the current pattern of tax revenue flows.<sup>10</sup> This global tax dynamic adds to the broader pattern: financial outflows from developing countries to developed countries dwarf financial flows of developed countries to developing countries. The Global South is essentially [a net creditor to the Global North](#), thereby [subsidizing](#) it in many ways.

Calls for a comprehensive governance reform of global taxation thus include the creation of a U.N. Tax Convention to ensure redistributive justice. Curiously, it was the Standing Committee under the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), a human rights treaty body, which already in 2016 noted [in a binding recommendation](#) that illicit financial flows negatively impact women’s human rights in the Global South. This is relevant as it asserts the CEDAW committee’s interest in pursuing structural and systemic issues that pertain to the extraterritorial impacts of government action and their responsibility to address the issue of tax havens, including through regulatory efforts to avoid misuse, by the private sector. This opens the door to involving Human Rights Treaty Bodies in addressing such global structural and systemic issues, and thus re-articulates a broader and more systemic application of human rights frameworks. The engagement of these bodies, in combination with strategic litigation addressing structural issues, should be considered an important gateway approach for more comprehensive and collective global governance reform.

## Interconnections: extra-territoriality and human rights

Addressing multiple intersecting crises requires discussing the interconnected issue of extraterritorial impacts and the violations of human rights resulting from those effects. An example of this is the responsibility of developed countries for their environmental and climate policies and the roles of the corporate and financial sectors in causing and accelerating climate change and environmental degradation.

- 10** According to the [2020 report on the state of tax justice](#) globally, the five jurisdictions most responsible for countries’ tax losses are British Territory Cayman Islands (responsible for 16.5 percent of global tax losses, equal to over US\$70 billion), the U.K. (10 percent; over US\$42 billion), the Netherlands (8.5 percent; over US\$36 billion), Luxembourg (6.5 per cent; over US\$27 billion) and the United States (5.53 percent; over US\$23 billion). For comparison, only [US\\$161 billion in official development assistance \(ODA\) was provided by OECD countries in 2020](#)

In this sense, extraterritoriality refers to actors of one nation who operate abroad and claim protections, immunities, and exemptions from the legal system and territorial jurisdiction of the state in which they operate. Structural challenges such as climate change, which can only be solved through multilateral actions of responsible actors acknowledging a shared global responsibility, highlight this issue of extraterritoriality. For example, [just 20 fossil fuel companies](#) can be directly linked to a third of global carbon emissions through their relentless exploration of oil, gas, and coal. Extraterritoriality – or the intention to avoid being held legally responsible for the impacts of one’s actions on human rights outside of their own territory – is also a main reason why developed countries have been refusing to ensure operative human rights language in many international instruments in the past years. An emblematic case is the 2015 Paris Agreement to prevent dangerous global warming: the only place in the accord where a reference to human rights was accepted during negotiations is in its preamble. While seemingly conveying a cross-cutting approach and the importance of human rights for the fulfillment of the Paris goals, this reference is, in fact, without legal bite for the purpose of implementation.

A misconception persists in the multilateral sphere that the responsibility of sovereign states to address legal obligations – such as protecting and promoting human rights – applies only within their own territories and borders, even though the actions of rich countries especially have significant negative spillover effects. While claiming environmental improvements at home, rich countries export negative environmental and climate impacts to the Global South through their commercial or fiscal policies and their production and consumption patterns.

So there is still a long way to go to ensure that extraterritoriality does not undermine a core principle – the “polluter pays” principle – at the heart of global frameworks for sustainable development and climate protection. Fortunately, some binding human rights instruments such as CEDAW are taking up these conversations: in 2017, the [CEDAW Committee formally called](#) on Norway to revise its energy policy in order to address the negative impacts on women’s human rights due to the extraterritorial impacts of its oil extraction in the Arctic.

In addition to the extraterritoriality of human rights impacts, the climate emergency and accelerating environmental degradation also point to the need to assess the systemic risk posed by financial sector instruments and actors, as highlighted by the aforementioned Campaign of Campaigns mounted by [civil society and social movements](#). Developed countries as a group hold a special responsibility by having contributed the majority of climate change-causing GHG emissions through their industrialization since the 1850s. One could argue that by building up and not addressing the historical climate debt they owe to developing countries, developed countries have caused severe extraterritorial impacts on countries, communities, and people in developing countries.



Additionally, by not adequately fulfilling their financial commitments under the U.N. climate regime to support developing countries in their climate actions, developed countries are exacerbating the negative extraterritorial impacts (including human rights abuses), especially for the poorest and most marginalized communities facing food insecurity or struggling to adapt to disasters caused by extreme weather. Developed countries are still far away from fulfilling their collective financial commitment to jointly mobilize US\$100 billion annually in climate finance for developing countries by 2020. The Paris Agreement, which extended the mobilization goal to 2025, also mandated a new, higher collective climate-finance target to be set by 2025. According to the most [recent OECD progress report on climate finance](#), public and private financing provided and mobilized by developed countries for climate action in developing countries reached only US\$78.9 billion annually by 2018, still below the US\$100 billion commitment, with only US\$62.2 billion in public climate finance.

Furthermore, rich countries' failures to meet their climate-finance obligations are magnified by their ongoing refusal to better regulate the global financial sector. While advocacy efforts focused on urging rich countries to accelerate and scale up the mobilization of billions for climate action are important, this sum must be put in context of the trillions being mobilized for continued fossil fuels investments. Mandated climate-finance provision under the UNFCCC – and even the US\$10 billion Green Climate Fund (GFC) as its main multilateral finance instrument – represents a minor share of the broader provision of climate finance, or to be more precise, climate-compatible financial flows. This is where the real discussion should focus and the real impact can be made.

While activists are still pushing for adequate climate-finance delivery, a broader view makes clear that financial-sector regulation overall must be a primary strategy, with a focus on forcing divestment away from extractive sectors and projects and toward initiatives that prevent harm. For example, lending from 35 U.S., Canadian, Chinese, European, and Japanese private banks to fossil fuel companies reached US\$2.7 trillion over the period from 2016 to 2019, and has risen each year since the Paris Agreement was adopted in 2015. IFI's such as the World Bank are likewise complicit in these investments, according to a [report](#) from the European Network on Debt and Development (EURODAD). The study found that, between the 2015 signing of the Paris Agreement and August 2020, the World Bank Group provided at least US\$12.1 billion of public assistance to 38 countries for fossil fuel-related projects, including US\$10.5 billion in direct finance to such projects and the rest as technical assistance and preexisting equity investments.

Regulation, then is key. The extent of the harm determined actors can do through targeted financial-sector operations is immense, including by undermining clean investments. An analysis by the [Transnational Institute](#) highlights that large oil- and gas-producing and trading corporations such as Royal Dutch Shell are increasingly engaging in speculative trading, which might allow them to manipulate fossil-fuel prices so that renewable energy solutions become less financially attractive.



Likewise, credit-rating agencies and commercial banks that follow their rating signals insufficiently incorporate climate risks in their assessments of the credit-worthiness of corporate actors. That gap supports a system of revolving credit that allows corporations to borrow over a period of time without further reviews. An example is the case of the [Dakota Access oil pipeline](#), in which U.S.-based Citibank led a consortium of 17 international banks to provide a US\$2.5 billion syndicated loan. Clearly the [commercial banks' risk assessments](#) failed to properly take into account climate change, environmental degradation, and human rights.

Clearly, a U.N. framework and increased surveillance are imperative to regulate the financial sector by addressing the role of credit-rating agencies, banks' credit-worthiness assessments, and speculative trading in perpetuating investments that harm people and planet. Adequate financial regulation ultimately must follow the feminist motto to "divest from harm and invest in care."

## Conclusion

By necessity, many details were left unexplored in this discussion, which focused on showcasing the critical interrelationship between existing structural shortcomings and systemic failures in the global economic and financial architecture from a feminist and decolonial understanding. Many of the solutions proposed are technically feasible and often not new, although implementing them acquires a new urgency in the current moment of multiple crises. The traction and success of these proposals will determine the wellbeing of future generations.

While the political will to address many of these issues, especially by those countries, commercial actors and institutions with the most decision-making power in the system, might be lacking, a globally coordinated advocacy push by civil society and social, environmental and economic justice movements from around the world is gaining strength and momentum. The Campaign of Campaigns is a living collective effort, learning from internal and external dialogue and promoting both learning from top down and bottom up and is moved by solidarity between and among movements. It is a complex and sophisticated proposal to core challenges for the chaotic times we live. But, as many mythologies have pointed out, chaos can also be a starting point to create something better and beautiful. Social, environmental and economic movements are ready to step up to the plate with their thinking and energy.

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