



TRANSFORMING PUBLIC SERVICES AND TAX JUSTICE FOR GENDER EQUALITY IN ZIMBABWE

ACTIONAID ZIMBABWE

1. INTRODUCTION

Zimbabwe, like many developing countries, faces significant challenges in achieving gender equality and social justice. Women and girls continue to face discrimination and disadvantage in various spheres of life, including education, employment, healthcare, and political participation. This policy brief examines the potential of transformative approaches to public services and tax justice in addressing these challenges and creating a more equitable and just society. It draws on research conducted by ActionAid Zimbabwe, highlighting the need for a comprehensive approach that addresses the root causes of gender inequality and empowers women and girls to claim their rights.

2. GENDER INEQUALITY IN ZIMBABWE - A MULTIFACETED CHALLENGE

Gender inequality in Zimbabwe is not merely a matter of individual experiences but a deeply rooted systemic issue. Patriarchal norms and structures perpetuate discrimination against women and girls, limiting their access to resources, opportunities, and decision-making power. This manifests in various ways, including:

- Unequal access to education: Girls are more likely to drop out of school than boys, particularly in rural areas, due to factors such as poverty, early marriage, and lack of access to menstrual hygiene management facilities. This reinforces gender stereotypes and limits girls' future opportunities, perpetuating their economic and social disadvantage.
- Limited economic opportunities: Women are overrepresented in informal employment with low wages and few benefits while facing barriers to accessing land, credit, and markets. This reinforces their economic dependence on men and limits their ability to contribute to household income and participate in economic decision-making.
- Inadequate healthcare: Women face challenges in accessing quality healthcare, including reproductive health services, due to limited access to facilities, high costs, and stigma. This has severe consequences for their physical and mental health, further limiting their ability to participate fully in society.
- Underrepresentation in decision-making: Women hold only 31% of seats in parliament, reflecting their limited participation in political and economic decision-making processes. This reinforces the power imbalance between men and women and prevents women from influencing policies that affect their lives.

These inequalities are not isolated but interconnected, reinforcing each other and creating a cycle of disadvantage for women and girls. A transformative approach recognizes this interconnectedness and emphasizes the need to address the root causes of gender inequality, rather than simply treating the symptoms.

3. TRANSFORMING PUBLIC SERVICES: A PATHWAY TO EMPOWERMENT

Transformative approaches to public services aim to address the specific needs and priorities of women and girls, while also challenging the underlying power imbalances that perpetuate gender inequality. This requires:

- Analyzing and addressing gender bias in policies and programs: Identifying and removing policies and practices that discriminate against women and girls. For example, reviewing school curricula to ensure they are free from gender stereotypes and promoting flexible work arrangements to enable women to balance work and family responsibilities.
- Empowering women and girls to participate in decision-making: Ensuring women have equal opportunities to participate in the design and delivery of public services. This could involve establishing women's councils at the local level to provide input on the allocation of public resources and ensure women's representation in decision-making bodies.
- Investing in women's economic empowerment: Providing women with access to resources and opportunities to improve their economic status. This could include microfinance programs, skills training, and access to land and credit.
- Promoting gender-responsive budgeting: Allocating resources to programs and services that address gender inequalities. This requires conducting a gender-based analysis of budgets to identify and address gender gaps in resource allocation.

4. TAX JUSTICE FOR GENDER EQUALITY: A CRITICAL COMPONENT

Tax justice plays a crucial role in achieving gender equality. A fair and progressive tax system can generate resources to finance public services that benefit women and girls, such as education, healthcare, and childcare. Additionally, tax policies can be designed to promote gender equality by:

- Taxing high-income earners and corporations more: Generating revenue to invest in public services that benefit women and girls, while reducing the wealth gap and promoting economic justice. This ensures that those who benefit most from the current economic system contribute their fair share to supporting public services that benefit all.
- Closing tax loopholes: Preventing corporations and wealthy individuals from evading taxes, ensuring everyone pays their fair share, and contributing to increased resources for public services. This promotes transparency and accountability in the tax system, ensuring that resources are used effectively to address gender inequalities.
- Promoting gender-responsive taxation: Ensuring that tax policies do not disproportionately burden women, such as providing tax breaks for childcare expenses or increasing the tax-free threshold for low-income earners, many of whom are women. This recognizes the unequal economic burden faced by women and ensures that tax policies contribute to reducing gender inequalities.

5. RESEARCH FINDINGS: ILLUMINATING THE PATH FORWARD

ActionAid Zimbabwe's research on transformative approaches to public services and tax justice focuses on four key areas:

- Water and sanitation: The research highlights how women and girls bear the brunt of water scarcity and inadequate sanitation facilities, limiting their time for education and economic activities and exposing them to health risks. This reinforces their domestic burden and limits their ability to participate fully in society.
- Education: The research exposes how gender stereotypes and discriminatory practices in schools continue to hinder girls' access to quality education, reinforcing their disadvantage and limiting their future opportunities. This perpetuates the cycle of poverty and inequality, limiting women's ability to contribute to economic development.
- Mental health: The research sheds light on the disproportionate impact of mental health issues on women and girls due to factors such as gender-based violence, poverty, and lack of access to mental health services. This highlights the need for comprehensive mental health services that are accessible, affordable, and gender-sensitive.
- Sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR): The research reveals the significant barriers women and girls face in accessing SRHR information and services, including limited access to contraception, safe abortion services, and comprehensive sexuality education. This reinforces their vulnerability to sexual and reproductive health problems and limits their ability to make informed decisions about their bodies and lives.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS: CHARTING A COURSE FOR ACTION

Based on the research findings, ActionAid Zimbabwe recommends the following:

1. **Develop and implement bold, gender-responsive budgeting frameworks**
 - Conduct a comprehensive analysis of how public resources are currently allocated, identifying and addressing gender biases in the budgeting process.

- Ensure that resources are directed towards programs and services that directly benefit women and girls, such as education, healthcare, childcare, and water and sanitation.
 - Ringfence the wealth tax revenue to support the implementation of gender-responsive public services.
- 2. Reform tax policies to promote gender equality and economic justice**
- Increase taxes on high-income earners and corporations, closing all loopholes people use to evade the wealth tax.
 - Eliminate the consumption tax that was imposed in the 2024 budget, as it disproportionately affects low-income earners, many of whom are women.
 - Implement a bold, comprehensive tax system that promotes economic equality and reduces the burden on low-income earners.
- 3. Invest in high-quality, accessible, and affordable public services that benefit women and girls**
- Significantly increase public spending social services such as on education, healthcare, childcare, and water and sanitation, ensuring that these services are designed and delivered in a way that is responsive to the needs of women and girls.
 - Address the barriers that prevent women and girls from accessing these essential public services.
- 4. Raise awareness and understanding of transformative approaches to public services and tax justice**
- Engage with a wide range of stakeholders, including policymakers, civil society organizations, media, and the public, to build support for the proposed policy changes.
 - Empower women and girls to claim their rights and participate in policymaking.
 - Leverage the framework and expertise developed by other CSOs to inform the implementation of gender-responsive public services.
 - Leverage on the GRPS framework and expertise to inform implementation at national level.

As a result of implementing these bold and specific recommendations, ActionAid Zimbabwe can chart a course of action that promotes gender equality, economic justice, and the provision of high-quality public services that benefit women and girls.

7. CONCLUSION - A CALL FOR COLLECTIVE ACTION

Transformative approaches to public services and tax justice offer a powerful pathway for achieving gender equality and social justice in Zimbabwe. By addressing the root causes of gender inequality, empowering women and girls, and promoting a fair and equitable distribution of resources, we can create a society where all women and girls have equal opportunities to thrive and contribute to a more just and prosperous future for all.

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