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'Accelerating the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls by addressing poverty and strengthening institutions and financing with a gender perspective'

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The International Financial System and Women's Poverty

* The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations.

The international financial system and women's poverty

There have been recent—and significant—setbacks to various Sustainable Development Goals, including particularly those relating to eliminating hunger, reducing poverty and creating greater economic diversification. These have been strongly gender-differentiated in their gender impacts, with substantially worse implications for women and girls, which have in turn reversed progress on the SDG on reducing gender inequality. These setbacks and reversals are commonly ascribed to recent global shocks, some of which could be seen as exogenous such as the Covid-19 pandemic and its impacts, to the Ukraine War and the associated rise in global food and fuel prices; and some that can be seen as generated by economic dynamics, particularly the fiscal and monetary policies of the rich advanced economies. These have certainly been significant in unleashing forces that have made conditions worse in many poor countries. However, this was possible only because of a broader global context in which the international financial system and the legal architecture underpinning it, operated against the socio-economic rights of people across the world, and especially women.

In this paper I describe some of the ways in which this has occurred and continues to occur. The first section describes the background of international and external financial liberalization that swept in the last part of the 20th century, and the growing involvement of developing countries in international capital markets in the past two decades. The second section considers the most significant manifestation of this: the ongoing debt crisis in many countries. The third section highlights the link between global food prices and financial investments and considers how this immediately affects gendered food poverty. The fourth section provides a set of policy recommendations at both national and international levels.

The context

The international financial architecture is supposed to transfer resources from capital-rich to capital-poor countries, but rarely does so, and too often mobile capital flows in the wrong direction. The current international financial system cannot be understood without recognizing how much it has changed over the past decades, primarily because of financial liberalization measures undertaken n both advanced and developing economies. These have been directed at diluting or dismantling regulatory control over the institutional structures, instruments and activities of agents in different segments of the financial sector.[1]

These measures can relate to internal or external regulations. *Internal financial liberalization* typically includes, to varying degrees: reducing or removing controls on the interest rates or rates of return charged by financial agents; reducing "directed credit" and state involvement in financial intermediation; breaking down the "Chinese wall" between banking and non-banking activities; allowing greater freedom to various stock market activities; allowing various new financial instruments such as swaps; shift to prudential guidelines for banks as opposed to direct controls on their activities. *External financial liberalization* typically involves changes in the exchange control regime, particularly with reference to the capital account. Such measures broadly cover: allowing foreign residents to hold domestic financial assets, such as debt or equity; allowing domestic residents to hold foreign financial assets; and—the most extreme—allowing foreign currency assets to be freely held and traded within the domestic economy.

In the mid-to-late 1980s, there was a wave of financial liberalization measures in the advanced economies, followed by a similar wave in developing countries in the 1990s. These occurred to varying extents in different national contexts, but generally led to greater integration of developing countries with global financial markets. This process of financial deregulation leading to much greater openness of the

[1] Chandrasekhar, C. P. (2004) "Financial liberalization and the macroeconomics of poverty reduction", G-24 Discussion Papers, Geneva.

capital accounts of such countries, went along with neoliberal economic reforms that were oriented to "export-led-growth", to be supported by foreign capital inflows. Indeed, there were significant increases in volatile capital flows, leading to a significant increase in external debt over time in many "emerging markets" and even "frontier markets. A series of financial crises over the 1990s and early 2000s led to lower net inflows thereafter, until the Global Financial Crisis of 2008 created yet another shock to the global system, which generated macroeconomic policy responses in advanced economies with major effects.

This macroeconomic policy response involved massively increased liquidity and incredibly low interest rates in the advanced economies. In a world awash with liquidity the search for higher financial returns meant that more funds flowed to "emerging" and "frontier" markets through credit and bond issues. Many low and middle income countries (LMICs) that were previously excluded from private capital markets were encouraged to take on *more* loans, particularly via bond markets suddenly interested in more risky debt, because of persistently low interest rates in a world awash with liquidity. This was actively encouraged by the international financial institutions and celebrated by platforms of private investors such as the World Economic Forum in Davos, since it enabled these countries to access credit at very low rates, this was always a potentially problematic process, since it dramatically increased the vulnerability of lower income countries.

Monetary hierarchies in the global economy mean that capital leaves LMICs much more quickly at the first sign of any problem. And these countries were much more battered economically by the Covid-19 pandemic. Advanced economies were able to provide massive countercyclical measures, especially significantly increased fiscal spending, because financial markets effectively allowed and even encouraged them to do so. By contrast, LMICs faced significant declines in export and tourism revenues, tighter balance of payments constraints, greater difficulties in accessing much more volatile external capital. They were prevented from increasing fiscal spending by much because of those same financial markets, because of debt overhang and potential capital flight. As a result, their economic recovery has been much more muted and economic conditions remain mostly dire. Then the Ukraine war and related profiteering by big corporations, made matters much worse especially for food- and fuel-importing countries, by generating inflation. The sad truth is that once "investor sentiment" moves against LMICs, it tends to respond regardless of the real economic conditions in specific countries, as we have seen over and over again in different episodes of crisis since the 1990s. Private credit rating agencies amplify the problem. This means that "contagion" is all too likely, and it affects not just economies that are already experiencing difficulties (some identified by the IMF and private agencies and therefore already facing capital flight and more stringent borrowing conditions) but a much wider range of LMICs.

For many countries, this trajectory was unsustainable from the start. But recent events caused even governments that were deemed more 'responsible' to face repayment difficulties. All LMICs have faced forces beyond their control. The Covid-19 pandemic had major adverse impacts on economic activity, imports and exports, and foreign exchange earning capacity through tourism and remittances. The price hikes in global food and fuel markets since the onset of the war in Ukraine were temporary (and largely the result of corporate profiteering and financial speculation in commodity markets), but they nonetheless had severe and prolonged impacts on food prices in LMICs. Higher interest rates in the United States and the European Union caused globally mobile finance to flow back to those countries, creating a double whammy of depreciating currencies and reduced access to credit in the middle of debt cycles.

As a result, developing countries have faced multiple whammies—not only from the pandemic and the Ukraine war-induced commodity price hikes, but from capital movements that have intensified downward pressures on their currencies and made imports more expensive in domestic currency terms, and added to external debt distress. All this, combined with decelerating economic activity, has put further pressure on fiscal space, to the point that it has been estimated that 85 per cent of the world's population are likely living in the grip of austerity measures in 2023.[2] These add to inequality between and within countries, as well as economic insecurity—and the effects are particularly adverse for women and girls.

Other current failures of the international financial system are related to this. Inequalities in "risk perception" make LMICs face higher debt servicing requirements and constrain fiscal space even in emergencies. There is no global financial safety net to provide liquidity in crisis periods. The system is unable to address central challenges of financing development and global public goods to meet climate and health challenges. The system also allows the profitability of private financial institutions take precedence over human rights.

The current and ongoing debt crisis

Estimates of debt stress by the IMF[3] suggest that as of May 2023, 11 countries were in debt distress (that is, in default or on the verge of default) while 51 countries were in severe moderate debt stress. Typically, a debtor country captures international headlines only when it actually defaults on some or all its payments, or when it is forced to approach the G20's Common Framework for a debt relief package, or when it appeals to the IMF for emergency liquidity support. Yet this list of debt emergencies—or even the longer list of debt-stressed countries as estimated by the IMF—understates the actual impact of excessive debt in low and middle income countries. Far too many countries that are not classified as "debt-stressed" are so described because they are diligently keeping up with debt service payments, even at the cost of essential spending on their citizens and critical spending required to meet developmental and green transition goals.

One reason to persist with debt payments despite massive external shocks and other rightful claims on public spending, is to maintain "investor confidence". The current external debt of LMICS has disproportionate involvement of a multitude of private investors, and bonds have become the major source of external debt, accounting for around half of the debt stock for the group as a whole. This makes such countries extremely vulnerable to capital flight, and the very fear of such capital outflows can limit government spending and make states avoid running what could be considered to be large deficits. This is why LICs and MICs effectively curtailed their public spending and primary deficits during pandemic, while HICs did not. This is evident from Figures 1 and 2.

Figure 3 indicates the resulting impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on public debt to GDP ratios, based on IMF data. All countries increased their debt-GDP ratios during the pandemic. But high income countries increased by much more, because of the massive recovery packages many instituted, with significantly enhanced fiscal spending. But for particularly those with global reserve currencies, this debt was typically or mostly in their own currencies. By contrast, for other countries, a significant and often the greater part of public debt was in a foreign currency, with much of the debt being US dollar-denominated. In lower middle and low income countries the increase in debt-GDP ratios during the pandemic was also significant, but less of it was because of new and additional fiscal spending; rather, it was often because of the moratorium on debt payments that allowed debt to accumulate without being paid for a period.

[2] Ortiz, Isabel and Matthew Cummings. 2022. *End Austerity: A Global Report on Budget Cuts and Harmful Social Reforms in 2022-25.* Eurodad Report. https://www.eurodad.org/end_austerity_a_global_report
[3] https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/dsa/dsalist.pdf

Figure 1

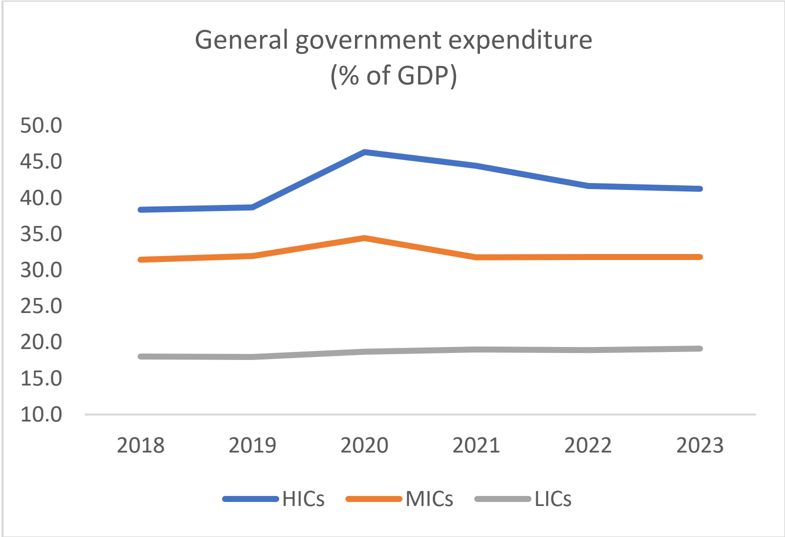
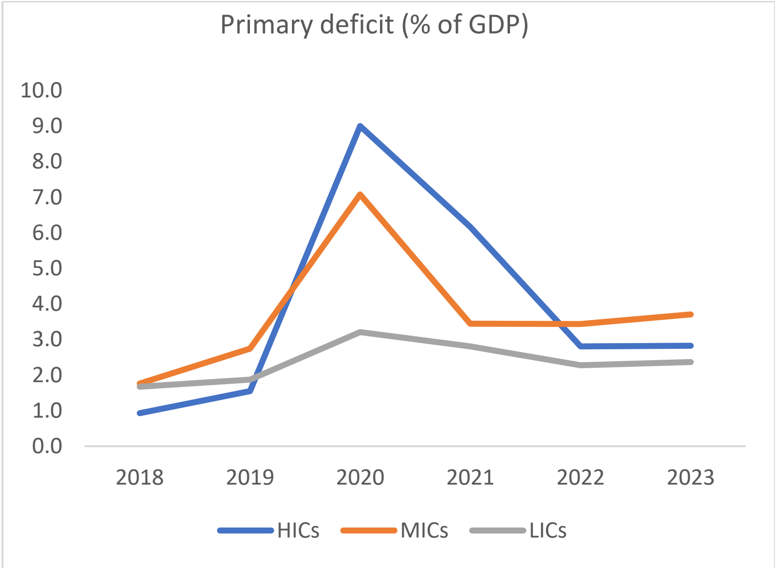
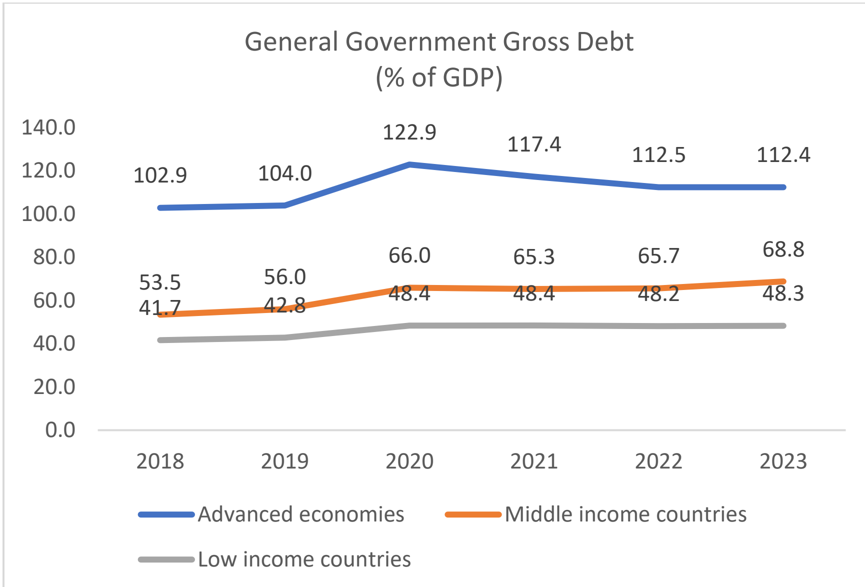


Figure 2



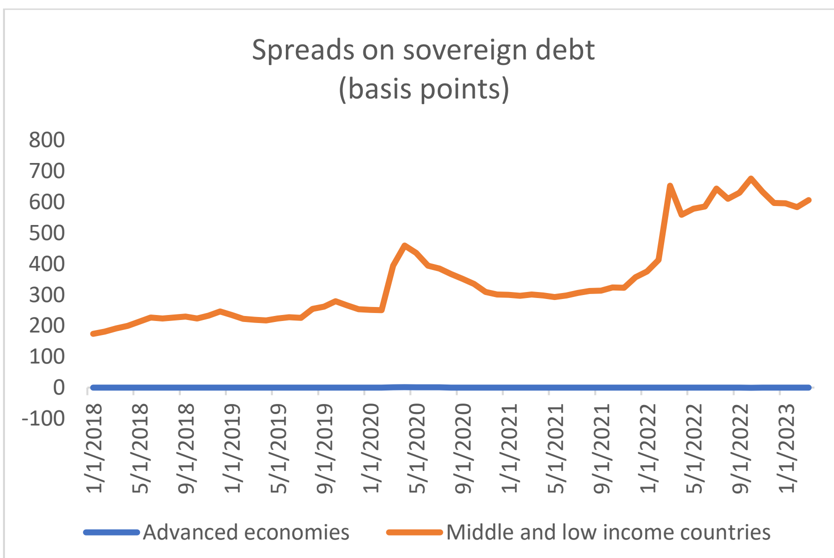
This really meant that typically most LMICs, included all LICs, were *not* spending what was required in terms of social protection and other necessary expenditure to counter the dreadful impacts of the health crisis, lockdowns, livelihood losses and increased hunger, particularly on women and girls. The fact that this was widespread across LMCs suggests that this was not because of internal political economy reasons so much as because of external forces, essentially those created by the global financial system and fear of capital flight. This affected the subsequent recovery, but most importantly it had immediate impacts on health and other socio-economic conditions. The increased poverty and hunger that has resulted can be directly related to the constraints posed by the international financial architecture.

Figure 3



Source: IMF Fiscal Policy Monitor September 2023

Figure 4



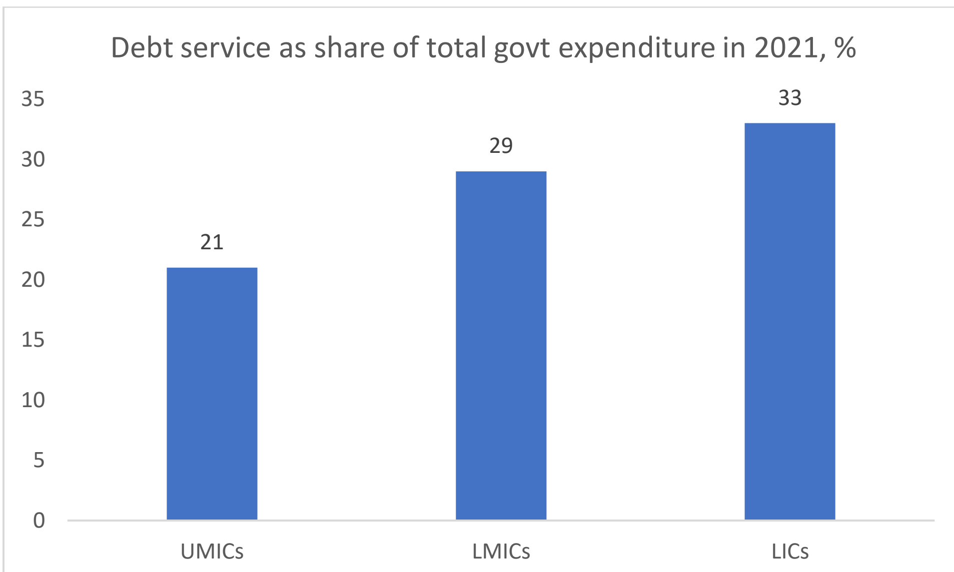
Source: IMF Fiscal Policy Monitor September 2023

Remarkably, however, despite this significant fiscal restraint among LMICs, they were nevertheless punished, quite brutally, by the private financial markets. Figure 4 shows the relative changes in sovereign bond spreads across high income countries and LMICs. In general LMICs have to pay a premium over prevailing global rates because of higher "risk perception", with the result that the poorest and most vulnerable countries often have to pay the highest interest rates.

While average spreads in HICs remained low (less than 1 basis point!) in LMICs the increase over the pandemic was dramatic, and has been between 600-700 basis points through 2022 and the first half of 2023. Such large spreads—which mean big increases in the costs of borrowing—are the result of an extremely unequal, even unjust financial system whereby HICs can get away with policies that LMICs cannot, and that even so, the LMICs are pummeled by private bond markets.

As a result, debt service payments on the legacy debt of LMICs now have to be squeezed out of economies that are already in straightened macroeconomic conditions and are facing multiple other problems. A study by Debt Relief International provides some indication of what this has meant.[4] Their study covers 144 countries, using data from various sources, including IMF and World Bank databases, as well as data on public budgets collected by Development Finance International. In 2021, fully one-third of the public spending of the poorest countries was for debt service payments, while the ratio was only 21 per cent for the richest countries (Figure 3).

Figure 5

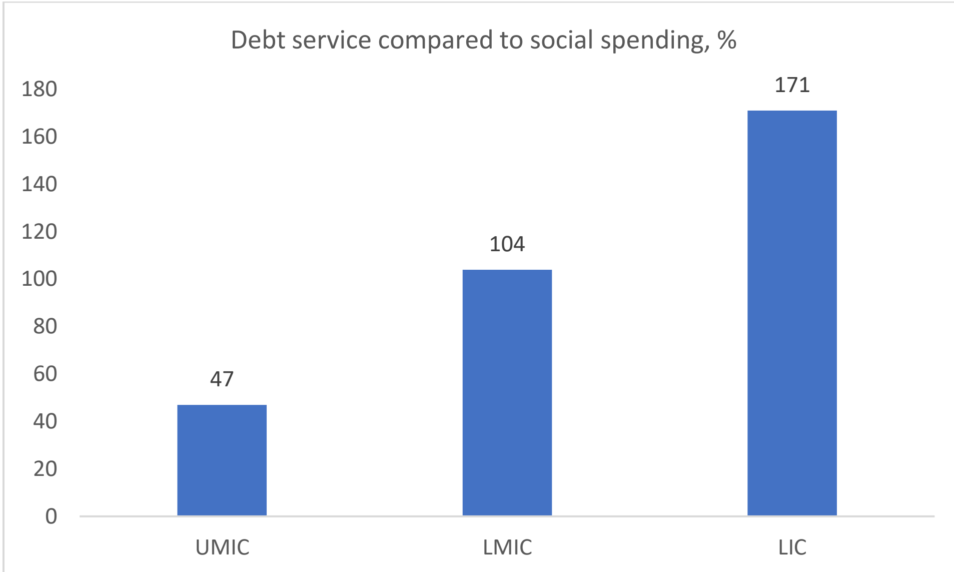


Source: https://www.kirkensnodhjelp.no/contentassets/c1403acd5da84d39a120090004899173/a-nordic-solution-to-the-new-debt-crisis-sep22.pdf

Figure 4 brings out what this meant in terms of meeting basic needs of citizens, by comparing debt service payments to core social spending (covering expenditure on education, health and social protection). In upper middle income countries, just under half of the amount of social spending was spent on debt service, but in lower middle income countries (where such spending is all the more required) the debt service payments were *more* than social spending. Shockingly, in the low income countries, debt service payments came to 171 per cent of social spending! These are not just the poorest countries, with significant proportions of absolutely hungry people, but also the most climate-vulnerable countries, which are already experiencing a range of climate-related shocks that affect ordinary people.

[4] https://www.kirkensnodhjelp.no/contentassets/c1403acd5da84d39a120090004899173/a-nordic-solution-to-the-new-debt-crisis-sep22.pdf

Figure 6



Source: https://www.kirkensnodhjelp.no/contentassets/c1403acd5da84d39a120090004899173/a-nordic-solution-to-the-new-debt-crisis-sep22.pdf

Note that this refers to ALL low and lower middle income countries, on average. The imperatives of debt service are therefore putting huge pressures on essential social spending of LMICs, even before they are forced into debt default or have to approach the IMF for assistance. The countries in actual debt distress face even more acute problems. As of 30 June 2023, more than half of LICs were at high risk of debt distress or already in debt distress. There are also several middle income countries involved, with defaults (e.g. Sri Lanka) or severe debt stress (Egypt, Pakistan, etc). Between 2020 and the first quarter of 2023, there were 14 default events across nine different sovereigns rated by Fitch (Argentina, Belarus, Ecuador, Lebanon, Ghana, Sri Lanka, Suriname, Ukraine, and Zambia). Governments in such countries face massive constraints in even continuing with earlier social spending levels, much less responding adequately to the need for greater social protection in the face of economic crises caused by debt distress.

The belated and half-hearted measures at debt relief that have been on offer so far have done little to resolve these or increase the fiscal space available to debtor countries. For example, apparently Sri Lanka and Zambia will continue to have to spend around 40 per cent of their budget on debt service *after* the supposed debt relief deals brokered by the IMF and the G20 Common Framework respectively. This is not just a deeply unjust and unbalanced system, it is also completely unsustainable. The consequences for increased poverty and material downslide in affected countries are obvious; and these have very strongly gendered impacts.

Food and finance

The report on the State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2023 makes for grim reading. 2022 was a terrible year for increasing food insecurity. Around 122 million more people faced hunger in 2022 than in 2019, before the global pandemic. This represents a deterioration in 2022 compared to the previous year, which tends to be explained by the rise in food prices. An estimated 42 per cent of the world's population—more than 3.1 billion people—were unable to afford a healthy diet in 2021. As always, women and girl children continue to be the worst affected in terms of nutrition indicators, as gender inequalities in food access continue to be pervasive, especially in the poorest parts of the world.

South Asia and Africa dominate the absolute numbers of hungry people, accounting for more than 82 per cent of the global total. But when looking at specific countries, another worrying pattern emerges: the countries experiencing the biggest increases in food insecurity are also those reeling under debt crises and facing severe climate change impacts.

This calls for a careful analysis of the factors driving hunger. Hunger reflects the interplay between lack of access to physical supplies of food, purchasing power and prices of food items. Physical supply is determined by local and national production, in which weather and climate shocks, agroecology, and conflicts all play a part. It also depends on the country's ability to import food, which is turn can be affected by transport shocks as well as foreign exchange constraints. The purchasing power of households and individuals is determined by the availability of income earning opportunities, money wages and self-employed incomes relative to food prices and other essentials, and the extent to which social protection is provided, for example through public provision of essential food items, food coupons, etc. Food prices are driven by national and international trade patterns.

There is now growing awareness of the local, national and global concentration of agribusinesses and their ability to influence global food prices.[5] In addition, there has been an effect of speculative activity in commodity futures markets and their impact on spot markets for global trade prices of food items. Both of these factors have been considered in detail in the latest [Trade and Development Report 2023] from UNCTAD, which confirms that "Corporate profits from financial operations appear to be strongly linked to periods of excessive speculation in commodities markets and to the growth of shadow banking… During the period of heightened price volatility since 2020, certain major food trading companies have earned record profits in the financial markets, even as food prices have soared globally and millions of people faced a cost-of-living crisis."

The nature of speculative activity makes it short-lived, and so the sharp spike in food prices that began in the run-up to the Ukraine War from late 2022 peaked in June 2023, and thereafter food prices (especially of wheat, which showed the sharpest increase) fell equally sharply. Food prices have been on a downward trend since then, such that by August 2023, FAO data show that wheat prices were well below their levels of two years previously.[6]

This should have made life easier for food importing countries—and indeed, several analysts concluded that such temporary spikes in food prices can be ignored precisely because they come down again relatively quickly. But for many such countries, domestic food prices have stayed very high or continued to rise even as global prices fell. This is not new—something similar happened in the wake of the global food crisis in 2007-08, when prices in many low and middle income countries kept increasing even after global food prices had come down significantly.

This can be traced to the ability to import food. The period from early 2022 onwards was marked by cascading shocks impacting several food importing countries: the end of the moratorium on sovereign debt repayments; the shift to tighter monetary policies and higher interest rates in rich countries, which led to capital flight out of these countries; the pressure on import bills coming from higher energy prices. Most of all, the rigidity of debt repayments has created a severe constraint on other essential imports. Meanwhile, these combined forces have also led to substantial currency devaluations, which make the local price of imported food that much higher.

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[5] https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/there-is-no-global-grain-shortage-by-jayati-ghosh-2023-08?barrier=accesspaylog
[6] https://www.fao.org/3/cc7752en/cc7752en.pdf

The FAO has identified ten countries where food prices registered extreme increases well above global trends in the period leading up to mid-September 2023: Argentina, Ecuador, Ghana, Malawi, Myanmar, Pakistan, South Sudan, Sudan, Zambia and Zimbabwe.[7] Note that these are all countries with major sovereign debt problems and severe foreign exchange shortages. Other than Ecuador (a dollarized economy) they have also experienced substantial currency depreciations since the start of 2022, ranging from 24 per cent for Zambia to 63 per cent for Pakistan to 86 per cent for Ghana to as much as 344 per cent for Argentina. (Calculated from CEIC database.) Only some of this can be attributed to domestic economic mismanagement: a bigger cause, which affects many more countries, is the impact of cross-border capital flows responding to macroeconomic policies in the major economies.

This means that, to combat hunger, it is not enough to try and control financial activity in global food markets, although that is obviously necessary. Countries will have to go back to other means of food price stabilization. This means focusing on national agrarian policies and international trade regimes, that (soil and climate permitting) ensure or regional national self-sufficiency in staple food items. Public grain buffer stocks to ensure physical supply within countries and regions are once again relevant and must be seriously considered. (The US uses strategic oil reserves to manage prices, but food is no less crucial for most countries.) Emergency reserves of food should be combined with social protection and food security safety nets within countries. This means a greater focus on public investment and incentivizing the private investment relevant for small holder sustainable agriculture.

To cope with global price fluctuations, a publicly-administered virtual reserve mechanism, with governments' direct intervention in the physical and the financial markets, is also a possibility. This would involve small, physical decentralized reserves complemented by a financial fund used for intervention in futures markets against price spikes/dips. In financialized commodity markets, as in currency markets, public intervention could even help market participants to recognize the (real) fundamentals. In addition, low and middle income countries clearly have to consider ways of managing short-term capital flows, particularly to prevent their destabilizing impact on domestic food prices.

Some conclusions and policy recommendations

There are strongly gendered differences in the impacts of economic programmes and policies, including those involved in strategies for economic adjustment associated with debt relief. It also suggests that many economic policies that are apparently "gender neutral" implicitly but effectively rely on gendered division of labour and the unpaid and underpaid work of women to cushion the felt severity of fiscal austerity and cutbacks in certain kinds of public expenditure and public provision. Ignoring these impacts is not only bad from the point of view of equity, women's welfare, and socio-economic justice; it can also result in worsening material conditions and lower chances of stable and sustainable economic recovery from a debt crisis, which is presumably the aim of debt relief. Therefore, it is necessary for debt relief packages to factor in such impacts explicitly, and be aware of the gendered differences that result in differing effects for men and women, boys and girls, and the resultant effects on wider economic and social outcomes.

When doing so, it is crucially important to avoid purely symbolic or relatively minor gestures that do little to improve the actual condition of women, within a wider package that makes them worse off. Unfortunately, this seems to have become the norm in much of the more recent "gender-aware" policy orientation, in which declarations of good intent and minor measures substitute for genuinely transformative approaches and policies. All too often, the incorporation of gender concerns is seen in terms of the inclusion of some specific women-oriented schemes or types of expenditure that target women and children. This is not just inadequate, it can even be counterproductive, especially if it distracts attention from the overall thrust of the conditionalities when they operate to impact women adversely. Some examples of such adverse

[7] Op cit.

impacts have been provided above. In such a situation, "do no harm" may be an even more important injunction, than "do good," especially if the declared "good" is relatively minor.

Such policies persist in conditionality associated with current debt relief programmes even in the midst of the pandemic. Analysis of the contents of recent and ongoing IMF agreements[i] that were all associated also with some form of debt relief (even if only rescheduling) has revealed some deeply concerning patterns. Between March and September 2020, 76 out of the 91 IMF loans negotiated with 81 countries involved cutting public expenditure in ways that could result in deep cuts to public healthcare systems and pension schemes, wage freezes and cuts for public sector workers such as doctors, nurses and teachers, as well as unemployment and other benefits, like sick pay. 9 countries, including Nigeria and Angola, have been asked to introduce or increase the collection of regressive value-added taxes (VAT) that fall disproportionately on the poor, and especially impact women adversely as described above. 14 countries, including Lesotho, Tunisia, Barbados and El Salvador, have been asked to freeze or cut public sector wages and/or jobs, affecting health care in countries that are already poorly served. In Ecuador, the IMF asked for reversal of increases in health care spending and stopping cash transfers to people unable to work. This indicates that, despite more positive statements from IMF leadership, at least in terms of the IMF's actual program implementation, none of the lessons of the past adjustment experiences—and the knowledge of the gender impacts, including those noted above—have been learned even during the current crisis.

Therefore, "thou shalt not" do certain things should be a more defining constraint on debt relief programmes. There are certain actions that must be avoided, which *cannot* simply be counterbalanced or compensated for by other positive actions ("thou shall") that purportedly benefit women, particularly in "targeted" ways. Some of the actions that should be avoided in any of the programmes associated with debt relief:

- Do not provide debt relief that is so small and so delayed that it has very little effect on state's fiscal capacity. The purpose (and volume and speed) of debt relief should be to ensure not only that levels of public spending are maintained, but that they are increased to counter the downward pressures created by the crisis. This means that the level of ambition in debt restructuring must be much higher than at present and recognise the need to involve private creditors in such restructuring.
- Imposing fiscal austerity measures should be avoided in general, because countercyclical policies are required during the downswing and debt relief measures should be directed towards ensuring such countercyclicality. Fiscal austerity and cuts in public spending are particularly unjustified in situations like the ongoing pandemic, in which substantial increases in public health spending and in economic recovery measures are urgently required. The typical argument that cuts in public spending are inevitable to undertake the adjustments required for stabilisation and external adjustment have been proved to be false, both by the past experience of developing countries and the current and ongoing policy practice in advanced countries. Advanced country governments have realised and now openly state that it is necessary for their economies to "grow out of the debt problem" rather than let debt servicing suppress incomes and recovery. There is no reason why the same logic should not apply to developing countries, which should also be allowed expansionary policies to enable them to grow out of debt.
- Do not insist on fiscal measures that explicitly or implicitly reduce spending on public provision of essential services – rather increase such spending (as below). In particular, any requirements of public spending cuts that reduce employment in public services or reduce wages of public workers, should be completely avoided, and all such spending should be ringfenced at the very minimum.
- Monetary policies should avoid becoming procyclical, with appropriate measures for internal debt relief, especially for MSMEs and women-owned small enterprises in informal credit arrangements.

- Do not allow/enable prices of essential commodities to increase, especially through regressive taxation measures like increasing VAT. These measures (which are still being recommended/enforced, as noted above) are anti-poor and anti-women, and also inhibit economic recovery.
- Do not expect specific programmes targeted to women/children to undo the damage created by broader macroeconomic policies that reduce employment and livelihoods. As far as possible, policies should be universal so as to prevent unjustified exclusion, especially of women and those already disadvantaged in other ways. The exception could be programmes that are geographically targeted (to particularly badly affected areas) or self-targeted in nature (like wage employment schemes). Universal access needs to be a key principle in public service provision.
- Avoid formalisation policies that do not benefit women workers, especially when they actually harm women in self-employment. Closely monitor policies like zoning that prevent informal women workers from plying their trade. Reduce requirements like online registration and digital payments and presence, unless prior and proactive efforts are made to enable less-literate women without adequate connectivity to access these.

Of course, there are positive measures that should be included in programmes and policies. Many of these are general principles that apply in all conditions, but they become particularly relevant in crisis conditions and are especially so during the current pandemic, which is fundamentally a health crisis that has spread to economic devastation. The current pandemic has resulted in massive economic downturns that are close to humanitarian catastrophe in many developing countries; but it can also serve as an opportunity to change course and develop a more positive agenda for our economic futures. Such a positive agenda is also urgently required to ensure that societies and economies will be resilient enough to face the emergence threats posed by climate change and the socio-political tensions generated by massively increased inequalities. Therefore, some of these elements should be incorporated into a positive national agenda:

- Change the structure of taxation by focussing on more progressive taxation, in particular through equitable taxation of multinationals (using unitary taxation with formulary apportionment), taxes on extreme wealth, taxes on financial transactions.
- Increase spending on health care and education. Ensure that all women workers in such public programmes receive proper wages and working conditions.
- Focus on universal access to food and nutrition, especially in situations where livelihood losses coincide with rising prices of food
- Bring in public employment programmes that ensure equal wages to men and women and expand the scope of such programmes to encompass services and all activities that improve the quality of life. Also include more “green” activities that address environmental concerns and help to mitigate and adapt to climate change.
- In banking regulation, consider specific requirement of women borrowers who are less likely to have collateral and land titles that provide access to credit.
- Recognise the very specific needs of women entrepreneurs, especially with regard to access to inputs and markets.
- Build in policies that enable greater associations and unions of women workers, both employed and self-employed. Enable and encourage the formation of producer and marketing co-operatives.

There are also important changes required in the international financial architecture, that would enable or encourage such national policies to be adopted. These include:

- Ensuring a genuine global financial safety net, as was originally envisioned in the Bretton Woods conference but has not been realised by the IMF. This would provide automatic assistance in the form of selective SDR allocations to countries meeting certain defined criteria, such as a climate shock, and dramatic terms of trade shock, or some other shock not of their own making, with associate estimate of the damage.

- Ensure a quick, speedy, and effective sovereign debt resolution mechanism.
- Much greater and tighter regulation of international financial markets, particularly commodity futures markets that affect the prices of essential commodities like food and fuel.

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[i] Spending, accountability, and recovery measures included in IMF Covid-19 loans", Oxfam Report, October 2020.