



Press Statement

Delegates to the 8th Zimbabwe Annual Debt Conference, convened in Masvingo (15 - 16 July 2026) adopted the Masvingo Declaration on Debt Justice and Sustainable Development. Delegates underscored that Zimbabwe's longstanding debt overhang is being compounded by a global polycrisis characterised by climate-related shocks, armed conflicts, geopolitical fragmentation, trade disputes, declining multilateral cooperation, widening inequality and heightened macroeconomic uncertainty. The conference ran under the theme, ***"Rethinking Sovereign Debt Management in Zimbabwe: Justice, sovereignty and people-centered socio-economic development in a global polycrisis."***

The delegates noted that Zimbabwe's Public and Publicly Guaranteed debt which is estimated at between US\$21 billion and US\$23 billion, with a growing domestic debt burden estimated at nearly US\$10 billion continue to constrain structural transformation, limit fiscal space, reduce investor confidence and compromise the State's ability to fulfil its constitutional and developmental obligations. Delegates emphasized that sovereign debt is not merely a macroeconomic issue, but a matter of justice, governance, democracy, human rights, intergenerational equity and national sovereignty, with unsustainable debt diverting public resources away from essential services such as health, education, social protection, infrastructure and local government development.

Conference Consensus

Delegates agreed that the global polycrisis is worsening sovereign debt vulnerabilities across Africa, as affordable development finance shrinks and climate finance remains dominated by loans rather than grants. They stressed that Zimbabwe's debt overhang continues to weaken sovereignty and developmental policy space, with debt servicing consuming 11% of mobilised revenues, crowding out productive investments and essential public services. Delegates further called for debt sustainability assessments to go beyond debt-to-GDP ratios to include foreign-exchange constraints, contingent liabilities, debt composition, repayment capacity and development outcomes.

The Conference highlighted urgent domestic challenges including weak public financial management, corruption, procurement irregularities, exchange-rate distortions, overpricing of public contracts, arrears accumulation and quasi-fiscal operations, which have worsened domestic indebtedness and weakened confidence in public finance. Delegates affirmed that debt is also a social justice and human rights issue, disproportionately affecting women, youth, persons with disabilities and vulnerable communities and undermining government's capacity to confront the **"five evils"**: poverty, diseases, ignorance, squalor and idleness. The Conference underscored that debt is a gender justice issue that increases unpaid care burdens and heightens risks such as GBV, including in mining communities.

Delegates welcomed progress under the Structured Dialogue Platform, while stressing that significant governance gaps remain and calling for stronger debt transparency, parliamentary oversight, effective Public Accounts Committee and Auditor-General functions, legal accountability for misuse of public resources, improved public access to debt information, regular public debt reporting and meaningful citizen participation. The Conference also acknowledged structural debt drivers and fiscal risks associated with land reform and compensation obligations and emphasized the need to strengthen agricultural productivity while safeguarding fiscal sustainability and protecting social spending. Delegates further noted that high public borrowing crowds out private sector investment, government arrears constrain liquidity and policy uncertainty undermines industrialisation. They also highlighted that debt has constrained investment in local government infrastructure including water, roads, sanitation, housing and public transport and that delayed devolution funding undermines local economic development.

Resolutions and Calls to Action

In the Masvingo Declaration, delegates resolved to advance:

- Reform of the global financial architecture, including support for Africa's collective advocacy for a United Nations Framework Convention on Sovereign Debt, comprehensive debt relief for countries facing unsustainable debt burdens, climate finance primarily as grants and highly concessional finance and reforms of international financial institutions to ensure equitable representation of African countries.
- Stronger domestic debt management and resource mobilisation, including comprehensive fiscal reforms, elimination of corruption and financial leakages, strengthened public financial management, progressive domestic resource mobilisation, combating illicit financial flows and aggressive tax avoidance, modernised tax administration through digital technologies and transparent leveraging of mineral wealth. This includes the establishment of appropriate sovereign and sinking funds for strategic debt reduction while ensuring future borrowing finances productive investments capable of generating economic returns.
- Transparency, accountability and responsible borrowing, including comprehensive public debt audits (including odious and non-performing debt), publication of complete debt information, strengthened parliamentary oversight, enhanced independence and capacity of oversight institutions, strengthened whistleblower protection and anti-corruption mechanisms and compliance with transparency, value for money and public participation principles.
- Protection of social spending, including ring-fencing health, education, social protection and local government financing during debt resolution, continued piloting of a social registry for cash transfer targeting and placing citizens at the centre of debt policy through meaningful participation.
- Gendered approaches to debt and public finance, including gender impact assessments for existing and new debt (including impacts on unpaid care work), stronger people power and participation of women and youth in development dialogues, increased women representation in decision making and gender responsive budgets at national and local levels.
- Management of structural fiscal risks, including transparent land compensation and tenure reforms, fiscal sustainability of long-term compensation commitments and accelerated reforms under the Structured Dialogue Platform.

- Support for private sector-led growth, including clearing verified domestic arrears to businesses, restructuring debt maturity profiles, improving access to affordable finance, reducing policy uncertainty, strengthening investor confidence and promoting industrialisation, beneficiation and value addition.
- Regional cooperation, including strengthening Africa's collective voice through joining the Borrowers Platform and the Debt Managers Network, implementing the Common African Position on Debt at national level and implementing commitments in the Lomé and Harare Declarations.
- A sustainable debt future, ensuring debt creates its own repayment capacity through productive investments, maintaining adequate fiscal space for emergencies and embedding the Common African Position on Debt into national budgets, national debt strategies, Vision 2030, National Development Strategy II, Agenda 2063, the Sustainable Development Goals and Zimbabwe's constitutional obligations.

Closing

Delegates reaffirmed that debt justice is indispensable to national sovereignty, democratic governance, human dignity and sustainable development. They committed to advancing transparent and accountable debt governance, strengthening domestic resource mobilisation, promoting productive borrowing, protecting social investments, supporting private sector development and advocating for a fair and equitable global financial architecture.

Delegates called upon the Government of Zimbabwe, Parliament, development partners, regional institutions, civil society, academia, the private sector and citizens to work collectively to implement the Masvingo Declaration and accelerate debt resolution in a manner that safeguards human rights, restores public trust, expands fiscal space and advances inclusive and sustainable development for present and future generations.

About ZIMCodd

The Zimbabwe Coalition on Debt and Development is a social and economic justice coalition working to promote citizen agency, accountable governance, debt justice, fair taxation and equitable development in Zimbabwe and Southern Africa.

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