

Climate Debt and Reparations in Africa: A Feminist Narrative of Collective Action

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I come from a continent that contributes less than 4% of global greenhouse gas emissions, yet we lose between USD 7 and 15 billion every year to the impacts of climate change; losses that could climb to USD 50 billion by 2030 if the world does not change course (UNECA, 2022; AfDB, 2021). This is the imbalance that defines the climate debt conversation: Africa did not create this crisis, yet our people pay the highest price. In the Sahel, women tilling parched soils wrestle with unending droughts; in southern Africa, fisherfolk and youth rebuild again and again after devastating floods. They carry the heaviest weight while being shut out of the very financial systems designed to respond to crisis.

When I joined the four-day convening (*the Southern Africa Convening on Climate Debt and Reparations*), through the support of [WoMin Africa](#) and [ACJC](#), I witnessed how powerful it is when testimonies meet evidence, and when science is linked directly to justice. Civil society and grassroots leaders sat together in one room, confronting truths too often ignored. For me, this gathering was not only a dialogue; it was a space where reparations were redefined, not as charity, but as the repair of historic injustice and a pathway toward a fairer future.

Day 1

Whose Memories Count? Testimonies, Trauma, and the Politics of Loss

The opening day created space for testimonies that humanized the climate crisis. Songs and rituals carried the weight of collective grief, reminding us that culture remains an anchor in times of rupture. Women narrated storms that washed away homes, floods that drowned livelihoods, and droughts that stripped land bare. These accounts are not isolated tragedies. They reveal structural vulnerabilities produced by centuries of extractive economies and unfulfilled global commitments.

For women, particularly those in rural and coastal areas, the crisis translates into daily survival choices—deciding whether to save seed for planting or trade it for food, whether to rebuild after a flood or migrate to uncertain cities. A feminist analysis reminds policymakers that women are not only vulnerable populations but also frontline innovators, rebuilding food systems, water management practices, and local economies when institutions falter. Testimonies from Day 1 highlight the urgent need for reparations that go beyond compensation, moving toward structural transformation where local resilience is funded and protected as a matter of justice, not charity.

Day 2

Who Owes What? Science, History, and the Feminist Question of Responsibility

The second day centered on the science of climate change, but also on the politics of knowledge. Participants learned how greenhouse gases accumulate, trapping heat and disrupting rainfall patterns. The data is clear: Africa contributes less than 4% of global emissions, yet faces some of the harshest impacts, including declining crop yields, extreme droughts, and recurrent flooding. For smallholder farmers, especially women, this means increasing food insecurity and deeper poverty traps.

Science opened the door, but justice reframed the debate. Conversations shifted to historical responsibilities, linking the rise of industrial economies in the Global North to present-day climate impacts in Africa. Country representatives demanded recognition of this debt. Ghana argued for debt cancellation, Zambia called for climate reparations to be channeled directly to affected states, and South Africa stressed community-level accountability for any loss and damage funds. Civil society groups urged for stronger advocacy platforms to prevent elite capture of resources. Feminist voices clarified that reparations must address gendered inequalities by ensuring funds reach women farmers, caregivers, and youth, who are most burdened by the crisis.

Day 3

Justice, Politics and the Limits of False Solutions

Day 3 blended art with advocacy through theatre that dramatized the politics of climate debt. Performers personified nations, exposing the unequal power dynamics between historical polluters and vulnerable states. This method reinforced what communities have long argued: climate debt is not a voluntary contribution but a legally and morally binding obligation.

Debates also exposed the dangers of false solutions. Proposals such as carbon trading and geoengineering promise efficiency but risk deepening inequality by shifting accountability from polluters to vulnerable communities. Women leaders emphasized that these approaches often sideline indigenous knowledge and undermine agroecology, which remain the most sustainable pathways for adaptation. The feminist perspective insisted on prioritizing food sovereignty, land rights, and community-led adaptation over market-driven mechanisms. Policymakers and donors are urged to reconsider investment strategies: channel funds into proven, low-cost solutions that strengthen ecosystems and livelihoods, rather than experimental projects that reinforce dependency.

Day 4

Counting the Debt and Designing Pathways for Reparations

The final day moved from narrative to negotiation. Discussions focused on the economics of climate finance, revealing stark disparities between needs and actual flows. Studies estimate Africa requires over USD 250 billion annually to adapt and mitigate, yet current finance commitments fall drastically short. In Southern Africa, the figure averages only USD 33 per person per year, far below the cost of building resilient infrastructure, supporting smallholder farmers, or safeguarding water systems.

Participants outlined demands that are pragmatic and implementable. Finance must take the form of grants, not loans, to avoid compounding sovereign debt burdens. Accountability mechanisms must ensure that resources reach women and marginalized groups, not just national treasuries or urban

elites. Regional cooperation emerged as a critical strategy: African states should coordinate demands in global forums and build a unified stance on reparations. The feminist analysis provided a diplomatic yet uncompromising message—justice requires more than pledges. It requires measurable transfers of resources, rooted in transparency, gender equity, and long-term community resilience.

Conclusion: Towards a Feminist Diplomacy on Climate Debt

This dialogue affirms that climate reparations are both a moral and an economic necessity. For policymakers, the evidence is clear: without systemic investment in adaptation and loss-and-damage finance, Africa's development goals remain unattainable. For donors and international institutions, the lesson is that finance must be structured to empower, not entrench dependency.

The conversations captured in this report affirm that climate debt is not an abstract idea but a moral, political, and economic obligation owed to African peoples whose futures are being compromised by a crisis they did not create. The call for reparations is a call for justice, one that demands debt cancellation, direct financial transfers, and institutional reforms that empower communities rather than reinforce dependency.

A feminist diplomacy calls for accountability that is practical, community-driven, and rooted in equity. Women's experiences of survival and innovation should guide financing frameworks, while hard data on economic costs ensures that advocacy remains credible in institutional spaces. Reparations are not a gift to Africa; they are overdue payments for a climate debt that continues to grow.

I cannot close this account without acknowledging the collective effort that made these dialogues possible. The dedication of the organisers and facilitators, especially WoMin Africa and ACJC, was matched by the courage of grassroots leaders whose knowledge and lived realities gave the conversations depth and urgency.

With the support of partners, sponsors, and allied institutions, what might have been another workshop was transformed into a living space of resistance, vision, and hope. I left with the conviction that the responsibility no longer rests with us alone. The path forward now lies in the hands of policymakers, donors, and international institutions who must find the courage and fairness to treat reparations not as a gesture of goodwill, but as the necessary step toward a just and sustainable future.

Many thanks to all who made this gathering possible; your vision has strengthened my own resolve to keep pushing for climate justice and reparations.