

REPORT

AFRODAD Media Initiative Training

21-23 March 2022



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Acronyms and abbreviations

AFCOD	: AFRODAD Conference on Debt and Development
AFRODAD	: African Forum and Network on Debt and Development
AFROMEDI II	: AFRODAD Média Initiative
CEMAC	Economic Community of Central African States
COVID-19	:
CRADEC	African Regional Centre for Endogenous Development
CSSR	: Supervision, Monitoring and Accountability Framework
<i>DTCs</i>	: Decentralised Territorial Collectivities
DRM	: Mobilisation of Domestic Resources
DTS	: Special Drawing Rights
IFFs	: Illicit Financial Flows
IMF	: International Monetary Fund
G20	: Group of 19 major world economies plus the European Union
IADM	: Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative
ISAD	:
ISDS	: Debt Service Suspension Initiative
M-DNA	: Media Debt Network Africa
MINEPAT	: Ministry of Economy and Territory Planning
SDGs	: Sustainable Development Goals
OMD	: Millennium Development Goal
PCTC	: Common Platform for Work and Collaboration
PPTE	: Highly Indebted Poor Country
TFP	: Technical and Financial Partners
UNICEF	: United Nations Children's Fund
USD	: U.S. Dollar



1. Background and introduction

Africa is particularly affected by the global crisis. Growth on the continent has contracted to -1.5% in 2020 from 5.2% in 2019 (IMF, 2020), due to the downward trend in global commodity demand. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the world since late 2019 and has triggered a crisis that, beyond its complexity, in 2020 gives signals of a definite extension. According to the October 2021 edition of the Public Finance Monitor, Emerging and developing countries face complex challenges, with less favourable growth prospects, limited fiscal space and increased refinancing risks due to shortened public debt maturities.

With the ongoing COVID-19, and other unexpected shocks, African governments are losing the fiscal space they need, as well as the benefits of previous tax reforms or efforts to reduce illicit financial flows. This has a negative impact on domestic resource mobilisation (DRM). The international debt architecture is biased and appears to favour creditors who profit from debt.

The pandemic, beyond its negative effects on economies, has highlighted the need for different national, regional and international actors, including the media, to come together to address the crisis. The various actors must work together to create or promote the necessary processes for an equitable economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and prevent future economic crises. Concerted media efforts beyond the national level have also become crucial, as the socio-economic challenges facing countries have roots that can be better understood and addressed through a clear understanding of the debt ecosystem at different levels.

1.1 Power of the media

Journalists play a very important role in informing the different actors in society. A significant part of the population does not have easy access to information, even though this is a constitutional right. Journalists' awareness of public debt issues is still lacking in the African and Cameroonian media, which is the reason for the production of articles and reports on public debt and financing for development of average quality. However, media men, with their potential, should play a leading role in informing public opinion.

In 2021, AFRODAD launched the annual Pan-African Media Forum on Debt and Development, with the main objective of building the capacity of media



practitioners in understanding debt and development issues.

In March 2022, AFRODAD in collaboration with its partners in 20 Sub-Saharan African countries (Congo, Mozambique and Zimbabwe, Burundi, Cameroon, Chad, Gambia, Guinea, Ghana, Kenya, South Sudan, Togo, Zambia, Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Mali, Malawi and Senegal) is launching AFROMEDI II. This is a pan-African forum that aims to build the capacity of journalists on debt and development. This action is a continuation of previous training sessions for media practitioners organised by AFRODAD in Lesotho, Malawi, Rwanda, Tanzania and Zambia.

AFROMEDI II was an opportunity to launch the Media-Debt Network Africa (M-DNA), a platform where journalists can meet to exchange views on issues related to debt and financing for development.

2. JUSTIFICATION, OBJECTIVES AND EXPECTED OUTCOME

2.1 Justification

Africa is threatened by a debt crisis: two decades after debt restructuring under the HIPC initiative and MDRI. Public debt has been rising steadily on the African continent and in all regional economic communities for over 20 years. It has risen from about USD 192 billion in 2000 to over USD 1.5 trillion in 2020. This is well above the region's revenue potential of USD 43.2 billion and USD 457 billion over the same period. This clearly shows that African countries have borrowed beyond their revenue potential. A situation that has been aggravated by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

Beyond the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative, other debt relief mechanisms have been put in place. These include:

- The Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative (MDRI) which includes the Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSI) deferring debt payments until December 2021 to allow countries to save resources to combat the adverse effects of COVI-19;
- The G20 Common Framework for dealing with debt beyond SADI, which has received only a half-hearted response from member states on debt restructuring.

The IMF has also issued USD 650 billion in Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) of which African countries receive only 5% and of which about SDR 100 billion is still expected to be recycled to low-income countries through IMF channels, such as the Poverty Reduction and Growth Fund and the Resilience and Sustainability Fund.



As it stands, these initiatives have not really achieved the desired results in terms of addressing the African debt predicament. This situation calls for action within the media community to contribute to policies aimed at ensuring debt sustainability in Africa.

Addressing debt and development finance issues in the context of recovery from the COVID-19 crisis requires thinking beyond governments. All stakeholders, mainly the media, need to be fully involved in the process, to ensure greater effectiveness.

The media, as the fourth estate, must positively influence society on various issues related to the improvement of the welfare of citizens. In this regard, journalists have to play a very important role in conveying the right information to all stakeholders. To do this better, journalists, who are the weapon of democracy acting as a watchdog to protect the public interest against malpractices, must see their capacities strengthened on debt and development issues, because, to better explain and sensitise the population on these problems, they must have a perfect mastery of them. As a pan-African organisation, there is a need for AFRODAD to intensify capacity building at the continental level while comprehensively linking the national, regional, continental and global aspects of public debt, their interconnection and impacts, their interconnection and ripple effects on economies and, most importantly, on citizens. The first edition of AROMEDI I took place in June 2021, in partnership with Action Aid, Oxfam and other national partners. The Pan-African Media Conference mobilised four hundred and nine (409) journalists from various African countries.

The conference is gradually evolving into an in-depth educational workshop that will ensure the transfer and use of knowledge relevant to media champions in promoting a new debt movement that positions "Africa as a rule maker, not a rule taker".

2.2 Objectives

The objectives of this workshop are:

- Contribute to journalists' existing knowledge and understanding of debt management and related financing issues in Africa;
- Exchange innovative and effective techniques for monitoring and reporting on public debt and related issues;
- Build a network of journalists capable of reporting adequately on debt management and related issues at national, regional and continental levels;



2.3 Expected results

- Increased number of media publications on debt management issues;
- Debates and discussions on public debt issues;
- Increased number of media actors joining the network of journalists on debt and related issues.

3. PROCESS AND RESULTS

3.1 Organisation and format of the workshop

The AFRODAD Media Initiative (AFROMEDI) II involved at least 20 African countries, some of which are in debt crisis or at risk of being so. The Cameroon chapter brought together in a mixed format, about thirty participants from the media, administrations, civil society, academia and the private sector at Centre Jean XXII, Mvolyé" in Yaoundé, and the rest connecting virtually from other places in Cameroon, through the Zoom.

On the first day (21 March 2022), after a local preliminary plenary session in Yaoundé, during which the issues and objectives of the conference were explained to journalists and other participants who had not taken part in previous events with AFRODAD in collaboration with ADIN, the Cameroonian participants logged on in Nairobi for the main opening ceremony and followed the opening speech by Jason BRAGANZA, AFRODAD's Executive Director. His statement was then commented on in another local plenary session. Participants then reviewed the outcomes of previous events on debt, including the Pan-African Media Conference on Debt and Development 2021, the CEMAC joint declaration on debt, and formulated their expectations for the AFRODAD Media Initiative (AFROMEDI) II, reflected in the following questions:

- The issue of debt and its conditionalities, is it possible to separate debt and conditionality?
- Are national budgets sincere?
- Why is debt not useful in the context of the teachers' strike in Cameroon?
- How do African states contract debt?
- How do African states use the contracted debt?
- How does the no-objection notice constitute a handicap in the debt spending process?

Thereafter, for the rest of the day and the last two days, the Cameroon chapter of the AFRODAD Media Initiative (AFROMEDI) II followed the main conference programme, logging in to Nairobi to follow the presentations as planned, and returning from time to time to the local plenary for discussions and comments before logging in again for their concerted contribution. The local plenaries were moderated



by Martin TSOUNKEU, the local moderator, while the discussions around the different agenda items followed brief presentations by some local experts present in Yaoundé: Mr DOK (expert); Jean MBALLA MBALLA from the Regional Centre for Endogenous Development (CRADEC), Mr NGUELE UNICEF Nutrition Ambassador, Ms MEVOA.... From the Ministry of Economy and Territory Planning (MINEPAT) and Mr. MBASSI ONDOUA expert in Community Development.



During this process, Cameroonian participants took the opportunity to collectively participate in the sessions broadcast from Nairobi and build their national perspective on each of the issues on the agenda. Finally, after the main closing session in Nairobi, the Cameroonian participants, meeting in a local plenary, discussed the recommendations and the way forward and officially launched the CAMEROON_MEDIA DEBT NETWORK AFRICA. The launch was followed by a workshop on the tools and modes of communication used to reach the maximum number of citizens. The participants started to enrich the platform's database with press, web, TV, radio and illustrated press articles. They also participated in an evaluation session of the event.

3.2 Results

The substantial results of the AFRODAD Media Initiative (AFROMEDI) II, Cameroon Chapter, are detailed below:

3.2.1 On debt conditionality

According to Agence Ecofin ¹, between 2008 and 2018, the average public debt of African countries rose from 38% to 56% of the continent's gross domestic product (GDP). Despite debt relief measures such as the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative and the Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative (MDRI), in addition to the framework defined by the Paris Club, notably the definition of borrower requirements and technical objections, Cameroon and several other Central African countries are experiencing inflation, deterioration of the social fabric with a strong impact on the impoverishment of the populations. The main cause noted is the conditionality of the debt, which sometimes renders the expenditure ineffective and consequently the debt becomes useless because it does not contribute to the recovery of the socio-economic fabric. The main question that arises is whether it is possible to separate debt and conditionality?

¹ <https://www.agenceecofin.com/finances-publiques/0102-73412-en-lespace-de-10-ans-la-dette-publique-africaine-est-passee-de-38-a-56-du-pib>



It should be noted that debt is intrinsically linked to conditionality and one cannot be thought of without the other. In the same way, debt only retains its status if it is accompanied by a number of conditionalities. The no-objection notice is one of the debt conditionalities that undermines and annihilates the effectiveness of structuring or social projects implemented in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly the problem of foreign experts with exorbitant mission expenses and salaries throughout the duration of the project. Nevertheless, it is possible to adjust debt conditionalities and borrowing conditions. This depends on the expertise of the actors involved in the negotiation. As a proposal for better conditionalities the participants of the Cameroon chapter formulated:

- The need for developing countries to diversify the profile of debt negotiators and to involve different categories of actors (women, youth, parliamentarians, civil society, specific professional bodies, etc.);
- Maturation of projects at the local level before engaging in any debt negotiation process;
- Awarding of contracts to local companies;
- Integration of civil society advocacy and their involvement in negotiation processes
- Involve communities in pre-negotiation discussion sessions in order to find solutions that reflect the realities of the "world below";
- Ensure that projects that have already been matured are implemented by experts

3.2.2 The generalisation of debt characteristics to Sub-Saharan African countries

The observation that emerged from Paul OKUMU's presentation was the generalisation of debt characteristics in most African countries. Indeed, the debts contracted by these countries are not for development purposes but rather to sink into a vicious circle of endless interest rates. Developed countries in the process of indebtedness propose interest rates that are not favourable to developing countries. The role of the media is therefore to raise awareness and involve the population. This action of the media can only be effective if and when the media men:

- Have reliable sources of information;
- Conduct outreach research and ask good questions;
- Organise talk shows between the donor and the population to present the contours of the partnership;
- Ensure that citizens are informed through the use of social networks;
- Identify neutral and objective experts who can enlighten them.



It was also recalled that African countries need to resurrect the project of creating an African Fund to which they can borrow. Find an alternative mechanism to finance their development endogenously. It is also necessary to rely on participatory governance in order to effectively mobilise Domestic Resources (DRM) and ensure transparent management.

In the light of these perspectives developed above, it is clear that African countries do not have a fundamental need to go into debt. The avenue of the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrates this sufficiently. Rather, they need to collaborate with the so-called developed countries, particularly in terms of the transfer of skills, techniques and knowledge. In this context, the notion of development aid is becoming obsolete and inoperative, in the sense that it is always accompanied by conditionalities that lead to a vicious circle of indebtedness.

3.2.3 Media, communities and debt

One of the articulations of the Cameroon chapter of the AFRODAD Media Initiative (AFROMEDI) II, was the presentation of the report of the Study on the evaluation of community participation in public management in the Decentralised Territorial Collectivities (DTC) in Cameroon. The objective of the presentation of this report during this forum is to better understand the context of the debt in relation to the participation of civil society and grassroots communities. It is noted that Cameroonian civil society is active in the production of quality data on grassroots initiatives. This data is intended to support government initiatives and to document them. This is happening in a context where the resources allocated to the DTCs are becoming more and more limited, despite the repeated borrowing by the state to boost its development and the well-being of the population through development projects. This context makes it possible to question the debt convergence criterion and the process of allocating available resources. The actors present at the workshop noted the lack of objectivity in the way funds are used as a result of the debts contracted. This difficulty is the consequence of projects being registered for funding without having been matured beforehand. In addition to this difficulty, there is budgetary governance, which benefits from the opaque system of debt conditionalities to accentuate the sources of corruption and misappropriation of public funds. This has led to a situation where development projects do not meet the needs of grassroots communities.



Nevertheless, according to the report on the evaluation of community participation in the DTCs, civil society is organising itself and is active in providing concrete solutions to their daily problems. There is the Common Platform for Work and Collaboration (PCTC) and the Monitoring, Supervision and Accountability Framework (CSSR), which ensures:

“monitoring of actions implemented at community level in accordance with the principle of responsibility, the enhancement of local capacities, the existence of a shared vision and, above all, accountability through the questioning of responsibilities and monitoring, in particular of compliance with identified needs” (Report 2022, P.33).

These frameworks help to strengthen government action in monitoring, vigilance on public spending, and highlighting the real needs of communities.

Some of the shortcomings noted in this study are methodological. The study is limited to a few disparately selected DTCs (12), and the diversification of the respondents' profile is not sufficiently representative of the realities of DTCs in Cameroon. However, the results of the study are still relevant given its operational character and its productivity in evaluating the actions of the DTCs that have undertaken the integration and implementation of the study's recommendations in the operationalisation of their actions at the local level. The recommendations formulated to improve the study report are the following:

- Be explicit in presenting the context to show how civil society can effectively contribute to endogenous resource mobilisation,
- Improve the context by highlighting the context of implementation of the SDGs following the MDGs;
- Better detail the context and respect the sampling done;
- Mitigate bias and explain how mitigation has been done.



Community participation becomes an effective and sustainable way to reduce the debt burden and/or move from unnecessary debt to more effective debt that allows for economic growth and the well-being of people. It also becomes a means to reduce Illicit Financial Flows (IFFs) and promote responsible fiscal governance. The media has a crucial role to play in reporting civil society actions and popularising good practices to communities and decision-makers. They also have a role in reorienting public opinion by asking good questions and committing themselves not to be propaganda media, but rather information and education media.

3.2.4 Stop the Bleeding: the role of women and young people

3.2.4.1 *The role of the woman*

The gender perspective in taxation was discussed. The question that fuelled the discussions was: how can gender issues be addressed when talking about debt?

There were five discussion points:

- Access to credit;
- Lack of guarantee for access to finance;
- Promotion of women in low taxation;
- Removing women and young people from the group of social cadets, i.e. to carry out positive discrimination in order to close the gap;
- Addressing the issue of youth by dissociating it from that of women.

Indeed, women have little access to credit because of the conditionalities and guarantees that are required. This prevents women, who today represent 52% of the population of Cameroon, from contributing considerably to the taxation process. In the Stop the Bleeding initiative, women have a role to play, especially in the management of strategic spheres of internal fundraising (taxation).

3.2.4.2 *The role of young people*

Another question that arose was how to sufficiently involve young people in the issues of debt, financing, taxation

? This question stems from the observation that questions of taxation, debt and development financing are taboo for young people. The social representations with regard to these issues show that they consider these subjects to be the responsibility of politicians or, better still, of older people. However, these are subjects which, if understood, will allow a better understanding of certain urgent issues for young people. In particular the difficulties of employability, the porous fabric of entrepreneurship, and the mismatch between training and employment. Educating young people about these issues is crucial to strengthening the mechanisms for



combating IFFs and contributing to more effective civil society advocacy.

The following proposals will improve the participation of young people in Stop the Bleeding processes:

- Build the capacity of young people on financial education, IFFs, public wealth, taxation and land issues;
- The media should inform and sensitise young people on their role and responsibility in the development of the country, using youth communication channels (social networks);
- The need to reform the social models conveyed by the media;
- The promotion of positive youth actions and their popularisation.

3.2.4.3 *Media as rule-makers*

The positioning of the media on the chessboard of governance reduces them to organs of reception and application of rules. Yet the media has the capacity to shape public opinion and thus become a 'rule maker'. This is in line with AFRODAD's belief that the media has considerable power to influence decision-makers, which must be explored to the millimetre in order to promote social responsibility and good governance.

The missions of the media being to inform, educate and train, there is a fundamental work to do. First of all, the media must be trained on the problem of debt and interested in the issue, in order to enable them to better carry out the awareness-raising work to be done at the grassroots level. The following proposals were made:

- Identify sources/databases for reliable information research;
 - Raising alerts on urgent development issues;
 - Flood communication channels with what is useful and uplifting;
 - Plan a number of missions to raise awareness: the media must have a discourse that will raise awareness, but also to raise consciousness;
 - Use the means of communication to reach the most young people (social networks) and be present there while adapting to the usual modes used to get the message across ;
 - Develop and adopt a national media policy;
- To form a platform of media interested in debt and development issues.

These recommendations preceded the launch of the CAMEROON MEDIA DEBT NETWORK AFRICA platform on 23 March 2022 in Nairobi and in the 20 countries that participated in AFROMEDI II.

4. CAMEROON MEDIA DEBT NETWORK AFRICA

The launch of this platform in Cameroon made it possible to reflect on its mode of operation, its financing, and the data production strategy.



A few questions were raised during the meeting:

- How to mobilise resources to make the CAMEROON MEDIA DEBT NETWORK AFRICA functional?
- How to reconcile the political views of the different actors and media men who will constitute the platform?
- What strategy should be adopted to recycle and update the collection, processing and online dissemination methodologies to make the CAMEROON MEDIA DEBT NETWORK AFRICA effective?
- How can the different country platforms be brought together to have a common African media vision on debt, their mechanisms, and monitoring ?

It should be noted that CAMEROON MEDIA DEBT NETWORK AFRICA is an autonomous entity. It is financed mainly through an internal mobilisation strategy of its own funds, as well as through subsidies from TFPs.

Recirculation will take place as and when required using innovative communication methods (Zoom, Google Meet, Microsoft team). A WhatsApp group has been created for this purpose to allow all platform members to be in permanent contact. A workshop was also organised to allow the different members of the platform to experiment with the data production mode. In this framework, the platform is organised in 5 categories of media (written press, illustrative press, radio, television media, online media), civil society and experts. They should collaborate in the production process in order to disseminate quality content.



CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The AFRODAD Media Initiative (AFROMEDI) II enabled Cameroonian participants, meeting in Yaoundé and connected from other locations in Cameroon, to interact with other participants from across Africa to share views on how best to make the media relevant to the debt advocacy process in Africa. It was an opportunity for journalists and media practitioners to build capacity and share best practices on debt reporting issues and discuss how to organise themselves to produce quality information. The Cameroon chapter of the AFRODAD Media Initiative (AFROMEDI) has far exceeded its objectives of contributing to journalists' knowledge and understanding of debt, exchanging innovative and effective monitoring and reporting techniques, building a network of journalists capable of reporting adequately on debt management and related issues. It also triggered a dynamic movement on the part of the Cameroonian media to engage in collective work at the continental level. They understood that the stakes were high and committed themselves to immediate action in collaboration with other stakeholders, including the DTCs, the committee of experts, and civil society. Apart from

the African Borrowing Charter, which was presented to AFCOD and recognised as a powerful reference tool for media publications, with a view to making change on debt a reality across Africa, the report of the Study on the Evaluation of Community Participation in Public Management in Decentralised Territorial Collectivities (DTCs) in Cameroon was added to the list of information tools. To this end, they expect AFRODAD to continue to support their actions and to invest in maintaining the interactive continental MEDIA DEBT NETWORK AFRICA,

with living components at the country level.

