

June 23: We celebrate the INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC SERVICES DAY

Theme: Who cares for the future?

To: Political and administrative authorities,
Public service executives and
The community of humanitarian actors

Actionaid DRC is an autonomous non-governmental organization, member of the global ActionAid federation which works for social justice, gender equality and poverty eradication. With our experience in humanitarian responses, working to support Internal displaced people, women forums and indigenous people to building sustainable resilient environment and women livelihood.

It is clear that COVID-19 will have a dramatic impact on public finances in the short and medium term in our country. We know that this is an especially intense period for countries as they try to secure resources for desperately needed services in a difficult environment.

In DRC's context, on average women spend four hours and 25 minutes daily doing unpaid care and domestic work, in comparison to men's average of just one hour and 23 minutes.

Globally this is changing by less than a minute per year. If properly valued this work would constitute at least 9% of global GDP or US\$11 trillion.

In the DRC context, there is still a lot of gaps to consider especially:

- When women spend several hours per day caring for children, provision of free public schools and early childcare can be transformative. When women are expected to care for the sick and elderly at home, access to health services can reduce the burden. When women spend hours collecting water, access to clean water close to home can transform lives. Indeed, the provision of gender responsive public services is key both to delivering on human rights and the Sustainable Development Goals, and to transforming women's lives. Quality provision of early childcare, public education, health care, water and sanitation, are crucial – alongside investments in energy, agriculture and social protection.
- The health and economic crises triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the massive displacement of the population will exacerbate weaknesses in the DRC's health system and livelihoods; put the lives of more poor and vulnerable citizens on the line.
- Evidence shows that the country had a significant shortage of health workers before the COVID-19 pandemic hit.
- The WHO finds that the numbers of doctors, nurses and midwives per 10,000 population in the Democratic Republic of Congo are substantially lower than the WHO's recommended thresholds. According to the latest figures available, the country had 0.74 doctors (2016) per 10,000 population compared to a recommended threshold of 15, 11.10 nurses (2018) per 10,000 population compared to a threshold of 30, and 0.23 midwives (2016) per 10,000 population compared to a threshold of 3.
- The WHO also estimates that the DRC will face a shortage of 200,000 to 300,000 nurses in 2030. This projected gap represents more than double the country's total number of nurses in 2018 (the

most recent data available). This is a steep hill to climb in a 12-year period and would require considerable political will and financial investment.

Unfortunately, around the world and particularly in Africa, different public services have been chronically underfunded for decades, leaving countries unable to deliver on people's rights, way off target for achieving the SDGs and unable to respond as effectively as they could to COVID-19.

We continue to salute the work that the government is already putting to intervention measures in place including:

- The week of April 12th, the Prime Minister approved a three-month VAT exemption on pharmaceutical products and basic goods, as well as the easing of some tax measures to support business and making donations to the country's COVID relief fund tax free.
- The following week the country also adopted measures to provide water and electricity free of charge for two months for households, hospitals and micro, small and medium-sized enterprises affected by closures, prohibit evictions for nonpayment of rent between March and June, and to suspend VAT on the production and sale of basic goods.
- We congratulate the courage and dedication of the health workers who are on the front line of the COVID-19 response.

We are writing to you on Public Service Day (June 23) to suggest measures to avoid a collapse in the delivery of essential public services:

1. **Government institutional services should necessarily provide health care, nutrition, access to land and other care to internally displaced persons affected by the conflict**, including women and girls despite their status, and guarantee equal access to public services and to the services necessary for living in dignity.
2. **Strengthening the social justice and health sectors to ensure effective management of cases of gender-based violence (GBS)**; the government should invest in capacity building on case management mechanisms in the social sectors and justice is therefore equal to health and properly equip health centers with sufficient care and make free services available to those affected by gender-based violence.
3. **In the context of COVID-19, the suspension of debt payments is now on the global agenda - but it tends to be too low (covering only debt owed to other governments, not debt private or multilateral) and for a too short duration (until the end of 2020, when it will be necessary at least until the end of 2021)**. The DRC government should work with other countries to make a pan-African call for more sustainable debt cancellation, rather than a suspension that only delays payments. This must go hand in hand with a commitment to reform the debt procurement process so that all future loans are agreed through a transparent and accountable process. Now is the time for the DRC government to insist on its right to spend the revenue it generates to provide a comprehensive and lasting response to COVID-19 and invest to achieve the SDGs, rather than paying old debts.

ActionAid International

DRC Office

Croisement Av. Colonel Ebeya et Hôpital H1

Gombe/ Kinshasa/ R.D Congo

Email: actionaidrc@actionaid.org

Website: www.actionaid.org/

www.drc.actionaid.org/



4. **Remove the current constraints on the public sector wage bill that are blocking the recruitment and decent remuneration of nurses, caregivers, teachers and other essential front-line staff.** The government should establish contacts with various donors and partners to guarantee more investment in public sector workers, especially in health and education workers.

We the undersigned are committed to working together with our government to ensure that COVID-19 marks a turning point for our country, moving us towards a more sustainable economy and society that cares for both people and the planet. We hope that we can work with you to ensure a revaluing of frontline public sector workers as the foundation for a more sustainable economic future.

Yours sincerely

Actionaid DRC

Kinshasa

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Yakubu Mohammed Saani

Country Director, Actionaid DRC

National PSI affiliates

+ national EI affiliates national trade union federations / national Women's rights organisations / partners; national Tax justice, fiscal justice, debt organisations; national youth movements/ partners / student unions; national Partners; national Universities / think tanks / research institutes; prominent individuals and activists + wider public
