THE POWER OF THE 99% TO STOP CORPORATE CAPTURE & DEBT
You are about to embark on a journey that we hope will shed light on and inspire action to challenge two intertwined issues impacting the well-being and livelihoods of billions of people around the world while imperiling the planet. We invite you to learn about the global debt crisis and the phenomenon of corporate capture as a driving factor.

This story is the result of the shared analysis and collective action of ESCR-Net - International Network for Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, a member-led network connecting over 300 social movements, Indigenous Peoples' groups, and human rights organizations and defenders from 76 countries. Since 2003, the Network has provided a space for members to connect their struggles across regions to address systemic challenges, including the harmful human rights impact of the global debt crisis and the increasing influence of corporations and economic elites in policy and other decision-making spaces.

Recognizing that to ignite change, we first must understand how the system works, what forces fuel it, and who is benefiting from it, 'The Power of the 99% to Stop Capture & Debt' serves as a political education tool to spur discussion and deepen understanding of the root causes of debt and its colonial legacies, the role of debt in imposing the dominant economic model globally, the actors involved, and its intersection with other issues such as the care and climate crises. Ultimately, this comic strives to inspire action to confront the models imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and private creditors, which prioritize creditors' profits and corporate interests at the expense of labor rights, environmental protection, democratic processes, and public spending to ensure human rights to healthcare, education, food and more.

We also aim to challenge the dominant narrative propagated by economic and financial elites, who use convoluted language to obscure the injustices within the
system. Therefore, above all, this is a story of possibilities and a reminder that united, we can stop corporate capture, cancel illegitimate and unsustainable debt, and advocate for transformative change.

Special thanks to our members from the Economic Policy Working Group and the Corporate Accountability Working Group for their important contributions to crafting this story. We also wish to acknowledge the immense efforts of our allies and the hundreds of organizations, Indigenous Peoples’ and feminist groups, and social movements fighting to reclaim human rights and public interest in the face of the growing power of corporate and financial elites. They are building alliances and working together toward the change we aspire to see — a world where care for people and planet, solidarity, and substantive equality guide decisions and shape structures that ensure human rights for all.
HARARE, ZIMBABWE 2033

NANA, MY TEACHER TOLD ME THAT YOU’RE A HERO. SHE SAID WE HAVE A HEALTH CLINIC, A SCHOOL, AND A CLEAN RIVER BECAUSE OF YOU!

I JUST DID MY PART TO ENSURE THAT OUR GOVERNMENTS FULFILLED THEIR OBLIGATIONS AND PROVIDED US WITH THOSE THINGS.

WHAT DID YOU DO?

IT'S AN INSPIRING STORY ABOUT ORDINARY FOLKS WHO TEAMED UP AS A MIGHTY GLOBAL MOVEMENT TO STOP THE MOST COLOSSAL HEIST IN HISTORY!
THE ROBBERY STARTED BEFORE OUR TIME, THE TARGET WAS THE FUTURE OF MILLIONS OF PEOPLE WORLDWIDE.

GIVE ME YOUR FUTURE!

WHY DID THEY WANT TO STEAL THE FUTURE?

IT WASN'T DONE BY MASKED THIEVES AND IT DID COST PEOPLE AN ARM AND A LEG. A FEW AIMED TO CONTROL AND DECIDE THE DESTINY OF THE MAJORITY FOR THEIR OWN PROFIT. THEY PLANNED TO INFILTRATE GOVERNMENT DECISION-MAKING SPACES AND INFLUENCE THEM TO SHAPE THE PRESENT AND FUTURE AS THEY WISHED. WE USED TO CALL IT 'CORPORATE CAPTURE.'

CORPORATE CAPTURE

THE OTHER HALF IS DUE IN A MONTH.

BUT HOW COULD A FEW PEOPLE DO ALL THAT?
They had a powerful weapon: debt, which they combined with corporate capture. This deadly duo had catastrophic, sometimes even fatal effects on the lives of millions and the planet as a whole.

Let’s go way back in time to understand how this global plan came to be.
During the colonial era, European powers established colonies to extract resources such as minerals, spices, land and crops. To do so, they brought in companies or created ones themselves.
The colonial model was built on the dispossession of land and resources of indigenous peoples and the forced labor of millions of people in colonized countries.

The model led to economic growth in Europe and an increasingly influential financial elite.

My empire is bigger!

Steal and ship 5 million people to extract all their resources.

Conquer Indochina, we need rubber.

How do we get to play this game?

What I like most about this game is that the bank always wins.

You don't!

Colonial powers often forced countries to finance their own colonization by borrowing at exorbitant interest rates, they used force and slavery to gradually dispossess the people of their future.

Why do we owe them, if this is our land?

I buy you shovels and you complain!
YOU WANT TO BECOME INDEPENDENT? WE CAN ARRANGE THAT. HERE IS HOW IT WORKS:

YOU BUY OUR FULL PACKAGE WITH INFRASTRUCTURE, EDUCATION, MILITARY, ETC. INCLUDING ALL THE FINE PRINT, OF COURSE.

NOW YOU CAN CALL YOURSELF INDEPENDENT.

WE WILL ALSO LEND YOU A RAFT.

This debt continued even after many countries fought for and gained their independence. Debt was one of the legacies of colonialism that kept our countries subjugated and sinking...

The United States and Europe did not allow the end of colonialism to mean the end of the system of usurpation. Every attempt to promote unity and solidarity among countries of the Global South or to take control of their own future was seen as a threat to capitalism.

TROPHY WALL

DAMN MOSQUITES

LUMUMBA † 1961
ALLENDE † 1973
SANKARA † 1987
ARISTIDE 1991–2004
During the global recession and inflation of the 1970s, neoliberal capitalism became the vehicle to boost corporate and financial profits.

School of the Americas

Neoliberal "Freedom"

FFFRRR...  ...EEE...  ...DOOO...  ...MMM!

All together now

Debt and debt crises were a strategic weapon to impose the new economic model on countries with lower income who were already impoverished by the colonial period.

We're a impoverished country. We don't know how we will manage to pay these interests.

We'll figure out a way

Carbon  Water  Gold

Gas  Oil  Lithium

Minerals
Many countries fell into a cycle of dependency and debt, with new loans to service old loans and with conditions that prioritized debt repayment. This made them especially vulnerable to economic, health, and climate crises.

But just in case, we can offer several interesting ways for you to pay us back.

In the meantime, the financial and economic elites got richer. The system of usurpation through debt allowed them to fuel their unsustainable model of growth and consumption while imperiling the entire planet.

The debt crisis was unjust and illegitimate. Low-income countries were forced to repay loans...

...instead of investing in public services for citizens or measures to fight climate change.

Wow, look! Just out of thin air!
LIKE IN MANY OTHER COUNTRIES, OUR COMMUNITIES, ESPECIALLY WOMEN, ENDURED THE MOST CHALLENGING HARDSHIPS...

THE COST OF LIVING KEPT SOARING, AND GOVERNMENTS HAD CUT PUBLIC PROVISIONS FOR EDUCATION AND FOR CARE. AS WOMEN, WE STRUGGLED TO TAKE CARE OF OUR FAMILIES, AND WE HAD NO CHOICE BUT TO TURN TO PRIVATE LENDERS FOR CREDIT...

NOT ONLY WERE OUR COUNTRIES BURDENED WITH DEBT, BUT WE ALSO FOUND OURSELVES TRAPPED IN THE CYCLE OF INDEBTEDNESS.
BUT WE HAD CHOICES

WE SAID NO!

WE REVEALED THAT THEY WERE THE ONES WHO ACTUALLY OWED US

WE EXPOSED THE CORRUPT SYSTEM AND THE IMPUNITY

UNITED WE COULD MAKE DEMANDS

POFF

WE SAID ENOUGH OF THROWING ONE AGAINST THE OTHER

POFF

WE PRIDED OURSELVES ON OUR IDENTITIES

POFF

POFF

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WE HAVE CHOICES!

CANCEL THE DEBT!
WHAT THE ELITES SHOULD HAVE COUNTED ON WAS THE PEOPLE AND THEIR POWER TO ORGANIZE TO SHAPE THEIR OWN FUTURE.

PEOPLE AND THE PLANET OVER PROFIT

NO TO HARMFUL CONDITIONALITIES

NO TO AUSTERITY MEASURES

PAY FOR CLIMATE CHANGE

NO TO ILLEGITIMATE DEBTS

ENSURE DEBT TRANSPARENCY & ACCOUNTABILITY

FUEL HUMAN RIGHTS, NOT FOSSIL FUELS

CANCEL THE DEBT

STOP CORPORATE CAPTURE

CENTER CARE IN ECONOMIES & SOCIETIES
Locally, nationally, and internationally, the calls for debt cancellation and an end to corporate capture grew into a global movement that demanded governments give us our future back.

But that's how the system has been built.

You represent us, not elites' interests!

It was a long and difficult struggle, but with much effort, we got the debt canceled, and governments began prioritizing human rights and the planet over profit.
AND PEOPLE WERE HOPEFUL AGAIN...

...BUT WE NEED TO STAY VIGILANT
BECAUSE CORPORATE CAPTURE ALWAYS HAS ITS WAYS.
"The Power of the 99% to Stop Corporate Capture and Debt" is the third issue of the comic series launched by ESCR-Net to popularize the phenomenon of corporate capture of government institutions and decision-making. Visit our website for more episodes about the corporate capture of the United Nations and the corporate capture of healthcare systems.

CLAIM OUR FUTURE

If you believe the future belongs to the people and not to economic and financial elites, scan this code to send a message to the International Monetary Fund to #CancelDebt.

https://escr-net.ink/canceldebt