



Felogene Anumo

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## Climate Change and the Covid-19 crisis are Two Sides of the Same Coin: You can't Tackle One Without the Other

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*As the pandemic continues to expose and deepen inequalities worldwide and we continue to see more extreme weather events, [Felogene Anumo](#) draws our attention to the global nature of their disruption. The parallels of power, greed and political choices in response to these crises only proves to us why now more than ever a commitment to building feminist economies and working for deep systemic change is needed.*

*"Never let a good crisis go to waste" is a masculinised, militarised and greed-driven statement that can only be celebrated by those who have profited from the pandemic, such as the [billionaires whose wealth has increased by USD 10.2 trillion](#) during this ongoing crisis. Evidently, as well as the distribution of Covid-19 pandemic profiteering, survival and relief has been highly skewed in favour of the privileged, including Global North countries and transnational corporations.*

Presently, the highly-infectious [delta](#) and [lambda](#) variants of Covid-19 are making their way across the Global South where they are slowly but surely wreaking havoc among low-income and indigenous communities due to low health capacity as a result of decades of austerity measures, under investment in health infrastructure and a lack of access to vaccines. Yet wealthy Northern countries, including so-called feminist governments, continue to hoard vaccines enough to vaccinate their populations many times over. Perversely, the unfolding [vaccine apartheid](#) situation has also seen these countries actively oppose any efforts to ensure equitable access to life-saving vaccines for the rest of the world.

### **Too hot to handle?**

On the climate side of things, the occurrence of extreme weather events such as fires and floods are at an all- time high. What scientists are calling “[unliveable heat](#)” at 47.9C was already reported in parts of Canada at the beginning of summer 2021. The rich can afford to escape the heat or buy cooling equipment like as air conditioners, but these are options out of reach for the majority of the world’s population.

Extremes in weather affect the livelihoods of those in impoverished communities as was recently [witnessed](#) in Bangladesh, where a heat wave destroyed 68,000 hectares of rice affecting over 300,000 farmers. Over the last 20 years, it has been reported that [climate apartheid](#) has led to people from Global South countries dying at a rate 7 times higher than those living in the Global North. Recent [research findings](#) indicate that if global heating is not reduced, more than 8 billion people will be at risk of mosquito-borne diseases such as malaria and dengue fever.

Already in 2019 without taking into consideration the recent research, [94 per cent of malaria cases were reported in Africa](#) while Europe has been malaria- free since 2015. The global injustice of the climate crisis is that those who are [least responsible](#) for historical carbon dioxide emissions in the Global South are the ones who will suffer the most from its effects.

### **Piercing the Corporate Veil**

In the same way, vaccine hesitancy and vaccine nationalism have been a huge hindrance to the global distribution, uptake and availability of vaccines; climate change deniers and corporate lobbyists play a huge role in deterring environmental progress. Driven by the greed for more profits over public health and the environment, the role of big pharmaceutical companies is seen in vaccine injustice by [defending price and vaccine monopolies](#).

It is also seen in the efforts of oil and gas companies who spend a staggering USD [200 million on lobbying governments to block, control or delay the adoption of legally binding climate policies annually](#). Interestingly, it was also during the 2020 pandemic year and associated suffering that global military spending reached the highest levels in decades. With the top [5 biggest military spenders](#) being the United States, China, India, Russia and the UK and a lot of countries 'preferring' to spend military funds on a militarised pandemic response including policing of people during lockdowns, maintaining curfews, border control and protection of property over people and imprisonment.



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### **Reclaim the State from ongoing corporate capture**

Karl Marx advances that history repeats itself, first as tragedy, second as farce. It is also a well-known truth that lessons in life are repeated until they are learnt.

Climate change and the global Covid-19 health pandemic are both global and unprecedented in their disruption. Jointly, they pose a direct threat to the holy trinity of sustainable development – humanity, ecologies and economies. Governments, as duty bearers, are visibly struggling in their pandemic and climate change responses, further proving how ill-equipped the world is to cope with risks exacerbated by greed and destruction. This makes it impossible to continue to ignore the failures of our economic development path and the lessons it offers.

In the wake of a global health pandemic as well as a devastatingly real climate crisis, we need to deeply rethink the role of states and their obligations to fulfil human rights and ensure the planets wellbeing. Extreme wealth and poverty gaps, vaccine inequalities, unpaid care work, and environmental destruction are not the result of natural phenomena but of political choices.

Corporate dominance over our health, environment and economies is the result of years of ‘[market fundamentalism](#)’ a strict and literal adherence to the principles of free market capitalism. It is this strong belief that free market economic policies and pursuing economic growth (at all costs) will bring benefit to the whole society, that has steadily shifted the role of the state as a provider of essential public services and goods to an enabler for profit-driven corporations. In both health and climate, corporations simultaneously generate and exploit underinvestment of public health systems, climate change adaptation research and pandemic preparedness.



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Within the corridors of decision-making and through a [multi-stakeholder approach to policy making](#), corporations are also wielding their power to influence government policies and multilateral spaces to serve profit-making interests rather than public good. Private sector needs to be shown the door, because there is a huge conflict of interests between corporate profit and climate and [vaccine justice](#). In fact, the response to the Covid-19 crisis and climate change mitigation is in dire need of intersectional feminist analysis and leadership.

Feminist movements are not new to the challenge of multiple crises. Solutions have long been articulated and fought for by feminist movements in research, advocacy, practice and mobilisations locally and globally. Those whose lives and livelihoods are already affected should be on the driving seat of policy making. As Ayanna Presley puts it, “Those closest to the pain must be closest to the power.”

## **Defending the Future: Gender, Conflict and Environmental Peace**

It is clear that [defending the future](#) will require deep systemic change. The multiple crises the world faces today magnify structural inequalities that are based on the exploitation of labour and natural resources, and unsustainable production and consumption patterns. The biggest exposé in these times has been a care crisis of global proportions. Not just the triple burden of care that most of us are still facing, but the failure of economic systems to place care at the core of human economies and prioritise the sustainability of people’s health and livelihoods, and environment over profit.

The right to health and healthy environments are human rights and global common goods that should not be a preserve of the rich. Our commitment to

build [just, green, anti-capitalist, decolonial and feminist economies](#) is needed now more than ever. Let us not lose the urgency to build better and build differently.

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### About the author



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Felogene Anumo is a pan-African feminist activist who is passionate about using her creativity, politics and intellect to strengthen feminist movements to build collective power. She co-leads AWID's Building Feminist Economies initiative which aims to strengthen feminist efforts to transform the economy at local and global levels as well as to amplify feminist and just economic visions, models and practices. In the context of Covid-19, she leads AWID's #FeministBailout and economic recovery plans which aims to bring together feminist and social justice movements to rethink, reimagine and demand the re-centering systems of care in our economies and ecologies. Felogene tweets @felogene.

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