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Positioning Public Services in a Rights-Based Economy

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Positioning public services in a Rights based economy.

COVID-19 pandemic has put spotlight on major injustices at the core of our current economic model which exposes many to shortages and risks and delivers extreme wealth for the few. War in Ukraine, political instability in Africa and increased foreign debts by governments in the global south have led to increased inflation which has put the poorest on the margins. Governments as primary duty bearers are crippled by reduced revenues and high rates of debt servicing which has negatively affected provision of public services. Public services are vital goods and services that provide a foundation for dignified and enriching life. They exist to provide everyone irrespective of status with basic necessities and opportunities including water, education, and healthcare. They also are supposed to meet the needs of vulnerable groups like women and girls, persons with disabilities, orphans and vulnerable children as well as the elderly. Research shows that public services reduce the gap between rich and poor¹. The poor are the highest beneficiaries of public services as they help them reduce pressure on household expenditures. However, in order to ensure that the services benefit the public effectively, they must be legitimately administered and protected from commodification and privatization under the governments' obligations. However, under-investment and austerity measures affect the provision of the services. Attempts by governments to introduce user fees to critical services negatively affects the capabilities of the poor to access the services thereby undermining peoples dignity. They become a preserve of a few rich and less accessible to the majority 'public' poor.

The paper will explore how human rights values and standards can be used as a tool to reposition people at the center of public services and guarantee dignified living conditions.

¹ Oxfam (2019), <https://oxfamlibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/620599/bp-public-good-or-private-wealth-210119-en.pdf>