

BIRTHING LEADERS

STORIES OF CHANGE
IN AFRICAN WOMEN'S
ORGANISATIONS



AFRICAN
WOMEN'S
DEVELOPMENT
FUND

Credits

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PREFACE

The African Women's Development Fund (AWDF) was established in 2000, as an Africa-wide philanthropic, grant making initiative to support the realisation and fulfilment of African women's rights through funding of autonomous women's organisations on the continent. Building the capacity of African women's organisations is one pillar of this commitment to resourcing women-led transformation in Africa

In 2015 the AWDF Capacity Building Unit began the Leadership and Governance programme - a pilot designed to nurture and support the evolution of a cadre of African feminist leaders by supporting them to grow, develop, and bring about changes in the world through their organisations. It combines direct technical support and grants for organisational change with individual and organisational coaching



The Leadership and Governance programme is based on our knowledge of the persistent challenges of African women's organisations with issues related to resource mobilisation, communications, governance, leadership transition, safety and wellbeing. Given funding constraints and the external context that African women's organisations work in, many tend to focus on narrow short-term advocacy or urgent service-delivery projects, with little capacity to expand alliances, envision innovative strategies, grow their organisations and implement forward thinking.

The Leadership and Governance programme focuses on investment in two areas. The first is in strengthening the institutional and governance structures and systems of participating organisations, including organisational capacity assessments and support to governing boards. We also chose to include one-on-one coaching as a means of making a concentrated investment in developing individual and collective leadership skills. We intentionally chose to coach both the Executive Director/CEOs and a staff member in second level management in each organisation, as a way to strengthen the leadership pipeline.

Through this we worked to build the leadership skills of women leaders themselves, and enhance their understanding of feminism, human rights, and movement building, along with creative ways of thinking about management and governance.

This process was enabled by an extraordinary team of African women coaches and organisational development specialists, who brought their soulful feminist approach to the process of nurturing individuals to find and embrace their inner power, as well as find creative ways to manage and rethink organisational governance.

At AWDF we know that it is vital to invest in both the individual and the collective, as effective and ethical organisational systems and frameworks are only made possible in African women's organisations through the visions and practices of effective and ethical leaders, well-grounded in feminist values and ideology and with a clarity of purpose that can accelerate the process of social justice and development.

The stories in this collection are intended to be used to help reflect, (re)think and help encourage conversations in African women's organisations around the process of personal growth and collective growth and change in leadership as individual staff members and as organisations.

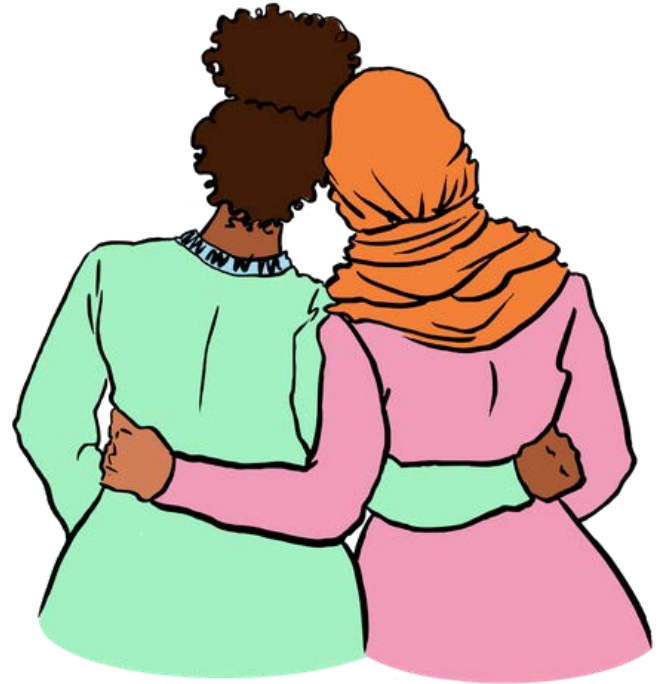
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In the spirit of confidentiality, all of the stories have been anonymised, and all of the names of people, organisations and countries, and some details of the respective organisations have been changed.

TRANSFORMING ORGANISATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Sister to Sister Group

The Sister to Sister Group (SSG) was set up with a focus on supporting younger sisters in the movement to grow, build their confidence and become leaders in their own right in the women's movement. Intergenerational learning was a key component in this



SSG joined the Leadership and Governance programme at a time when they had already begun plans for leadership transition, although this had not worked well the first time. Their programmes were thriving. However some questions and concerns were still to emerge when it came to thinking about how the organisation was run, how the board and staff related, and how well the organisation was able to give space and voice to everyone working in it.

Understanding how an organisation was born, motivation behind the birth, and then growth is a radical project that every NGO must undertake. As the coaching process began with SSG, the coach supported staff and board to create a timeline to ensure all were reading from the same page about the history and original purpose of the group. This was a way of reflecting on how the organisation has 'travelled on the road' to supporting young women's rights. The story began with a needs assessment that revealed shocking levels of sexual abuse in schools. Early programming was designed to respond directly to this. The work slowly grew, embracing the idea of mobilising young women beyond the school environment and organising convenings for them to learn more about feminism and build feminist solidarity, and from there to running

programmes at university. Initial administrative structures and systems were also mapped, including finance and operations, the setup of the Advisory Council and Governance Board, and the early donors and their impact on the organisation's work. The shared timeline showed that it had not been an uphill climb. However there were some difficult moments, twists and turns negotiated by the organisation.

In tracing the history of SSG's programming, it was difficult to escape from the contentious issues of sexual diversity and abortion. After all these are the issues one finds among young people. Here, it was discovered that the values of the individual board members and those of the organisation did not mesh. While staff and the community of young women that SSG worked with were comfortable addressing issues of sexuality and reproductive rights, at least three of the board members openly indicated that they were uncomfortable with these two contested issues. This in turn posed questions about why board members who were so out of sync with the organisation's own politics and positions had been selected to serve.

It emerged that some board members were not selected based on their competence and what they could offer to the organisation, but rather

because they were either friends or family members of the director. The board overall also did not interact much with staff and was not up to date on activities and the broad direction of SGG. This became the first sensitive point in the change story.

The second issue that came to play was concerning the Director's transition process. The Director, as founder of the organisation and also a member of the board, had been heading the organisation since its inception. She played various roles that sometimes conflicted. For instance, she was responsible for coaching some of the members of staff, while at the same time responsible for being their director. These two roles cannot be played independently of each other without sometimes clashing as the coach is meant to be unbiased and confidential. She was also due to hand over the organisation to emerging leaders, as part of the mandate of growing new feminist leadership, however this process had proved difficult.

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SGG had succeeded to grow programmatically through the passion and leadership of its founding Director and its staff, however this growth was starting to be compromised by issues of conflict of interest on the board, not having the right fit of board members, and also the painful but necessary process of transitioning to a new Director. Although difficult, the SGG board and senior leadership did willingly consider going back to the drawing board to discuss their values and the extent to which these guided the recruitment of board and the makeup of the staff.

At board level there was a review of membership, and the board agreed that it needed to be reconstituted. Two old members stepped down and three new members joined. The new members were selected for their relevance to SSG's mission and their ability to bring knowledge and technical insight. The new board now constitutes some of the best in the women's movement in terms of understanding development, leadership, feminism and issues of sex and sexuality among young people and also with diverse skills, all relevant to the work of the

organisation. The new board was then taken through a proper induction and education on various aspects of the work of the organisation, such as the strategic plan and governance tools of the organisation. They were also taken through a conversation on feminism and religion as well as understanding issues of sexual orientation, gender identity, and abortion from human rights angles, as critical issues that young people navigate.

The board agreed that conceptual clarity was important, and board members were encouraged to attend some of the staff training activities that focused on themes of feminism. This helped them become more familiar with SSG's activities and its theoretical framework. These processes also helped create more familiarity and engagement between board and staff. Board members meet with staff more regularly now and are up to date on activities of the organisation. Board members are also looking at ways to harness their personal expertise to the benefit of the organisation.

The founding Director had poured her passion into the organisation and understandably found the question of moving on difficult. However with discussion and external perspective she was able to fully embrace the process of handover, setting in place a plan with the board to create an executive transition process- handing the baton from a sister, to another sister.

The Safety Nest

The Safety Nest was formed with an aim to create a peaceful society, free of the mental health stresses caused by poverty. It was envisioned as an organisation where women gather to network and share knowledge on how they can turn their ideas into practice and have a positive impact on their communities and in their own lives.

Since its establishment, The Safety Nest was headed by the founding Executive Director and a Board of Trustees that were appointed by the Executive Director with no elections held since there was no General Assembly. Although the organisation revolved around its membership, the Director had decided on its founding not to register it as a participatory membership organisation. This meant all decisions came down to him and the board. Moving the organisation forward however was a challenge because the Board of Trustees did not understand their role in supporting the organisation grow.

Due to the fact that they were friends and family to the Executive Director and Founder of the organisation, decision-making around the role the board members played was very complicated and challenging. To date all board members were appointed directly by the Executive Director and had no knowledge about the purpose of their roles, or what policies they were meant to govern by.

Almost all the governance manuals of the organisation were outdated and the organisation operated without referring to the manuals for strategic direction. Some of the

board members had never even seen or read any of the organisation's policy manuals. Men were a majority on the board and so made most of the decisions, coupled with the fact that the Director was a man- though the mandate of the organisation was to support women. The vision and mission of the organisation was too vague, with no clear direction as to where the organisation was headed.

With the above challenges confronting the organisation, it was difficult to meet the organisation's short and long term goals. The Safety Nest asked for help to work on their official documents and policies and develop a manual for the board which set out a terms of reference for their roles- something they did not have. They desperately needed to discuss reconstituting their board. The Safety Nest had never held a meeting of its members! With support, they planned to discuss how to hold their very first Annual General Meeting (AGM).

the path to change

The Safety Nest received their first board governance training led by their coach from the Leadership and Governance programme. The training helped board members and staff to understand the value of good governance at all levels of the organisation and especially between the board and the management. Until the time of this training, the board had not read any of the organisational founding documents- its constitution, its Human Resources and Financial policies- or even a Strategic Plan. Communication between the Board and the Executive Director was also neither consistent nor regular, meaning that the board were not up to date on the organisation's work. The board embraced the fact that it was time to develop a Board Manual.

A policy alone can't change an institution- but the process of even naming that there was need for more structure and formal process, and of having to lay out how decision-making was meant to take place was itself a catalyst for conversations that organisation needed to have. Through this process of developing new policies, the story began to change for The Safety Nest. With processes around decision-making and governance now spelled out, it was not possible for the Executive Director to remain making all decisions

The board manual also explicitly described a transparent process for appointing board members. The Safety Nest began to reflect on where the organisation stood and how it hoped to evolve in the next few years.

The first board training set the stage for change and allowed board members and staff to speak out freely on issues such as re-envisioning The Safety Nest and establishing a new, authentic and committed approach to leading and governing the organisation. Board members and staff began to think about the need to establish and put in place a General Assembly, review its constitutional documents together with the Board of Directors and to hold its first Annual General Assembly. They began to see the need to revise and re-formulate the vision and mission of the organisation.



a revived soul

With support from the organisational coach both the staff and board of The Safety Nest were able to critically reflect on their role and importantly their accountability to their mission. The board was reconstituted- now with a majority of women, as was fitting, given the fact that its work was focused primarily on women's rights and needs. The women staff who previously did not have much say in decision making are currently involved and lead the organisation in key decisions- having been given the platform to speak, engage and shape the new organisational policies. They realised that if they were to genuinely operate as a membership organisation they needed processes to make sure that members could input into the work and big picture vision of the organisation- and so they introduced policies and practices to support this including the AGM. Through this process, the vision and mission statement of the organisation was made more meaningful and true to what the organisation had been set up to do. With these changes, The Safety Nest has revived its focus on supporting women to create a peaceful society

Wonder Women for Social Change

Wonder Women for Social Change works to promote an inclusive approach to development by working with young women and women entrepreneurs to thrive and flourish in their businesses and to fight for and sustain their rights. The organisation recently underwent a transition at the senior management level with the appointment of a new Executive Director from within the organisation with the hope that she would promote the growth and continuity of the organisation. Unfortunately, achieving this goal was not as easy as anticipated because, while the governance board of WWSC had approved the appointment of the new Executive Director, they did not provide the support needed to encourage the director to put up her best for the growth of the organisation. Was this a negative use of power? Or a lack of knowledge on how to support the director?

missing links

In the first place, the organisation's governance board had only two thirds of the membership prescribed by their constitution. The existing members while quite active in their roles as board members, did not have governance board manuals to guide their activities. This meant that the organisation did not have the right kind of guidance for their activities, and did not know how to support the organisation to build and maintain their governance structure. The board members also did not have a structured board meeting schedule and met on adhoc basis, twice a year, to take decisions regarding the organisation. Clearly, this affected the pace of some of the organisation's work. In addition to this, the organisation had an outdated Strategic Plan which needed refocusing. They also lacked a Human Resource manual and the staff did not have job descriptions. The organisation needed

a good resource mobilisation strategy as it lacked one. This resulted in inadequate financing which sometimes resulted in delays in salary payment. The most challenging was the fact that, the Executive Director herself did not have a job contract and clear job description, which made it difficult to function effectively.

As an organisation with such a clear and relevant niche in the women's rights movement, one would have thought that they would flourish in all aspects. These internal hurdles unfortunately threatened to cripple the organisation, and possibly close them down altogether in the longer term.

changing the tide

With these challenges, the new Executive Director searched for ways through which she could amplify the work of the organisation and also become an effective leader herself. After successfully getting the board's buy in, the Executive Director applied to participate in the Leadership and Governance programme as a step in trying to turn around the fortunes of the organisation. She felt that this was the last opportunity to keep the organisation on its feet, hence keep impacting the lives of the many women and girls they worked for. This was a golden moment for WWSC.

From the onset, it was clear that the Executive Director understood how her organisation would be impacted by the programme. The board on the other hand were reluctant to embrace the possibility of change. They had in the past dictated to the Executive Director and never fully understood the needs of staff of the organisation as they never met with or had any discussions with them.

They made decisions based on their whims as there was no connection to the staff and community partners.

The board also didn't quite understand how much power they wielded and where that power responsibly ended, as they had never had training on governance and had no board manual to guide their activities. Unfortunately, the Executive Director did not have any of this information either as she had not had prior training either on governance or board duties and responsibilities.

After working to gain the trust of the board, the coach successfully opened their eyes to all the possibilities that could become the new story of the organisation. The first ever Annual General Meeting was held for the organisation, and 4 new board members with the relevant experience and expertise elected to bring the number of members to 9 as per their constitution. One of the new members currently provides free legal advice to the board.

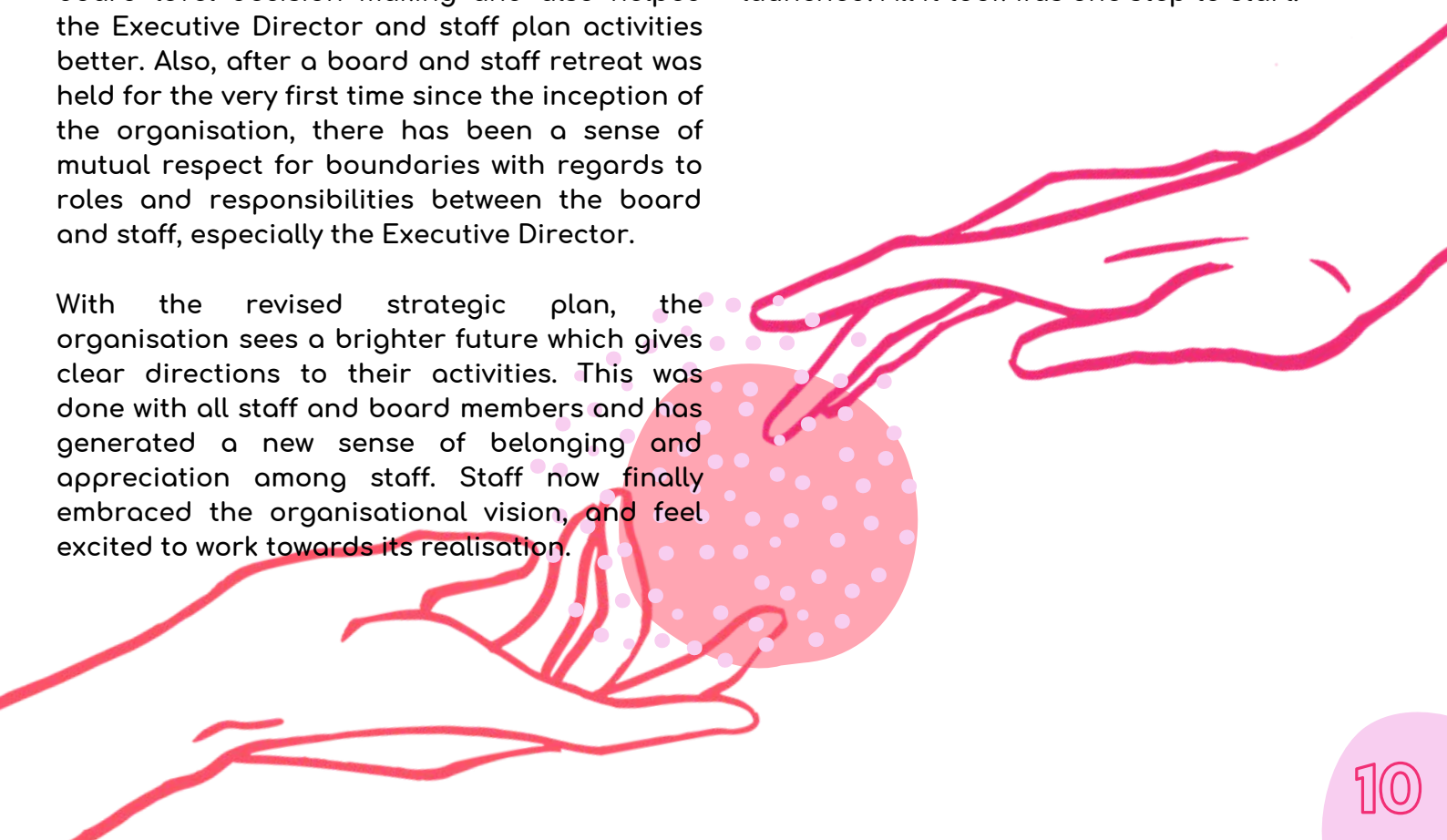
A board manual was developed to guide the operations of the board, with their roles and responsibilities clearly stated. The board members were actively involved in this process and have wholeheartedly embraced the manual. This was followed by the design of a board calendar which has streamlined the timing of board level decision making and also helped the Executive Director and staff plan activities better. Also, after a board and staff retreat was held for the very first time since the inception of the organisation, there has been a sense of mutual respect for boundaries with regards to roles and responsibilities between the board and staff, especially the Executive Director.

With the revised strategic plan, the organisation sees a brighter future which gives clear directions to their activities. This was done with all staff and board members and has generated a new sense of belonging and appreciation among staff. Staff now finally embraced the organisational vision, and feel excited to work towards its realisation.

The organisation's Human Resource and Finance manuals were also reviewed and have resulted in appraisal of staff to better align them with their responsibilities. Staff have also been given contracts, including the ED, and job descriptions have been clearly spelled out. Productivity has improved immensely and the high staff turnover experienced before and even during the start of the programme has suddenly halted.

After having identified the organisation's challenges during the programme, they were invited to participate in a Resource Mobilisation Strategy training run by AWDF. They were guided to develop a Resource Mobilisation Strategy Document which was incorporated in their new strategic plan. Also, the organisation organised a step down training for all staff and this developed a deeper connection of staff to the organisation. The organisation has also successfully increased the number of their donors from one to four. There is a general sense of job security and sustainability within the organisation now, and salaries are a lot more frequent.

Within the course of a year, the organisation has had its heart restored and all staff and board are enjoying a breath of fresh air. There is general pride and belief in the fact that the sustainability of the organisation has been launched. All it took was one step to start.



Leading the Change

Leading the Change is an organisation that was initially established as a centre for training unemployed boys in skills that would equip them for the future. They initially paid little or no attention to young women and girls.

The organisation was situated in the urban slums where there were high rates of violence against women and girls. Violence was common in the community and so no questions were raised when a girl or woman was abused, no punishment was unleashed on the abuser and this impunity in turn fueled more violence in the area. Women and girls lived in fear and there was no intervention anywhere to salvage the situation.

The founder of Leading the Change began to take note of this injustice, and decided to change their focus from boys to young women.

reflecting within

Functioning mainly under the direction of the founder, Leading the Change had only three staff supporting in the organisation's activities. They were committed but did not have the relevant experience and confidence needed for the work they were engaged to do. The organisation had no well-structured systems or policies to help with their strategic direction. The space they occupied was very small and was not in a very secure location and as such exposed the organisation and the girls that visited the centre to frequent abuse and attacks. In addition, Leading the Change lacked financial resources to expand the programme to reach other marginalised areas and did not also have the skills to raise financial resources in that regard.

As an organisation that worked with girls, certain policies were needed to protect the girls - including on health and child protection - but these were also not in place. While they had a governance board, they did not understand their roles, and without the right procedural manuals and policies to guide their activities, they were also without direction and were seen to be a disappointment by staff of the organisation who seemed to have unrealistic expectations of them.

changing the tide

These challenges gradually affected the effective functioning of the organisation, growth was slow and although the staff had so much passion for the work, they lacked confidence to speak at schools and other programmes. The only thing they seemed to have working in their favour at this point was determination to empower young girls and women in the area, and it was this that led them to start searching for ways to improve their performance, the systems in the organisation and the leadership capacities of staff. This search led them to the discovering of the AWDF Leadership and Governance programme, and unsurprisingly, they immediately applied to participate with the encouragement of their founder. To them, this was an opportunity of a lifetime.

With strategic guidance from their coach, the young leaders began to name and face their fears. As they did this their confidence and self-esteem started to grow, as they began to discover their hidden leadership potentials. One important thing that help the leaders was the development of personal strategic plans to serve as a roadmap for their leadership development. The organisation's board also received board governance training, which gave them better direction as to their roles and how they could support the organisation.

They were also assisted by the coach to develop procedural manuals, terms of reference as well as other policies that guided their operations and set out clear expectations of them with regards to their contributions to the direction of the organisation. For the first time they defined how often they were expected to meet as well as their role in helping to raise funds for the organisation's operations.

Leading the Change was eager to grow, and they worked cordially with the coach and the governance board to review outdated manuals, and draft policies that did not exist including those on Human Resource and Financial Management.

By challenging themselves to their own fears, the young leaders that participated in the programme are starting to win the admiration of other young girls as they speak boldly and confidently in schools and other social gatherings-encouraging their fellow girls to defend themselves against abuse and to stand up against their abusers.

They have a clearer understanding of what leadership means and are empowering other young girls to lead. The founder, realising their newly gained confidence and leadership skills, decided to step back from leading in key decisions and given the young women leaders the chance to run the organisation.

As a result of improved writing and fundraising skills, Leading the Change attracted new funders and continue to expand the reach of their programme activities. For continuity and sustainability of the organisation, they are beginning to introduce their programme in bigger spaces and institutions such as the universities as a fundraising strategy. With the support from AWDF, they moved from the smaller space to a bigger and safe neighbourhood, a space where the girls feel safer to talk and get involved in the programme activities.

TRANSFORMING INDIVIDUAL LEADERSHIP

The stories in this section speak to the experience of individuals being coached and supported through the AWDF Leadership and Governance programme - representing both middle level and senior management (typically the Executive Directors) in their organisations

At the beginning of each cohort, a CEO Forum was organised for participants. Each time we did this we found that most of the middle level management and a few of the senior level management participants struggled to use their voices. They could hardly interact with other participants, and would only voice out (in a whisper mostly) their opinions, but only after being prompted by the facilitator. One of the programme's main objectives was to address the root causes of this apparent lack of confidence in the incredible women that lead African women's organisations.

At AWDF we recognise that the root causes are structural. Many of the young women in the programme come from low to lower middle-income households and had never even travelled out of their countries. They were unsure of themselves when interacting with people who they perceived to be of higher income, and using facilities where people of their social class are often not made to feel welcome. They did not feel like they had anything to offer in a room full of women who had "gone places" and effected change. They did not believe that people who looked like them could actually be leaders. They mostly felt inadequate.

cultivating confidence

Participants were flown to a common location, lodged in a decent hotel and taken through yoga sessions each morning before daily sessions on topics such as African feminism, governance and feminist leadership. The setting was as important as the content for many of the participants. They were exposed to a new country, to flights on an airplane (many had never sat in an airplane before) and to different cuisines. They were invited to recognise the importance of exercise and self-care, with special yoga sessions organised for women with physical disabilities.

A second strategy used was group exercises and presentations which ensured that everyone spoke up and challenged themselves to share some information. Mock filmed interview sessions were also used to train participants to be able to address the media or other stakeholders. Confidence levels went up by the end of the second day.

The third and most important strategy used was one on one coaching for all leaders. Coaches spent time with leaders over the period of each cohort timeline, understanding their personal journeys, and supporting them through the process of considering how to channel past and current experiences into positive feelings about themselves. They unlearned and relearned about self-worth and confidence and in many cases discovered the power within themselves.

MUTHONI

challenging invisible hierarchies

Muthoni despite her hard work and dedication to the organisation, had low self-esteem due to her level of education. She avoided having to interact with board members or partners, and even more so, donors. At the beginning of her coaching journey, she hardly responded to emails from AWDF directly and preferred to redirect responses through the Executive Director. She reports that “I would tremble and lack words to express myself in large audiences. This lowered my self-esteem and made me fear interacting with people of high class”.

She remembers crying the first time she was asked to lead an internal staff meeting, she had a cold chill ran down her spine to the bottom of her toes because she could not utter any word out of fear. This challenged her ability to actively participate in high level meetings which was necessary given her role in the organisation. This lack of self-esteem stemmed from her belief that she was not good enough due to her low level of formal education and her social class.

Muthoni discovered her self-worth during the coaching process. Her coach challenged her to see the positive sides of herself and to gain strength from them. She then pushed her gently into spaces that required that she spoke to audience, all the while with affirmation and encouragement. Muthoni’s coach encouraged her to write about herself, in a bid to get her to recognise her strengths and opportunities, and while this took time she began to recognise her own value and all of her incredible achievements.

She no longer backed down from assignments given by her coach, such as playing a central role in writing proposals, participating in presenting the proposal to prospective donors, she recognised the change that was happening within her. Muthoni gradually lost her fear of speaking in spaces with people she had considered to be ‘better’ than her because of their educational level or social class. She now represents her organisation in several forums, leading presentations on her organisation’s work.



“Leaders mentor other people to develop personal leadership skills that would help them to achieve professional goals and to deliver results for their organisation”

She also leads in development of proposals, especially those aimed at empowering women and young girls. She has not stopped at self-leadership though. With her newly affirmed voice, she has decided to take the initiative to mentor and promote leadership among young women, girls and grandmothers in the community. Through her leadership, her organisation has forged partnerships with several other like-minded organisations and strengthened their networks in the community.

Muthoni also has a different perspective on leadership. She in the past believed that leadership was meant for people in senior management only, and about bossing or being in control and exerting power over those under you. Through the coaching journey and in practising leadership herself, she has come to a deeper understanding of the concept of feminist leadership.

She says “Leaders mentor other people to develop personal leadership skills that would help them to achieve professional goals and to deliver results for their organisation”. She is currently the face of feminism in her organisation and borrows examples of feminist

leadership from her coach, who she greatly admires and looks up to.

Muthoni proudly mentions that “I have a better understanding of myself, my strengths and weaknesses in leadership roles and how I can utilise these qualities effectively”.

KHANYISILE

*finding power
beyond the surface*

Khanyisile lives in an environment that judges, in a very subtle manner, by the outer appearance of the skin. People in leadership do not look like her. They are of a different gender and race mostly. Her organisation gives her the opportunity to work on issues she is passionate about, unfortunately before the Leadership and Governance programme there were hidden traces of the outer environment within the organisation. Coupled with a lot of kowtowing and hidden politics, the environment became one of survival of the fittest, albeit in very hushed ways. The feminism in the organisation was not so apparent and in some ways, even shunned. The situation looked bleak and Khanyisile did not feel like she had a voice, let alone one that mattered. She was shy and needed a confidence booster. She kept her ideas and dreams to herself. Being a counsellor in her organisation however, this did not allow her to carry out her work to the best of her ability- because how can you encourage someone to open up and be brave when your own insecurity is apparent?

The coaching process helped bring out a new Khanyisile. She says that "being allocated a Coach was an achievement as it gave me a sense of sure support and guidance". She feels like she has more purpose, as having developed a personal strategic plan has mapped out her personal goals and gives her direction as to which path she would like to and can take.

Gaining and trusting her voice has meant that she is able to value her thoughts now and proceeds to make contributions during meeting and activities at work. She is now the secretary of her organisation's change management team and facilitates training offered by her organisation to other organisations.

Khanyisile believes also that gaining exposure through her travel outside of her country, which was her first, to attend a CEO Forum opened her eyes to and had her appreciate the importance of representation in different spaces. She said that this is helping in an initiative she is starting in her community, of helping organisations /people who help others – what her Coach refers to as being defenders of those who defend human rights – as a way of her contribution to and participating in her community.

She also expressed that participating in the CEO Forum "was amazing as I met and interacted with wonderful women who have worked and achieved positions of influence. Women who are like me; that I cannot get over". She believed in herself a whole lot more since, as she witnessed at first hand young women with her skin colour who held leadership positions and are striving to make a change for women on the African continent. Khanyisile, together with the other leader who were coached in her organisation have taken it upon themselves to inspire a more feminist organisation. She has since facilitated all conversations concerning Feminism at her organisation and "also enjoyed the challenge of manoeuvring the content to suit all our levels of understanding".

Khanyisile reflects on these changes within her with joy and amazement; "that I used to be quiet not because I did not think I Have something to say but I did not recognise and own my voice. I own it now and trust it as well as my thoughts".



GASIRA

learning self love

Gasira grew up partly in an urban slum and partly in a village, experiencing nothing but violence and poverty. She struggled all through primary to senior high school, with the most challenging period being in senior high school where her source of funding was cut abruptly and she sometimes had to resort to deceit in order to escape from being sent home due to unpaid school fees.

These experiences and more led to feelings of inadequacy, insecurity, low self-esteem, and certainly, there was never even a thought given to self-care. She was a little overweight and this added to her feelings of insecurity.

She said *"My personal wellbeing is nothing I ever considered because I didn't see the sense in taking care of myself while I needed to chase money"*. Discovering her organisation and beginning to work with them, to get by and even to address some personal challenges in terms of finances. However, the true change came when she was selected to participate in the Leadership and Governance programme

After having had to identify and face the genesis of her negative view of herself through writing, Gasira rediscovered herself. She saw and understood the strength and resilience in her which had kept her fighting and had gotten her to the point at which she was. Her coach earned her trust and she in turn let herself soak in whatever advice of knowledge she could get from her coach. She began the endless possibilities in life and in her own words note that *"one day, I will be the firebrand that lives somewhere inside my shy, quiet skin"*.

With her increase in self-confidence came the ability to get over her shyness, which she admitted affected her ability to work. Writing, which also plays a central role in her work but which she found to be a chore before is more enjoyable to her now as she now believes she actually has something positive to contribute. Gasira now takes self-care very seriously and worked on losing weight to a point where she now feels healthier and more comfortable in her skin.

"Feminist leadership is about inspiring others, building their capacities in their different areas of interest and encouraging them to their best as well as recognising the efforts put in by team members to achieve a course"

Gasira also took advantage of the process to unlearn and learn about leadership and gender. She had in the past believed leadership to be "born leaders and that they were only found at the top of the pyramid in institutions". She has a totally different view of leadership now and believes "Feminist leadership is about inspiring others, building their capacities in their different areas of interest and encouraging them to their best as well as recognising the efforts put in by team members to achieve a course". She adds that "Through the coaching I learnt that leadership should be trans-formative and that effective leaders give birth to leaders".

Gasira has become more flexible, more active and vibrant and an irreplaceable member of her organisation.

"Through the coaching I learnt that leadership should be transformative and that effective leaders give birth to leaders"



She contributes ideas that lead to the positive growth of the organisation. Her confidence has also enabled her to participate in various interviews on behalf of the organisation. She also observed that a phone received from AWDF as part of the governance grant activities played a major role in improving her communications.

Being from an economically marginalised community where people used communal mobile phones, this was actually the first mobile device she did not have to queue to use. It was easy for her to go online for research and even write short reports.

Gasira feels that her most significant achievements throughout the coaching process have been finding her self-confidence, as she now believes that one needs this to be able to truly grow. She is also proud that her sisters see the transformation in her and look up to her as their role model. She has also challenged herself to go back to school and has completed her

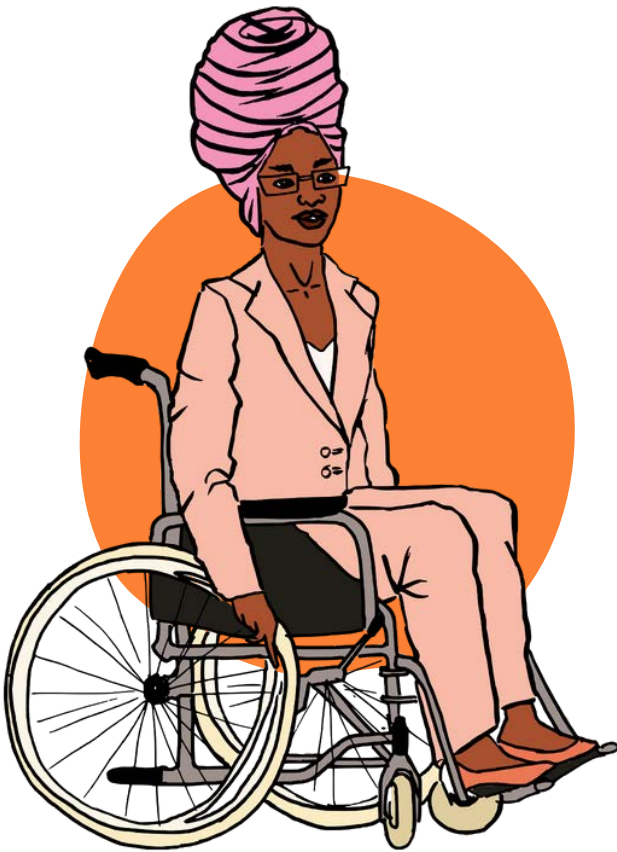
Diploma in Project Management, being the first in her family to get to this level. She is optimistic that she will soon go back to pursue a degree course.

Gasira believes that having someone you can look up to as your mentor and run to at any given time is very helpful for personal growth, it makes things easier. She found that in her coach



ZAWADI

*overcoming stigma
to lead with strength*



Zawadi grew up in a remote and rural area, where most of the roads to educational institutions were not accessible to children with disabilities. Growing up with the inability to walk, Zawadi experienced and witnessed how people living with disability such as herself were unfairly treated. At her young age, Zawadi couldn't understand why society treated people with disability so unfairly- the stigma, abuse, isolating and sometimes separation from their very own families. What Zawadi soon realised was that, disabled people were considered a curse in their very own society.

Most children with disability could not go to school due to the stigma and partly due to poverty and the inaccessible nature of educational institutions and roads infrastructure. Despite the unfair treatment of people with disability, Zawadi's family were very supportive and insisted that she gets an education and therefore enrolled her in school. Being a girl in such a patriarchal society came with its own pegs and this was further complicated by the fact that Zawadi had a disability. This did not make life easy as she constantly faced stigma from her peers and society coupled with inaccessible infrastructure and educational institutions.

These however did not deter her from pursuing her desire for an education. She struggled her way through school with all the challenges, very determined to be productive and to have a successful life. She was determined to challenge the stigma and unfair treatment faced by people living with disability particular women and girls.

Defying all odds, Zawadi has graduated from school and is married with 2 beautiful daughters. She is also heading an organisation that fights for the right of women and girls living with disability in her country. Realising that it was the support she got from her family that contributed to her achievements, her goal was therefore to ensure that she fights for the rights of women and girls with disability and to create opportunities for women and girls with disability in her country to live productive and independent lives.

Embarking on the mission to fight for the rights of women and girls with disability did not come easy. As the head of the organisation that fought for the rights of women and girls with disability, Zawadi struggled with trust issues and could not relegate people to accomplish certain tasks. She had low self-esteem and lacked confidence and therefore overburdened herself with work. Her low self-esteem and lack of confidence affected her ability to lead in an effective way. She worked in isolation rather than in a team with the staff and as such they faced funding challenges.

The Leadership and Governance programme brought transformation to Zawadi and her organisation. Through the coaching, Zawadi started to develop her confidence and self-esteem. With the support of her coach, she discovered the power within her and improved on her leadership skills. She began to work hand in hand with other staff and relegated certain responsibilities that previously were done by her. She began to speak up publicly about the unfair treatment faced by women and girls with disability and began to lobby for changes in policy at the community, regional, national and international platforms.

in her own words

" the programme helped me to have high self-esteem in articulating issues in our programme areas such as the prevention of gender based violence and access to reproductive health rights services.

"It helped me to discover the power within me which I never knew I had and I have been able to transfer this power to the women and girls with disability I work with at the grassroot. I also have a sense of belonging and dedication to other staff members as a result of this project "

Together with the team at the organisation, Zawadi is fulfilling her goal of fighting for the rights of women and girls with disability. They have provided training on gender based violence (GBV), Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) and advocacy for over 500 women and girls with disability.

They organise rallies around GBV in communities where large numbers of women and girls with disabilities take part. As a result of her organisation's advocacy, the SRHR policy being developed by the Ministry of Health has incorporated and mainstreamed women and girls with disability rights and issues.

In order for the organisation that she led to thrive, Zawadi herself needed to feel grounded and affirmed in her own capacity - proud and present as a woman with a disability and a whole world of knowledge and commitment to contribute.



MIREMBE

reclaiming her roar

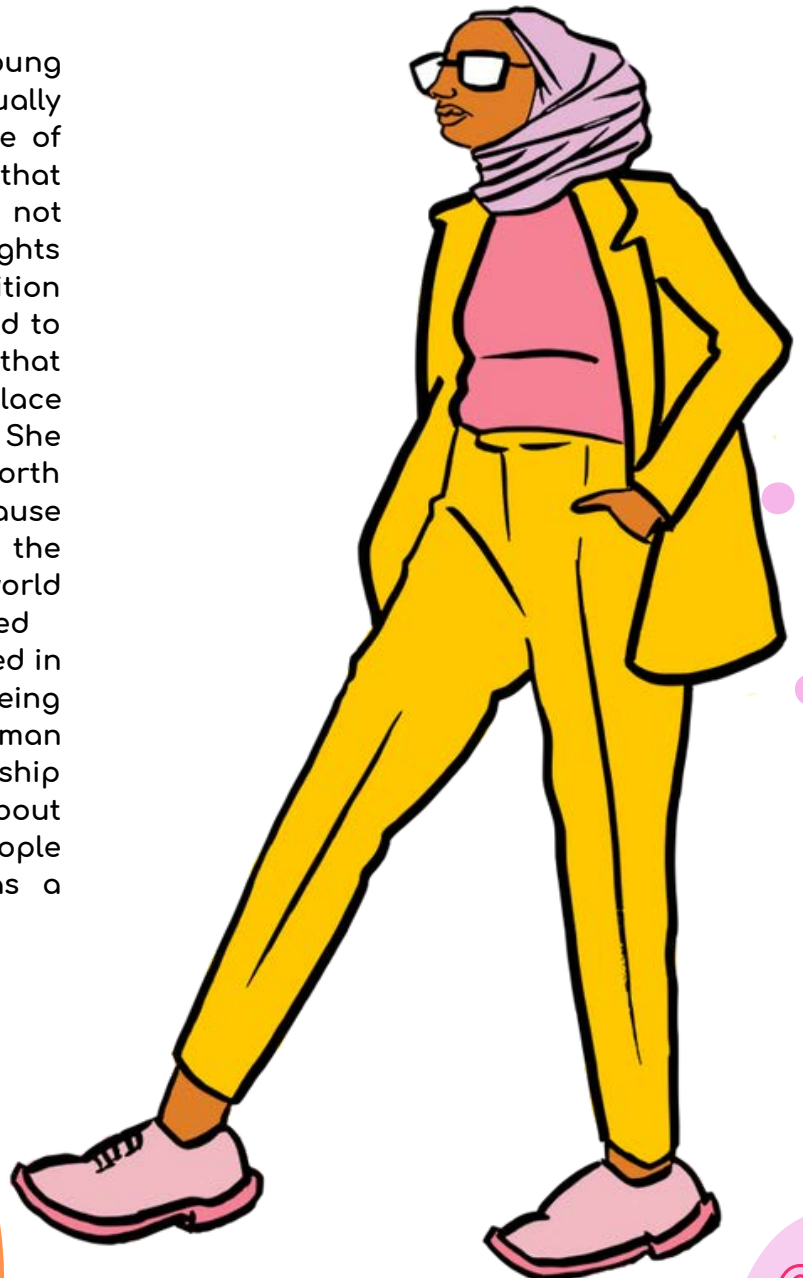
Mirembe is an Executive Director - fabulous stylish, poised and a brilliant feminist. She is fearless and is constantly challenging unequal power relations wherever she goes. She loves to talk about the injustices women face in society in the media, at rallies, at her organisation and even at home. Mirembe is a strategic thinker and her passion is mobilising communities to bring about transformation in terms of shifting gender barriers and facilitating communities to create change.

She is recognised in her country for her passion to see a just and equal world where women are not afraid to lead or challenge injustices. She is a proud feminist and continues to advocate for people to realise that there is the need for a change world where women live in peace.

Mirembe was a strong and confident young woman, however, her confidence was actually challenged when she stepped into the role of Executive Director. She began to realise that the confidence she thought she had was not enough to lead and support a women's rights organisation. Once Mirembe took up a position as Executive Director her confidence started to reduce and she experienced a growing fear that she was incapable. She was in a dark place within herself and did not know how to fit in. She started to feel embarrassed and her self-worth and self-esteem started diminishing because she couldn't function effectively as the Executive Director. She found herself in a world where the leadership of men is more accepted and this made her feel hopeless and drowned in her own fears. She felt she was constantly being judged by people because she was a woman and did not clearly understand what leadership meant. To Mirembe, leadership was about dictating to others and commanding people around using your power or position as a leader.

Mirembe got saturated at her job and felt like quitting because of the feeling of inadequacy, of not knowing how to get out of that dark place. Mirembe felt increasingly insecure about speaking in public and a persistent flow of self-criticism happening in her head all the time.

These fears and self-attacks were having a very negative effect in Mirembe's professional and personal life. She realised she was drowning and failing at her job but couldn't find the courage to fight the situation. There was no support from any one at work to help her overcome her inadequacies. She felt everyone one was waiting for her failure. She started to feel insecure about speaking up for herself and the fact that she had worked for very long without a contract.



in her own words

"I was a confident woman before I attained the role as an Executive Director.

However, with this role my confidence went down day by day because I did not know how to fit in it especially not knowing how to support the board,

differentiate the role of the Board and Management.

I had not received any training or guidance on what was expected of me and what I needed to do.

I did not understand what leadership was all about"

With the help of a coach, Mirembe started to rediscover her voice and to reclaim her self-worth. She re-engaged awareness of the power within her. Discovering the values of feminist principles through the coaching process, she boldly named herself a feminist: **"Being able to name myself as a feminist came after attaining an elevated level of consciousness on women's rights. It was a huge achievement for me"**

As a first step towards change, Mirembe began to define her goals for the future and develop a personal strategic plan to guide her. She quickly connected with other young women leaders and began to share her experiences while learning from other experiences also.

Mirembe began to understand feminist leadership and started leading with feminist values of solidarity, respect, peace and diversity. She overcame the fear of speaking up at work and also speaking against the injustices in society. Her confidence and boldness began to attract other people, the media and her organisation. A new and bold leader was discovered and her contributions started to make impact in her organisation. Mirembe now shines even brighter as a leader in the fight for women's rights in her country and is contributing to the realisation and full enjoyment of women's rights in Africa.

"The exposure encountered in the process was educative and fantastic.

I made friends across the continent, learning the different ways that patriarchy presents and knowing more of the different country situations in the region was helpful. I feel connected to Cameroon and the civil situation there, I know more about Ghana, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Senegal, Zimbabwe and many others countries".

MALGU

the journey



Malgu knows too well how different her future could have been. She remembers! How bleak everything looked. Days at the office when it seemed impossible to get staff members to get work done, to motivate them, to get any help from them. How she struggled to control her temper in such times, and embarrassed herself when she should have been showing leadership.

When board members overstepped bounds and made decisions for her and without her input. When she had no writing skills and lacked the capacity to develop a plan for alternative ways of generating income in the organisation rather than depend solely on a single benefactor. How she lacked finances herself and always borrowed to keep her and her siblings afloat. The sadness she felt when she sometimes had to even borrow money to pay hospital bills after having overworked and overstressed herself to the point of falling sick.

Malgu remembers her first interaction with other participants and coaches. How unsure she felt, how she hardly spoke to anyone, how she only listened, not because she had nothing to say but because she could not find her voice. But she also remembers that success did not come overnight. The calls between her and her coach at all hours of day, the deliberate

training on feminism. She remembers how her coach ignored the fact that there was conflict in her community and still travelled hours on unsafe roads to make it to train the organisation's board and also meet with her. The flight misses because of road block, the hardship that came with it. How could she let such a person down? How could she not make the best of this opportunity given to her?

Malgu remembered fondly also, how it felt when AWDF invited her to a Resource Mobilisation Strategy training as a result of her participation in the Leadership and Governance programme. The feeling she had when she was presented with a draft copy of a strategy document that she had developed. The feeling she had when the first positive response came in after a proposal with the incorporated resource mobilisation strategy had been submitted to other donor organisations. Malgu loved that feeling.

She loved feeling that she was enough. She loved that she was able to interact with participants and speak in front of everyone to share her story by the next convening. She also loves that she finally believes that her dreams are actually achievable. She sees it all... The continuous ticking of lines on her personal strategic plan which her coach forced her to make time to write.

Today, Malgu looks back at her life with pride, dignity and a sense of maturity and growth that only she really understands. Malgu sees life differently. She is more aware of the forces and patriarchy and how its interaction with her own life as well as that of the women she works with. This has made it easier for her to negotiate around her fears whenever possible, and when unavoidable, to deal with it.

As the head of her organisation, she is experiencing, for the first time since she took on the role, cooperation from board members and staff alike. She is allowed to work within the scope of her role, with almost no interference from her board. Staff members are more responsible, they take their work seriously and see the leaders in themselves as well, thereby making them more proactive. Her relationship with everyone at work has improved greatly, and she hardly ever gets out of control with anger anymore.

Malgu has also noticed that she is less stressed because of work as she now knows when to take a break. Her almost routine hospitalisation episodes have almost disappeared because she is now better able to manage stress, both in her personal and professional lives. She takes advantage of the gardening she loves to relax and wind down. She gets her calm from it, and better still, her new-found financial independence from the income made from selling the produce from her gardens.

She has successfully shared this idea with her siblings, and her younger brother looks to be on the way to financial freedom also by following in her footsteps. The same applies to some of the beneficiaries of her organisation who are beginning to enjoy personal growth in income outside of the association with the groups they belong to, they made a smart choice to take Malgu's advice.

Malgu sees that she will become a mentor to other young women in her organisation and her community. She will be one of the role models many of the young women will have, just as she looks up to her coach and all the other strong women she had come into contact with through the trainings and those she has only read about.

Malgu has found her voice, and is able to speak in front of audience consisting of different people with different backgrounds. She loves this new person she has become, she loves her. But she has not forgotten. She has not forgotten who she was, before her organisation was selected to participate in AWDF's Feminist Leadership and Governance programme, before she was selected to be coached, before she met her coach.

She knows she can, and she will be that person she has dreamt herself to be in the next five years. She knows this because she has witnessed her own resilience, and her victory over adversity. She has been introduced to a different side of herself through coaching...and she is never letting that woman go!

