

VOICE, POWER AND SOUL ||

Portraits of African Feminists ||



VPS II

Edited by Shamillah Wilson and Sarah Mukasa

In **Volume II** of the hugely successful **Voice, Power and Soul: Portraits of African Feminists**, we hear the stories of African feminists from all walks of life, tell their stories of struggle, achievements, hopes and inspiration.

In this edition 64 African feminists describe their personal evolution as feminists, their activist work, and their vision for an African continent, and indeed a world, framed by equality and respect for women's rights.

The women profiled represent over five decades of feminist activism. Their stories bear witness to a legacy of African feminist thought and resistance which is rarely documented in accounts of African history; feminists who contributed to Africa's liberation struggles, feminist Members of Parliament who have stood up for political ethics and human rights, feminist lawyers who have advocated for the revision of biased colonial-era laws, feminists who have intervened during armed conflict to protect the rights of civilians, feminists who are challenging religious fundamentalisms, feminists who are leading the response to HIV/AIDS, feminist artists who are creating new cultural expressions.

The women profiled come from all regions of the continent, and a spectrum of professions and experiences. Many of the women speak of the mothers or grandmothers as their first role models, pointing to a long tradition of African women's activism. All women are proudly African, uncompromisingly feminist, and committed to the collective work of transforming African societies for the better.

The design draws on the character of the authors, reflected in colours and textures of their adornments, mostly produced by women across the African continent. The design itself is intended as a testament to African women creative intelligence, progressive trends and contributions to the aesthetic life of our continent.

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Preface

We are excited to present to you this second edition of the Voice, Power and Soul: Portraits of African Feminists. This edition comes four years after the first and the feminists portrayed are women from across the African continent who have been actively involved in the African Feminist Forum. The African Feminist Forum (AFF) is a gathering that brings together African feminist activists on the continent and in the diaspora to deliberate on issues of key concern to the movement. It is currently hosted by the African Women's Development Fund (AWDF). The forum has held convenings in Ghana (2006), Uganda (2008) and Senegal (2010). In 2012, the focus of the AFF was to pilot web-based and ICT based convenings in its efforts to mobilise greater engagement and participation by African feminists. AFF marked a major milestone in the development of the feminist movement on the continent. It raised the visibility of African feminist activism and spearheaded a number of processes especially at national levels which have marked significant transformatory changes. These include successfully challenging discriminatory legislative proposals in countries such as Nigeria and Uganda. One of the significant achievements of the AFF has been the adoption of the Charter of Feminist Principles for African Feminists (referred to often by the women featured in this publication as the Feminist Charter), a highly acclaimed document that has found resonance with feminist movements in other parts of the world. In addition it has produced the OD Feminist Tool to operationalise the charter. Both instruments have been far reaching in their influence and have been adopted as far afield as Latin America and South East Asia. A full copy of the charter is featured as an annex in this publication.

Voice, Power and Soul is a political project. It provides a platform to amplify the voices of African women and more importantly to challenge the dominant narratives which portray African women largely as passive recipients of aid. This volume provides a glimpse of the courage, innovation, determination, passion and commitment of feminist organizing in Africa as demonstrated

by the 65 women featured. It brings alive the agency and the power of women's organizing as well as the challenges with which they grapple. One of the continued battles faced by the African feminist movement has been the challenge related to whether 'African feminism' does in fact exist, and by extension whether African feminists do exist. The political nature of this initiative thus becomes clear as the mere fact that for a second edition we are managing to profile about 65 feminists from across the continent who in fact are saying 'We define and name ourselves publicly as Feminists because we celebrate our feminist identities and politics'. The diversity of feminists profiled in this edition is also in direct contrast to the idea that African feminists form a homogenous grouping. Instead it clearly acknowledges and celebrates the diversities and makes the statement that "in spite of our differences, we can identify the basic transformatory agenda for African societies as we join forces in the same struggle."

This publication does not claim to be fully representative of the women and voices who tirelessly work to transform power relations in Africa. This is merely the second instalment of a longer term effort to amplify the voices of African feminists across generations. The success of the first edition of Voice, Power and Soul indicates that there is a thirst for knowledge and greater understanding of feminist organizing on the continent. We hope this volume will be just as interesting and rewarding.

AWDF wishes to thank, MDG3 Fund, UNWomen and DANIDA for the support to make this publication possible. We are also extremely grateful to Shamillah Wilson, who has worked exceedingly hard to compile and arrange the narratives of the women featured in this publication. We also acknowledge the efforts of Thelma Owusu-Boakye who provided administrative and logistical assistance for this publication.



Josephine Abahujinkindi Rwanda / Netherlands

 *I call myself a feminist because I fully support feminist principles that consider women as the real agents of change of their conditions.*

I have lived and worked in Amsterdam since 1998. I was born and grew up in Rwanda. I hold a Masters in Law with focus on International Public and Private Law from University of Lome / Togo. My first degree is in Social and Legal Services.

I am a co-founder and Managing Director of the Fund for the Advancement of Women's Rights in Francophone Africa (FADHAF). I am also a consultant in women's rights and gender equality and equity. I specially support women's organisations in the Diaspora by providing them empowerment and training on women's rights issues, advising on organisational strategies and fundraising activities. I call myself a feminist because I fully support feminist principles that consider women as the real agents of change of their conditions. I am aware that women should act together to support each other in their efforts to advance their rights. Therefore we need space and the means to let our voices be heard so that we build and strengthen women's movements all over the world especially in Africa. As a feminist I am ready to do all in my power to support feminist values in both my professional and in my personal life.

African Feminists continue to face challenges related to political, economic and cultural factors that surround them. Dictatorial and corrupt regimes in most

African countries are hostile to democratic principles and especially women's human rights. This hampers the work of African feminists. The economic crisis and impoverishment that most African women struggle with on a daily basis is also extremely debilitating. In addition the cultural inhibitions, customs and practices that are against women's rights also constitute a big challenge for feminists in Africa.

We can address these challenges through strengthening women's NGOs and increasing the resources available to them. We also need to continue building capacity and raising awareness on women's rights and gender equality at all levels. Finally, we need to enhance the solidarity and networking among feminists in Africa so that we are able to speak and move with a common vision. The African Feminist Charter is a powerful instrument that can guide us in the African women's movement and we can create spaces for engagement with it as well as disseminating it more widely.

My determination to achieve gender equality and social justice inspires me tremendously. My dream is that women all over the world are able to enjoy their rights without any limitation, enjoy their dignity and are free to make decisions about their lives and those of their families.



Doaa Mohamed Abdelaal Egypt

▮▮ *For me, feminism is about seeing women as human beings.*

I live in Johannesburg, South Africa, while I work internationally in Africa, Asia and Latin America. I coordinate a global project on violence against women and information and communications technologies. This involves managing research, policy advocacy, training and capacity building and providing guidance and supervision to country coordinators. I also train women and communities in the strategic use of ICTs for social justice with a focus on digital storytelling.

I call myself a feminist because I see unequal power relations that are supported and reinforced by the system of patriarchy as the root of women's oppression. I believe that the struggle for the actualisation of women's rights is personal and political and that it must be fought in private and public spaces. My politics and practice is built on the values of inclusion, participation, acknowledgement of privilege and embracing and celebrating difference of age, location, sexual orientation, class and ability.

Some of the greatest challenges faced by feminists in Africa today include the collusion between religious fundamentalisms, states and patriarchy that has caused a backlash against feminism and a steady rolling back of the gains that have been achieved. We are also in a moment when the critical spaces for feminist reflection, collaboration and action also seem to be diminishing. Added to this is the fact that a donor development agenda that supports a particular kind of 'gender work' means that much of the social

justice work does not fundamentally challenge gender hierarchies, and sometimes reinforces them. To shift this, we need to get better at sharing and distributing the rich body of scholarly work that is being produced by African feminists. We also need to support and initiate inter-generational feminist processes and ensure that the stories and experiences of African feminists and our struggles are told unscripted, in many languages, by many diverse feminists and shared and popularised throughout the continent – not only in print form, but capitalising on huge potential that ICTs hold. I love the individual ethics section of the Feminist Charter because it really resonates with my personal values and articulates them so clearly and strongly. It would be great to see the Charter come to 'life' so to speak by seeing what these ethics mean in practice through the voices and experiences of those who subscribe to these values, so use the Charter to frame the stories referred to earlier.

In my own life, I make every effort to work with and connect to other African feminists in my work and personal life and to reflect on and share our struggles, victories and share strategies for change. I am deeply committed to ensuring that more women's rights activists are able to use ICTs strategically in their advocacy and participate in internet governance spaces where decisions around censorship, definitions of harm, and internet rights are being dominated by groups who do not necessarily have a women's rights framing.



Kafui Adjamagbo-Johnson Togo

||| *I am a feminist because I have chosen to support women, to fight against legal discrimination that they suffer as women.*

I work for the West Africa sub-regional office of Women in Law and Development in Africa (WILDAF) as the Coordinator, since April 1997. My role includes travelling extensively to support the strengthening of networks of women's organizations in the different West African countries. I design and carry out programs in collaboration with these networks, and to monitor and evaluate the programs that we initiate, since it is very important to us that our initiatives actually lead to changes in our communities and societies. In addition to direct support of the WILDAF network of organisations, I am also engaged in advocacy for the reform of laws and policies at all levels. I am also very politically involved and I am an activist in a party of which I am a founding member since 1990.

My journey with feminism began quite early in life as my awareness increased of the inequalities and oppression of women in my family environment, my neighbourhood and in society in general. As a little girl, I also suffered in silence with some women who were close to me, in particular my mother. Naturally, in my academic life, I used the opportunity to explore and denounce the subordinate status of women in Togo. I am a feminist because I have chosen to support women, to fight against legal discrimination that they suffer as women, to defend the values that underpin the vision of women living together in social justice, equality, tolerance, solidarity and honesty.

African feminists are often misunderstood and criticized as 'foreign' to the continent and having no links with African realities. As a result, many women who are actually unaware of what feminists do not want to associate themselves with the movement. The feminist movement needs to continue its efforts to make ourselves understood by those who do not belong to the movement. We need to avoid giving the image of a sectarian movement and one that is disconnected from the interests and concerns of all women. We also need to convene training for girls and generations of women, and members of women's organizations to achieve a truly feminist culture within African women's movements. Finally, we need to integrate the feminist agenda in the development policies and platforms at all levels.

I try to bring out feminist principles in my relationship with my spouse, children and my family, my colleagues and in meetings that I attend I am always ready to dialogue with those that who want to share their thoughts, attitudes and positions. I am passionate about the fight against injustice in general and the prospect of being able to contribute to a shift in the status quo is my constant motivation. My role as wife and mother is stress relieving and helps provide the balance from dealing with the persistent social challenges I encounter in my work and activism. I find pleasure in preparing my family and friends' favourite dishes and bringing them joy as it fills me up with joy too.



Beatrice Akello Uganda

■ ■ *I am a feminist because I believe that women have the right to dignity.*

I work for the Alliance for Integrated Rural Development Information and Resource Centre (AIRDIRC) in Kamuli District, Uganda.

I have dedicated my life to addressing the challenges that women face. Within our societies and our communities we have to constantly deal with discrimination and practices that tend to make us less than what we are. In addition, in most rural communities, women are having to work hard to address poverty and escalating levels of violence that prevent them from developing or moving forward. Traditions and culture also play a role in keeping women in roles and positions where they are 'less' than men. And women themselves contribute often to maintaining some of these traditions due to their lack of knowledge and information.

I am a feminist because I believe that women have the right to dignity. I believe that no matter where we are, where we are from, we all deserve respect for our rights and to get the same opportunities to grow and develop as those who live in non-rural areas. I am motivated by a sense of justice – but also because I believe that we can only change our reality if we stand up for ourselves.

In Africa, the most important challenges we as feminists face are the intricate national and international laws that discriminate against women.

Although there has been work on these laws, there continues to be efforts to maintain the systemic nature of women's oppression.

We also need to recognise that having new and progressive laws in place is not enough. We also have to fight for them to be implemented – otherwise justice remains elusive to so many women who do not have the information, education and also access to challenge unjust laws. The lack of funds to address emerging issues and deal with transforming our societies is another major challenge for us to move forward steadily and strategically. Possibly one strategy to address this is to form networks to find innovative strategies to address our issues, but also to be creative in mobilising resources to keep the struggles going.

In order to strengthen the feminist movement in Africa, we should revive, energise and feed solidarity initiatives that allow feminists to constantly communicate, provide support to one another and ultimately erode the systemic base of women's oppression.

Personally, I am inspired by other feminists who have paved the way for African feminists and who have shown us what is possible.



Doo Aphane Swaziland

▀▀ *I draw a lot of inspiration from the Charter of Feminists Principles for African Feminists. It can be used for personal empowerment, for organisational strengthening purposes, and also to make African feminism more accessible to a wider audience.*

I am currently an African human rights and gender consultant living in Mbabane, Swaziland. I work for Women for Women Development Consultancy a company I co-own with a colleague. I have positioned myself to serve in assignments that have added value to the lives of women and their communities.

I call myself a feminist because as far back as I can recall I have been questioning and fighting in overt and subtle ways my disempowerment and that of other women both within my family, and public spaces such as school, church, work environment and politics.

One of the key problems we face as feminists is a de-politicised agenda. The feminist agenda is generally regarded as irrelevant because of the view that governments are already attending to all issues around gender inequality and equity. Feminists are also faced with serious misunderstanding and backlash from the very women whose interests they seek to represent. More and more women are of the view that feminism has since been overtaken by events because of international, regional, sub-regional protocols that seek to protect them and constitutions that have to varying degrees entrenched gender equality. To some extent the privileges that come with education, urban dwelling with its amenities and luxuries have also contributed to feminism being misconstrued. In addition, the combination of issues that contribute to women's lived experiences: the widening gap in haves and have-nots of society with women being most affected; HIV and AIDS, lack of access to education and good job opportunities are seen mainly rural women's issues or sectorally rather than mainstream feminists issues; and continue to put pressure on us to find alternative ways to transform women's

lives. Finally, the lack of resources for feminist organisations to consistently and systematically address the challenges we see around us is another key issue we have to work our minds around.

To really address these challenges, we need to provide spaces for feminist engagement from grassroots levels, upwards with agreed coordinating mechanisms. We also need to mobilise funding for women's organisations from women themselves. Finally, we need to devise strategies that empower women economically, politically and socially.

In my personal and professional life I have since childhood committed myself to contributing to addressing these realities. I have questioned inequality within the family, access to positions at Sunday school, power contestation at university, challenging of laws that affect women who have contracted marriage similar to mine i.e. in community of property profit and loss. See *Doo Aphane v. Registrar of Deeds, Minister of Justice and Constitutional Affairs and Attorney General*.

I draw a lot of inspiration from the Charter of Feminists Principles for African Feminists. It can be used for personal empowerment, for organisational strengthening purposes, and also to make African feminism more accessible to a wider audience.

I am inspired by life, which I believe is worth living; as well as my aging mother who is very energetic and able to look at life positive even when she is at her most vulnerable.



Thelma Awori Uganda

“ I believe in the rights of women to be all they can possibly be, their right to happiness, to control the fruits of their labour and to control their bodies.

I live in Uganda and work across the continent of Africa in various countries. I use my expertise as an adult educator to raise people's political consciousness around gender and macro economic injustice that would ultimately see them organising to challenge it. I am also a trained facilitator and work as a consultant to facilitate meetings and conferences, training workshops and other large and small gatherings.

I call myself a feminist because I am staunch believer in justice for women and the validity of women's perspectives. I am dedicated to giving visibility to this knowledge of women, particularly the knowledge of women leaders in rural areas on the practice of leadership. I believe in the rights of women to be all they can possibly be, their right to happiness, to control the fruits of their labour and to control their bodies.

In my work I have sadly found an extremely high prevalence of internalised oppression due to religion and socialisation. Supporting women and men in becoming conscious of their own rights and responsibilities is an important strategy to ensure that we enlist men as allies and activists in this struggle for social justice. This will allow men to unlearn or become conscious of the effects of their privilege and power on women. I find that when they do, there is some change but their comfort with their innate indulgence of self-occupation is a major hindrance to change.

I think that African feminists, like feminist in other parts of the world, face the biggest challenge of the hegemony of patriarchy. Helping women at the

community level become aware of this hegemony is very important. A fresh struggle to overcome new manifestations of patriarchy is constantly beginning; and it seems a matter of perpetuity. Another challenge is to popularise feminism by building the mass frontline of grassroots women who are feminists. The third challenge is a dearth of literature on African feminism that keeps a public discourse moving in tandem with the hegemony of patriarchy. Most feminists are overworked and have little time to reflect or theorize on their experiences. Secondly, the oral tradition has not been easy to break. We can address some of these challenges by popularising the feminist movement, give grants for publishing on feminism and for theorizing on experience and hold writers workshops on feminism and publish the outputs.

I am deeply committed to work intensively at the grassroots, experimenting and learning how to help grassroots women do feminist activism, how to be clear about their agenda, the importance of having an agenda and going after it until results are evident. Sometimes it seems like extracting teeth with the bare hands. Other times, when the situation is poignantly critical, it works. It is however baffling why the daily oppression of women is not sufficiently upsetting and heart-rending to catapult women into action.

Activism is time consuming and rural women are overburdened. Rural women inspire me. They are the passion of my life and I will do everything and anything for their empowerment. Their knowledge and expertise are crying for a receptive ear, for powerful questions that will unearth and challenge their wisdom.



Mansa Ayisi-Okyere Ghana

■ ■ *I believe in equality for all based on the basic principle that we are humans and entitled to equal and just opportunities.*

I live and work in Accra, Ghana as a professional events manager. In my line of work, my main responsibilities lie with planning and overseeing all aspects of an event from the conception stages to completion. I handle all types of events from corporate events to social events. It's a highly pressured job that requires me to be meticulous, calm and a trouble shooter at any one time but the reward is seeing the event executed flawlessly. I call myself a feminist because of my strong beliefs in women's empowerment and development. I don't subscribe to the misguided definition of a feminist as a bra burning, male hating angry woman. I believe in equality for all based on the basic principle that we are humans and entitled to equal and just opportunities.


Feminists in Africa today are faced with the institutional and social/cultural structures that have long been in place to favour men. Although we are seeing shifts as a result of constant education and sensitizing of people to women's value in society and the necessity to give them equal opportunities, we still have a long way to go to shed inherent societal beliefs. Unfortunately, far too many of us are actively involved in maintaining inequalities and silence in the face of women's oppression and violence. To shift this positively for women, we need education at all levels that extends beyond women who identify as feminists, to men, to children and to leaders. We need to infiltrate spaces so that our vision becomes real.

In my own life, I have a 6 year old daughter and I try to teach her everyday that being a girl shouldn't stop her from doing anything she wants to do in life. I am fortunate because I come from a line of strong Ghanaian women who have never let 'being a woman' stop them from doing anything. I have seen feminism in action all my life and so it comes naturally to me to practice my beliefs both at work and in my private life. It is harder in my professional life to fight stereotypes but I have found that breaking down situations and explaining implications to people often gets them to appreciate what I am advocating for. I am inspired by many things! Most notably, by prominent women who continue to fight for our rights and promote empowerment. Secondly, the visible changes in African women's lives today and the continued fire, commitment and desire for African women to stand up for themselves, to speak for themselves and define solutions for themselves.

Most importantly I'm inspired by my family, my mother who proves to me that I can reach greater heights if I so desire, my daughter who challenges me to be a responsible feminist and my faith which makes it all possible.



Zeytuna Abdella Azasoo Ghana / Ethiopia

 *I am a proud AFRICAN WOMAN. I believe every woman is entitled and has a right to enjoy all human rights.*

I live in Ghana. I work with the African Women's Development Fund (AWDF), an African grant-making foundation whose vision is for African women to live in a world where there is social justice, equality and respect for women's human rights. In order to achieve this we mobilize and disburse financial, human and material resources to women rights organizations to support positive transformation in Africa. This contributes immensely to women's developmental agenda by mitigating the impact of various challenges faced by many women in Africa. African women do make change happen.

My prime responsibility at AWDF is managing Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) related work of the organisation. As such, I coordinate: periodic internal and external evaluations, monitoring visits to grantees, development of annual work plans, facilitation of midyear and end of year organisational reviews, data collection and analysis among others. I also provide inputs to the grant-making program and donor relations work of the organisation. These are done with the aim to inform decision making and in shaping program directions of the organisation.

I am a proud AFRICAN WOMAN. I believe every woman is entitled and has a right to enjoy all human rights. Women carry much of the burden in society and we deserve to be cherished and treated equally. There are many challenges that the feminist movements in Africa face, including those strongly linked to economic, political, social and cultural spheres and practices of society.

To overcome some of these challenges, feminist movements in Africa should deepen efforts to share and learn from each other, opening up to different ways of thinking, doing and strategising as well as networking with other feminist movements outside Africa. We also have an excellent tool in the African Feminist Charter that we can use to guide our work. This tool should serve as a means to shape organisational undertakings including working relations with various stakeholders. Besides, there is a need to intensify efforts in order to popularize and incorporate the Charter by creating space and time during major sub regional, regional and global conferences. This can be followed by organisations signing up to report periodically on the use of the African Feminist Charter.



Yaba Mangela Badoe Ghana / UK

 *I believe that the primary challenge facing African feminists today is to get women's voices heard and taken seriously.*

I live and work in London and Accra Ghana, where I spend a few months every year making films for the Institute of African Studies, at the University of Ghana, Legon. I call myself a feminist because I am staunch believer in justice for women and the validity of women's perspectives. I am a documentary filmmaker and writer with over thirty years experience in broadcast journalism. I've made documentaries for BBC1, BBC2, BBC4, ITV and C4. Throughout my career, I've combined a love of television and radio with a passion for writing. This has given me an excellent sense of narrative structure, an ability to convey the drama at the heart of a problem, and the confidence to devise entertaining ways of reaching the widest audience possible. Having worked on film, Beta, DV and HD with actors and presenters in studios, and on location in Europe, America, Asia, the Caribbean and Africa, I'm able to gain access to very different types of people as well as supervise the editing and scripting of documentaries.

I have called myself a feminist since my early twenties, when I was the leader of a Cambridge research expedition to investigate female-headed households in urban and rural communities in Jamaica. Ever since then, trying to understand the cultural, economic and social relationships that underpin the choices available to women has been a determining factor in my life.

I believe that the primary challenge facing African feminists today is to get women's voices heard and taken seriously. Secondly, we need to organise

ourselves in such a way that we have a meaningful impact on government policies, to ensure that the economic basis of women's lives improves; and that every woman, especially the poorest, realises her full potential. Thirdly we should activate national debates about cultural practises underlined by religious beliefs, which demonise and encourage violence towards women.


In order to strengthen the feminist movement in Africa, we need coordinated regional and national solidarity, cooperation and dissemination of information; a clearer, concerted communication presence in national media landscapes; and more effective use of film and radio to promote feminist goals to the widest audience possible.

In my personal and professional life, as a broadcast journalist and filmmaker I've made films addressing these matters. In 1983 'Lost Harvest', part of the series 'Global Report' for BBC2, investigated the abuse of the land rights of women rice farmers by their male counterparts, thanks to the ethnocentric approach adopted by IFAD in implementing irrigated rice farming in The Gambia. More recently I've completed a documentary film 'The Witches of Gamgaba' about a community of women in the Northern Region of Ghana, condemned to live away from their families because they are believed to be witches.

I am inspired by good writing, good film-making as well as transparent, honest politicians, both male and female.



Kampire Kagale Bahana Uganda

 *I call myself a feminist because I have no other choice. I firmly believe that women's position around the world is unequal to that of men, and I wish to be part of the force that changes it.*

I live and work in Kampala, Uganda for a Women's non-governmental organisation called Forum for Women in Democracy (FOWODE). I am a program assistant in the Women in Leadership program and provide support to the Program Officer and Executive Director to implement programs that increase the number and quality of women in decision-making positions around Uganda. This includes capacity-building workshops, national level advocacy work, proposal writing and research. Although the word feminist has become an epithet of sorts, I think it is necessary to take on that mantle proudly, and live my life as an example of what a feminist actually is.

Feminists in Africa face a lot of challenges because African women are not only faced with male oppression, but economic and racial oppression as well. There is much to be done if women in Africa are to take a lead in the development of the continent. Gaps in healthcare, education and political and social leadership are some of the most egregious and harmful problems facing African women today. On the personal level, the statistics on sexual and gender-based violence across Africa are horrifying, and have far-reaching effects on women, our community and our development.

I believe that we can tackle some of these challenges by creating spaces for women across Africa to share experiences, success and failures in organising and just provide solidarity to each other. One of the reasons I am excited about the African Feminist Forum is that in sharing our strategies we can become a


more powerful force. For this reason, the Charter on Feminist Principles for African Feminists is a critical tool that should be internalised, and disseminated. We also need to have more mentoring among all feminists around organising, strategizing, mobilising and analysis. In particular young women have a lot of energy and new ideas, and older women have a lot of experience and much to teach. Relationships between the two can only be fruitful for the feminist movement. Also, by continuing to wear the feminist mantle proudly and publicly, we can reduce the stigma around it.

In my professional life I have chosen to work in a field directly related to the betterment of African women. I firmly believe that increasing the number and quality of women in leadership goes a long way toward addressing some of the above issues.

Of course, "the personal is political" too. I try to live my life with feminist ideals in mind. I also do a lot of writing personally and feminism and the position of women in Africa is a topic that is never far from my work. I am inspired by the strength of African women. Hearing stories about, and meeting women who have faced diversity with great strength and grace makes me grateful for the opportunities I have been given, and determined to use them wisely. It gives me the passion and energy necessary to make change in this world and it makes me proud to be an African feminist woman.



Olufunmilayo Balogun Nigeria

 *I am inspired by the possibility of change in the future, by women, who have achieved a lot and opened up spaces, by women who work day in and out without complaining under hideous conditions and most of all, I am inspired by Africa and the promise it holds.*

I am currently the Director, External Relations and Advocacy to the International Planned Parenthood Federation Africa Regional Office in Nairobi. My role is to build and strengthen partnerships with multilateral and bilateral organisations and in particular, the African Union and Regional Economic Commissions to ensure that sexual and reproductive health and rights remain key priority issues within development discourse both in Africa and at the global level. I am responsible for communicating the work of IPPF and its 42 Member Associations in 42 countries in Sub-Saharan African and building relationships with donors to increase funding to expand IPPF's service provision.

I call myself a feminist because I see that patriarchy bestows an unfair advantage to men, working from the premise that men are latently superior to women. I understand that this is the premise that guides all institutions, policies, laws and relationships, and that it puts women at a disadvantage.

The inability of women to occupy political space, have equal access to education, control over their bodies, in particular sexual choices etc and the lower status they have are all attributable to this fact. My being a feminist is a lifelong struggle to break patriarchy, both at a personal and professional level. The key challenge for feminists in Africa is that feminism seems to be losing steam and not enough women are being brought on board to understand what it means and to subscribe to it. It always seems to be a losing battle as more and more women are subscribing and re-affirming patriarchy and this is being

strengthened by the increasing and alarming rise of religious fundamentalism, both Islamic and Christian.

What I think is needed to strengthen the feminist movement in Africa is strong movement building to expand understanding and recruiting of feminists amongst young women through different means – social networks, universities, using fun ways to engage young women; work with universities to introduce feminism as undergraduate curricula; and mass dissemination of what feminist ideals are. I also think that the Feminist Charter should be shared with as many people as possible but more importantly, it should start being incorporated into the Principles of Organisations in Africa that identify as 'Feminist Organisations' or are led by Feminists. Not so much word for word, but the underlying principles.

In my personal and professional life I continue to mentor young women to understand that they have choices and my whole professional life has been dedicated to promoting the rights of women – to political participation, to have sexual autonomy, to lead – and in this way, contribute to the dismantling of patriarchy.

I am inspired by the possibility of change in the future, by women, who have achieved a lot and opened up spaces, by women who work day in and out without complaining under hideous conditions and most of all, I am inspired by Africa and the promise it holds.



Gertrude Bibi Annoh-Quarshie Ghana

“ I call myself a feminist because I believe in the rights of women and I advocate and support all efforts by women to exercise their rights.

Although I live and am based in Accra, my work takes me to a number of African countries. I am currently working with the African Women’s Development Fund (AWDF), an innovative organisation at the cutting edge of social justice and women’s rights philanthropy in Africa. As Finance Manager, I am responsible for managing the overall financial obligations of all projects and maintaining accounting controls by preparing and recommending policies and procedures. I am in charge of the functions involving money and strategies around raising and using money efficiently, economically and effectively in my organization. I work very closely with other members of the management team on matters that can affect the financial health of the organization as well as the overall organisational strategy.

I believe that our actions define whether we are feminists or not. I have been called a feminist and I call myself a feminist because I believe in the rights of women and I advocate and support all efforts by women to exercise their rights. My work is centred around ensuring that women are able to live in a world where there is social justice and equality.

One of the challenges facing feminists in Africa is strengthening the movement to attract and retain a wider network of feminists of all generations from young girls to older women. The movement does not seem to be engaging as much as it should with the necessary actors who are contributing towards the marginalisation of women. For sustainability and continuity, there is the

need for deliberate attempts to raise awareness about the achievements of the movement by celebrating feminists and documenting their achievements so that others can be informed and be part of the movement especially young women. There should also be more clarity on what the movement hopes to achieve in the future to make it relevant to the society at large.

I also believe that we need to celebrate the work and achievements of feminists and connect with each other at a personal, community, national and international level. To ensure that our flames of passion continue to burn, we need to inspire one another, to work tirelessly till all forms of inequality against women are eliminated. It may take centuries but we should never give up. The Feminist Charter can be used as a guideline to establish feminist clubs for girls and young women. Girls have to be mentored at an early age to believe in themselves and their identity.

In my personal and professional life, I continue to raise awareness on feminist ideologies. I have a network of young women that I mentor and by associating with them, I take the opportunity to raise their consciousness about the inequalities around them and to make a choice to be part of the change to end all forms of violence I am inspired by change – by the accomplishments people achieve everyday and their refusal to give up on their rights. I love nature, travel and the beach – it reassures me that all the things that are bothering me really don’t matter in the big picture.



Codou Bop Senegal

 *I call myself a feminist because I believe in equality for all human beings.*

I am a Senegalese scholar and activist on woman's rights and human rights in general. I am based in Dakar, Senegal, where I serve as the Coordinator for the Groupe de Recherche sur les Femmes ET les Lois au Senegal (GREFELS). GREFELS works on sexuality, sexual orientation, the rights of women with disability, migrations and trafficking in women, women's rights in customary and religious laws and gender violence justified by customs or religion. I have been active with the local and regional feminist movement and have been a member of the Working Group of the African Feminist Forum. I have published women's reproductive health and sexuality, homophobia, on women's access to land, gender-based violence and on migration and citizenship.

I call myself a feminist because I believe in equality for all human beings. My struggle as a feminist is to achieve a society without people being excluded because they are women, or live with a disability, are old, or belong to what in Senegalese society is called low caste. I want to live in society where everybody can access resources available. I am committed to a society that considers and respects the rights of all groups (especially those who tend to be marginalized), and who believe in the principles of equality and does whatever is needed to ensure it is a lived reality.

As feminists in Africa, one of our biggest challenges is that women themselves do not believe that they can be leaders, and have the capacity to learn to lead

at the highest level politically, economically and culturally. As women, we are constrained by masculine definitions of leadership, and miss the opportunity of transforming the structures, and systems that ultimately work together to keep women subordinated. As African feminists, we also need a renewed commitment to breaking the silence around sexuality and bringing the issues to the fore, especially sensitive aspects that are regarded as taboo in all the countries. Sexuality issues are challenging in many African countries, hence people speak comfortably about sexuality in safe spaces but avoid talking about it in public. It is important for us as feminists to lead the way for a collective discussion on sexuality that highlights the politics of sexuality in terms of rights and citizenship.

I live my feminism in the fullest way in developing my capacities, in sharing them with the feminist and women's movement, in mentoring younger women, in supporting women's struggles in Africa and elsewhere. Part of my commitment to the politics of feminism is the willingness to speak out, dialogue and raise the profile of issues that may be considered uncomfortable, taboo and confrontational to the gender politics that have become the accepted norm in African societies.

I am inspired when I attend feminist gatherings and learn from our experiences (the good and the bad) and from our analyses.



Rose Buabeng Ghana

 *I am passionate about women's rights issues especially the environment and livelihoods for African women.*

I am a Ghanaian and work for the African Women's Development Fund in Accra as a Programmes Officer-Anglophone Africa. In particular, I am in charge of all applications and reports from English speaking African countries. My role includes reporting, analysis of grant-making activities of AWDF, networking and building relationships with a wide range of partners in Africa region; site-visits, setting and monitoring targets for grant-making on a thematic and regional basis; and representing AWDF at relevant events. I also provide technical assistance to grantees and maintain interactions throughout the grant cycle.

I am a feminist, sure, but I take it for granted. I learnt through the example of my illiterate mother who was a hardworking entrepreneur and always supported young unemployed women with financial assistance and advice to engage in sustainable business ventures to support their households. By example, she taught me how to be strong and industrious as a woman in order to gain the confidence and respect of your community. Hopefully, I am teaching my two daughters the same lesson.

I am passionate about women's rights issues especially the environment and livelihoods for African women. I think that the most pressing and urgent issue is increasing violence against women on the continent despite all international, regional and national instruments protecting the rights of women. Secondly


increasing poverty levels among women has rendered most women vulnerable, is compounded by climate change and its attendant impact on livelihoods of women. As feminists we are challenged because the resources to convene, strategize and deliberate are dwindling. We need to seriously look at alternative means of resource mobilization to sustain convening and the creation of safe spaces to engage on critical issues affecting women on the continent and finding lasting solutions. Secondly, we need to strengthen grassroots mobilization and movement building and integrate these into national and regional level movement building. Finally, we need to mentor and attract more young women into the movement and to sustain their interest in activism. We also need to popularise The Charter within the feminist circles and even beyond. Women's organizations must also be provided with the needed capacity building to use the Charter more effectively to transform their organizations.

At the personal level, I have adopted some young girls at the high school level am mentoring in gender equality and feminist issues; this is to groom them and enhance their interest in feminist activism.

What inspires me most is the hard work of previous generations of feminists; the power of women to champion their own development and the need to fight for women's basic rights to have a voice, to make our own choices, to be respected and safe in our society.



Leah Chatta-Chipepa Zambia / Uganda

 *I believe in promoting and defending the equal political, economic and social rights for women in their diversity regardless of class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, work, religion and so on.*

I work as the Executive Director for Akina Mama wa Afrika in Kampala, Uganda. I am responsible for monitoring the organization's consistent achievement of its mission and financial objectives. I also provide leadership in developing and implementing programs, organizational and financial plans; as well as maintaining effective communications, publicising activities of the organisation, and maintaining sound working relationships with stakeholders. Finally I represent the organization's programs and positions to partners and ensure staff management, financial management and direction.

I am not shy to call myself a feminist nor to be labelled as one. I believe in promoting and defending the equal political, economic and social rights for women in their diversity regardless of class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, work, religion and so on. These are rights that are enshrined in the Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Where these rights are denied, it is my duty to fight for their recognition at a personal level and also with others who stand to promote and defend the rights.

The challenges feminists face include the continued vilification of feminism as being aggressive, exclusive, anti men, anti marriage etc. This has resulted in a situation where even funders do not have women's rights activists in their organizations, or where funders shy away from funding feminist organizations. In addition, donors have reduced funding for women's rights to fund gender in government programs to achieve the MDGs. Added to that the emergence of the private sector as an engine of growth which is getting increased funding;

this sector rarely is involved in promoting gender equality let alone women's rights; and the picture concerning women's rights appear dire.

Being a mother of grown up daughters we discuss women's rights and how these are actually a feminist agenda. I also from time to time use my daughters' contacts on Facebook to discuss women's rights and how these need to be defended and promoted. I try to relate to current news items that I find in newspapers e.g. incidents of women's dress, rape, maternal death etc. In my professional life, I am conscious about managing the organization in a way that applies feminist principles to include: participation, building staff, flexibility, transparency and accountability to mention a few.

I am a mentor for three young women from a disadvantaged community in my country. I have encouraged them to stay in school because it is their right. Having found myself in a position to influence allocation of funding to women's rights I accomplished this task and got the organization to see the importance of promoting and defending women's rights to address the imbalance in access and opportunities for women. Finally, my activism includes making the decision to work for a women's organization that is a feminist organization and does not shy away from being labelled.

I am inspired by the love and support I get from my mother, siblings, husband, children and my grandchildren to work away from my home country for the past thirteen years.



Fanta Cisse Senegal

▀▀ *I call myself a feminist because it is about a simple issue of social justice.*

I was born and I live in Senegal. I am a sociologist and have been a member of GREFELS since 2009. I am extremely grateful as GREFELS has created the space for me as a young feminist to work with and engage with other like-minded women. I also worked for the regional office of WLUML/AME (Women Living under Muslim Laws/Africa and Middle East). It is an international solidarity network that provides information, support and a collective space for women whose lives are shaped, or governed by laws and customs said to be derived from Islam.

Working with women and for women is one of the most gratifying things in my life. I call myself a feminist because it is about a simple issue of social justice. I am a woman and I am conscious of having the same rights as those of my male counterparts, rights that are not respected in Africa, often in both legal and in social terms. My activism is dedicated to ensuring that all women get access to and control over resources, access to skills, control over the body (abortion rights that are still denied) and take part in decision making process the same level as the men.

Globally, women don't enjoy the same autonomy as men in terms of their status and roles. It is often difficult for them to assume control over social and political institutions that determine the framework of their life.

In recent times, there has been an attempt to denigrate feminist movements. The first challenge therefore would be to prove that feminism is a legitimate demand for the rights of women, which are in all, the same for every human

being. African women should be sensitized on these issues as they are agents of transmission of the values of a retrogressive and misogynous society unto future generations. It is unfortunate that most young women that I know believe that is archaic and irrelevant. Their thinking is that, this is a western imported ideology forgetting that great feminists lived (and still live) in Africa.

As a sociologist, my orientation is rather geared towards issues of gender, law, culture and reproductive health. Through my engagements with GREFELS and WLUML, I am able to assist women to break the isolation through which they waged their struggles, using more effective tools such as presentations of petitions and call for assistance.

I am inspired by African women's fight for their freedom and their rights, just like Nder who preferred to die being burnt alive instead of succumbing to oppression. I am moved by the likes of Aline Siteo Jaata, who was not only a migrant but a docker, who also led movements to resist colonialism despite her physical disability. Members of YEWWU-YEWWI (one of the very first Feminist Associations in Senegal) who embarked on a relentless campaign for the consideration of Women Rights, their participation in decision-making mechanisms and their fight for the recognition of 8th March celebration as an official day and the campaign to recognise Siteo Diatta as a national hero.

Finally, I am inspired by my mother, who in spite of her 9 children, and taking care of her nieces and nephews, managed to combine work and family. A feat I don't think I could ever achieve.



Yaliwe Clarke South Africa / Zambia

▀▀ *I seek to create spaces in which African women engage in authentic dialogue about our experiences of making changes in our lives that both embrace our power and challenge oppression.*

I currently work at the School of African and Gender Studies, Anthropology and Linguistics, University of Cape Town. My work entails both teaching undergraduate and post-graduate courses about gender justice in various African contexts and issues. In addition to this, as a board member, I contribute to the work of Isis Women's Cross Cultural Exchange Institute (WICCE), Uganda, and the Sex Workers Education and Advocacy Task Force (SWEAT), Cape Town. I also sit on editorial boards of three journals – Feminist Africa; BUWA: A Journal on African Women's Experiences; and Development in Practice.

Inspired by the human ability to overcome adversities and suffering, my work as a feminist activist has involved noticing and challenging gender inequalities that confront African women. I seek to create spaces in which African women engage in authentic dialogue about our experiences of making changes in our lives that both embrace our power and challenge oppression. More to Life facilitation techniques enable me to integrate regular self-reflective exercises and meditative practices into the workshops and meetings I facilitate. Buddhist philosophies, the conscious use of breath and meditation help me to draw on and manifest 'deep peace'.

In the courses I teach at the University of Cape Town, I examine stereotypes about gender and work that are set in place through historical processes in African contexts. I focus on women's and critical men's movements that have emerged in the context of political struggles against various forms of social injustice. I pay particular attention to the ways in which certain kinds of political action is informed by theories about feminism. I am particularly interested in feminist critiques of development, conflict, and peace processes (including

women's activism, the formation of movements, and trans-national alliances), in order to offer new approaches to theories on gender and development in African contexts.

Prior to joining the AGI, I interacted with African women's rights activists and peace-builders/conflict resolution practitioners and gained extensive continental training experience in gender and peace-building. As a part-time lecturer at the Mindolo Ecumenical Foundation Peace Centre in Kitwe, Zambia, I developed a gender and conflict module that formed part of a diploma and certificate course on peace-building.

Also, as a Senior Project Officer at the Centre for Conflict Resolution, I co-authored a Peace-building Training Manual for African Women in Decision-Making and conducted various training workshops for women in civil society and government in West, East and Southern Africa. Over the last nine years, I have worked with a range of civil society organisations in Southern Africa, notably: Zambia Civic Education Association (as Project Coordinator); Zambia Association for Research and Development (as ordinary member and Chairperson); the Southern African Conflict Prevention Network (as Network Coordinator); Mindolo Ecumenical Foundation; and the Centre for Conflict.

My research interests include developing new analytic voices around the meaning of 'gendered security' for women in diverse settings (slums, refugee settlements, migrant routes, conflict zones, and peacekeeping initiatives). I am convinced that these voices are embedded in African women's lived realities of 'peace and 'security'.



Bunmi Dipo-Salami Nigeria

 *I am a feminist because I am unapologetically passionate about improving the status of women.*

I live in Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria. I am a public servant. At present, I coordinate programmes and projects bordering on Integration and Intergovernmental Affairs, including MDGs in Ekiti State, Nigeria. The focus of my work includes ensuring the institutionalization of appropriate structures aimed at securing a synergy geared towards the socio-economic development of the State; identifying areas of intervention and ensuring the implementation of approved MDGs projects; strengthening relationships with development partners and identifying initiatives for improving the wellbeing of the people's economic development, among others.

I am a feminist because I am unapologetically passionate about improving the status of women. I believe in the capability and potential of women and I acknowledge the role of patriarchy in the oppression of women around the world. I disagree completely with the perception of women as inferior, subordinate, and second-class citizens. I believe every woman must have a voice to make choices. I work in solidarity with other women and some men to fight patriarchy and make women visible as critical stakeholders to improve their condition and position.

The major challenges are the compartmentalization of the rights of women by feminists, thereby making some more important than others. Some self-professed feminists even believe that some rights are NOT RIGHT. Poverty is a monster that constitutes an impediment to the realisation of the vision of feminists. The over-dependence on donor funding is also a challenge to feminist organisations. Religious fundamentalism continues to grow in dimensions that were not anticipated decades ago. The list is endless!

From where I stand, I don't see a movement yet. However, I will propose the following: (i) The Feminist Charter should become a living document that regulates the lives of feminists and goes beyond being another brochure that stays on the shelf; (ii) Our voices MUST be heard beyond the conferences and workshops that we organise for and with ourselves; and (iii) We need to broaden the scope by working with women of all ages at all levels and within all sectors. We need to stand with one another at all times.

In my own life, I try to be the change that I desire through leading by example. I focus attention on making women economically independent and equip them to acquire critical leadership skills that enable them impact the lives of other women positively. I continue to improve my knowledge of religions. I encourage other women to use their religion to their own advantage by interpreting the provisions to suit their understanding of God as the No 1 champion of justice.

Small breakthroughs inspire me. I am motivated when I see smiles on the face of a woman who took a decision to leave an abusive relationship; I am inspired when a young woman sees the big picture and dedicates herself to championing the cause of women. I rededicate myself when I see women in positions of power stand with other women. Big achievements also keep me going, such as the adoption and implementation of policy on gender equality; equal opportunities initiatives; affirmative action, etc.



Simidele Dosekun Nigeria / UK

Feminism for me is the necessary and proud struggle for all women to enjoy our full rights and humanity and to be respected as such – no 'ifs' or 'buts' as we say!

I currently live in London but work remotely in Nigeria. I am a PhD student at King's College, London in the Department of Culture, Media and Creative Industries, focusing on gender. My PhD looks at a new trend of 'hyper-feminine' stylisation among young, urban and upwardly-mobile Nigerian women. I am essentially asking who these women are and how they think of themselves and their options and desires as women. Work wise I run a freelance editing service in Nigeria and occasionally work as a gender consultant.

Feminism for me is the necessary and proud struggle for all women to enjoy our full rights and humanity and to be respected as such – no 'ifs' or 'buts' as we say! I call myself a feminist because I believe I am engaged in this struggle in multiple ways and am certainly committed to it for as long as it takes. I also consider myself to be an African feminist academic in the making, and I think knowledge production is a critical site of feminist engagement, particularly in Africa.

The general cultural climate is hostile to women, never mind those who call themselves feminists and challenge norms. Poverty and under-education are overbearing obstacles in the lives of most African women, so as African feminists we must necessarily address these issues. They also hamper our own activist and organisational capacity. Then there is rising religious fundamentalism and the perennial problem of violence against women, moreover with little or no recourse to justice.


We need to grow our movement, so we need more women in diverse spheres and walks of life to hear our message and come to champion it. We particularly need more feminists in government. We also need to continue and grow our intra-continental dialogue because many patterns and challenges recur across our different countries. Finally, we need more African feminist research, writing and publication. In a sense we need to know ourselves more and shape our own narratives.

Both personally and professionally I constantly battle to assert my feminist principles and in fact to live them when this means being a 'killjoy,' to use the wonderful term of black British feminist Sara Ahmed, or means 'being difficult.' I ran a Nigerian publishing house for three years so I tried to use that platform to insert more gender egalitarian content particularly into our children's books. I hope to eventually work as a feminist academic in Africa and so further contribute in this regard.

I am inspired by feminist 'killjoys' who remain full of joy! I often feel so angry or depressed about one issue or another – sexism, gender violence, corruption, abuse of power etc. – so I am inspired by those who do not lose heart, joyfulness or compassion in the face of continued injustice. I am also inspired by people who conduct themselves with honesty, integrity and fairness, particularly when this is not rewarded or the norm, as is sadly the case in a country like Nigeria today.



Lona James Elia Sudan

 *I tell people that I am a feminist because I fight the oppressive and exploitative structures that discriminate against and marginalize women.*

I am a Southern Sudan woman, born during the war, grew up in the war and brought up her children in exile in Kenya. I came to Kenya in 1993, having studied in Egypt from 1989–1992. Lived in Kenya all these years, came to Juba the capital City of Southern Sudan after the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005. However, having lived in Kenya as a refugee since 1993, my children are still studying there due to lack of good education facilities and teachers. In addition the curricular used in Southern Sudan is very different and most schools function in Arabic. This made me keep two homes and visit Kenya frequently to see my children. As the Executive Director for the organization, I receive and transmit VFC's official communications; maintain high level contacts with appropriate government officials and ensure that all the organizational policies and procedures are adhered to and timely reporting to the Donors; approves budget and staff recruitment, fundraising and represent VFC at a high levels meetings and other forums.

I call myself a feminist, because I believe in the feminist values of a disciplined work ethic guided by integrity and accountability at all times, expanding and strengthening a multi-generational network and pool of feminist leaders across the continent. I work to ensure that the feminist movement is recognized as a legitimate constituency for women in leadership positions, building and

expanding our knowledge and information base on an ongoing basis as the foundation of shaping our analysis and strategies. We need to champion a culture of learning beginning with our selves within the feminist movement to mention but a few.

The use of the word feminist is very much contested by both women's organizations and individuals. There are many in Southern Sudan who are committed to the Charter of Feminist Principles and values and would want to be members but who do not wish to be called feminists due to the connotations attached to the identity. Secondly, there is a need to find creative strategies that would engage women at the grassroots to actively participate in feminist movement activities. To address this we need to continue investing in women's leadership development (in particular in Southern Sudan), in increased networking and collaboration, and widespread education to address the divides between women.

I tell people that I am a feminist because I fight the oppressive and exploitative structures that discriminate against and marginalize women. As an institution we have ensured that we include feminist components in our training.



Fatma Emam Egypt

I call myself a feminist because I have been through incidents in my life that proved to me that equality and egalitarianism are basic rights for everyone.

I was born in Cairo and I live and work in Cairo as a researcher and founder of Nazra for Feminist Studies.

I call myself a feminist because I have been through incidents in my life that proved to me that equality and egalitarianism are basic rights for everyone. I believe that women suffered and are still suffering from patriarchal system, so I believe that if I want to live my life, I would adopt feminism as part of my identity such that it will enable me to see the world through perspectives that are just.

One of the main challenges facing women is religious fundamentalism. Extremists are prevailing in many African countries, not only hindering any advancement to the status of women, but also negating their acquired rights.

One of the greatest lessons that I, and others have learnt through organised struggle is that people all over the world can make a difference, and so solidarity and support are essential for the success of any legitimate call for justice and human rights. In situations when it seems as if potential allies like the international media is reluctant to confront or upset those in power, we as people can use whatever is at our disposal to achieve our objectives. Whether that is new-fangled ways of mobilization and

creating awareness such as social media, or whether it is using age-old methods of protest and resistance, we can make a difference. Ultimately, my activism not only in Egypt, but across borders is inspired by the notion that we are all in the same trench, so regardless of nationality, we must seek freedom for others, just as we do for ourselves.

In terms of feminist struggle, our broader objectives can be achieved when we create platforms for networking and also mobilising more young women to join our efforts. Information is key as a means to facilitate dialogue, but also propel us to action and ultimately reflection so that we are able to renew our strategies, that we are able to confront and overthrow oppressive forces of power.

Personally, I have been brought up in a very conservative family; however they were enlightened persons who have trained me to dare to question. I tried and I am still trying to claim my rights. Professionally I joined feminist movements in their endeavour to counter the rise of radical voices in the Egyptian society.

I am inspired by the struggles of women for voice and justice in difficult and often dangerous circumstances.



Fatime Khady Faye Senegal

▮▮ *At a personal level, I am inspired by principles and ideals of justice and have translated this into my efforts to fight for our right to be free to choose.*

I live in Senegal, West Africa. I live in Toubab Dialaw (60 km away from Dakar) in a small fishing village where I am tirelessly committed to the work with women and youth associations.

I am a feminist as I have always been gender sensitive from childhood. I have always refused to conform to stereotypes and resisted dictates that tended to box me such as “you belong/you don’t belong to”. At a personal level, I am inspired by principles and ideals of justice and have translated this into my efforts to fight for our right to be free to choose. In the society I live in, much of what women’s lives would be is often chosen for them and women often become shackled by norms, traditions and the confines of traditional roles that hamper their ability to actualize all parts of themselves.

I believe that in Africa, our biggest challenge is educating and empowering women in communities. Whilst we have made great strides in more women being empowered and educated, this has not filtered down to women at all levels of society. In many contexts women still have to justify and fight for their education and empowerment. Both of these, impact on their ability to claim dignity, rights and also to advance themselves to another economic level.

If we want to strengthen our work in Africa, we need to get more organized, especially in French speaking countries. We need to increase the dialogue and the organising in our own spaces and countries and also across spaces and countries. Then, we also need to build bridges with our Anglophone sisters. Despite some initiatives to address the lack of connections between Anglophone and Francophone feminist groups, we still have a long way to go. We need to prioritise this, get together more often and build strong collaborations. Only through this, will we finally see some sustainable changes in our countries.

In my own life, my professional activities have often focused on engagements with youth associations in the area of sports and culture, as well as on economic empowerment through creation of enterprises for women and health. I am a member of the Association for Integrated Development in Toubab Dialaw, Toastmasters Clubs International and the Pan African Network of Leaders (PANeL) Senegal. These platforms provide me with many opportunities to live out my feminist identity, to challenge existing inequalities and to grow.

My inspiration comes from all women around the world who do small (and great) things to free themselves from stereotypes and invent new ways of expressing themselves (writers, artists, politicians, etc.).



Mariama Faye Senegal

 *Women and girls possess enormous potential that is still underutilised and whose real value is unknown.*

I live in Dakar, Senegal where I have been working as a consultant to GREFELS (A research on Women and Law group based in Senegal) since the year 2009. My work as an independent consultant has included election monitoring, capacity building workshops, networking, drafting of fundraising proposals, implementation of research projects and report-writing.

I am a feminist because in my opinion; women are not occupying their deserved positions in our societies. I believe that as women, we all need to play a role in unearthing the discriminations that women are subjected to under the guise of religion, customs and traditions, and the disparities of social classes. There is a political attempt to stifle the statements of women and that is the reason why it is necessary to revisit history, reinterpret religious taking into account trends of our society. Women and girls possess enormous potential that is still underutilised or whose real value is unknown.

As feminists in Africa, we have a lot to do to in some countries to encourage the education of the girl child, to fight illiteracy and to prevent them from being ignorant of their rights. The inadequate education accounts for most women being victims of injustices and discrimination, something they have taken in stride simply because society has made them to. The high levels of violence against women in all our countries is another key issue - mercy killings,

homophobia, stoning, repudiation, underage/forced marriages are some of the forms of violence that are committed with impunity. Indeed where some forms of violence seem enshrined in societal norms due to the rise in religious fundamentalism or the existence of discriminatory laws against women. In addition, we need to find ways to address the needs of people considered as vulnerable (people living with disabilities, elderly, widows, etc).

Some of our strategies can include rethinking academic programmes by highlighting in history and science textbooks for example women who played leading roles and to introduce gender equality concepts, human rights, democracy, as early as the primary school stage. It is important that we popularize what feminism really means.

Personally, I try to draw people's attention to societal prejudices, discrimination and gender-based abuses. In my professional life, I strive to work in a true spirit of respect and solidarity. Although we are often faced with resources and support challenges, we are able to overcome them thanks to our relationships with civil society and institutional players. I feel inspired by my mother, my aunts and my sisters from whom I always learn lessons of generosity and courage. I feel inspired by the generation of men and women who fought valiantly for us to have access to education, the right to vote, and other social advantages.



Lesley Ann Foster South Africa

▀▀ *I am inspired by the wisdom, strength, courage and power of my daughter, who as a young adult is making her way through life in a truly amazing way.*

I live in East London, South Africa. My work is across 26 African countries because I am president of Amanitare Sexual Rights Network. I am also on the board of IWRAP AP and our work is across 122 countries. I work on issues of gender equality and social justice, with specific focus on violence against women, HIV/AIDS and sexual reproductive health and rights. My personal vision is to work towards a world where all women are free and enjoy all their human rights.

I call myself a feminist I will not accept inequality and I recognise that our society is a patriarchal one in which power, control and privilege are vested in men. This leads to women suffering many forms of discrimination and oppression within their families, communities and society as a whole. Women are full human beings with the ability to determine their own destinies and are entitled to the freedom to control their own bodies, their lives and determine the place they want to occupy in life. Women are full human beings and should be accorded the respect and dignity that comes with being human.

African women across the continent face the challenge of patriarchy which is embedded in every system within African society. It dominates our economic, social, cultural, religious, and traditional systems and serves mainly to oppress women. Our challenge comes from the fact that patriarchy, colonization and our political systems (e.g. apartheid) has robbed us of a true sense of our power as women. Too many women suffer from a lack of self esteem from low self worth and a lack of confidence.


Our starting point needs to be to re-establish a strong sense of identity and power among women. Then, it is important that we transfer knowledge and skills to younger people through inter-generational forums and to document our history and share this across the continent. We should also establish a feminist body with a political focus that works to develop young feminists and provide an ongoing feminist critique and analysis of events on the continent. A constant flow of information (using the range of ICTs) to women is needed to build the movement. I have worked to free myself from oppression at a personal level by seeking to free myself from the notion that I needed a partner in order to be a complete human being.

I have resisted relationships in which I am expected to be subservient to a man or where I have to give up my dreams and aspirations in order to be accepted. At a professional level I work to build women's knowledge and understanding of themselves and of their potential to be change agents in their own lives and in that of other women. I have dedicated my life to supporting women in their journeys of transformation and liberation. I am inspired by the wisdom, strength, courage and power of my daughter, who as a young adult is making her way through life in a truly amazing way.

I am inspired by my two grandsons whose innocence, creativity and intelligence excite me. I am inspired by the strength and courage I observe in women every day.



Diakhoumba Gassama Senegal / Spain

 *I think that African Feminists should urgently become versed, visible and lead several critical development issues to influence all policies and programme that affect women and girls in Africa.*

I am a human rights lawyer and I am currently working for UNDP in New York. I am a feminist because I believe as a human rights activist that there is a serious emergency for women and girls to be respected and for them to have the same opportunities as men and boys in all spheres of society. But, most importantly, I am a feminist because I am angry, not ready to compromise and prepared to stand up against any violation of women's and girls' rights anywhere in the world. I believe that it is time for accelerated action as women of the world have been patient for long enough. I feel like the feminist community is the space for well thought through, critical and effective change. I am a feminist with not a single 'maybe', 'if' or 'but'. I think African feminists face challenges within and outside the movement. Within the movement there is a lot of unnecessary ego fights and distrust that make us weaker. There is also a lack of serious commitment to accountability and to empowering as well as giving space to younger women.

I think that African feminists should urgently become versed, visible and lead several critical development issues to influence all policies and programme that affect women and girls in Africa. As a Francophone African I also feel that the movement is evolving at two speeds depending on where you come from and that sometimes Francophone (and also Lusophone) sisters are left behind. Sometimes it feels like the leadership of the movement is nearly exclusively exercised by Anglophone sisters. Outside the movement I think the greatest challenge for us is to be understood by our families and communities and too many times I have seen how lonely and isolated some of the sisters are.

Finally, I feel like there is too much interference from other regions (especially the US and Europe) in our fora while we get very limited access to theirs.

Coming from a very traditional community, I am seen as an alien because I choose to oppose and strongly voice concerns about inequality and harmful practices in my own family and community. I believe that change starts with us and our closest relationships and that it can only come from daily actions using a zero tolerance policy at all moments. I also try to show my family and community that there are other values that they have that I hold and respect and that I am not rejecting our culture. In my work I always try to support, give visibility and encourage dynamic, professional and innovative initiatives. I am also trying to participate in the rejuvenation of the movement by encouraging young women like me to participate actively. Finally, as I am bilingual, I always try to assist Francophone sisters to voice their priorities to our Anglophone sisters and I also participate actively in the revitalisation of the feminist movement in Francophone Africa.

I am inspired by any victory against patriarchy, by older sisters who have managed to stay true to themselves and empower and mentor others and by those who stand up and speak up when they are alone. I am inspired by the strength and courage of women who overcome adversity, who are vibrant, honest and committed to continue working towards societal change at all levels with not a single 'maybe', 'if' or 'but'.



Azola Goqwana South Africa

▮▮ *The history and the context of our lives do not leave us as African women any choice but to be feminists.*

I live in Cape Town, South Africa. I was born in a small remote rural village in the Eastern Cape called Mqanduli. Even if I were to go anywhere in the world I would still go back home because it is the place that reminds me of who I am; it keeps me grounded. I have worked in countries like Malawi and Zambia.

Currently, I am a writer, an entrepreneur and also someone who works for a feminist movement building organisation. Thus far, my work has focused in building feminist movements in Zambia and Malawi. I have found it incredibly exciting to work with groups of women to develop political awareness such that the women themselves start processes, campaigns and initiatives that confront and challenge power. In addition, working on initiatives to strengthen and amplify a political voice of young feminists in the Southern African region has been inspiring. I believe that in the next 5 years or so Southern Africa will have a strong collective of young African feminists. If I were to dream out loud I would love to see the young women in the region mobilising and organising around a collective issue that would dramatically shift the realities of young women (and other women). I mean the issues can go from the state policing on women's bodies to the availability of basic things like sanitary pads for young women.

It probably sounds clichéd but I owe my feminism to my grandmother. I grew up with 4 cousins and she was the only person that was looking

after us as our mothers had to work in the nearby towns. None of us had a father present in our lives, so a male presence was a foreign thing in our house. I am not suggesting that grandmother did not give the boys preference in something's like house chores but she also taught us independence of being able to do things like shopping without her. Knowing that you had been given a huge amount of money for the month's groceries was scary because it meant that if you lost the money there would be no food for the whole month. So even then we learned to be careful with things like money.

It is easy for me to call myself a feminist. The history and the context of our lives do not leave us as African women any choice but to be feminist. With that said I think that the term feminism can be limiting to a lot as women who are feminist can easily reject it as they think that they have to act and speak a certain way if they call themselves feminist. I also think that because feminism cannot be easily translated into many African languages, it is seen as an ideology of the educated. Whilst acknowledging that this may be an old argument, I also think we need to do more to address it.

I am inspired by teenagers who are so sure about what they want to do about their future and the amount of knowledge that they have about sexuality and sexual health, at a very young age. I am also inspired by women who stand up to harassment and demand respect and dignity.



Caroline Bazarrabusa Horn Uganda

“ I believe that my commitment to feminist values grows out of my genuine love and respect for the woman who raised me and protected me as a child.

I am currently resident in Uganda where I was born and grew up. I have also been enrolled in a Masters level gender studies program as a student at Makerere University in Kampala. I am a state registered nurse, midwife and health visitor by profession and I have worked in Uganda, Nigeria and the UK in the field of maternal and child health. I also hold a BA and postgraduate qualifications in English literature and political science.

I call myself a feminist because I am working hard on becoming a politically effective one. I believe that my commitment to feminist values grows out of my genuine love and respect for the woman who raised me and protected me as a child. As an adult that founding love and respect has progressively been translated into a renewed commitment to women and politics in general.

As a result of my current involvement in a gender studies program as a mature MA student I have become increasingly interested in contributing towards the development of a dynamic framework for instituting women's experience as an alternative to the mainstream scientific models that continue to leave women's

perspectives and accumulated repertoires of local knowledge out of important public policy decisions.

My current work concerning the interrelation of rural Ugandan women subsistence peanut farmers' daily household food preparation and the constitution of gendered embodied knowledge and space has provided me with an opportunity to address some of the cognitive and ethical-political questions about African feminist theories of knowledge, methodologies and activism.

I am inspired by the current vibrancy of the women's movement and radical transnational feminism as alternatives to mainstream heteronormative cultural values. I am inspired by critical feminists who seek to change the way we think and feel—so that we can contribute much more compassionately. I am inspired by philosophical thoughts and art forms: that make me see differently. I am inspired by transformative scholarship and political perspectives that affirm the creativity and positivity of others' difference.



Immaculate Ingabire Rwanda

■ ■ *In my own life, both professionally and personally, I have dedicated my efforts to advocacy for gender sensitive laws.*

I live in Kigali, Rwanda, where I work at national and regional level as coordinator of a coalition fighting violence against women. My responsibilities include advocacy, sensitization, training as well as providing legal aid to women survivors of violence.

I call myself feminist, because I believe and am committed to the struggle for: equality between men and women. This principle, grounds the work I do to tirelessly fight for a world where violence against women is not accepted as a norm, where women's rights are the norm rather than the exception and where we have successfully eradicated discrimination based on gender.

Feminists in Africa face many challenges, but to me the most important are those resulting from the social and cultural environment that is deeply shaped by patriarchal values and beliefs. The deeply entrenched nature of these values is what shapes current attitudes, beliefs and practices towards all members of society. Most commonly, I have seen how this has not only engendered within women a lack of self-confidence, but it has also contributed towards increasing poverty among women and a justification for discrimination that contributes to the pervasive violence we see on our continent today. Despite the gains we

have made as feminists, we continue to face resistance to dismantling of this patriarchal system.

I believe we can address these challenges if we commit ourselves to ongoing networking at local, national, regional and international levels to combine our efforts and become this force that is unstoppable. We need to bring on board more women at all levels who are willing to work in small and big ways towards these goals in the private and the public domain. We need to provide the support for women to be able to do that. We also need to ensure that we increase the number of women in decision-making organs.

In my own life, both professionally and personally, I have dedicated my efforts to advocacy for gender sensitive laws. I have also worked directly to ensure that our organisations are strong and able to build a movement of women through sensitization and creation of women only spaces so that we start shifting the status quo, and we are better able to deal with the challenges that come our way. In my activism, I draw inspiration from my own and the personal experiences of women I know, in particular the experience of my mother.



Ngozi Iwere Nigeria

 *I am a feminist because I believe in the full personhood of women.*

I live in Lagos, Nigeria. For the past 35 years, I have been an activist for social justice. I helped to build the radical student's movement in the country in the 1980s and I'm active in the pro-democracy and working class struggles. I am the founding Director of Community Life Project (CLP), which is a Non-Governmental organisation promoting participatory, holistic grassroots development. We work on issues of health, livelihoods and governance. The majority of our people are marginalised from the development and governance processes and public policies and programmes don't often serve their interest. Through advocacy and training, we help government agencies become more participatory and responsive. More importantly, we build the capacity of grassroots people to take independent action to improve their quality of life. We provide the knowledge and skills necessary for people to find their voice and use it to make government more democratic and accountable. I am a feminist because I believe in the full personhood of women. I am angry that society allows women to be treated as second-class, subordinate beings. I work from a women's rights and human rights perspective.

The need to fundamentally improve the status and living conditions of the majority of African women is the major challenge facing us as African feminists today. While the work of women's movements all over the world has resulted in some gains for women everywhere, the majority of women in Africa still lack access to education, healthcare, financial capital and land. As African feminists we have to devise ways and means to positively transform this situation over the next two decades. Secondly, our movement is still largely elitist and

dominated by those of us who have been privileged to receive good formal education. It is most desirable to open the space a lot more for the participation of young girls and to synergise our work with the struggles of women at the grassroots. In addition to this, we need to encourage programmes challenging patriarchal and macho values that target men, boys, and women gatekeepers in our communities. We have the advantage of the African Feminist Charter which is a tool that can be used to engage the Ministries of Women Affairs all over Africa. We should also get buy-in from large women's networks, including faith-based women's networks.

In my personal and professional life I have tried to raise my children without sexist prejudices and to instil feminist consciousness in them. I ensure that grassroots women are a significant part of my social network and that we work with, organised, trade-based, self-help women's groups. I am inspired by the success of past struggles for women's rights, class and racial justice such as the struggle for universal adult suffrage, majority rule in South Africa, access to land by Cuban peasants. They help me not to feel overwhelmed by the forces of injustice and oppression.

I am inspired by the sun-set, the sheer immensity of the ocean, blooming flowers and the shedding of leaves by trees, little wonders and beauties of creation. They are reminders that the world renews itself and brings hope that change will definitely come to women and all the down-trodden peoples of the world. I only need to stay feminist, keep going and never quit.



Fatma Zohra Karadja Algeria



A specific toolkit that is invaluable in enabling our work is the African Feminist Charter in Africa. It is our responsibility to use it, disseminate it, adapt it and even make revisions as we start implementing with renewed vigour to revitalise our efforts for women's rights.

I live in Algeria. I am the Director of an organisation that supports abandoned children and marginalised women. I am also the Chair of an organisation that promotes the rights of women and children and provides psychological support to mothers. I am currently the Vice President of ECOSOCC/AU (Economic and Social Cultural Council of the African Union).

I boldly call myself a feminist because since being a student I have always been committed to defend women's rights. This has influenced and shaped my professional choices and well as my community work.

Despite strides in education and extensive work to promote the status of women, African women continue to be subjected to social injustice and patriarchal systems that continue to inhibit women's dignity, rights and development. The main challenge for activists is to ensure the implementation of the various conventions and instruments ratified by governments. To effectively push back against efforts targeted at hampering women's advancement, it is necessary for feminists to create and nurture vibrant regional networks. However, we need to think more creatively about how to ensure that these networks function well and assist in propelling us forward towards our ultimate goals. We also need to organise ourselves in such a way that on the one level we continue to ensure that we advocate for new legislation where necessary, or implementation and honouring of existing legislative instruments that promote our objectives and

goals. Finally, we need to develop new ways of thinking around how we at community and societal level effectively curb gender-based violence and discrimination.

To achieve this, we have many resources at our disposal. We have the experiences of feminists across the continent who have seen many changes, we have toolkits and guides, and we even have our own funding initiatives. A specific toolkit that is invaluable in enabling our work is the African Feminist Charter in Africa. It is our responsibility to use it, disseminate it, adapt it and even make revisions as we start implementing with renewed vigour to revitalise our efforts for women's rights.

On a personal level, I have managed to assert my feminist identity in my family as well as community. Moreover I have managed to bring up my two children, a girl and a boy within the principles of equality. In the 70s I took a bold step by creating a safe space to provide support for single mothers that were ostracised by their communities. I am deeply inspired by equality and what it represents. It does not have to remain an ideal – but can be a lived reality. I also completely ascribe to freedom and choices. As a feminist movement our goal is not to have all women be the same. Our fight has been to ensure that women have the freedom to choose how they wish to live their lives and to be respected for whatever choices they make.



Fatoumata Badini Kinda Burkina Faso



As feminists, we need to mobilise awareness in women and men to contribute towards a situation where women's rights are a lived reality.

I live in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, and I am a Lecturer at the University of Ouagadougou in the Department of Sociology. The courses I teach include Gender and Development Analysis; Gender Education and Society, Research Methodology and Urban and Industrial Sociology. In addition to teaching I also supervise the dissertations and theses of students as well as carry out research and publish articles covering a range of issues related to women's lives, work, and the impact of urbanization on gender relations.

I call myself a feminist because I believe that the inequalities, discrimination and violence suffered by women worldwide is not inevitable. I firmly stand by the notion that we have the possibility of transforming gendered relations of power through a sustained confrontation and dismantling of patriarchy.

Looking at Africa today, feminists face the challenge of fighting to eliminate all forms of blatant discrimination and violence against women. They must promote the rights of girls and women in the fields of education, employment, access to basic services, physical integrity, participation in public spheres of decision making, especially social protection. As feminists, we need to mobilise awareness in women and men to contribute towards a situation where women's rights are a lived reality.

This process should include ensuring that women in decision-making in state institutions are supported and their voices are profiled. We also need to ensure

that we make our own struggles and movements visible in such a way that others may find entry points to join us so that we have a louder voice. Finally, we need to work on the African feminist movement itself, to ensure that we have a common agenda, that we develop innovative strategies and are able to implement them in ways that are novel.

The African Feminist Charter, as a document of guidance and reference to the struggle of women can serve as a tool for advocacy and mobilization on the cause of women. I believe it can be introduced at different educational levels or be popularized as an instrument of civic education. This should be undertaken through translation into local languages and a wider dissemination and accessibility to all social strata.

My own contribution to the broader objectives of the feminist movements is visible through the research, teaching and also publications I have done. In addition, through participating in broader forums, I am able to bring a feminist voice to a range of different spaces. In my personal life I share a lot of feminist ideas with my family and people around me. I also try to consciously educate my children on gender equality. The vision of transformation, inspires me and motivates me to continue the sustained struggle for justice and equality.



Kathambi Kinoti Kenya

 *I am a feminist because I yearn and work for rights and justice for women everywhere.*

I live and work in Nairobi, Kenya. A lawyer by training, I have extensive experience in the field of women's rights. I am a writer and researcher, passionate about women and Africa. For the past few years, I have worked as the Women's Rights Information Coordinator of the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID), and currently I am a founder trustee of the Young Women's Leadership, an organization that works towards the holistic empowerment of young women.

I am a feminist because I yearn and work for rights and justice for women everywhere. I embrace feminist theories that trace the cause of women's inequality to patriarchy, and I believe that for fundamental change to occur, we must dismantle patriarchy.

As African feminists, the list of issues and challenges that we are confronted with is extensive. Whilst, there are countless efforts across the continent to address these challenges, we fall short as African feminists in sharing our work and telling our multiple stories. This often leads to our wonderful work being told by others, or even misrepresented and sometimes appropriated by other actors. To find appeal and connection to women across the board, we have to take seriously this challenge to make our work known, accessible and connect it to women where they are. Whilst the African Feminist Forum through the Voice Power and Soul publication is attempting to do this, more of us need to be challenging the discourse about African women and African feminism.

At another level, the backlash against women's human rights defenders, against the gains that feminists have made seems to be increasing in certain contexts. It always seems like we are moving two steps forward one step back. The consequences of voicing out and confronting injustices need to be borne in mind when we develop our strategies. And of course, to achieve our goals we need enough money, but there isn't enough of it finding its way to the feminist movement on the continent. What we need is more funding; more sharing of strategies and stories; and greater celebration of African feminists. We could also make better use of the Charter of Feminist Principles for African Feminists by sharing it more widely, including with movements in other regions, and translating it into other languages so that it can be accessible to more women. Finally, in our organisations, we need to find ways to operationalise it so that the principles we hold so dear do not remain a dream, but become living practice (with the challenges that come with it) in more feminist organisations in the region.

At a personal and professional level, my contribution has been to write to about the challenges, and to explore and share what has worked in different countries, regions or communities. I am deeply inspired by positive and uplifting stories as it is an affirmation that it's not all doom and gloom in the world. I am also energised through creativity, beauty and ultimately justice.



Sophia Kpebutso Ghana

■ ■ *I have been transformed through my exposure to the realities that women face, through observing, listening and learning the way patriarchy snatches away our ability to dream and be the light of our world.*

I was born and raised in Ghana. I work with the African Women's Development Fund a Pan-African grant making foundation which mobilises financial resources to support local, national and international initiatives led by women with a vision for African women to live in a world where there is social justice, equality and respect for human rights.

I am a proud feminist because I know I am! I have been transformed through my exposure to the realities that women face, through observing, listening and learning the way patriarchy snatches away our ability to dream and be the light of our world. I am a feminist because I believe in the dignity of a woman and the impact a woman can make when given equal opportunities. I am a feminist because I believe in equality in the home, in the workplace, in all other relationships and our society.

The challenge with feminism in Africa is lack of understanding. People do not understand the movement. People equate feminism with man-haters and women who 'want to be men'. Another challenge is a lack of vibrant young women within the movement. Young women who themselves think of, dream and act using innovative strategies to address the challenges faced by women in our societies. In addition, this lack of young women in the movement is a challenge as it has implications for the sustainability of the movement.

These challenges can only be addressed if women are key players in the feminist revolution. Secondly, the feminist movement has to proactively coach younger women and mentor them so that they become impassioned and are ready to step into the big shoes of their predecessors. It is also important that

efforts be made to empower women at all levels of society, to popularize feminism so that it starts chipping away at the negative perceptions that are held about feminists. These strategies can easily be done through the national feminist forums as these would be rooted in local realities and challenges and thus ensure that the solutions that emerge are fitting for each African country. The Feminist Charter is a tool that is available to guide these actions and it is up to each local context to take it and apply it and adapt it so that it becomes a living document.

Our transformation as a continent can only happen if we move from just engaging in discourses, to purposeful action. This will ensure that the ideals and the values of feminists will no longer invoke tentative responses such as "I am a feminist but...", "I am a feminist if...". Commitment from the movement to building bridges, communicating and willingness to change if necessary is a definite requirement for this.

In my professional life I am proud to say I work with an organisation that is deeply rooted in the feminist ideals and works to ensure that women-led initiatives thrive across the continent. I believe that "the personal is political". I recently found myself amidst a group of younger people through the university training I am undergoing. Meeting these people I have tried to share my knowledge with them and also tried to live by example. Also I have a four-year old son who motivates and challenges me to be a better feminist.

I draw my inspiration from women who have for centuries stood up against injustices and risked everything to achieve freedom and dignity.



Betty Luma Cameroon

 *I see the need to address the issue of obnoxious and vexatious laws that propagate the discrimination against women.*

I live in Douala, Cameroon. I am a member of International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA) Cameroon. This is a women's human rights organisation that seeks to address the key issues that affect the rights and dignity of women and girls in Cameroon. I am also a member of the National Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms in Cameroon representing the key issues, vulnerabilities and concerns of women.

I call myself a feminist because during the course of my work with FIDA Cameroon I am constantly confronted with the realities of injustices against women. Personally I am faced with the extreme loss and indignation that result from having to engage with women whose lives seem characterised by indignity, loss, and also so much psychological pain. Sometimes I feel like our responses to these realities are like patching a wall on a shaky foundation. My feminist action is driven by the need to strive daily for equality between men and women and to pave the path to women's equality. I see the need to challenge the issue of obnoxious and vexatious laws that propagate the discrimination against women.

In terms of the challenges of the African feminist movement, I believe we encounter the backlash that happens as a result of misconceptions that brand us as "hysterical females who are not capable of keeping their reason and passion in balance". Feminists are often shunned in a society where patriarchy is prevailing and are thought to have borrowed strange ideas from western cultures. African feminists face the challenge of breaking free from stereotypes


that keep women in subordinate status. At the collective level, in Cameroon, the feminist movement is weak and lacks support from other women especially the younger generation, who may not want to identify with their ideals.

However, every challenge does come with solutions. I believe we need to promote synergy between African feminist associations and give space to groups that consider themselves marginalized. We also need to actively and consistently tackle the project of bringing younger feminists into the fold. We have many advantages such as cyberspace and other ICT forums that can help us reach more women (especially young women) and we have to use them strategically and creatively.

In my own life, I resist any attacks against me and my person or anything that I stand for as a feminist. I am personally involved in education of all and sundry on women's human rights. Both men and women, perpetrators and victims of violence and discrimination are my target for education. I am also deeply committed and engage in encouraging the younger generation to join the movement at any opportunity available. I am inspired by women who never give up, who believe in themselves by standing up for their rights as human beings, resisting subordination and male chauvinism and dominance. Men who shun discrimination and fight for the wellbeing of women everywhere also inspire me. I gain sustenance from the support and encouragement I receive from friends and family.



Maria Magezi Uganda

 *I identify myself as a feminist because I am aware of the myriad forms of discrimination that women face in different spaces; and as a result I actively seek to change that situation.*

I live in Uganda and work with Akina Mama wa Afrika a pan-African feminist organisation as a Program Officer. This means that I get to work in several areas of Africa. I am involved in building coalitions, leadership training for young African women to actively influence policies. Engage in national and regional advocacy to improve the status of women.

I identify myself as a feminist because I am aware of the myriad forms of discrimination that women face in different spaces; and as a result I actively seek to change that situation. It is not enough for me to just see the situation and look away. I believe feminists in Africa as a collective are faced with a lack of consistent and vibrant organising on issues. This results in piecemeal reactive action rather than proactive engagement. At individual level, even while we claim that feminists support all women, the commitment to practically do this is not evident when 'controversial' topics such as sexual orientation and sex workers rights come to the table. This affects the collective in terms of cohesion, commitment and probably explains the poor mobilisation and vibrancy for certain issues. Feminists live and work in an environment that is male dominated. Sometimes it feels like the feminist cry is a lone voice that is worsened by negative stereotypes. Feminists have a task to prove to dissenting voices that feminism is indeed real, African and not a western concept or an elitist club.

To address these challenges, the movement has to build the bridges between the 'elite' and 'ordinary' women. It cannot continue to be viewed as club for

urban, elite or career women. The feminist movement has to be innovative about creating or generating funds for its constituencies. We cannot continue to be donor funded. We also need to keep the fire burning consistently and act pro-actively in order to be effective.

In my personal and professional life, I have addressed women in diverse places to make them aware of patriarchy and the way it has been weaved into society as norms and beliefs. Personally I have supported other women in "sisterhood" in all kinds of small but meaningful ways. I have chosen to live by example. I have also engaged in advocacy campaigns against stereotypes of women and feminists. At a professional level, I have ensured that projects are all inclusive of all women without discrimination 'no "ifs" , no "buts"'. This has also included advocacy campaigns for all women. Finally, I have volunteered time as a Member of the Uganda Feminist Forum Working Group and offered technical assistance to community based women's organisations.

I am inspired by two words: change and growth. I am passionate about creating change in the lives of women so that they can become self reliant, make personal decisions with availability of choice and making their lives better. This explains my interest in empowering women economically, receiving and continuing education and above all believing in themselves that they have the potential to make their lives better.



Olla Mahadi Sudan

■ ■ *I constantly work on deepening my analytical capacity on issues such as gender, feminist and movement building as well as human rights.*

I work in Sudan as a Programme Officer for the Salmah Women Resource Centre. My first introduction to this work was through Sudanese Women's Empowerment for Peace (SuWEP). As a young Sudanese woman working in a non-governmental organisation, I committed myself to learning and also to dedicating myself to fully engage in peace issues as an advocate and activist. My work currently involves providing updates to and of the Sudanese women peace building movement. In addition, as I provide technical support that is needed in our daily office work and provide support using web tools for our campaigns and activities.

I call myself a feminist because I strongly believe that women and men should have equal rights. On a daily basis I commit my efforts to the realisation of women's human rights as an extension of this belief. My work has allowed me over the last 3 years to work with women youth in building their capacity on gender issues and gave me the ability to conceptualize women's issues in Sudan and link it to the global context. I constantly work on deepening my analytical capacity on issues such as gender, feminist and movement building as well as human rights.

I believe that women in Africa face different challenges, injustices and unfair working conditions, gender based violence, and the effect of detrimental laws. The only way for us to make a real difference to women's lives is through working collectively. Working on our own will not change the realities of

women, so we need to network, develop new strategies and we also need to reflect on our existing strategies. In addition to this, we need to continue raising the awareness of the injustices women face, as well as of our efforts to address this. This will ensure that more people (both men and women) who identify with what we share could join our efforts, and we will also build a chronology of evidence of our work for future generations. A good way to do this is to augment the current African Feminist Charter with real stories of women from all ages and countries as they use it and as they grapple with the principles and ideology of feminism in reality.

In my personal and professional life, I am committed to working toward empowering youth, women and men, in Khartoum and in conflict areas, on policy advocacy and on issues of human and women's rights, feminism, and reproductive rights. I also participate in action research and in documenting and publishing the struggles and stories of women (old and young). At a personal level, as a young woman, I work at connecting with other young women in my own country as well as regionally and globally, and to learn as much as I can from those who are willing to mentor me. I am inspired by women's achievements and the dreams of youth.

I am always inspired when I connect with people and especially women from around the globe and get to know their life stories.



Revai Makanje-Aalbaek Zimbabwe / South Africa

🗨️ *One of the challenges that African feminists face today is that feminist work is highly diluted by gender-speak.*

I am a Zimbabwean feminist currently living in South Africa. I call myself a feminist because I believe in the equality of all humans and especially equality of the sexes. I have devoted most of my professional and personal life to the fight against the oppression of women. The main way to achieve the liberation and emancipation of women is fighting patriarchy and all oppressive institutions both in the public and private spheres of life.

One of the challenges that African feminists face today is that feminist work is highly diluted by 'gender-speak'. This means that there is less confrontation of issues such as power. African feminists also continue to confront negative labelling such as 'rebels' and 'anti-establishment' and in some cases being out rightly dismissed as peddlers of 'Western' ideas. Another challenge is inadequate resources to carry out serious transformative work to challenge inequalities between sexes. There are seriously negative political, social and economic situations prevailing in any African countries eroding gains for equality and making further work more difficult.

In my own personal and professional life I have addressed these challenges by showing and demonstrating to communities I work and live with that the fundamentals about human rights and human dignity are universal and equally applicable to everyone regardless of sex and the many other diversities that we have as humans. In my previous role as Regional Program Officer for HIVOS,

I worked to make resources available for women's rights work and especially support for young upcoming feminists. Currently I am working as a freelance legal feminist and human rights consultant and continuing to challenge the status quo. In Zimbabwe I have worked with other feminists to challenge the political and economic deterioration of the past ten years.

To strengthen the feminist movement, we need to regularly link and share information through different forums physical and on-line; mentoring and supporting young women feminists; and hold deliberate discussions about power, oppression, feminism and what all this means in the African context.

I am inspired by the chance and possibility of making positive changes to women's lives. I have seen changes in women through simple interventions such as legal/rights literacy, awareness-raising, and provision of legal aid to abused and battered women. I also have seen changes being made through complex, dangerous political actions such as challenging politicians, structures of patriarchy publicly as well as public condemnation of violations of women's rights. I am also inspired by other feminists who tirelessly work to make a difference and by the positive changes in their own personal lives. My own life also inspires me- what I have managed to achieve and do because of the work and sacrifices of other feminists including my mom.



Isabella Matambanadzo Zimbabwe

 *I learnt feminism in our home and family from my mother and my grandmother.*

I am a daughter of the African soil. My home is Zimbabwe. I live with my mother who is in her 60s. It is one of the daily delights of my present life to be able to enjoy a very close and loving relationship with my mother and to harmoniously share a home with her. My mother, through the magical space of her womb was my first home. I am privileged that she is my present home. It has not always been that way, and I am grateful that we have been given this time together.

I am a writer, this comes from the many years in the public and private media. And, I am a feminist activist, this comes from being in civil society institutions that had a mission and vision that I shared. I have been very fortunate so far to have a career path that has given me a space and a platform from which to organise these talents and gifts into a sense of service that reads as a fairly reasonable professional resume, because it comes with the generosity of a title that the corporate bureaucracy can organise. For me, it has always been a place from where I can have some structure and resources to be of service to communities where there is work to be done. Maybe one day I can be courageous enough to just say if I have to roll up my sleeves and work, I get work done.

I learnt feminism in our home and family from my mother and my grandmother. It just wasn't called or named Feminism, be that with a capital F or just an f. My mother and my grandmother have, to me been the most beautiful women I have ever known. I saw them show solidarity and sisterhood to women within and outside of our family circles and this left me in awe. It gave me a sense of purpose. All I am I owe to these women of my family and many other women who have been generous with experience and counsel in the three or so decades of my life. Women from near and far who have shared their

wisdom and strength with me and for me, in ways that are expressed formally and in ways that have been unexpressed, but understood. I attribute any part of my character that is positive, that is lived in a way that demonstrates feminist thought, emotion and action to my mother and my grandmother and my community of sisters. It may sound trite to someone reading this in the 21st century, an age of constitutional equality, the world wide web and other forms of civil and political liberty, but for me to sit on the laps of black African women who stepped out of the devastating confines of the forms of racisms and sexism that the very ugly infrastructure and legalized reality of colonization, combined with the oppressive components of our Africanness is nothing short of astounding.

For women in my world, that have in any way had our humanness undermine, we value what it means to be raised by educated, professionally skilled, wage earning and taxpaying professionals who have their own bank accounts, in their own names, have their own minds and hearts, and control and ownership of their bodies. This is an extraordinary achievement.

I aspire to a time when I can present my feminism with the wisdom, grace and art that I witnessed in their kitchens, bedrooms, bathrooms, gardens, plough fields, places of worship and public life. When I can express this sense of resistance and liberation in and with a collective of others who believe that we are full human beings rather than dogs (no disrespect to animal rights activists). When I arrive at this point in my life, then I can say my precious matriarchal inheritances have been honoured, and then I can sit back and exhale. Anything in my character that resembles less than this 'Queendom' as the rap diva Latifah names it, is me, is my shortcoming. So for now, I continue to learn, to error, to relearn and to commit to growing.



Stéphanie Mbanzendore Burundi / Holland

 *I would love to see women take their destiny in their hands.*

For the past 14 years I've lived in Rotterdam in Holland. I was born in Burundi where I grew up, studied and worked.

I am currently the founder and President of Burundian Women for Peace and Development. Its main objectives include promoting peace and security, women's political participation and HIV prevention. We have implemented many projects including training of 70 community leaders in conflict resolutions and the UN Resolution on 1325, as well as awareness creation on girl child education. Our organisation has also created a Centre for Peace in Burundi that also serves as our physical address in Burundi. In 2008, we were nominated for the Peace Prize and currently the organisation has been nominated by the Ministry of Gender and Human Rights in Burundi, a member of the National Steering Committee on the 1325 Resolution.

I am a feminist because I support every initiative aimed at promoting women's participation in decision making. I would love to see women take their destiny into their hands. That explains why I passionately work for women's empowerment through my work. The fact that patriarchal structures continue to find ways to oppress women in Burundi outrages me and fires me up such that I constantly encourage women to fight for their liberation.

African culture does not favour women's empowerment and also most of our countries do not support women's leadership that is evident in women's

persistent under-representation in political spaces. Furthermore, the lack of inclusion of women's concerns in policies and laws and budgets further creates systemic barriers to women's rights and justice.

We can only address these challenges if we build the capacities of women's organisations through grants and support in addressing the structures of inequality. We also need to ensure adequate training for women on their rights and strengthen networks of women's rights organisations through learning and exchange visits. The Feminist charter is one tool that we can use to help us achieve our goals. It needs to be widely disseminated within women's organisations, schools and government institutions as it can influence policies. It must be translated in many African languages to ensure easier access for even grassroots women.

As I am committed to fight for women's rights, I believe that I must advocate for them and I do this whenever the need arises. In many spaces I try to lobby for the respect and promotion of women's human rights.

I draw my inspiration from my determination to work for social change, so that women can enjoy their freedom and their rights as citizens. I am also motivated by the dream that women and men be considered as equal.



Olutoyin Mejiuni Nigeria

 *Feminism helped me to understand the challenges that I have had to surmount in the private and the public spheres, and it has offered me a range of possibilities.*

I live in Ibadan in South-Western Nigeria, and work in Ile-Ife as a university lecturer. I am an Associate Professor in Adult Education. I teach, conduct research and do community service or social change work. My research and publications focus on the political dimensions of adult education, women's learning, and the concerns of women in the teaching-learning interaction and context; with emphasis on questions of identity, and the transformative and emancipatory potentials of educational interactions. I am a Consulting Editor for *Adult Education Quarterly (AEQ)*, one of the two journals of the American Association for Adult and Continuing Education (AAACE). I am the National Editor (2010–2012) of the Nigerian National Council for Adult Education (NNCAE), the umbrella association of adult educators in Nigeria. I therefore serve as the editor of *Adult Education in Nigeria (ADEDNG)* the Journal of the Nigerian National Council for Adult Education (NNCAE). I coordinate the peer review process for the journal and lead the process of the publication of the proceedings of the associations' annual conference, and her other publications.

I do voluntary work for Women Against Rape, Sexual Harassment and Sexual Exploitation (WARSHE), an organisation which I co-founded in 1998 with one woman and a man. WARSHE helps girls and women to prevent sexual violence and abuse through education, training, advocacy, intervention and research. I had served and I continue to serve on the advisory board of women's (rights) organisations and a children's transition home in Nigeria.

I am a feminist because feminism is the main lens through which I view the world, and my world. Feminism has helped, and continues to help me make meaning of my experiences. Feminism helped me to understand the challenges that I have had to surmount in the private and the public spheres, and it has offered me a range of possibilities. When we name ourselves as feminists we need to be true to the ideals of feminism, and to make every effort to practice what we preach. We need to attend to our authenticity in the face of constricting normative values and ideologies.


As we mobilise we need to keep focusing our energies on those who have good hearts and are feminists, and not just those who have good hearts but are "professional" development workers who do not subscribe to the ideals of feminism. There is a need for forums where we can engage our illiterate sisters who are clearly feminists. There is also a need for a forum where African feminists can link up with men who are not afraid of feminists.

In my teaching and community work I am always moved by people who are honest, and have respect for others, and by beautiful, intelligent, confident, and well mannered teenage girls and young women.

I will turn 50 on the 27th of September 2012. I am an Okun from central Nigeria, I am married, and I have a no nonsense and kind hearted teenage daughter from my first marriage. I love the sound of big orchestras.



Janine Moolman *South Africa*

 *I call myself a feminist because I see unequal power relations that are supported and reinforced by the system of patriarchy as the root of women's oppression.*

I live in Johannesburg, South Africa, while I work internationally in Africa, Asia and Latin America. I coordinate a global project on violence against women and information and communications technologies. This involves managing research, policy advocacy, training and capacity building and providing guidance and supervision to country coordinators. I also train women and communities in the strategic use of ICTs for social justice with a focus on digital storytelling.

I call myself a feminist because I see unequal power relations that are supported and reinforced by the system of patriarchy as the root of women's oppression. I believe that the struggle for the actualisation of women's rights is personal and political and that it must be fought in private and public spaces. My politics and practice is built on the values of inclusion, participation, acknowledgement of privilege and embracing and celebrating difference of age, location, sexual orientation, class and ability.

Some of the greatest challenges faced by feminists in Africa today include the collusion between religious fundamentalisms, states and patriarchy that has caused a backlash against feminism and a steady rolling back of the gains that have been achieved. We are also in a moment when the critical spaces for feminist reflection, collaboration and action also seem to be diminishing. Added to this is the fact that a donor development agenda that supports a particular kind of 'gender work' means that much of the social justice work

does not fundamentally challenge gender hierarchies, and sometimes reinforces them. To shift this, we need to get better at sharing and distributing the rich body of scholarly work that is being produced by African feminists. We also need to support and initiate inter-generational feminist processes and ensure that the stories and experiences of African feminists and our struggles are told unscripted, in many languages, by many diverse feminists and shared and popularised throughout the continent – not only in print form, but capitalising on huge potential that ICTs hold. I love the individual ethics section of the Feminist Charter because it really resonates with my personal values and articulates them so clearly and strongly. It would be great to see the Charter come to 'life' so to speak by seeing what these ethics mean in practice through the voices and experiences of those who subscribe to these values, so use the Charter to frame the stories referred to earlier.

In my own life, I make every effort to work with and connect to other African feminists in my work and personal life and to reflect on and share our struggles, victories and share strategies for change. I deeply committed in ensuring that more women's rights activists are able to use ICTs strategically in their advocacy and participate in internet governance spaces where decisions around censorship, definitions of harm, and internet rights are being dominated by groups who do not necessarily have a women's rights framing. I am personally inspired by moments of connection with women who I never met, but with who I share a bond through our common desire for change.



Françoise Mukuku DRC

 *It is imperative that we do more than pay lip service to our commitments.*

I live in Kinshasa, capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo. I am the national coordinator of a young feminist group called Si Jeunesse Savait (If the Youth Knew) that I initiated with some friends in 2001. I have worked as a journalist both the radio and electronic media for 8 years. Currently, I work as a Communications Consultant and I do research into reproductive and sexual health, rights and general gender issues in collaboration with several NGOs of the Great Lakes' Sub-region. I am passionate about technology, reading, travels and meeting people. I manage to combine my work, expertise and personal interests.

I call myself a feminist because I spend my life on a daily basis showing people that there is no difference between a man and a woman and for that matter men and women should enjoy the same powers, have equal access to resources, opportunities and live a free life devoid of all forms of violence.

One of our greatest challenges as African feminists is the impact of religious fundamentalisms that is increasingly gaining root thereby threatening rights we had fought so hard for. In addition, women's economic independence continues to be a big challenge because as long as women are denied access to resources, they will not be able to make their own decisions.

In order to shift the status quo, I believe that efforts to include and to employ young women should be increased. In addition, if we really want feminism to

have relevance to all women, we need to find creative ways of transmitting our message and our work to women living in rural areas, or to women who have no contact with or connection to the feminist movement at the moment. It is imperative that we do more than pay lip service to our commitment. We need to undertake more actions in communities, where women live the realities we are struggling to transform, rather than the usual strategies of elitist speeches and speaking to each other only. I also think we should consider ways to translate our tools such as the African Feminist Charter in the major African local languages to engage communities, but also enable more people to help us refine it and our thinking of what is needed to effect change.

Personally, my contribution to feminist struggles is through my work in the different spaces I find myself in. I started working at a very young age and I have always made a point to fend for myself so that I would be able to challenge or stand up to anyone who threatened my autonomy and freedom, whether it be in my personal or professional life.

The one person who truly inspired me was my mother, in particular the way she single-handedly brought us up, inculcating the spirit of equality between men and women in us.



Patricia Munabi Uganda

■ ■ *I call myself a feminist because I continue to question the structures, systems, institutions that continue to subjugate women.*

I live and work in Uganda for a women's rights organisation, Forum for Women in Democracy (FOWODE). I am the Executive Director and I oversee the overall programmatic area of work (including monitoring and evaluation), as well as contributing to the strategic thinking, fundraising and financial management and oversight for the organisation. Additionally, I do lots of networking with other like-minded organisations and sisters especially those with whom we share similar goals.

I call myself a feminist because I believe that women are born equal with dignity that their rights are indeed human rights and that women should be respected irrespective of their diversities. As women, we deserve to be given space to exercise our voice and our power. I call myself a feminist because I continue to question the structures, systems, institutions that continue to subjugate women.

One of our biggest challenges as a feminist movement in Africa is the continued rise in fundamentalisms. Daily religious, cultural and other fundamentalisms continue to undermine some of the advances that have been made in the area of women's rights. In addition, we still struggle with "spreading our wings" and "connecting the dots" so as to grow the feminist movement. We have not preached the gospel as much as we should to as wide an audience as possible. There is also a lack of understanding of feminism and many people fight it without even understanding what it is about. Much more needs to be done to enable both men and women to learn about feminism and unlearn some of the things that have blocked their minds to the feminist discourse.

In order to effectively address these challenges, we need to build knowledge on contemporary issues and enhance our analytical skills so as to engage in critical discussions with stakeholders on feminist approaches to these issues. We also need to strengthen our movement by raising and engaging with critical questions that will enable us to grow and continue being role models for others. We also need to grow the movement by continuing to bring on board a diverse range of women, young, old, rural urban, educated and uneducated so as to be a force to reckon with. In my both my personal and professional life, I live my feminist politics through conversations (both formal and informal) with women in the various districts that we work in, challenging both young and not so young leaders to question the subjugation of women. As a leader myself, I have also endeavoured to nurture some young female leaders by giving them space and opportunity to learn and grow into feminism. At a family level, I have continued to have conversations about what feminism is, the need to respect diversity, and personally embracing the feminist charter and endeavouring to ensure that the individual ethics are reflected in my personal life.

I am inspired by the many daring women out there who brave ruthless conditions, unrelenting governments, uncompromising communities, madde-ningly ambitious patriarchs to fight for the rights of women.



Sarah Nakame Uganda

 *My drive to see young women empowered and valued is what makes me a feminist.*

I work with Mentoring and Empowerment Programme for Young Women (MEMPROW) where I am in charge of the Research, Communication and Advocacy programme.

I am a feminist because I love to see women rise to their potential through empowerment and leadership forums. The reason I chose to work with MEMPROW was because of my passion to reach as many young women in order to tell them that they are equal in right and potential as men, and that they too can excel. I am also committed to seeing women rise from oppression, discrimination and segregation caused by the patriarchal society. My drive to see young women empowered and valued is what makes me a feminist.

I think that the greatest challenge facing feminists in Africa today is the patriarchal structure that discriminates and segregates women at home, school and in the public spheres. This has resulted in stereotypes that men are superior, and women are inferior which has caused women not to believe in what they can be if they took up leadership positions.

One of the ways we can address this is a deep commitment to mentoring young women to join in feminist efforts. This means building on and strengthening leadership programmes for young women, creating spaces for young women to reflect on and exchange experiences with feminists of all generations.

The African Feminist Charter is one of the tools that can be used in this endeavour as it makes feminism accessible to young women. It can be used and distributed in public universities and libraries so that many young women can access it. In addition, the values and objectives can be included as modules in training programmes.

In my own life, I engage in a capacity building programme for young women at universities and high schools where I also facilitate sessions on effective communication skills for young women. By doing this I am empowering women to use their communication skills to compete favourably with their male counterparts. I am inspired by women that have achieved greatly; those who despite many challenges managed to get an education or ascend into key leadership positions that impact on the lives of communities.

I am also inspired by women who founded community and women's initiatives; who continue to reach out to young women for capacity building, personal development and growth. Finally, young women that have taken up professions such as surveying, engineering, medicine, etc, and achieved success, inspires me to be bold and successful also.



Daisy Namakula Nakato Uganda

 *It is important that the Charter be translated in the many African dialects and become a popular tool used in meetings and spaces where women from all backgrounds come together.*

I live in Uganda where I work for Women's Organisation Network for Human Rights Advocacy (WONETHA) as a Sex Worker Advocacy and Media coordinator. I am responsible for reaching out to stake holders, law makers and the media to advocate for sex workers' human and health rights to ensure that the sex workers have access to the necessary services, information and spaces for their well-being and capacity. I call myself a feminist because I am moved to take action against structural forces that promote the negative environment of patriarchy.

I believe that one of the biggest challenges facing feminists in Africa is the lack of comprehension among many who do not understand feminism. Furthermore, discrimination and power struggles play a big role in disrupting the momentum and derails the movement from focusing on the pervasive threat of patriarchy. This is also not helped by the perception, and sometimes the experiences of many activists who find that feminism seems to only be for those who are educated and well-spoken.

At the same time, there are some who choose to call themselves feminists with the 'ifs' and the 'buts'. In other words, they are only feminists if certain issues are not taken on, or if certain groups are excluded. This fragmentation means that a lot of time is spent fighting the demons within. This does not help the

image of the feminist movement at all as we have still not managed to address stereotypes of feminists as being man-haters.

For us to really strengthen the feminist movement, it is important that the African Feminist Charter becomes a living document that provides guidance, but also supports us in calling for accountability to the feminist values. It is important that the Charter be translated in the many African dialects and become a popular tool used in meetings and spaces where women from all backgrounds come together. The experiences of using this Charter in these different ways could be documented and used as a means to show us where we could improve on it.

In my personal life, I have integrated feminism into my life by becoming aware of my own experiences and looking at how I can advance the feminist goals. I have built my self-esteem and also negotiation skills and advocacy skills to be able to challenge injustice. In my work, I have reached out to other women by sharing my story, and also to create spaces for them to share theirs as a feminist practice. I am inspired by women who are able to overcome challenges in their lives, who are able to challenge patriarchy and also who create different realities for themselves. I am also inspired by small gains. Achieving goals one at a time – it gives me hope and courage.



Vivian Ngonzi Uganda

■ ■ *Strong feminist spaces at national level like the Uganda Feminist Forum (UFF) provide fresh energies and mentoring opportunities for the young women and transferring the leadership to avoid the strong generational gaps.*

I live in Kampala, Uganda and I work with Akina Mama wa Afrika (AMwA) a pan-African movement building organisation that supports and initiates coalitions, networks, develops African knowledge for the lobbying and advocating for African women's rights including conducting an African women's leadership institute that builds the capacity of women from various backgrounds and capacities to engage in transformative leadership through a feminist perspective.

I consider myself a feminist because I believe in the dignity of a woman and oppose all patriarchal tendencies that undermine women. I take note and recognise the rights of women and endeavour to apply them in my personal and public life. As a result, many young women do confide in me but also seek for knowledge in as far as their rights and dignity are concerned.

It is a pity that the word 'feminism' has been misunderstood by society and these misconceptions have labelled women with various demeaning titles like 'rebels, prostitutes, marriage breakers' to mention but a few. In addition, the unending traditional practices that still impede the development of women and deter their prosperity in as far as making informed decisions related to their lives continue to hamper the progress towards gender equality.

In addition, the fact that there are still very few young women involved in feminist organising presents a missed opportunity as young women need to be mentored and encouraged to fully participate in the feminist movement and speak for themselves and as much as possible to shift the status-quo.

Strong feminist spaces at national level like the Uganda Feminist Forum (UFF) provide fresh energies and mentoring opportunities for the young women and transferring the leadership to avoid the strong generational gaps.

I have siblings and sister friends who look up to me for guidance and I endeavour to engage them as much as I can with relevant information in as far as their rights as women and human dignity are concerned. In addition there is a need to create frequent feminist spaces at national, regional and international levels that will encourage strong and collective voices for African women. The feminist movement on the continent also need to fully engage young women by creating mentoring programs/spaces and effectively affirming the transfer of leadership opportunities to the younger generation.


As feminists, the need to walk the talk and fully commit and follow the feminist charter especially in our professional spaces is paramount.

As a young feminist, I draw my inspiration from strong African feminist women who have not given up on the fight, have been exemplary to the young women, walked the talk, have stood up to be counted and are not about to give up as our feminist journey is a continuous one.

My other inspiration comes from women who despite the various challenges in their private lives (marriages) have committed to not looking back but hold their heads high with a smile.



Anne Nkutu Uganda

 *While we require the support of others to attain and enjoy these rights, we are responsible for defining what we want and demanding for it.*

I am a Consultant and Manager of the Nordic Consulting Group (U) Ltd. My work largely revolves around programme development, monitoring and evaluation and organisational development. I have a particular interest in Women's Rights and Governance issues and mainly the role of NGOs in empowering communities to demand and claim their rights. Apart from the typical development interventions, my work on women's rights issues has included documenting feminist organising -movement building and leadership development.

I call myself a feminist because I believe that we as women must take the lead in the struggle for our own rights. While we require the support of others to attain and enjoy these rights, we are responsible for defining what we want and demanding for it. One of the key challenges for feminists in Africa is that delicate balance between religion and "African culture". Both have created a lot of ambivalence in many women's minds on the question of women's rights and entitlements. Looking at religion and culture through black & white lenses has constrained the space for constructive engagement on issues that concern women.

Sharing tools for analysis on women's rights issues and disseminating information on good practices and strategies applied by different organisations to engage culture and religion is one way to address these challenges. There is a need to demystify feminism – (we need an African word for it) to make ourselves understood. Rights have no colour. We also need to showcase the diversity of African feminists – as part of strengthening our sisterhood with other women. Women out there need to understand that you can be a feminist and still embrace many other values.

Finally, we need to work with young people. This includes nurturing young women leaders, involving them actively in the movement and allowing them to enrich the movement with their innovative ideas and youthful energies.

Finally, I am inspired by people who grow big ideas starting with little else but vision, conviction and resilience.



Uju Obiora Nigeria

 *I have also participated in developing and delivering gender training for men as I believe this is also an important part of our strategy to transform social relations of power.*

I recently relocated to Warri in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria to take up a new employment as Senior Program Officer (Gender) in Participatory Partnerships for Community Development (PPCD) a Chevron funded project. Prior to joining PPCD, I worked as Program Manager, of the Women's Rights Program of the Heinrich Boell Foundation, Nigeria office for five years. My job entails building capacities among the representatives of the communities in Chevron's areas of operations (to deliver sustainable benefits to their communities). Specifically, I work towards ensuring that women are empowered and gender is mainstreamed across the structures and programs of these representatives called (The Regional Development Councils - RDCs). I work with 8 RDCs in five states.

I call myself a feminist because I believe in the equality of men and women; I stand up publicly against patriarchy which is a fundamental challenge to women's struggles. This belief forms part of my private and public life and the struggle is an integral part of my day to day activities.

African feminists still struggle with lack of cooperation in the women's movement. There is insufficient unification in the struggle against the status-quo. I believe

that to address the challenges we face as African feminists we need to enlarge the scope of the movement by sensitizing /co-opting all self identifying women's rights activists to have a common understanding of feminists' principles. Secondly, we need to increase the space for the participation of young/upcoming feminists. This is critical as we need to ensure that the struggles and gains started have a means to continue, that we develop new strategies and that we continue to dismantle patriarchal systems, structures and initiatives. Finally, we need to ensure that we disseminate feminist materials or readers more broadly, to audiences beyond the groups we normally reach. This means we have to ensure that our strategies, our ideology and analysis is accessible to others outside of the movement as well.

I have personally added my energy in the feminist endeavour to women's rights education, advocacy and empowerment. I have participated in developing and delivering gender training for men as I believe this is also an important part of our strategy to transform social relations of power.

I am inspired by feminists' activism without fear or hypocrisy.



Achola Odido Uganda

Why not put the Feminist Charter into pictures and song, as well as make a documentary out of it?

I live in Kampala Uganda and I work for Radio One FM90. I am a reporter, assistant producer for Spectrum Political Talk show. I also currently being trained to host the show, which would make me the first female political talk show host in the country. I am also an artist (painter) and photographer, poet and freelance writer, and have just started making documentaries.

I call myself a feminist because I believe that there is nothing a man can do that a woman cannot do. Also naming myself as a feminist and studying feminist principles has made me reclaim and be proud of my feminine qualities that I had deliberately hidden and rejected because I believed it made me vulnerable to the abuse I had been subjected to at various points in my life.

For the feminist movement to shift, it is important that spaces and avenues are created for self-definition. These need to move away from the victim/ whore/ bitch/mother discourse. We also need to make concerted efforts to take our principles out into the public sphere and unwaveringly explain what we are about- rather than uttering out sporadic rants and then keeping quiet. These feed into the stereotypes of feminists and do not advance our broader agenda.

Furthermore, although this issue crops up over and over again, the importance of helping younger feminists establish themselves career-wise and financially is another strategy that needs to form part of a holistic plan of transforming not only society, but the movement as well. This will lay a solid foundation for engagement and dialogue to ensure that the baton is passed on, and therefore the efforts that have started do not disappear or have to be reinvented again.

We are lucky that we have a more diverse group of feminists (skills, experience) that we can draw on to accelerate our movement. It is important to create mass awareness about our efforts. Why not put the Feminist Charter into pictures and song, as well as make a documentary out of it? Keeping it in print limits its dissemination and understanding by the masses.

In my personal life, I have lived out my feminist identity by trying to be myself. Being an artistic pirate has also helped me evade socialisation of my nature.

I am inspired by nature, happy people as well as art.



Olabisi Olonisakin Nigeria / UK

“Feminists in Africa should systematically mainstream gender such that the focus on feminism will not be perceived or seen as women’s issues only but as a demand for strategic engagement in all aspects of governance.”

I live in Ado Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria as well as in Essex, United Kingdom and work as an independent social policy researcher and evaluation specialist. As an evaluation specialist, I undertake reviews, evaluations and impact assessment of publicly funded projects/ programmes. As a social policy researcher, I undertake needs assessments that inform or aid service commissioners to commission and provide services that reflect the needs of the population.

I’m a feminist because I analyze, recognize, and to the best of my capacity, challenge systems of oppression and exploitation of women, on which patriarchy thrives. I’m committed to gender mainstreaming, as a strategy for promoting gender equality, albeit recognizing the inherent weaknesses in the systems and processes aimed at promoting gender equality. Over the last 10 years, my work has entailed ensuring that gender perspectives and attention to the goal of gender equality are central to policy development, research, implementation and monitoring of programmes and projects.

Feminists in Africa at the moment are burdened with the struggle to highlight inequalities based on gender; and combating those inequalities with ‘strategic gender interests’. While this is of great importance and a good starting point, it tends to limit the focus of African feminism to women’s issues instead of a larger, strategic focus on all areas of governance, which invariably impact on their lives as citizens. Feminists in Africa should systematically mainstream gender such that the focus on feminism will not be perceived or seen as women’s issues only but as a demand for strategic engagement in all aspects of governance. We can tackle these challenges by establishing local informal forums at different levels to explore theories of feminism.

We also need a ‘3rd eye’ looking particularly within the private sector to identify African women with history of personal values and ethics similar to that of the feminist movement. Such women should be invited to forums that may help them locate their core values within African Feminism. Finally, attempts should also be made to carry along women with limited education. A system should be put in place to help such women articulate themselves and ensure that their contribution is taken on board.

At a personal level, I often come across African women that exude the values and ethics of African Feminism in their personal and organisational capacities, yet they do not confer that identity on themselves. I signpost them to trainings or informal forums that may help them recognise themselves as African feminists and position their personal challenges of patriarchal oppression within the African feminism discuss.

I am inspired by modern architecture, natural landscapes, secluded beaches and music. However, my ultimate source of inspiration over the years has been my sister. Perhaps it’s because I have such admiration for her strength, selflessness and sense of justice or because of her unconditional love, support and belief in me. She’s taught me some of the most valuable lessons in life, one of which is being true to myself. Of late, ‘being true to myself’, of itself, has become a great source of inspiration. So has my four and a half year old daughter! Her innocence, humour and lack of inhibition gives me a sense of purpose.



Blessing Oparaocha Nigeria

 *I speak out even when it is difficult to do so.*

I live in Lagos, Nigeria where I work with Alliances for Africa as a Program I live in Lagos, Nigeria where I work with Alliances for Africa and the Nigerian Feminist Forum (NFF) Secretariat as a Programmes Assistant. My duties are to support planning and implementation of programmes for the organization and the NFF. I also support outreach, training, and networking to ensure that we achieve our objectives. In addition, I play a central role in media relations, proposal writing and also documentation of the NFF.

I call myself a feminist because I oppose in word and deed, all forms of patriarchal oppression. The lives of women and girls do not seem to mean as much as the lives of men and boys. We are poorer, more vulnerable, less educated, battered, and discriminated against. I believe in the global struggle for women's rights and liberation.

In my own view, the challenges feminists in Africa face today have to do with religious fundamentalisms. Especially in Nigeria, religion affects the way most women see themselves and also the freedoms that women are 'allowed'. Another challenge is the misconception of what feminism is. Most women are feminist based on the passion they have in advancing women but they refuse to be seen as feminist because of the stigma attached to feminists, sometimes because of the violence targeted at feminists, and most often

because they are afraid to claim it as an identify for fear of being perceived as too confrontational.


We can address these challenges through engaging younger women, by convening spaces big and small for them to increase their knowledge on feminism as well as movement-building initiatives. We also need to institutionalise feminist principles in our day to day activities as wives, mothers, mentors, leaders. Finally, we need to tell our own stories, and publicise our achievements, successes in many different spaces, including the media.

In my personal life I have addressed these challenges by always saying that I am a feminist. I preach it and I show it wherever the need arises and I speak out even when it is difficult to do so. In my professional life I have tried to address these challenges by actively opposing all forms of oppression. I engage in advancing the life of women by promoting and advocating for women's rights in Nigeria.

I am inspired when I put a smile on the face of a women struggling between the demands of cultural norms and her own aspirations. I am inspired when I see women in control of their own destinies. I am inspired when laws are enacted to protect the rights of women.



Esther Passaris Kenya

 *I am a believer in the inalienable rights to non-discrimination, dignity, equality and respect for all human beings of who women are an integral part.*

I am an entrepreneur businesswoman in Nairobi, Kenya. I am the founder and chief executive officer of Adopt A Light Ltd, a private company engaged in the provision of outdoor advertising services in Kenya and which pioneered public private partnership arrangement in the development of lighting infrastructure in the City of Nairobi. I am also studying for a degree in law as a part time student at the University of Nairobi.

I am a believer in the inalienable rights to non-discrimination, dignity, equality and respect for all human beings of who women are an integral part. I know for certain that liberating women – allowing them the space to fully express and fulfil themselves intellectually, emotionally, economically and socially will release powerful fountains of intellect, knowledge, creativity, entrepreneurship, and inherent goodness that reside in the being of every woman and thus contribute towards making our world an infinitely better place. I am therefore passionate about the empowerment of women.

Feminists in Africa face a myriad challenges which include high levels of poverty which exacerbate the social-economic obstacles facing women; entrenched cultural biases; changing roles and responsibilities and increasing financial and emotional burden befalling women as the pillars of the family on account of absentee fathers; unequal access to opportunities in most spheres; and dominance of the male in the political and economic spheres. Hence feminists have to swim against a strong tide of prejudices, stereotyping, negative attitudes and limited means.

The feminist movement can be strengthened by supporting the development and networking of women's organizations within and between countries and help build their capacity to synergize and propagate feminist's ideals; encouraging the participation of feminists in politics and business whence they can acquire the resources, tools and platforms to organize into strong lobbies for women's rights and causes; and supporting the education of women and promote the feminist movement amongst women in education thus creating an incubator for feminists.

Personally, I participate regularly in television/radio talk shows and speak at various youth and women's forums to advance the agenda of women's empowerment and provide inspiration to young women. I co-founded a secondary school that enrolls bright girls from extremely impoverished families. Where I can, I provide jobs and material support to women. I support the Kenya Breast Health Programme, and the Nairobi Women's Hospital which assists girls/women victims of sexual violence and abuse. I am member of the African-Spanish Women's Network for a Better World. I have also sought to be elected to parliament.

I am inspired by African women who demonstrate unbreakable resolve and resilience to overcome numerous hurdles and work tirelessly to improve their lives and those of their families. I am inspired by go-getters who rise to the top of academic and business and by the laughter, exuberance and optimism of children and the promise they represent.



Charmaine Pereira Nigeria

I call myself a feminist because I work towards a world where women are liberated from misogyny, exploitation and subordination and where men are liberated from the desire to dominate women.

I currently live in Abuja, Nigeria where I am an independent researcher working on issues of sexuality and women's empowerment, feminist thought and practice, and women's relations to the state. As Co-ordinator of the Initiative for Women's Studies in Nigeria (IWSN), I've raised funds for and overseen action research on the politics of sexual harassment and sexual violence in six Nigerian universities, and on women's experiences of citizenship. I have been involved in activism around the constitutional reform process, affirmative action for women in politics, and challenging inequitable laws such as the Public Nudity Bill. I chaired the Legislative Advocacy Coalition on Violence Against Women (LACVAW), at the time it formulated a federal law on this matter. I am currently engaged with the coalition's push for its enactment.

I call myself a feminist because I work towards a world where women are liberated from misogyny, exploitation and subordination and where men are liberated from the desire to dominate women. What drives me is a sense of profound injustice at the conditions in which so many women live their lives, whether their oppression is on the basis of the economic circumstances they find themselves in, the religion they practice voluntarily or otherwise, who they choose to love and so on. This has to change, and in order to do so, one needs a critical analysis and an organised movement to challenge the power relations that uphold such inequity.

I believe that African feminists face contemporary contexts marked by rapid social and economic change and the rise of identity politics in the wake of imperialism and militarism. The violence that this spawns, particularly against women, is unacceptable, whether in conflict situations or peacetime. Women's bodies, and especially their sexualities, become the targets of reactionary moves to impose 'order'. Some of our main challenges include finding appropriate

intellectual frameworks to understand these changes and to organise effectively against them, given our small numbers and relatively limited reach. I think we can address this by strengthening the feminist movement through face-to-face meetings, like the national and continental feminist forums, to facilitate debate, the sharing of experience and a sense of being strengthened by our diversity, in the pursuit of shared goals. I think intergenerational exchanges are very important - a two-way exchange between the more experienced among us and those newer to feminist struggles. Better funding and institutional support for women's organisations would go a long way to making our work more effective.

In my professional life, I've tried to address some of these challenges through the kinds of research I do and my efforts to strengthen capacity for teaching and research in gender and women's studies. In my personal life, I strive to be (not always very successfully) the kind of person that I envisage inhabiting a feminist society - one who can exercise her critical faculties without losing a sense of openness to the emotional in oneself and other people or the absurdity in life(!).

I am inspired by the indomitability of the human spirit when I read the life stories of women who have overcome huge obstacles in their lives. I am invigorated by the use of the imagination in explorations of psychic and emotional life in literature. Beautiful things like flowers in the garden, hummingbirds, music - all contribute to enriching my life and the lives of those around me. Finally, I marvel at my children, the questions they ask, their perspectives on life and the ways in which each, in their different ways, is more able to be true to him/herself than I ever was at that age.



Transforming the agenda
of Gender Inequality and
Injustices in NIGERIA

Amina Salihu Nigeria

 *I respect the rights of others to choose and affirm my right to do the same.*

I live in Abuja, Nigeria where I am a Consultant, Policy Adviser and Farmer. As Coordinator of C4C, the DFID Coalitions for Change Programme (2007 April 2011), I facilitated the emergence of the Gender and Affirmative Action coalition, designed a change champions youth internship project enabling young women and men gain experience through working and living with established mentors across government, civil society and the private sector. I also designed a persons with disabilities project to lead a campaign from charity to rights based approach on disability issues. I sit on the technical, advisory panels and committees of civil society, private sector and government initiatives including serving as the Co-Chair of the Board of Directors of the Nigerian Women' Trust Fund.

I am a feminist because I am committed to changing the condition of women in Africa for the better. I abhor all forms of oppression. I respect the rights of others to choose and affirm my right to do the same. I am proud of my many identities as a woman, mother, professional, and spouse. I recognise that the challenge is balancing them all and not having to choose between them.

Feminists in Africa are misunderstood. We face the challenge of communicating our philosophy. We need to find the appropriate language and forms of documentation of our philosophy so we can achieve our goal of ending all forms of oppression with others. One way to do this is to cultivate honest friends across gender and ideological divides- men, non-feminist women, activists and younger persons. Where we are already doing this, we need to sustain the engagement.

We must strengthen our inter-generational conversations. Feminists are a small band and so face the danger of burning out. We must find young, fresh voices to keep the struggle alive. A way to do this is to affirm and name our role models, by writing their her stories and sharing that to motivate ourselves and others to think feminist. We should also create an endowment funds to engender research into women's human rights and a greater awareness of feminist as an academic discipline and philosophy.


As a feminist, every day presents a chance to give equal opportunity to everyone especially women. In my work, I see every day, the indomitable spirit of African women. Growing up it was a privilege to listen to my mother and witness firsthand her love for all and resilience in the face of oppression. Her willingness to protect her children and meet our needs makes a humbling and inspiring story, which has fuelled my love of giving voice to women.

My source of inspiration is a 'fruit salad' comprising; a divine force that gives me strength, my mother, nature, my children's love, the humbling everyday sacrifice ordinary people make and my ability to earn a living and be in control of my life.

I am not afraid to name myself feminist. I believe it is a noble and courageous thing to protect women, even if it is one woman at a time.



Delphine Serumaga Uganda / Canada

 *I do believe feminism is the ideology that will bring about an equal and just society/world and must be entrenched in addressing challenges of the African continent.*

I am blessed to work as an independent expert in my field so I live and work in both Uganda and South Africa; wherever is convenient to do my work at any given time. I specialize in strategic and organizational development for women's rights organisations on the African continent. My aim is to ensure women's rights is not taken as a project but a process of shifting patriarchy in real ways.

I actually do not call myself a feminist, I believe that I embody feminist principles and values and live them on a daily basis. Being a feminist to me is not a label but a lifestyle. In my professional life, how I interact with my colleagues or those I lead is based on my understanding and comfort level of equity within the context of human rights and dignity. I unashamedly am biased towards ensuring women's rights are incorporated in any work environment I am privileged to work in. In my private life, I am a mother of one girl. As a result of my own experiences growing up as a young African girl, I am committed to impart information that will safeguard my daughter as she grows and experiences the world. I do not want her to grow up in fear or with a negative attitude towards the world, but to be strong to protect herself and empowered to make decisions that make her happy, content with her choices and safe within the environment she works and lives. Ultimately I feel that I need to have some ideology that guides how I practice, behave and simply be in this world so I can remain happy and content with myself and the world. I am comfortable in the skin of feminism.

In my opinion the greatest challenge is us as women being able to deconstruct what we have been taught and socialized into over the centuries.

Our understanding of the depth of inculcation is something we do not interrogate enough considering as Africans it is from a traditional and colonial experience. Our ability not to self-hate is the second challenge in my view. Patriarchy has successfully managed to socialize women to a point of not liking or attaching negative connotations to being a feminist or feminist thought and principles. Thirdly, Africa has competing issues such as poverty, HIV and its social impacts food security and conflict. Therefore, one can argue that if we do not address feminism strategically within these aspects of the African context, feminist ideology becomes a competing issue that is really an ideology. The question would then be: Does Ideology have space to compete with pressing survivalist matters that are competing for attention and need for redress in themselves?

I do believe feminism is the ideology that will bring about an equal and just society/world and must be entrenched in addressing challenges of the African continent. The challenge then is how we incorporate feminist ideology into the workings of leading and strong INGO's and NGO's, governments, and international financial institutions that seem to be the drivers of global agendas.

I am inspired by the long line of women who had to fight for their place in their communities and social circles. These women did not identify themselves as feminists but clearly upheld principles and practices that are of feminist ideology. I believe I am where I am today and content with my life choices because of the paths set by the strong women in my life. I want to promote the positive aspects of womanhood that I know of from a personal level.



Sally Jean Shackleton South Africa

“ *We need to live the commitment in all spaces to accept and welcome diversity in all its forms and engage with it honestly.* ”

I live and work in Cape Town, South Africa, and I work in South Africa. My work has a focus on media, communications and using information and communication technologies as a tool to raise voices for change. I work with sex workers, transgender people, gender activists and feminists. I am currently working with the Sex Workers Education and Advocacy Taskforce (SWEAT), Women’s Net and Just Associates (JASS).

I call myself a feminist because feminism is fundamental to challenging oppression, and because doing so puts me in the company of a community of many powerful and thoughtful women.

There is a crisis in leadership in the feminist movement—I know so many women that kept working through their own crisis, through illness and who are tired and burnt out—we have to learn to nurture each other and provide relief for those of us working on the front line.

I also think we are not welcoming enough to young women, and accepting diversity. We ourselves marginalise people—transgender people, lesbian women, sex workers in particular, have found feminists to be unwelcoming or closed to their concerns.

If we want to shift this reality, we need to start investing in young women and young women’s leadership, mentoring and empowerment. We need to live

the commitment in all spaces to accept and welcome diversity in all its forms and engage with it honestly. Finally, to strengthen connections, we could build better communication and use of ICTs and a feminist practice of technologies—skilling women to write, make movies, amplify their voices.

I think we can popularise the African Feminist Charter for local messaging and adoption. I think it should be linked to local challenges—like the struggle for sex workers rights. I would also like to hear more stories of adoption of the charter, more stories of African feminists who use the charter, its application in real life and in organisations.

In my personal and professional life, I work with organisations like Gender DynamiX and SWEAT as well as the African Sex Workers Alliance, and I try to integrate the concerns of these groups in my feminist work. In the organisations I work with, these groups are specifically included, or are a focus.

Right now, my inspiration comes from the many impressive and powerful women and men I work with. I moved cities and now live close to the sea, and this inspires me too, and does spending time with the children in my life. I love working with girls, and Women’sNet’s daughter project, Girls’Net inspires me. Working with women on making media is an amazing experience—the magic of seeing and hearing ourselves reflected in media is a powerful tool for us to recognise ourselves and see our own struggles as important.

Women
who
owns
our
Bodies

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Leila Sheikh Tanzania

▮▮ *A feminist is a person who has compassion and who believes in sisterhood.*

I am the owner of a consultancy firm Studio Calabash Ltd. I specialize in designing strategies for lobbying, advocacy and for public education programmes. This includes conducting action research, mapping intervention strategies to mitigate disaster and disease and writing copy and scripts for radio, television, community theatre and billboards. My experience includes designing programmes for radio, newsletter and TV. I have also been an anchor woman on two programs "UKIMWI na Jamii" and "Jamii yetu" produced for DTV/Channel Ten and special programs/documentaries on CTN, ITV, TVT/TBC, TVZ, Radio Tanzania, Radio One and Radio Clouds FM.

Being a feminist is not only a state of mind or of the decisions and actions we take but it is also a state of 'being', of being emotionally involved in the feminist ethos, of the awareness that a feminist is a person who has a sense of responsibility to change society by contributing even in a minute way of dismantling patriarchal structures and helping to build societies which are based on Rights; Justice; Equity; Knowledge and Strong Women's Movements. It is recognizing that there is gross injustice against marginalized groups and accepting that all of us have a role to play in bringing change!

A feminist is a person who has compassion and who believes in sisterhood.

As feminists in Africa, our challenges include the lack of consensus over various issues such as Own Choice Sex Work, defining it as exploitation of women and not taking the time to analyse the difference between own choice sex work and human trafficking. In addition, we have a situation where civil society organisations have become sources of employment; sources of income instead of being platforms to lobby and advocate. We also compete as women's rights groups for funding which in turn fragments us. Finally, we have to contend with a hostile mainstream that perceives feminists as frustrated, unhappy women a perception which we haven't attempted to change.

We need to increase our networking efforts at the continental level not only through conferences, but through information technology. We also need to create space for dialogue so that we can build a foundation of unity to achieve our goal.

In my own life, I have forged this agenda by initiating discussions in the organizations in which I'm a member. I have produced radio programmes and written extensively, as well as trained marginalized women (and men) on movement building; human rights; lobby and advocacy.



Fatou Sow Senegal / France

 *I was among the first generation of African women researchers who, after independence, have given a voice not only to African issues, but also to women.*

I received my baccalaureate in science and philosophy from the Université de Dakar before leaving for France to complete a doctorate in sociology, at the Université Paris-Sorbonne, and much later in my career a Research Director from the Université Paris Diderot. At a very early stage of my career, I was attached as a researcher to the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) in Paris, while based at the Université de Dakar for 30 years. I spent the last ten years at the Université Paris Diderot. This marked the beginning of a career, which has taken me to three continents: Africa, Europe and North America.

I was among the first generation of African women researchers who, after independence, have given a voice not only to African issues, but also to women. My encounters in the 1980s, and during the UN Women's Decades with Women's Studies and feminist critiques in North American universities as well as feminist organisations from the South have enriched my own analysis on various topics ranging from environmental issues to women's leadership, from reproductive and sexual rights to the impact of religion and culture on women's citizenship.

I had the opportunity to teach and lecture on gender issues in Africa, European and North American academia. I set up the first feminist course, in 1988, at the University of Dakar, in an environment that was very resistant. I taught courses on Women in Africa and Sociology of the family and gender relations. Ayesha Imam, Amina Mama and I set up the Gender Institute at CODESRIA,

since 1994 that provide gender training for African scholars and produce Gender Series. I was also President of the Réseau de recherche sur la santé de la reproduction en Afrique francophone (1992-1996) as well as Coordinator for Francophone Africa of the Network Development with Women for a New Era (DAWN). I edited many of their publications in French. I also joined the African Feminist Forum to meet with African feminists in order to strengthen feminism in our context.

Since I retired from academia, I am the International Coordinator of 'Women Living under Muslim Laws' in London, Codou Bop and I set up GREFELS (a research group on women and law in Senegal) as a partner of WLUML. My research interests and activism have centred on the fundamental rights and equality of women. In the African context, we still have much to do to ensure that inequalities do not remain a religious and social dictate and to continue the fight against all forms of religious and cultural fundamentalisms. We can only move forward on these issues if we do all that we can to ensure that laws that the movement fought for are fully enforced to show their effectiveness. We also need to make strides in our analytical and writing capacity to ensure that across generations we are able to build and disseminate a repository of our thinking, actions, reflections and discourses.

In my own life, I tenaciously fight prejudices and inculcate feminist principles in my children. I draw my inspiration from the solidarity and company of other feminist sisters and from the key principles of honesty and modesty.



Tina Thiar South Africa

“ I vowed to dedicate myself to ensuring that women have equal access to resources and opportunities.

I live in Cape Town and I work with the Women's Funds and Community Foundations in Southern Africa. I am a board member for the Southern Africa Community Grantmakers forum, WINGS and Women's Net. My role is to work with the Women's Funds on sustainability and advise them on corporate fundraising. I am also an advisor on programs and grantmaking strategies for women's organisations.

I call myself a feminist because since I was very young, I have been angry when I saw inequality. Growing up in a poor community where race discrimination was huge, and the use of financial resources to advance our male partners was very disturbing. So I vowed to dedicate myself to ensuring that women have equal access to resources and opportunities in my country. Today still although apartheid has been abandoned we still see much inequality and women's empowerment needs more attention.

The biggest challenge to feminists in Africa is the access to resources, financial, land, energy, technology and skills. To address this, we need to mobilise more resources for women's empowerment, support women to challenge the government on basic needs of women (land, water energy) and organise more skills training and networking opportunities.

I believe we also have to engage with the political space and there our work needs to be directed on three levels: more women in politics, education and training of women elected and influencing leaders of the government (which is not easy in South Africa). As women we also need to organise more grassroots women's convening and meetings to ensure that we share with them our strategies and organise learning and sharing opportunities.

In my personal and professional life, I have been part of the Women's Funding Movement in South Africa and Internationally. I am involved in donor education and network with both business and civil society. My contributions are not big, but I am proud of the work we have done in the region.

What really inspires me is to see the young people excel and use the opportunities that have been created by so many women before them. I am also very inspired by grassroots women's organisations that are sustainable and that with many volunteers are able to do the work without much financial contributions from external sources. They just deal with the issues that they face on a daily basis.



Coumba Toure Mali

It is challenging to be a feminist daughter, wife, mother, and worker. In all parts of my life, the struggles are present and constant.

I currently live in Mali where I work for Ashoka. My role is to support social entrepreneurs and their organisations, also known as Changemakers. The work I do is based on the assumption that every problem, every issue in any community can be solved by engaging people to find innovative solutions to these problems. Using this philosophy, we support these processes by making visible the initiatives and facilitating networking among Changemakers to ensure that they are able to realize their objectives and find opportunities for collaboration where possible. The philosophy is also based on the idea that given that new problems are constantly born, we need to equip everyone from childhood to have the capacity and the sense of responsibility to act and bring about change and justice. I also write and publish books and other educational materials for children. My role is to inspire and nurture the minds of children to become leaders and Changemakers ultimately.

I am a feminist because I believe that women have different ways of being and relating and can ultimately drive the positive change we need to transform our world. I realize that some fundamental things need to change for the positive for most of society, including women, men, children and many categories of people that suffer injustice. However, I do believe that feminism has the potential to bring about justice, peace, happiness and joy in the public and private life.

Feminists everywhere share some of the same challenges, but in Africa, we have the added form of racial marginalization. We also face the challenges of poverty that is born from exploitation and injustice.

If we want to change our reality, we have to socialise our children, male and female, to be feminist such that they develop the qualities of empathy, self-confidence and courage to bring about the desired change. When I am working to defend women's rights in West Africa, I have to deal with the fact that men and women in many of our communities are suffering under blatant form of injustices and exploitation. I have to deal with the fact that the expectation is that we also defend other issues in our communities.

It is challenging to be a feminist daughter, wife, mother, and worker. In all parts of my life, the struggles are present and constant. I have to make sure that I stay true to my beliefs. Whilst at the same time honouring my commitment to stay joyful and alive in relationships with other people inside and outside of my community. To engage with institutions that are not feminist, I do my best to learn from my failure to laugh at myself and remain optimistic. I also ensure that I engage with people and institutions that are supportive. On a daily basis, as I see people coming up with great ideas and dedicating their life to bring about change, I am humbled and inspired. Personally, working with children and relearning from them the qualities we lose as we grow older, gives me hope and joy.



Oury Traore Mali / Ghana

◀◀ *Most important, I am a feminist because I do not conform – I embrace my mind, Soul and Spirit.*

I am from Mali, but have been living in Accra, Ghana since 2005. I am an Independent Consultant working mainly in Peace and Security. I also undertake assignments in Leadership, Organizational Development, Gender, Human Rights and Civil Society. My primary skills areas are in research, training, Evaluation; Program Formulation & Design; Process Facilitation; and Institutional Building. I train senior military in peacekeeping; conduct evaluation for donors; Design conceptual framework; formulate research methodologies, etc. I work mainly with the African Union (AU), ECOWAS, the European Union (EU), donors and the International NGOs. I also train in conflict resolution techniques, Civil-Military relations and other peace and security issues.

I am a feminist because I do not believe that I am a sub-human or that I am less of a human being because of my sex. I believe that all human beings should have equal rights and equal opportunities regardless of their sex. Although women and men have different physical traits, they are both capable to think on their own, to have ideas, lead effectively, and take decisions that affect their lives. I am a feminist because I believe in women's emotional, physical and financial integrity and independence. I am a feminist because I am not afraid to stand on my own and assert myself. Most important, I am a feminist because I do not conform – I embrace my mind, Soul and Spirit.

Feminists in Africa are misunderstood by our society at large. We are also isolated from the mainstream of global feminism because we struggle with our identity. Furthermore, Feminists in Africa are not really working in solidarity


despite some of the efforts that are underway. We should focus so we can dismantle this well-established patriarchal structure by developing strategic leadership of women of all ages; allocate resources to feminist's movements and institutions. We also need create a healthy space to amplify the voice and visibility of Africa Feminists by working in solidarity and collaboration at national, regional and international levels. We need to partner with like-minded women and men to dismantle patriarchy that is detrimental to our societal fabric.

I try to live in awareness and see all women as sisters despite our various views, perceptions and perspectives. I try to focus of our communality instead of our differences. I also train women's NGOs to become effective leaders, to embrace other women; to lift other women and to focus on our collective vision and objectives. I am mentoring a few younger women professionally. In my friendship, when the relationships become toxic, I withdraw and remove myself because I really think that it is ugly for women to compete and beat each other when we're already so abused by our societies. I am focusing my energy in improving myself spiritually, professionally and health wise, but also reach out to those who are in need.

I am inspired by increasing roles women are playing in leadership and in becoming effective leaders - more aware women in leadership positions. I hope, pray and work for a better world where love and peace prevail and where a critical mass of women leaders will emerge.



Amy Shupikai Tsanga Zimbabwe

 *My life and my work are centred on a quest for social justice for women in particular and black people in general, through a combination of academia, research and activism.*

I live and work in Harare. More specifically, I am a senior lecturer in law, and Deputy Director of the Southern and Eastern African Regional Centre for Women's Law. (SEARCWL), a graduate feminist institution, focusing on women and the law, and housed in the Faculty of Law, at the University of Zimbabwe. I teach Theories and Perspectives in Women's Law and also Women Law Reform and Social Justice Strategies at Masters level. I also teach Women's Law to undergraduate law students. Research and research supervision up to PhD level, drawing on women's lived realities, are also core elements of my work.

Given that feminism is about striving for, and defending women's rights at all levels of society I don't see feminism as something that you merely call yourself but rather as something that you do and also something that you live by. My life and my work are centred on a quest for social justice for women in particular and black people in general, through a combination of academia, research and activism. My quest is to ensure that feminist standpoints, in their multiple manifestations, are an integral part of the dialogue that shapes our understanding of law and reality in our context. Equally important to me is ensuring that women's voices and experiences inform our standing of law and what it is that needs to be changed.

Few take African feminists seriously. Ensuring that our discourses permeate all critical levels that shape the continent's reality is in my view one of the greatest challenges facing feminists in Africa today. It is vital that we do not remain talking amongst ourselves as feminists but that we also mainstream our ideas and visions for the continent into the critical areas that influence our existence,

be they the academy, the market or the political sphere. It is about knowing where best each of us can make a difference, and to contribute by playing our part in that selected arena on feminist terms.

As African feminists, we need to harness more effectively our continent's history of struggle from domination in order to bring home the point that women's struggles, especially against patriarchal and sexual domination, are key aspects of that struggle. Also, strengthening our articulation and involvement with the political and development discourse on the continent, will help to link feminism to the day-to-day realities of many women in Africa. Finally, we need to strengthen our 'doing': we need to be more action oriented in every sphere, in the sense of providing living testimonies of those changes that we so desperately want to see. My contribution to mainstreaming feminist realities in the academic realm has been through ensuring the production of a breed of lawyers who have a feminist view of the law and of the world and who have the confidence to stand up for what they believe in, internally and externally. I give freedom to my soul, first and foremost when it comes to my personal life, as I see this as critical if we feminists are to move the agenda of acceptance a step further throughout each generation.

In word, thought and deed, blackness and being an African woman in particular, is most certainly what truly inspires me. I do not permit others to trample on me just because I am black or because I am a woman. This is why I find both these states of 'being' truly inspirational as they have helped me to contribute to getting humanity to hold itself to higher values.



Maame Afon Yelbert-Obeng USA

 *I believe in the power of women and our collective ability to effect change.*

I was born and raised in Ghana and have been living in the US for the past 12 years. Over the past decade, I have had the joy and privilege of working to support initiatives that bring significant and meaningful changes to the lives of women and girls across Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). For five years I worked as Programmes Officer for SSA at the Global Fund for Women, making grants to support women's groups. From early 2011 to June 2012, I worked with Women's Earth Alliance as the SSA Programmes Director, partnering with Africa-based organizations to address climate change issues and promote environmental and economic security.

I am passionate about building women's leadership, with a specific focus on facilitating transformative mentorship for young African women. Just as important in my life is music - I am an accomplished singer and released my debut album RISE globally in May 2012 in the US, kicking off an international tour. RISE is an expression of the multifaceted woman that I am, an embodiment of music and a message which transcends multiple genres, ranging from gospel and inspirational to music for social justice. RISE pays tribute to the richness of African music.

I call myself a feminist because I believe in the power of women and our collective ability to effect change. Growing up with a single mother and several aunts and female cousins, I saw how the women around me managed every aspect of life - career, love, children, and all other societal obligations - with strength, tenacity, versatility, a sense of humour and a forward-looking vision.

Juggling motherhood, work and all the different aspects that come with being a woman, I am experiencing first-hand this beautiful story of being a whole woman. As whole women we are free to bring all of who we are - our fears, tears, triumphs, gifts, faith, talent etc., to all that we do, recognizing that what we do is just as important as how we do it.

The fragmentation that exists within the women's movement has the potential to erode the gains that we have made. As we forge ahead, it is important to replenish where our gains and accomplishments have been compromised. It is also crucial to build, practice and invest in sisterhood at all levels to unlock and realise the bright and promising future of African Feminism. In addition, we have to build alliances with men and welcome them as ambassadors for women and girls in Africa.

I am proactively addressing these issues by embodying sisterhood in all forms and expressions. I bring other parts of me such as my gifting and love for music, my crazy sense of humour and infectious energy to women's gatherings, infusing them with fun, laughter, promise and hope. I believe that it is important for the feminist movement in Africa to capture the richness of our culture and enjoy the vast plethora of Africa's musical rhythms, sounds and stories.

I am inspired by the shoulders on which we stand today to reclaim and restore our spaces, and lifted by the stories of many women and girls who lead the way with courage, dignity, grace, wisdom and beauty.



Bibi Bakare Yusuf Nigeria

“ I am a feminist because I believe that things can be different and feminism in all its imperfection is the only movement for change that has successfully integrated all the different issues that affects us for the benefit of all humanity.

I was born in Lagos and spent my early childhood there. I left Nigeria to attend boarding school in England when I was 13, and from there, I went on to study Anthropology and Communications at Goldsmith's College, University of London. I then did an MA in Gender Studies at the University of Warwick, followed by a PhD. In 2003, I returned to Nigeria to take up a Senior Visiting Research Fellow at Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU) at the Centre for Gender Studies. Following on from this, I began to work as a consultant for various private organisations and development agencies.

In 2005, I co-founded Cassava Republic Press, a company focused on publishing the best in African writing. We publish fiction and non-fiction titles for adults and children. We are about to launch Ankara Press, a new imprint devoted to romance with African characters, as well as a “Cassava Crime” series. I am very excited about these new imprints. If there is sufficient dedication, publishing like any of the other creative industries has the potential to influence and change ideas and expectations and shape how the next generation thinks. It is a potentially transformative industry.

This potential for social transformation informs our selection of materials to publish.

I call myself a feminist because when I think of who I am today, my strength and my passions, my joy and pain, my desire and restlessness, they are the result of the women who have come before me, the women whose words have become my own, the women who have refused to sit quietly in a little corner or kneel to serve their men; the women who have fought and continue to fight against the tyranny of patriarchy; the women that I want my children to be and the women I pray all women will want to be. I am a feminist because I am angry. I am angry at the inequality, the continued violence, silencing and repression of women's voices and will to power. I am a feminist because I love to be in the community of women even when they sometimes cause me great anguish! I am a feminist because I believe that things can be different and feminism in all its imperfection is the only movement for change that has successfully integrated all the different issues that affects us for the benefit of all humanity. But the journey ahead is still long.

Charter of Feminist Principles

PREAMBLE

NAMING OURSELVES AS FEMINISTS

We define and name ourselves publicly as Feminists because we celebrate our feminist identities and politics. We recognize that the work of fighting for women's rights is deeply political, and the process of naming is political too. Choosing to name ourselves Feminist places us in a clear ideological position. By naming ourselves as Feminists we politicize the struggle for women's rights, we question the legitimacy of the structures that keep women subjugated, and we develop tools for transformatory analysis and action. We have multiple and varied identities as African Feminists. We are African women – we live here in Africa and even when we live elsewhere, our focus is on the lives of African women on the continent. Our feminist identity is not qualified with 'I's', 'But's', or 'Howevers'. We are Feminists. Full stop.

OUR UNDERSTANDING OF FEMINISM AND PATRIARCHY

We are committed to an understanding of Feminism that places Patriarchy at the centre of our analysis. Patriarchy is a system of male authority which legitimizes the oppression of women through political, social, cultural and religious institutions. Men's access to, and control over resources and rewards within the private and public sphere derives its legitimacy

from the patriarchal ideology of male dominance. Patriarchy varies in time and space, meaning that it changes over time, and varies according to class, race, ethnic, religious and global imperial relationships and structures. Furthermore, in the current conjunctures, patriarchy does not simply change according to these factors, but is inter-related with and informs relationships of class, race, ethnic, religious, and global-imperialism. Thus challenging patriarchy effectively also requires challenging other systems of oppression and exploitation, which often mutually support each other.

Our understanding of Patriarchy is crucial because it provides for us as Feminists, a framework within which to express the totality of oppressive and exploitative relations which affect African women. Patriarchy enables and legitimizes the structuring of every aspect of our lives by establishing the framework within which society defines and views men and women and constructs male supremacy. Our ideological task as Feminists is to understand this system and our political task is to end it. Our focus is fighting against patriarchy as a system rather than fighting individual men or women. Therefore, as Feminists, we define our work as investing individual and institutional energies in the struggle against all forms of patriarchal oppression and exploitation.

OUR IDENTITY AS AFRICAN FEMINISTS

As Feminists who come from/work/live in Africa, we claim the right and the space to be Feminist and African. We recognize that we do not have a homogenous identity as feminists - we acknowledge and celebrate our diversities and our shared commitment to a transformatory agenda for African societies and African women in particular. This is what gives us our common feminist identity. Our current struggles as African Feminists are inextricably linked to our past as a continent – diverse pre-colonial contexts, slavery, colonization, liberation struggles, neo-colonialism, globalization, etc. Modern African States were built off the backs of African Feminists who fought alongside men for the liberation of the continent. As we craft new African States in this new millennium, we also craft new identities for African women, identities as full citizens, free from patriarchal oppression, with rights of access, ownership and control over resources and our own bodies. We also recognize that our pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial histories require special measures to be taken in favour of particular African women in different contexts.

We acknowledge the historical and significant gains that have been made by the African Women's Movement over the past forty years, and we make bold to lay claim

to these gains as African Feminists – they happened because African Feminists led the way, from the grassroots level and up; they strategised, organized, networked, went on strike and marched in protest, and did the research, analysis, lobbying, institution building and all that it took for States, employers and institutions to acknowledge women's personhood.

As African Feminists, we are also part of a global feminist movement against patriarchal oppression in all its manifestations. Our experiences are linked to that of women in other parts of the world with whom we have shared solidarity and support over the years. As we assert our space as African Feminists, we also draw inspiration from our feminist ancestors who blazed the trail and made it possible to affirm the rights of African women. As we invoke the memory of those women whose names are hardly ever recorded in any History books, we insist that it is a profound insult to claim that feminism was imported into Africa from the West. We reclaim and assert the long and rich tradition of African women's resistance to patriarchy in Africa. We henceforth claim the right to theorize for ourselves, write for ourselves, strategise for ourselves and speak for ourselves as African Feminists.

Charter of Feminist Principles cont.

INDIVIDUAL ETHICS

As individual feminists, we are committed to and believe in gender equality based on feminist principles which are:

- The indivisibility, inalienability and universality of women's human rights.
- The effective participation in building and strengthening progressive African feminist organizing and networking to bring about transformatory change.
- A spirit of feminist solidarity and mutual respect based on frank, honest and open discussion of difference with each other.
- The support, nurture, and care of other African feminists, along with the care for our own well-being.
- The practice of non-violence and the achievement of non-violent societies.
- The right of all women to live free of patriarchal oppression, discrimination and violence.
- The right of all women to have access to sustainable and just livelihoods as well as welfare provision, including quality health care, education, water and sanitation.
- Freedom of choice and autonomy regarding bodily integrity issues, including reproductive rights, abortion, sexual identity and sexual orientation.
- A critical engagement with discourses of religion, culture, tradition and domesticity with a focus on the centrality of women's rights.
- The recognition and presentation of African women as the subjects not the objects of our work, and as agents in their lives and societies.
- The right to healthy, mutually respectful and fulfilling personal relationships.
- The right to express our spirituality within or outside of organized religions.
- The acknowledgment of the feminist agency of African women which has a rich History that has been largely undocumented and ignored.

INSTITUTIONAL ETHICS

As feminist organisations we commit to the following:

- Advocating for openness, transparency, equality and accountability in feminist-led institutions and organisations.
- Affirming that being a feminist institution is not incompatible with being professional, efficient, disciplined and accountable.
- Insisting on and supporting African women's labour rights, including egalitarian governance, fair and equal remuneration and maternity policies.
- Using power and authority responsibly, and managing institutional hierarchies with respect for all concerned. We believe that feminist spaces are created to empower and uplift women. At no time should we allow our institutional spaces to degenerate into sites of oppression and undermining of other women.
- Exercising responsible leadership and management of organisations whether in a paid or unpaid capacity and striving to uphold critical feminist values and principles at all times.
- Exercising accountable leadership in feminist organisations, taking into consideration the needs of others for self-fulfilment and professional development. This includes creating spaces for power sharing across generations.
- Creating and sustaining feminist organisations to foster women's leadership. Women's organizations and networks should be led and managed by women. It is a contradiction of feminist leadership principles to have men leading, managing and being spokespersons for women's organizations.
- Feminist organisations as models of good practice in the community of civil society organizations, ensuring that the financial and material resources mobilised in the name of African women are put to the service of African women and not diverted to serve personal interests. Systems and structures with appropriate Codes of Conduct to prevent corruption and fraud, and to manage disputes and complaints fairly, are the means of ensuring institutionalized within our organizations.

- Striving to inform our activism with theoretical analysis and to connect the practice of activism to our theoretical understanding of African feminism.
- Being open to critically assessing our impact as feminist organizations, and being honest and proactive with regards to our role in the movement.
- Opposing the subversion and/or hijacking of autonomous feminist spaces to serve right wing, conservative agendas.
- Ensuring that feminist non-governmental or mass organisations are created in response to real needs expressed by women that need to be met, and not to serve selfish interests, and unaccountable income generating agendas.

FEMINIST LEADERSHIP

As leaders in the feminist movement, we recognize that feminist agency has popularized the notion of women as leaders, as feminist leaders we are committed to making a critical difference in leadership, based on the understanding that the quality of women's leadership is even more important than the numbers of women in leadership. We believe in and commit ourselves to the following:

- Disciplined work ethics guided by integrity and accountability at all times.

WE BELIEVE IN AND COMMIT OURSELVES TO THE FOLLOWING:

- Disciplined work ethics guided by integrity and accountability at all times.
- Expanding and strengthening a multi-generational network and pool of feminist leaders across the continent.
- Ensuring that the feminist movement is recognised as a legitimate constituency for women in leadership positions.
- Building and expanding our knowledge and information base on an ongoing basis, as the foundation for shaping our analysis and strategies and for championing a culture of learning beginning with ourselves within the feminist movement.
- Nurturing, mentoring and providing opportunities for young feminists in a non-matronizing manner.
- Crediting African women's labour, intellectual and otherwise in our work.
- Creating time to respond in a competent, credible and reliable manner to other feminists in need of solidarity and support whether political, practical or emotional.
- Being open to giving and receiving peer reviews and constructive feedback from other feminists.

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Shamillah Wilson - is currently an independent feminist consultant focusing on women's rights, leadership development and movement building in Africa. She holds a BA (UCT) and an MBA (University of Liverpool). She has gained extensive networking, coordination and communication experience in South Africa and internationally. Her experiences include the African Gender Institute at the University of Cape Town (UCT), Commission on Gender Equality (CGE) and the Speakers' Forum of South African Legislatures. From 2001 to 2007 she was the International Director for the Association for Women's Rights in Development's Young Women and Leadership Programme and Feminist Responses to HIV and AIDS. Shamillah is also a founding Board Member of the Youth Against AIDS Network, a regional network of youth leaders in Africa. She is currently an Advisor to the Global Fund for Women and the African Women's Development Fund. She is also a founding member and Chairperson of Sonke Gender Justice Network (SGJN), an organisation working around gender equality, HIV&AIDS and human rights. She is also the Director for the Learners' Network, a group that builds young people's leadership since 2002. Her work in the past 5 years have focused on building leadership of community groups to address women's rights violations. In addition, she has focused much of her efforts on movement-building and leadership development with a range of different groups. Shamillah is inspired by challenges that life throws at her and is committed to unleashing the power of possibility in others.

Sarah Mukasa - works as the Director of Programmes at The African Women's Development Fund (AWDF). Prior to this she worked at Akina Mama wa Afrika as the Programmes Manager for Eastern Africa. Sarah has a BA in Business and Management from the University of East London and an MSc in NGO Management from the London School of Economics and Political Science. Sarah is a feminist activist with extensive experience of advocacy at international, regional, and national levels. She has participated in a number of key UN meetings, where she has coordinated advocacy strategies for the various women's interest groups, including the African Women's Caucus, and the Solidarity for African Women's Rights, a campaign for the ratification and implementation of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa. Sarah also lived in the UK for a number of years, where she worked in local and health authorities as a community development officer, developing services for minority ethnic communities in London and in particular refugees and asylum seekers. She has a special interest in the areas of race as it interfaces with gender, sexual rights and issues relating to the integrity of women's bodies, as well as the institutional development of women's rights organisations. She is a member of the Working Group of the African Feminist Forum.

Voice, Power and Soul |||

Portraits of African Feminists

In Volume II of the hugely successful Voice, Power and Soul: Portraits of African Feminists, we hear the stories of African feminists from all walks of life, tell their stories of struggle, achievements, hopes and inspiration.

"I believe in the rights of women to be all they can possibly be, their right to happiness, to control the fruits of their labour and to control their bodies"

Thelma Awori, Liberia/Uganda

"I seek to create spaces in which African women engage in authentic dialogue about our experiences of making changes in our lives that both embrace our power and challenge oppression"

Yaliwe Clarke, Zambia, South Africa

"I call myself a feminist because I have been through incidents in my life that proved to me that equality and egalitarianism are basic rights for everyone"

Fatma Emam, Egypt

"Women and girls possess enormous potential that is still underutilised and whose real value is unknown"

Mariama Faye, Senegal

