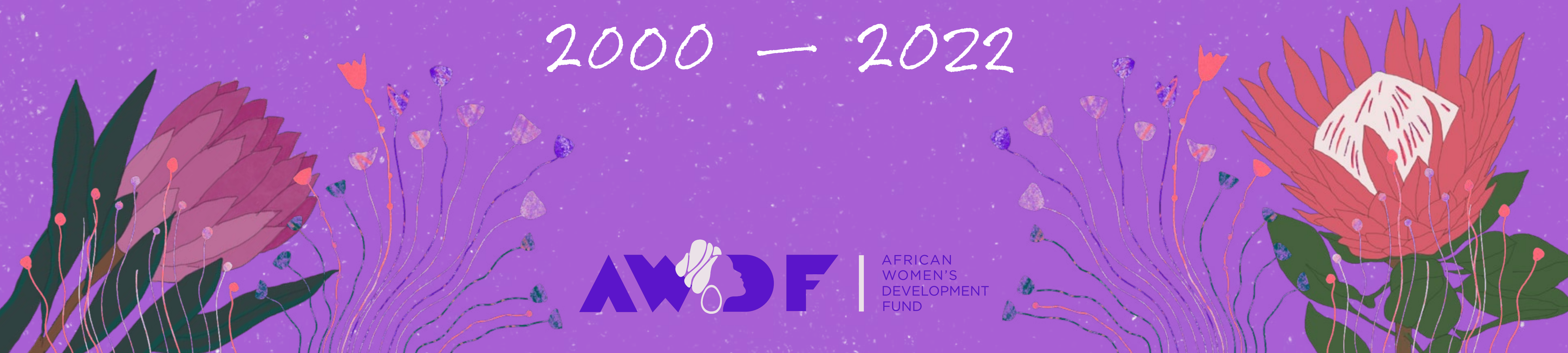


AFRICAN WOMEN'S
DEVELOPMENT FUND

Our Journey So Far

2000 — 2022



AFRICAN
WOMEN'S
DEVELOPMENT
FUND

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There is the wind
The coming of the days

There is fire
The foundation making way

There is the sun
The beginning and the end
The beginnings and the ends

There are the fallen leaves
Of service and substance

There is the air
Expansive space

There is water
The architecture of the protea
Magenta coloured daisies
Offerings after a long days work





There are twenty-two years
Over 8,030 days
192,720 hours.

How can one possibly tell these
stories?

One cannot.

But many, together, can try.

Our note to you...

This story is told in the voices of AWDF founders, staff (past and present), partners, grantees, and friends. As you read, you may notice that the stories interchange between we and I and they - an interplay of what the narrators know, heard and saw. We ask that you read this journey in the way that it was experienced, very many voices - individual, and collective, so many sisters, together.



The Spark

Dr Hilda Tadria and Joana Foster

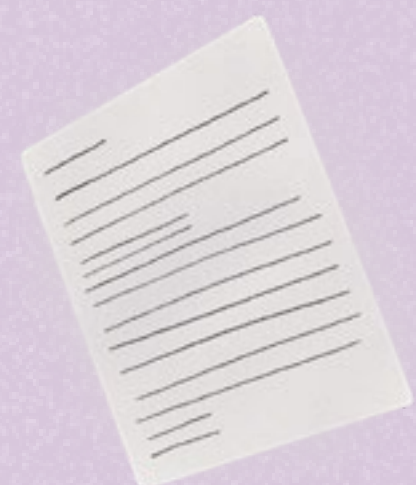
connecting on the sidelines of a preparatory conference for Beijing held in Dakar, back in 1994. Followed by an early morning recreational walk on the beach to share reflections on the experiences at the conference and subsequent conversations about needing a resource pool, by African women, for African women. A USD 5,000 grant to write a proposal offered by the Global Fund for Women. A submitted proposal. A follow up grant. Ruminations of an African women's fund by Bisi Adeleye-Fayemi, while at Akina Mama wa Afrika. A culmination of those ideas as Bisi and Joana take a walk in London, right before they are to attend the 1998 Commission on the Status of Women in New York. Further conversations between the three, refined thinkings of what this fund would look like and some initial commitment of funds from select partners and individual African women. A launch and donor forum in 2000 that results in millions of resources, and AWDF is born. The rest, as they say, is herstory.



“I was impacted by their vision and fearlessness...and the determination of the three women to make this work. At that time, there was nothing like a basket of funds going to the emerging organisations doing so much work, good work..all the funding was coming from Northern organisations ...it was a very interesting and innovative idea...to have African women leading such an initiative was interesting, but also a little bit scary because you never knew where it would end – you know how sometimes you have a very good idea but you’re afraid to step forward, but it was clear to me that these women were not afraid to step forward. That stood out to me.”

— Rose Mensah-Kutin, ABANTU for Development, Ghana

The three founders speak more [here](#) about the beginning, before the beginning.



The Landscape

The international development sector was exceptionally exclusionary at the time that AWDF started. The different voices we interviewed in creating this story spoke of partners that would tell you everything you needed to do to get money for African women, and their conditions were significantly different than for organisations outside of Africa. Some of the African feminists at the time felt that the philanthropic and development sectors just didn't trust African women. They didn't think them capable.

AWDF started because resources weren't going where they needed to go. They weren't going to smaller organisations, to those that weren't registered, didn't have formalised structures and processes in place, all of which they needed to make them eligible. But, of course, with their proximity to communities, several years of expertise and lived experience of the nature and magnitude of the problems, they are the ones leading transformative change across the continent. We knew this as the founders when we began AWDF. We knew this as friends, as partners, as colleagues, and as grantees. We knew who was doing the work. We knew them and we believed in them.

AWDF came into the philanthropy world, a sector that was created and ruled by the Western world. AWDF confronted it, and joined forces with other women's funds from the Global South, with partners and friends, to turn philanthropy on its head. And it wasn't just that they changed the way things were done amongst those that ran the sector, it was that they created an altogether new space. A space for and by African women. It was quite a thing. It still is.

I'm most proud of the times we were brave...

...Bisi, Joana and Hilda, when they set up the organisation, they were brave. They were pushing boundaries. There was no regional women's fund and they took that decision to raise the money, to set up the organisation, to set up the networks..." -

Theo Sowa, former AWDF CEO, Ghana



The Launches

At the turn of the millennium, women from all over the globe were gathered in **New York** for the five year review of the Beijing Declaration - a visionary global agenda for the empowerment of women. It was June 2000. The AWDF founders - Bisi Adeleye-Fayemi, Joana Foster and Hilda Tadria decided this was where AWDF would be introduced to the world, alongside their African and diaspora feminist sisters.

There had been no plans to fundraise during the launch, but impromptu pledges were made by African women who wanted to be a part of kickstarting this fund. They gave what they could, raising USD 13,000 in one night.



A little over a year later, on a beautiful December day in 2001, African women gathered for the **Africa launch of AWDF in Accra, Ghana** with high hopes, ready to celebrate, and celebrate they did. As Bisi recounts, by the time of the launch, AWDF had already awarded USD 344,000 to 38 women's organisations in 28 African countries.

“The launch in Ghana was very big, successful, a very beautiful thing...with the first lady of Nigeria, the first lady of Burkina Faso, but to me, the most important guests were the women's movement, those who have been strong, vocal voices in the women's movement across Africa coming together to see the historic birth of AWDF.”

– Abigail Burgesson, Ghana



The Early Years

The **first home for AWDF** was the third floor of Aviation House, across from the Shangri-la in Accra. It was a great landmark. The day of the opening, even the pillars were dressed up! A few years in, the third floor could no longer contain AWDF, and so by 2004, AWDF moved to a building that it occupied in its entirety. Although AWDF was still renting, she was proud! Four years later, AWDF managed to purchase two buildings, one of which it used as its more permanent, rent-free home to date. For [Taaka Awori's newborn baby](#), the AWDF House was the first stop from the hospital, even before he got home!

It was an exciting time, **the early years**. Everytime we would have meetings, all of the gatherings and consultations, there were always wonderful conversations. You just can't imagine the quality of the debate in those early years.

It was right after Beijing, and there was a lot of momentum to ensure it wasn't just gathering dust on the shelves. To have an organisation like AWDF, pushing the agenda of Beijing, which African women's rights organisations had championed and which countries had signed on to, was very significant.

And of course, it was wonderful to have funds dedicated to African women led organisations. Millions were given out in grants in the first few years, pushing African women to the centre stage.

What it looked like? Back in the day, it didn't matter that a grantee partner didn't have a phone or email to be reached directly at any time of the day. AWDF would mail and receive grant agreements by post, and phone calls would be made to contacts in towns, setting up a day and time to speak with the grantee partner. That's how we worked. That's how we had to work to get to the women we knew we needed to support, the women doing the work.





When we met

Listen to this [audio](#) on when individuals met with AWDF



How Voices in the Movement Describe AWDf





We started with Money

We started with money. We started with money because we knew African women's organisations needed funding for their programs, so we got to work, raising funds. Here is our story in **figures.**

Over the past 22 years, AWDF has given out

2,884 Grants

(from 38 in 2001 to 250 in 2022)

Equaling

\$68,801,984 USD

in all-time grants

(from 344,000 in 2001 to 11,447,143 in 2022)

to *1,555 Organisations*

in *47 African countries*

+ 5 Middle East countries*

* These five Middle East countries are included as part of the [Leading from South](#) partnership. As it began, it continues - AWDF maintains its Afro-centricity.

AWDF's Endowment Fund now stands at

USD\$4.7million

These are the figures as at November 2022. There are so many stories in these numbers. And also, there is so much outside of these numbers.



“We like feminist funds. AWDF is a clear reflection of what a feminist fund looks like... AWDF doesn’t stress you - the application process is not as exhausting as typical application processes. They’re very supportive, they’ll show you they’re there to help, but I like the fact that they don’t micromanage, allowing you to own your project and own your work, which is different from other funders who will give you money and somehow want to micromanage because they want it to be very clear that you’re doing this work because they’re supporting you. AWDF is quite different. You are managing your work. They let you be. They will not put you under unnecessary pressure. They will just assure you that they’re here, if you need them. You have all this independence and liberty to implement your work the way you want, without feeling like there is someone hovering over you or dictating what you do.”

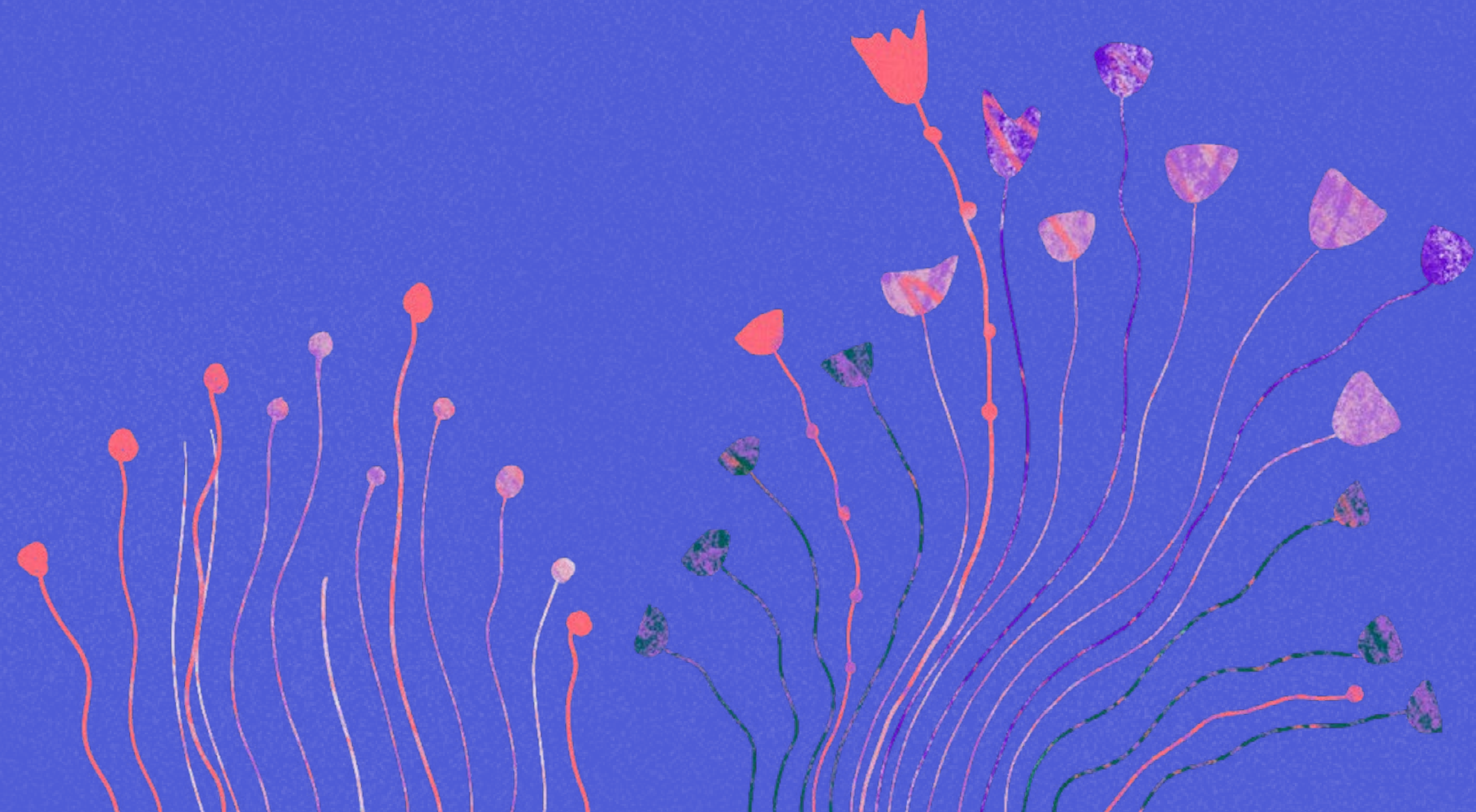
- Gloria Mutyaba, FARUG, Uganda

In the beginning, most of our granting was focused on smaller organisations and supporting livelihood programs. Over the years, with more funding, and more voices in the movement pushing us to listen and expand our work, we did just that.

Queer. Rural. Urban. Small. Medium. Large. Start-up. Sports-oriented. Arts centred. **These are AWDF grantee partners**, African women-led and feminist organisations AWDF invested in over the past two plus decades of our existence. AWDF funded grantee partners, not only for programming and advocacy, but also to strengthen their institutions, with AWDF **providing extensive coaching** for directors, managers, and board members. We were not so focused on whether the organisations that we were funding were women led, as long as the specific programmes were run by a woman. As we learned along, we changed accordingly to ensure women and gender-diverse people have control of the money. Only women led organisations. Now we ensure that the organisations we fund are led by women executive directors and women or non binary board chairs (at least 70%).

“AWDF has been phenomenal. A lot of the smaller NGOs are not able to get funding, AWDF has always been the startup for most of these smaller NGOs, when you’re just starting, they give you the support you need - with all the capacity building, all the technical advice, you’re able to move out and seek other sources of funding. They’ve been very great and continue to be, especially for the up-and-coming NGOs who are still trying to find their feet. AWDF has always been there to provide support from the beginning.”

– Deborah Tayo Akakpo, Gender Center, Ghana



Change at a glimpse

Over the years, we have witnessed our grantee partners do amazing work in all corners. Pushing boundaries, shaping and shifting policies, challenging attitudes and practices, building movements, strengthening themselves and their organisations, setting precedent for progressive rulings and advancing accountability mechanisms. They have pushed for women's representation, participation and leadership; agitated for the rights of women to own and control their bodies and their lives, free of violence, discrimination and coercion; organised so that women would have access and control of resources; and challenged oppressive systems. It is the collective strength of many chipping away at the mountain, one stone at a time that can cause it to come crumbling down.

On the next page we share some of AWDF's grantee partners' impact stories...



Listen to this [Audio](#) from FIDA Cameroon

“I slept that day like a happy woman, today people will know husbands don’t have the right to do whatever they like with their wives, the laws on violence apply to everybody.” That’s Gladys Mbuyah of FIDA Cameroon speaking about a woman coming to FIDA to prosecute her husband for domestic abuse. He quickly found out that he was in trouble.

“The Groupe d’Appui aux Initiatives Féminines pour un Développement Intégré et Durable (GAIFEDID)/AWDF relationship is like a tree where AWDF is the root, GAIFEDID is the trunk, the women we support are the branches, and the positive changes at the level of these women are the fruits. Let’s take as an example the ability of female sex workers trained by GAIFEDID, through AWDF funding, to advocate in front of more than twenty Members of Parliament at the National Assembly of Benin. This is unprecedented in Benin.”

– Pauline Houdagba, GAIFEDID, Benin

Women in Law and Development in Africa (WILDAF) advocated for the African Union’s [Maputo Protocol](#) to reflect African women’s concerns and supported its ratification in 14 West African countries. They pushed for

systemic change that led to access to land and other resources for over 12,000 women farmers and mobilised over 500 traditional leaders to work towards women’s rights, particularly working to shift norms and policies around child marriage in Togo, Benin and Mali.

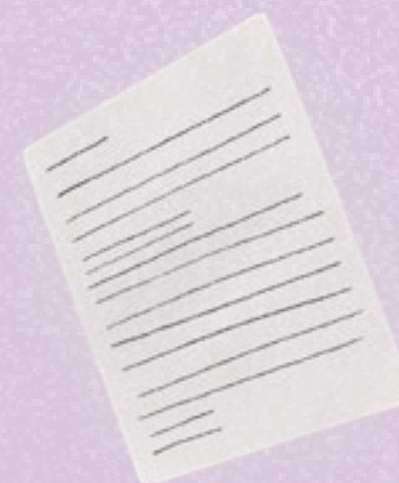
“The funds from AWDF in 2017 gave us the confidence to persist, deepen and strengthen our campaign, and train and retrain our volunteers. AWDF was an extraordinarily sympathetic donor – allowing us to strengthen our feminist ideals and ideology, which had an enormous impact on our advocacy and leadership. We were able to be self-reflective and self-critical with their support. This is very rare in a donor and we value it enormously.” -

Rape Crisis Cape Town Trust

Women and Land in Zimbabwe was able to motivate the Cabinet to ban mining activities that caused pollution of streams and contamination of water sources, impacting crops, cattle and health. Additionally, Chinese and Russian investors who had been mining on land allocated for agriculture were immediately suspended.

The work of Integrated Disabled Women Activities (IDIWA) in Uganda has resulted in improved access, control, and ownership of property for women and girls with disabilities. District-level laws on the promotion of employment and economic rights of people with disabilities were developed through consultations with women and girls with disabilities in two districts in Uganda. The law calls for protection, the elimination of discrimination and equal rights for women and girls with disabilities in the job market.

In this [Audio](#) Rose Mensah-Kutin of Abantu for Development Ghana, talks about the [Women’s Manifesto](#) for Ghana which, while originally published in 2004 with support from AWDF, continues to be a reference and guide for feminist organising across the continent.









Learning as we grow

We've been in the philanthropy sector now for two decades and counting. We are still learning. We've understood, again and again, that alone, we can go fast. But it's only when we go together, that we can go far. This comes with its own set of wahalas, but it's worth the trouble in the end. We have embraced our mistakes and the major shifts that have altered our work, using them as moments to pause, introspect, tease out the lessons and grow.

Change takes time - especially the kind of systemic, deep rooted change we seek. It requires a real investment of resources, a commitment to engage deeply, to try varied methods from different angles. The resources and support needed are not only financial, technical and human, but also emotional. We have learnt to plan, while also being able to adapt to unforeseen circumstances, pandemics, emerging needs and lessons we learn along the way. We know that our funding processes must be flexible, responsive and relevant to actual needs at all times, including in emergencies. Most importantly, we can't do this work without centring those whose lives are most impacted by the change we seek, and without building the movements that sustain us.



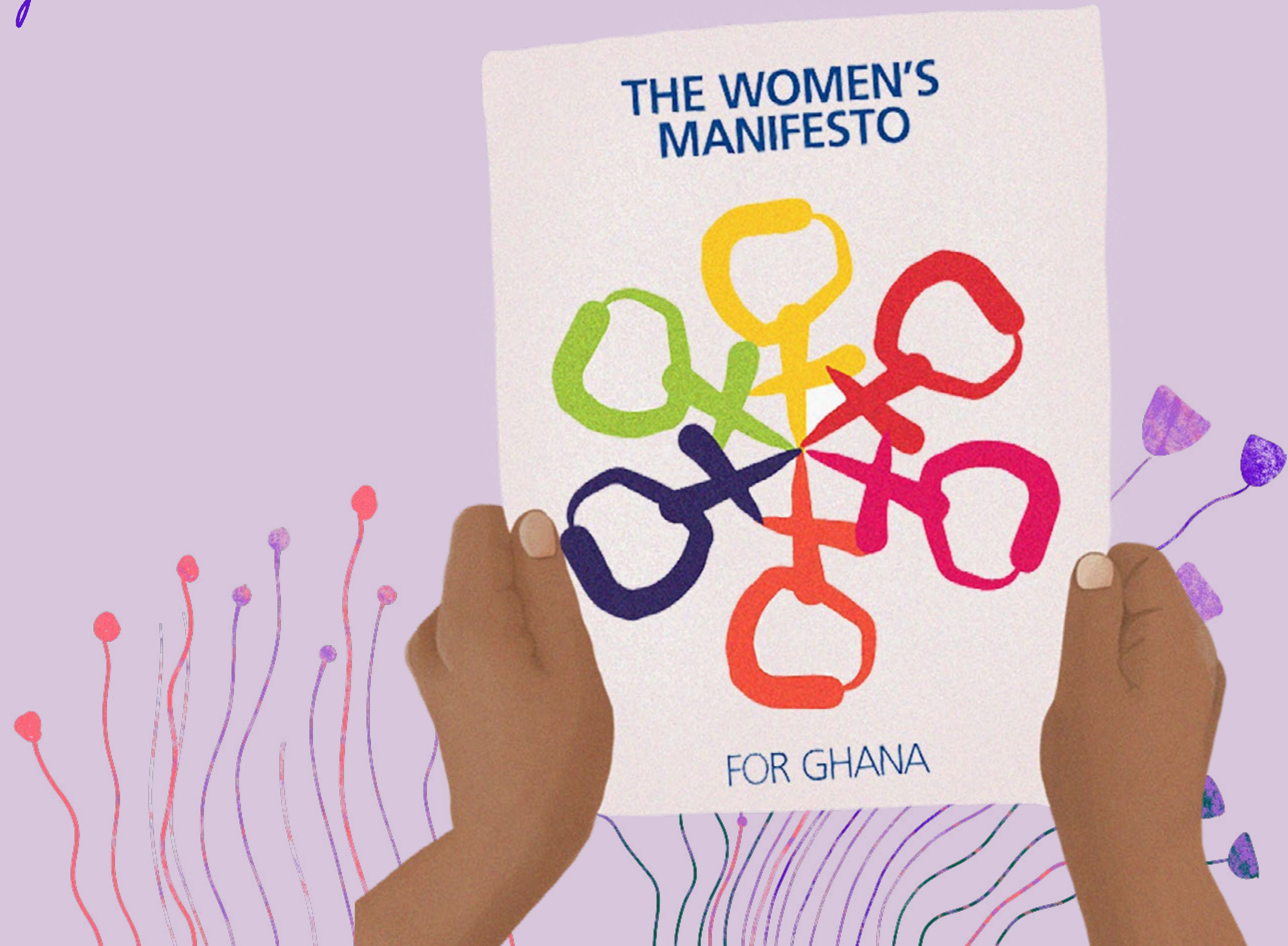
Our bold and ever evolving strategy is guided by our grantee partners and peers on the continent and around the world. We are here to support and resource the work of women's and feminist movements, which means we must first understand what works for them. What kind of support do they need to work in transformative ways? What would strengthen them? What would allow them to adapt to changing conditions, to survive and weather the storms, and come out stronger? We convene them together so they can guide us, and based on what they tell us, and what we hear, we adapt our approaches accordingly.



Beyond the money

When we started out, we knew African women's and feminist organisations needed money for programmes but it was not long before they made it clear to us that money alone was not sufficient. They needed mentors and coaches, networks, knowledge and communication tools and platforms. They needed to convene and to lean on each other to build their capacities and ensure their own sustainability, as well as to ensure the sustainability of the change they were seeking to bring about. So, we co-created the capacity building programme in 2007 together with the African Capacity Building Foundation. Twenty years later, we tell the story of our contribution to strengthening African feminist leadership [highlighting change at individual level and within organisations.](#)

Read more about AWDF's capacity strengthening work to learn about the impact we have co-created with actors in the movement on the next page...



Guided by feminist facilitators, the AWDF capacity strengthening portfolio continues to sharpen and enrich the perspectives of feminist and women's rights leaders. It equips them with the tools and networks they need to advance transformative leadership and governance, financial management, monitoring, evaluation and learning, resource mobilisation, organisational structure and culture, human resources, communications and effective advocacy.

In our effort to create tools for capacity building, and build the knowledge base of feminist and women's rights movements, we have developed various toolkits. These include the [feminist organisational development tool](#) and grantee-inspired collection of change stories in the [Birthing Leaders Handbook](#). These have continued to inspire practice-based institutional growth by showcasing moments of reflection, change and growth for institutions and individual leaders in critical areas like communications, strategic planning and management, financial management and resource mobilisation to inspire other feminist leaders working in similar contexts.

We are proud to see the capacity building programme birth several initiatives, critical among them, the [Feminist Leadership and Governance initiative](#) launched in 2014. African feminist coaches [Hope Chigudu](#), [Yene Assegid](#),

[Paula Fray](#) and [Christine Guchu-Katee](#) have continued to work with cohorts of individual feminist and women's rights leaders together with the organisations and collectives they lead to nurture personal leadership development with the goal of strengthening systems. Each targeted organisation receives a capacity building grant to address their self-identified needs and to implement the change strategies they jointly identify with their coaches through reflective interrogation of organisational cultures, reviewing existing policies and creating networks of support. We are cognisant of the shifts in capacity strengthening work and recall the words of African feminist [Sandra Zenda](#) of

the Institute for Young Women's Development, Zimbabwe who stated that, "capacity building is not only about teaching someone how to do something, but also teaching them how to think about something, how to see, and how to analyse to create change." We carry these lessons with optimism, keen to transform AWDF's capacity building portfolio to centre the agency and resilience of grantee partners, feminist movements and women's rights organisations.



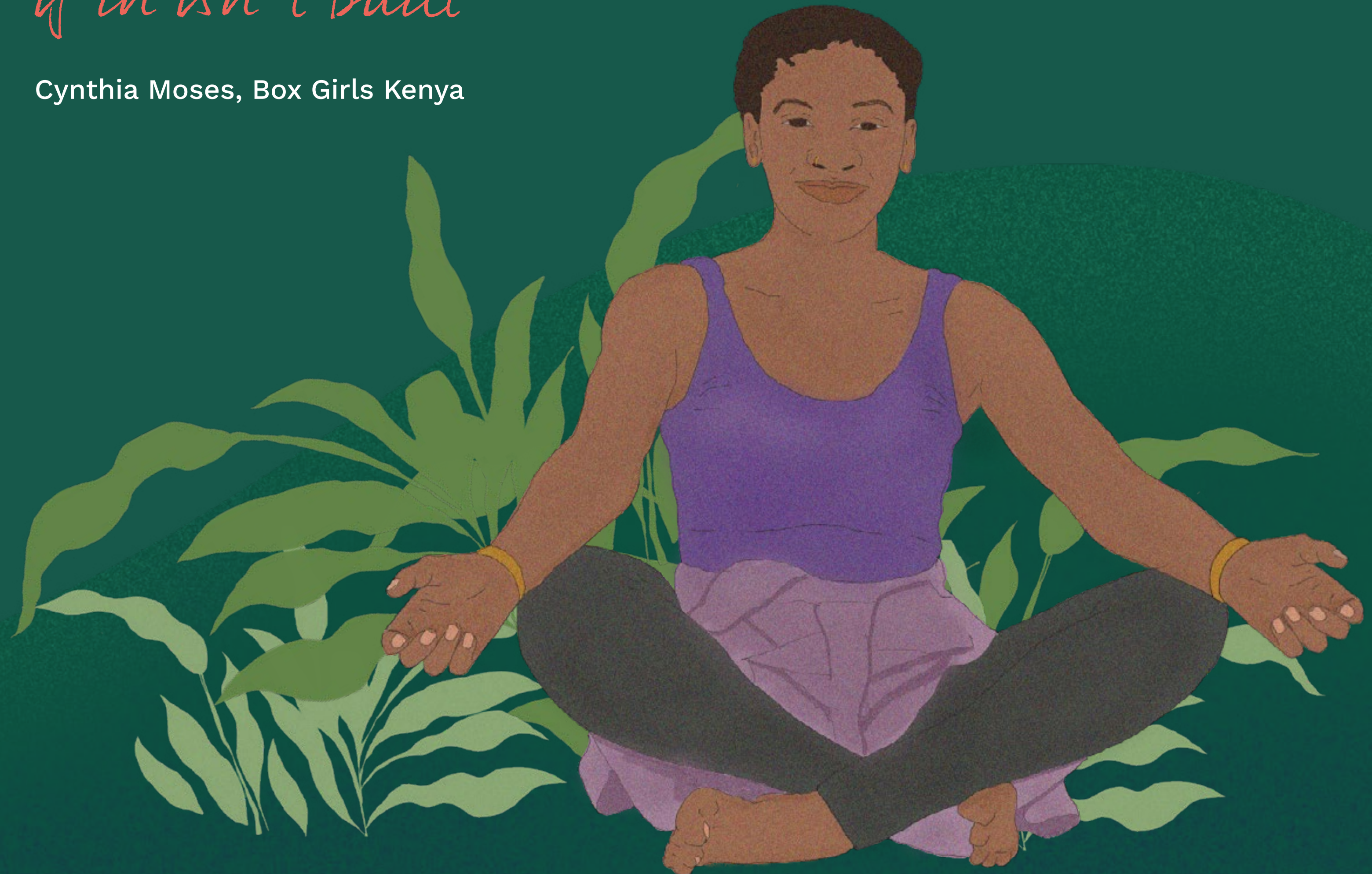
Organisations with a soul

You're in this movement long enough and you know that it won't last if it's not joyful. It needs space for pleasure. Belly laughs and communion. Building organisations with a soul, as [Hope Chigudu](#) calls it. Over the years - listening to our grantee partners, seeing the work's toll on our staff, on our bodies, feeling the anxiety in our communities, across the world - our work has increasingly focused on wellbeing and the centring of the people that allow movements to exist.

We detail this journey in this collection on what wellbeing means to us. It highlights the AWDF-led [Flourish Retreat](#) inaugurated in 2018 and snippets on framing wellbeing in feminist organisations and for individual feminists by [Theo Sowa](#) - former CEO of AWDF, Ghana; [Mpumi Mathabela](#) - One in Nine Campaign, South Africa and [Cynthia Moses](#) - Box Girls, Kenya.

*"You can't build out,
if in isn't built"*

Cynthia Moses, Box Girls Kenya



In 2018, we inaugurated [The Flourish Retreat](#). An initiative centring on beauty and relaxation, where African feminists and women's rights activists come together and engage in sessions on chakras, moon rituals, essential oils and aromatherapy, exercise, breathing practices, journaling, yoga, building altars, and individual and group counselling.

“The little time I spent at the retreat taught me lifetime lessons; that happiness and self-care are also in small things and actions and that I don't have to wait to have enough money, enough time or the right moment to take care of myself. I had been pushing myself for years, not resting, putting everything and everyone before myself, and feeling guilty for even wanting to rest, wanting to let go. The retreat confirmed to me that self-care is a political act ... It helped me think of ways to add what I learned into our work and share it with the team in order to strengthen the organisational culture of family and love.”

– Mpumi Mathabela, One in Nine Campaign, South Africa

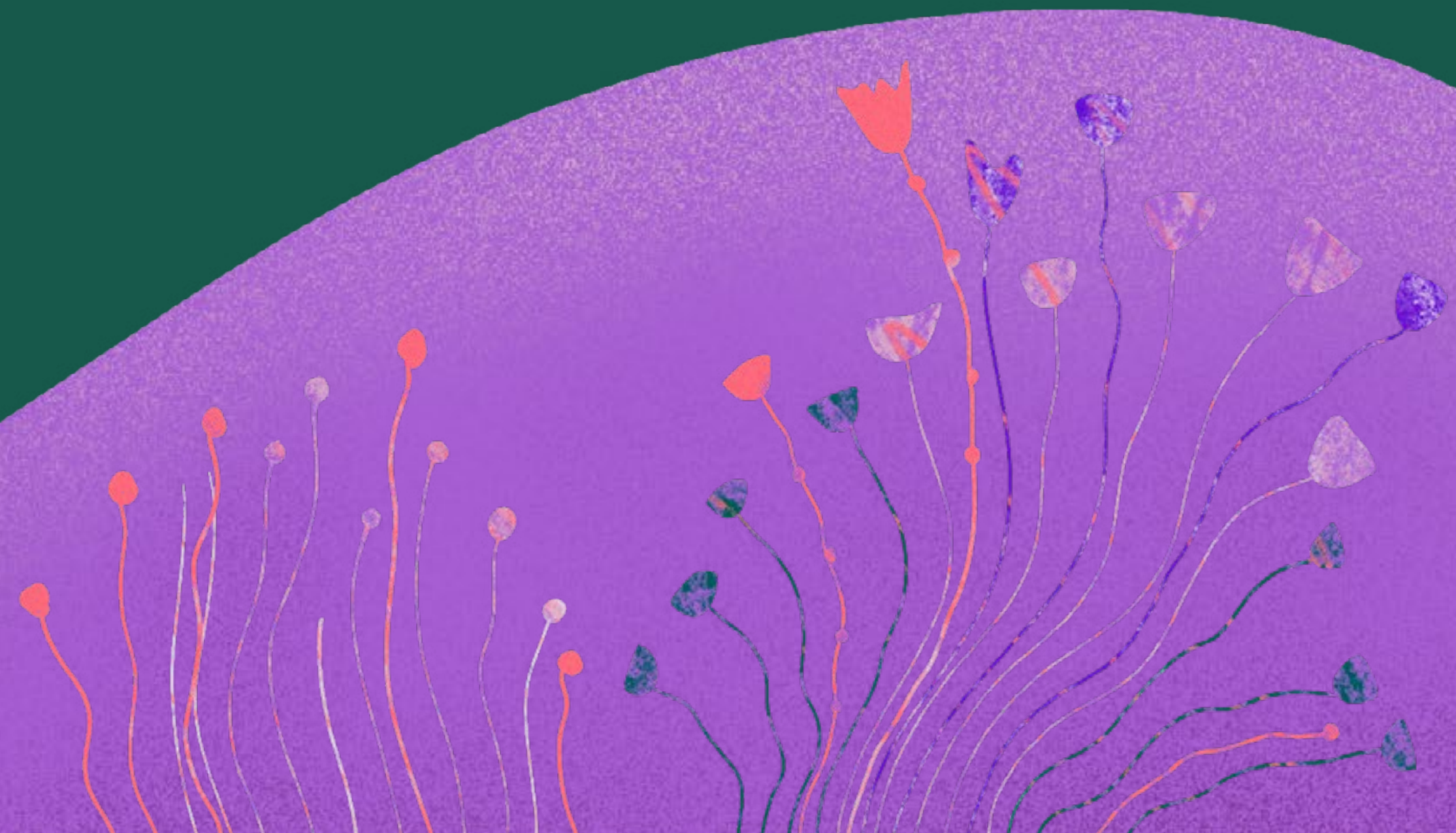
After one of our training sessions on self-care, conducted by Hope Chigudu, Box Girls Kenya created a Happiness Department, with a Happiness Manager recruited solely to care for the well-being of staff with funding from AWDF. Wouldn't the world be a much better place if

there were greater investments towards our well-being, individual and collective?

Listen to this [Audio](#) clip to learn more about the happiness department.

“Remember that work is not the world. Yes, we want to change the world as feminists, but we have a greater world to change. Work is not everything. But if we really want to change the world through our work, we have to look after ourselves and be a part of the collective well-being of our movements. And that means, time with family, time with friends. Time thinking and not just doing. The temptation is to try and make things right for everyone else but yourself, and that doesn't work.”

– Theo Sowa, former AWDF CEO, Ghana



The Charter Of Feminist Principles For African Feminists

Early on in the work, it became clear that what we were keen to do was support activists, women's rights and feminist organisations and feminist ideas. So, we gathered, we organised workshops and forums, we debated, we interrogated our own beliefs, privileges, identities and aspirations and, together, we worked to contribute to African feminist thinking and communion that defines us, as a collective.

Following some earlier attempts, AWDF convened the first [African Feminist Forum](#) in Accra in 2006 - a momentous occasion that was! It brought together over 100 African feminists to think deeply and converse openly and honestly about the state of the women's movement. The conversations and deliberations at the Forum birthed several national feminist forums and the [African Feminist Charter](#) - a crucial tool that sets out the collective values we hold in our work and in our lives as African feminists. Sixteen years later, the African

Feminist Forums continue to convene across multiple countries, providing space for African feminists to pause and introspect, to question, to affirm, to analyse and collectively strategise on ways to best dismantle oppressive patriarchal systems.

This journey is not linear. Many times, you go back to the beginning. You ask, how can we do this better? What do we need to change? What are our principles and how can we stick to them? How do we ensure peace and safety in the movement? How do we make sure we are inclusive? You know, one of the most important things to come out of the AFF was the Charter of Feminist Principles For African Feminists. Now we can say, read this. If you agree, sign your name. Welcome to the movements.



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 politicise 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 when 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 'Ifs', 'Buts', or 'Howevers'. We are Feminists. Full stop.**



Listen [here](#) to learn more about the Charter of Feminist Principles For African Feminists



The Devil is a Liar

In the words of an anonymous sibling...

So, we're in a meeting and we're talking about something like abortion rights and unbeknownst to us, we had invited women to a meeting who were Christian fundamentalists. They started talking fire and brimstone, "[the devil is a liar!](#)," one of them screamed. We were so shocked. We just thought, what have we just invited into this space? It's not the first time something like this has happened. It wasn't the last time. In one meeting, a woman complained that, "the lesbians are taking all of the resources."

There is so much diversity in the African women's movements. And that's where the Charter comes in. What does the Charter say about intersectionality? What does it say about mutual accountability? Who are we? Over the years, that is what we have had to remind ourselves of. We have stumbled and we'll stumble again. But the future is dependent on us reminding ourselves of our principle feminist values.

Growth can be a scary thing. Once we started getting larger funding streams, more bilateral and multilateral funding, there was a shift in our accountability, which leaned heavier to our

fundings rather than to our movements. Grant making processes became more stringent, which meant that the smaller organisations we intended to resource couldn't access us because they could not meet our criteria.

We knew it was important to self reflect and to listen, and we have been trying very hard to rectify this. In recent years, we have had several calls for proposals that specifically targeted organisations with small and medium budget sizes, or organisations from underfunded countries and regions. Once, our leadership team declined a bilateral donor's offer to provide sizeable funding to AWDF, because the restrictions and conditions on the grant would have been detrimental to our grantee partners. Our 2023-2033 strategic framework is intentionally designed to address these gaps and ensure that our feminist principles are fully infused in all our processes.



Sisterhood is Prime

It's so alive. The work. Over 20 years and I didn't experience boredom. There was power in working with a determined women's rights organisation like AWDF working with other determined women's rights organisations.

You know, I remember that I was in Kampala for a meeting and the director of one of AWDF's grantee partners was there - Freedom and Roam Uganda (FARUG), a queer-led organisation based in Uganda. It was my first time meeting them in person. And they just kept on saying, "I can't believe you trusted us with that much money, we're a small organisation. You gave us money and then you gave us more..."

We have other funders. We know how it works. But, our relationship with AWDF feels different. It has been a long and grounded friendship that has bloomed throughout the years in love, solidarity, and sisterhood. More so is the joy of knowing that we can always call on each other as friends, partners, and sisters on this revolutionary journey.



We've learnt from each other, what solidarity looks and feels like. What it means to be your sister's keeper - when it matters most.

AWDF is like family. I don't know how else to describe it. Like home. Like being welcomed with all parts of you.

It feels like sisterhood. They believe in us. It's like a good friend who's always in your corner. You need her and she's there. When one person is struggling, we come together, even if we disagree on things, we come together. That's AWDF.

Strange that we keep saying we? We haven't worked with AWDF for years. Some of us never really worked with AWDF. But that's what it feels like, it feels like we.

Here, sisterhood is prime.

Listen [here](#) for more reflections on sisterhood in the AWDF



Governance is a labour of love



AWDF would not be where we are today without the love, labour and leadership of the African feminists who have built and rebuilt our governance structures. Since our very first Board meeting in 2001, wonderful African feminists, on the continent and in the diaspora, have collectively steered AWDF's growth, providing strategic advice and deepening our connections with feminist movements and funders. We are hugely indebted to all the women and feminists who joined our Board over the past two decades, and grateful for their commitment.

AWDF was guided to explore several governance approaches, including formal registration in addition to the main one in Ghana. In the early years, friends of AWDF in the United States registered AWDF-USA as a 501(c)(3) to raise visibility and financial support in the United States for the Accra-based AWDF. Similarly, in 2011, AWDF was registered under Section 21A of the Companies Act of South Africa with the objective of raising funds for our grantmaking in the Southern Africa region. Over time, our Ghana based entity became strong enough to carry all the responsibilities, registering directly as a 501(c)(3) in the US, and managing all our continental work from Accra. These processes provided opportunities for learning and growth that we are still benefiting from as we continue into the future.

Sankofa

We believe very much in **Sankofa** - which refers to the belief that we must look back to go forward. We must learn from what we didn't do right so that together, with all the lessons we learn collectively, we can go further. In order to keep moving, we must also look to the future and anticipate what is to come. In 2016, AWDF embarked on a strategic planning process that was inspired by the need to invest in **building feminist futures**. In thinking about what may come, and preparing scenarios so that we're ready for any eventuality. This process birthed "Shaping Africa's future", [AWDF's 2017-2021 strategic plan](#) that gave direction for how we should best utilise our resources, capacities and aspirations based on what research and futuristic trend analyses projected would be the landscape to come for African women, girls and gender-diverse people.

Our 2023-2033 strategy offers a long term plan and focuses on providing holistic support to African women's and feminist movements in ways that respond to their evolving needs, and enabling them to lead the much needed transformative work, investing in their agency and resilience, not just their programmes and activities. We will also focus on amplifying African women's and feminists' voices and knowledge and voice, and promoting a more supportive philanthropic and development ecosystem for gender justice in Africa and beyond.

Read on to learn more about AWDF's journey to preserve African feminist narratives over the years...



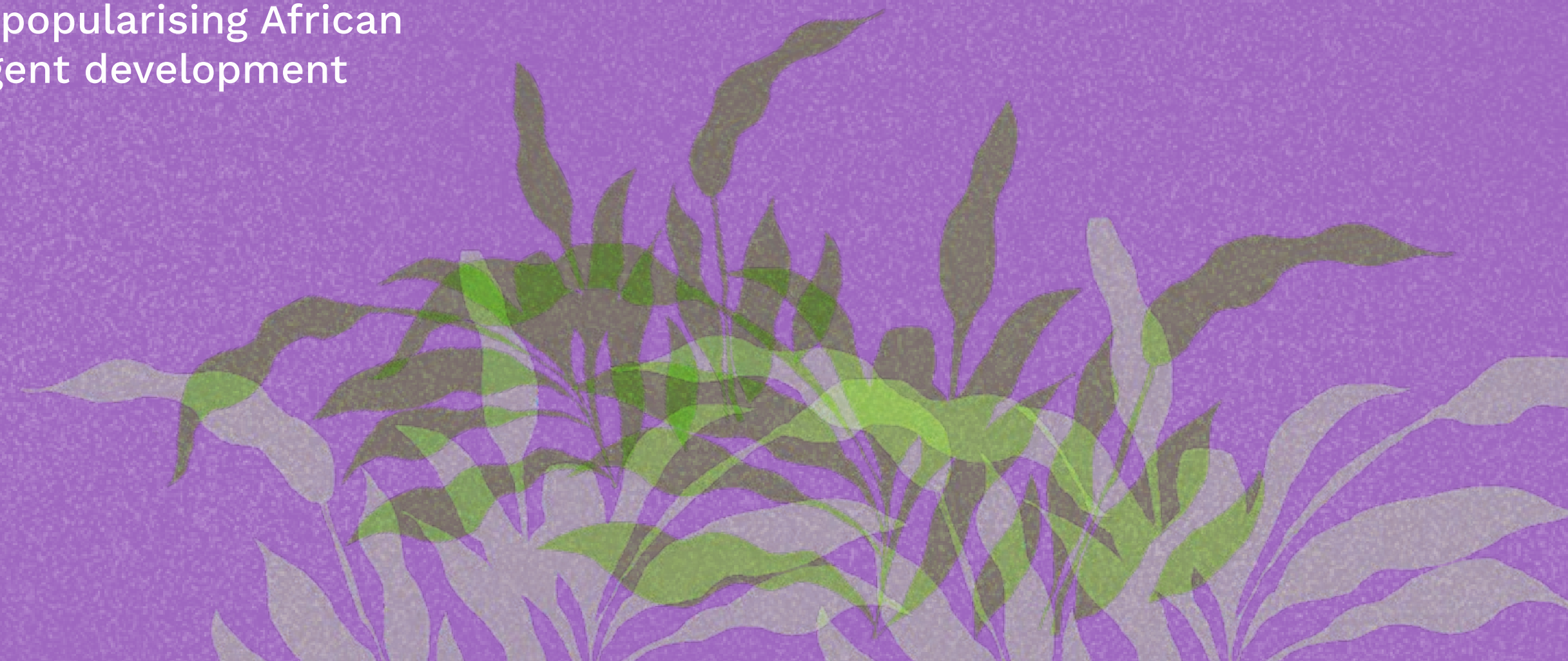
In 2013, AWDF created its **knowledge management portfolio** to collate platforms, innovate tools and preserve African feminist narratives through research, knowledge exchange and archivals. The stories about African women were told in funder boardrooms, on media front pages and policy debates - but rarely by themselves. How could we move forward if our past and present were systematically erased? This work required **research** and a transformation of traditional and often Western driven research politics. We learned along the way that the data we need is not the data we have. The movement needs voice, it needs platforms, connection, communication and visibility. It needs knowledge. So, we got to work.

AWDF was already managing [AfriRep](#) and the [Sauti Centre](#), physical and virtual knowledge exchange platforms to collect, preserve and connect feminist movements and the public to research and other forms of knowledge created by African feminists and women rights organisations. Together with our website and other social media channels, these platforms thrive, disabusing the notion and the practice

that perceives African women as users and not creators of knowledge resources - exclusionary notions that disregard African women's voices and narratives.

We are proud to have documented the personal narratives of feminist and women's rights activists in [Voice Power and Soul](#) (79 African feminists describing their identities and commitment as feminists) in the early 2000s aimed at visibilising and centring the identities of African feminists. This evolved into the 'Know Your African Feminists' videos with the AFF. Most recently, these efforts have yielded groundbreaking research like the [Raising Voices](#) and AWDF co-produced [violence against women \(VAW\) Primer](#) which frames the politics, language and analysis on VAW and the Africa wide study on the scale of [women and noncommunicable diseases](#) popularising African feminist perspectives on urgent development issues.

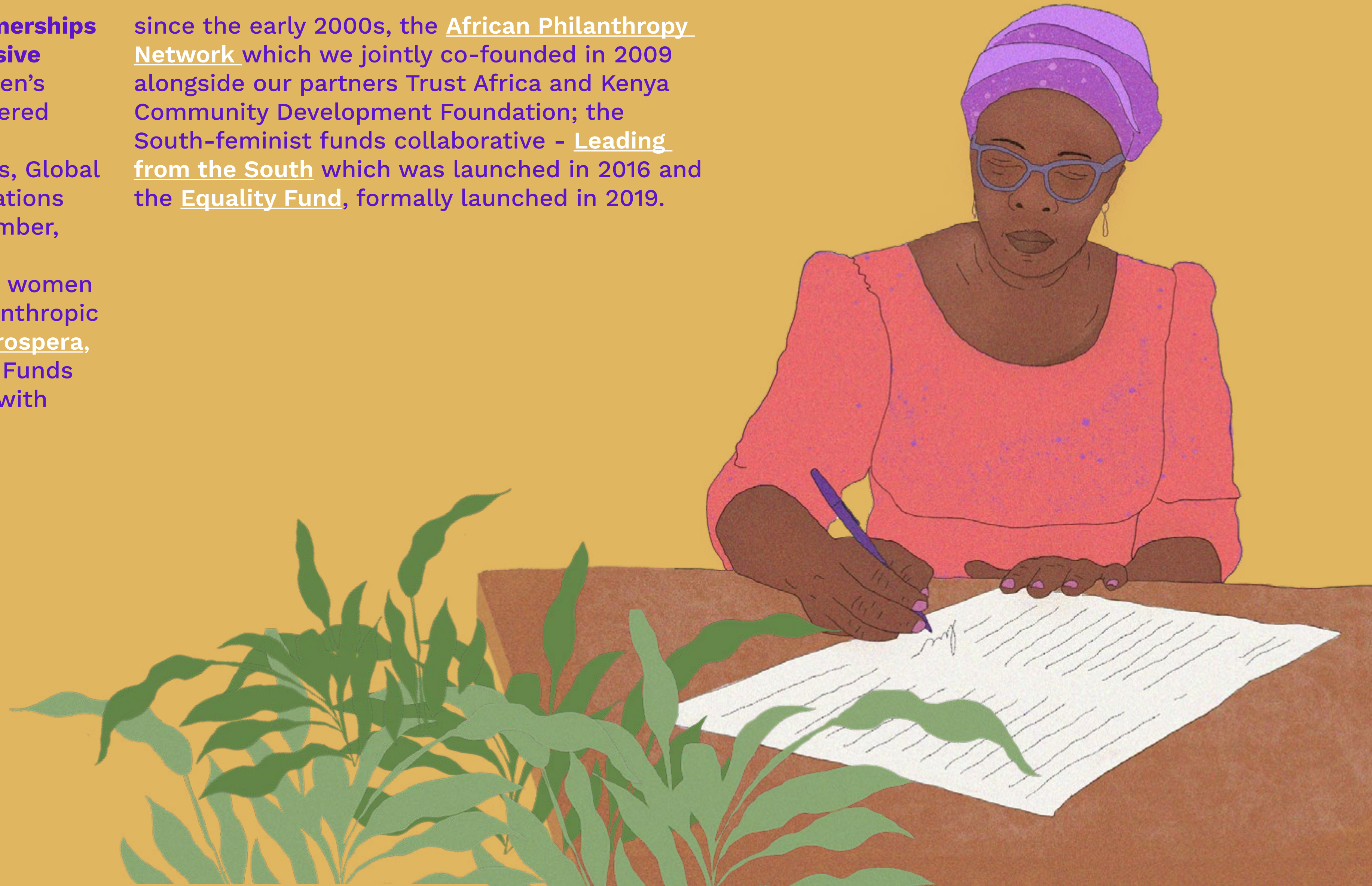
The **African Women's Writers Workshops** launched in 2014 have successfully built a network of African women writers and voices of authority in public spaces to be able to provide feminist narratives of womanhood and of women's rights movements. As a result of these workshops, participants have gone on to secure publishing deals, written social change and/or feminist articles published in continental and international media, and have spoken on global platforms such as TED Global. In addition to contributing to challenging institutionalised erasure, we use these spaces to profile and articulate know-how, lived experiences and thought-processes of African women, linked always to policy, advocacy and research platforms, networks and funder communities.



Rooted in partnerships

This work has always been about **partnerships** and the creation of diverse and **expansive funding opportunities** for African women's movements and organisations. We entered partnerships with other Africa-based philanthropic initiatives, feminist funds, Global South funds and international organisations and continue to serve as founding member, advisor, partner and active participant representing the aspirations of African women and feminist organisations in the philanthropic sector. Among others, these include Prospera, the International Network of Women's Funds which we have been actively involved with

since the early 2000s, the African Philanthropy Network which we jointly co-founded in 2009 alongside our partners Trust Africa and Kenya Community Development Foundation; the South-feminist funds collaborative - Leading from the South which was launched in 2016 and the Equality Fund, formally launched in 2019.



AWDF was actively involved in the formation of [Prospera](#), the International Network of Women's Funds, in the early 2000s, even as we were beginning to shape what AWDF would look like. In 2003, we hosted the annual conference for Prospera, where 25 women's funds from all over the world were in attendance. We continue to be an active member of Prospera, working to transform the funding landscape for girls, women, gender-diverse people and their communities. The network serves as a global hub for various women's rights funds across the globe to be in solidarity with each other, learn from one another, and influence together.

In July 2009, we co-founded the African Grantmakers Network, alongside our partners Trust Africa and Kenya Community Development Foundation. This was the culmination of years of conversations, deliberations and convenings. This network later became the [African Philanthropy Network](#), a continent-wide network of organisations and individuals in Africa and the diaspora engaged in and setting the direction for philanthropy, shaping how resources are mobilised and spent. The network strives to manage power dynamics, put gender, race and class at the forefront of conversations and decisions about giving, and encourage and centre empathy and solidarity.

Our efforts to centre South-feminist funds have been rewarded in many beautiful ways. We are proud to be a part of [Leading from the South](#), a partnership built on a foundational belief in the power and capacity of Global South women's funds. Launched in December 2016, LFS is a partnership between four Global South women's funds – AWDF in Africa, Fondo Mujeres del Sur in Latin America, Women's Fund Asia, and the International Indigenous Women's Forum - AYNi Fund. Initiated with a focus on feminist-led advocacy, and with funding from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of The Netherlands, the partnership has recently expanded to other approaches, including core funding and collective care. Leading From the South demonstrates the critical role and expertise of Global South women's funds in resourcing women's rights organisations and movements and nourishing feminist networks to thrive transnationally.

Alongside Match International and others, AWDF was a core partner in the visioning and advocacy efforts that led to the creation of the Equality Fund, formally launched in June 2019. The [Equality Fund](#) is a feminist-led grantmaking organisation that leverages their unique funding model - one that unites gender lens investing, government funding and multi-

sector philanthropy - to unlock capital for feminist movements worldwide. Kickstarted with a C\$300 million funding award from the Government of Canada, the Equality Fund, has already mobilised an additional C\$100 million. AWDF partners with the Equality Fund in various ways, including by leading the Fund's feminist grantmaking in Africa.



Artists are Philanthropists Too

And, we can't forget that time that we made an album! *Sheroes* featured artists from 17 countries including Angelique Kidjo, Yvonne Chaka Chaka, Oumou Sangare, Nneka, Wiyala, and Sia Tolno to name a few, all of whom gave up their royalties so that all of the proceeds could go to the work of AWDF. It was the first time that we focused on African women artists as philanthropists and it very well might have been our most successful independent fundraising initiative. It was also fun!





Auntie Joana

On 5 November 2016, Joana Foster, our co-founder and sister, passed at the age of 70. Her spirit lives, her courage and fierce love for African women guides us still. In her honour, AWDF established the Joana Foster Memorial Grant and awarded grants totalling USD 55,000.

We recollected what staff, partners and friends remember and say about Joana



“The whole of her was a positive body - that’s why I was attracted to her - *her positive vibe*. You look at her and say, ‘I want to be her friend’”

“She was *sensitive*, she understood the situation and made sure to handle it with care.”

“I loved her smile.”

“She was dedicated to her work but at the same time, she was carefree.”

“Joana was elegant.”

“A small woman with a big heart, always ready to share knowledge and gifts.”

“I still vividly remember the first day I met Auntie J, some 21 or so years ago. I remember the classy, beautiful cloth she wore that day, her stylishness, and her captivating smile, as she walked into the conference room. We became friends instantly. She took me under her wings and nurtured and mentored me to the very last day I saw her.”

“Auntie J was a pioneer and trailblazer.”

“I learnt a lot from Auntie Joana. We spent a lot of time together travelling, attending meetings and planning for AWDF. She was always full of enthusiasm, joy and energy. *She loved to cook, garden and dance*, and she enjoyed good wine and tea. She was a very elegant woman who took a great deal of pride in her appearance. She was also a very healthy eater. ‘I am going to be there for my own wake. No one is going to have more fun than me’ she declared. That was vintage Joana. Warm, funny, smart, loving, generous, optimistic.”

“She was always giving something to someone.”

“An absolutely amazing woman, she wanted to do ten things at once and was determined to do all of them.”

“Without her, without her sacrifices and commitment, AWDF wouldn’t be what it is today.”

“She was passionate, committed, vivacious.”

“She had a joyous spirit”

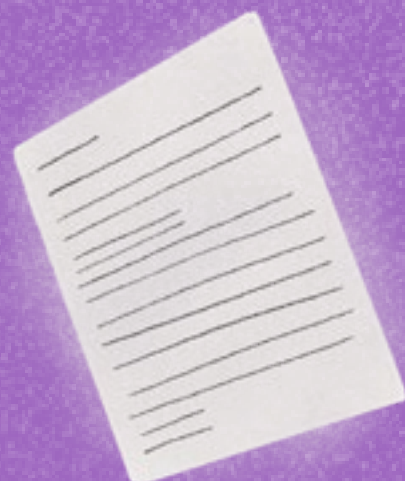
An unforgettable friend and mentor.



The journey continues

It has been beautiful, yes? We were there for our sisters and they were there for us. We were African women funding African women. We are African women.

Listen [here](#) for some reflections on the journey



We.

She said of the beginning of the journey that it defines what friendship is in the sense that your friends are the ones you share ideas with. AWDF was just an idea that friends discussed over tea. There were so many conversations. So much debate. It was lovely really.

We.

But, I don't want our story to end where we began. We have become successful over the years and there is a point at which you then start to become a victim of your own success. We've become credible, we've become the kind of organisation where people are now coming to knock on our doors. If we are not careful, we can end up looking like an African version of the same organisations that we critiqued, the architects of the landscape that AWDF was created to change - which brings us back to where we started.



I'm scared. I love it so much that it scares me.

We.

For me, the best thing that AWDF has done is force us to consider ourselves as African feminists and I'm scared that they may lose that focus. There is danger. Our strength has been on our feminist principles and we can't lose sight of that.

We.

It's a big responsibility working with AWDF. It's an honour. I am tired. I am very tired, but I never doubt our impact and our vision.

We.

Twenty-two years later, AWDF is still creating a feminist transformation in the discourse on what is funded, by whom, where, when, and how much.

We.

You know, AWDF trusted us. They trusted us. I can't believe they trusted us. We trust African women. We know they know how to do the work. We always knew. That was the project. To fund what we always knew to be the way.

We.

It pays to be brave. When we are brave, when we take risks, when we fly in the face of people's expectations, that's when we'll be fulfilled, when we can make change, when we get nourished.

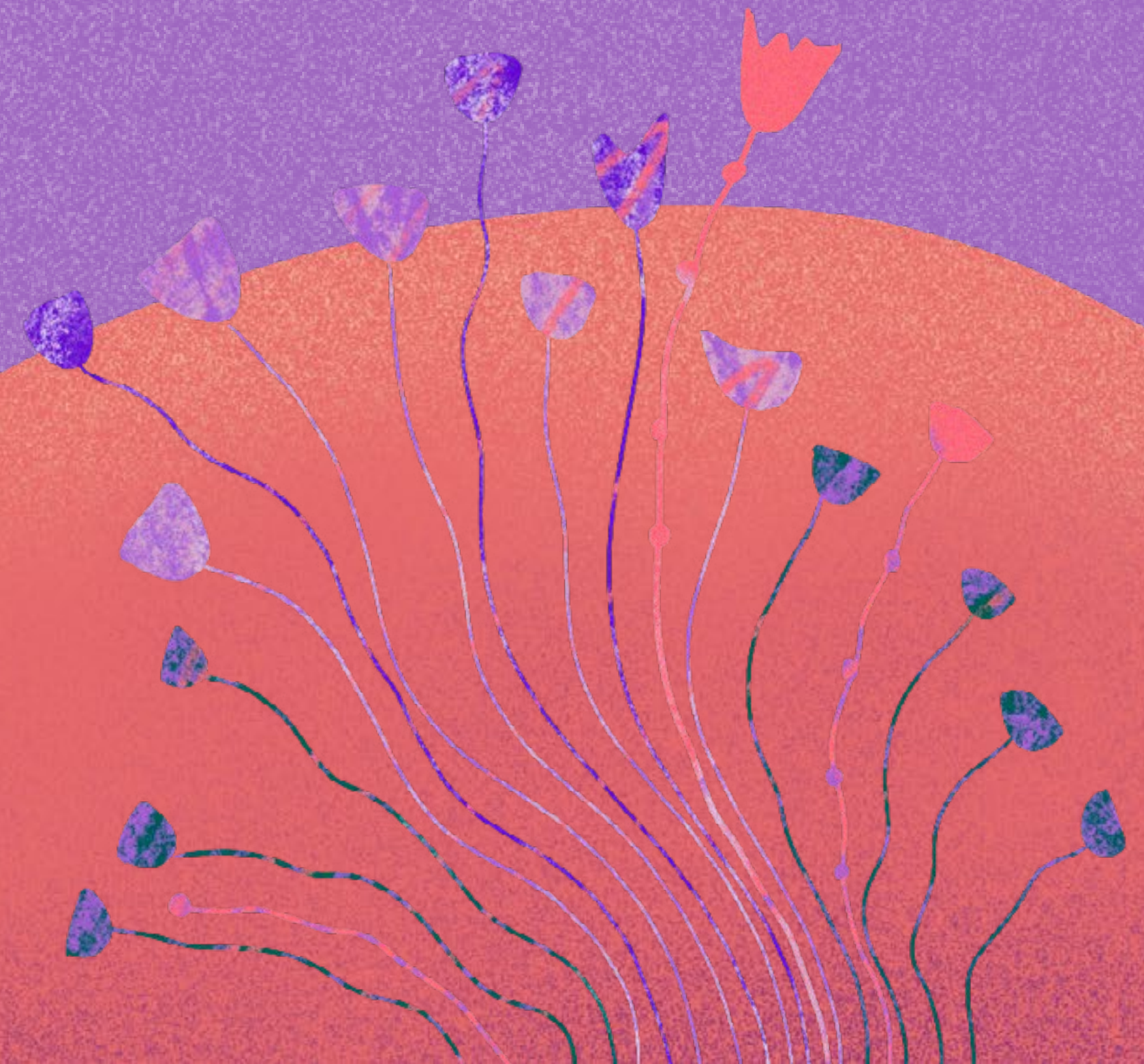
We.

We must not only invest in resourcing our movements, but nourishing and nurturing them.

We.

There's so much to do. There's still so much to do, and we'll do it together. The way we always did it, together.

We.



Gratitude

This story carries the words by AWDF co-founders, staff (past and present), Board members, partners, friends and grantee partners, collected and woven together, added to and organised by African feminist storytellers - [Agazit Abate](#) and [Nabila Abdulmelik](#). Some are direct quotes while others paraphrased to create a community of voices. They are the writers of this story, together. The names of all those whose words are used in this AWDF story are detailed below. We directly spoke to some of them, read through responses to questions we had sent out to others. We also read through posts, write-ups, articles, documents, reports, even book excerpts - written by and about AWDF. We went through AWDF's archives - including images of this journey, and this is what became of all of that.

This documentation project was carried out by African feminist storytellers [Agazit Abate](#) and [Nabila Abdulmelik](#), with the guidance of [Dinnah Nabwire](#) (Knowledge & Voice Specialist), [Malaika Naa Lamley Aryee-Boi](#) (Knowledge & Voice Assistant), and [Françoise Moudouthe](#) (CEO) from the AWDF team. The design and illustration was done by [Kirsty de Kock](#), assisted by [Kirsty de Kock](#). The story webpage was developed by [Kirsty de Kock](#). Audio content support

was provided by [The Stub Accra](#). Translation support was provided by [The Stub Accra](#).

We were in conversation with, and/or took quotes and inputs from the following:

[Abigail Burgesson](#)

[Barbara Phillips](#)

[Beatrice Boakye-Yiadom](#)

[Bella Matambanadzo](#)

[Bisi Adeleye-Fayemi](#)

[Comfort Lamptey](#)

[Cynthia Moses](#)

[Caroline Armah](#)

[Deborah Tayo Akakpo](#)

[Dorcas Coker-Appiah](#)

[Everjoice Win](#)

[Françoise Moudouthe](#)

[Gertrude Bibi Annoh-Quarshie](#)

[Gladys Mbuyah](#)

[Gloria Mutyaba](#)

[Dr Hilda Tadria](#)

[Hope Chigudu](#)

[Iheoma Obibi](#)

[Immaculate Mukasa](#)

[Jeanne Mapendo](#)

[Jessica Horn](#)

[Mohammed Sulemana](#)

[Ndeye Sow](#)

[Oluwatobiloba](#)

[Elizabeth Ayodele](#)

[Pauline Houdagba](#)

[Petronie Nyawenda](#)

[Rose Mensah-Kutin](#)

[Taaka Awori](#)

[Theo Sowa](#)



The funding partners

It would be remiss of us to talk about who we fund and how we fund, without acknowledging who have funded us in the past and those who continue to fund us - trusting our mission and resourcing the centring of African women and feminist organisations, individual activists and collectives.

Over the years, we have received funds from 80+ individual, institutional and corporate donors. We must pause here to deeply thank individual donors for their trust and generosity. The African women who gave what they could at the very start. Those who volunteered to raise big and small amounts of money for our work. And those who decided to include a gift to AWDF in their legacy estates. They have strengthened us financially, but also emotionally.

What follows is a list of AWDF's funding partners from the 22 years of our existence.



1. ActionAid International
2. African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF)
3. AJG Foundation
4. Anonymous Donors
5. Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation
6. Both Ends
7. Carnegie Corporation
8. Catapult Foundation
9. Catholic Organisation for Relief and Development AID (CORDAID)
10. Comic Relief
11. Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (DANIDA)
12. Department For International Development (DFID)
13. DOEN Foundation
14. Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Netherlands)
15. Equality Fund
16. Fidelity Investment Charitable Gift Fund
17. Ford Foundation
18. FORD IIE
19. FORD Foundation West Africa
20. Foundation for A Just Society
21. Foundation for Civil Society
22. Global Affairs Canada
23. Global Fund for Women
24. Global Giving
25. Global Ministries - United Methodist Church
26. Goldman Sachs Philanthropy Fund
27. Heyman Family Foundation
28. Humanist Institute for Cooperation with Developing Countries (HIVOS)
29. Individual Donors
30. Johns Hopkins University School of Public Health
31. Levi Strauss Foundation
32. Libra Foundation
33. MacArthur Foundation
34. MamaCash
35. Match International
36. Nelson Mandela Foundation
37. Nelson Mandela Children's Fund
38. New Field Foundation
39. New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD)
40. New Venture Fund
41. Nommontu Fund
42. Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD)
43. Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs
44. NoVo Foundation Fund of the Tides Foundation
45. Open Society Foundation
46. Open Society Initiative for Eastern Africa (OSIEA)
47. Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA)
48. Oxfam Novib
49. Prospera - International Network of Women's Funds
50. Rockefeller Philanthropic Advisors
51. Royal Netherlands Embassy
52. Safe Abortion Action Fund
53. Sigrid Rausing Trust
54. Silicon Valley Community Foundation
55. Silver Foundation
56. Southern Africa Trust
57. Stephen Lewis Foundation
58. Swiss Embassy
59. The Sister Fund
60. Tides Foundation
61. Trust Africa
62. United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)
63. UN Women
64. Urgent Action Fund-Africa
65. USA for Africa
66. Wellspring Philanthropic Fund
67. William and Flora Hewlett Foundation
68. Women's Foundation of Minnesota
69. Women's Funding Network

AWDF Timeline

The AWDF journey is a non-linear collection of many moments, times, milestones, people, events and locations. We recognise that we cannot exhaustively recollect all the steps of this journey, we have summarised a selection of them in an interactive timeline.

We invite you to view AWDF's 22 years' timeline here and connect with the when, where and with whom our 22 years' journey shaped up.



AWDF moves to a building which it occupies in its entirety

2004



2003

AWDF hosts the annual conference of the International Network of Women Funds, with over 25 women's funds from around the world in attendance

2005

- AWDF invited to join Ford International Initiative to Strengthen Philanthropy, a learning cohort to prepare participating foundations to receive endowment grants
- AWDF celebrates its 5th anniversary with the launch of a HIV Fund and Women of Substance Awards

- AWDF helps establish and hosts the African Feminist Forum and the adoption of the African Feminist Charter in Accra, Ghana
- AWDF supports Africa's first democratically elected Female President by hosting the Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf Market Women's Fund (The Fund eventually became autonomous)
- AWDF begins a funding partnership with Africa Capacity Building Foundation that enabled AWDF to strengthen its Capacity Building, M&E and Knowledge Management programs. The AWDF Resource Center was also established as a result of this partnership.
- AWDF receives a US\$3m endowment grant from Ford Foundation and launches its Endowment Campaign in Johannesburg, South Africa

2006



2008

- AWDF receives 5m Euros from the newly created Dutch MDG-3 Fund, the highest to any civil society organisation at the time
- AWDF develops a Feminist Organisational Tool in order to make the African Feminist Charter operational in feminist organisations
- AWDF launches a pan-African CEO Forum for grantee partners, a precursor to the Feminist Leadership and Governance Initiative
- AWDF publishes Voice, Power and Soul (Vol 1), images and stories of African Feminists
- AWDF hosts the 2nd African Feminist Forum in Kampala, Uganda
- AWDF purchases two buildings, one of which becomes its rent-free home (The AWDF House)

Launch of African Grantmakers Network (Now African Philanthropy Network)

2009



2010

- AWDF Celebrates its 10th Anniversary with Women of Substance Awards and Legacy Grants (for buildings) for selected grantees in several countries
- AWDF produces another documentary, Women of Substance 2
- AWDF's first CEO and Co-Founder Bisi Adeleye-Fayemi steps down to move back to Nigeria. Theo Sowa takes over as CEO in a seamless transition
- AWDF hosts the 3rd African Feminist Forum in Dakar, Senegal



AWDF publishes Voice, Power and Soul (Vol 2), images and stories of African Feminists

2011



- Feminist Leadership and Governance Initiative Launched
- AWDF joins the Amplify Change Initiative co-hosted with Mannion Daniels, and the Global Fund for Women

2014



Flourish Retreat Inaugurated

2018



- Raised \$45 million while in the midst of COVID, the most raised in one year
- Theo Sowa steps down as CEO and Francoise Moudouthe takes over in another seamless transition

2020

AWDF grantmaking reaches Cycle 50!

2021



2016

- Launch of Leading from the South
- AWDF hosts the 4th African Feminist Forum in Harare, Zimbabwe
- AWDF co-founder Joana Silochina Foster passes away on November 5th

2019

Launch of Equality Fund

2012

AWDF launches the online African feminist knowledge repository - AfriRep

2021

AWDF receives its highest ever unrestricted gift of USD\$15million from Mackenzie Scott



Rollcall

We know a journey is never walked alone. There are more people who were a part of AWDF's journey than we could mention. Please help us honour all those who were and continue to be part of this story, by adding their name to the form on our [site](#)



go to <https://journey.awdf.org/>
to view the site

