

Voice, Power and Soul

Portraits of African Feminists

Edited by Bisi Adeleye-Fayemi and Jessica Horn



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A global collaboration by appointment

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Preface

In 2001, I spent a few months at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), University of Toronto, teaching a summer course on Feminist Theory and Activism in Africa. This was one of my responsibilities as the Dame Nita Barrow Distinguished Visitor for that academic year. When I was leaving, my good friend and mentor, Dr Angela Miles, on behalf of OISE, presented me with a beautiful farewell gift. It was a book about Canadian feminists, which had been painstakingly put together over a number of years. It featured portraits of individual feminists as well as some feminist collectives, all diverse in their backgrounds and callings, but all naming themselves politically as feminists. As I read through the book, I thought to myself, how great it would be to have something like this profiling African feminists. For every Canadian feminist I read about, I knew three African feminists who shared more or less the same ideas. Yet we were not visible. Our voices were not being heard. This was the beginning of an idea that has finally become *Voices, Power and Soul: Portraits of African Feminists*. It features images of women who have been actively involved in the African Feminist Forum.

The African Feminist Forum (AFF) is a biennial gathering of African Feminists, and is currently hosted by the African Women's Development Fund. The Forum held its first convening in November 2006 in Accra, Ghana and the second forum took place in September 2008 in Kampala, Uganda. The AFF brings together feminists from across Africa and the Diaspora working at different levels of feminist engagement and activism. The AFF has made a significant contribution to the development of a feminist epistemology in Africa and has created a solid foundation for building a feminist movement on the continent. One of the significant achievements of the AFF has been the adoption of the Charter of Feminist Principles for African Feminists, a highly acclaimed document that has found resonance with feminist movements in other parts of the world.

Some of the faces in *Voices, Power and Soul* are well known in the international women's movement and development circles. Many are not. The voices are rich and varied, and while some might carry messages of anger, rage, frustration, and pain, they also talk about hopes, dreams, aspirations and inspiration. The amazing insights and experiences highlighted in this production are reflective of the challenges facing women active in social change movements in Africa today.

AWDF thanks the Women's Program, Open Society Institute (OSI), Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA) The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the MDG3 Fund of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs for making this publication possible. We are extremely grateful to Jessica Horn for her tireless and brilliant work in compiling the images and narratives. We also thank Rosalind Hanson-Alp for her beautiful graphic design work, as well as Peter Buyondo for the wonderful portraits.

This publication does not claim to be fully representative of the women and voices who are struggling to make Africa a better place, that of course is not possible. This should be regarded as the beginning of several efforts to amplify the voices of African feminists across generations. With this publication, we are putting the soul back into feminist movements in Africa. We hope that through these compelling narratives we can better understand the many struggles for women's human rights and personhood, as seen through the eyes of African feminists. There are many powerful statements in *Voices, Power and Soul*, but a key message from all the contributors is that we are feminists, no 'ifs', no 'buts'!

Bisi Adeleye-Fayemi | Executive Director, African Women Development Fund



Hakima Abbas | Kenya/ Namibia/ Egypt

I call myself a feminist because I oppose, in words and in deeds, all forms of patriarchal and sexist oppression, heterosexism and homophobia. I see the African feminist struggle as core to the struggle for social justice of our continent and seek to dismantle pervasive patriarchal social systems, relations and institutions both within and outside of our movements.

African women face the challenge of multiple oppression based on race, class, sexuality, gender, amongst others. Yet feminist theory and practice is often linked to western concepts, his/herstory and dynamics of women's liberation. The challenge for African feminists is to firmly root and continue to develop feminist theory and practice in Africa from an African perspective by supporting the research, writing and activism required to build a strong African feminist movement and by unearthing the rich African feminist heritage.

I currently work as the Deputy Director of Fahamu, Networks for Social Justice, a pan-African social justice organisation that supports the strengthening of human rights and social justice movements promotes innovative use of information and communications technologies, stimulates debate and analysis through online and print publications, creates platforms for advocacy and develops training courses for the sector. Both in my current job and in my independent activist work I have sought to contribute to African feminist activism and to provide platforms that amplify the voices of African feminists, such as the online progressive forum Pambazuka News.

There is a rich tradition of feminism in Africa- it needs to be documented and publicised! We can keep building momentum for feminist activism by supporting the growth of African feminist political theory and popularising African Feminist principles and thought. We also need to invest in strengthening feminist structures and grassroots networks across the continent. It is invigorating to be a part of the ongoing movement for justice in Africa. I remain inspired by meeting, learning from and sharing ideas with African women and men who are driven by a sense of justice and equality.



Bisi Adeleye-Fayemi | Nigeria/ Ghana

I am a feminist activist, social entrepreneur, organisational development practitioner, fundraiser, trainer and writer. I am the Executive Director and co-founder of the African Women's Development Fund (AWDF), an Africa-wide grantmaking foundation for African women's organisations.

Before I joined AWDF, I worked for Akina Mama wa Afrika, (AMwA) an international non-governmental organisation based in London, United Kingdom and Kampala, Uganda as Executive Director. While I was at AMwA, I established the African Women's Leadership Institute (AWLI), which today, has helped nurture over 5,000 women's rights activists and leaders across the continent. During my years at AMwA and involvement in the AWLI, I would wonder at how women would become transformed from being with other sisters, listening and learning. This is what has made me passionate about creating and promoting safe spaces for women. I believe that it is in these spaces that women learn how to love themselves and unlearn the many lies that patriarchy has told them over the years. It is in these spaces that I would come to value the power of women's friendships, solidarity and determination to succeed against all odds.

I am a feminist because I am angry. I am angry because despite what most constitutions, laws, policies and scriptures say, women are still treated as second-class beings. 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 to disease, we risk our own lives to bear life, we are bartered, sold, raped, beaten and even stoned to death.

I am a feminist because I have hope. I have hope in the love, brilliance and creativity of my sister feminists, who rise and rise again. I have faith in my sisters who mobilise, campaign, research, write, run shelters, rule markets, nurse the sick, care for their families, run for office and risk their lives. It is all their efforts that will make this continent great again.

I would like to see a stronger feminist movement in Africa. The challenges we face as a continent are immense, and it is women who bear the brunt when States collapse. We need to ensure that women continue to stake their claim to the leadership of this continent. We have been adrift for too long, staggering from one crisis to the other, one war to another, one crazed despot to the next. Women are tired of picking up the pieces. It is time for us to say Enough is Enough! We need to go back into our local communities, and work with allies, including good men, to ensure that we create a new meaning for leadership and governance on this continent. We owe our children and ourselves a better future, and this can not be achieved if women continue to be marginalised; it is like trying to clap with one hand. A clap with one hand produces no sound, a clap with both hands resounds.

I can hear the clapping now, it may be a bit faint, but I hear it. May the voices of African feminists continue to resound.



Marren Akatsa-Bukachi | Kenya

I wasn't always a feminist but must have subliminally ingested feminist values from my mother during my upbringing and early life. My mother would not have called herself a feminist but she was a strong woman who believed in justice for women and fought for these beliefs. She was the provincial leader in one of the most respected women's organisations in Kenya at the time, Maendeleo ya Wanawake. I watched her speak and act with passion on women's issues.

Later on in life, I got married to a man who was an only son, and became a mother to four daughters. I put my foot down when I was asked to drink some herbs that would make me give birth to a son. I began to understand what many women went through when they were made to feel responsible for things that they had no control over. I became a stronger woman for this experience and after 15 years I walked out of my marriage with my four daughters. Nowadays no one can mistake me when they meet me because I exude my feminism in what I say and in what I do. I walk the talk.

My eyes were truly opened to sexism when I was involved in electoral work and civic education. I researched and wrote reports on women's political participation in Kenya, and what I saw was hair-raising. I was shocked by the lack of respect for women, the vulgar language, and the cultural and negative lens that was used to portray them as inferior or as loose women. I watched as some politicians got divorced because their husbands and clans could not stand the thought of a woman wearing trousers. I was made a stronger woman through these experiences and I credit them with the turning point when I became a truly baptised feminist. I became very angry. I am still angry.

I moved to Uganda in 2004 to work as Executive Director for the Eastern African Sub-regional Support Initiative for the Advancement of Women (EASSI), a feminist organisation that was founded in 1996 to monitor how governments in the region are implementing the 12 critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action. It is EASSI that opened my eyes to the broader perspectives in the continent as I interacted with women from all walks of life.

Over the years I have seen acceptance of lesbian, bisexual and transgender women coming out of the closet, and fellow feminist allies fighting for their human rights, I have seen language change from calling women "prostitutes" to "commercial sex workers", I have seen funding to support the human rights of these groups of sisters. I have seen a move towards inclusivity rather than exclusivity, and I have seen the revival of the women's movement in Africa. This is what we need to sustain- a movement for African women, which reflects and is supportive of the diversity within this population. This includes younger feminists, feminists in the private sector, in the villages and in religious organisations.



Cesnambihilo Dorothy Aken'ova | Nigeria

I was a victim of differential treatment as a child. I fought my way through it to get the same educational opportunities as my male siblings. I fought my way over dress codes within the family. I was always defending myself and got physical beatings regularly for asserting myself. I grew up with the capability of spotting the difference in how people were treated. I analysed the socio-political contexts that I lived in and was always aware of inequality, particularly between men and women. Working with a women's health organisation helped me to organise my thoughts and contextualise my response. It also helped me to institutionalise my response and helped me to expand my analysis and scope of engagement beyond me and my friends to the broader society. I call myself a feminist because I am able to challenge situations of inequality, and design and implement interventions to bring about change. Integrity, diversity and choice are the values that I hold dear.

I have been part of the group of feminists and human rights activists who have worked to shift the paradigm of "sexual reproductive health rights"; two separate but related focuses on sexual health and rights and reproductive health and rights. I have advocated over the years for attention to and respect for sexual rights, especially for sexual minorities. I have also been part of the movement to shift a focus from pathology in dealing with sexual health, to a focus on rights. I am vocal about the need to use sexual pleasure as an entry point for addressing women's health and rights issues. We need to place the positive aspects of sex and sexuality at the centre of our interventions, and not just try and make people change their behaviour out of fear. In my work I continue to train and advocate at a community level and around Nigerian government policies, and I'm also part of activist networks that are pushing for the respect of sexual and human rights of sexual minorities at the United Nations and in the African regional level.

I am motivated to make a difference. In my view the more orgasms that are out there, under conditions that are safe and respectful of rights, the more motivated I am to continue my work, and inspired that change is in fact happening.



Carolin Angir | Kenya

I work with an ActionAid International coordinating a project on violence against women in humanitarian emergencies. This project is implemented in Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi and Sierra Leone, and involves ActionAid's partners as well as other local and international groups, the United Nations, and governments who have committed to addressing violence in these contexts.

I define and identify myself as a feminist because I believe in the struggle for recognition, respect and implementation of the rights of women. I enjoy working with women and for women to ensure that they benefit in whatever space I am able to influence. Feminist thinking encourages solidarity, which is something that I have been able to apply and believe in. Solidarity from other feminists has strengthened my confidence in dealing with the challenges I encounter in my everyday life as a feminist. I believe there is no equality and development without appreciating women. I am in the struggle for women's rights and working with other women to achieve this. I am proud to be identified as a feminist and I am determined to make a difference in the lives of women!

Living and interacting with the wider society, feminists in Africa still face the challenge of acceptance in private and public spaces. One has to be strong and confident to be able to deal with the odds and challenges. At the household level, feminists still have to deal with partners and spouses who don't believe in women's rights because they have been socialised as patriarchy since their childhood. At work, feminists are often met with opposition, particularly when an organisation has decided either to ignore gender equality or to work in a more "neutral" way through gender mainstreaming. There is a new wave of thinking in gender work around male involvement. It is my belief that this dilutes the women's agenda and promotes integrated approaches that comprise the status and reduce the focus on women. Unfortunately, most organisational cultures don't provide conducive spaces for feminists to practice and build the feminist movement. Making the personal political is the main challenge. We have to make change happen in the different spaces.

I am always reinvigorated when I see transformation in women's lives for the positive; especially for those who have been through difficult circumstances but are getting independent and moving on. My own mother was determined to ensure that my sisters and I grew up to be independent as women, and made many sacrifices for it along the way. Her words and efforts are a constant reminder to me that I can make it happen as a woman.

Working with women of all races and backgrounds has made me realise that more often than not we have the same issues and challenges, and that we need to be persistent and consistent in our struggle for recognition and change. I know that in my own little and sometimes big ways, I make a contribution.



Allen Asimwe | Uganda

I am a human rights activist engaged in supporting reforms and interventions that promote and protect human rights of all people, in particular women and children. I currently work with the International Human Rights Network East Africa based in Kampala, Uganda; an organisation that supports other governments, non-governmental organisations, donors and United Nations agencies to integrate human rights based approaches in their work. I also serve on several boards and committees that work to uplift the status of women and I am currently the chairperson of the Federation for Uganda Women Lawyers (FIDA-U); an association that brings together over 300 women lawyers. Through FIDA-U we aspire to promote the human rights and dignity of women and children using the law as a tool for social change.

I am deeply passionate about women's human rights because of experiences as one of the millions of women on the African continent, right from the family unit through to the community and broader society. I believe in and subscribe to feminist ideology. Currently, I am working with several women leaders to reenergise the campaign on violence against women and to engage sexual and reproductive health rights issues in Uganda. At the regional level, I am working with academics and activists to review strategies to enhance access to justice for women in the traditional and formal justice systems.

The biggest challenge in our activism as feminists has been the lack of a unifying vision as to what we want to achieve and see happen on the continent as African women. Feminists also continue to face stigma and isolation by family and wider society which challenges can be mitigated by increasing education opportunities and awareness raising so as to increase the understanding of fellow women and the rest of the community as to what we want to achieve and to demystify feminism. I often find that stigma is informed by ignorance and once people are informed and engaged with, they often appreciate and join the feminist cause.

I continue to learn from the experiences of feminists gone by and those living today who push forward despite the almost insurmountable blockages and challenges faced daily. I am also inspired by my two children whose excitement with life infuses me with energy to continue the struggle for women's total emancipation.



Rissi Assani-Alabi | Benin / Ghana

I am from Benin but presently live in Accra, Ghana where I work at the African Women's Development Fund (AWDF) as a Programme Officer for Francophone Africa. I manage the grantmaking portfolio for Francophone Africa, and with my strong organisational and leadership skills I also double up as the Executive Assistant to the Executive Director of AWDF. I am a professional translator and I have used this skill to facilitate the participation of francophone African sisters in many feminist spaces on the continent.

I boldly call myself a feminist because I believe in the global struggle for women's rights and liberation. It is a fact that economic, political and social inequalities still exist between women and men. Being a feminist implies that strong activism is needed to overcome these global issues. As a feminist I believe in myself and value my personhood.

Throughout my social life I try as much as possible to bring in a feminist touch to whatever I do. I am passionate about women's rights and leadership issues. Occasionally I provide voluntary services to local community based organisations in Benin to enable them to grow into organisations that are sustainable, and able to better contribute to the feminist movement in Africa.

As a feminist, one of my key achievements has been to be fully involved in the African Feminist Forum (AFF), which is a safe and autonomous space created for African feminists to discuss pertinent issues around the movement, and to strengthen it. It has also been a unique opportunity to have an intergenerational exchange with experienced and great African feminists. I am also very proud to have translated the African Feminist Charter into French. The Charter was one of the major outputs of the first AFF held in 2006. By doing so I have been able to make it possible for the francophone feminist sisters to understand this guide document and sign on to it. I am glad that I have been able to facilitate increased knowledge among our sisters about African feminist principles.

Feminists in Africa face many challenges including stigma as a result of the negative perceptions of the concept of feminism. I am convinced that the time has come for us to challenge the patriarchal nature of our communities and governments by promoting women's leadership and encouraging them to seek authority positions at the level of governance and be fully involved in decision-making processes. Although the movement does have many challenges, I am hopeful that we will go forward with the determination and concrete actions of organisations like the African Women's Development Fund and Akina Mama Wa Africa that lift up the status of women and promote feminist leadership.



Mairo V. (Hajiya) Bello | Nigeria

I live Kano in Kano State, Northern Nigeria. I have worked in a range of professional contexts, including working as a banker for 25 years, a public administrator and a sociologist. As an activist, I have held a range of positions in the labour movement, and have been part of the women's movement in Nigeria for more than 30 years. I am an advocate for women's rights to be recognised as human rights nationally and internationally. My current work focuses on creating an enabling environment for sexual, reproductive health and rights for young people and adult women, promoting women's rights, and developing young women and men to be responsible adults.

In Northern Nigeria where I live, I have been a part of pioneering work on adolescent reproductive health and rights. I am the founding director of the Adolescent Health Information Projects (AHIP), located in Kano, which provides information, education, and counselling on sexuality and reproductive health to thousands of young people. We work in a subtle manner to counter fundamentalism and promote the well-being of young people. We also empower less privileged girls with not only practical, income-earning skills but also lessons in decision-making, leadership, health management, assertiveness and rights. AHIP's research and advocacy activities promote the reproductive health and rights of adolescents in a region where such issues are not readily discussed.

I claim a Muslim and a feminist identity because I am an activist for a world where equal rights and opportunities will be for every human and not for a few; a world where women's rights will be respected as human rights and not as a privilege.

As feminists in Africa today, we face the challenge of clarifying our values and balancing the multiple roles we play in making society a humane place to live for everybody. We need to fight against the tendency to undervalue ourselves as we have been taught to do by society. We also need to confront and end the stigma and misconceptions around what feminists stands for. In my own life I make every effort to "work and walk the talk" and to live my life according to what I believe in. Wherever possible I also encourage younger women to absorb the values and spirit of feminism. We have a lot to share and learn from each other in different regions of Africa. I hope that in the future we will have even more opportunities to meet, visit and exchange experiences among ourselves as feminist working in different countries.



Katana Gégé Bukuru | Democratic Republic of Congo

I live in Uvira in South Kivu in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo. I work for an organisation called Solidarity Movement of Women's Rights Activists (Solidarité des Femmes Activistes pour la Défense des Droits Humaines- SOFAD). We work through a grassroots network of over 600 women to end sexual violence and provide counseling to rape survivors. We train and mobilise women activists and scale up their participation in the protection and promotion of human rights, support the rehabilitation of victims of all forms of violence, and fight against proliferation of light weapons in all countries of the Great Lakes and in East Africa broadly.

During war and armed conflict women and girls are subjected to all manner of violence committed against them. For this reason my organisation we ensure that women are the direct beneficiaries of our interventions. We have organised women into peace clubs in our various residential areas with the hope that this network of groups will develop into a strong grassroots feminist movement. We also focus on empowering women to participate in peace and other political processes of their countries, and to use communication technologies to engage with the media and do advocacy.

I call myself a feminist because I vigorously fight in defence of rights for all women, irrespective of their race, political or religious affiliation. In over a quarter of a century of activism I have faced all manners of threats to my life and person from armed groups and others. However, I believe that this fight must continue, and I am willing to keep struggling. I was humbled that my work was recognised in 2007 when I was awarded a Frontline Human Rights Defender award.

Feminists often work in very stressful contexts, which affects their own well-being as activists. We are often put under scrutiny by our governments or by people in our communities. This can have physical and psychological consequences for us as activists. When we talk about sustainability of women's organisations who have been affected by war, it is necessary to highlight the psychological problems caused by the threat of death, the disruption of your organisation's plans, and the loss of self esteem that can result from witnessing violence and despair. We urgently need to address the well-being of feminists in Africa. We also need to build and consolidate our economic power as the feminist movement.

Reflecting on my many years as an activist, I remain inspired by women's commitment all over the world, and by the initiatives of the members of the peace clubs to strengthen the feminist movement in my country.



Abena Pokua Adompim Busia | Ghana/United States of America

I am a professor at Rutgers University in New Jersey, USA where I teach in the Departments of English, Comparative Literature and Women's Studies. However, I consider myself as living in Ghana! I write poetry and specialise in teaching the literature and culture of the Black world. I am on a mission to make clear to a new generation, through an understanding of Black expressive cultures from food to music and the spoken word, that there are ties that bind us as a people, through the centuries and across continents. I am also co-director of "Women Writing Africa" a cultural restoration and publishing project, which hopes to restore African Women's voices to the public sphere. We have spent nearly two decades publishing four volumes documenting the history of self-conscious literary expression, ritual and quotidian, sacred and profane, written, spoken or sung by African women throughout the continent. Our hope is to allow new readings of Africa's history by shedding light on the things that women do and say, for in doing this, we hope to find where the fault lines of memory lie and so change our assumptions of how knowledge has been shaped.

The central challenge for feminists is one of vigilance, and not just in Africa. Whatever position we occupy, we need to keep actively aware of the structures of power that shape our lives, and learn to work with them and through them without becoming co-opted by them. Feminism is an egalitarian praxis, and it can be hard to sustain especially in moments of stress and danger when being authoritarian, or succumbing to authoritarianism, seems easier and certainly safer. This is true at every level from family relations to faculty meetings or civil society boardrooms and cabinet meetings. As a teacher I have tried to change the way I teach to make it less authoritarian, re-designed the assignments I give to make them open to collaboration and/or different kinds of inventiveness and skills, and re-assessed the ways I evaluate to put value in the processes rather than the end result.

I call myself a feminist because feminist thought and praxis have come to define my sense of agency. I am proud to have been a founding board member of the African Women's Development Fund and am motivated to keep on this path by being with people who want to change the world for the better!



Christine Butegwa | Uganda

I live in Kampala where I work with Akina Mama wa Afrika (AMwA). AMwA is a pan-African international women's non-governmental organisation, which builds the leadership capacities of young African women to influence policies and decision-making spaces. As the Africa Regional Coordinator, I coordinate the African Women's Leadership Institute, lobbying and advocating at the national, regional and international level, promoting feminist epistemology in Africa, networking and feminist movement building.

I am a feminist because I am against all forms of patriarchy that oppress women. My mission is to contribute to the dismantling of patriarchy in both my personal and professional life. Although I have fought for women's rights as far back as I can remember, AMwA and its African Women's Leadership Institute (AWLI) was the space where I completely embraced my identity and ideology as a young African feminist. I am a proud AWLI alumni. My personal journey as a feminist has also been shaped by not just the spaces I have occupied, but by my mother, friends, and colleagues who have been my role models, mentors and provided the social networks that I lean on to inspire and push me forward. I believe in continuous learning and practicing feminist values and not just talking or rhetoric. I also believe in transferring skills and knowledge, mentoring and building a younger generation of feminists needed to own and sustain the gains of the women's movement in the midst of challenges.

The women's movement has made important gains across the continent over the past 30 years. However today we are seeing growing political, social and cultural threats to this progress. There is a backlash of religious, cultural and other forms of fundamentalisms that have also penetrated the women's movement. We are seeing the erosion and shrinking of autonomous spaces for feminists. All of this can be overcome. We need to keep investing in building feminist leadership, including through mentoring young African women. The battle with patriarchy continues, in my own personal life and in the lives of my fellow activists, in particular around challenging religious and cultural fundamentalisms. We also need to keep growing and promoting feminist epistemology and the body of feminist knowledge. Central to our success is keeping and building new feminist autonomous spaces that enable feminists to analyse, mobilise, rejuvenate and strategise for action.

There are many African women who have dedicated their lives to make the world a better place for girls and women. I am proud to join them in defence of women's rights. I want both my daughter and son to inherit a world where women and men live in equality, peace and justice.



Florence Butegwa | Uganda

I am a feminist lawyer and human rights activist. A Ugandan by birth, I have lived and worked across the African continent. I currently work for the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. I chose to name myself as a feminist because I believe that the subordinate situation and position of women in our society is a direct consequence of patriarchy. I have committed myself in my personal and professional life to challenge male dominance in its different manifestations as the basis for effort to secure rights and empowerment for myself and for other women.

I endeavour to practice my feminist beliefs in all areas of my life. There is what I do as a feminist in the context of my official work – providing technical and financial support to the African Union and women’s rights networks with the aim of strengthening regional and national policy and institutional frameworks and programmes for women’s rights. I also engage in advocacy for the same purpose. Then there is what I do as a feminist in my personal capacity throughout the year – offering moral support, a listening ear, friendship, and mentoring to sisters wherever they are at the time (geographically and in life’s experience), and many times sharing in crying bouts when at a loss! There is what I do as a mother – trying to be a good mother (whatever that means!) and nurturing a family (ever expanding with in-laws and grandchildren) in which we are friends more than anything else. There is what I do as a wife – ever expanding my and my partner’s understanding of the concept, role and space of “wife”; being a sexual partner and learning from the benefit of hindsight and ageing.

In the many years that I have worked in defence of women’s rights in Africa I have seen many positive shifts in thinking, political will and practice. However, in recent years, I have also seen the space for political feminists organising begin to shrink, or be wrongly cast as “non-essential” to development practice. This shrinking has occurred in part to the success of our feminist activism, as more mainstream organisations take on the gender equality and women’s rights agenda though not always with the same political analysis or commitment.

Despite some hurdles we are seeing more women claim a feminist identity, and must continue to nurture young feminists through outreach and mentoring. I am compelled to remain on this feminist path by the many women that I come across in my life’s journey who have dared to hope, to challenge, and to feel comfortable in living differently; by those women who are succeeding in making the different become normal in their personal and professional life. Even one of them succeeding makes it worthwhile to continue.



Atsango N. Chesoni | Kenya

I work as a consultant on governance and human rights, focusing on equality rights, constitutionalism, policy and legal reform. I undertake work at both a national and regional level, including gender analysis of policies and legislation, advising parliamentarians and other policy makers about gender gaps, advocating for gender responsive and women friendly policies and legislative reform, documenting human rights violations and developing gender mainstreaming frameworks for regional and international bodies such as the African Union.

I don't remember ever not being a feminist. I'm one of six daughters. Whilst my parents never discriminated against any of their children, we were privy to pejorative things said about my mother and us girls purely on the basis of our gender. When I was 11 years old I remember my mother telling me that a woman could be lucky and be born to a good man, she may be even luckier and marry a generous man, but every woman should have something of her own, something made from the sweat of her own hands. She also told me about her maternal grandmother who was an industrious woman and built her own house. Whilst it may not have been named as such, I had access to feminist literature and discourse from an early age. As a little girl I remember reading copies of my mother's Ms magazines. In university I undertook women's studies courses and consciously organised as a feminist with other feminist thinkers. I attribute my feminism to my mother, Mary Aherwa and to my father, Zakayo Mutsunga Chesoni who told me at an early age that I "could be anything I wanted". They believed in girls and women and gave their daughters every single opportunity possible. Continuing that legacy, I am inspired by the possibility that my daughter (who hasn't been born yet and may never be) may actually be a full citizen of my country.

Unfortunately opportunities to dialogue and discourse with other feminists are still extremely limited. The corruption and ethnic chauvinism that hinders other progressive forms of political organising are also a challenge within the women's movement. In Kenya, the women's movement relates in an ambiguous manner to the concept of feminism, and there is still ignorance and stereotyping of what "feminists" and "feminism" are. This is partly due to the fact that few women have a chance to engage with feminist discourse outside of universities. In many parts of Africa there continues to be proscription of, and overt state violence against, women's rights organisations and also organisations working in certain areas of women's rights, for example lesbian rights.

As we challenge inequality and discrimination in the world outside, we also need to challenge it in our own organising. We must continue to promote training and leadership opportunities for diverse women, acknowledge and interrogate prejudice within the women's movement and advocating and encourage dialogue around intersectionality.



Hope Chigudu | Uganda/ Zimbabwe

I am a sociologist and an organisational development practitioner. When I was young, I thought that a life of equality, wisdom and justice would be my birthright if only I worked hard at school, excelled, got a good job and a good salary. I was wrong.

My first job was in the corporate sector where I worked as a human resources officer in a leather company. There was extreme abuse of women's rights in this company. Sexual harassment was taken for granted, our jobs were devalued and the language used to address us was abusive and derogatory. My understanding of feminism was limited but I knew there was something wrong. My conscious process of transformation was catalysed by reading the *the Women's Room* by Marilyn French. The story follows the transformation of a woman, Mira Ward, and her circle of friends, as the women's movement begins to have an impact on their lives. Throughout, the women characters talk about their relationships with men and children, complete with aggrieved, savage humour. I shared the book with my friends and in it we found our "cave" of enlightenment. From then on I chose to work for women and with women.

I joined the Ministry of Women's Affairs in Zimbabwe as a changed woman, a feminist. Even though we mostly used the Women in Development framework, working in this Ministry was an empowering experience that exposed me to the daily hassles and grit of rural women. I grew to appreciate the importance of knowing how governments work and whom to lobby if you want change. I realised the importance of grassroots political mobilisation and having a presence at the negotiating table. I appreciated how personal issues are impacted by policy decisions from abortion to access to primary health care, free education and the cleanliness of the air that we breathe. During the same period, I realised the need for women to have their own spaces. Together with a few friends, we started a women's resource centre in Harare.

I left the Ministry to become a gender programme officer at an international non-governmental organisation. Once again, I was exposed to the grinding poverty of rural women. During the same period, I joined a women's reading group and read more about women's issues, gender and feminism. It was a period of flowering and flourishing. I joined the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation, working once again in the leather sector, but this time addressing gender. It was a difficult experience that showed me that there is a sector out there which we, as feminists, are not reaching. However I found the UN environment disempowering and draining. I worked with my bags packed (metaphorically speaking) and after four years, I actually carried my bags and left.

Having done the rounds, it was time to set up my own consultancy firm, Hope Africa, and share whatever I had learnt with other organisations. This is where I am, trying to bring my feminism, emotional and spiritual intelligence to the work that I do.



Ennie Chipembere | Zimbabwe

I am a Zimbabwean currently working and living in Johannesburg, South Africa. I call myself a feminist because I believe in the equality of women and men. I have and continue to fight for equality both in my private and public spaces. I believe and work for women's empowerment and for ensuring that women's rights are recognised and enjoyed as human rights. I also call myself a feminist because I fight the system that privileges men and presupposes that women are inferior. I therefore walk the talk in my own life.

I work for ActionAid International as the International Women's Rights Technical Advisor. I support the global women's rights work of my organisation and support organisational efforts to institutionalise women's rights. Part of my time is also dedicated to supporting women's rights staff with their work and also personal development.

In the organisations that feminists have created we need to re-value personal development, coaching and mentoring of young feminists. Partly due to donor requirements, most of the investments we make are in the content of women's rights issues and not much on the "software" of sustaining activists, encouraging spaces for thinking and debate and for personal learning- even though it is what keeps us going. Increasing investment in young feminists is a vital way of passing on the torch for the movement to grow. We need more, new and energetic champions.

Furthermore, many of us are too caught up in the day to day work to take time out to properly write, document and analyse what we do and the nature of our struggles. This is vital for retaining the memory of our movements and for documenting the achievements that few others will be willing to recognise. We have always had to stay alert as activists, and to keep engaging with new and emerging issues on the global arena from our own perspective is important so that we are not left behind or have others interpret these issues for us.

I am inspired by feminist change agents. I believe in human potential and that if people are given the right nurturing and support they not only become good at what they are hired to do, but they can even achieve greatness. As a manager, I believe if people are helped to identify their heartfelt interests, align this with the right work focus and develop their skills, then they can expect wonderful, real and dynamic things out of that combination. Not only do you have an effective employee, but you also have a passionate person getting fulfilment from what they are doing, and in most cases going the extra mile.



Aïssatou Cisse | Senegal

I have always fought to defend women's rights. My activism started when I was very young, beginning of course by fighting for my own rights! I grew up with an education which had been imposed on Senegalese society by its Western colonisers, and entrenching the oppression of women (we tend to forget that women in the West have long been oppressed). I also grew up in a context where religion was used to confine women's space and take away our voices. In the fight for women to reclaim their voices I have personally pledged to leave no stone unturned. People often call me a feminist, and I respond that if that is what being a feminist is, then I claim the name!

Throughout my life I have been inspired by Queen Pokou and Queen Djeumbeutt Mbodj. For me, they symbolise women's empowerment because they demonstrated that a woman's place is not only behind the stove. Each of them was able to lead kingdoms made up of men, women and children, and did so firmly and justly.

As a writer I focus my creative expression on the experiences of women and children. I fight against polygamy by writing novels, depicting the negative aspects of this practice. I also fight against early marriage, forced marriage and female genital mutilation through my writing and by mobilising people. I create awareness among women and girls on widowhood rites that force a woman to marry her deceased husband's brother, which must be totally eradicated because it is a terrible form of violence against women in rural areas. I received an award for creativity from the Lebanese publishing house Namaan for my novella *Linguère Fatim* on the courage of the African woman. I am currently working on a manuscript entitled *L'Avenir est Mien* (The Future is Mine).

The manipulation of religious belief to serve men's interest is a major concern for African women. We need to keep raising awareness about the fact that the laws and beliefs that entrench inequality are actually just man-made interpretations. Women still face discrimination against women at work, be it in the private or public sector. And we need to change the commonly held view of HIV and AIDS as being a "women's concern" and transmitted by women to men. Most of the media campaigns we see show a man meeting a woman and having sex, and realising afterwards that he is HIV positive. In reality it is often the male partner infecting the woman!

I think that our duty to ourselves as feminists is to help children change their attitudes by making them understand that boys and girls should have equal opportunities- at home, by equally sharing house chores, at school by being admitted on the same conditions and in marriage by freely choosing his or her partner.



Dorcas Coker-Appiah | Ghana

I am a long-time resident of Accra, Ghana's fast expanding capital. I am the Executive Director of the Gender Studies and Human Rights Documentation Centre, a women's rights advocacy organisation based in Accra. Like most activists, I am also involved in a myriad of other activities. In Ghana, I am on the steering committee of a network of women's rights organisations, NETRIGHT. I am also a member of the Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA)- Ghana and I'm chair of the board of the pan-African network Women in Law and Development in Africa (WILDAF). At the international level, I am a member of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the body of experts elected under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) to monitor implementation of the Convention by States Parties.

I call myself a feminist because I believe in the equal rights of women and men. I believe that women should be given the same opportunities as men to achieve their full potential. I believe that having children is a gift from God but not the *raison d'être* of being a woman, and that as a human being and a woman I have the right to be whatever I want to be and do whatever I want to do. I believe that as a woman, my value is in my being a woman and not as somebody's wife or mother. These beliefs form the core of my feminist principles.

I think feminists today face most, if not all the challenges that our predecessors faced including enduring socio-cultural norms that prescribe the roles of women as being subservient to men and under men's authority. Women remain burdened with the role of carrying on the regeneration of our tribes and nations and therefore with men's attempts to control their sexuality. We are also seeing a resurgence of religious fundamentalism which is eroding the gains that we achieved in the last two decades.

I continue to be humbled by the stories of numerous women whose lives have brought joy and comfort to their families and friends, their sacrifices and the personal struggles which created the space for me and several like me to be where we are today. I am inspired by somebody thanking me for having helped her or him to obtain justice. I am inspired by the little unnamed acts of kindness in this world of materialism and selfishness. I am inspired by the early morning birds that wake me up with their melodious songs, the beautiful flowers and their fragrant scents, the beautiful orange glows of the sunset and the silvery shine of the full moon sliding over trees.



Aminata Dieye | Senegal

My activism was born in secondary school where I joined my first activist organisation. It was further awakened at university where I encountered rural women who would come to beg for leftover food at the women's student residences. I saw this as an injustice, and I began to pay weekly visits to some of the women. We would sit every Sunday and talk about their situation. At the time, my professors were in the process of founding a human rights organisation. I joined in and added my voice to say that the only way to transform the lives of women was to engage these women in the movement for justice, respect and rights. In 1991 we founded Rencontre Africaine pour les Droits de l'Homme (RADDHO) in Dakar. At RADDHO I was responsible for the Women and Children Rights Department before leading the Alert and Urgent Action Unit. Even though the organisation ended up being dominated by men, I still fought to make sure that women's rights were included in the scope of its activities. Today I call myself a feminist because I fight inequality and injustice in my society and I refuse to yield to rules which trample upon my rights. I know that I have the right to be free, and to do what I like.

I continue to be involved in a range of human rights initiatives. I worked as the Programme Coordinator of the Pan- African Centre for Gender, Peace and Development from 2005 to 2008. The centre was established by Femmes Afrique Solidarité in order to provide high level certificate training for women in peace and development. I currently serve on the board of the World Organization Against Torture (OMCT) based in Geneva, Switzerland, and the Union Africaine pour la Défense des Droits de l'Homme (IUDH), a network of more than 40 African human rights organisations based in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. I have for many years been one of the main contacts as well as a member of the advisory committee of the Africa programme of Amnesty International- Netherlands. I became an Ashoka Fellow in 2002.

As African feminists and as human rights activists we face many intersecting challenges. The impoverishment of women concerns us all and we must intensify our mobilisation in order to take part in the search for solutions. In the same way as equal rights and the fight against patriarchy, economic and social rights are today an important part of our strategies to fight for social justice. We need to keep engaging young people and addressing the apathy that some have. We also need to confront the upsurge in fundamentalist groups which threaten to roll back previously won gains. The rise of fundamentalism makes it imperative for us to intensify our mobilising and the struggle to preserve our rights and bridge the gaps between rich and poor. In confronting these challenges we need to keep mobilising women, both young and old, but also to provide training and mentoring to ensure that activists know the issues and are supported as they confront institutions of power.



Margaret Dongo | Zimbabwe

I was born in the 1960s into a family of seven children. My father was a builder and my mother a peasant farmer. At age 15 I joined the Zimbabwe war of liberation, and fought alongside my sisters and brothers for Zimbabwe's independence, but also first and foremost to free the women in Zimbabwe from the bondage of slavery imposed on them as women. I have never believed that men make the best leaders or rulers in society.

After the war I co-founded the Zimbabwe War Veterans Association to give voice to veterans who were marginalised after the war. I entered active politics and for many years served as a member of the central committee of Zimbabwe African Nation Union- Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), which I later left. In the 1995 elections I was the first and only person to challenge vote rigging successfully, and went ahead to win the subsequent run-off as an independent Member of Parliament. While in government I was a member of a number of parliamentary committees, including Public Accounts, the Committee on Indigenisation, and as Chairperson of the Local Government Portfolio Committee. I served in Parliament for ten years before becoming the first woman to head an opposition party in Zimbabwe, the Zimbabwe Union of Democrats.

Throughout my life as an active politician I have remained focused on improving the lives of women. It has not been easy. There is still a culturally entrenched inertia to accepting women leaders, particularly in active politics. Formal political life has still not adapted to being welcoming of women political leaders. We are also facing arguments against gender equality that are being backed up by some of our religious leaders. The often quoted Biblical origin of women from the rib of Adam is often abused to mean that the women are subservient to men. Unfortunately many women themselves believe this, and accept the idea that they hold a lower status in society.

I believe in the power of self-actualisation, and have invested in my own personal development through education, pursuing a Masters in Public Administration at Harvard University. I now coordinate a voluntary development programme to uplift the lives of women and children in the rural areas through projects that are sustainable and make a real difference in their lives.

I am moved by the success of many women leaders like Mbuya Nehanda who stood up for their people. And I will never forget the competent involvement of women cadres in the armed struggle in Zimbabwe, which clearly demonstrated to me that there is no scientific basis for discriminating against women. I hold firm to my own belief that discrimination based on gender is wrong. We need to maximize our potential as human beings, and give life our best shot.



Aminetou Mint El Moctar | Mauritania

I live and work in Nouakchott, the capital of Mauritania. I am President of a non-governmental organisation called the Association of Women Supporting Families (Association des Femmes Chefs de Familles- AFCE) which advocates for Mauritanian women's equality, empowerment and their access to decision making bodies. In Mauritania we are struggling against child marriage which is widespread and is a violation of the rights of girls and young women in our society. Although the Family Code states that people must be at least 18 years old before they marry, the law is not enforced to protect the poorest and least educated. Slavery is also a widespread and abhorrent practice in my country. My organisation works with and advocates for the rights of women slaves and their children. We are vocal in denouncing slavery and calling for people involved in perpetuating it to be brought to justice.

I consider myself a feminist because I fight to ensure that women participate in the management of the affairs of my country and for equality, empowerment and independence of women in all areas. As part of my activism, I fight to neutralise the impact of feudalism and customary practices. I also lobby my country's women's organisations to ensure that women reject the role of being submissive, and have mobilised for women's representation in politics and decision-making. In 2006 my organisation was awarded the French Government's Human Rights Prize for the work we did in supporting women to participate in politics.

Feminists are facing several challenges including male domination, and the influence of customs and traditions on what society will define as fair or acceptable. As a movement we also often do not have the chance to share experiences amongst ourselves and to build strong solidarity among feminist organisations in Africa and the world at large. This can be addressed by creating more forums for feminist activists.

I am always amazed by the degree of awareness among women and the boundless determination that women have to pursue the struggle they have set for themselves. I am also inspired to see the feminist movement grow in all African countries, and to see women activists begin to counter the control that religion and other institutions have over women.



Jeannette Eno | Sierra Leone

I am a feminist because I fully subscribe to and actively espouse an ideology which locates women as central to the ordering of our social, political and economic existence. In my professional life I have made the active choice to work with institutions and individuals that share similar values to mine.

I grew up in Sierra Leone where I attended Annie Walsh Memorial School, the first girls secondary school in West Africa. It was the 1970s, and I studied against a backdrop of great political change, with successive coups, military regimes and a period of student uprisings which began to shape my political consciousness. As a university student in London in the 1980s, I engaged in pan African movements including the anti-Apartheid struggle. I recall the energy I put into my toi-toi down to Clapham Common, interacting with African political exiles and engaging in endless political discussions in the basement of the Africa Centre in London's Covent Garden. During that time I combined my work in local government with a deeper exploration into African culture as a dancer with the renowned Adzido Pan African Dance Ensemble.

I contributed to the establishment of the African Women's Leadership Institute (AWLI), a pioneering initiative of the pan-African international women's organisation Akina Mama wa Afrika (AmWA). I also served as AmWA's Board President from 1997 to 2003 and then as a Board member until 2007. During that time I worked as an independent consultant, and facilitated leadership training at the AWLI (and at times breastfeeding in between training sessions, as some of my sisters would testify!). From 1999 to 2004 I worked as West Africa Programme Manager at Conciliation Resources, where I led a team supporting organisations that were engaged in peacebuilding and addressing the root causes of conflict.

When the war ended in Sierra Leone I decided to return home, and keep contributing to peace. I went on to head a national initiative called Enhancing the Interaction and Interface between Civil Society and the State (ENCISS), which aims to increase the capacity of civil society to engage with and hold government to account. I facilitated Women's Elections Watch, which raised awareness around women's demands for affirmative action and political representation in advance of the 2007 general elections. After the elections I was appointed as one of the Technical Co-ordinators to the Presidential Transition Team charged with reviewing the status of the previous government administration, and making recommendations to the President around the structure and role of government departments.

My experience of working with national government made me see the need to mobilise financial and other forms of support for women candidates running for political office who subscribe to a feminist agenda for change. The media is also critical in our work for social transformation. In any struggle you need sustenance and inspirations. For me this comes from unconditional love from my daughters, love from sisters in the struggle who are part of the AmWA "experience", the writing of Toni Morrison, and stories of women and men who have dared to push the boundaries.



Comfort Eshiet | Nigeria

I live in Lagos where I work as a Programme Officer with Alliances for Africa (AfA). In this role I have designed and implemented several projects and trained grassroots women on the ideals of feminism and its importance to women in Africa. I was also part of the team that advocated against the Indecent Dressing Bill that was tabled in the House of Assembly. My organisation is an active member of Nigerian Feminist Forum's Steering Committee as well as the Feminist Media Watch which addresses the issue of feminism in Nigeria.

We urgently need to invest in creating and sustaining feminist space in Africa. As we build the movement we must encourage feminist leadership and ensure that the movement reflects and is supportive of the diversity within Africa. I think that it is necessary to identify those women who are doing various activities to uplift the plight of women in their communities but do not identify themselves as feminists, and make them part of the feminist movement in our different countries. Mentoring of young feminist to take up the feminist ideals and struggle is also very important. Young feminists should be exposed to basic feminist principles to enable them to identify if they are feminists or not.

I live and breathe feminism. Not-in-your-face feminism, but nevertheless, everyday, on-going feminism. In many areas women and men experience the same problems. However sometimes this is not the case, and it makes you question why there is a difference, whether it matters, and whether the world would be a better place if the difference did not exist. You realise that often it is the world that needs to change, rather than individual women.

I am a feminist because on so many billboards, in so many magazines and television advertisements, women's bodies are used to sell products that have nothing to do with women's bodies. I am a feminist because I am horrified by the fact that women are raped, that rape is legal within marriage in many countries, and that assault at home is considered "just a domestic affair". Most women do not control whether or not their bodies are used for reproduction. I am a feminist because so many of the freedoms won by women are so new. I am a feminist in honour of women who fought for these changes and because I believe that we need to protect these freedoms. I am a feminist because though I have a son, I also have female cousins and nieces, and I want them to be free to choose how to live their lives.

For these reasons, and for many more, I am a feminist.



Shereen Essof | Zimbabwe/ South Africa

I am a feminist activist. In Cape Town where I currently live, I am involved in the Water for All Coalition, a coalition of largely working class women who have established a network that links communities across Cape Town to bolster the struggle against the city administration. I also work with outsourced cleaning workers through the University of Cape Town's Workers Support Committee in pushing for just labour practices.

My activism also comes alive as a founding member of Building Women's Activism (supported by the International Labour Information and Research Group), a political education and support base for activists working in labour unions and social movements. In Zimbabwe my feminist activism continues as a member of the Feminist Political Education Project (FePeP). In addition to this, I am working on a doctoral degree.

Women on the continent have been kept down because they are isolated from each other and are paired off with men in relationships of dominance and submission. Men will not liberate women, women must liberate themselves. This cannot happen if each woman tries to liberate herself alone - women must work together. However women cannot be sisters if they recapitulate masculine patterns of dominance and submission, we have to live our vision of a different, freer world now. To realise this vision, new organisational forms have to be developed and new strategies have to be devised and implemented. It is this potential and spirit that will be lost if we allow our energies and visions to be co-opted and diluted.

I think some of the challenges we are facing include clearly articulating a revolutionary feminism beyond the confines of the "converted". It is a feminism that confronts violence, that is concerned with control over one's own body, alternatives to the nuclear family and to heterosexuality, new methods of child care that will liberate parents and children, economic self-determination, ending sex stereotyping in the media, workplace, and in education, abolishing repressive laws, providing women with the means to develop skills and positive self-attitudes, and oppressive power relationships.

Women aren't free just because they are surviving, or even economically comfortable. They are free only when they have power over their own lives. Women, even more than most men, have very little power over their own lives. Gaining such autonomy, and insisting that everyone have it, is a major goal. This is dangerous work, for it challenges everything in the mainstream. It calls for an alternative way of being in the world. And it entails reaching out to ordinary women across the continent who may not know feminism by its name or theories, but who live with and feel the injustices everyday.

I call myself a feminist because I strive to:

... build autonomy

The process of ever growing synthesis

For every living creature.

I destroy patriarchy

and all overarching systems of oppression

I spread

Spontaneity, creativity and laughter

I learn the joys of equality

Of relationships

Without dominance

I destroy domination

In all its forms.



Joy Ngozi Ezelio | Nigeria

I live in Nigeria although, as a transnational feminist, my work is certainly beyond the shores of Nigeria. My life's struggle and work for about two decades has been centred around ending oppression, and promoting the recognition of equal worth of all human beings and the enjoyment of human rights by all, especially women. To me, this is what feminism is about. I share in the philosophy of gender equality and women's empowerment irrespective of geographical location and identity, and I believe that it should be at the core of any development initiative.

As usual with African women, and as a feminist, scholar and activist leader, I wear several hats that are all geared towards making a world where all can enjoy their human rights based on the principle of equality and without discrimination on the ground of sex, gender, economic, social or political status. I currently serve as the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Human Trafficking (2008 to 2011) and I also teach law at the University of Nigeria, where over a decade ago I pioneered the teaching of "women's law". As an activist, I have been involved in social movements for a long time. Through a feminist organisation known as Women Aid Collective (WACOL) I have championed the cause of gender equality and women's empowerment, and worked to build the next generation of transformational feminist leaders. WACOL prides itself as a gender conscious organisation and is today a citadel for feminist learning and civic engagements for change.

Many would agree that the greatest problem in Africa is the lack of leadership and the governance crisis that follows from it. I have dedicated my personal and professional life to promoting excellence in leadership and investing in transformational feminist leadership through trainings for the next generations of feminists, women leaders and change agents. Furthermore, as an academic I have paid particular attention to knowledge production and have published extensively in the field of feminist legal scholarship, as well as documenting the work of my organisation and experiences as a feminist activist.

I am inspired to act in the face of injustice, oppression and inequalities, and to speak out, and make demands to right the wrong done. I am equally inspired to continue the work I do when I know that I am making a difference in my community and in the life of people, especially those in vulnerable situations or in difficult circumstances. When I see a smile on the face of a woman or a girl who has suffered violation of her rights and freedoms and whom we have helped to obtain justice, I get energised to do more. Together we can build a world where women and men will enjoy their human rights. I am also inspired by the challenges –personal and otherwise– that I have surmounted to hold on to my vision of a better world as I look into a future where women enjoy their full human rights without discrimination.



Rokhaya Gaye | Senegal

I am a lawyer with a Bachelors degree in law from Cheikh Anta Diop University in Dakar. I have worked for the African Network for Integrated Development (Réseau Africain pour le Développement Intégré- RAD) since 1993. I started working with RAD's legal advice centre. I now coordinate RAD's legal programme which was created in 1989 to promote and protect women's rights through the popularisation and defence of rights. In addition to this work, I have been a long standing member of networks and associations for the defence of women's rights. Among these are the Committe Against Violence Against Women (Le Comité de Lutte Contre les Violences Faites aux Femmes - CLVF), the Network on Women's Rights and Development in Africa (Le Réseau Femmes Droits et Developpement en Afrique - FEDDAF) and the Research Group on Women and laws in Senegal (Le Groupe de Recherche sur les Femmes et les Lois au Sénégal - GREFELS).

I am a feminist because I am engaged in a daily fight against men's oppression and domination of women, with the aim of ensuring a more just and equitable society without any gender discrimination

As feminists and human rights activists we have had some important successes in changing laws and policies. However as with all movements for transformation, we also face barriers and complexities. The first is to keep flying the flag of the feminist movement in an African context characterised by an upsurge in religious fundamentalism and marginalisation. The second is how to enable people made vulnerable by poverty to feel ownership of the feminist agenda. We must keep working on translating key principles and concepts of feminism into an accessible language to help the activists at the grassroots to take ownership of the movement. Mobilising young women in community activist groups is also another important way of growing understanding, dialogue and the movement itself.

Throughout my professional life I have been part of initiatives that seek to popularise and disseminate information about human rights. This has helped create a more active citizenry and inspired activism and protest around human rights violations. In my personal life I have invested in raising my children with ideas and sensibilities that help them challenge gender discrimination. I remain hopeful of the possibility of establishing and sustaining an egalitarian society without gender discrimination or social injustice.



Leymah Roberta Gbowee | Liberia

I am a Liberian, but currently live and work in Accra, Ghana as Executive Director of Women Peace and Security Network Africa. I lead a team of highly competent women to promote women's participation in peace and security governance in Africa. This entails training rural women in community peacebuilding processes (one of my true passions), and organising and mobilising non-violent peace advocacy campaigns. I also spend part of my time lobbying policy makers for implementation of the many instruments on women's involvement in peace and security processes, specifically UN Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820. I initially did not like lobbying as it seemed too focused on talk, with little or no action. However I realised that decision makers at this level have only a bird's eye view of what is happening. I also realised that my "big mouth" is a means of communicating what women in conflict situations are really going through.

I call myself a feminist because I believe women have the right to live and achieve their full God given potentials. I feel sad at the state of women in the world and wish for more change in the situation alongside the acknowledgement that women are leading the way in changing this. I am always willing to work with other women for the improvement of women's status. In Liberia, I joined my fellow countrywomen in calling for an end to the war that plagued our lives. I always aim to help others become aware of how much further women need to go and how society restricts them and predetermines their roles. I strongly believe that we can only make a difference in the world through unity and our collective strength.

In most African society the misconceptions about feminism have caused many African feminists to face unnecessary stigma. We are labelled as unmarried, lesbian, lawless, radical women, who refuse the African "tradition" of women submitting to their men. I am aware that many people do not fully understand what feminism is about. I feel that naming myself as a feminist and clearly stating what I stand for is really important. I have named myself, but also walked the talk, which has silenced a lot of critics.

I draw strength and inspiration from the strength and resilience of African women, who continue to mobilise and seek change in their situations, despite having little or no resources. The level of passion for change that is exhibited by an ordinary African woman speaks to me personally. My thought is always, "if she is not giving up, despite the odds, who am I to give up?". I first witnessed this through the lives of my mother and grandmother, the first African feminists that I knew.



Pregaluxmi (Pregs) Govender | South Africa

Throughout my life I have committed myself to the interrelated struggles to end racism, classism and sexist oppression. I began formal activism in 1974 and served in the struggle against apartheid as a student activist, a teacher and a trade unionist. In 1987 I began working in a clothing and textiles union, which had the largest women's membership of any union in South Africa. Three years later I helped establish and then headed the first Worker's College, based at the University of the Western Cape, which aimed to develop workers' leadership. From 1992 to 1994, I managed the Women's National Coalition, a platform for 2 million rural and urban women to help shape South Africa's transition to democracy and a new constitution. I was elected as member of parliament in 1994 under the African National Congress (ANC), and re-elected in 1999. As an MP I initiated the first national process of gender budgeting, which catalyzed similar initiatives globally. My own government pledged commitment to follow through, and began developing gender-responsive budgets in the 1998/1999 National Budget Review.

Following the World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1996, I argued in a national forum that our own government should reduce its spending on defence and redirect the resource towards women. My fellow activists and I were pleased to see that one of Cabinet's key post-Beijing objectives included a commitment to "decrease military spending and reallocate to women's empowerment". However in 2001 I found myself being the only MP to register opposition to the arms deal by abstaining in the Defence Budget vote. I believe strongly that the over 50 billion Rand spent on arms should have been utilised to implement the Cabinet's commitment to reallocate its spending towards eradicating poverty and violence and responding comprehensively to HIV and AIDS.

As an MP I also chaired parliament's Committee on Women, which ensured the enactment of 80% of the legislative changes identified by South African women as key to their emancipation. All of this work was happening amidst the alarming rise of HIV infection with its devastating impact on women and girls. In 2001 I chose to speak out in parliament and "break the silence" around our dissatisfaction with President Mbeki's position on anti-retroviral drugs.

I resigned as an elected official in 2002 and since then have devoted my energies to reflection, writing, training and mobilising. I wrote the memoir *Love and Courage: A Story of Insubordination*, as a personal exploration of the possibility of using power to emancipate rather than constrain. I was honoured to be selected for the Panel of Eminent Persons established on the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. I work as an independent feminist activist through the consultancy, WOMEN'S LIP to build Women's Leadership in Politics based on the power of love, courage and insubordination to the patriarchal politics of hate, greed and fear. And I practice yoga to sustain my spirit as a parent and activist.



Fahima Hashim | Sudan

Since 1998 I had a lot of feelings of discomfort and a sense of unease within myself about the things around me; I was unable to articulate or classify it and therefore unable to analyse or deal with it. My understanding of gender concepts all these years was never linked to feminism or even a clear sense of patriarchy. I knew about the social construction of gender but had never deepened that understanding to link it with our day to day life. In the same year I attended a workshop titled “Gender and Sustainable Development in South Asia”. The workshop was conducted in Bangladesh with 30 activists and gender trainers from different countries in South Asia. As I went through the training the concepts started to fit together like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. It enabled me to find the language within me, which I had been unable to define; the language of concepts of patriarchy, gender and feminism. Slowly I began to see linkages and connections between my experiences and feminism theory.

This training was instrumental in shaping a new self, which was stronger, clearer and more committed to the kind of work I envisioned myself doing, as well as the kind of women/person I wanted to be. I went back home with a new vision, knowledge and my feminist identity. I knew that being a feminist would be very difficult, but I also went home with the satisfaction of knowing what I wanted and could not compromise. I live in Khartoum State, the capital of Sudan. I work as the Director of Salmah Women’s Resource Centre, a feminist resource centre that advocates for human rights, legal reform and against violence against women, conducts action research work around sexuality, reproductive rights, and documentation of the Sudanese women’s movement. We work with young women and men, although our primary focus is women whether they are young or old.

I believe that every issue is a woman’s issue, and that the personal is political. So my political struggle against patriarchy includes addressing all issues that affect us. The struggle for equality for all is my personal life commitment as well as my work commitment. That is why I call myself a feminist.

We are all aware of the many interrelated challenges that undermine equality. Globalisation and the resulting feminisation of poverty, increasing violence against women across Africa, multiple discriminations and biased social norms, and fundamentalism all contribute to this. Unfortunately we also lack governments in Africa that are sensitive to women and women’s issues.

It is vital to keep organising spaces such as the African Feminist Forum where we can come together and bond with other feminists in Africa. It is so powerful.



Jessica Horn | Uganda/United Kingdom

I was not born a feminist, but became one pretty soon after I took my first breath and gazed on a world full of possibility but also pain for many girls and women that I encountered. As a feminist I share the belief that women's oppression can no longer be the legitimate means of ordering our world. No society is healthy if its girls and women face violence for exercising the simple desire to be free. As a feminist I understand the necessity and beauty of women's struggle for autonomy and choice, and the need to transform society for the benefit of all people. And I am re-born as a feminist every time I see a woman or girl resist social limitations and master the art of spreading her wings.

I grew up on university campuses in Southern Africa and later the South Pacific, surrounded by post-colonial and anti-apartheid debate. While this framed my early political consciousness, I found that feminism provided me with a much more embodied understanding of power.

The body, as the beginning place of rights, of self-expression, and of resistance, has always fascinated me. I found a home for this passion in the movement for women's right to self-determination over our bodies. Since my teenage years I have joined with others in activism, and later study, training, research and funding around women's sexual rights, freedom from violence, and making empowered choices in the era of HIV and AIDS. I have done this in many capacities including through volunteer work with HIV+ women's groups, as Coordinator of Amanitare, the Pan-African network on sexual and reproductive rights, as a human rights funder, and now as a consultant to human rights groups, government bodies, and progressive donors. I was part of a fantastic team of activists that created Uhai, the East African Sexual Health and Rights Initiative, a pioneer in African philanthropy. And during the moments in between I take time to nurture my other great fascination- art as a medium for dissent. I have a published collection of poems *Speaking in Tongues*, and I'm currently working on forming a collective of African feminist artists.

I was raised by a woman that I have come to recognise as a revolutionary mother, who used the act of mothering as a process of education and affirmation for the minds and sensibilities of her children. From this upbringing I learned that the real catalyst for liberation is neither force nor discourse, but the revolutionary power of love. One of the biggest threats to Africa's social fabric is the blasphemous theology of hatred that is being spread by religious fundamentalists. We as Africans need to be more vocal in saying that discrimination and violence against lesbians and gay people, unmarried women, sex workers, or HIV+ women is neither godly, nor just, nor African. Change begins here, today, between us. We need to recognise that the choice to love rather than despise each other is a political act. We need to keep expanding the feminist embrace.



Ayesha Mei-Tje Imam | Nigeria

Women's human rights are essential to democratic, equitable and sustainable development on planet Earth. I promote this belief through research, policy formulation, advocacy, campaigning, and facilitating training and empowerment so people can engage in constructing and demanding gender-fair entitlements. My work covers women's rights in religious, customary and secular laws and social practices as well as developing feminist analysis. In a current action-research project, I work with non-governmental organisations in francophone West Africa to engender citizenship, focusing on women's access to justice, political participation, and rights to land and other resources. Other projects include researching African feminist ancestors, and reclaiming and redefining culture so women can assert their rights.

As a feminist I recognise that patriarchy and other forms and relations of oppression, exploitation and marginalisation which inter-relate with patriarchy (such as class, race/ethnicity, imperialism and hetero-sexism) must be ended. Relationships between people and in society and the economy need to be transformed, so that women, men, girls and boys have the possibility of living life with choice, autonomy and freedom from want. Hence I endeavour to bring feminist analysis to other arenas of struggle (and vice versa), for example as a board member of Greenpeace International or as the first Chair of the African Democracy Forum.

With other feminists, I work to advance feminist theory and activism. I conceived of and organised the first meeting of what became Women in Nigeria (WIN), the first post-independence feminist organisation in the country. In 1994 I planned and facilitated, together with Fatou Sow and Amina Mama, the first Gender Institute in Africa at the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa. It has been held annually since. We also edited the book *Engendering African Social Sciences*. I co-founded BAOBAB for Women's Human Rights in Nigeria with Hajara Usman, and have collaborated in various capacities over the years with the international solidarity network *Women Living Under Muslim Laws*.

As a feminist I try to live my ethical principles daily, respecting and encouraging people I interact with. I resisted marrying for many years (and was inadvertently a role model for many young women in Northern Nigeria, according to their fathers who complained to me!), until I chanced to find a partner who believed in feminist principles of equality, sharing and cooperation, and wanted to live them with me.

While there is always need to expand feminist activism, I think that we can celebrate how many feminists there are in Africa now; both old and young, in different locations and from different experiences compared to the very few when we started WIN in 1982. I am also encouraged that my sons assume automatically that they share equal responsibility for domestic work and childcare.



Asma'u Joda | Nigeria

I am a feminist and a woman's human rights activist based in Yola Adamawa State in north-eastern Nigeria. I am the founder of the Centre for Women and Adolescent Empowerment, an organisation that works with the community to empower women and adolescents to take responsibility for their own rights, and know their rights and responsibilities both as citizens and as women and men. Our previous work has included stopping child marriages, securing divorce for women in abusive or unhappy marriages and getting legal redress for girls who have been raped. I am also a member of the Nigerian Feminist Forum.

I have been part of the women's movement in Nigeria, Africa and internationally for a very long time. I am a feminist because I think women and men are equal and that women must have the right to be what they chose to be. I have talked with men and women both in private and in the governmental sphere in Nigeria and shown them we have to make a change. I was a part of a team of trainers that travelled across Nigeria in 1993 to train women in politics, and I'm happy to say that some of those women have successfully gone on to become elected politicians contributing to change in their local environment.

Our greatest challenge as feminists is to convince women that we don't want to become men or take over from them, and to convince men of the same. They need to be convinced that the only way Africa can get out of its dilemma is for women to be equal partners. Male allies have admitted that men have failed to move us forward and that it is obvious to them that the world cannot move forward while half of its population are ignored. In Africa we face a range of difficult realities, which include poverty, disease and lack of access to basic facilities. Having more feminists in government and public spaces would change thinking towards a better livelihood for all. To succeed in this fight for equality, we need to start generating resources from within Africa.

I maintain a belief in the possibility of a world where everyone is equal and where our differences do not matter. A world where there is peace, where war is alien and conflict a story told about others in the past. A world where a woman's head is held high and where all doors are open to both men and women, young and old. Where sex, gender, colour, and faith are no longer grounds for discrimination. A world where poverty no longer exists.



Musimbi Kanyoro | Kenya/ United States of America

I am a feminist educator, theologian and activist and currently working as a grantmaker. For the last 30 years I have worked in jobs that have had women at the centre. I view the world through women's eyes. I have a firsthand knowledge through working with women in many geographies, circumstances, and conditions and I ultimately believe that there is global injustice that affects women's lives right from childhood. I call myself a feminist because I stand with women on issues of justice. I have worked as an international leader for the last twenty-five years, but always intimately connected with Africa and specifically with the lives of African women.

I am currently working with The David and Lucile Packard Foundation in California as Director of the Population and Reproductive Health Program. Through our grantmaking we are working towards a future where women have reproductive health choices. The issues that I work on are close to my heart as a feminist.

The biggest challenge for feminists in Africa is the lack of cohesion and space for using our collective power; women who identify themselves as feminists very often work in isolation. Another challenge is overcoming the idea that women's concerns are somehow smaller than the "big" issues of poverty, bad political governments, or disease. We always have to argue that changing the status of women is part of the solution to all of these things.

I have learned to speak the truth to power both in the private and in the public arena and also to know that if women have to make a change, they also need to have resources including money. I advocate for the empowerment of women with skills and education and decision-making spaces as well as for funding women's own ideas and spaces. I speak out with courage on issues that are important to African women and to the women's movement as a whole. I live the life of a feminist in my home, and in my religious, social and political spaces.

I am inspired by having seen some big changes in my lifetime, including the overturning of the apartheid system, the fall of the great wall in eastern Europe, the rise to power of women such as President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf of Liberia, and the election of the first African-American president. I am inspired by seeing young women find their own voice and use it. I am inspired seeing my own daughter claim her own voice and identify herself as a feminist at the age of 21.



Jamesina Essie King | Sierra Leone

I have a passion that drives me to contribute to addressing injustice against women manifested in so many ways, be it structural, traditional, religious or legal, denying them the opportunities to fulfil their potentials, realise their dreams, make and pursue decisions and contribute to the fullest extent to the development of themselves their society, community and country.

I have a post graduate degree in law from Georgetown University Law Centre and have practiced law in Sierra Leone. The work that I do is constantly challenging, questioning and assessing the public and political commitments to advancing the rights of women. I am a Leadership Advocacy for Women in Africa Fellow of the Women's Law and Public Policy Fellowship and a founding member and past president of Legal Access through Women Yearning for Equality Rights and Social Justice (LAWYERS) – an organisation of Sierra Leonean women lawyers dedicated to enhancing women's access to justice. I have contributed to various transitional justice mechanisms in Sierra Leone, and have recently researched and published on the issue of gender and reparations in Sierra Leone.

I currently serve as Chairperson and a Commissioner in the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone. In this role, I work with my fellow Commissioners to implement a statutory mandate, which includes investigating human rights violations, human rights education, and advising government on the compliance of national law with international legal obligations. We also monitor implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions Recommendations and the recently enacted Gender Justice laws. Women suffered greatly during the civil war in Sierra Leone. As we rebuild the country, the Human Rights Commission serves as one important mechanism to make sure that women rights are no longer violated.

I call myself a feminist because I am proud of being a woman and have always insisted on the opportunity to make choices without any apology. I have always asserted my individuality and pursued my ambitions and dreams to the best of my abilities and opportunities available to me. I take full responsibility for the consequences of every decision I make. In my work as an activist I am comfortable with working alone but I also enjoy working in partnership with other women, and other partners who share my values, passion and aspirations for an equal and just society.

I have always tried to study and understand the context in my work, recognizing my limitations, exploring possibilities and never giving up. I have always celebrated successes in our effort to advance the causes of women and to work towards a better and equal society. I am not afraid of failing and consider challenges as opportunities to do things better. I have realised that I may not make the change I want to see today, but I am positive that each day I live I am contributing to that change.



Demere Kitunga | Tanzania

I am a feminist activist, publisher and writer. I identify as a feminist because my world view is framed from the perspective of women's rights to equality and human dignity. My life, my work and my relationships are fashioned in a way that allows me to constantly challenge any hindrance to those ideals, including analysing, organising and recruiting allies to this cause.

My passion is to promote readership as a way of empowering women, men, girls and boys to interrogate conventional knowledge, seek their own version of the truth and enjoy the world of letters as leisure, culture and a mode of learning. I currently head a firm called E&D Readership and Development Agency- Soma, a non-profit which works with a sister organization named E&D Vision publishing. The whole enterprise is founded on feminist principles which are visible in the books we produce, services we provide, and how we organise space and relationships. Soma (meaning "read" in Kiswahili) runs a book café, publishes a literary magazine and hosts a myriad of literary, social and cultural forums including reading, literary and debate clubs, book exhibitions, inter gender/inter generational dialogues, author profiling and talent shows. We also do research and advocacy on the need to create a social environment that stimulates reading and creative writing, mentoring young writers and women interested in publishing and working in other fields in the knowledge industry. Soma Book Café is the hub for these interventions. I am also a founder of four activist organizations. Of all of them, it is in the Tanzania Gender Networking Programme (TGNP), of which I am a founding member, that I am continuously renewed as a feminist and feminist organiser.

I am motivated by the pursuit of knowledge, organising for change and creative expression. My greatest passion is being a part of a journey that leads a woman to reach the feminist "aha!" moment, when her eyes open to see the power dynamics in her personal life and relationships. As feminists the road ahead of us is steep as we remain entangled in patriarchal relationships informed by the neoliberal world order and related militarism, loss of sovereignty, heightening tensions between classes of people due to the plunder, expatriation of resources and grand corruption. We are witnessing growing fundamentalisms alongside the state's abdication from social provisioning. Although the poor in general are affected, women bear the greatest burden. In this era of "no alternatives", I see feminist ideology and politics to be the only viable alternative paradigm.



Kyomya Macklean | Uganda

I work with commercial sex workers, providing support and advocating for their rights with the organisation Women's Organization Networking for Human Rights Advocacy (WONETHA). It is not easy work to do in Uganda. Women sex workers face violent discrimination from society. People label them "bad women" and ask why they have no so-called "morals". Yet who asks the same questions about their clients, some of whom are married men and well-known public figures? It is an unfair double-standard.

People think it is acceptable to abuse, exploit and commit violence against sex workers, as if they are not human beings! Violence is one of the biggest issues facing sex workers and sadly, often from the police. I am not saying all police are bad; some are kind and protect sex workers. However there are those who hurt, rape and beat sex workers and take their money. I have seen so many of the sex workers that I know raped and then told "oh, you are a whore, whores cannot be raped, you are asking for it!" The world imposes a label on sex workers as being "immoral", "dirty" and "unworthy". And sadly some sex workers start to believe these labels and end up hating themselves the same way some people in our society hate sex workers. Some sex workers stop caring about themselves and their health, but many others refuse to accept societies prejudices. Why must women sex workers, or in fact any woman, be reduced to a stereotype, a fantasy, an object of somebody's hate?

I am a feminist because I believe that all women and girls have a right to respect, to health, to freedom from violence and to equality. This includes women who are sex workers. I also support the rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender people. Ugandans who are sexual minorities are still Ugandans. They are human beings and deserve respect, love and support like any other Ugandan.

With other sex worker advocates, I have sensitized the public in Uganda through the media and by networking with other organizations. There are also men who are sex workers, and women and men are working together to challenge the discrimination that sex workers face.

It is a hard battle, but I refuse to be deterred. I remain inspired by the strong feminist women in Uganda, including Solome Nakaweesi Kimbugwe, Syliva Tamale and Miria Matemebe, who have fought for women's rights and for equality in Uganda, and who continue to do so despite discrimination in the media and even death threats. I also love children and try to make a difference in their lives.



Prudence Nobantu Mabele | South Africa

I was born in Benoni, in the east of Johannesburg. I am a feminist, a women's human rights defender and a sangoma (traditional healer). I am the Executive Director of Positive Women's Network, an organisation that I founded in 1996 to provide a space for HIV positive women to address our economic, educational and health needs and to project our voices and demands for services, rights and respect. I was one of the first black women in South Africa to publically declare my HIV positive status, and joined with other activists to found the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) in 1998. I continue to mobilise for women's rights including the sexual and reproductive health and rights of HIV positive women. Over the years I have advocated and trained around women controlled prevention technologies such as microbicides and the female condom. I have advocated for treatment access, for appropriate care and support for women living with HIV, and for positive prevention as a shared responsibility where all people know their status and use protection. For too long we have placed the burden on women to declare their status and take precautions- and yet we know that both men and women have to share the responsibility! I have also mobilised around ending violence against women, and am a member of the One in Nine Campaign which was started in response to the rape trial of (the then Deputy President) Jacob Zuma. The campaign takes its name from the fact that only one in nine rape survivors in my country report the crime to the police, which shows how unwelcoming the justice system is for women.

In my work I encourage women to take charge of their lives and also to hold policy makers accountable to implement the programs that serve women's needs. I have been privileged to be asked to represent different constituencies of people- HIV+ people, HIV+ women, and women's rights activists- and I don't take this responsibility lightly. I have served on South African National AIDS Council representing people living with HIV and AIDS. In 2004 I was selected to carry the Olympic torch as part of an international torch relay for the Athens Olympics. I believe that the quality of women's leadership is even more important than the numbers of women in leadership. In my own life, and in the training and empowerment work that I do, I try to make the point that leaders need to live their beliefs, and to be fair and accountable.

Our society is still framed by patriarchal power. I, like all women in my society, face exploitation and oppression by patriarchal structures which legitimise the oppression of women through political, social, economic, legal cultural, religious and military institutions. Most of our resources are still controlled by men, and "culture" is still used as an excuse to perpetuate oppression. I am a feminist because I challenge these norms.



Patricia Ann Made | Zimbabwe

I live in Zimbabwe, and since 2002, have worked as an independent consultant on a number of initiatives within the Southern African region and beyond. My work involves research on the media's coverage of events and issues from a gender perspective, compiling and writing handbooks and toolkits for the media and other audiences in the areas of gender and media, HIV and AIDS, human rights, governance and elections and women's human rights. I also work as a facilitator and a media trainer.

As a black woman, I know from first-hand experience the faces of sexism and racism. Having to constantly prove one's worth and value in a world that defines and confirms one's human value because of one's race and sex, there is no other choice but to declare one's commitment to rooting out systems, attitudes and methods of oppression that seek to "keep me in my place", and to silence my voice. My heart, mind and my soul know without a doubt that I should be not judged by the colour of my skin or my gender. It is the strength of my character, the goodness of my heart and the ways that I use my mind and talents to contribute to my family and many communities that should be the measure of my worth. That is why I call myself a feminist.

In the professional sphere of my work as a journalist, editor and eventually a senior media manager in an international news agency, I have always consciously used the power that I have had to ensure access and freedom of expression for women and marginalised voices. I have written about the violations and inequalities that women face in societies, and worked within media management to implement various measures to make the media aware of how it perpetuates discrimination and sexism both in the workplace and in its editorial content, as well as strategies and policies that need to be put in place to end sexism and discrimination against women in and through the media.

As part of strengthening our movement, we need to make a conscious investment in encouraging the development of African feminist theory to analyse and make linkages between the political, economic, social, cultural, and development challenges at the national, regional and global levels. The production of African feminist knowledge across all sectors is critical to giving power and sustainability to an African feminist movement. We need to harness the power of communication, and work on the development of a clearly identifiable African feminist discourse that is used to build a movement through the production of popular education materials, academic materials, literature and other art forms and communications and media messages and materials. As part of our work of popularising feminism, we also need a stronger focus on education for critical consciousness to encourage more informed thinking, informed discussions and informed messaging on feminism in Africa.



Bene E. Madunagu | Nigeria

I am Chair of the Board of the Girls Power Initiative (GPI), a Nigerian non-governmental organisation that I co-founded in 1993 to pioneer sexuality, sexual and reproductive health and rights education for adolescent girls. Through education and training, GPI has encouraged hundreds of young women to stand up for their rights and to understand and choose the identity of “feminist”. GPI is committed to managing and educating girls into healthy self-reliant, productive and confident women for the achievement of positive changes and transformation of patriarchal values in Nigeria. In 2007 GPI received the World Association For Sexual Health International Award for Excellence in Innovation in Sexuality Education.

I work in Africa and internationally as a consultant and trainer on gender, sexuality, sexual and reproductive health and rights and HIV and AIDS issues. Over the years I have been actively engaged in advocacy to ensure that my own government lives up to its commitments to protect health and human rights. I have been a member of national committees tasked with reviewing adolescent health policy and expanding HIV and AIDS education in Nigeria. I have also contributed to international women’s activism on development, linking our experiences as women in Nigeria and Africa more broadly to global struggles for women’s equality and against neo-liberalism. I served from 2004 to 2008 as the General Coordinator of Development Alternatives With Women for a New Era (DAWN), one of the oldest networks of feminist activists from the global South. As a member of the International Consortium for Medical Abortion and a board member of the organisation IPAS, I also add my energy to international efforts to prevent unnecessary deaths from unsafe abortions and promote women’s rights to choice and access to safe medical abortions. Alongside my work on policy and community mobilisation I also teach. I began my career in the sciences, and am a Professor in the Department of Botany, University of Calabar in Cross River State, Nigeria.

In our daily work as feminists we face male chauvinism arising from a fear of women sharing the same decision-making seats as men. We are bombarded by this excuse of “culture” which is rarely called upon except when it is used to enforce sexism, the suppression of female sexuality and the oppression of women. As feminists, we are working collectively to ensure that all African women and girls are able to live safe, healthy lives and to make informed and empowered choices about their own bodies.

I am an absolutely confirmed feminist, with no “ifs” or “buts”. I am a feminist by choice and conviction, passionate about total enjoyment of sexual and reproductive health and rights, human freedoms and expression of one’s sexual identity without restriction but with information and services to do so in a healthy way. I am passionate about combating gender discrimination and insensitivity in whatever forms. I am a committed human rights defender and work in defence of victims of sexual abuse and all other forms of violence against women and girls.



Djingarey Maiga | Mali

For many years now, I have lived and worked in Kati, a multi-cultural and multi-religious commune of about half a million people situated about 13 miles from the capital of Mali, Bamako. I serve as the Director of a Malian organisation Femmes et Droits Humains (Women and Human Rights). My organisation seeks to defend women's rights, and takes a holistic approach to tackling sexual and reproductive health, political participation, economic rights and the right to education.

I came to call myself a feminist after going through my own experiences facing discrimination in my society and at school. I did very well at school and came first in the exams. The teachers were angry towards the boys when they saw that a girl was leading the class. One day I asked my father, "can a girl be the first?" and he responded, "well, show them that a girl can!" It was like a game for me to challenge the boys and to fill the places that were supposed to be reserved for men. This helped me strengthen my confidence and later made me realise that it was possible to make change. Being able to analyse, solve and act for women's rights in a world of patriarchy made me call myself a feminist. I am so proud when people in my community call me a feminist.

After secondary school I pursued advanced education and have a diploma in Computer Science, Applied Language and Communication on Human Rights. Communication has always fascinated me as a powerful tool for social change. From the mid 1990s I worked with the Institute for Popular Education as the Human Rights and Gender Analysis Trainer and Women's Education Coordinator. I ran programs on women's reproductive health education, the eradication of violence against women (including the struggle against Female Genital Mutilation), gender analysis, women's leadership and public participation. I have also worked with the People's Movement for Human Rights Education as the National Coordinator of an initiative called "Consensual Human Rights Cities" which sought to promote the enjoyment of human rights at the community level across Mali. I continue to collaborate with fellow activists internationally through networks including Women Living under Muslim Laws, Women's Global Network for Reproductive Health and Rights and the Africa Democracy Forum. I also oversaw the participation and planning of Malian civil society in the Community of Democracies process hosted by Mali. This is an international effort to strengthen democratic norms and values worldwide.

As Africans we face many challenges including the rise of religious, cultural and economic fundamentalisms and the challenge of making all that we do visible globally. These may be big challenges. However I am an optimist, and live by the saying "Who ever wants to, can! Change is possible".



Pravina Makan-Lakha | South Africa

I live in Tongaat, a small town to the north of the city of Durban, and work at a civil society institution, the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD) that aims to influence political developments by bringing conflict resolution, dialogue and institutional development to the forefront as an alternative to armed violence and protracted conflict. I head ACCORD's Operations Division and lead the initiatives that support the inclusion of women as a strategic constituency in preventing, managing, and transforming conflict.

Understanding the injustices that we as women bear and the victories that we have gained in terms of our rights has developed my consciousness about the plight of women. My conscience forces me to ask "Where are the women? Why are the women absent? How can women become involved? Why are women not involved? What are the needs of women? Who is deciding what women's needs are?". Asking these questions is accompanied by a search for solutions to bring about positive change.

I am a firm believer in the idea that change must start where we are. I have begun identifying younger women in my family, at a community level and within my institution, and encouraging them to take ownership and leadership of their destiny. I have shared the networks that I have access to with other women as a way to facilitate mentoring and developing a feminist consciousness.

The greatest challenge that we as feminists face in this decade is the reversal of the gains the movement has made in advocating for a feminist policy agenda. As Africans we face the impact of a world in economic crisis, the preference for military solutions over dialogue to resolve conflicts, and the effects of climate change. The feminist agenda is relevant in all of these developments, however we need to express that clearly if we are to develop a critical mass of feminists. We are also contending with the fashionable inclusion of "gender sensitive/ gender equality" in political, economic and social development as a means for dealing with patriarchy, which tends to obscure whether enough is being done towards women's rights and their emancipation.

I enjoy living in these interesting times of change and having the opportunity to contribute to the change. I am aware that I need to create and re-create myself in response to evolving needs, and I take pleasure in doing so. Working in the peace and conflict field allows me to witness the small victories in conflict-affected societies. It is wonderful both to belong to a family and to have the opportunity to create my own family, sharing the responsibility to socialise them with values of equality, respect, and justice.



Betty Makoni | Zimbabwe

I am the Director of the Girl Child Network (GCN) which is an activist organisation for over 60,000 girls in Zimbabwe. I founded the organisation in 1998 and am now working on creating a sister organization in Botswana. With GCN I design progressive empowerment programs that facilitate, instil and provide the means for girls to reach their full potential as women leaders. I am also the founder of Ray of Hope which is a network of domestic violence and rape survivors working to transform themselves from victims to leaders, and am the lead focal point person for Grassroots Organisations Operating Together In Sisterhood – Zimbabwe which brings together women's community based organisations. I do regional and international advocacy to demand that international legal instruments meant to protect girls do not just remain words on paper. However what I love doing most is creating informal, free spaces for women and girls at community level.

I am a feminist because I have never lived in any world that is habitable except the world of women and girls. I started selling goods at age six with a group of girls. I lived a life where only my girlhood defined the power in me, and not the men around me. At age seven I stood up for my mother who suffered domestic violence everyday and told her to let go of her marriage. I realised at that age that women can have their own spaces without men and the violence that they inflict. Later I demanded that I attend girl-only schools. I was fascinated by the world of Roman Catholic nuns. I smelt freedom and a sense of a women's movement in the convent. At one stage I thought I would join them. To me they were my first idea of what feminists should be...women who enjoy their space and do what they want to do. I know I am a feminist because I have taken charge of my own sexuality and will never let it be controlled by a man. Society may well have a narrow view of what feminists are, but I fear nothing in the world of patriarchy. To me, patriarchy is one institution I am working to disband and dismantle.

As African women, feminists have to fight for space to do, feel, think and say what they want. That space has been invaded by patriarchy under the guise of neutral work on "gender". I have had to stand firm against donors who want us to include boys in our girls clubs. I explain to them that the space is for girls as they have been denied this space in all other areas of life. In doing my work, I am inspired by my poor mother who died as a result of domestic violence. I feel the same should not happen to women and girls again. Rural women, who have strong stories of bravery and their fights against patriarchy, inspire me. My husband, who believes that women should be able to exhibit their strength without men threatening them, inspires me. The girls I work with inspire me. We need to educate girls in feminism from when they are very young. Feminism must be a birthright.



Usu Ndeanasia Mallya | Tanzania

I am a feminist activist and work as Executive Director of the Tanzania Gender Networking Programme (TGNP), a feminist organisation whose vision is to see a transformed Tanzanian society where there is gender equality, equity and social justice. I grew up observing and agitating against inequalities based on gender. As a woman, wife, and a mother, I experienced how my life and those of the people around was muddled by patriarchal relations and psychology. As a result of my work with TGNP, I have and am still learning and acquiring tools for analysis of patriarchy, its interface with all other oppressive social relations, and impact. I believe that a movement to dismantle all these oppressive social relations is not only possible but an ethical obligation. My vision is to inspire others in transformative feminist movement building, as I have been inspired by so many sisters in Africa.

To build a feminist movement in Africa we need to join forces, particularly given the increasing complexity of the context due to globalisation, re-colonisation and the rise of fundamentalisms. The many efforts by individual feminists and organisations need to be linked together to bring forth the needed formidable voice. To do this we also need innovative resource mobilisation strategies for sustainability. Our work as feminists has been made difficult by skewed international, national, community and household resource mobilisation and utilisation strategies which are limited in prioritising the needs of women and men, girls and boys. In addition, the ideology and vision of feminism is yet to be owned and used as a guiding principle and framework in our work and individual lives.

Professionally, the work I do provides opportunities for growth and action. I facilitate, analyse, mentor, train, undertake research and organise for change at different levels. Currently at TGNP we focus on facilitating the building of a transformative feminist movement that is grounded locally. We engage with grassroots women and actors to challenge and demand changes and accountability for women's needs and concerns from macro and micro policies, institutional frameworks and processes at all levels.

The liberating effect that feminism has and is having in my life provides me with the passion, energy and commitment to work for an alternative and a better world. I hold firm to the knowledge that a sustainable livelihood for all women and men is possible, with the dismantling of patriarchy and all other exclusionist social relations. I draw power from the collective spirit for change within the feminist and women's movements, from the rich herstory of women's resistance, and from the fact that today more women and girls from all walks of life are becoming aware and are challenging discrimination and oppression.



Amina Mama | Nigeria/ South Africa

I am a researcher and university professor and teach courses on gender and the politics of development development, militarism, feminist theory and methodology and women's movements. I hold a tenured professorship as the Chair in Gender Studies at the University of Cape Town, South Africa and am currently serving as the Barbara Lee Distinguished Chair in Women's Leadership at Mills College in Oakland, California.

Most of my research work has been collaborative, involving teams of African researchers and activists working to develop and apply feminist principles and methods that aim to bring theory and activism together.

I am currently developing a collaborative project on Gender, Militarism and Women's Activism in the West African sub-region, and most recently completed research projects on African sexualities, and gender and institutional culture in African universities. As a full-time professor I use feminist pedagogies in the classroom, and contribute to developing political-intellectual communities of feminist thought and practice through projects like the Feminist Scholars Network, the Gender and Women's Studies (GWS) listserv, the journal Feminist Africa, and by working with colleagues on the development of a feminist curriculum for teachers in public universities.

The greatest external threat to women (and by extension humanity) is the growth and acceptance of a misogynistic, authoritarian and violent culture of militarism, in all its manifestations within the various institutions of the global capitalist military industrial complex, as these are variously iterated around the world. I think that the survival and well-being of women in Africa today is continuously threatened by the historically-sediment accumulations of misogyny that take many forms. This sustains the injustices meted out to women of all ages, bearing fruit in the exploitation of their bodies, and the wastage of their talents. This places an historic responsibility on those of us who live and live well. We challenge history every day that we do so. We need to be aware of this, while not succumbing to the potentially paralysing sense of guilt, collective trauma, internalized misogyny, and humiliation. The challenge is instead to make good of whatever opportunities we have to live graceful, peaceful, happy, ethical and generous lives in community with others.

As a feminist, I am dedicated to the liberation of women all over the world, but especially in the African contexts with which I most closely identify. I regard my life as a continuous process of seeking and learning and I try to infuse this principle in my professional work as a teacher and researcher, in my personal life, relationships and child-rearing practices, and in my activism and support for others sharing this vision.



Tomupeishe Anne Maphosa | Zimbabwe

I work in a gender and development consultancy in Harare as the Communications Officer. My work includes assessments, strategic planning and gathering and disseminating information to support the development of organisations working on gender equality and women's rights. I am a self-motivated woman who is concerned about and works towards the fulfilment of equity and equality for women and girls. I believe that women deserve so much more than what they are currently exposed to. I see the potential in women to make a difference in their lives and for humankind. That is why I call myself a feminist.

The persistence of patriarchy, which many women help to perpetuate, is a major challenge for feminists. Patriarchy is difficult to separate from traditions, cultures and beliefs, and at times even from a woman's own sense of self worth. We also face the challenge of the continued relegation of feminist thoughts to mere "unimportant women's issues" in society, or worse still to underfunded women's ministries in our governments. And we face the challenge of a male attitude that thinks that sending girls to school is the only (and end of the) contribution they can make towards women's equality.

As part of my feminist activism, I clearly articulate my views and act upon them to family and friends regarding practices that perpetuate patriarchy. I have chosen to be involved with women's organisations and their work. And I continue to work with young girls to help them embrace a fuller education and social curriculum that does not limit their career and life choices.

In order to strengthen the feminist movement across the continent we need to keep reaching out to young women through training nurturing, mentoring and making feminism relevant to their lived realities. We need to keep honing our communication skills, working in and with the media to properly represent what feminism is, and the values and beliefs of women that call themselves feminists. And we need to keep working as we have done over the years to respond to violations of women and girl's rights and taking action, knowing that others will follow.

From my work thus far I have learnt that we are not on an easy road. At the end of each day I take stock of what I have achieved, who I have touched, how I have grown, and with that I gather more energy for tomorrow.



Marjorie Mbilinyi | Tanzania

I call myself a transformative feminist because I am passionate about changing the present structures of power which oppress and exploit girls and women. I have struggled against gender discrimination all my life, beginning as a child who did not know how to name the source of the anger and bitterness that I felt. As a young adult in the United States, I was swept up in the civil rights movement in which the main focus was the struggle against racism. My feminist “awakening” came twice. The first was as a student, reading *The Feminine Mystique* and coming to understand my mother’s experience for the first time, being able to better cope with the anger that I’d felt and never resolved following her untimely death in 1960, very much a victim of patriarchy. However, there was no women’s studies taught at universities then, and no organised women’s movement that I knew of to turn to.

The second awakening came as a new young wife and mother, after I’d moved to Tanzania in 1967 to marry my partner of several years, and when I bore my first child. I was surprised to find that the former closeness which I had with my husband was over, and I had to deal with demands from the in-laws and patriarchal expectations about appropriate “feminine” behaviour once married and a mother. At the University of Dar es Salaam, where I worked as a lecturer on Education, I struggled against systematic gender discrimination in the promotions system. Organising fellow women at the university was an immediate response, having recognised that individual protests like my own protest poetry would not get far. I discovered the marvellous energy and joy that is derived from working in solidarity with other women to fight against gender discrimination and women’s oppression and to fight for real change in our own lives, as well as in the lives of the most oppressed and exploited women among us.

I taught and was a scholar activist at the University for 35 years, and with others founded the Women’s Research and Documentation Project (1980 -), Tanzania Participatory Research Network and the African Participatory Research Network, the Gender and Economic Research in Africa network (GERA) and the Tanzania Gender Networking Programme, TGNP (1993-). After ‘retirement’, I went to work for TGNP in 2004 as Analyst/Researcher. At TGNP we have been faced by the major challenge of balancing grassroots level activism with policy engagement around gender mainstreaming at the national level. TGNP is carrying out a feminist movement building study to find out more about women/feminist activism in all spheres of society, so as to better inform our own understanding of transformative feminism and the kind of issues that have most priority for grassroots women, and to strengthen our strategies for transformative feminist movement building.

What else do I do? I shake things up, raise provocative questions, challenge the system, and encourage everyone, especially women, to do the same! There is something joyous and freeing about speaking out, alone, as well as together. We need to create all kinds of alternate spaces for every girl and woman to speak her song.



Sindi Medar-Gould | Nigeria/ St. Lucia

I live in Lagos, Nigeria. I work with Baobab for Women's Human Rights, a non-profit, non-governmental and non-religious women's human rights organisation that is committed to the promotion and protection of women's human rights under the three parallel systems of law in Nigeria, namely customary, statutory and religious laws. The organisation that I work for is structured on feminist principles and aims to give women opportunities to be empowered. I have also been an active member of the network of Women Living Under Muslim Laws for several years.

I have worked as a trainer on gender, leadership, feminism, conflict resolution, gender budget analysis, human rights and ethics and have been involved in activism for political, civil and women's rights for decades. At university I was a member of the Feminist Collective, president of Black Student Union for two terms, and also served as a women's affairs officer for Castries North East Constituency in St. Lucia. I am a card carrying member of Saint Lucia Labour Party in the country of my birth, and ran the constituency office of the Member of Parliament for Castries North East. I represented St. Lucia as a gender expert at the United Nations on several occasions. I have lived and worked in Nigeria for many years. Prior to joining Baobab, I worked as the Executive Director of Women for Independence, Self-Sufficiency, and Economic Advancement (WISSEA) in Kano and the Coordinator of the Women and Law Program for Kano State. I serve as Chairperson of the Nigeria Coalition on the International Criminal Court (NCICC) and a board member of Association of Women's Rights in Development (AWID).

I call myself a feminist because I passionately believe and work for the liberation of women from patriarchy and patriarchal inequalities. To me, feminism is about equal rights between the sexes and equal opportunities for all.

Many African women fear being identified as a feminist even if the work they do is feminist oriented. In addition, we face a generation gap as there are still more older than younger women involved in feminist organising. We need to keep welcoming younger feminists to the movement and to look at strengthening the regional feminism response mechanism. In all my work I encourage young women to stand up for their rights with the understanding that their rights are non-negotiable.



Kenya/ Switzerland

Zeedah Mutheu Doris Mierhofer-Mangeli

I am a feminist trainer, leading workshops on empowerment, development and gender and security sector reform. I have a passion for oral herstories; collecting the life stories of older African women as a means of documenting women's testimony and experience. I also use my camera to document women's activism and lives of African women. Over the years I have initiated and been part of various programs and initiatives to provide safe spaces, increased knowledge platforms, and supportive resources to sustain these initiatives, such as Mentoring and Development camps for girls, and the Resource Center for Black Women in Zurich, Switzerland which I co-founded and which is now in its seventeenth year. I am also a politician, and the first Black woman to run for a parliament seat in Switzerland. My political work is my base for promoting racial and equality in Switzerland and Europe, especially for Black and Migrant women. I am a mother of two wonderful daughters and four fascinating goddaughters, who are all part of the dynamic legacy we are creating for African women on the continent and in the Diaspora.

I believe in, practice and promote feminist values and principles unconditionally, with no "ifs" or "buts!" I am inspired by other women who go the distance in the promotion of feminist values and beliefs, genuinely living their private lives as they do their public ones.

We still face the struggle to sustain basic human rights for all African women against a backdrop of hardcore patriarchy, in all its varied forms, and amidst rising fundamentalism. As African women, we are also constantly having to play catch-up with basic technology, easily available in other parts of the world. This has at times hindered the speed of our activism.

In the vision of an African feminist future, shared by myself and many others, I see a world where all human rights for women and men are promoted, recognised and practiced. The African continent has experienced far too many armed conflicts, and it is clear that we need peace building and security sector reform that includes women on all levels. In my training work I have also seen the incredible value of supporting new leadership and for training successive generations in the principles of African feminism.



Setcheme Jeronime M. Mongbo | Benin

I have worked for over 17 years to promote justice for women and girls through economic empowerment, education, counselling and legal actions. To broadly fulfil my mission, I founded the organisation SIN-DO which is women-led and women-focused. At present I work as Chief of Party of the EMPOWER Project, a project implemented by CARE International, which works to promote women's rights through the reduction of gender-based violence in across all communes in Benin. As part of this I lead a team of 12 organisations, two networks and public social promotion centres to increase understanding and application of women's rights.

I call myself a feminist because I believe in women's values, I understand the violations that women are victims of, and I work daily with them and with men for the full respect of women's rights. I work for women to be recognised fully as human beings.

As with all African women, African feminists face social pressures linked to cultural and traditional norms. Social norms such as the expectation for women to be the sole care givers for their children makes it difficult for many women to have full time jobs. As women, many feminists have not had the same opportunities as their male counterparts to pursue education or to be visible in society. Feminists are often accused of being "deracinated and westernised", which is an incorrect and unfair characterisation.

I was fortunate that from a young age I had support from my parents as well as a courageous temperament which allowed me to pursue an education. I had experiences of international women's organisations such as the Association for Women's Rights in Development and the Global Fund for Women from early on in my career, which also exposed me to feminism.

We still have a lot of work to do in building the feminist movement and in achieving the feminist goals of women's rights and emancipation. To succeed we need to support feminist activists wherever they are and to involve young women in our work. We also need to keep working to change laws in order to comply with human rights principles, and to raise awareness amongst both women and men about the principles of human rights.

Whenever I need to feel revived I remind myself of the realities on the ground, the daily lives of women and girls and their battles for survival in the face of enormous challenges and difficulties. Their willingness to carry on is an inspiration.



Siphokazi (Sipho) Mtathi | South Africa

I am a feminist activist, educator, creative writer and poet. For the past ten years, I have organised around HIV and AIDS. I was a member of the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) in South Africa, serving as the organisation's National Deputy Chairperson, National Treatment Literacy Coordinator and subsequently General Secretary. I was also a Steering Committee member of the Pan-African Treatment Access Movement that helped develop movements for treatment access across Africa. In 2007 I was appointed to the national team tasked with designing and drafting the country's five year Strategic Plan for HIV and AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Infections. I also sat on the South African National AIDS Council representing the women's sector. I now work as an independent consultant and continue my feminist activism in a variety of locations, including as a board member of Women on Farms, and founding member of Feminist Alternatives (FemAI), a Southern Africa based feminist organisation. I am working on a novel and poetry anthology, as well as setting up a Women's Writing Institute (a project of Feminist Alternatives), which will facilitate, resource and publish women's writing.

I am a feminist because I am a woman living in a world where if I am not vigilant, I will be erased, exploited or dehumanised. I call myself a feminist because my being aches when I experience or witness injustice of any kind. I know that I am just one of billions of women who live under a social system of patriarchy which is structured, legislated and financed to advance the interests of some men and disempower women and others who do not fit into its boxes. I am a feminist because I want to live and have all human beings live free from exclusion and dehumanisation, with love, opportunity and wholeness. Feminism offers me tools and the possibility to imagine, live, and build such a future.

There are too few spaces where we can live our feminist identities without contestation and backlash, and too few resources to build our own progressive spaces. Many of us are economically poor and have to make survivalist choices. Some are forced to be a part of depoliticised spaces where feminism is considered too radical and therefore not welcome in the pot of activist ideologies. At a broader level, the resurgence of conservatism poses a huge problem. The success of the struggles we lodge against patriarchal oppression will be determined by how deeply we engage culture, tradition and social institutions, as these are powerful in their oppression of women. We have to constantly figure out ways to disturb these power dynamics including by writing and developing feminist-controlled media.

Change is not only possible but happening. I am inspired when I witness ordinary women's extra-ordinary everyday resistance, even in contexts where patriarchy entrenches and reconfigures to outwit and overpower us.



Maude Mugisha | Uganda

Even when I did not know about patriarchy, I resisted it in my personal life. I have refused to accept the dominance of male figures. At age six I wanted to start school, however my parents said that I couldn't, as they wanted me to stay home to look after my baby sister. My two older brothers were already at school and I did not want them to feel like they could come home and boss me around. On the first day of the school year my parents had left me at home with the baby. So I put the baby on my back and carried her food with me to school! The teacher was alarmed to see me appear at the school compound with a baby on my back. However, I was determined and did not listen to his advice to go home. He later arranged for me to leave the baby with his mother while I attended school in the mornings.

When I was eight, my mother sent me with a message to give to my father as he was attending a meeting where elders were negotiating my cousin's bride wealth. I stopped behind a door and listened to them negotiating about how many cows the bride-to-be's side needed to pay, as if they were in a market. I was furious and returned home forgetting to give the message to my father. When my father came back, I confronted him and asked why they wanted to sell my cousin for cows! He laughed and said "that is the tradition". I told him that if that was the case, then I did not want to get married and that if I did, he should not dare sell me for cows! He commented that no man would want to marry me if I kept such an attitude! I got married at the age of twenty-two with no bride-price exchanged. When it did not work for me, I left. I am a happy single woman but I know I am lucky because not all women who experience abusive relationships are able to make the choice that I made.

I currently live in Namibia, working as Gender Advisor to the United Nations Country Team. Previously, I worked with two feminist organisations in Uganda. The first was Action of Development (ACFODE), which was started after the 1985 International Women's Conference in Nairobi. I applied to be its first Executive Director, and happily took the job although there was hardly any money to run the organisation! My nine years of work there clarified and strengthened my understanding of who I was as a woman and my resolve to contribute to bettering women's lives. I moved to work at Eastern Africa Sub-regional Support Initiative for the Advancement of Women (EASSI) (1997-2003). I am glad that I made a contribution to what EASSI is today, forging ahead with a feminist agenda in the sub-region.

I am a feminist because I am angry at the injustices women face. It is my calling to work with women in dismantling patriarchy and supporting each other to enjoy life in its totality. I believe that the torch for African feminism has been lit, and that it will not be put off.



Sarah Mukasa | Uganda

I am a feminist activist who is in the business of mobilising resources to support and sustain (in both financial and material terms) the efforts and initiatives led by African women to advance the rights of all women in Africa. I currently work as the Director of Programmes for the African Women's Development Fund based in Accra, Ghana. In practical terms, I fundraise, train, mobilise, convene, advocate, make grants and manage staff. Occasionally, I even manage to write something (though not as much as I would like)!

Feminism is as much a part of my identity as my name, gender, race and so on. I don't know what else I could be but a feminist. Otherwise I could not survive the daily assault from every corner, in every setting, on every aspect of womanhood (of me). How could I not be a feminist? How could I not embrace the one thing that told me I mattered; that I am a human being who deserves respect and dignity? How could I not be a feminist? Feminism is that revolution that showed me how to dance.

We need to tackle the shocking normalisation of violence against women's minds, bodies, spirits and sexuality. In doing this we find ourselves dealing with the onslaught of fundamentalisms of all kinds. The crisis in Africa from weak economies, weak political and civil institutions, global marginalisation and the contempt of most African political leaders for citizens all culminates in increasing levels of impoverishment and hopelessness for many in Africa, but especially for African women.

I have chosen to work with African institutions that are committed to strengthening feminist activism and leadership, and providing the financial, technical and material resources needed to build a strong and autonomous movement. In my personal life I have tried to maintain economic self-reliance and continual education on feminist scholarship and management practices. I see raising my daughter with respect as part of my feminist work.

There is always a lot more work to be done. For that we need courage, belief and love for ourselves and each other as women and Africans. We also need a whole lot of organising for conceptual clarity, political savvy, mass mobilisation and constituency building, and transformatory leadership development. Let's not forget that huge stash of cash – mobilised from within the movement! Above all, we need things that inspire us. For me that includes music, communing with myself, being with loved ones, the written word, the many women (and men) that I meet in the course of my work, the beauty of Africa, and my daughter.



Stella Mukasa | Uganda

I work as a consultant on the legal sector, human rights and governance. My firm espouses strong feminist principles and is currently employing only female consultants. I also teach gender, law and human rights at Makerere University in Kampala.

I believe that I was largely predisposed to become a feminist. As a little girl I always wanted explanations for why I should or should not do one thing or the other, and was quite perceptive of unjust treatment whether directed at me or another person. The feminist tendencies in me were nurtured at my first work station – the then Ministry of Women in Development. I vigorously pursued a career in promoting women's rights and have not turned back since. I was also mentored early on by a veteran feminist.

My baptism with fire happened when I encountered a victim of domestic violence at the hands of her husband (an army man). The victim sought justice to no avail as her husband was protected by the institution he served. With her permission I gave a testimony on her behalf at the Global Tribunal on Women's Human Rights during the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna 1993. The other testimonies I listened to during the conference kindled the fire in my belly to date! I left the conference a very angry woman, determined to play my part in order to make a difference to the lives of all women.

I had an interesting feminist experience in my marriage when I had to demand that the title of the land for our matrimonial home be changed to include both our names. The initial calm negotiations did not yield anything so I had to use a language of rights! It was a tense experience, ending with the title being more or less thrown at me! I could have recoiled, but I snatched the opportunity and managed to change it.

As a feminist I believe in equality between men and women and I continuously challenge male domination at any given opportunity. As African feminists we face the perception that feminist principles are alien to African culture. We also face persecution and misogyny. In resisting this, I lay claim to women's personhood and dignity as fundamental human rights that are not negotiable. These principles inform the work I do as a consultant.

In order to strengthen the feminist movement in Africa we need to keep encouraging more women to join while strengthening existing organisations that are a part of the movement. We have to work on sustaining cohesion and momentum. As a feminist, I fully embrace my responsibility to stand up to patriarchy at whatever scale in both my private life and the public spaces that I occupy. This responsibility includes ensuring that every woman understands their worth as a human being and makes an effort to defend their personhood and dignity.



Muadi Mukenge | Democratic Republic of Congo/ United States of America

I live in San Francisco, USA where I work as at the Global Fund for Women as Regional Director for Sub-Saharan Africa. I oversee funding that goes to support courageous women's rights organisations across Africa who are challenging the status quo. My job also involves bringing the organisations that we fund together to share strategies, ideas and information, and to link them to other donors.

As a feminist I am committed to deconstruction of power paradigms that limit women's voice, agency, opportunities, and participation. I work toward this goal and continuously raise awareness of inequalities that manifest themselves in relationships, structures and processes. I believe in the intrinsic potential and ability of each person and commit my time to supporting a movement of social transformation where women and girls are valued and heard and are viable actors in society.

We must keep confronting renewed voices of "can't", "shouldn't" and "why", increased intolerance for human rights, and superficial attempts at prioritising women's rights through the masked strategies of gender mainstreaming and creation of gender bodies that have no real power or resources. We have to completely reverse the focus on territorial and military security, and redirect it towards human security. We must confront the gross impunity on violence of all forms, but especially sexual violence in conflict zones, and the failure of society to socialise boys in such a way that they treat girls with respect.

In my own life I have committed myself to supporting the dreams and initiatives of sister friends and colleagues. I have defended and helped facilitate spaces for dialogue and frank discussion and questions and for networking. I have also promoted the inclusion and participation of women that are usually not at the decision-making table, and pushed for class and regional diversity in the women's movement. In the work that I do I see it as imperative to raising visibility around sexual violence and the need to address it. The need to do this has become even more urgent in light of the terrifying violence that we know women suffer in conflict situations, including in my home country.

As a movement and as individual activists we need to remember to celebrate the beauty of life and our achievements, however small. I am moved by every success, every triumph of another human being, every act of kindness, and every time someone gets up to try again after a fall. I am inspired by people who have the courage to speak the truth, treat others with respect, and who don't take "no" for an answer. Another, kinder, more equal world is possible!



Kaari Murungi | Kenya

I am a feminist lawyer, human rights and democracy activist. For the last eight years I have worked as Executive Director of Urgent Action Fund-Africa, a women's fund that I co-founded in 2001. UAF-Africa invests in the transformation of the world in which women live. It occupies a unique niche within the human rights and philanthropic sectors and has pioneered the rapid response grantmaking model in conflict situations. It is now firmly established as a feminist activist fund.

As a feminist I consider my work to always be political and collaborative. Throughout my entire adult life I have worked with others to fight oppression and authoritarianism. I am sure that I was born feminist; I have never struggled with the logic of feminism. My political understanding of feminism however developed through my involvement in the pro-democracy struggles in Kenya in the early 1980s, and the mentoring of an iconic male teacher. I understood then that as feminists our agenda was to alter the status quo. I am a part of that most powerful movement that has committed itself to the complete destruction of patriarchy and misogyny which now finds expression in heightened militarism and diverse fundamentalisms.

I have found it useful in various struggles to figure out ways of changing or subverting the law for transformation. Throughout the 1990s, I was involved with others, in a process of ensuring the inclusion of a gender perspective in the work of the International Criminal Court as well as ensuring that transitional justice mechanisms that were sprouting up in post-conflict countries on the African continent were taking account of women's experiences. This interest took me to Rwanda and Sierra Leone where I lived and learned from women working in the most difficult circumstances brought about by genocide and civil war. These women, who have emerged from conflict bruised and battered and yet have been able to pick up the pieces of their lives and raise families and sustain communities, are my greatest inspiration.

I spent a season of my life at the Harvard Law School's Human Rights Program as a visiting fellow in 2005, researching local justice responses to mass atrocities and women's positioning in these responses. I consider learning from women's experiences a key factor is designing programs of intervention those suit women's needs. Research and learning is therefore critical in informing our feminist strategies. I am absolutely excited by the re-emergence of an African feminist movement. This has enabled many of us to recharge and reenergise our passions, and take a critical look at the challenges that confront our organising. We will move forward embracing all our sisters in all their diversities. The true test of our feminism will lie in how well we will be able to do this.



Roselynn Musa | Nigeria

I am a Nigerian but have recently moved to Accra, Ghana after many years living in Nairobi, Kenya where I worked as an Advocacy Officer for the African Women's Development and Communications Network (FEMNET). I now work as Information and Documentation Officer at the African Women's Development Fund.

As an activist, I draw on a long history of women's right activism, research and capacity- building around social justice. Over the years I have gained valuable experience in administration, counselling, communication, strategic planning and analysis. I don't just call myself a feminist, I believe I live as one! I believe that we are not born feminists but are made feminists. My own life is testimony to that, as I became a feminist in response to the many unfair situations that I encountered in my life. I find injustice completely de-motivating and cause to stand up and be counted! Creativity and thinking outside the box and hard work to realise one's dreams and potentials energise me. I am impressed by leaders who practice what they preach and lead by example.

African feminists particularly African women in general are confronted with so much discrimination and animosity as well as misconceptions. Discriminatory and unresponsive policies and practices and violence against women continue to be widespread and systematically exclude women from publicly participating in politics and decision-making. At the societal level, public policies and laws that enshrine key laws and fundamental human rights are either totally ignored or are misinterpreted and misapplied when it comes to issues that are of major concern to women. The majority of women face huge obstacles in participating in public life and in realising women human rights. Religion, culture, and our governments remain the biggest challenge to feminists in our bid to ensure that women are able to access their rights and freedoms which international, regional and national women human rights mechanisms have offered. In addition to this, most women are subjected to daily physical, and psychological violence in all spheres of life. This is exacerbated by serious political ill will that prevents African women from enjoying equal rights in both public and private spheres of life.

In both my personal and professional life I have made a commitment to speaking out and reaching out to people. I have also addressed some of the misconceptions about feminists, and live my life in tandem with the ideals of feminism without any apologies and not minding who is upset by this!



Solome Nakaweese-Kimbugwe | Uganda

I became a feminist because I was angry; very angry and filled with positive anger that took a better part of my life. I always felt I had to do something to change the status quo. As a child, I observed how my mother stayed home while my father had a highly successful career. Even though they had both met in high school, they had totally different opportunities. I started questioning why she was always overseeing domestic chores. She had no office to go to every morning, no briefcase and no car, and always kept to herself and spoke quietly. My mother was a very happy woman but deep down, I suspected she was an untapped resource that also deserved all the “good things” in life. As a teenager, my elder sister and I started to engage my mother, who eventually shared her unfulfilled dreams of emancipation and made us promise to achieve all that she didn’t - a good university degree, success, economic independence and adding value to society. As a teenager I swore an oath that echoed my mother’s words: “At least everyday, pick up your handbag and leave the house. Even if it means that you will spend the day in the park, at least you will learn something new.” I was later to learn that this oath alluded to the many rights that women were denied, such as freedom of movement, economic independence, and accessing networks and information.

I joined the women’s movement in Uganda due to the discomfort that I felt with all the inequality. With time however, I felt that I needed to re-politicise my work. This happened when I attended the African Women’s Leadership Institute (AWLI) in 2003. I left this institute more angry but resolved and ready with armory to attack and finish off patriarchy with no regrets. At 28 I became the director of the strongest national women’s advocacy coalition, the Ugandan Women’s Network (UWONET). At 32 I became director of the pan-African feminist organization Akina Mama wa Afrika. I have contributed to bringing to the fore the debate of exclusion of some women and constituencies even within the women’s movement in Uganda, and supporting groups working on sexual rights, including Commercial Sex Workers and Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay and Transgender groups as well as inspiring many young and seasoned women.

To me feminism means women’s universal freedom from oppression of the mind, soul, thought, body, sexuality and spirit. It means non-conforming to societal norms, practices, religions, cultures, and values that discriminate and insubordinate women. It means daring to be different and question authority, speaking out, claiming my space and being autonomous. It means appreciating the equality of all women irrespective of their identities, diversities and choices. For me its plain simple: “No woman is free until all women are free”. It means sisterhood-that collectivity, bonding, the power and energies of sisters ever flowing, networks and understanding each other. At a personal level, it means reclaiming back my sexuality and bodily autonomy, and bringing to light the politics of sexuality and how it is used to control women’s lives.



Maria Nassali | Uganda

I currently work with the FIDA-Uganda, the Uganda Association of Women Lawyers, as the Chief Executive Officer. I was recruited specifically for the re-branding of FIDA-U to reposition it as the viable and premier women and human rights organisation that it is.

I am a feminist because I am a woman and a person of sound mind. Therefore I claim equal rights in that respect and would challenge any form of discrimination and marginalisation both at a personal and institutional level. There is considerable confusion around the term “feminism” in the Africa context, and we need to work on clarifying our political stance. I became a feminist by observing my grandmother Evelyn Nakitto who had no boundaries. She successfully secured seven husbands and raised sixteen children on her own as well as owned titled land. Illiterate as she was, she understood that women had power. Her motto was “If you want it, go get it”. She was never afraid to fail, as long as she had given it her best shot. My belief in women’s agency was further entrenched by being raised in Bwaise, a slum area that originally belonged to single women. Paradoxically, these beliefs were reaffirmed by the Catholic nuns at an all girls school of St. Theresa Namagunga. The nuns instilled immense pride in us as girls. We were taught to believe that we were as good as boys and perhaps in some instances better.

As part of my feminist activism I am making personal and professional commitments to advancing women’s rights. I am currently undertaking doctoral studies that interrogate the relationship between governance and rights. I have also gone back to my roots to work with an organization that I believe would impact the lives of women in directly challenging inequalities. At FIDA-U we are sensitising women lawyers to appreciate sexuality as a root cause of women’s marginalisation.

In order to strengthen feminism, we as feminists have to inculcate a sense of pride in being woman. The main rallying theme, in my view seems to be calling for pity as “helpless marginalised groups”, an ideology propagated by men and internalised by us. We need to make younger women and “other” women want to associate with us because we make them feel good and expectant of a better world. In reality, many sense fatigue, anger and desperation in us. In contrast, men have an internalised sense of superiority that enables them to perpetuate patriarchy however miserable and pathetic an individual man may be. Feminism is the belief that women are human beings. And, to paraphrase remarks made by a fellow activists at the closing of the global Association for Women’s Rights in Development Forum in 2008, “we must embrace our own power, with the intensity of a lover”.



Jessica Babihunga Nkuuhe | Uganda

I am a Ugandan, and have lived and worked in Uganda, Zimbabwe and Northern Sudan. I am currently based in Nairobi where I work as Executive Director of the Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights – Africa .

As far back as I can remember, I have always resisted the subordination of women and girls at the family level and in the community. My earliest recollection is when I confronted my father and told him that he would never negotiate for dowry for my marriage. As an adult I ensured that it did not happen. I also remember my anger at the fact that Zimbabwean women had been rounded up because they were unaccompanied by men and were assumed to be commercial sex workers! This anger pushed me to join meetings that led to the formation of the Women's Action Group.

Throughout my adult life, I have sought to empower myself and other women to be able to negotiate our way through life, and to challenge the male domination in our families and communities. As an activist I contribute to advocacy for greater and more meaningful participation of feminists in finding sustainable solutions to the armed conflict situations and other crises that wear a woman's face in Africa. For the past 12 years, I have helped document women's experiences in armed conflict in order to ensure that future generations understand the power relations that exacerbate violence against women in conflicts. The documentation is a means of ensuring that women's voices and issues become part of the historical record. I am involved with a range of organisations that build women's capacity to participate in conflict early warning, peace building and conflict transformation, and in advocacy campaigns for the respect of human rights for all women.

In the course of my work I have realised that too many women still fear to stand out as different, and will stay for too long in abusive or intolerable relationships if only to be seen as married and therefore "complete". In addition, the rise of religious fundamentalisms means that we still have women on the continent who believe that women's subordinate status is God-given!

In this journey there are sisters who serve as my role models and I am not afraid to seek out their wise counsel. My mother and grandmother warned me of the evils of patriarchy at a tender age. I remain inspired by their wisdom. We as African feminists of all shades of opinion and different generations are strengthening our spaces. Feminist funds are emerging on our continent and these will ensure that our organising gets the requisite resources. Feminists are standing up to be counted, and they are standing for the rights of all women in Africa, in small but sure steps. There are many young women who are not afraid to identifying themselves as feminists. There is still so much to learn, to do, and to enjoy!



Zawadi Ny'ongo | Kenya

I am a feminist because I know no other way to be. I am a feminist because I care. I am a feminist because I just am. I am committed to fighting against every form of injustice, but particularly the kind that creates inequality between men and women. I truly believe that dismantling all forms of patriarchy and eliminating discrimination against women are the keys to addressing all other forms of social injustice.

Personally, I am always trying to redefine my feminism and myself, unlearning what I have learned, and learning or creating my own knowledge about what it means to be a feminist. I enjoy being in the company of other feminists, exchanging ideas, and learning from each other and from the experiences of others in the struggle.

Professionally, I have worked on convening various spaces for African feminists to come together to engage in dialogue about different issues and develop strategies to strengthen their organisations and movements. These have included spaces to discuss peace-building and conflict transformation, resource mobilisation, sexual rights, and HIV and AIDS. I have also worked on the issue of feminist resource mobilisation for women's rights organisations and movements worldwide with the Association for Women's Rights in Development.

I know many incredible African feminists, but we are yet to mobilise a large, visible, effective and sustainable African feminist movement. We need to overcome the challenges of elitism, ageism, homophobia and ableism, and build a diverse and inclusive movement. We have done a lot of work to define and repackage what we mean by African feminism, and we need to popularise this ideology.

I remain hopeful despite the challenges we face. I am inspired when I experience and witness transformation in my life and in the lives of others. I am inspired when I dance, when I cry, and when I laugh. When I work with others to overcome a huge challenge or achieve a goal, it gives me the energy to move on. When I learn new things and experiment with different ideas or ways of doing things, it is invigorating. When I am reminded that I am not alone and that I have the ideological, moral, and emotional support of others who are in the struggle for social justice, I am inspired. And when I witness the resilience of women all over the world, rising above the most difficult situations, I am reminded that I can never give up.



Iheoma Kennaya Obibi | Nigeria

I am a feminist writer, blogger and activist, living and working in Lagos. There is no other name than "African feminist" that can best describe me and make me comfortable to answer with pride. Being referred to as "that African feminist and writer" is a very satisfying experience.

I am an Ashoka Fellow and currently work as the Executive Director for Alliances for Africa which is an African-led human rights, peace and sustainable development organisation. I am passionate about training, and love to work with other Africans in a training context exploring the issues and building the skills needed to affirm human rights, justice and Africa's future.

We face many challenges as African feminists. The most pressing is religious fundamentalisms in all its ramifications, which is sweeping across Africa. Related to this is cultural conservatism and isolation encouraged by religious fundamentalism. We have ongoing problems such as traditional practices that impinge on the ability of women to engage in making informed choices on issues that affect their lives as young women and the lack of political will to address the sweeping negative oppression affecting women.

As the feminist movement gathers force, we must continue to invest in creating feminist leadership with adequate foresight and mentoring opportunities for our young sisters. The transfer of leadership opportunities cannot happen in a vacuum, we have to acknowledge that young women in the movement need mentoring and we need to create this leadership transfer, while at the same time addressing the role that older feminists can and should play. We need to be braver about addressing contentious issues such as same sex relationships within the African context. And we need more financial and other resources!

As I live out my feminism in my personal and professional life, I always remember that my own mother was courageous enough to leave a violent relationship, and to save herself and her children from further victimisation. This memory gives me strength, and affirms my belief that it is possible to say no to violence and to change your life. I am raising my own children with that belief, and look forward to seeing them make confident choices about their own lives and futures. I am passionate about writing short stories, as they provide me with the opportunity to dream, imagine and describe the many places, people and things that I have experienced.



Awino Okech | Kenya

My feminist politics evolved from childhood as I was raised in a family of strong women. I began my engagement with community development work right after high school, through an apprenticeship with a local organisation Kenya Female Advisory Organisation (KEFEADO) based in Kisumu. I had an opportunity to work alongside educationalists on a programme around enrolment, retention and completion of school by girls. My interest in women's rights began during this work. I subsequently pursued a Bachelors in Political Science at the University of Nairobi. Over the same period I worked and later became one of the lead trainers with Amani Peoples Theatre, a civil society organisation established by young Kenyans in response to the first politically motivated ethnic/land clashes in the 1990s. My team developed gender and peace building community training modules that we implemented across Kenya. This work later led me to conduct workshops with other theatre and development practitioners in Africa, Europe and the Middle East.

I embarked on a Masters degree in Gender Studies in 2005. It was refreshing to engage with the theory and praxis of African feminists, alongside mentors at the University of Cape Town's African Gender Institute (AGI). During my studies, I joined one of the few feminist theatre collectives in South Africa – The Mother tongue Project. At Mother tongue I helped develop an applied theatre programme. We worked in partnership with a Kenyan organisation exploring contemporary rites of passage for young women. The project looked at the ways that femininity is constructed in the traditions of inner city settlements. We also piloted a project on the intersections between violence against women and HIV/AIDS in one of South Africa's largest black townships, Khayelitsha. A third project focused on women refugees in Cape Town, exploring xenophobia, trafficking and integration. All of these processes culminated in full theatre productions and were used as advocacy tools by the organisations that we collaborated with.

I am now pursuing Doctoral studies at the AGI and received a Steve Biko Leadership Fellowship to support this. My current research focuses on the practice of "wife inheritance" amongst the Luo in Kenya. I am fascinated by the binaries of culture, tradition, modernity and the constructions of femininity in Africa today. I continue to be involved in civil society activism on women's rights and believe in fusing academic research and "practical" activism. I am inspired by consistency and I strive to be consistent in what I do, what I say, and how I live my life. Feminism is a continuous journey for me.



Nigeria/United Kingdom

'Funmi (Oluwafunmilayo) Olonisakin

I have worked for many years in the field of international security, a field populated largely by male experts and often dominated by male-led military and security establishments. I head a policy research unit at Kings College London on conflict, security and development, direct a peace and security Fellowship programme for African women and teach a Masters course on African Security. I was the first African woman to receive a PhD in War Studies from King's College London. I have chosen to work in this field in the hope of contributing to filling critical knowledge gaps particularly on peace and security in Africa. One consequence of this choice is the opportunity to contribute to the women, peace and security agenda.

I call myself a feminist because I promote and defend the rights of women to realise their fullest potential, free from the oppression of patriarchy in all its forms. I also contribute to efforts to create spaces for the development of that potential. The work is by no means easy. We face the re-engineering and reinforcement of patriarchy by religious fundamentalisms, not least Christian fundamentalism. We need to know more, do more research and build a base or rigorous intellectual understanding of Africa's experience. As feminists we also need to sustain healthy self-critique and focus on the pursuit of excellence in all our endeavours. We should not shy away from a systematic engagement with formal processes.

I have aimed to make my own contributions through creating a fellowship programme that offers opportunities for young African women to competently and confidently articulate feminist ideas for change in order to champion change in the male dominated spaces that shape their lives. The programme exposes African women to current thinking and national, regional and international institutions involved in tackling conflict, peace and security in Africa. The fellowship will soon be incorporated into the activities of a new initiative that I helped found called the African Leadership Centre, based at Kenyatta University in Nairobi. I have worked in the United Nations system and in the academy and see the need for more engagement by African feminists in both. We need to promote participation of self-identified feminists in strategic political, social and economic institutions. Simultaneously, we need to strengthen our collective knowledge building and the effective dissemination of that knowledge. And finally, we need to help cultivate a critical mass of young African feminists for leadership.

As a scholar, mentor and activist I am constantly inspired by seeing the incredible talent that exists in the next generation of African feminist leaders and witnessing unfolding opportunities for them to unleash that talent and potential!



Grace Idaehor Osakue | Nigeria

A teacher by profession, I am a feminist by choice and a sexuality educator by vocation. I am co-founder of Girls' Power Initiative (GPI) Nigeria a feminist, youth development organisation whose activities I co-ordinate in Edo State; Country Co-ordinator of the International Reproductive Rights Research Action Group (IRRRAG) in Nigeria; Principal of Itohan Girls Grammar School - an all girls Senior High School in Benin City, and the Secretary of Ikpoba Okha Local Government Chapter of the All Nigeria Confederation of Principals of Secondary schools (ANCOPSS).

I am a feminist and I live it in my beliefs, passion, daily actions and work. My feminist consciousness began when I was dissatisfied with the sharing of my father's estate by my uncles according to a tradition that did not recognise that my sisters and I existed simply because we are females. I decided there and then to work to end that tradition and all such practices that put us down as women. Membership of Women in Nigeria (WIN) which I joined that same year (1983) gave me the platform for both training and actions to make a difference in women's lives. Ten years later in 1993 I took the step further in co-founding Girls Power Initiative in order to engage girls at a young age as advocates for social justice, increase the numbers of young feminists and assure there are new and younger generations of feminists to continue the work after us.

As feminists, we need to keep living the talk. We do face misunderstanding from men and women around our feminist politics. We also face conservatism in political structures which makes our work of securing equality difficult. In conjunction with others, I have invested in working with policy makers and gate keepers around sensitive issues in order to create a conducive environment for the change we desire and work for to take root, mature and spread.

We can help build the feminist movement in Nigeria and in Africa by encouraging more interactions amongst African feminists to learn about what we are doing across the continent. The internet is one medium for doing this. We need to see more national feminist forums and feminist training institutes during major conferences on the continent.

I draw inspiration from the enthusiasm and actions of the girls that I work with and the feedback from the positive communities we work in. My family is also a major source of inspiration not only by the support they give me but by their words and action which show that they are also living the talk with me. I look at my granddaughter and see the beginning of even another generation of feminists in my lineage which makes me feel more energised.



Irene Ovonji-Odida | Uganda

My path to feminism was by a long route, grounded in my family background and upbringing, but also honed by the friendships that I made. Born the fourth daughter, but following the only boy, I was nevertheless my father's favourite. His support gave me the confidence to believe in myself and not see myself as inferior to boys in any way. My mother too was a strong though retiring woman. She supported our family for many years by tailoring after my father was fired from the Cabinet for opposing Idi Amin's policies, and gave me a powerful female role model. However my full induction to feminism was in the second year of law school at Makerere University, during a course on family law. The then lecturer, Dr Khidu Makubuya, taught the course in an innovative way that forced one to think and question the law and its basis. For example he would say, "When a man and woman marry, in law the two become one - the man!". It made me sit up and think- but if they become the man, where does the woman go? I realised that the woman disappeared! Throughout law school I became a serious debater, taking on the male students who were very fond of teasing and harassing female law students - we were only about nine in my class of sixty students.

I have been fortunate that I was given tools - an analytical mind and knowledge of the law- with which to work for justice. I have been able to use my work in law reform for this cause, and have contributed over the years to the work of transforming laws and policies, while also teaching and providing practical support to women through legal aid. I joined the Uganda Law Reform Commission in 1994. While there I coordinated the Domestic Relations Project (on family law reform), initiated a domestic violence project and worked on domestic and family land co-ownership. During that period I was member of the Uganda Constituent Assembly Commission which managed the 1995 constitution-drafting process in Uganda. I did considerable research and outreach with the women's movement during the that time to ensure clauses on women's human rights were included in the revised Constitution. In 2000 I became the first Legal Director in the Directorate of Ethics and Integrity, Office of the President, before I was elected as a Member of the East African Legislative Assembly in 2001, where I served for five years. While in that position I spearheaded initiatives to increase involvement of legislators in World Trade Organisation negotiations, to increase transparency and representation of constituencies from the global south, and better link official delegations and non-governmental representatives from Africa.

Although I continue to work in and with the government, I remain connected to civil society movements and initiatives for women's rights in Uganda and more broadly Africa. I have been motivated on this journey by the commitment that I saw and mentoring that I got from my older sisters in the law. I hate injustice. I am a fighter and injustice makes me fight for rights.



Temitayo Abosedo Oyedemi | Nigeria

I live in Lagos, Nigeria where I work as a Programme Associate for Positive Action for Treatment Access (PATA), a non governmental organisation working to ensure that every individual has access to treatment education and every HIV infected person can access quality, affordable, ethical and humane treatment which will empower them to take charge of their lives and health. At PATA I co-facilitate the only support group of young professionals living with HIV in Lagos. I also coordinate production of a weekly HIV education and treatment literacy programme called "In Moments Like These" which broadcasts on local television. With my team I conduct treatment literacy in a range of places including churches and schools.

I started working on HIV/AIDS and women issues in 2004 after testing positive for HIV in 2000 and surviving a rape experience in 1999 as an undergraduate. I started as a volunteer at a Nigerian HIV treatment centre and have since worked as a counselor providing group and individual counseling. I have been involved in providing home-based care and support services to women living with HIV. I have also participated in various print and electronic media programs advocating for the rights of women living with HIV in Nigeria. In my various talks and facilitations at training sessions for young women, I have spoken on the need for the provision of post exposure prophylaxis (PEP) and education of women on the availability of services for rape survivors. Since then I have been able to counsel women on how to take charge of their lives.

I call myself a feminist because I am of the strong belief that women should be given their rightful place in society, and not reduced to an object of ridicule. As a feminist I am motivated by stories of women who have excelled and have tried to make commendable impacts in their societies.

In the African context, we contend with unfair cultural beliefs that a woman has no say in what happens in her life. This has also made many women feel that they are powerless and that nothing can be done to salvage their situation. It is important for us to share and use our own life experiences to draw out cogent reasons why a woman should be given her rightful place and full respect in society.

I look forward to see women and women groups become strong advocates on gender-based violence, sexuality and reproductive health and rights of women living with HIV in Nigeria, and for women's groups and networks to influence policies at local and national levels. This will make a big difference in my work because it will help demystify HIV/AIDS and strengthen the place of women in our communities.



Mary Sandasi | Zimbabwe

I am an HIV/AIDS, gender and human rights activist. I came from the background of a classroom teacher to development worker with women and girls on HIV/AIDS, and I'm currently the Director of the Women and AIDS Support Network in Zimbabwe. I train, mobilise and advocate around the rights and health concerns of positive women, access to female-controlled prevention, and the broader issue of women participating meaningfully in decision-making in the public realm, and in their own lives.

I am a feminist because I was groomed to value myself as an individual and have managed to keep my identity through and through. I have been married twice but kept my birth name, going against all pressures of marriage and identity. I have always perceived myself as a whole. I have refused to be seen as a sex object or to service men rather choose my own partners. I am not inferior to my brothers or any man. I belong to a movement that fights for justice and recognition for women. Some will say that feminism is not an African woman's struggle, but the truth is that it is, there are feminists in African history/ herstory who have done good work for their communities.

If one gets involved in feminist struggles, I believe that the entry point should be one's identity, one's name. Look at the transaction of marriage- in many cases women take on their husband's surname. Some have been stuck with those names even when divorced. There is no law that says when you get into partnership you must change your name or identity, yet most of us do without recognising it as a form of oppression. This is how women are blocked from access to and control over resources.

It has become quite apparent that there is a need to create a radical person who can stand up for herself and enjoy her rights by challenging institutions and socialised oppression. At my workplace we have young and older women. We walk them through a process of self-actualisation to help them move away from this patriarchal way of living with men controlling and heading everything. It is an important process that enables women to make decisions about themselves, what they want to be and how they want to deal with their health. We help them ask- how do we want to relate to our sexuality and sexual identity? When do I want to have sex, with whom, where and when? How do I prevent sexually transmitted infections and pregnancy? Who decides for whom?

I have learnt a great deal from the experiences and wisdom of older women around how they are managing to cope with HIV/AIDS. I have lived my very normal life carrying all kinds of labels like a "rebel" and "single parent". I am a role model for some, and I am proud to have given that legacy to my four children.



Nana Darkoa Sekyiamah | Ghana/ United Kingdom

I am a feminist, an African woman, a blogger, a sister, a daughter, a writer, a life coach and a trainer. I treasure and hold my multiple identities because that gives me the freedom to pursue my multiple interests and enables me to be who I want to be. I value creativity, independence and happiness. I indulge my creativity through my writing, nurture my independence and prioritise indulging in fun, recreational activities.

My professional life as a Programme Officer for Fundraising and Communications with the African Women's Development Fund in Ghana allows me to marry my passions, beliefs and skills. I believe that all women have the right to a joyful, fulfilling and rewarding existence free from the socio-cultural limitations often placed upon women. My job allows me to work towards the realisation of this vision for all African women.

In my life I have been inspired by the achievements of women from all across the globe including the African-American writer/lecturer/poet Maya Angelou, the Ghanaian professor/writer Ama Ata Aidoo and South African activist Pregs Govender. Through her writings Maya Angelou has taught me the importance of perseverance, bravery and creativity. Ama Ata Aidoo is an inspirational writer to many Ghanaians and in person is warm and generous of spirit. I admire Pregs for her "love and courage". The qualities I admire in my heroines are those qualities that I continually aim to bring to all that I do in my life.

One of my current passions is documenting the lives of African women. I think more African women need to write and document their lives and herstories. Those of us who can read and write have the additional responsibilities of not only documenting our lives but the lives of our mothers, aunties and grandmothers who may not be able to capture their life stories. My grand aunt never had the opportunity to gain an education simply because she is a woman. However her brother, my grandfather, had the opportunity to gain an education, travel the world and write his story. One of my goals is to continue capturing my grand aunt's herstory and to publish her biography.

Recently I have also been very interested in creating a repository of knowledge on the diverse sexualities of African women. Too little is known about women's sexuality and even less is known about the diverse sexualities of African women. I think African women need safe spaces to learn and share knowledge about our diverse sexualities. I believe the anonymity of the internet may be able to provide one such space which is why I have started a blog on African women's sexualities www.adventuresfrom.com.



Luta M. Shaba | Zimbabwe

I am a feminist lawyer, policy analyst and Executive Director of a Harare-based non-governmental organisation called The Women's Trust. I provide training in leadership and personal empowerment with the main focus on capacitating women to engage with governance processes and attain decision-making positions. I have published the *Power Stepping Pocket Book* for girls as my personal contribution to encouraging young women to think about power, leadership and change. I have also published *Secrets of a Woman's Soul*, a novel based on the true story of my mother's death from AIDS, and my experience of living positively.

The Women's Trust led a massive and successful national campaign to get women to stand as candidates and vote for other women in the historic March 2008 elections in Zimbabwe. We have documented our experiences of the "Women Can Do It" Campaign in an information-sharing book titled, *Lessons in Advocacy*. We are poised to be the regional centre for leadership and governance in training Southern Africa.

I call myself a feminist because I believe in women's power and I am passionate about the need for women to realise their full potential and for society to accept women as full human beings and citizens. I feel privileged to be part of the band of "Mad Women" that have shaped social reality and continue to do so, knowing that what I do today is contributing to a new world order where women no longer have to argue for the legitimacy of their existence.

The growth of religious fundamentalism is one of our biggest threats. There has been a renewal of the "good woman syndrome" (i.e. promoting a very narrow definition of what it means to be a respectable woman), and it is more difficult to manage because this time around educated women are leading it. They are appropriating feminist language for their own use with words like empowerment, leadership, spirituality, development and wealth creation. In my own work I use *The Woman's Bible*, a text from the 19th century which analyses the bias in religious teachings. It is part of the leadership curriculum at The Women's Trust, where we use it as a tool to discuss how religion and religious teaching has been misinterpreted and used against us as women.

A second threat is that political crises in countries like Zimbabwe have forced an almost complete focus on so-called bread and butter issues, and have meant that strategic concerns for women (including accessing safe abortions, sexual rights, rights concerns for women living with HIV) are deemed unimportant. We need to challenge this as we work on strengthening the feminist movement, ensuring that we stay networked through collaborative activities and information sharing on regional, continental and global events.



Hilda Tadria | Uganda

Throughout my life I have worked for positive changes in the lives of African women. As a young school girl, I remember going along with my mother to teach reading, writing and nutrition to women in her community-based groups. When I first joined Makerere University as a Lecturer, I was concerned that the young female students did not have access to any counselling services. Along with a professional counsellor, I worked hard to address this, until the University agreed to establish and institutionalise a counselling service for all students. In 1985 I founded Action for Development (ACFODE), out of my concern for the marginalisation of women at all levels. For the rest of my professional life, I have focused on working towards transforming policies and programmes to address gender inequalities and women's empowerment. In 1995, I began a dialogue with a colleague at the Pre-Beijing conference in Dakar, about the difficulties of accessing donor support for our collective activist work. We concluded that we needed to start a fund to support African women's activism. On this journey we met another woman with the same passion and mission- and together created the African Women's Development Fund (AWDF). The reality of this fund is that it touches, and in different ways transforms, lives of women across the continent.

I recently retired from the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, where I worked as Regional Advisor on Economic Empowerment of Women. I have since returned to Uganda and established the Mentoring and Empowerment Programme for Young Women (MEMPOROW), an organisation that focuses on enhancing social survival skills for young women. We organise training programmes for young girls and women aged between 15 and 25 years, hold a monthly intergenerational dialogue between young women and older gender equality activists and feminists, and organise gender sensitisation workshops for public and private institutions.

In all areas of my life I uphold values that are feminist values. For decades my work has focused on transforming gender relations and especially those that perpetuate the subordination of women. I believe in women's leadership and work towards seeing women in decision-making and leadership positions. We still contend with entrenched negative patriarchal values, most of which are an imposition from colonial rule, religious fundamentalism, and persistent undemocratic processes that sustain abuse of women's rights in many of our countries. All of this demands a feminist response.

In my personal life, I try to make sure that I identify the patriarchal norms and practices and refuse to be guided by them. I make it clearly known that I am a feminist, so that there is no debate about who I am, and in this way, most people I interact with know what I stand for, what I can and can't accept. Together, and through greater networking and dialoguing, we can empower more women. We also must be more engaged across different generations, and keep including young women to ensure rejuvenation and replenishment. Each of us needs to make the personal commitment to this work of transforming women's lives, and to walking the talk.



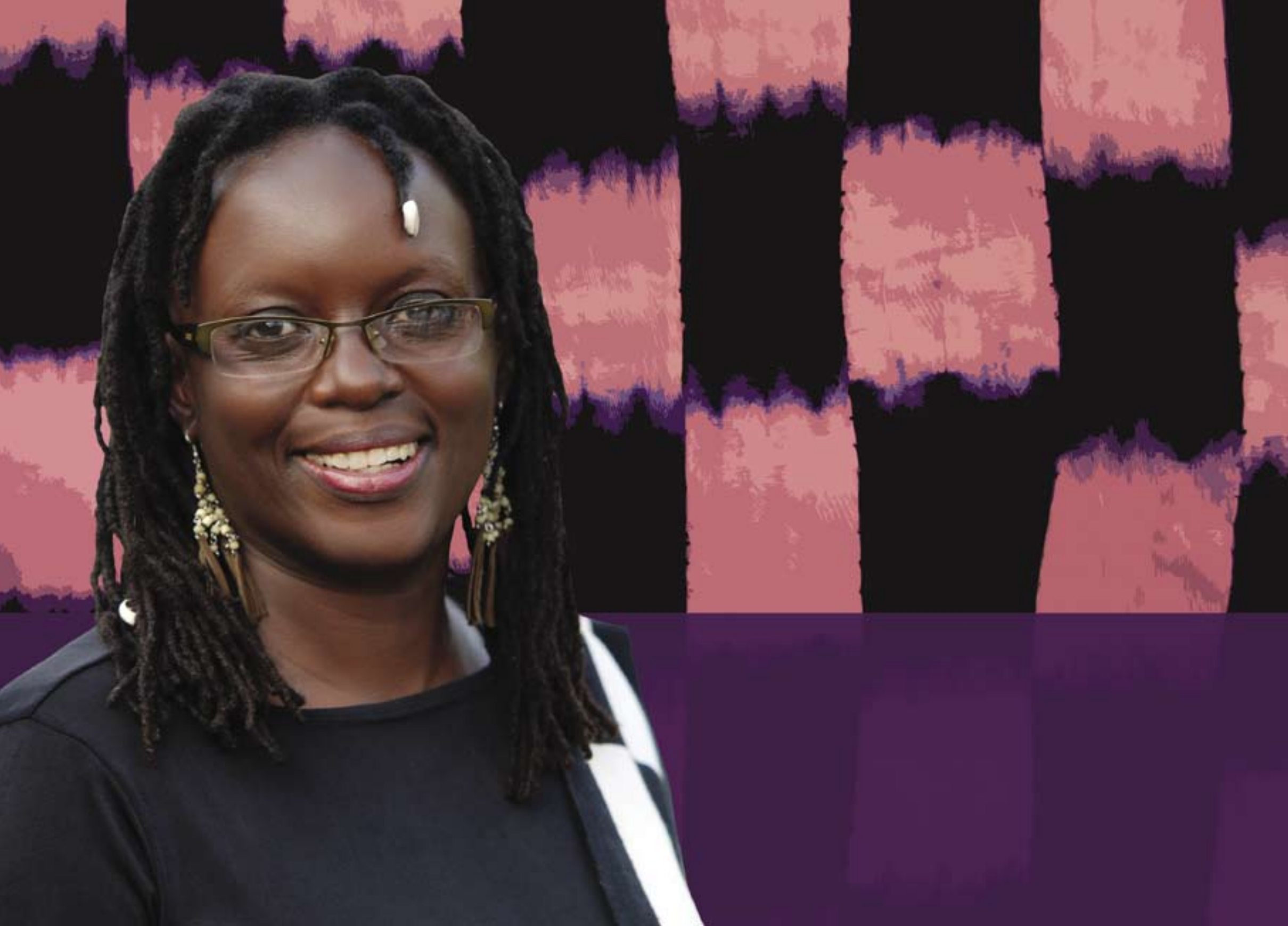
Mabel Ule Ngoe Takona | Cameroon/ Kenya

I am a Cameroonian but I live in Nairobi, Kenya, where I work with ActionAid International in the Africa regional office as the Africa regional coordinator for HIV and AIDS. I manage the regional HIV/ AIDS activities and collaborate with a range of stakeholders to advocate for the right to life and dignity for people, particularly women and girls, living with and affected by the pandemic .

Injustice and discrimination are two things I detest and always challenge. In my private and public space, I have refused to accept cultural norms of what is masculine and feminine which our patriarchal society has for so long used to ensure that women are marginalised and prevented from achieving their full potentials. From the perspective of HIV/AIDS these inequalities have made women and girls more vulnerable to infection and bear the brunt of the pandemic. Ensuring women's issues are addressed from prevention to care and support is the main focus of my work.

The term "feminism" is still largely misunderstood in Africa, with many people still perceiving it as a foreign concept. Others have used this excuse to negatively label and discredit the dedicated sisters who have committed to challenging the status quo and to defending the rights of all women. As a result, while there are many African women who struggle to challenge men's power in their day to day life and in their own little ways, few are willing to call themselves feminists. Also as women make gains in challenging patriarchal power, some men have responded by trying to re-entrench their power. We can see that in the whole shift to a discourse on "male involvement" and working with men. This is moving resources away from women-focused projects and putting them back, once again, in the hands of men.

I am unapologetic about what I do and why I do what I do. Working in the field of HIV/AIDS you can justify the health or service arguments using statistics. Yet we still find ourselves having to justify why we need to challenge patriarchy if we are to win the war on HIV and AIDS- as if the statistics don't show us that more women are infected than men, or that women and girls are taking on the burden of care and support work, often at great cost to their own well-being. In my experience, mobilising positive women and linking them up with other women's rights activists and structures, has been life transforming. Women have found their personal will to stand up and be counted by refusing to be victims and mere spectators in a world of inequality. They realise that rights are never given - they are claimed. Every achievement in advancing the rights of women, however small, is cause for celebration and fuel to continue the fight.



Sylvia Tamale | Uganda

I am an academic, a lawyer, sociologist and feminist activist. I am also an Associate Professor and currently the Dean of Law at Makerere University, the first woman to ever hold that position in Uganda. I graduated with a Bachelor of Laws from Makerere University, a Masters in Law from Harvard University and a PhD in Sociology and Feminist Studies from the University of Minnesota. I call myself a feminist because the term embodies my political resistance to patriarchal/imperialist ideology, institutions and structures. In 2003, an end-of-year poll conducted by the *New Vision*—Uganda's biggest daily newspaper—voted me “The Worst Woman of the Year” because of my vocal and “radical” support for sexual rights. I made a Worst-Woman-of-the-Year badge of honour that I wear with a lot of pride and dignity!

Feminists in Africa today have to contend with a resurgence of cultural, economic and religious fundamentalisms, which represent patriarchal/capitalist extremism. These are protected by repressive patriarchal states that will stop at nothing to protect male power and privilege. In my own work I have tried to address these challenges first by trying to transform the consciousness (and hopefully the lives) of young people in the lecture room, in my own family (I have two young sons) and in various public spaces. Secondly, my activist sisters and I have confronted patriarchal oppression and discourses through courts of law, research and the media.

We have successfully challenged oppressive and discriminatory laws in the Ugandan Constitutional Court regarding women's rights in divorce, adultery and inheritance legislations. It was also through court room activism that we won a landmark ruling in the High Court affirming the fundamental rights of Ugandan lesbians to privacy, property and protection from torture.

The task of challenging an all-powerful patriarchal system is daunting but certainly not insurmountable. In order to succeed in this endeavour, feminists need to actively participate in economic and political processes and all levels of public offices. We also need to sharpen our conceptual analysis of hegemonic patriarchal institutions and its various structures of power including in sexuality, law, culture, religion, media and language. And feminists in Africa need to regularly replenish their political and personal energies, as well as their ranks for activism without passion soon dissipates into mere rhetorical prop.

Despite the challenges I remain certain that change can happen. I take inspiration from nature, books, children, optimism and justice and I am always uplifted by the words in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights...”



Mariam Tendou Kamara | Republic of Guinea

I was born in Liberia to a mother from the Democratic Republic of Congo and father from Guinea. I trained and worked as a pharmacist in the United States of America specialising in HIV/AIDS. In 2005 I raised funds to travel back to Guinea on an exploratory mission to assess civil society work around women and girls and progress in responding to HIV/AIDS. As a result of this research I co-founded a non-governmental organisation called WAFRICA which aims to improve the social, economic and professional status of women and girls, particularly those infected and affected by HIV/AIDS. I returned to live in Conakry in 2006 and have put my energies towards mobilising women and young people to dialogue around issues affecting their lives, and to building an effective response to HIV/AIDS. One of the initiatives I pioneered was a social dialogue platform which enables around 150 people to meet and discuss an issue of importance to them. These platforms are being broadcast on national television and radio and are contributing to national debates on equality and on development. They also give space for women and young people to claim their voice and express their opinions and ideas to a national audience. I am also involved in the government-led response to HIV/AIDS as a member of the Country Coordinating Mechanism for the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. In 2008 I was appointed to the Cabinet of the Minister of Youth Employment as a national advisor.

As a feminist I fight for the cause of women and girls. I define my feminism as moving from ideology to action. I am a militant who has her convictions, personal experience as an African woman and professional experience as a health worker. With these I fight for the advancement and enlightenment of women, in particular illiterate woman and girls. As feminists we need to work on communicating our words, struggles and progress to the women we serve at the grassroots. We also need to make clear that we are feminist as well as African women who are proud of our heritage. We need to challenge the completely false perception that we are following “westernised” beliefs. Communication is the central tool of our movement. As Africans we face a communication problem as Anglophone and Francophone activists often find it hard to collaborate and share information. We can address this by always providing interpretation and making an effort to translate materials into relevant languages.

Through my own activism, I wish to give meaning to the sacrifices made by our mothers and those who lived before them, they often had to accept the unequal condition of women as the norm. Through my work I am contributing to building of a more just and equitable society for future generations of African women and girls.



Una Kumba Thompson | Liberia

Many years back, I called myself a political activist. I desired to see change in governance and was part of a student movement advocating for a government that would be democratic, inclusive and non-discriminatory and a government that would bring about socio-economic opportunities, political participation and prosperity for the masses. Those were the days when I was told by my parents that as a woman I could not study political science or get involved in political activities as these were seen to be the preserve of men. I challenged that idea and dared to do what I believed was my right to choose and pursue my dreams as an individual.

I realised as time went by that I was not only a political activist, but a women's rights activist. I came to understand that as a woman I was no less of a human being because of my biological make up, and that simply being a woman was no reason for me to be held in bondage by rules, regulations, social norms and values created and perpetuated by men. Today, I call myself a feminist because I believe in the rights of women and their full enjoyment of those rights without any strings attached. I believe that women have equal rights above, on, and beneath the earth, and are wonderfully created just as men are.

I currently serve as the Chief Executive Officer of an organisation called Women of Liberia Peace Network (WOLPNET). My work with WOLPNET began in 2006 upon leaving an appointed assignment as Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs for Administration. My desire to contribute to the development of women in a socio-economic and political context at a community level propelled me to commit my efforts and skills to building a strong women-based institution through which women's rights, issues and concerns can be addressed. Many things are easier said than done, but conviction in a cause has made it possible for me to walk the talk. I motivate and help women daily to follow their true feelings.

We are still contending with a world where the position of women as defined, charted and cultivated by society places us in a subservient role to men. I strongly believe that this is a fundamental cause of the under-development, marginalisation, exclusion, discrimination, and human right abuses of women as well as the continuous and increasing social, economic and political crisis of our continent. It is alarming to think that in the 21st century a woman in Africa is still considered a rebellious, unwomanly, unstable, a bad influence and an unfit mother and wife if she dares to question the status quo of male dominance, and demand equal rights.



Isatou Touray | Gambia

I was born in Banjul where I received my education. I initially trained as a teacher, and was posted in various parts of the country, including the rural areas. I observed that women were working for over 18 hours and walking for long distances to collect firewood with their children on their back. As a home craft teacher, I worked with them on activities such as improving family health through improved nutritional education and on building skills for income generation. I realised that these women were also exploited and that their concerns were not taken into consideration in most development activities. I saw them being mobilised to attend workshops, and then have nothing reported back to them. They would come to me asking, "What came out of the promise made by the Ministry?"

From that point I committed myself to grassroots activism. I engage communities through awareness raising and training. I use information derived from the field to engage the state and call for accountability. I now belong to several networks, and the experiences I gain from these global initiatives are disseminated to empower communities, decision makers and legislators to advance the feminist agenda on development. I have also conducted doctoral research. I now work as Executive Director of the Gambian Committee on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Girls (GAMCOTRAP), a women's rights organisation that I co-founded in 1992 to promote sexual and reproductive health and rights, and work to eliminate Female Genital Mutilation.

I call myself a feminist because I believe in the power and soul of women. I don't have to act like a man or manifest macho tendencies to be accepted in certain contexts. I feel that my rights form part of the whole, and what I chose to be should not be the reason for discrimination. I have seen how women are subordinated in various cultures, traditions and religions. I have seen and experienced the inconsistencies of interpretations about issues affecting my life and how these come to be different for men. All these experiences have accumulated over the years and made me a feminist. If feminism is about liberation of women I have chosen to do only that. If feminism is about women's self-determination and to regain my integrity, I have chosen to live it! I am a feminist activist because I would like to see a transformation that gives both men and women equal opportunities to self-actualise. I want to be part of creating a world free of discrimination, a world that recognizes diversity to enable us to live in peace and harmony with each other. Of late I have taken to writing about our experiences and documenting our work for posterity and public consumption. We need to leave a legacy that is remembered in the future.



Mary Wandia | Kenya

I am an African feminist. I became a feminist shortly after joining the regional organization the African Women's Development and Communications Network (FEMNET) in 1999 where I worked as a Programme Officer advocating gender mainstreaming in the transition from the Organisation of African Unity to the African Union (AU) as well as trade and financing for development. I grew up in a community where violence against women and marginalisation of single women was the norm. As a child of a single parent I grew up with a low self-esteem that emanated from the isolation by our neighbours, classmates and teachers because I did not bear a man's surname. Feminism is the tool that revealed to me that my mother's decision to give me her surname was a radical form of feminist resistance to patriarchal domination. I remain inspired by her activism. Working in a feminist organisation marked the start of a journey of learning how patriarchy had controlled my life and that of the community that surrounded me all my life. It is that background that motivates and sustains my struggle to ensure that I contribute to women's empowerment and to reject stereotypes that try to minimise the status of single parents and girls just because they do not bear a man's name or live with one under one roof. Since then I found a home in the feminist movement where I continue to be nurtured by feminists. I also do my best to mentor other young women that I have had the opportunity to work with.

For the past ten years I have contributed to women's rights advocacy work at the national, sub-regional and regional levels in Africa. Following the post elections crisis and violence in Kenya in 2008 I helped form the Kenya Women's Coalition for Sustainable Peace which was a key forum for mobilising Kenyan women to advocate for the protection of women's rights in mediation process and post-conflict phase. I am also one of the co-founding members of the Solidarity for African Women's Rights (SOAWR) that advocates for the implementation of the AU Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa. I am the former Women's Rights Coordinator at the Africa Secretariat of ActionAid International in Nairobi, and am currently working as the Pan Africa Gender Justice and Governance Lead at Oxfam's Pan Africa Policy Programme.

I am very optimistic that the African Union is a viable institution for promoting and advancing women's rights. It is still male dominated, however women have begun to challenge this. The first achievement was including the principle of gender equality in the AU Constitutive Act and election of Commissioners. Our next battle was for a legal framework to safeguard women's rights. We now have a women's rights protocol that goes even further than international women's rights instruments in aspects such as reproductive rights, rights of elderly women and women in conflict. There is a lot of work in the years ahead that will demand our creativity, passion and commitment as African feminists to ensure that our issues are entrenched in all the AU's processes, protocols and practices. I am delighted to be part of that struggle.



L. Muthoni Wanyeki | Kenya

I am a political scientist who works on development communication, gender and human rights. I currently work as the Executive Director of the Kenya Human Rights Commission (KHRC). Prior to this I was the Executive Director of the African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET), a regional feminist network.

I have chosen the political identity of "feminist" because I believe in my own autonomy, choice and freedom—as well as those of all other women. African women continue to face the denial of autonomy, choice and freedom in all areas of life, alongside an enduring lack of access to and control of all kinds of opportunities and resources. All too often inequalities are justified on the basis of culture and/or religion. We continue to contend with an alarming scale of violence against women individually and collectively. In the spirit of feminist politics, I have chosen to work (both politically and professionally) on all of these issues.

To build African feminist activism, we need to insist on ethics, and accountability for breach of ethics, within the African feminist movement. We need to support the African feminist movement with resources of all kinds, including the voluntary offering of our own energies, intellect and time. We should also encourage constructive criticism and debate on our analysis and our strategies.

I think we all begin because we're angry at what we see around us: the gulfs between women and men between the impoverished and the enriched between Africa, the underdeveloped world and the overdeveloped world. We find ways to name those gulfs and to understand them. "Feminism" is not just a political identity in that sense. It's a way of naming and understanding those gulfs. And I have other political identities, ways of naming and understanding those gulfs that intersect with feminism- dependency theory, pan-Africanism and socialism. But anger without love, for the humanity and potential in all of us, isn't enough.

And so we need inspiration. I am inspired by people in all fields who devote energy, intellect and time to honing their skills and excelling. I am inspired by African artistic work and culture, past and contemporary, and by African intellectual work and thought. I am motivated by collectivity and solidarity, and by love.

That love must also be- deeply and fundamentally- for ourselves. We become cynical and de-sensitised, we hurt and we tire. And so we must learn to take care of ourselves as well. I take care of myself now by returning to exercise. I used to be a competitive swimmer, but I now go to the gym. I've started tae kwon do again. I've done two sprint and two full Olympic triathlons. I try to eat well and sleep enough. By doing so, I'm also being an African feminist, one who loves myself enough to go beyond my own survival, and to be healthy enough to enjoy community in all its forms.

What I want for myself and for all African women, is autonomy, choice and freedom, health, and happiness.



Korto Reeves Williams | Liberia

I live in a country which *The Economist* magazine described in 2003 as “the worst place in the world to live”. Now we have made history by electing the first female president in Africa. These descriptions eliminate every other country except Liberia.

I work as the Women’s Rights Coordinator of ActionAid Liberia, meaning that I am the one who angers people, despite my smile, as I bring up taboo topics, demand women’s rights, and hold no apology for this stance. This responsibility entails working with community women on one day, and sitting in a room filled with old men who say “only a virgin can be raped” on another. I am a poetess too and have used poetry to heal my war wounds and exorcise stubborn demons out of my life.

Liberia is a deeply patriarchal society, male dominated and inequitable. Women suffer daily violations of their rights as if it were normal. I come from the background and belief that this anomaly should be deconstructed and challenged to move ahead. In doing this, women must have the ideological and spiritual drive to feel strong in their position. It is in feminism that I have found answers and clarity of purpose. It is in feminism that I have found the description and structure that certifies my feelings, thoughts and outrageous anger. I call myself a feminist because I have no other description for my beliefs.

While working, I also completed graduate school, and wrote a research paper whose premise focuses on the inherent need for feminism in women’s struggles. I will use this document to share information on Liberian society and how the mainstream perceives women contribution to social change. This analysis, I believe, will help both young and old women value feminist reasoning and positioning.

We have a way to go in understanding our united strength, deconstructing the myth of male supremacy and the practice of patriarchy. In Liberia, feminism is considered a derogatory ideology. How do we share the joys and values of this movement that breathes life into our being? Only by lifting the cover from our eyes-male and female- will we know that the world is different and changing.

To build the feminist movement in Africa, we need more women to identify openly as feminists. We need to support documentation of feminist literature. And we need to hold feminist forums nationally as a means of outreaching and being more visible as feminists. Whenever I encounter the intellect of a woman, ready to challenge falsehoods that violate our rights I am inspired. I am humbled when African sisters provide this intellectual ambience!



Shamillah Wilson | South Africa

I run my own enterprise Sowilo Leadership Solutions, as well as consult on women's rights, HIV/AIDS and sexual rights. I am a feminist because I believe that human beings have the potential to be great – not based on anything but their humanity. Knowing that structural inequalities prevent women from accessing their basic rights, needs, safety and security, all of which ultimately hamper their self-actualisation, is enough reason to participate in feminist activities. I am one of those busy feminists who believe that my activism transcends all spheres of activity within society. One of my major passions is entrepreneurship, as I believe this is an area that we as feminists still have not engaged in enough as a creative entry-point into economic empowerment. If we harness our creativity into creating alternative economic paradigms, I believe we would have the basis for funding our revolution. After all, we have to model the alternatives instead of staying with just critiquing the status quo.

To me, feminism is about how you live your life. It is not about the separation of personal and professional. In my personal life I constantly try to challenge my thinking, my actions and how I practice feminist principles. In my professional life I bring it into everything I do – relationships with colleagues, my own relationship to power and also the outcomes of the work.

Despite a considerable history of feminist thought and activism in Africa, feminism is still seen by many as “unAfrican”. Struggles for women's liberation and emancipation are continuously undermined by fundamentalist agendas and misogynist attitudes. There is also the fact that feminists are a minority, not aided by the fact that many women still are not comfortable calling themselves feminists. We also face a lack of cohesion among feminist movements, amplified by fragmenting forces.

As we move forward, we need to work on popularising feminism among younger women and grassroots women, and to make feminist language accessible to them. We also need to become more visible and coordinated in response to issues and trends. There is a need to celebrate the achievement and honest engagements that we have made to date. And we need to ensure that we take care of ourselves at the physical level, the emotional, and the spiritual levels. All of these feminist values need to translate into real strategies for addressing the financial concern of ourselves and our feminist sisters that we have long neglected.

Despite all the challenges, I continue to be inspired by solidarity, innovation, and seeing people being able to change their own realities.



Everjoice J. Win | Zimbabwe

I am a Zimbabwean, and while I have worked in many countries I always regard Zimbabwe as my home. I have been an active member of the struggle for women's rights and recognition in Zimbabwe, Southern Africa and beyond. In Zimbabwe I have worked with the Women's Action Group and Women in Law and Development in Africa (WILDAF). I have also helped found a number of other women's organisations.

I currently work as the International Head of the Women's Rights Theme at ActionAid International, based at their head office in Johannesburg, South Africa. In this role I oversee the broad strategic direction of the organisation's programs and campaigns on women's rights.

I call myself a feminist because, well, what else is there to call oneself? Let's look at the options: a gender activist (what is that)? A development worker (sounds like something to do with banking)? A human rights activist (but which humans)? Feminist just says what needs to be said. It communicates the exact "attitude" that needs to be communicated and how far I am prepared to go. On anything.

Many women in Africa fear naming themselves as feminists, which means, by extension, endless apologies and fear of being named. Another problem is the overwhelming tendency to tick boxes, deliver projects, hold events and activities rather than focusing on the long hard political work of transformation. We need to stay true to our vision, in spite of the seemingly intractable practical problems of HIV, conflict, or the food crisis.

I keep asking myself in whatever I do or say – will this change women's lives in the long term? Will this alter power relations? I have been lucky to always work in organisations that enable me to do this. I am able to work with other feminists, take time out to just talk things through and re-strategise. Although I strive to think of the big picture it is important to ensure that the practical interventions remain strategic and speak to feminist values and behaviour.

As a movement we still need to grow our numbers numerically and to build more organisations that define themselves and work as feminists. Related to this is building individual feminist leaders and their leadership skills inside and outside our own organisational "safe zones". And we must not be afraid to take up more "air time" in public spaces and claim our space in the mainstream.

My heart fills with joy when I see a young black woman break out of her shell like a fledgling: growing wings, flying up, up, and away. I laugh when I hear my 14 year old son say very loudly "my mum is a feminist and she is head of women's rights!" And he tries to explain to someone in great detail! I am inspired by very materially poor women that I often meet, but who have a great sense of self and are very clear about their rights. A beautiful heavy African summer downpour on Sunday night followed by intensely beautiful sunshine on Monday morning keeps me going all week!



— | CHARTER OF FEMINIST PRINCIPLES FOR AFRICAN FEMINISTS.

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 'Ifs', 'Buts', 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 center 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.

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-fulfillment 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 incomegenerating 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
- 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-matronising 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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| 18 | Assani- Alabi, Rissi | 72 | Kitunga, Demere | 126 | Okech, Awino |
| 20 | Bello, Mairo V. (Hajiya) | 74 | Kyomya, Macklean | 128 | Olonisakin, 'Funmi (Oluwafunmilayo) |
| 22 | Bukuru, Katana Gégé | 76 | Mabele, Prudence Nobantu | 130 | Osakue, Grace Idaehor |
| 24 | Busia, Abena Pokua Adompim | 78 | Made, Patricia Ann | 132 | Ovonji-Odida, Irene |
| 26 | Butegwa, Christine | 80 | Madunagu, Bene. E. | 134 | Oyedemi, Temitayo Abosede |
| 28 | Butegwa, Florence | 82 | Maiga, Djingarey | 136 | Sandasi, Mary |
| 30 | Chesoni, Atsango N. | 84 | Makan-Lakha, Pravina | 138 | Sekyiamah, Nana Darkoa |
| 32 | Chigudu ,Hope | 86 | Makoni, Betty | 140 | Shaba, Luta M. |
| 34 | Chipembere ,Ennie | 88 | Mallya, Usu Ndeanasia | 142 | Tadria, Hilda |
| 36 | Cisse, Aïssatou | 90 | Mama, Amina | 144 | Takona, Mabel Ule Ngoe |
| 38 | Coker-Appiah, Dorcas | 92 | Maphosa, Tomupeishe Anne | 146 | Tamale, Sylvia |
| 40 | Dieye, Aminata | 94 | Mbilinyi, Marjorie | 148 | Tendou Kamara, Mariam |
| 42 | Dongo, Margaret | 96 | Medar Gould, Sindi | 150 | Thompson, Una Kumba |
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| 46 | Eno, Jeanette | 100 | Mongbo, Setcheme Jeronime M. | 154 | Wandia, Mary |
| 48 | Eshiet, Comfort | 102 | Mtathi, Siphokazi (Sipho) | 156 | Wanyeki, L. Muthoni |
| 50 | Essof, Shereen | 104 | Mugisha, Maude | 158 | Williams, Korto Reeves |
| 52 | Ezelio, Joy Ngozi | 106 | Mukasa, Sarah | 160 | Wilson, Shamillah |
| 54 | Gaye, Rokhaya | 108 | Mukasa, Stella | 162 | Win, Everjoyce J. |
| 56 | Gbowee, Leymah Roberta | 110 | Mukenge, Muadi | | |
| 58 | Govender, Pregaluxmi (Pregs) | 112 | Murungi, Kaari | | |