



SILENCING OUR FEARS AND FEARING OUR SILENCE



A REPORT OF THE 8TH
CONVENING OF THE UGANDA
FEMINIST FORUM

30TH JULY -1ST AUGUST 2019

JINJA, UGANDA



...WE ARE WALKING POTS

BOILING WITH WORDS WE WANT TO SET
FREE

WHEN WALLS FORGET TO LISTEN...

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INTRODUCTION



THE UGANDA FEMINIST FORUM (UFF) IS A TRIBUTE TO THE SHARED DREAMS, HOPES AND ACTIONS BY WOMEN FOCUSED ON BUILDING A VIBRANT FEMINIST FRONT IN UGANDA. UFF WAS INAUGURATED IN 2008, THREE YEARS AFTER DIFFERENT NATIONAL AND REGIONAL CONVERSATIONS BY WOMEN LEADERS.

The key issues were, as they remain: - how to create a feminist space for deepened appreciation of the political, social and economic setbacks that women face and how to enhance the effectiveness of our workings through building a sisterhood anchored in solidarity, respect for diversity, ethical feminist leadership and strong feminist institutions. In light of worrying global, regional and national trends that point to a resurgence of cultural, social, political and economic neo fundamentalisms that could impede what gains have been made in the struggle for women's rights, UFF provides a space for feminists to interrogate and explore new ways of working. Ways that inspire shifts from consciousness or knowledge about women's oppression to a conscientious (active, working, fighting, advocating and striving) to dismantle the pillars of heteropatriarchy that back the oppression of women. These matters have been at the center of previous UFF Fora, the eighth, inclusive. Importantly, UFF is but one tributary that flows into the African Feminist Forum (AFF), a continental collective of African Feminist organising. The AFF was established and convened in 2006 to provide space for feminist organising at continental level. UFF, like other national level feminist fora on the continent serves to guarantee interconnectedness between continental and national level feminist work. The platforms speak to each other, ensuring that collective visioning and solidarity at continental level is anchored in a grassroots appreciation of issues as they manifest in the different national and regional contexts within which feminists

work. In that spirit, the UFF has adopted *The Charter of Feminist Principles for African Feminists*, developed to provide the philosophical, aspirational and principle values that unite Feminists in Africa.

UFF 2019 was held from the 30th July to 1st August 2019 in Jinja under the theme "Silencing our Fears and Fearing our Silences". It was convened in the spirit of encouraging critical inquiry, collective reflection, healing and a rekindled commitment to dismantling patriarchy through a politicisation of *Silence*. The theme was inspired by the writings of Feminist thinker and civil rights activist, Audre Lorde. The convening comprised of about 100 feminist leaders across generations, drawn from across the private sector, civil society, performing arts, mainstream political spaces, academia and the activist arena. The participants brought a wealth of wisdom, knowledge, lived experience and technical expertise in to the space.

Considerably, the 8th convening of the Uganda Feminist Forum marked a herstorical milestone for feminist organising in Uganda. Achieving eight successive gatherings is worth celebrating, as not many African Feminist Fora on the continent have held more than two successive feminist gatherings. That said, there are still many rivers to cross. This momentous achievement for UFF provides a recurring impetus for all to step back and appreciate the different epistemological, material, intellectual, and political struggles that collectively encumber feminist organising in the Global South.



The journey to UFF 2019 commenced with a series of build-up activities. These included a dialogue on Sexual and Gender based Violence at the National Women's Week in October 2018. The UFF working group also hosted a conversation on Sisterhood in December 2018 and in May 2019, Akina Mama wa Afrika (AMwA) issued a call for essays on contemporary socio-political experiences of silencing. These actions created the momentum and energy that gave thrust to the meeting in Jinja. Akina Mama wa Afrika also hosted two conversations on Twitter to engage African feminists in collective discussions on the prevailing context of silence and fear. The conversations sought to enable sisters connect struggles and collectively strategize on solutions to these challenges in the Ugandan and African context.

At its core, the 8th UFF sought to explore the different political, economic and social drivers of silence amongst feminists, the greatest of which is fear. The fear of social stigma, labelling and rejection in the exercise of agency around the contested issues that matter for women's liberation. These include issues like the rights of sexual and gender non-conforming women, the fear of being inarticulate in the scientific language of neoliberal capitalism and its attendant economics, the fear for the lives of our families and associates when women defy apathy and more. These fears lead to self-censorship by feminists, who choose to remain silent, too terrified to organise.

WHAT MADE UFF 2019 DIFFERENT?

That said, UFF 2019 was also unlike previous fora as it included innovations to enhance the sharing and learnings that feminist spaces enable. Notably;

- The presence of feminists from outside of traditional NGO spaces including trade unions, the banking sector, agriculture, film and sports.
- Sharing the space with feminists from different parts of the continent and the global south including India, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Kenya and Rwanda.
- UFF 2019 included learning visits where participants were able to visit and draw inspiration from initiatives undertaken by feminists to make a difference in their communities.

OBJECTIVES

Specifically, the forum sought:-

- To create a safe space for Ugandan feminists to reflect, heal, strategize and re-energize to identify, name and confront fears that lead to silence and inaction.
- To generate new feminist knowledge and pedagogies, elevating women's voices and opinions.
- To document and amplify the movement's herstories in order to increase historical consciousness and remember the contributions of women and people from marginalised groups.
- To further expand and transform the movement into a bedrock of organising and activism.

This report summarises the conversations, questions and musings that spoke to the complexities controlling the acoustics of feminist work in Uganda.



DAY 1

“...WHY WE COME HERE
WE COME HERE TO CARE
WE COME HERE TO SHARE
WE COME HERE TO CRITIQUE,
CATALYSE AND DEEPEN OUR FEMINIST POLITICS
WE ALSO COME TO CONNECT.
THAT IS WHY WE COME HERE...”

Excerpt from opening remarks by Eunice Musiime



OPENING CEREMONY

HOPE CHIGUDU OPENED THIS INITIAL SESSION WITH A CALL FOR APPLAUSE TO THE UGANDA FEMINIST FORUM FOR BEING THE LONGEST RUNNING NATIONAL FEMINIST FORUM ON THE AFRICAN CONTINENT. SHOUTS OF JOY AND ULULATING BLISTERED THROUGH THE AIR IN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF THIS 8 YEAR FEAT. IN THE SAME ESSENCE OF CELEBRATION, THE PARTICIPANTS WERE INVITED TO INTRODUCE THEMSELVES BY NAME AND HUSTLE. THIS EXERCISE PUT NAMES TO THE FACES OF FEMINIST ACTIVISTS, ARTIVISTS, POETS, WRITERS, ACADEMICS, SEX WORKERS, FILMMAKERS AND MORE FROM ACROSS UGANDA

Following, Eunice Musiime Kataaha, the Executive Director of Akina Mama wa Afrika, the hosting secretariat of the UFF made her welcome remarks that can accurately be summed up in the phrase "Why we come here". She re-emphasised the importance of the UFF as a place for Feminist reflection, sharing, caring and learning. She also introduced and thanked the members of the UFF working group and acknowledged a very special category of sisters from different parts of the Global South and Asia, friends of the UFF, who attended the forum to learn and share their experiences of transforming women's lives in the places they call home. She acknowledged the support from the agencies that funded the forum namely the African Women Development Fund (AWDF), Urgent Action Fund Africa, Open Society Initiative for Eastern Africa, Womankind, Hivos and the UFF Working Group. Her remarks came to a close with a reminder to the participants to remain vibrant and engaged throughout the convention.



"This room is more than a gathering of women. It is a compendium of unique stories, each as powerful as the next. Each as worthy of celebration as the last. Every woman here has earned their place in this space and that must be respected regardless of our individual views or moral stances. Indeed, we are here to protect the right of every woman to be here, to be happy and to be fulfilled. Let us remember to listen, remain non-judgemental and respectful of each other as we deliberate" -

Hope Chigudu





Dr Maggie Kigozi gives opening remarks at the 8th UFF

WELCOME REMARKS BY DR MAGGIE KIGOZI

Dr Maggie Kigozi, the chairperson of Akina Mama wa Afrika's Board of Directors delivered welcome remarks. In her remarks, she recalled the milestones that she and countless more Ugandan women have delivered to ensure more of their presence in government and the private sector. In spite of the glaring challenges that continue to hold women back, such as teenage pregnancies, female genital mutilation and social exclusion of sexual and gender non-conforming persons, Dr Kigozi encouraged participants to remain committed to the cause of advancing feminism, regardless of how tiring and unending the road seemed. A budding feminist herself, she reminded participants of the interconnectedness of women's rights, to challenge the deceptive idea that certain rights,

such as economic rights should be given priority over the rights of women to live free from the fear of violence. As such, women must be as vocal about their safety as they are about ending unequal pay at the work place. She acknowledged the effort that went into delivering the UFF-the long hours put in by the AMwA secretariat, the UFF working group and development partners who put their financial resources into the forum. Her welcome remarks drew to a close with an invitation to all the participants to take part in the *Equal Pay Walk*, a Women's March that would be staged later that month to draw attention to the unequal pay realities that women of colour face at their places of work.

COLLECTING AND CENTERING OUR ENERGIES FOR THE NEXT THREE DAYS: RE-ECHOING OUR PRINCIPLES, BELIEFS AND EXPECTATIONS

VALUE SETTING

Values provide the ethos and principles that guide participant interaction in order to deliver meaningful meeting outcomes. The goal of this session, steered by Hope Chigudu and Ophelia Kemigisha, the Chief Steerers of the UFF 2019, was to arrive at the tenets participants would adhere to during the forum. These were generated through group table discussions where participants expressed the principles that would guide their presentations, submissions and overall participation. These included:-

- Trust
- Solidarity
- Loudness
- Connections
- Voice
- Sisterhood
- Re-learning
- Respect for diverse views
- Active listening
- Participation



COLLECTIVE HERSTORICIZATION OF THE UGANDA FEMINIST FORUM



“...HISTORY IS THE PAST

HERSTORY IS THE FUTURE...”

Vered Cohen-Barziley



2008

The Inaugural UFF was convened from 17th- 19th January at Jinja Nile Resort under the Theme “Releasing the Feminist Brakes.”

At least 52 women, including trailblazers such as Dr Sarah Ntiro, gathered to affirm the need for an ideological shift in women’s organising, towards an overtly political, and as such, feminist reframing of women’s oppression in Uganda.

Participants who were present for this meeting shared their memories which included recounts of tears from women who were silently enduring gender based violence, homophobic walk outs by women who were not ready to share a space with those who identified as LGBTQ+. There were new friendships formed and comrades re-united too.

That meeting adopted and launched the *Charter of Feminist Principles for African feminists in Uganda*.

2011

The second Feminist Forum was convened at Country Lake Resort Garuga under the Theme “*Movement Building for Impact and Sustainability of the Feminist Mission.*”

The agenda included conversations on building a resource base for the Forum to guarantee its sustainability. As such, knowledge of how to make and multiply money was central to the agenda. The meeting also looked into the issue of burn out and the need for self care as a number of sisters were experiencing health scares from cancer and exhaustion.

The meeting also revisited the Charter to take stock of its progress since its launch at the previous UFF.

2013

UFF 2013 was held at Ranch on the Lake, now Lake Victoria Serena Kigo under the theme *Feminists’ Movements and our Organisations: Remaining Relevant*”.

Again, top on the agenda was the issue of Financing for the Feminist movement as well as the role of communication technology in advancing feminism in Uganda. The meeting helped women to appreciate the power they had to generate their own sources of funding, free from the patronage and other complexities tied to donor aid.

There were also taboo breaking sessions on sexuality because we can not embrace what we can not speak about.

A mural was created by Nyanzi, a feminist artist, who captured the essence of the forum in a visual work of art. The mural hangs on display at Akina Mama wa Afrika in Kampala.

History. Wherever we turn, we are bombarded with versions of events that center male privilege and male entitlement. This is even truer of stories of women. And if men are at the center of women's stories, women remain marginal, minor footnotes at best. For this manifestation of literary silencing to end, women must tell their own stories. Women must herstorize. It is important for women to tell their stories to strengthen one another, to build their documentation and broadcasting capacities to stand up for a multitude of other women and to meet the growing demand from a world that wants to hear more stories by women, of women doing great things.

The purpose of this session was to collectively generate and share the twelve year herstory of the UFF, to help every participant to appreciate the legacy and continuum of feminist critical thought, agency and ideation that they embody as members of the UFF. The timeline below shares a summarised recount of events, gathered from the individual and collective memory of participants who have lived to tell the tale of previous UFF fora they had participated in.



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2015

This meeting took place at Imperial Royal Hotel, Entebbe under the theme Whose Power, Whose Politics? .

This forum looked into the challenges women's organising was grappling with, including dwindling support to organisations, due to the resurgence of intolerant, fundamentalist ideologies that promoted misogyny, homophobia, islamaphobia all of which threatened feminist organising particularly in the Global south.

It provided a space for introspective reflection in the wake of an increasingly brutal political regime and narrowing space for civic organising that had left many battered, and many times paying the price for their agency with ill health and even death.

2017

The 7th UFF was held at Kingfisher Safari Resort, Jinja, under the theme Detonating the Power of the Uganda Feminist Movement

The meeting considered how to navigate significant life transitions - such as those of death, womanhood, motherhood and changes, seen or unseen in work life.

The meeting also had alot of friendly fire that presented key lessons that were instructive for the UFF 2019.

2019

HERE AND NOW: The 8th UFF was convened at Jinja Nile Resort, under the theme "Silencing Our Fears and Fearing Our Silence."

BREAKING THE SOUND OF SILENCE WITH A FEMINIST SONG WITH NANCY KACHINGWE



Figure 4 Nancy's keynote address sparked off conversations on the need for the movement to engage with theory at a deeper level

Nancy Kachingwe is a Women's Rights and Public Policy consultant based in Harare. Her keynote presentation focused on the role of the urgency for women to build collective consciousness for in doing so, they would find the courage to face the future. Nancy implored the participants to turn their barrels towards the systemic hetero patriarchal oppressions that create conditions of dire poverty, insecurity, danger and economic exclusion of women. She stressed the need to eradicate both the systemic techniques used to mute women as well as the drivers of silence as they present in the different spheres such as the capitalist neo liberal economy.

Neoliberalism, for instance, tends to overlook the structural underpinnings of economic underdevelopment by apportioning blame to its victims, rather than addressing the primary chauffeurs of poverty. For example, the gendered distribution of labour as a factor of production relegates women to the private sphere, where

the contribution they make to economic productivity goes unrecognised. Burdens of domestic care and reproduction continue to fall disproportionately on women and yet there are limited efforts to reduce, redistribute or reward women for shouldering the weight of tending to human beings who become consumers of products and services. Instead, women remain deprived of essential social services such as healthcare, clean water, safe cities, to mention but a few. In that sense, capitalism creates all manner of inequalities and injustices-from undervaluing the contribution of women's labour to the economy to undermining the sovereignty of nation states. It is heavily reliant on gender oppression for its model of accumulation and names the outcomes of this "development".

That said, feminists must continually reimagine and reconstruct the workings of a notion of development otherwise supported by violent gendered subordination, militarised ideas of masculinity, racism and homophobia. The presentation concluded with an appeal to every feminist present to:

- Understand economic theory because capitalism relies on gender oppression for its model of wealth accumulation.
- Name and define for ourselves what a feminist self-determination of our bodies, our resources and our economies looks like in the 21st century. This will determine the ways in which we show solidarity with fellow sisters around issues such as climate justice, social justice and gender justice for all groups of women.
- Create time for both individual and collective thought about the ways in which feminists can continue to actively undermine techniques of silencing as they are deployed against women.

DANCING TO A NEW SOUL SONG: PRACTISING FEARLESSNESS WITH MACKLEAN KYOMYA



“BUT TODAY MY SISTERS,

LET US SPEAK.

WE WILL BREATHE BETTER.”

Harriet Anena



Fighting patriarchal repression shielded by the tyrannies of silence does not just happen. We can learn how to raise our voices. Practicing fearlessness is about unlearning the habits and defying the disempowering practices that enable a culture of silence to thrive where women's lives are at stake. For centuries, women's sex work has provided incomes that have sent children to school, provided start-up capital for businesses and in doing so, transformed the lives of communities. Yet, in spite of this contribution to economies, sex work remains criminalised in many parts of the world while sex workers remain objectified, stigmatised and socially devalued for defying gendered notions of women and sexuality.

This makes sex work a “degrading” experience—but only when feminists do not speak out to say this is not intrinsically so. Macklean Kyomya is the Executive Director of Alliance for Women Advocating for Change (AWAC). She is a former sex worker who now advocates for the rights of female sex workers, their children and adolescent girls. Macklean invests her time contributing to the transformation of narratives around sex work through networking and sharing positive stories that humanise sex workers. However, this did not happen naturally. Macklean answered the call to speak for sex workers at a time when there was social stigma and fear around sex work. She sold sex to pay for tuition and put food on her table,



at a time when she was a memory her own father preferred to forget. This situation was made worse by the hyper sensationalisation of sex work in the media which criminalises sex work as opposed to dignifying it. The journey has been rife with challenges, which have also bolstered her resolve to speak out in a Ugandan society that is still largely intolerant of practices such as sex work.

Macklean has since gone on to hold the first ever sex workers conference in Uganda. She also pursued further studies to build her technical capacities as an advocate for the rights of marginalised groups. From her story, the participants drew the key lessons below;

- Practicing Fearlessness has a lot to do with surrounding oneself with people-fellow sisters who speak to the loud feminist in one. For Macklean, that included networking with activists on the continent who had overcome the silencing

barriers she was dealing with. Specifically, she recounted her experience of attending her first sex worker convention in South Africa. She was conscientised on how sex workers organised themselves as they exercised their civic and economic agency. This inspiring exchange encouraged Macklean to write more, speak louder-and break the silence around sex work in Uganda.

- We fight fear by taking little steps in the direction of the causes we believe in, no matter how insignificant these may seem at first. For Macklean, this included reaching out to fellow sisters in the sexual minorities community who helped her to conceptualise and register an organisation. One thing led to the next and before long, AWAC was in place, a safe space for sex workers to meet, engage and deliberate on issues that mattered for their livelihood.



Finally, we learn to speak out by standing in solidarity alongside our sisters who have been stigmatised as a silencing tactic. For Macklean, this took the form of celebrating radical feminist scholar Dr Sylvia Tamale. At a time when Ugandan media shamed and labelled her as “the worst woman of the year”, due to her support of LGBTI and sex work issues in Uganda, Macklean chose to affirm Dr Sylvia. This did not only strengthen her relationship with Dr Sylvia, it also made her more comfortable taking the path of greater resistance, chanting for change while beckoning more of us to strap our boots and join in the march to slay patriarchy!

Figure 5 While Nancy talked about theorising, Macklean (left) shared her lived experience practising fearlessness as a sex worker in Uganda

HOW TO BECOME FEARLESS.

Take small but consistent steps to address the issues that matter to you as a feminist



Do not go at it alone. We will defeat patriarchy in teams held together by coordination, trust and solidarity



Commit to learning a little more about feminist politics daily. This will boost your confidence by undermining the fear of being incoherent



Stand with the marginalized. Where groups are experiencing forms of silencing, use your voice to amplify their cause where you can.



Surround yourself with feminists who are breaking silence through innovations that bring untold stories, experiences and knowledge to light. Read their writings, retweet their posts and in no time you won't help but break the silence!



DEAR DAUGHTER: READING BY SYLVIA NALUBEGA

The session kicked off with a reading from Sylvia Nalubega, who read out a sobering essay to the forum. *Dear Daughter* captures the regrets of a mother in her final moments before death. It was an admission of regret for not speaking out to protect her only daughter from gender based violence. The full version of her touching recount can be accessed online at www.akinamamawafrika.org/UFF2019Publication

**"YOU DESERVE TO BE HEARD
IF YOU CAN'T SPEAK YOU CAN WRITE,
IF YOU CAN'T WRITE, YOU CAN SING
IF YOU CAN'T SING, YOU CAN RECITE POEMS
IF YOU CAN'T RECITE POEMS, YOU CAN DANCE..."**

HOW FEMINIST SISTERS ARE PACKAGING RESISTANCE

The panel conversation on *how feminists are packaging resistance* was moderated by UFF working group member, Maria Alesi with Florence Butegwa, Muganzi Ruth and Scovia Arinaitwe. The panellists spoke to the practice of feminism beyond the organisational sphere and how appeals to civility are used to silence women within and beyond conventional spaces of organising. By sharing the lived experiences of feminists who are dismantling patriarchy in their private lives, the conversation reaffirmed the feminist mantra, "*the personal is political*".

FARMING, FEMINISM AND THE RESISTANCES IN BETWEEN.

Feminists cannot afford the luxury of retirement, yet. As feminists navigate through work and life transitions, they must carry feminist politics wherever life may lead. As such, resistances to subjugation find very potent forms of expression within the typical Civic organisation or NGO as well as the private sphere. Florence Butegwa retired in 2015 to Kibale district in Western Uganda. Having made a tremendous contribution to multiple

processes that have improved the socio-economic and political lives of women in over 14 countries, she wanted a retirement that would give her space to continue doing work that matters for social justice, without the precarity of formal employment. Given the connection between feminist agency and ownership of resources, farming presented an opportunity to earn an income while fighting the different faces of patriarchy at the grassroots.

Importantly, tilling the land has provided a space to connect with women farmers at the grassroots. In her experience, while women may be more aware of their rights, there are still huge gaps between the knowledge and active claim to these rights. In that sense, there are still many rivers to cross. Therefore, packaging resistance in such a context has taken the form of encouraging women to engage with, rather than shy away from the state. She has used her voice to inspire grassroots women to politicise their hardships. The women do this by demanding for political accountability in areas that matter to them, such as access to markets and

agricultural extension services for their produce. Florence also took feminism home. Within her own family, Florence has stood up against oppression by protecting the rights of her late relative's widow to property. This required her to challenge all her brothers in defence of the widow, even if that meant blocking them from being present at their late brother's funeral. In lending her voice to those who are silenced by fear of the state, grief or fear, Florence exemplifies the ways in which one can take one's feminism wherever one would choose to go.

PACKAGING RESISTANCE THROUGH DARING HETERONORMATIVITY



“EACH TIME A WOMAN STANDS UP FOR HERSELF,
WITHOUT KNOWING IT POSSIBLY,
WITHOUT CLAIMING IT,
SHE STANDS UP FOR ALL WOMEN.”

Maya Angelou



Muganzi Ruth is a queer feminist and the program director at Kuchu Times. An advocate for the rights of sexual minorities and gender non-conforming persons, she exemplifies what it means to fight heteronormativity in the home. Growing up, her sexuality was questioned and subsequently pathologised. What started as subtle remarks and insults towards her evolved into overt, full blown homophobia. This is not uncommon for LGBTQI persons struggling to gain the acceptance of their families. There are studies that have shown family members even go as far as taking their children for conversion therapy and mete out other forms of emotional and physical violence including corrective. Ruth had no choice but to speak out against this brutal, tormenting behaviour coming from her own family. From naming and claiming her sexuality to demanding to be respected regardless

of the choices she made, the experience of coming out about her sexuality presents a number of lessons;

- It is important to demand respect even if that means verbalising this demand. Speak out and demand that you are accorded your rights as a human being because you are one.
- In Ruth's experience, patience with our homophobic relatives goes a long way. We must be willing to support processes of unlearning and helping our families to come to grips with our choices. In that sense, every time we raise the awareness of just one family member, we chip away at heteronormative patriarchy, one act of patient unlearning at a time.

PACKAGING RESISTANCE THROUGH DEFYING APPEALS TO CIVILITY

SCOVIA ARINAITWE makes a contribution to feminist organising by building the capacities of women in movement building. As a coach and trainer on Non-Violent Resistance, Scovia constantly contends with critics whose responses to non-violent civil action by women focuses on method appropriateness as opposed to the matters at hand. Addressing an audience that constantly confronts these challenges, she stressed the importance of embracing the various nonconformist ways and tones through which women may choose to express their agency.

Silencing takes a litany of forms, most of which are justified through the use of appeals to civility. These supposedly rational demands protect patriarchal privilege by undermining the agency of the oppressed through tone policing and mansplaining, for instance. By deploying these

tactics, women's voices and resistances against an oppressor tend to get oversimplified, dismissed, trivialised or derailed so that the main issue is overtaken by debates around the how rather than the what and why something was said. In the end, feminists end up second guessing themselves and their motives for fear of being frivolous. As a result, women end up self-censoring for fear of being labelled as being "too much".

In conclusion, every non-violent form of expression has its place in the struggle as long as it is well politicised. We all have different resources and creativity at our disposal and we need to liberate ourselves from the fear of difference in the way we express ourselves. We have no business asking the oppressor to determine the tools and tactics we should use to challenge oppression!



L-R: Ruth Muganzi, Scovia Arinaitwe, Florence Butegwa and Maria Alesi interrogating civility in resistance

PLENARY RESPONSE TO THE PANEL PRESENTATION



"...Essentially, appeals to civility make the ridiculous demand that we have to speak softly about our tyranny...that we must be nice to our oppressor..."

Participant remark

.....I like the idea of resisting appeals to civility. It is one way to prevent our work from becoming cliché. When you speak in a "normal voice", you normalise the oppression of a woman....

Participant remark



THE PERSONAL IS POLITICAL: COLLECTIVE REFLECTION ON OUR FEARS AND SILENCES USING THE CHARTER OF FEMINIST PRINCIPLES FOR AFRICAN FEMINISTS

In its pages, the Charter of Feminist Principles for African Feminists stamps our identity as Feminists on the African continent, spelling out the individual and institutional ethics of feminist organising and agency in the dismantling of patriarchy. It stresses the indivisibility, inalienability and universality of women's human rights for all women regardless of their social and sexual identities. The Charter sets out the values that underpin our work and importantly, asserts the right of African Feminists to theorize, write, and speak for ourselves. In essence, the Charter spells out our commitment to breaking different silences. This session took the form of an intergenerational panel hosted by Christine Butegwa. She spoke with Pauline Kahuubire, Anne Nkutu and Dr Hilda Tadria. The conversation looked into the various ways we experience silencing in the forms of misogyny, the growth of surveillance culture through social media, continued invasion of our privacy as women and the remedies to the same prescribed in the Charter of Feminist principles for African Feminists. These reflections are summarised below.

PAULINE KAHUUBIRE experienced silencing through negotiating her feminism within a complex web of gendered expectations of muteness and gentleness from women. Raised in a patrilineal household, it was easy for patriarchal ideas of raising girls to aid the culture of enduring pain

and trauma in silence. Now free from the fear of speaking out, she has finally broken a 20 year long silence in triumphant resistance to gender based violence. This is in keeping with the individual ethics spelt out in the Feminist Charter, which affirms the right of every woman to live free of patriarchal oppressions, domination and violence, as well as the importance of critical engagement with discourses of religion, culture, tradition and domesticity with a focus on the centrality of women's rights

ANNE NKUTU admitted to yielding to repressive notions of womanhood that literally made her an accomplice in her own subjugation. Growing up, Anne was taught to be all things to all people. As a nurturer, she took care of everyone, always saying yes to everyone's demands regardless of the implications this would have on her own life. She mothered, gave away all she had, most of the time, in a bid to keep up with these internalised, unrealistic list of what a good woman should be. But not anymore.

The feminist Charter encourages feminists to question structures that keep women subjugated and to develop tools for transformatory analysis and action against patriarchy and its accompanying evils such as exploitation. Given that the personal is political, Feminists must be the first agents of



their own liberation. At a personal level, breaking silence is about being able to say No! No to attending to everyone at the expense of her own health, wellbeing and money. In doing so, Anne has begun to say yes to herself and to the things that matter for feminism.

DR HILDA TADRIA watched her mother speak truth to power. She was raised to fear silence and its non-profitability. Her father cheered her mother on and in a sense, modelled for their daughter a world free of silences. Dr Tadria has since gone on to experience the world for herself, championing the cause of feminism wherever life has taken her. In the wake of state repression of civil liberties

, growing insecurity and simply not being able to run as fast as she could when she took part in street protests, Hilda shared the inspirations from the feminist Charter that keep her fire burning in spite of these otherwise terrifying realities:-

- In an era where feminists have to endure shaming for being called so, the Charter reminds one to be proud and publically name oneself as a feminist. It harkens one to be bold about their feminist identity and the politics that this naming represents.
- The Charter appeals to both one's individual and collective agency. Not one can and should go at dismantling patriarchy on their own. We need each other because together we are stronger.
- The Charter reminds us of the commitment to professionalism all feminists must embody. We must do what we do well and excel in doing so. We must be accountable where we are trusted with resources including people and finances. In so doing, we become an indispensable part of institutions and actions that matter for our liberation.



SILENCE DOES NOT PAY-

Dr Hilda Tadria



PARTICIPANT ENGAGEMENT WITH THE FEMINIST CHARTER

The plenary session led by Christine Butegwa transitioned into a call to all participants present to read and internalise the Charter because it provides a useful guide for each of us to understand feminism. As a first step, all participants present read the contents of the Charter to themselves, section by section to re-acquaint themselves with it. Each group shared their key reflections captured below:-

- The Charter reminds us to focus on the strength our diversity represents as opposed to being terrified and fearful of our difference.
- Our group focused on the commitment to dismantle patriarchy in all its manifestations, and what this means for our individual ethics and personal accountability to the Charter.
- The Charter made us self-reflect on the need to develop alternative models of economics as an active way of undermining exploitative forms neo liberal capitalism.
- We need to translate the Charter into more local languages.
- The Charter reaffirms our identity as feminists and helps us give more women the courage to name themselves as feminists.

COCKTAIL AT THE MUSEUM

The final session of the day was a cocktail at the Museum. This event was an artistic exhibition of the moments, events and faces that have marked significant milestones in struggle for women's liberation in Uganda. The Museum was organised by Wulira!, a group of Feminist Ugandan women

committed to using digital media to share the history, politics and hopes of women. The highlights of the event are captured in the pictorial below. The day came to a close with a reminder to all participants to attend the self-care sessions that were held in the morning.



....In my house this year we are celebrating the feast of Kwanza, the African-American festival of Harvest which begins the day after Christmas and lasts for seven days. There are seven principles of Kwanza, one for each day. The first principle is Umoja, which means unity, the decision to strive for and maintain unity in self and community.

The principle for yesterday, the second day, was Kujichagulia-self-determination-the decision to define ourselves, name ourselves, and speak for ourselves, instead of being defined and spoken for by others.

Today is the third day of Kwanza, and the principle for today is Ujima – collective work and responsibility-the decision to build and maintain ourselves and our communities together and to recognise and solve our problems together.....





DAY 2

DAY TWO KICKED OFF WITH A WELLNESS SESSION OF YOGA AT THE BREAK OF DAWN. THE FIRST SESSION WAS A RECAP OF THE KEY HIGHLIGHTS AND REFLECTIONS FROM THE DELIBERATIONS THAT WERE HELD THE PREVIOUS DAY.

SILENCE IN THE ECONOMY: A PANEL DISCUSSION ON THE STATE OF THE ECONOMY THROUGH A FEMINIST LENS.

As far back as 2008, a study by Uganda's Ministry of Finance Planning and Economic Development (MFPED) showed that addressing gender inequalities would increase Uganda's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) annually by 1.2 % on average for the period of 2008-2016. Given that the 2010/11-2014/15 National Development Plan (NDP), projected a GDP growth rate for this period of about 5% – 7.25%, an additional 1.2% annual growth in GDP arising from inclusive development could have been a big boost to the economy. Eleven years after this study, not much attention is being paid to gender inequality in economic policy formulation and management. As a result, women remain excluded from Uganda's economy.

Uganda's findings support global evidence that gender equality accelerates economic growth and reduces poverty and that persistent, unjust, gender inequalities reduce prospects for economic growth. That said, Uganda is one of many countries on the African continent whose neo liberal policy regimes are but instruments of Empire.

This panel hosted by Irene Ikumu concerned itself with the structural barriers to the economic inclusion of women, from illicit financial flows (IFFS) to unpaid care work. The members of the panel were Janepher Nassali, Anita Ntale, Rita Aciro Laker, Leah Eryenyu and Sarah Nkuchia Kyalo.

UNPACKING ECONOMIC INJUSTICES FOR WOMEN WORKING ON FLOWER FARMS: JANEIPHER NASSALI SHARES HER STORY

JANEIPHER NASSALI leads a trade union comprised of flower farm workers like herself which was established in 2006. She shared with the participants what she experienced as a worker on a Dutch owned enterprise in Uganda. Every day on the farm is a struggle for her dignity as an African woman facing the shackles of a capitalism whose greed for profit cannot be satisfied. Continued exposure to harm is not news, as women on flower farms attend to the most high risk undertakings,

including the daily inhalation of deadly fumes from pesticides that give life to flowers but destroy their own.

Like many young people, Janepher has stayed on the flower farms for the sake of her livelihood. A typical work day will require women to bend their backs nipping buds and sorting stems of up to sixty bunches of roses for less than a dollar a day. Overseas, each bunch retails for no less than four Euros. When the workers at the trade Union

Figure 7 Janepher leads her fellow workers on flower farms in Uganda in advocating for their right to decent work



attempt to raise their fists in demand for better pay and working conditions, they are silenced with reminders that Uganda has no minimum wage policy. As such, the investor cannot accept responsibility where the state relegates its citizens to the fangs of the market. For many of the farmers, dignity comes secondary to the need to feed their families, and as such, they endure inhumane conditions of work, the absence of job contracts all of which are qualified by the absence of a National minimum wage.

One to defy the apathy, Janepher has endured walk outs by men too afraid to join a trade union led by

a woman. Flower farmers also have to negotiate their expression of agency within a complex web of interests that includes those of donor funded NGOs. While NGOs have exposed the evils on flower farms, they also end up leaving farm workers exposed to the wrath of farm owners. As a result, the farm workers lose their jobs, and are worse off for the advocacy efforts of NGOs. Janepher's story humanised the statistics of flower farmers subjected to gendered forms of exploitation. Importantly, she demonstrates the ways in which women are pushing back against the power of unbridled capitalism.

PAPER ON THE STATE OF UGANDA'S ECONOMY AND WOMEN'S LOCATION WITHIN IT BY ANITA NTALE

Anita Ntale, a trade and development researcher with a background in studying the dynamics of trade institutions, regional integration and political economics explored the scholarship behind Janepher's reality. Among other things, her presentation looked into the state of Uganda's economy, and the pillars that aid the economic exclusion of women. More of her key points are hereby summarised:-

- In Uganda, the presence of enabling laws and policies that promote women's participation in the economy has not been followed by

investments towards their implementation. For example, while the National Development Plan (NDP) makes demands for gender specific sector planning, we still see limited implementation of this in certain ministries and their line agencies.

- Women remain excluded from National social development programmes such as Universal Primary and Secondary education and where they are enrolled, there are significant disparities in education outcomes in spite of incentives. For example while girls may be enrolled into schools, their literacy levels

remain lower. Girls also face impediments to attaining education including a gendered care work burden and monthly menstruation related encumbrances.

- Political participation is also limited particularly at local government level, where distribution of resources at the grassroots is determined. While there are more women in politics, the numbers have not necessarily translated into qualitative gains for women's economic inclusion
- Women at Work: While the statistics suggest Uganda has at least 10 million women of working age, there is a chance that there will be disparities in terms of labour force participation. Women remain under represented in the workplace. For the ones that slip through and get into work, there is a chance women will face wage discrimination at the work place in comparison to men. Pay gap differences limit the disposable incomes women have left over for savings and investment.
- Women still account for the bulk of labour in the informal sector and as such, are at the receiving end of challenges within this segment of the economy. These include job insecurity

characterised by work without contracts, without safety wear and the like.

- Unpaid care and domestic work remain a challenge for women, tethering them to the domestic sphere which does little to harness their economic productivity potential. Across the world, when women get jobs, they are usually paid lower incomes in comparison to men. This reduces their disposable income to purchase goods and services which ultimately affects demand. Women are also unable to do all the work they would like to do because domestic duties and responsibilities compete for a significant amount of their time, which would otherwise be spent on economic productivity because that is what society expects. As a result, this affects the supply of labour which negatively impacts the economy, reducing longer term growth.

For Anita, as well as the other panellists, an economy that works for women is one built around an economic paradigm that focuses on economic development as opposed to economic growth only, one that measures progress based off human development indicators such as wage growth.





DISCUSSION ON MACRO ECONOMIC ISSUES, TAX JUSTICE AND UNPAID CARE WORK

PATRIARCHY IN THE ECONOMY: WOMEN'S SUBJUGATION THROUGH UNPAID CARE WORK.

The conventional model of economics raises significant issues: Goods and services are not bought from the market ready for immediate consumption. Many of the things we consume require more work to be done on them. Food, for example must be cooked if one is to maximize its utility. When a labourer is sick, women will most likely attend to them. If nobody cooked the food or looked after a labourer when one was ill, how would they be able to recover and return to work?

This attests to the significant inputs of work (paid and/or unpaid) required to manage the non-

profitable, domestic or private sphere, so that people can go to work in the public sphere. In the conventional concept of economics, these nuances are not catered to and that is why a gendered, feminist approach to economics is important. Following, we must now ask: Who does the work so that people can go to work? Who spends time doing what? In the same way we would allocate an otherwise scarce resource like land, we now ask: How is limited time allocated in the home across a range of activities? Do power relations affect decisions over a woman's use of time? What are the implications of this for an economy?



IT IS ESTIMATED
THAT UNPAID
CARE WORK
CONTRIBUTES AT
LEAST TEN TRILLION
DOLLARS' WORTH
OF OUTPUT PER
YEAR, EQUIVALENT
TO 13% OF GLOBAL
GDP.

AS FEMINISTS,
HOW CAN
WE START TO
CHALLENGE THE
DOUBLE TAX
AGREEMENTS
THAT ENABLE
TAX EVASION
TO THRIVE?
PARTICIPANT
FEEDBACK TO
PRESENTATION

FOR RITA ACIRO, the Executive Director of Uganda Women's Network, the answer to the question above would be a resounding YES! In her panel response to how unpaid care work affects women's economic participation, Rita drew connections between patriarchy and how it is symbolised through unpaid care and domestic work. Unpaid means that the person doing the activity does not receive a wage and that the work is not accounted for in the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) calculations. Care means that the activity serves people and their well-being; it includes both personal care and care-related activities such as cooking, cleaning and washing clothes. Work means that the activity entails expenditures of time and energy. Due to its largely social supportive nature as it takes place mostly in the home, it can also be further simplified or seen as the work that goes into making sure people can go to work. Following, Rita spoke to the ways in which patriarchy and care work are mutually reinforcing of each other.

HOW DOES UN-PAID CARE WORK SYMBOLISE DEEPLY ROOTED PATRIARCHY?

- The realities of attending to unpaid care work cost women and girls valuable time currencies that would otherwise be invested in acquiring an education or participating in the formal economy. For example, women and girls in rural areas walk an average of eight to ten kilometres in search of cooking fuel to prepare meals at home, while their male counterparts are in school.
- It is one of many ways through which women's labour remains invisibilised, as unpaid care work is not accounted for in the country's GDP. It is estimated that unpaid care work contributes at least ten trillion dollars' worth of output per year, equivalent to 13% of Global GDP.
- To offset the burden of women's unpaid care work, it must first be recognised, reduced and re distributed equitably. In her conclusion, Rita re-echoed the need for Gender-Economics that works for women and acknowledges their contribution to economic growth.

"...the gendered distribution of unpaid care work violates basic human rights. Moreover, economic and political systems do not take into consideration women's domestic responsibilities. (To ensure that women are able to engage more productively in economic activities), we must recognize, reduce and redistribute unpaid care work...."

" Magdalena Sepulveda, UN Special Rapporteur on extreme Poverty and Human Rights, Chilean lawyer



CONNECTING TO THE GLOBAL AND REGIONAL CONVERSATIONS ON ECONOMIC RIGHTS AND TAX JUSTICE FOR WOMEN

LEAH ERYENYU, the Research, Advocacy and Movement Building Manager at Akina Mama wa Afrika opened her response by defining key terms that every feminist should know when it comes to tax justice. In summary, tax evasion and avoidance robs women while the rich get richer. Tax havens, for instance, aid tax evasion by enabling individuals and businesses to trade free from taxes and financial regulations under systems of guaranteed secrecy. Tax havens, such as the Cayman Islands, Monaco, Bermuda, Belize, Mauritius and Panama are firmly entrenched in the global financial system, being involved in as much as 50% of the World's trade.

Tax Justice, on the other hand, seeks to restore the taxes to whom they are due. It means fairer systems for taxing. Research has revealed that developing countries lose billions of resources to transnational corporations dodging taxes through shady tax treaties that haemorrhage rather than develop their economies. Leah expounded the ways in which tax justice could make a difference for the economic lives of women by ensuring availability of funds that can be channelled to sectors that matter the most to women such as reproductive health care. As a tax justice crusader, Leah compelled participants to pay ardent attention to matters of economics, taxes and illicit financial flows for the reasons below;

- Women and girls' unpaid work subsidises economic growth. Where states lack revenue to provide essential public services, it is more likely to be women who fill the gap with their bodies and time, reducing the time women have for education or other economic activities.
- Tax Justice ensures women access social services. Women always end up on the receiving end of regressive tax regimes. However, if women use their collective voice to demand for tax justice, they contribute to the availability of public resources that could fund sectors that matter for women. These include education and health care.
- Tax Justice provides social protection for women by shielding women from the impact of vulnerabilities caused by exploitative economic relationships. The result of this includes women losing land to powerful multi-national corporations which drives them further to the margins of economic productivity and poverty. Social protection programmes are therefore effective in contributing to the protection of women's rights to livelihood and land.

Leah concluded her presentation by encouraging the participants to draw inspiration from the wave of resistance sweeping Latin America, a groundswell that saw women in trade Unions stage protests to demand for tax just reforms at the G20 summit in Argentina.¹

¹ <https://www.dw.com/en/peaceful-protests-hit-g20-in-argentina/g-46532575>

WORKING TOWARDS BUILDING FEMINIST ECONOMIES

SARAH NKUCHIA-KYALO is a program officer in the economic governance program at Open Society Initiative for East Africa (OSIEA). Sarah appealed to the common identities in the room, speaking to each participant as first, a Feminist, African, and woman. In reference to the experience of exploitation on Dutch flower farms previously shared by Janepher, she spoke to the importance of deconstructing the ogre of neo liberal economic programmes that leave African women brutalised and violated. Untamed capitalism that brokers the exploitation of women, appropriation of resources from the South to the North and the transfer of ideas and technologies from the North to the South has no place in Africa's future. Therefore, building alternative, feminist economic models will require the following;

- A decolonisation of our economies. This would entail feminists vitality and leadership in creating reforms-radical reforms, in National and Global Economic policies that actually protect the dignity of all people-not just a few. Economies that protect women such as Janepher from exploitation and abuse.
- A search for economic models that strengthen, rather than weaken the sovereignty of African states. The default tendency of the neo liberal state to degenerate into a violent, extractive conduit for the inflow and outflow of capital requires a pan African reimagining of the Nation state-one that works towards building strong economic blocs as opposed to weak, fragmented states.
- A feminist economy that affirms the worth and contribution of African people to their economies. It must acknowledge the subsidies women bring into the economy, as retirement plans for their ageing parents, as caretakers of infants and the vulnerable who offset costs that should be borne by a functional state. It must also acknowledge and affirm African entrepreneurs in the economy who should not be subjected to racist exclusion from incentives wastefully thrown at investors from the west.

Figure 8L-R: Anita Ntale, Irene Ikumu, Rita Aciro, Sarah Nkuchia and Leah Eryenyu interrogating the state of the economy for Ugandan women





Can we mobilise ourselves and start petitioning the governments where these exploitative multinational companies come from?

– Participant remark

MONEY, MONEY, MONEY!

This panel was moderated by Harriet Gimbo who hosted Rosie Motene, Joyce Nangobi and Dr Maggie Kigozi to a conversation on the myths surrounding women and money.

ROSIE MOTENE, a filmmaker and actress based in South Africa acknowledged the role of folklore in influencing how women relate to money. That said, there are examples of women who have refused to accept the idea that women and money are incompatible. She shared an inspiring story that showed how women in South Africa have refused to accept myths handed down to them by taking back control of their financial future. The *Business Women's Association of South Africa* (BWASA) was founded in 1980 to network, train and mentor women in South Africa in the area of wealth creation through business growth. Thirty years on, the platform brings together over 5000 African women in their diversities, from grass root farmers to former first ladies.

Rosie also cited the National film Association of South Africa that finances initiatives to support women through funding film projects in a bid to boost the incomes of creative arts entrepreneurs. A beneficiary of the grant herself, Rosie attributed the growth of platforms that empower women financially to relentless efforts of advocacy by civil society organisations who kept demanding for policies and programmes that could enhance the inclusion and participation of women in South Africa's economy.

JOYCE NANGOBI, the team leader at Slum Women's Initiative for Development (SWID) is passionate about building low cost housing for women in informal settlements. Originally a teacher by profession who worked with Child Fund, she was concerned about the levels vulnerability women experience including homelessness due to high rental fees in urban areas. She taught herself about low income housing options for the poor

and the rest is herstory. In spite of a personal health struggle with diabetes and resistance from authorities who do not believe women should build and own their homes, Joyce has mobilized women and funding from agencies including African Women's Development Fund (AWDF). They have bought land in both rural and urban areas and are in possession of the land titles. On these pieces of property, they have commenced the construction of safe, low cost housing for women and men. Women who own land and housing are in a better position to access credit facilities to expand their businesses and in doing so, transform the livelihoods of their own communities. Joyce also narrated how women are using their land to grow up to as much as 30,000 kilograms of maize, mangoes and oranges which they sell to earn an income.

DR MAGGIE KIGOZI was thrust into business after the sudden passing of her husband. As such, she had no choice but to learn how to steer the businesses he managed. She spoke to the importance of overcoming fear of business by being willing to learn the ropes, even on the job. Dr Kigozi's story is also one of breaking glass ceilings, from being the first woman Executive Director at Uganda Investment Authority (U.I.A) to opening doors for women to chair boards on corporations such as Pepsi. While at UIA, she steered the Gender Seal Initiative whose goal was to incentivise the economic inclusion of women. As a result of this, banks began to create financial products that met the needs of women living in rural areas and more companies were open to having women on their boards. She implored the participants not to shy away from the private sector in spite of the challenges it may be rife with. There are countless opportunities for the Feminist movement to mobilise and learn from women in the business sector, bringing the panel to a close.

Where do we stand as individuals? Are we saving money as feminists?
What little steps are we taking to make sure we will survive even after
our comfortable monthly pay cheques cease? -

Harriet Gimbo, Session Chair.

Figure 9L-R: Joyce, Dr. Maggie, Rosie and Harriet discussing the M-Word: Money



SILENCE ON SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY AND EXPRESSION

In Uganda, the context within which LBQ persons work has become more repressive. Patriarchal narratives² continue to shape perceptions and the resulting subjugation women endure based on their sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGIE). Perceptions of indifference towards the systemic discrimination of LGBTQ+ person's stem from the lived experiences of fear and exclusion³ by their own family members and by feminists themselves. Heteronormative othering continues to plague even the Ugandan feminist movement, which leaves non-conforming women feeling deeply betrayed⁴ excluded and ultimately silenced. Given the fundamental link between power, knowledge and sexuality, it seems the only to end the criminalisation of sexual difference is a revolution. A revolt against laws, speech and all other such prohibitions that enable the pathologisation of sexual difference to thrive.

The panel was hosted by Ssenfuka Joanita Warry, who spoke to three young women about their experiences of silencing within their own homes⁵ as well as beyond the wider Ugandan feminist movement. The panel also included an ally of the LGBTQ+ movement, whose perspectives shed more light on the role of religious institutions in weaponising sexual identities among other important points to note. Members of the panel were Jay Abang, Gloria Mutyaba and Isabella Akiteng.

² Natenda, Shira (2019). Unlearning Conservative Narratives on Sex Work, learning Sexual positivity and Liberation. In the 8th Convening of the Uganda Feminist Forum(Ed) *Fearing Our Silence and Silencing Our Fear*" p17, Akina Mama wa Afrika, Kampala

³ Wanjiru, Phyllis (2019). Shocked into Silence: When your own trample on you. In In the 8th Convening of the Uganda Feminist Forum(Ed) *Fearing Our Silence and Silencing Our Fear*" p19, Akina Mama wa Afrika, Kampala

⁴ Nampijja, Shamim (2019). The Silence of Allies in In the 8th Convening of the Uganda Feminist Forum(Ed) *Fearing Our Silence and Silencing Our Fear*" p18, Akina Mama wa Afrika, Kampala

⁵ Okile, Byarugaba (2019). *My Child is different: A baseline study of the perceptions and experiences of Parents, Families and their lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) Children in Uganda*. Chapter Four Uganda.

Figure 10L-R:
Gloria, Joanita
"Biggie" Warry,
Isabella and Jay
breaking the
silence on SOGIE
rights



JOANITA SSENFIKA, the Executive Director of Freedom and Roam Uganda (FARUG) kicked off the session by sharing the basic concepts of gender and sexuality such as sexual orientation, gender identity and so forth. Gender identity⁶ refers to how a person sees themselves-their internal sense and personal experience of gender. It is self-determined. Sexual Orientation is a term used to describe a person's pattern of sexual attraction based on gender. It may include attraction to persons of the same gender or a gender different than one's own. She then invited the members of the panel to share on their experiences of being muted on account of their sexuality. That said, LGBTQ+ and gender nonconforming persons still struggle to access HIV health care, being discriminated against for being queer. As such, women continue to share prescription and lose their lives to otherwise preventable health conditions.

JAY ABANG was raised in a religious family and struggled to reconcile her faith with her gender identity. A daughter of a reverend, she made the tough choice to follow her convictions of herself and her sexuality. It has taken a while for her family to understand and appreciate her difference. She was eventually reconciled with her family and continues to patiently educate and support the unlearning of knowledge that enables sexual prejudice to thrive. Further, Jay spoke to the silences on the horrors experienced by survivors of corrective rape are loud. The struggle for funding that lesbian rights organisations have to go through in comparison to gay rights organisations means there is always uncertainty around resourcing for advocacy work.

FOR MUTYABA GLORIA, there are fears around solidarity, where LBQ persons hardly see their cisgender and heteronormative allies come out to stand with them when it matters the most. Gloria spoke to the common experience of the struggles women endure, queer women being no less affected by sexual harassment than cis-women are, queer sisters being no less brutalised by state imposed violence than cis-ters are. All women bleed the same and remembering this could help to undermine homophobic attitudes that tend to blur how we see and relate to LBQ persons.

ISABELLA AKITENG is a Sunday school teacher, one of many spaces she has chosen to exercise her feminist politics in. She admits to having struggled with biblical expectations of femininity and her feminist convictions. She acknowledged the existence of the fear of difference within ourselves as individuals first. Some of these identities include our Faiths, our cultural tribes and the expectations these identities come loaded with. It is these expectations that morph into the fears we eventually project in the women's movement. Challenging these fears requires deliberate unlearning. As a Christian Feminist, Isabella is always asked why she has chosen to support and work with LBQ women. In resistance to this form of silencing, Isabella has chosen to constantly re-affirm her belief in the equality of all women, regardless of their sexual orientation. Isabella has staged walk outs in resistance to draconian interpretations of laws that keep women subjugated. Her acts of resistance have opened doors for conversations in the church, acts that are slowly melting away an otherwise rock solid pillar of patriarchy.

First, I am a woman. - Joanita Warry

⁶ FARUG 2009. *The Lived Realities of Lesbian, Bisexual and Queer (LBQ) Women in Uganda* PDF.

WHAT ABOUT THE SILENT OTHER?

"..... Think of Theory as a way of diagnosing disease. To prescribe solutions to Patriarchy in its multiple forms, you must understand its underpinning root causes. Spaces like these provide an opportunity for us to review the effectiveness of prescriptions to patriarchy. Feminism gives us the tools of analysis to diagnose as critically as we possibly can. It provides the means through which we can reconcile our theory and practice. So do not be afraid to read and learn. Do not be afraid to theorise the ways in which you experience oppression as women..... "

Dr Sylvia Tamale

The idea of the silent other stands in conceptual opposition to the doctrine of transforming silence into action, arguing for the recognition of various silences as a potent form of resistance to patriarchy. In her stellar articulation⁷ of this, **LYDIA NAMATENDE-SAKWA**, a critical thinker and UFF participant makes a theoretical argument for an appreciation of non-threatening femininity. With no intention to water down the formidable social political shifts that have been preceded by radical acts of resistance, Namatende-Sakwa posits for an appreciation of an equally potent force known as covert resistance. In her case studies, she ably demonstrates how women have used the resources of relationality, pluralism, collectiveness, communality to build alliances that have enabled, rather than constrained their individual struggles against subjugation. In spite of very real threats to their attainment of education, not a single one of seven women ruffled feathers in the ways in which the UFF focused on. To do so may have cost Biru, Bitte, Faith, Jose, Dina, Fida and Jenny their education. Their resistance was in their silent, active, rather than passive endurance of gender related destitution. Lydia helps us to see and appreciate silence from a different and significantly important perspective. Her short essay titled *Without Ruffling Feathers: Insights on Non-threatening Femininity*, was one of many think pieces that shaped the conversations at the 2019 Uganda Feminist Forum.

LOVE AT THE FIRE PLACE: CONVERSATIONS AND HEALING CIRCLES

A Feminist forum is not one until we go personal- Hope Chigudu

Love at the fireplace was a session designed to help participants to offload the emotional hurt and trauma from different lived experiences. A place to tend the inner garden, the fireplace was a space to be heard, re-affirmed, accepted and importantly, a place where healing can begin. Importantly, the deep conversations made a case for the urgency of healing processes within the Feminist movement.

⁷ Lydia- Namatende Sakwa "Without Ruffling Feathers: Insights on Non-threatening Femininity" In the 8th Convening of the Uganda Feminist Forum(Ed) *Fearing Our Silence and Silencing Our Fear*" (pp 21-25). Akina Mama wa Afrika, Kampala.



DAY 3



WE HAVE BAKED MILLIONS AND MILLIONS OF MUFFINS. MILLIONS OF MUFFINS HAVE BROUGHT IN THE MONEY WE USED TO BUY THE LAND ON WHICH THE RIGHT'S FOR HER WOMEN'S SHELTER NOW SITS.

Day three commenced with a wellness session and immediately after, participants were dispatched for field visits whose details are written below. Following, participants returned to the venue for a conversation on next steps and the official closure of an unforgettable UFF experience.

FIELD VISIT TO RIGHTS FOR HER WOMEN'S SHELTER AND SLUM WOMEN'S INITIATIVE FOR DEVELOPMENT (SWID).

If ever a building was worth a million muffins, the **Rights for Her Women's Shelter** would be it. The overwhelming prevalence of Gender Based Violence inspired Rose Kigere to dare the odds. The odds that a young African woman would lead her team and build a world class shelter to house and rehabilitate survivors of violence. The odds that it could be done without the support of traditional donors. The odds that women could develop a building plan and supervise the construction of a building so that every penny could be accounted for and bake muffins every single day while at it, so that there would be money to pay for bricks and roofing materials. Rose and her team triumphed over long nights writing proposals and unreturned emails when an intern, connected her organisation to a company that was moved by her vision to build a safe space for women traumatised by sexual violence to recover.

The shelter is an important structure because it represents the agency of young women. While

most NGOs would simply create makeshift shelters out of houses not necessarily designed to help survivors of abuse, the shelter has been built purposely for women survivors. At the time UFF visited, Rose and her team were facing pressure from the state to open the shelter due to the demand for safe shelters, in spite of the fact that the state has not subsidised the cost of construction. The team of women at the shelter now concern themselves with ways to ensure they purchase a solar system to power the shelter and more. The UFF gave a modest contribution to lighten the resource mobilisation load for the shelter and agreed to serve as a drop off point for materials and items that participants may want to contribute to the shelter.

The second visit was to Slum Women's Initiative for Development. Slum Women's Initiative for Development (SWID) is a community based non-governmental organization that was established in 2003 in the Walukuba Masese Division of Jinja,

Uganda. Established in 2003, SWID promotes the development of low cost community structures in slum and rural areas to help economically deprived people to obtain land and shelter, among other and basic services¹. Joyce had shared the previous day on the remarkable work SWID does to enhance women's ownership to assets such as low cost housing and land. The visit helped participants to see for themselves what Joyce referred to. Both visits left participants as breathless as they were inspired and deeply challenged to do more to improve the lot of women in Uganda. These stories of women doing impeccable things, overcoming all manner of obstacles to make the world better embody the resilience of heart, mind and spirit of every African Feminist.

The visit to SWID left me inspired. Seeing women construct houses out of their savings, using climate smart materials challenged me to do the same -
participant response

EVALUATION, ACTION PLANNING AND WAY FORWARD

Hope Chigudu invited participants to share their reflections on the field visits as well as share more general recommendations for the next UFF meeting.

- The UFF provided a powerful healing space for one participant. She learnt more about the feminist Charter and was compelled to refer to it more regularly in her work.
- The fireplace conversations left me traumatised. The level of pain women are enduring inspired me to do more than I have to dismantle patriarchy.
- The Women's shelter is a demonstration of feminism in practice. I will come back to support Rose and the work she is doing at the shelter.
- It is important to create spaces for feminist economic organising. We need to take financial literacy seriously.
- UFF has been uplifting. It has left me inspired.
- UFF gives me courage to walk away from oppression. I have walked out of abusive relationships because of UFF.
- The hosts of the UFF have been amazing. A big thank you to Hope and Ophelia for steering us on!

As the participants tucked their notebooks into their bags, the forum agreed to the following next steps

- To re-ignite the Feminist Executive Directors Forum to provide a space for coordination, solidarity and reflection on how to keep the UFF visible in between fora
- That Memprow Uganda would convene the next Feminist leaders dialogue "Adiisi Ku Kyoto" to agree on possible actions Feminists can undertake collectively
- The working group would think of more ways to actively support the healing of women traumatised by different instances of violence and abuse.
- That we would write more and produce content that contributes to the advancement of feminism in Uganda.
- The next UFF will be convened in 2021 and more details will be shared in the course of the coming year.

¹ Also see a blogpost inspired by this Visit from UFF Participant Rosie Motene at <https://rosiemoteneblog.wordpress.com/2019/08/14/slum-womens%E2%80%8B-initiative%E2%80%8B-for-development-swid/>

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