



# STEADFAST, RISING AND READY:

The Power and Possibilities of  
African Feminist Philanthropy  
in a Persistently Uncertain World

**URGENT  
ACTION  
FUND +  
AFRICA**

FOR WOMN'S HUMAN RIGHTS



**Africa Philanthropy Network**  
Voice and Action for African Philanthropy

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which grapples with the hardest questions and complexities with and without funding and resourcing from external actors. This publication honors and affirms these individuals and groups.

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In Celebration of Feminist and Women's Funds in Africa

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ONE

**MARKING A  
MOVEMENT  
MOMENT:**

The Case for  
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# About This Publication

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The end of 2021 marks yet another key movement moment since the start of this new decade and the declaration of a global pandemic. "Steady, Ready and Rising" is a publication of The Africa Philanthropy Network [APN] and Urgent Action Fund–Africa [UAF–Africa] as a contribution to showcase the work, power, and solidarity of African Feminist Philanthropy and Women's Funds in particular.

These Funds have demonstrated for decades, and certainly throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, their readiness and capability to offer solidarity and support to those who most need this. This kind of readiness emerges from decades of sometimes quiet, sometimes not, but always consistent work by the Funds to advance sustained commitment to resourcing and fuelling women's and feminist organising. We have been able to firmly establish and sustain ourselves individually and collectively as networks, a part of a meshwork of feminist groups and movements, offering solidarity and support where and when it is most needed.

The world has been unfair and hostile to women and those who are gender non-conforming such as lesbian, bisexual, trans diverse, intersex, queer and asexual [LGBTIQA+] people, before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. This might continue as we enter deeper into this new decade.

These Funds are positioned to get the right kind of resources to the feminist formations across the continent in support of a vision of a world where all African women live in freedom, dignity and equality. The Funds will also expand their reach to African feminists and African women's human rights defenders from multiple movements so that they are safe, secure and free to do their work of transforming society.

Steadfast, Ready and Rising is intended for African women themselves as well as feminist-activists and women's human rights defenders and for the Feminist and Women's Funds and the broader philanthropic ecosystem. It is at once a call to remember and recognise, to mourn what we have lost in these two years and to celebrate who we are, what we do and how we are becoming. The publication is a "Chapbook" and for us, this translates to an accessible and easy to read offering for the living archives of feminist contributions to societal transformation and change.

Please join us on this platform as full participants as we remember, honour and celebrate some of the ways that feminist philanthropy has evolved our giving practice within the African philanthropic ecosystem during the COVID-19 pandemic.

# Who We Are

Africa Philanthropy Network is a continent-wide network of organizations and individuals that represents an ecosystem of philanthropy to support institutions and civil society member organizations serving different forms of philanthropy.

Urgent Action Fund-Africa is a feminist, Pan-African, rapid response Fund committed to transforming power relations through resourcing African feminists and women's human rights defenders and their formations as an act of solidarity.

This chapbook matters to us because we are deeply aware of the power of feminist philanthropy and are committed to and passionate about influencing and growing this kind of giving to the work of feminists and women's human rights defenders. The bold and creative work of feminists is increasingly recognised as co-creating a just and fair world.



Those in feminist philanthropy have been working alongside feminist, women's rights and LGBTIQ+ movements for decades and have evolved an understanding of the range of needs of the actors, groups and institutions that make up these movements. Our understanding has also evolved over time so that we are able to financially support groups and organisations for approaches and strategies on issues in very particular ways.



# Who We Are

Our work has made its contribution within the broader philanthropic ecosystem and often to the public, the complex, oppressive realities of those who are most marginalised, oppressed, excluded, stigmatised, and discriminated against. A feminist approach to fueling social justice work is being evolved by Feminist and Women's Funds in both "ordinary times" and "extraordinary times" such as the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated lockdowns and their consequences and impacts.

"We" co-created this publication because of this power which is being called upon in this moment. As feminists within philanthropy, we are certain of the power and agency of feminist and women's movements and our ability to move the world, and in particular, this continent, to a new place of grappling with the most intractable problems using a feminist analysis and approach. And we do this whilst remembering and creating space for laughter, dance, art and love.

This is the future that feminists have been creating and co-creating with each other and others. And whilst the "we" who spearheaded this publication is our two organisations, we see the bigger "we" in this publication as the Feminist and Women's Funds in Africa more broadly.



**THIS IS WHO  
WE ARE**



# Why This Publication?

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Feminist and Women's Funds have, over decades, made contributions that have been central to the overall work of the oppressed and vulnerable people, their groups, and organizations to liberate themselves.

Our contributions have been sustained and developed both during crisis moments and moments of relative stability.

This publication intends to position African feminist philanthropy by strengthening the body of knowledge on women-led advocacy and the value of adopting feminist and African philanthropic approaches to addressing structural inequalities.

In foregrounding the contributions of the Feminist and Women's Funds, we are, by default, showcasing the work and organizing power of individuals and collectives in the movements.

As Funds, we exist because these actors are boldly transforming society by ensuring that everyone, including gender non-conforming people, enjoy their rights.

The outstanding, often invisibilised work that women, particularly feminists, have poured into the survival and thriving of their own movements and communities are hope-provoking.

Their responses span different themes and issues, such as poverty and related inequalities, sexual and reproductive health and rights and justice, gender-based violence and violence against women, climate catastrophe and access to health and education, amongst others. They use multiple strategies including service delivery, influence and advocacy, learning, development and skills building, research, knowledge creation and documentation, amongst others.

As Feminists, we have resisted the forces that seek to silence, constrain and shrink us and our work and cast us as victims in need of protection.

# Why This Publication?

Why Now?

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We have insisted on spreading hope and a sense of agency and power through inspiring creativity in imagining a world where freedom, dignity, and equality are enjoyed by women and gender non-conforming people, even in the midst of the worst of the COVID-19 crises. Inside and alongside these movements are the evolving approaches of African feminist philanthropy.

To meet the needs of disability justice-focused organizations during COVID-19 crisis, for instance, we provided grant partners flexibility to repurpose funds and relaxed deadlines within which they are required to report back. In solidarity, we also trusted grant partners with making key decisions on how best to address the unprecedented challenges they encounter in the pandemic. So much has unfolded behind the scenes and not much of this work is headline-grabbing with the consequence that often the power of feminist activists and women's human rights defenders is easily invisibilised and even "forgotten".

During the two years of the pandemic, The APN, UAF-Africa, and fellow Feminist and Women's Funds worked in solidarity to support the work of feminist activists, women's human rights defenders, Women's Funds, and their organising by ensuring that their underground work is visible.

Their love and power in creating and sustaining activism, even in crises, EMERGENCIES, urgent situations, and accompanying unpredictability and uncertainty is shared here because we can all distill learning from them, their knowledge, and access to effective problem-solving mechanisms and "good practices". We want to see their efforts celebrated, emulated even replicated, where possible because they are an essential part of history and history-making events. They provide effective alternatives to the exploitative, oppressive, and destructive dominant forces in the current world order including capitalism, militarism, colonialism, racialism, and patriarchy.

# Why This Publication?

Why Now?

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The APN and UAF-Africa are now more than ever passionate and committed to influencing, alongside Feminist and Women's Funds, an accelerated shift to sustained support within the philanthropic ecosystem for these actors and their movements.

Their resistance and imagination are critical for promoting freedom, dignity, equality, and justice for all, most importantly, for decolonizing philanthropy and social justice work itself.

The COVID-19 pandemic marks a moment for funders and the entire philanthropic ecosystem to decide and make fundamental choices for a brave and major shift in the funding ground.



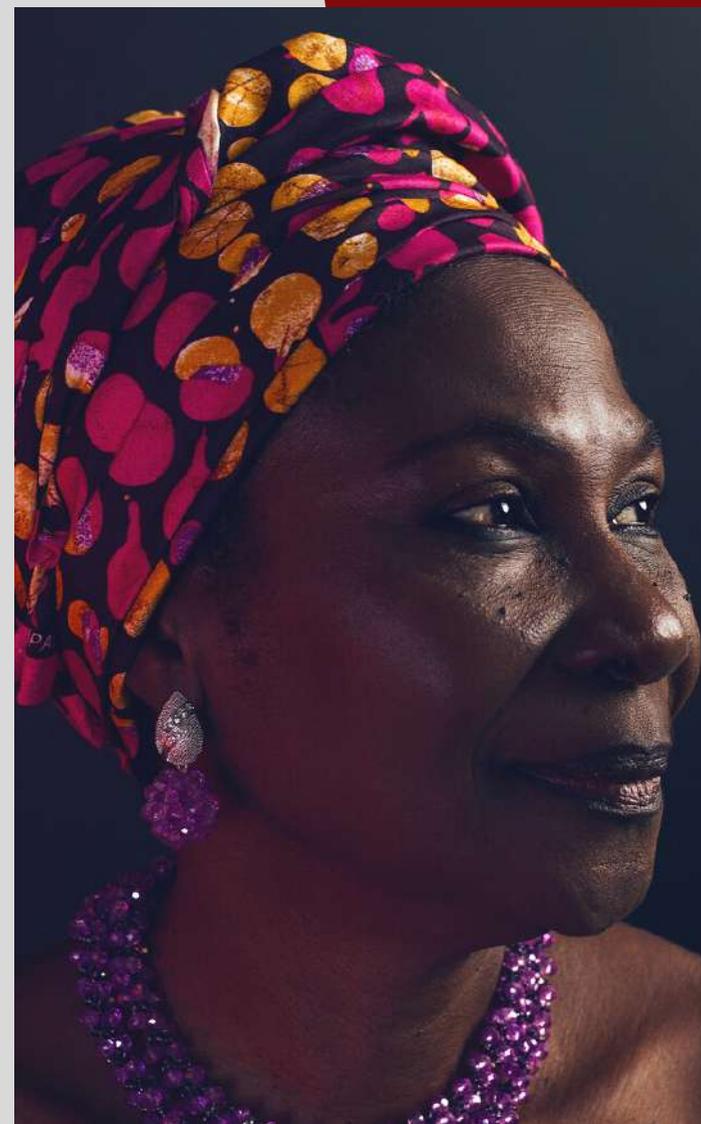
# Our Approach

Steadfast, Ready and Rising is the outcome of a process of listening and learning from a selection of Feminist and Women's Funds, organisations, and individual activists that have contributed to fueling and supporting feminist organising from the local to national to regional levels across the African continent amid the pandemic. The ideas and stories shared with us have been mapped analysed and packaged as a celebration and recognition of the powerful and often invisibilised work and activism of these individuals and groups.

We worked on this process and product with gentleness and fierce feminist power recognising some of the most complex and intractable challenges of society as far as women and Africa are more broadly concerned. We regard this offering as a link in a long chain and mesh of stories in the bigger story of African feminism and by extension, African feminist philanthropy.

There were significant limitations in the process of getting into conversation with the women whom we wanted to engage, mainly due to the significant and multiple pressures they currently face, in the COVID-19 pandemic. For many organizations, a focus on documentation did not seem a priority in a time of turmoil, pressed as they are for time.

This is more reason why we are celebrating this publication in honor of their work and choices to focus and dedicate themselves to the kind of care that has seen us all through the pandemic so far.



## Building a coordinated movement of African philanthropists

When COVID-19 hit, APN already had a work plan, key of which was a commitment and objective to build solidarity and a coordinated movement of African philanthropists. The ultimate goal of APN is to grow the visibility of African philanthropic practices within the continent and globally. In this way, APN seeks to maximise leadership and create a common agenda for African philanthropists.

## Horizontal Philanthropy based on solidarity and sharing

African philanthropic principles are based on the vast experience of the Africa Philanthropy Network emerging from a system of philanthropic engagements that have over generations been horizontal and based on solidarity and sharing, rather than the vertical trickle-down model that has become the stand-in for philanthropy. These are values that the APN focuses on popularising and preserving African models of philanthropy. APN promotes various forms of African philanthropy, but primarily, their interest is in individual and community philanthropy with necessary space made for organizations like UAF-Africa focusing on institutional philanthropy and embodying feminist principles and perspectives.



## Connecting African Philanthropy and feminist philanthropy

*This Chapbook is produced in collaboration with UAF-Africa as a foundation for women's role as frontline workers, in building and nurturing economic empowerment and justice, in rapid response to gender-based violence, in advocating for mental health as a justice issue, and even in producing personal protective equipment [PPE]. The publication acknowledges the power of feminist organising - centering on the needs and priorities of their communities, women, and marginalised groups because of their perceived gender and sexual orientation.*

*The publication highlights the role that African philanthropy plays by seeking to influence greater recognition that women's rights advocacy and the feminist agenda are central to addressing social justice issues and transforming the world for everyone to live in dignity and freedom in a fair and equal world.*

# Showcase One:



## Africa Philanthropy Network

## The Power of Feminist and Women's Funds

Many funders and grantmaking organizations are yet to acknowledge African philanthropic methods including how these groups are capable of producing sustainable social change.

The reflections and analysis shared by Feminist and Women's Funds are critical in highlighting and showcasing the solidarity and support role they contribute towards feminist activism and the work of women's human rights defenders in Africa.

The unique role of these Funds and their impact is set to grow as we move into a new phase of sustained unpredictability and uncertainty in this world. There is a particular focus on feminist solutions related to the resourcing of issues regarding gender-based violence, disability justice, mental health, sexuality, and sexual rights, including the rights of LGBTIQ+ people, and a range of strategies including advocacy and movement building.

The unseen yet powerful work of the movements the Funds serve is shared in summary through a selection of "showcases" and some key lessons learned from their work during the COVID-19 pandemic.



## A New Contract is Overdue

Stigmata Tenga, APN's CEO asserts, "In the final analysis, the Chapbook argues for and urges as an imperative, a new contract between funders and African women's human rights defenders and feminist-activists. It places African feminist philanthropy in the center of this agenda." In this publication, the APN shows how the organizations, Funds, funding partners, and governments have and can continue to benefit from an African and feminist philanthropic discourse in rallying the kind of support and solidarity to practice strategically and navigate the protracted impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in the future such as emergencies and crises.

### SOME APN IDEAS: Philanthropy as

- *Preserving African philanthropic principles and values*
- *A system of African philanthropic engagements*
- *Horizontal, democratic acts of sharing financial and other resources as well as solidarity*
- *An expression of critical leadership for social change movements*
- *A movement of African philanthropists advancing community-giving in facing the challenges of the continent*

# Showcase Two:



**URGENT  
ACTION  
FUND +  
AFRICA**

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# Urgent Action Fund Africa

UAF-Africa's immediate response was to mobilise her internal rapid response grant making machinery to mount a well-timed, well targeted and grounded effort to demonstrate friendship, support and sisterhood - solidarity to feminist activists and womn's human rights defenders across the continent.

The Fund knew that they would continue to organise with womn who themselves were thrown into crises as the pandemic took a hold in their own communities, families and workplaces. Three separate, but linked, features that enable the rapid response funding mechanism of UAF-Africa to contribute to movement building and strengthening include speed or timeliness of the response [readiness], the appropriateness [relevance] of the response and the connectedness of the Fund to the womn in the movements [relational work].

This approach meant that, in the next year and a half, the Fund was able to reach over one hundred thousand womn and girls through her various efforts.

“In May 2020, UAF-Africa organised a rapid assessment-mapping to conduct a risk and threat analysis, using and applying lessons from her work on similar emergencies. This enabled the team to create a shared vision based on a collective mental model about the organisation's goals, roles, focus, mechanisms and processes to enable an effective, robust and relevant COVID-19 offering to African feminist activists and womn's human rights defenders and their organisations. A concrete Emergency Action Plan with teams for both internal and external work came out of the Fund's timely activation of her internal emergency systems. This Plan was a set of agreements based on best practice - from our own learning and the work of others, including six working groups which led the Fund through the work of navigating a coherent and effective response.”

**Ndana Bofu-Tawamba, UAF-Africa's CEO**

**Internal Human Resource Management:** The Fund prioritised consulting with staff, identifying their support needs and preparing for sustained meeting of these needs, including financial and technical resources. Some priorities which emerged at the beginning, and over time, related to the technology and equipment needs to enable more efficient working from home; recruitment of a psychosocial therapist for collective debriefing, counselling, and support as well as for individual services, attention to leave, flexi work arrangements and introducing a shorter work week.

The Fund also introduced a Governance Strategy that addressed the active leadership and engagement of the UAF-Africa Board in decision making, sharing perspectives and generating ideas and recommendations related to the response to COVID-19. The Board offered expertise on feminist leadership, funding and programmatic risk analysis, creative budgetary management, sustainable human resources support and solidarity as well as strategic and deep grant partner engagement; this incorporated relaxation of grant application and reporting modalities. The governance strategy also addressed questions of coordination, coherence and sustaining linkages with strategic partner organisations and Sister-Funds.

The Funder Education Strategy which, according to Tariro Tandi, UAF-Africa Partnerships & Development Director, “...included briefing and engaging individual and institutional supporters on the realities and experiences of grant partners and the movements more broadly as well as on-the-ground realities; offering guidance to funders on their expected roles and contributions; negotiating with funders for amendments to agreements UAF-Africa manages towards a more flexible framework which could enable the movements to do their work based on the new realities.”

The Research and Documentation Strategy included a literature review on the pandemic and related contextual realities; a report that provides UAF Africa’s analysis of the gendered effects of COVID-19 and one on addressing gender-based violence [GBV] during the pandemic. It also ensured that the Fund could carefully and thoughtfully document her response to COVID-19 both internal and external as a learning process. The product included a position paper on how media and funders can work collaboratively with womn’s rights organizations in the pandemic focusing on listening and learning from grant partners and UAF-Africa Advisors on a wide range of questions, challenges, mitigation and relevant responses to COVID-19, as well as changes to existing grant-partnerships.



The Grant Making Strategy, according to Carol Werunga, UAF-Africa’s Solidarity & Support Manager, included, “An analysis of grant partners’ potential to deliver on agreed activities and outputs during the pandemic and lockdowns; tracking the impact of COVID-19 and analysis of grant requests [including the number of requests received, the number of grants awarded, and the nature of activities proposed by partners].”

Linked with the documentation work, the Fund wrote an article on how she plans and updates on the actual ways through which she supported grant partners. Here, the Fund paid particular attention to some of their biggest concerns including the need for flexibility to enable the use of funds in practical and meaningful ways, rather than relying on agreed work and outcomes planned before the pandemic.

The Activisms and Connection Strategy which included working with those who are already creating artwork that could be an inspiration to feminist and womn’s rights activists, drawing them into the work of the Feminist Republik [FR]; Information-sharing and connection through webinars on self and collective care and related themes emerging from the work of the FR.

By the end of week 1 of May 2020, the entire team at Urgent Action Fund-Africa was positioned and ready for coordinated solidarity and support to African womn’s human rights defenders [AWHRDs], their groups and formations. The Results of this organising have been documented elsewhere [Fire in the Rain, 2021]



## SOME UAF-AFRICA IDEAS: The Power of African Feminist Philanthropy

- *African feminist philanthropy brings forward a critical analysis that makes visible the vast power imbalances, huge inequality gaps, and adverse effects of declining global economies, which facilitate the feminisation of poverty in Africa.*
- *African feminist philanthropy challenges the current dominant worldview and power positing that it is divisive, that it expands rather than bridge the gaps of inequality.*
- *African feminist philanthropy works hard to dismantle the vestiges of colonialism, neo-liberalism, capitalism, racism and patriarchy that exist in systems and structures of global philanthropy?*
- *African feminist philanthropy is clear that development and aid are not neutral. It calls for constant redistribution and balancing of the scales of power.*

- *African feminist philanthropy values the concept of equitable partnerships, not through talk but through walking the talk. This type of philanthropy ensures critical questions are asked about who manages the money, who makes the decisions, and who has the last say in all partnerships, ensuring that respect is extended to local partners' expertise and competencies in designing sustainable programmes and solutions.*
- *African feminist philanthropy centres on the decisions, the voices, and actions of local partners, the people that make change happen!*
- *African feminist philanthropy applies an intersectional lens that helps counter the limitations of working in siloes and instead sees how issues are experienced in a multifaceted and intertwined way. In this regard, this type of philanthropy recognizes the need to address both practical and strategic needs all at once, especially during crisis moments like the COVID-19 pandemic.*
- *African feminist philanthropy plays a huge role in developing responses to crises that model an approach that values, respects, and cares for those for whom they serve.*
- *African feminist philanthropy works at the personal, institutional, ideological, and systemic levels to advance womn's "freedom to" and "freedom from."*

A large, light blue, stylized number '2' graphic that is partially overlaid by the text 'TWO'.

TWO

## MATTERS OF CONTEXT:

Feminist and  
Women's Funds  
Entering and  
Navigating a Global  
Pandemic

By June 2020, Feminist and Women’s Funds in Africa were mobilising themselves into a state of greater readiness for action, in support of, as part of and in solidarity with the feminist and women’s rights movements. Years of working as part, within and with women and feminist-activists and their organisations in communities across the continent, meant that they started off the response to the pandemic from a place of connectedness with access to and knowledge of the inner workings of and needs and priorities of these communities. The smaller and bigger Funds alike, had built valuable networks with grassroots social justice advocates, local thought leaders and institutions, and grant makers. This means that a coherent and focused, strategic philanthropic ecosystem with an ever-growing and strengthening feminist ethos and approach was underway, evolving and ready.



At the time of publication, the pandemic had been with us for 22 months. The Funds have been active, awake and alive to the power of fueling and resourcing feminist organising in general and during several earlier health crises, including the HIV&AIDS crisis in the early 2000s, the cholera crisis in Southern Africa, the Ebola crisis in the Congo and in West Africa as well as other crises such as political transitions, armed and civil conflicts and natural disasters to name just a few. In these urgent, emergency and crisis moments and phases, the Funds have built and strengthened crisis management grant-making infrastructure. This, with a view to making our own contribution to keeping feminist and women’s rights activists, organisations and movements afloat and surviving, even preventing them from shutting down and supporting them in their central role in crisis assessments of, responses to, communications on, and recovery from these crises. Before the pandemic, we filled a critical gap that governments, more prominent funders, INGOs and other organizations cannot or choose not to fill.

It was to be the same with COVID-19 across the continent, based on feedback received from a survey group of 1015 [one thousand and fifteen] CSOs spread across forty-four African countries, a report by EPIC Africa on the impact of COVID-19 on African Civil Society Organizations showing the effect the pandemic had on these organizations. The Report offered a good sense of how the pandemic severely constrained their operations and, in some cases, caused them to shut down. According to this report, 98% of CSOs confirmed that COVID-19 had impacted and disrupted their operations in more ways than one, 70% had to reduce or cancel operations, 55.69% had already experienced a loss of funding, 66.46% expected to lose funding in the next 3-6 months and 84.48% indicated that they were not ready and adequately prepared to cope with the disruption caused by COVID-19 to their operations.

A critical disability justice-focused organization, Disability Women and Girl's Union, confirmed that they were hit on many fronts: In June 2021, a strain of the virus discovered in Sierra Leone hit disabled women and girls hard, even as it spread through the country. They faced a pervasive lack of social protection, were mostly poor, vulnerable, and did not have access to any national response program. Within this broader crisis across movements, generally, feminist and women's rights organizations are traditionally poorly funded and where funding is in place, the kinds of funding and the conditions of the funding do not help in ensuring that they are able to engage in long term, sustainable transformative work with ease. In fact, the kinds of funding they do access often carry the risk of actually forcing them into survivalist mode, thus preventing the kind of organisational development that could set them up for medium- to long-term effective and impactful work. Within the lockdowns, they now faced challenges of restricted mobility, the absence of in-person organising and major challenges in making the transition to virtual work, especially smaller organizations that lack the resources and infrastructure to do so. Further, many cited an intensification of the familiar but now more intense hostile environments: draconian laws, surveillance, COVID-19-denying governments, amidst a general intensification of the lack of accountable and participatory decision-making.

African Feminist and Women Funds have a track record that prepared and positioned them for this new global-scale emergency. However, in spite of this deep experience, this was to be the first time that Feminist and Women's Funds found themselves in situations where they were forced to navigate a crisis with multiple and multi-layered impacts to this extent. The teams in the Funds were at once first responders and resource personnel, themselves caregivers in situations where mitigation policies and scarce resources meant that their own infected and affected loved ones needed their direct and sustained attention and care.

Additionally, they themselves were in danger of being infected or infecting others at work, just by showing up and doing their essential and critical work. This was happening on a massive scale all across the continent [and world] and the needs, priorities and demands were significant and overwhelming. Cases where this kind of overlap had happened in recent history, tended to be localized, affecting a region or community and as such, the capacity for responding with support and solidarity was more present. The extent of the impacts of COVID-19 and associated lockdowns were not isolated and not in some distant location but everywhere at the same time with varying levels of damage, triggering even more complex crises. These included GBV, isolation or re-traumatisation for LGBTIQ+ people, economic hardship across the board - including or particularly hitting the sex worker community - and a pervasive mental health crisis, to mention a few. In a nutshell, everyone, including the responders themselves, were thrown into physical, emotional and social crises.

Really quickly and with unprecedented efficiency and effectiveness as well as scale and scope, the Funds were able to almost seamlessly [with many challenges of course], adjust and transition into and accelerate our work on supporting crisis responses to marginalised and vulnerable groups. Feminist and Women's Funds move money, influence, and power to women- and girl-led solutions that address the root causes of social injustice. Women's Funds occupy a unique position within their regions—as philanthropic institutions and trusted advocacy partners. We are grounded in long-term relationship-building and the ability to be nimble, to learn, and to adapt. At the height of the pandemic, Feminist and Women's Funds moved resources to frontline communities much sooner than many philanthropic or government institutions. The readiness and positioning of the Funds with our strengths related to connection, understanding, trust, access and knowledge proved central as the needs of feminist and women's rights organisations and their communities became compounded and the pandemic intensified.

# THREE

## SHOWCASING FEMINIST SOLUTIONS IN A PANDEMIC:

Feminist resilience  
and imagination

# The Power of Movements

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The work of Feminist and Women's Funds is in solidarity and support of feminist and women's rights movements; and this in deep trust that they are problem solvers in the household, the community and broader society. They make ends meet, even when these ends don't meet!

For this publication, there was sharing by the Funds and a few of their partners of multiple stories, reflections and analysis of resilience, resistance and imagination from all regions and all sizes of organisations doing diverse work. Over the next few months and no doubt, years, more work will be done to share the ideas, work and analysis of feminist-activists and their movements across the continent during this persistent pandemic. The Showcase Studies below, as well as the lessons drawn from the Funds are shared to highlight what this work offers and why fueling and resourcing this work matters!



# Showcase Three:



**ROZARIA**  
MEMORIAL TRUST

**Rozaria  
Memorial  
Trust**

Murewa district, about 100 kilometers from Zimbabwe's capital city, Harare, is home to the Rozaria Memorial Trust (RMT), which hosts a women's shelter alongside information technology, library, and counseling hubs, amongst other services. The early support received from UAF-Africa supported them to build credibility, which they leveraged to get additional support with scaling up and improving infrastructure like electricity, boreholes, and IT resources. When they began to receive information about a rapidly spreading virus, RMT immediately began to ready themselves by making strategic decisions based on a series of questions they had posed [to themselves].

**Looking Out For Each Other: Sustaining Ourselves.** This leadership to center communal care, self-care, staff safety, and well-being of the staff team itself was critical. Those who do the work, the activists and other first responders, matter as much as the efforts "outside", both for themselves and because they themselves were going to be directly affected by the pandemic. Right at the start, RMT took time out to slow down and think strategically to ensure they could ready themselves for what was to come, asking themselves: How do we attain a level of information with the team that enables us to go out into the communities with answers where these are needed? How can our workplace policy prioritize counseling so that no one is left out? Who are those on the staff team that are at the highest risk?

**Looking Out for Women in Communities: The Basics of Sustaining the Work.** For an organization based in a rural community where they work with women, adapting to a COVID-19 reality also focused on the cost implications of sustaining the work with women. Relationship, solidarity and communication is central to organising. The pandemic and lockdowns threatened to cut this off. "Even when we were able to give internet bundles, we realized that we did not have enough equipment because with COVID-19, we could no longer cluster five people on one laptop."

**Tapping our Creativity and Innovation:** Both as a means to jump-start and accelerate small scale production as part of the livelihoods of women and due to intensifying supply chain demands, RMT strategised on the need to focus on local invention and industry. This included self-resourcing ventures where, for example, RMT increasingly relied on its women's networks, movements, and groups in the community to produce the food that the Shelter needed. This mobilised a micro-economy where today, 60% of the food used in the Shelter is food produced by the Shelter, including maize, groundnuts and vegetables. The centre also now has an orchard. "For us, it's very important that we recognize our continent's contributions because an achievement like this is not reflected in audited financial statements"



**Sounding Gender Alarms:** As part of their ongoing analysis of women presenting at the shelter, RMT recognised an increase in family-based violence. The numbers of rape and incest crimes were increasing as was child marriage, sexual exploitation, and abuse. The fact that historically, for many girls and women, home has not been a place of safety, protection and security but of risk, was now seen at a much bigger scale. RMT took their observations and analysis into collaborative research on the impacts of COVID-19 on child marriages with partners from Malawi, Zambia and Eastern Africa. Working alongside multiple local and global feminist and women's rights movements, they raised their voices, amplified the messaging as part of sounding the alarm to society, movements and policy makers about the gendered impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdowns. These alarms mobilised attention to the issues and offered options for many women in Zimbabwe and all over the world as a response to the alarms. An important caveat here is the reality of how the government asked for evidence to back up the "claims" of GBV such as forced marriage. In reality, this "evidence" would require that the cases be held up to rigorous data analysis standards. It would have delayed action. This insistence on evidence represents "the tyranny of data". Further, in relation to extent and scale - "For us, one girl is one girl too many!!"



## **SOME RMT IDEAS: THE POWER OF AFRICAN FEMINIST PHILANTHROPY**

- Taking a Risk [funding in the early days]
- An act of trust [belief in the people, their ideas and leadership]
- Creating opportunity for grant partners to develop leverage
- Sustaining support to an organisation as they test, explore and evolution
- Giving for holistic change: art, activism, healing, love and care are merging, inextricable
- Grow our own! – women in the supply chain, moving deeper into economy
- Recognising readiness as a serious capability for a persistently uncertain world



**ROZARIA**  
MEMORIAL TRUST

# Some Insights From Movements

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## A time of global pandemic

The RMT is just one of hundreds of feminist and women's rights organisations across the continent that benefits from African Feminist Philanthropy through the various Feminist and Women's Funds. The Showcase Study is just a slice of the work of RMT and a small peak into the ways in which the team navigated the crises of COVID-19 and the associated lockdowns. It focuses on the services they have continued, despite the odds, to offer to women –and indirectly to society – during the pandemic and the ways in which their resilience and creativity have enabled them to solve a series of almost intractable challenges.

The outstanding work of the organisation is a microcosm of the work of movements on the continent and spans a range of themes and issues that get to the root causes of women's oppression. This includes poverty and inequalities as well as multiple strategies and tactics for reaching and influencing multiple actors to ensure that women access all their rights and freedoms. They do this, whilst holding true to their objectives related to the urgency of responses to violence against women.

When feminists and women human rights defenders are empowered through funding outside rigid funding templates and structures, they are unstoppable. For instance, RMT negotiated as a bloc within the Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe where they functioned as chair of a women-led frontline responders' group. Empowered to take on this role, and relying on the power of the collective, when they went into meetings with strategic partners and government, their voice was no longer a single narrative but representing the collective experience of women's rights organizations, whether in urban areas, rural areas, whether older women, young women – all women in their diversities. Without this, Nyaradzayi believes that their voice would have been received differently.

In Nigeria, the rise in GBV cases, specifically the rape and death of two college students within days of each other months into the lockdown, led all thirty-six state governors to declare a state of emergency. The move, backed by talks of policy change, required the state governors to open a sex offenders register and sign on to federal laws that address rape and violence against women and children. This escalation happened in response to massive protest action, advocacy and other influence work by women's rights groups and civil society organizations, among them, the Nigerian Feminist Forum, a grantee partner of AWDF and UAF-Africa.

The resulting state of emergency and push toward data collection were actual examples of how feminist and women's rights organizations are uniquely positioned to sound the alarm at critical crisis moments and act collaboratively to amplify an urgent concern. In Liberia, Fatu Kekula, a nursing student developed a homegrown PPE method after four family members became infected and did not have access to overburdened healthcare facilities. Fatu's trash bag method protected her, and three of her sick family members survive the epidemic.

These examples – nuggets – reflect the power of women who apply an insider's understanding of their contexts/realities to building crucial interventions that protect the rights of their families and communities in crises and encapsulates the idea of "making ends meet"- what women across the continent do every day. Women get things done and when they work collectively, the impacts are multiplied.

Two Needs Assessments conducted by UAF-Africa with their grant and strategic partners across all regions on the continent in May 2020 and updated in February 2021 offered insights into the role that feminist and women's rights movements played and continue to play.

Here are some highlights from the Assessments:



## Challenges

### Challenges

The challenges that African feminist-activists and women's human rights defenders faced during this COVID-19 pandemic were many:

- AWHRDS and their organisations were, often without any dedicated resources
- They faced a drop in funding, massive increases in the need for their services and engagement
- Few had any buffer in the form of contingency resources to cater for the crises
- For many organisations, it was not possible to implement the previously made plans and funder agreements in view of the contexts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated lockdowns
- This amounted to the prompt and unavoidable adjusting of planned interventions in order to serve women and girls based on their real needs and priorities
- Most organisations were in some kind of crises with an extreme mismatch between the human, financial and skills-related resources and the needs of communities
- Many African women's human rights defenders and their organisations were under huge pressure to provide for practical and very basic needs, versus the broader, more long-term needs that much of their funding was allocated for such as capacity building and advocacy. For the most part, these organisations were unable to deliver on these needs because they were not in a position to provide services from their current project funds nor fundraise for them to meet these practical and basic needs
- Constraints related to transitioning their work virtually/remotely were common. The reality that unplanned-for investment was needed for ICT equipment as well as for learning on how to use these to maximize their organising and reach. Where this technology was present but previously shared, gaps emerged as social distancing guidelines and needs prevented such sharing and work from home mandates put in place. Where these were not in place, the demand for these was huge and urgent

## Triumphs

DESPITE the many challenges faced by women's human rights defenders and feminist activists across the continent, they somehow mobilized themselves and the resources to shift, sustain and strengthen their efforts throughout the pandemic. As with most emergencies they have generally been the first to respond to crises and the last to leave during efforts to support communities. Feminist and women's rights organisations were actively prioritizing, from the start, service and support for, and solidarity with, those who were on the margins of society such as sex workers, LGBTIQ+ people, domestic workers and persons with disabilities, amongst other. Across the continent – and world – they sounded the alarm on the soaring levels of violence against women and gender-based violence and generated and offered a feminist analysis of this. Responses by leaders and decision-makers included widespread political commitment [at least in word], major policy provisions and in some cases, actual delivery on and mechanisms for their implementation and tracking.

These women and gender non-conforming people have been at the frontlines and seldom acknowledged and often engaged in reproductive labour, largely invisibilised, unpaid and precarious. They have been using a wide range of strategies - some new to them and some a continuation of those strategies they were already engaged in prior the pandemic. They did this work as small groups, collectives, co-operatives and as organisations individually as well as in partnership with other organisations from the feminist and women's rights movements and across movements.

Such power and possibilities of feminist and women's rights movements is the reason that the Feminist and Women's Funds exist.



# At a Glance

## Seeds Planted, New Shoots

Some exciting growth points for many organisations and groups are major shifts or new moves into

- Digital activism and technology-intensive activism.
- The widespread and sustained use of arts, culture, recreation, spirituality and creativity. This was expressed through poetry and other forms of spoken word, healing circles and the use of visual art and color in documents and presentations.
- General centering of wellbeing and care as a practice and not just an idea or goal.
- Service provision for those who previously focused more on advocacy and related strategies and activities. Some of the advocacy issues addressed included access to food, water, health [particularly PPE] and to other social services, violence against women and gender-based violence more broadly and on widespread militarized state responses.
- Advocacy work for those who previously were more focused on service provision.

“We have engaged Government officials and other NGOs to be disability inclusive regarding COVID-19 interventions. First was the State Government and APGA who gave us 100 bags of 10kg rice, 35 bags of 6kg rice, some bottles of hand sanitizers, and a hundred thousand Nairas respectively. Then followed by State Ministry of Children and Women Affairs in collaboration with Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and about 30 women with disabilities benefited from the COVID-19 palliatives shared on 10th and 16th of August respectively. The Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs have committed to setting up a committee which would involve WWDs to enable inclusion and proper planning for WWDs during and after COVID-19.” [Nwanokwara Ncheta Augusta, during an Urgent Action Fund-Africa learning process]

## A Celebration!

African women, African feminist-activists and African women's human rights defenders represent the best of the love and power that fuelled the efforts at the frontlines of the pandemic. They are the frontlines.

Africa Philanthropy Network and their members from African Feminist and Women's Funds affirm, salute and celebrate their contributions.



Throughout the pandemic, the Feminist and Women's Funds were right there, working and walking alongside and standing behind the movements, offering financial and technical support and acting in solidarity with them.

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# FOUR

## THE POWER OF FEMINIST PHILANTHROPY IN A PANDEMIC:

Rising and Ready  
to Navigate a  
Persistently  
Unpredictable  
World

# Showcase Four:



UHAI  
EASHRI

UHAI identifies themselves as Africa's first indigenous activist Fund supporting sexual and gender minorities and sex worker human rights. On their website, in response to the self-reflecting question of why an indigenous activist Fund is necessary, they respond:

*"We do not simply support the field of Eastern Africa's sexual and gender minorities and sex worker human rights—we are the field!"*

## Acknowledging an ongoing state of VVUUCCH

UHAI, an indigenous African Fund has navigated the challenges of the pandemic owing to their groundedness in the communities the Fund serves and because "the LGBTQIA+ movements and the sex workers movements have always lived within a crisis." In this way, many communities were dealing with not just a virus that could shut down their bodies but one that could lock them outside of their only support systems – generally not their biological families and households. The critical concern became, *"How do we respond so that we don't lose the milestones that the community has been able to gain over the years."* Stellah Wairimu Bosire specifically considers disruption in access to healthcare for the LGBTQIA+ communities and sex workers as perhaps the biggest issue they faced. Even as government institutions continued to operate [often dysfunctionally], the LGBTQIA+ community and sex workers found themselves losing crucial reproductive health services for people with HIV, access to STI screening and prevention programs. The COVID-19 response was not gender sensitive and aware.

UHAI was uniquely positioned to understand and navigate the socio-political contexts in which their constituency live and organise because they embody their core principles through the fact that their board is led by activists most affected and who are empowered for governance roles to keep both the Fund and the movements accountable. The Board includes LGBTQIA+ people and sex workers. Also, UHAI functions as a rapid response grant maker with decision-making being activist-led through a peer grant-making mechanism. UHAI's method is centered and heavily reliant on a network of collaborators within the LGBTQIA+ and sex worker community which they are constantly building.

This positioning of UHAI meant that, from the start and throughout the pandemic, they have been able to identify the distinct and diverse realities and needs of people in the communities they support. Early in the pandemic, they carried out COVID-19 assessments in Kenya, Uganda and Ethiopia and at the time of the conversation for this chapbook, were concluding another in Burundi. The work of the Feminist Fund has kept going, in the face of the pandemic itself, as well as the lockdowns and multiple retrogressive and opportunistic "COVID-19 prevention" policies by governments across the East Africa region. What is most emphasized by the symbiosis between funders, local activists, and their communities is that survival in times of crises is reinforced by an ecosystem.

Based on a conversation with \*Stellah Wairimu Bosire, Co-Executive Director of UHAI –EASHRI, a member of the APN.



## UHAI Ideas For Building African Feminist Philanthropy:

- "We are the field", the movement, the community
- Building resilient, safe communities as a worthwhile, long-term investment in freedom and dignity.
- The possibilities of codifying the capabilities associated with "always living with and in crises".
- Positioning and readiness to understand and navigate the socio-political contexts of the constituency and grant partners.
- Capable to identify the distinct and diverse realities, needs and priorities of people in the communities they support.
- Recognition of all efforts that contribute to community freedoms, dignity and equality.
- Philanthropists as progressive thought leaders.
- Philanthropy as redistribution of resources.
- Philanthropy as an act that affirms the agency and autonomy of groups, organisations and movements [rather than disempowering communities through giving with predetermined targets for how the money is to be used]



# Showcase Five:

The Power of  
Feminist  
Philanthropy  
in a Pandemic



African  
Women's  
Development  
Fund

AWDF is a Women's Fund, a grantmaking foundation that supports local, national and regional women's rights organisations working towards the empowerment of African women and the promotion and realisation of their rights.

At the onset of the pandemic AWDF, wrote about three formal letters of solidarity to their grantee partners offering them flexibility in changing budgets, timelines, work plans etc', this was to allay any anxieties that their partners might have had because of the pandemic. AWDF noted that working in collaboration with other Funds such as UHAI, UAF-Africa and others has been a great opportunity to expedite the grant review process for partners that have been supported prior by these Feminist Funds.

The Fund has an open approach to partnering with other Funds, extending the same solidarity and complementarity they demonstrate with their grant partners to other Funds. A case in point is the way that the AWDF and the UAF-Africa work in solidarity and community – AWDF have occasionally provided grants to UAF-Africa towards rapid response grant making during crisis moments as well as in areas which the AWDF wants to make a contribution but does not have as much reach and rapid response deployment infrastructure and modalities as UAF-Africa does.

This interdependence is remarkable because it indicates a deep understanding, consciousness and appreciation for collectivity and a rejection and refusal of competitive funding cultures. This is unusual also, as in general, much larger and more established foundations are not known to collaborate in this way. AWDF bring and offer a broad funder base and significant funding volumes and the ability to contract and partner with smaller, local and much larger, regional and sub-regional feminist and women's rights groups and organisations.



They bring significant discretionary funding power to these partnerships. UAF-Africa in turn, uses the knowledge, track record, tools and infrastructure they have to rapidly deploy those resources so that they get to where they are most needed when the resources most count – with African feminist-activists and women's human rights defenders in various groups and organisations. This includes the critical capability linked with sufficient and capable staff at the ready and well-established funding modalities so that they can move resources through internet banking platforms within hours from Kenya to Niger, Zimbabwe or Tunisia and many other countries across Africa.

## **AWDF Ideas For Building African Feminist Philanthropy:**

- African Feminist Philanthropy as an act of solidarity, sisterhood and friendship.
- Seek and leverage interdependence, mutuality, reciprocity and sharing.
- Trust based grantmaking based on empathy, dignity and respect for grantees experiences and realities.
- African feminist philanthropy as reducing inefficiencies through seeing and seeking complementarity.

# Showcase Six:

The Power of  
Feminist  
Philanthropy  
in a Pandemic



XOESE

Xoese is a feminist foundation of public utility operating out of Togo which aims to financially and technically support the implementation of initiatives of women's rights organizations in French-speaking countries of the Global South.

During the early stages of the pandemic, XOESE identified an important way to help struggling organizations by advocating that the French government relax their qualification requirements for funding calls. This was after the French government announced a funding mechanism of 120 million euros for women's rights movements in the global south. XOESE recognised that the Call for Proposals had so many conditions that many of the women's rights organizations which most needed the funding would be unlikely to qualify. The conditions were so stringent that even many Women's Funds would not meet the condition of having an annual budget of a minimum of 500,000 euros.

XOESE started advocacy work by writing an open letter to the French president, Emmanuel Macron, with recommendations on how to improve access to the fund. This led to the French government consulting with French feminist organizations to improve the strategic framework for this funding window.

*Based on a conversation with Emilie Quenensse, Partnership Engagement Manager of XOESE*

## XOESE Ideas For Building African Feminist Philanthropy:

- Track and engage with actors within the philanthropic ecosystem so that guidance and benchmarking can be used to strengthen the potential impacts of funding on feminist and women's rights organising
- Work within networks of other Women's Funds and funders, including governments, so that there is early access to decisions in the pipeline. Establish mechanisms for ensuring Women's Funds are consulted systematically by funders as they design funding mechanisms and open new windows
- Have your ear to the ground and finger on the pulse so that there is an appreciation and deep understanding of the needs, priorities and capabilities of feminists and women's human rights defenders and their organisations .



# Some Insights From Movements

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## Feminist and Women's Funds During the Pandemic

*It is important to emphasize the interconnectedness of the African Feminist and Women's Funds: Each and every one of us plays a unique and strategic role and plays it well, according to our varying mandates. All African Feminist and Women's Funds are members of APN and Prospera (International Network of Women's Funds). I am proud to mention that these two networks have played significant roles in bolstering Feminist and Women's Funds' capacities to rapidly and strategically respond to their constituencies during crises such as HIV&AIDS, natural disasters, Ebola and this COVID-19 pandemic to mention but just a few. APN and Prospera's global philanthropy advocacy platforms strategically and politically position, amplify and elevate African Feminist and Women's Funds' agendas, impact and visibility. [Ndana Bofu-Tawamba]*

The Feminist and Women's Funds are reimagining and creating, co-creating and recreating funding cultures through a practice of how we work together, how we relate and in so doing, actually building the world we want. We seek to reflect the world we want in the world and spaces we operate in and a case in point is our collective, collaborative and coordinated efforts. The impact of such co-operation on the work of movements is significant and was key during the worst periods within the COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdowns.

## This is What Solidarity Looks Like: Looking Inside

The whole world has changed in multiple ways as a result of the pandemic. The centrality of human life and health has been brought to the fore in an unprecedented way. Wellbeing, care and healing, spirituality and art have all come together as part of the future of work. This is different to the instrumental approach of pre COVID-19 when looking after staff needs was seen as good business practice as people are then more productive. The shift is towards more genuine care about the welfare of others. Feminist movements and the Women's Funds have been promoting this kind of world of work for some time with significant backlash for being unrealistic and soft. During the pandemic, the Funds were able to immediately look inwards and advance very quickly this commitment to engaging with compassion and care with staff, volunteers, interns and consultants and associates. Examples include AWDF which has a buddy system, sister to sister conversations and weekly dance;



UAF-Africa, a long-time virtual organisation operating with staff presence in 16 African countries and supported by two anchor offices in Harare and Nairobi; advanced ideas that emerged out of feminist movements by sharing power structures that allowed staff members to back up when feeling overwhelmed with work and the personal pressures of COVID-19 pandemic while allowing other staff members to step in and up, hence ensuring the solidarity and support work the Fund centers continues.



Through UAF–Africa’s fostering care programming run by the Feminist Republik, self and collective care became central and rallying points for staff, board members and grantmaking advisors. UAF–Africa introduced practical and multiple benefits for staff such as shorter work weeks, access to psychosocial support services for staff and their families. The Fund strengthened her solidarity and support infrastructure for the feminist and women’s rights movements including providing more financial and technical resources to the Feminist Republik; a platform open to all African feminists activists and African women’s human rights defenders and works to inspire, mobilise, popularise and co-create cultures of self and collective care.

## This is What Solidarity Looks Like: Flexibility and Responsiveness

All the Funds in this publication established mechanisms for sustained communication and feedback with grant partners and strategic partners on their wellbeing and the situation in which they were operating and offered support. AWDF, for example, wrote up to four letters to grant partners in the first year of the pandemic to reassure them that the Fund cared and was there for them. This support was different across Funds, but the needs of grant partners for flexibility in delivery on contracts and agreements were universal.

This included timeous responses to communications, the extension of deadlines, approval of reallocation of resources and support for practical needs – of staff teams as well as women in their constituencies. The provision of food, water points, soap, sanitizers, PPEs, humanitarian support and services were amongst the most pressing and priority needs expressed and responded to. The Francophone Women’s Fund (XOESE) in Togo approved for grant partners to repurpose their entire grants to focus more on welfare, safety, and sanitation, in lieu of the activities that the financial resources had been originally allocated for.

## Have Insider Knowledge Across Issues, Geography and Strategy

Throughout the pandemic, the Feminist and Women's Funds, by virtue of being part of, embedded in and/or connected to the movements, had and were able to apply and share critical and useful information. This enabled an understanding of the realities of feminist-activists and women's human rights defenders to enable better decision making about how best to support them. They were also able to hear about and understand the decision-making, strategies and tactics of their partners and to have the benefit of this knowledge in making their decisions as Funds and also influencing back-funders' decision making. Numerous Funds shared examples of how they communicated and influenced funders upward the chain and worked to ensure that their funding practices responded to community needs.

## Capability to Trust

The embedded nature of the Funds in relation to movements, their ability to access information and so develop understanding, their open and democratic approach to grantmaking and their consistent demonstration of solidarity has for the most part enabled those in movements to trust the teams within the Funds. The extent of feminist networks and the philanthropic ecosystem also means that the Funds themselves have trust in grant partners and so have been able to make decisions in favour of grant partners based on deep knowledge and understanding of the contexts and realities in which the movements and philanthropic networks have to operate. This culture of trust has been critical during the COVID-19 pandemic because, amongst others, it enabled decisiveness on the part of the Funds which was in favour of grant partners in terms of, for example, flexibility and repurposing of financial resources.

## See Patterns and Trends

The Funds are able to surface the trends and patterns within the contexts and the movements both across the sub-regions and the continent as a whole. This is due to a number of co-factors including the embeddedness and positioning of the Funds both within the movements and the philanthropic ecosystem, their networks of advisors, the research [including needs assessments] they conduct, the analysis of partner proposals and reports, the two-way communications, feedback and relationships and the sharing of information between the Funds themselves. This ability to scan the environment and be trusted with intimate intelligence from the ground contributes to intellectual work that furthers our understanding and enables greater responsiveness as well as proactive efforts to support the movements.

## Popularising Feminist Perspectives

Feminists have been at the forefront of many struggles, bringing an analysis of power and the elevation of love as being the motive for the contributions of humans to humanity. A significant part of the role of feminists is to see, to be awake, alive and conscious to the invisibilised power relations in society and to imagine a world where power is shared and resources equitably distributed. Just a few years ago, the word patriarchy was resisted as something being pushed by feminists and too radical, an idea that society was not ready for. Today, the term appears regularly in conversations in governmental and inter-governmental spaces and in documents. Similar evolution has been underway in terms of the ideas of love and care. There was a time when there was such resistance to these as not belonging in “professional” space, discourse and practice. This has changed dramatically during the COVID-19 pandemic, if not before.

Feminist ideas are increasingly looked at as offering something that is missing from analysis, from programmes and organisations themselves, both in the human rights and development sectors. This capability and readiness to see and to analyse has enabled feminists across the world, and certainly on the African continent, to sound the alarm on issues that would otherwise be hidden, underplayed or ignored during the pandemic. A case in point is the escalation in violence against women and gender-based violence during the pandemic and particularly during lockdowns. Feminists were able to clearly articulate and popularise the messaging on this escalation and its causes and consequences and elicit a range of varying responses by states and civil society and media, including policy and practice such as targeted services, budgets and public education. This role of the canary in the coalmine has been critical in protecting the rights of women and gender non-conforming people prior and certainly during the COVID-19 pandemic itself. Feminist and Women’s Funds have made a contribution to this shifting discourse by demonstrating how donors can and should be in solidarity with these movements and of normalising this and setting the agenda for feminist donor policy and practice.





# A NEW, COLLECTIVE PHILANTHROPIC AGENDA:

Philanthropic  
Imperatives for  
Social Justice  
Organising in an  
Uncertain World

# The Politics of Money

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In a capitalist economy, money represents power - to say, to speak, to determine, to decide and direct. The power or politics of money has been placed high on the agenda of social movements over many decades, questioning funders' agendas and conditionalities. Pan Africanists have deepened that analysis through ideas on colonial and imperial power and African feminists have contributed to that layered analysis in multiple ways, including by articulating the ways that money-power intersects with gender, age and sexual orientation, amongst others.

Pan African feminists have focused and sustained leadership to articulate a feminist analysis of money-power to one, change the kind of relationships embedded in funder-movement relations; two, to increase the volume of funding that is allocated to African women's human rights defenders and feminists; three, to press for better kinds of funding, particularly larger, multi-year, core support, discretionary, unrestricted and flexible funding. A similar track record has been established by feminists elsewhere in the global south and indeed in the global north where solidarity with these struggles have translated to progressive philanthropic advocacy.

This thinking and work by feminists in movements and within the Women's Funds across the world is reflected in the Generation Equality linked work of the Women's Funds, which produced the Statement on Feminist Funds for Feminist Futures and also in the work to establish and develop the Global Alliance for Sustainable Feminist Movements. The Women's Funds in Africa have co-created and co-led these processes. These are important examples of "looking radically inward."

These dreams of a future where this work of building more equitable societies founded on feminist and African philanthropic principles is reliant on funding mechanisms that look radically inwards for solutions to African and global challenges.

During the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated lockdowns, African Women's Funds were able to extend and evolve this philanthropic advocacy in favour of feminist and women's rights movements in multiple ways, including:

## Great Flexibility of Funding

The Funds, in communication with grant partners, recognised the need for flexibility in grant agreements and were all able to get at least some of their funders to shift the conditions of their funding to make it more flexible and in keeping with new realities imposed by the pandemic and lockdowns. Whilst big ecosystems like Human Rights Funders Network, Candid, and Prospera play a vital role in making sure that the programmes are sustained, the chain extends to foundations like the Togo-based XOESE. The latter provided necessary support that gave many of their reliant organizations the motivation to continue doing their work at moments when they were not certain that they could continue as things became precarious for many Funds and organizations.

## Larger, Core-support, Unrestricted, Discretionary, Flexible, Long term and Multi-year Funding

The advocacy of the feminist and women's rights movements and the Funds in pressing for more and better funding produced tangible results during the pandemic and lockdowns. UHAI, XOESE, AWDF, Women Fund Tanzania, Fonds Pour Les Femmes Congolais, Mediterranean Women's Fund, and UAF-Africa referenced the ways that they were able to significantly diversify their funder base in response to their supporting rapid and strategic women's rights needs during the pandemic. African Feminist and Women's Funds have, during the pandemic, been very successful in growing the amount of financial resources that they have received. Some, like UAF-Africa, have grown exponentially in the last few years.

This is a clear testament to the successful philanthropic advocacy that has led to the recognition of the important role and impact of Women's Funds. UAF-Africa and UHAI, have played an important role in actively mobilizing resources and influencing funders to grow funding for Women's Funds. The co-creation and shared leadership role that the AWDF and UAF-Africa played in developing and sustaining, even through the pandemic the Leading from the South initiative and Count Me In! consortia work, is another case in point. .



## Influencing Donor Policy

Throughout the pandemic, the already improved relationship between feminist activists in movements and in the Women's Funds on the one hand and funders on the other, evolved further. Many funders quickly realised that their systems and frameworks did not enable funding flows to be sustained in this new context, leading them to approach the Feminist and Women's Funds for guidance and direction in this regard. While this kind of consultative approach was growing over the last five years or so, it escalated during the pandemic and in some ways, this represented a major shift that is almost certain to be sustained as uncertainty in the world persists. This enabled a new phase of influence by the Funds through greater trust and mutuality. Influence by the Funds on funders' policy and practice was also seen in invitations to act as strategic partners, a case in point being UHAI becoming a strategic partner with the Dutch government, offering technical and political support on funding policy. A similar experience by Success Capital, a UAF-Africa grantee, was invited to play a similar role by participating in decision making bodies of INGOs with funding mechanisms and with funders themselves.

The ongoing work by feminist activists to have the language of feminism and feminist principles and ideas reflected in funding policy has been pushing funders to consider the strategic advantage of feminist funding and of applying feminist ideas and analysis in framing their contributions. For example, Akina Mama wa Afrika, a UAF-Africa and AWDF grantee, have been working to influence the inclusion of feminist principles/feminist organizing by name in multiple efforts at national and global levels.

It is important to recognise the big players; funders who have been asking themselves the hard questions for many years and have, to varying degrees, made some of the critical shifts towards more ethical, pan Africanist and feminist funding. Many funders shifted into this space of transforming - or at least reforming - their approaches during the pandemic. Some of these grant makers had spent decades ignoring the nudging of the Funds and organizations but with the pandemic, the recognition of the threats of or actual reversal of many gains made by feminist and women's rights movements and groups over decades was an added impetus. The centrality of the very same principles of good governance such as participation, accountability and transparency that these funders hold their grant partners to have become central in their realisation of their own agendas.

Whatever the motivation, those who rose to the challenge of making the necessary shifts will be proven to have been on the right side of the transformation story. However, there are still many funders who appear stuck in past dysfunctional, undemocratic philanthropic cultures. Examples of how these funders persisted in this even when the pandemic was demanding a shift include some funders choosing a COVID-19 response strategy that channels the bulk of their funding to bureaucratic systems and structures. This strategy was employed by many big funders elsewhere. This short-cut is inconceivable when the slow pace within these bureaucracies and the persistent dysfunction of many of these entities has become clear. Further, the fact that the Feminist and Women's Funds have been able, over time, to shift funds easily and accountably in times of emergency and crises makes these kinds of decisions to channel the bulk of such much-needed funding to bureaucratic structures deeply concerning.

It is time for private and public funders to demonstrate their commitment to the same criteria they hold civil society organisations, groups and movements. This is especially true for those who profess progressive politics in terms of the kind of world we need to build. However, all funders now have to consider their own contributions to sustaining a system that breeds inequality whilst professing to be addressing inequality. The essence of addressing structural and root causes in any system of oppression [such as capitalism, colonialism, racism, amongst others] is to rethink and recreate institutions and society in ways that they do not create the oppressions in the first place. At the very least, those funders who profess progressive agendas but are themselves steeped in capitalist agendas and benefit significantly from this system, should be properly financing the work of those who commit to and seek new and different ways of achieving social justice.

At the most recent Uganda Feminist Forum, a UAF-Africa and AWDF grantee, one of the key points of focus was a conversation about the many constraints for feminists who are intent on influencing the current macroeconomic policies and offer alternatives that are inclusive. The conversations, with a focus on including feminist perspectives in high-level policy making, have been largely about tax justice and debt management as governments on the continent accumulate debts to meet the demands of COVID-19. They are deeply concerned about transparency and principled engagement by funders in these now urgent "root cause" conversations.

**'There is room for a conversation on accountability among the big players.'**

*Eunice, Musiimwe, Akina Mama wa Afrika*

**'This strategy implies a disconnect between some of the big players and CSOs.'**

*Fadekemi Akinfaderin, Nigerian Feminist*



# In Search of a Holistic Approach to Philanthropy

## Practical Needs, Wellness, Spirituality, Art and Dancing Are Valid

During COVID-19 pandemic and linked with the idea of more flexible funding, shifts in what “donor money” should and shouldn’t be used for was in many ways, forced by reality. To keep the wheels turning, the wellbeing of the activists and the ability of their groups and organisations to meet these needs was no longer academic, a goal for the future or something to be added in. It was central, obvious and urgent. The practical needs of activists had to be met. During this pandemic, UAF-Africa, elevated her rapid response support to feminist activists towards psychosocial wellbeing and mental health, the needs for PPE and basic needs such as food and clean water became a priority and there was now nowhere to send them to for these needs to be met. At UAF-Africa as with other Feminist and Women’s Funds, sustaining activism has always been about the full range of activist needs. Multiple initiatives of feminist groups to foreground self- and collective- care and healing justice, like the UAF-Africa's Feminist Republik initiative were immediate needs and priorities. Funding was shifted to these among other urgent and strategic needs. This represented a radical, although also obvious, merging and infusing of activism, art, healing and spirituality. Donor priorities have to catch up.

## Rethinking the Systems

Holistic funding also involves a deep recognition that there are no short cuts. Decades, if not centuries, of funding “low hanging fruit” and “results-based management”, a neoliberal idea of productivity and outputs that has been transposed into social justice work became impossible to sustain in the face of the realities of life in a global pandemic. “Build Back Better” became a mantra by the big players, including governments, as a way to rally collective action. This mantra does not demonstrate the urgency to get real and address the root causes of inequalities, unfreedoms and a lack of dignity for ordinary people everywhere. The failure of the decision- and policymakers of the world and in this case, funders, to address root causes of oppressions were the proverbial chickens that came home to roost in the pandemic. This dictum is an inadequate substitute for rethinking – the central flaw of this idea is that “building back” runs the risk of romanticizing the very systems that have excluded many people, particularly women and gender non-conforming people, in the first place.

## Ditch The Development Industrial Complex

Rethinking philanthropic cultures includes how to fund holistically, how to ensure accountability without insisting on “results-based management frameworks” and other technicist monitoring and evaluation industry frameworks. It is time to recognise and admit that these templates have for many and for the most part, not been able to offer frameworks fit for the real world and a VUUCCH world. Time is now overdue to replace funder reliance on narrow ideas of what constitutes "evidence" of a problem or changes claimed. The tyranny of "M and E" and "data" needs attention. Feminists are breaking free of these constraints. Success Capital, for example, has embraced a form of "data gathering" and "evidence" that is largely reliant on their lived experience. They articulate,

*...a narrative made out of centering their experience as a Pan-Africanist non-binary queer and feminist human rights defender. This is important as they have a keen interest in taking up space in CSOs where their realities may or may not be imagined. They do this by turning the camera on themselves. Their narrative is evidence.*  
[Dumiso Gatsha]



## Intersectional Approaches to Change Work

Rethinking also involves shifting to support more consistently comprehensive, intersectional approaches to social justice work. Single issue and narrow identity-based work and funding is short-termist and compound the problems later when the society is in crises, such as a global pandemic. Funders who ignore the imperative for holistic funding will keep falling into the chaos that comes with shocks and threats on the scale of local and global emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic. And they will even take many of us with them.

*We forget that the woman in question is not only a woman, but she's also an African woman, an African woman in a particular social, political, and economic context. Fund an environment, an ethos, beyond this specific crisis' moment!* [Theo Sowa]

# Imperatives For Action

## African Governments

Feminist and Women's Funds have for decades been seeking the removal of all barriers to their full and free functioning in support and solidarity with feminist-activists and women's human rights defenders in Africa. Changes by governments to the conditions and contexts in which African women's human rights defenders and feminist-activists do their work is now well overdue and where some progress has been made, it is at a slow pace and ad hoc. Governments must show accountability to international and regional standards through:

### Full and Accelerated Compliance with Resolutions and Reports:

- Resolution on the need for a study on the situation of Women Human Rights Defenders in Africa - 2012
- Resolution on Measures to Protect and Promote the Work of Women Human Rights Defenders - 2016
- Resolution on the Need to Adopt Legal Measures for the Protection of Women Human Rights Defenders in Africa – 2018
- Report of the Study on the Situation of Women Human Rights Defenders in Africa - 2012

## Recognition

- Recognize the critical role that African Feminist and Women's Funds play in crisis response and ongoing development, humanitarian and social justice work. Ensure their inclusion and representation in decision and policy-making structures, related to addressing the challenges of COVID-19 pandemic itself as well as economic and social recovery plans.

## Freedom Under the Law

- Repeal and amend laws and regulations that limit the rights to freedom of assembly, expression and access to information so that African Feminist and Women's Funds and women's rights organizations can do their work freely and without constraint.

## Intersectional Analysis

- Integrate and budget for an intersectional, feminist approach and analysis to national, regional and pan-African crisis response efforts and leverage the expertise of Feminist and Women's Funds and organizations to effectively address the specific issues and differential impacts of COVID-19 and other emergencies and crises on women and marginalized communities more broadly.

## Accountability Now

- End impunity of state and non-state actors for all forms of in-person, online/digital surveillance, attacks, violence and oppression of all women's human rights defenders and feminist activists and organizations, not least LGBTIQ+ activists, sex workers and other marginalized groups.

## Funders

The COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdowns serve to emphasise and reinforce to funders what feminist and women's rights activists and the Funds have been urging for decades. There is a very complex relationship between the movements and the big players. Decades of operating within a philanthropic regime which is, in the main, economically conservative, untrusting in culture and short-termist, feminist activists and women's human rights defenders and the Women's Funds are clear that something has to shift. The work they do is long-term and requires sustained investments and friendship, solidarity from funders and not a transactional approach that must also be "measured" in terms of change, outcomes and results.



## The imperative is for all funders to correct the crises in the politics of money in social justice philanthropy includes:

1. Political commitment by funders to shift their agendas in keeping with the Feminist Funds for Feminist Futures Call to Action of March 2021
2. Amend all funding policies to ensure that the shift to recognition of feminist philanthropy is institutionalised and therefore sustained
3. Rethink costing and budgets in keeping up with these commitments and policies

Specifically, track the implementation of these feminist friendly policies and leadership and management to account so that they:

- Support feminist movement building, holistic security and collective care
- Recognise and engage with Feminist and Women's Funds as strategic partners and ensure their involvement in funders' crisis response and recovery plans, particularly, for now, in relation to COVID-19
- Increase funding and provide flexible, long-term, core funding to African Feminist and Women's Funds
- Engage the Funds in meaningful ways and ensure transparency related to philanthropic policy and decision-making
- Invest in building and strengthening the infrastructure and capacity of Feminist and Women's and Funds

# Conclusion

The Africa Philanthropy Network, together with African Feminist and Women's Funds celebrate the work of women's rights and feminist activists and women's human rights defenders in Africa. We affirm and celebrate their efforts throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdowns. We celebrate the work of African Feminist and Women's Funds alongside these movements in these last 2 years. We stand together clear about our individual, separate roles and contributions as well as the power of our connected and collective organising. This publication has shared these efforts and offered some insights and analysis to their implications for advancing social justice in a persistently uncertain world.



We now seek an ethical and congruent approach by all funders to contribute to the work of Feminist and Women's Funds and organisations in ways that advance African philanthropic principles. Many non-governmental organisations and funders have been making the shift in the last ten years, in particular. This shift has escalated in the last five years. There is an unstoppable and deep recognition of feminists, feminism and feminist organising and contributions. The COVID-19 and related socio-economic, political and climate crises and the persistently uncertain world we are in calls for a more focused and sustained investment in feminist analysis, activism(s), movements and philanthropies. The connections between the progressive politics of African philanthropy and feminist philanthropy offers much in the way of building a conscious, intersectional, democratic system and movement of African feminist philanthropy. The ideas and principles of such a system are not just for feminists and Africans.

We are urging all those in philanthropic ecosystems who are not yet on board, to take the growing evidence of the power and impact of feminist approaches together with the opportunities and provocations offered by the crises of COVID-19 and the lockdowns to connect to these ideas and principles. Join the rapidly evolving community of progressive, democratic philanthropy as an act of community sharing and solidarity. African feminist philanthropy is a good place to start.

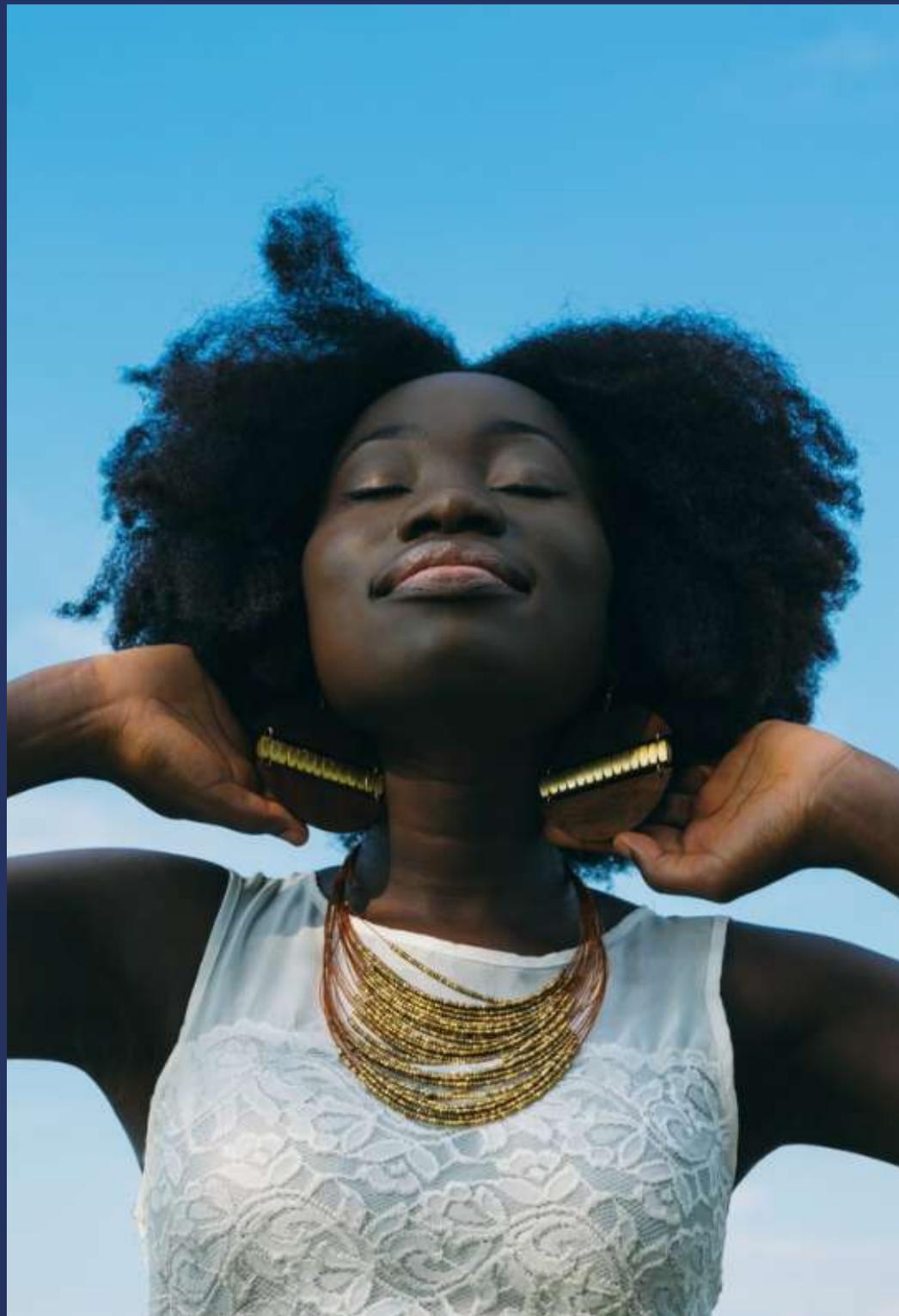
**1. Democratize philanthropy and other funding flows to increase accountability to feminist and women's rights organizations and movements;**

**2. Increase support to Feminist and Women's Funds as key to reaching local, national, and regional feminist and women's rights organizations and movements;**

**3. Support other funders to channel resources to feminist and women's rights organizations, to whom they may not have access without partnering with Feminist and Women's Funds;**

**4. Contribute to a body of knowledge on the effectiveness of funding feminist and women's rights organizations and movements to achieve gender equality by: tracking and analyzing our results (using feminist monitoring and evaluation principles); and sharing lessons learned and best practices.**

**[Feminist Funds for Feminist Futures, March 2021]**



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