EVERYDAY FEMINISM

The Anthology

WRITTEN BY THE LAM SISTERHOOD
FOR WOMANKIND WORLDWIDE

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LAURA EKUMBO AND MWENDE NGAO

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FOREWORD

On International Women's Day (IWD) 1989, Womankind Worldwide's work supporting and strengthening women's rights organisations and movements began. Since then, together with our partners, we have continued to work every day to secure equal rights for women and girls across the globe. **IWD is a time to pause, reflect and celebrate all the incredible achievements and milestones together.**

However, **IWD also serves as an annual reminder of the persistent challenges in achieving equal rights for women and girls in all their diversities.** Over the past year, we have witnessed alarming setbacks in women's rights across various countries, often coinciding with the rise of right-wing governments. Around the world, femicide is on the rise, alongside increasing cases of technology-facilitated gender-based violence. In Afghanistan, vice and virtue laws are systematically erasing women from public life. Stark regressions in sexual and reproductive health rights, along with continued violations of women's economic rights **threaten to undo decades of hard-worn progress.**

These challenges demand urgent action to safeguard the freedoms and rights of women everywhere.

Despite these profound challenges, **feminist activists and movements continue to rise up** with remarkable resilience and courage to demand gender justice – not just on International Women's Day, but every day. **We want to celebrate their boldness, their courage and their joy** along the way. We want to encourage you to join them in their collective action, in whatever way you can.

On International Women's Day 2023, we launched our first Everyday Feminism campaign to show how small, everyday feminist acts can drive progress toward a more equal and just future. **Everyday Feminism is a reminder that we all hold power, regardless of who we are and can use it to bring about meaningful change** in our homes, communities and the wider world.

What started as an idea, has bloomed into a global community of people committed to and celebrating acts of everyday feminism.

From spotlighting feminists who are living the principles of everyday feminism in their work and life in our Everyday Feminism campaign film, to inviting our community (of all ages and backgrounds) to add their own act of everyday feminism to the campaign online and in person at the Women of the World festival – a campaign that has reached over 700,000 people across the world.

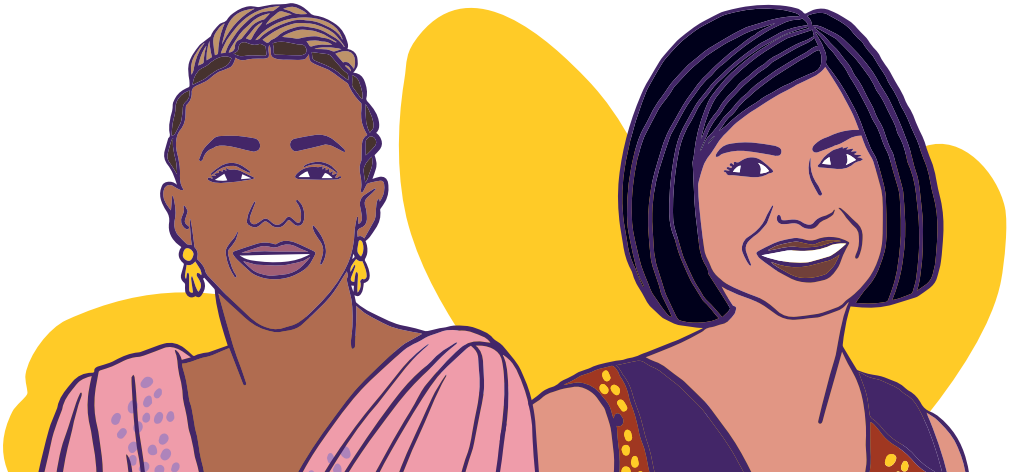
To celebrate IWD 2025, **we are excited to launch 'Everyday Feminism: The Anthology'**. This book celebrates ten renowned feminists who have been instrumental in advancing women's rights both in their countries and globally. Through their stories, we invite you into their everyday lives, work, feminism and activism.

Reading these stories made us reflect on what it means to be part of this movement. It's not just about these ten women – it's about all of us. Together, we are shaping a shared story of equality and justice.

WHAT'S YOUR ACT OF EVERYDAY FEMINISM TODAY?

We hope this book will be an inspiration to you, wherever you are in your feminist journey. If you're just beginning, may it spark curiosity, encourage learning and empower you to drive change in your home, workplace and community. If you're a seasoned feminist activist, may it inspire you to support and uplift the next generation of feminist trailblazers, ensuring that this vital work continues.

Feminism is for all of us. It is the path to a more equal future, where we all live with joy, choice and dignity. **What's your act of everyday feminism today?**



In solidarity,

Diana Njuguna and
Disha Sughand
Co-CEOs, Womankind Worldwide

INTRODUCTION

Storytelling has always been a powerful force for social change. So, in a world where feminist stories are too often sidelined, silenced or marginalised, we must amplify the voices and perspectives of feminists who continue to shape a gender-equal future.

This shared vision brought The LAM Sisterhood and Womankind Worldwide together to undertake the important work of honouring ten remarkable feminists.

Together, we have created a feminist artefact, one that provides intimate glimpses into the lives, passions, work, pasts and presents of ten women from the global feminist movement. Through their stories, we explore what it means to be a feminist today, and why it remains just as vital, every single day.

In the pages ahead, you'll hear from ten feminists who define and practice feminism on their own terms. Through their struggles and victories, they have challenged systems of oppression within their unique cultural and political contexts, making this book an embodiment of everyday feminisms. These are the stories of thinkers, activists, leaders and community builders who have expanded the boundaries of feminist thought; addressing issues such as gender equity, land rights, environmental justice, queer rights and labour rights. Across Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Kenya, Nepal, Zimbabwe, Uganda, India and Rwanda, these women all have different stories to tell about why and how they are feminists.

We hope these stories invite you to see yourself and the role you play – to connect your own practice of feminisms to the diversities celebrated in this anthology.

EDITAR OCHIENG

The Power of You

BY ALEYA KASSAM

Editar Ochieng is the Executive Director of the Kibera-based Feminist for Peace, Rights, and Justice Centre (FPRJC), the founder of the grassroots and radical feminist community Wild Feminist Network, and a leader at the forefront of advocating for women's rights in informal settlements. She sees the power of the women she works with, as well as the power of connecting with and celebrating each other every day.

Editar Ochieng is clear about who she is. In some ways, she always has been. This certainty sparkles through her eyes as she remembers herself as a 9-year-old girl, full of questions. But the answers she sought were not easily found.

So, she kept asking until she found her own way to being what she calls, "This 'witch', an unapologetic radical and intersectional feminist working with women from the grassroots community." Editar proudly embraces the fact that defying societal norms as a woman has led to her to being labelled negatively in her community, including being called bad or a witch. "Having a background of experiencing almost all forms of violence that women experience on a daily basis gave me power. I got my power when I decided not to be silent anymore. I decided to be a 'bad' girl. I decided to be a 'bad' example in my community. And I decided I need to voice up. I need to speak."

Now, 36 years old, a self-proclaimed disruptor of spaces and advocate for women, Editar is the Executive Director of the Feminist for Peace, Rights, and Justice Centre (FPRJC). It is precisely her leadership at the forefront of advocating for women's rights in informal settlements that Womankind's Her Voice Fund seeks to amplify.

When we connect online, Editar has just come from the gym, which she says is vital for her physical and mental health. Her smile is wide, and her hands paint pictures of the world she is working to build. Like the stark line separating the

THIS WITCH,
AN UNAPOLOGETIC
RADICAL AND
INTERSECTIONAL
FEMINISTWORKING
WITH WOMEN FROM
THE GRASSROOTS
COMMUNITY.

WOMEN'S POWER,
SUPERPOWER,
WOMEN'S POWER,
SUPERPOWER.

Patriarchy power,
powerless power

COME
THE WAY
YOU ARE

beetroot red and *zambarau* (purple) colours in her background, she is clear about who she is here for.

"When I see women and girls coming together, sharing their stories, I'm ignited because that is where I get my strength from. I've listened to so many stories of women who are hopeless. I've listened to so many stories of women who are successful. And it gives me hope every single day because for me, my religion is women. I get power from womanhood. I get power from sisterhood. I get power from sibling-hood."

And she is also clear about what she is not here for. "The energy that I don't have individually is to explain to patriarchy, to justify that you know we are married. Yes, I'm here. I'm a feminist and I'm married. I don't have that strength to do that. The only strength that I have, it is limited, is to tell women, *manze*, wake up, we are suffering and we need to join hands, and work together."

Editar is not just intentional in how she uses her energy, but she is skilled in generating it. At the intergenerational gatherings that she holds space for, they use protest songs to give the women *motisha* (motivation). She explains, "We use these songs just to make the space vibrant and alive, and for the women to understand how powerful they are."

Women's power, superpower, women's power, superpower.

Patriarchy power, powerless power!

As Editar starts to sing, the internet flickers and our videos cut out, but her voice leaps over the digital expanse. In the second line, her voice turns into a whisper. When asked why, she explains, "So when it comes to patriarchy, we need to lower our voice to make sure the woman part of it shines."

These songs, sang as amplification, as audacity, as alchemy, filled the air in January 2024 when over 10,000 women across Kenya joined the March Against Femicide. Editar was one of the key coordinators of the march. As of this writing, in just the past three months, 97 women have been reported killed in Kenya, that's more than one woman every 24 hours.

"I want to be there constantly telling men to their faces, stop killing women. Your fellow men are killing women. And you are silent. I want to speak to them directly. **I want to show my anger because if you look at the status of this country right now, we don't even have anything to smile about. We are living in fear. The fear is imposed onto us."**

The work that she does isn't without danger, from arrests to being called one of the most

hated women in Kibera, for Editar it is worth it, "We've really shaken the status quo. And we've really ensured that women are really respected." Recently, she's received backlash from men stating that she shares her story only as a way to get funds. Editar recognises these claims as an attempt to silence women, and responds, "As long as we have our voices back, nothing would impede me to use my story to empower other women. We use our stories of pain to remind us of the wounds and scars that we walk with daily, for advocacy, (and) to stop all forms of violence against women. Women survivors are already carrying so much baggage and with collective action we must stop violence."

Throughout the conversation, through her belly deep laughter and quiet comfort in making space for the pain, Editar always returns to the women who are at the centre of everything she does. Editar sees women. It is this that roots her feminism in simple everyday acts of care. Always seeing women.

The first, an act grounded in practicality. Every single day, she saves a small amount of money which she puts aside to support another woman. "I was in my village like four days ago and one of the things that I did, I ensured that the money that I kept, I had almost 60,000 Kenyan shillings. And I gave six women 10,000 Kenya shillings each to upscale their businesses." As a woman whose privileges she says comes 100% from women, it is important to her to continue with that spirit.

The second act blossomed from a painful moment. One evening, several years ago, after appearing on national TV to discuss abortion rights, Editar returned home to Kibera to find over 150 men gathered, waiting for her. They were planning to banish her from the community. It didn't take long for word to spread to her mother that she was, what Editar calls, a woman who is bringing immorality to the community.

Experiencing her mother's disappointment, it became clear to Editar how vital it was for feminists to really be seen by their families. "If I travel to your village, maybe I'm coming for work or I'm just travelling, now because you are my friend, I will visit your family just to ensure I tell them how we are really happy to have you in the world, and to give you all the praises, so that they will understand the kind of person their daughter is or maybe they're queer and they're not identifying as daughters. But I will do it to ensure that our women, our mothers appreciate the work that we are doing." And now, feminists around the country have taken on this practice for themselves, turning it into a small yet meaningful tradition that has fostered deeper connections and sisterhood.

MISTAKES ARE ACCEPTED BECAUSE WE ARE HUMAN BEINGS AND WE ARE LEARNING EVERY SINGLE DAY...

The third act is an echo of the connection that reverberates through Editar's work. "One of the things that we said we must also do is meet local feminists in the village. For example, if I go to Kiambu today, I'll ensure we've mapped grassroots feminists around that area, to meet them and also continue with the conversation because these are things that are really lacking." Connecting across geographies, across generations, across backgrounds, across issues is core to the Wild Feminist Network that Editar is a founder of, a network that holds space for women who want to change their community.

Each of these simple acts of care radiate out into the community. They are like beams of light that nourish, energise, and send warmth into her world, a world which she describes as full of women that she's connected to, and one where she is clear that, **"Mistakes are accepted because we are human beings and we are learning every single day...we try again, not to be perfect, but again, we try to do our best."**

Long after we've said goodbye, Editar's fiery energy lingers, creating a cocoon of warmth from the rain thrashing the pavement outside. Reflecting on her feminist journey, I'm struck by how Editar's is a story of continuous becoming – when there is such a clear precision about your why, it can create the most beautifully expansive and evolving space for the how.

Q&A

How do you tap into joy in your work?

Joy comes when we share our experiences.

This is all about everyday feminism. So, what's one way you 'feminist' every day?

One of the things I do every single day, fixing myself, is unlearning patriarchal notions that were imposed on me, like ensuring that I wash my feminist hat every single day to pump it and make it fluid... I know it's a difficult part... This is how I was nurtured and I need to unlearn it.

What is a win that you'd like to celebrate?

So the only thing that I've taken away from the winning thing is making women compete for us to be celebrated... For me, that is not feminism. Because if we are celebrating me, you are celebrating me as a woman and because maybe I'm unique. Not because I'm higher than any other woman in the world. It is because it is my time. And deserve to be celebrated for the work that I'm doing.

What is one thing around everyday feminism that you are grappling with or seeking answers to?

I'm really struggling with a lot of things that are really systematic. But the advantage that I have today [is that] I acknowledge them. I see them, whether they are invisible or I can see them with my eyes. I see them coming. I see invisible power.

When it comes to everyday feminism, for someone who doesn't know where to start, what would you tell them?

When you're getting in feminist spaces, come the way you are. Be open-minded because you will unlearn so much that we were never taught. You will understand how power dynamics look and how power dynamics suppress women, and oppress women every single day, so it's just about embracing each other. And also understanding that expertism doesn't mean going to school for 10 years... but also the experience that they have at that level means that one is an expert, and how do we learn from that knowledge and experiences that they have that they are bringing to feminist spaces.

SAKHILE SIFELANI-NGOMA

Smoke that Thunders

BY LAURA EKUMBO

ZIMBABWE

Sakhile Sifelani-Ngoma is the Executive Director of the Women in Politics Support Unit (WiPSU), an organisation that supports women's qualitative and quantitative participation and influence in policy and decision-making. Her work examines the countless ways women are made absent in spaces. While she focuses on protecting and enhancing women's political participation, she is ultimately driven by our collective progress, both visible and invisible.

"...when anybody talks about PHD syndrome, pull her down syndrome, it is my calling to rise and destroy that moment immediately. That is my collective everyday act of feminism."

The clouds are rumbling on both sides of the call. Sakhile Sifelani-Ngoma, sheltered in a dimly lit room somewhere in Zimbabwe, settles into the conversation with doodling materials close by. "I have one that I'm really proud of, but then it's, you know, the more structured the doodle the more stressed the meeting..." she holds up a vibrantly coloured drawing of an owl, "but there's no such thing as a purple and orange owl. Well, now there is." In reciprocity, I hold up my doodles, drawn during administrative meetings, its lines, lines, lines – "You have to break out, right? You have to survive." Sakhile affirms this expression as freedom practice. Midway through our chat she reveals to me, "I try to affirm women at least once a day."

As the Executive Director of the Women in Politics Support Unit (WiPSU) in Zimbabwe, Sakhile and I discuss feminist praxis, holding the line, unity through diversity, the (absence of) women in political spaces, embracing every option on the table, the importance of intergenerational work, and even the weather.

Born in the '79 cease fire, a time when her homeland had been struggling to regain its

A REVOLUTION IS NOT OVERNIGHT. IT'S ALL ABOUT INCREMENTAL CHANGE. SO EVERY DAY YOU JUST WANT TO KNOW, WAS I MOVING FORWARD?

WHEN ANYBODY TALKS ABOUT PULL HER DOWN SYNDROME, IT IS MY CALLING TO RISE AND DESTROY THAT MOMENT IMMEDIATELY

LEAD WITH LOVE

identity, Sakhile shares, “I think I embody that period, where we were trying to birth a new Zimbabwe, but we were also trying to stop the guns. And so these two things, they are sometimes militating against each other and I think that’s who we are as a generation and that’s who we are in the work that we do. We’re trying to help this youth bulge of Zimbabwe take space. But, at the same time we’re trying to protect what came before them, so that they carry that with them... And maybe, 50 years from now, history will look back and say, we shouldn’t have dropped the ball or we should have done this and I think we should be willing to take whatever criticism, at our time. But in this moment, where we are and with what we think are the pressing issues of the day, I’m happy with the identity that we have. We’re trying to be agile in a very fluid space.” Sakhile’s world is characterised by this fluidity, a respect for diversity which plays a central role to how she navigates what she calls “...a highly fluid environment characterised by both progress and regression in the same breath”.

Sakhile is intentional about how she occupies space, especially the internet, “I’m very careful about my digital footprint.” In fact, the only reason she opened a social media account was because 160 characters felt doable under the pressure of having to pick something. “Essentially, the board threatened me. I mean, that’s my story and I’m sticking to it... I don’t know if I picked right... I should have gone to the pictures.” She has a lot to say about the digital landscape, “I think social media or rather digital technologies weaponise identity. And that fragments societies, then we’re not able to look at things from a broader unifying perspective, such as Pan-Africanism.”

As part of an ongoing project at WiPSU, Sakhile was recently on the ground, gathering stories through “a process where some sisters in the movement will be reflecting on women who’ve contributed to Zimbabwe’s journey of leadership and who these women are.” As an organisation, they have been contributing to putting an honour role together. “I was almost in tears... I was literally struggling at the end of the day because [for] each one of these women, I [did] a deep dive. One of the things that struck me was that these women, who were part of creating contemporary Zimbabwe as we know it, came from not just various ethnic backgrounds, but had socioeconomic backgrounds that were as wide as my arms could stretch. They have an incredibly diverse set of origins. I mean, they were Pan-Africanists, and most of these women are remembered as simply being wives of so-and-so. The second thing that bothered me was because

they contributed so much and they were wives of significant nationalists in our history, they are remembered only as they are now – Zimbabwean. A lot of these women were not actually from Zimbabwe. They were from Uganda. They were from Ghana. They were from South Africa. They were from Malawi. They were born all over the continent." Sakhile reflects on the continent, Africa, "... hard pressed on every side, every country struggling to make their economies work for their own people." As a Pan-Africanist, "I feel there's a huge rise of ethnicism on the continent... Pan-Africanism is struggling right now." But the work Sakhile does reminds her of the importance of diversity "in the bigger context of what it means." It's through archival work like this project to honour the role women from across the continent played in shaping Zimbabwe as we know it today, "I think one of the things that I do contribute to and things that I work towards is around diversity. And I think that's part of my default setting, just reminding us that we're diverse."

The other part of her default setting – perhaps the primary one – is joy. "I try to go through the day and maintain my joy... I try to. I like to say to people, I don't want the world to change my default setting. I'm born happy and I'm happy. I'm going to do whatever it takes either to protect my peace or to protect my default settings. Part of it is really just "*Kukoka mweya*". A Shona phrase, Sakhile tells me, although she is not Shona, "the literal translation is to draw in your breath to draw in your energy to gather your energy." And although she gets up early, she does not get out early – she spends her mornings preparing to go out into the world. "I've realised that energy is so fragile. It has to be robust. Energy has to be strong. Your energy has to be good enough to handle all the craziness on the road... the negative energies, the energy vampires. In my family, we've got a saying where we say there are people who are *Farabundus*, the people who are 'moving civil wars'. And when you come into that space, you want to be able to interact because sometimes it's part of your job. Sometimes it's not a job. Sometimes you're part of a process which is nothing but daggers. And for me, the art of being myself or being a human being is being able to move through those spaces and still be me... At the end of my day, I'm energy depleted, inevitably. But I'm doing a little run through and I'm trying to ask myself the bigger questions. What was meaningful about my day? **One of the things also that activism has taught me is that a revolution is not overnight. It's all about incremental change. So every day you just want to know, was I moving forward? And if you**

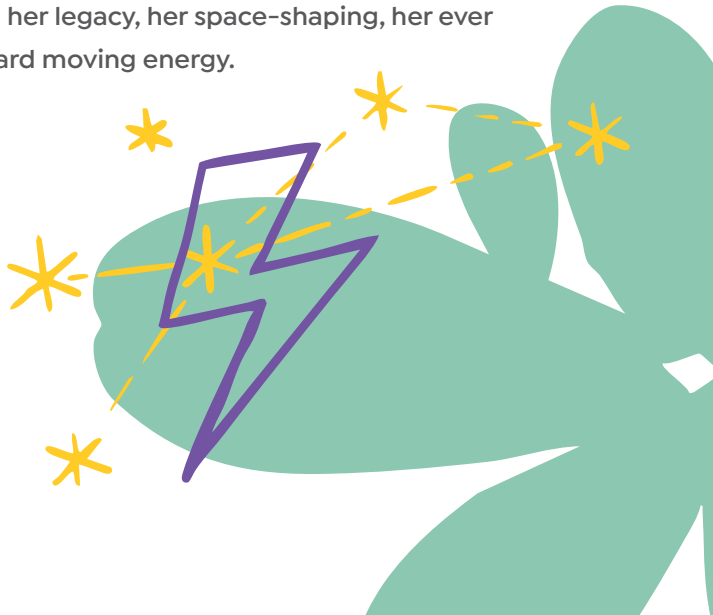
didn't move forward, was I at least holding the line?"

Although the work is draining, Sakhile finds inspiration in moving the needle forward, sometimes her work includes getting a group of fairly important decision makers to appreciate the fact that "Yes, Zimbabwe has got a quota system for women's representation. But we're not here to focus on the quota. We're here to focus on the full menu. And the full menu means being able to robustly say, we want half of whatever is available. So we don't want to eat the salad. We want to eat the whole thing." She understands that transformation is a process. **"What gives me hope is being able to count both the visible and invisible progress towards where the collective is driving towards. What's that saying? You want to go to the moon, but if you end up being a celestial being, that's good enough."**

Sakhile's work focuses on protecting and enhancing women's political participation, "The work we do at WiPSU is to create and hold space that delivers, first and foremost on increasing the numbers of women in politics. We have the luxury of saying we will talk about the numbers before we talk about anything else. Since the inception of the organisation in the early 2000s, we have been working towards 50:50 representation. That's what we're known for. But really we're known for counting women. And my argument is that actually we don't count women. We count the absence of women."

As the tenth director of WiPSU, Sakhile describes herself as "walking in inherited spaces," building upon a legacy. "I'm standing on the shoulders of giants and I'm picking it up, and I'm contributing to... did you hear that?" The skies in Zimbabwe are booming with thunder, "That's good, right?" A crackle echoes on the end of my call as well. "I'm hoping that I contribute something that somebody can also pick up when I leave it."

Sakhile Sifelani-Ngoma is walking stardust, part of a constellation of African women debunking "debilitating cultural arguments," like "feminism is not African... for me, that's obviously nonsense divided by rubbish." And the skies seem to affirm her – her legacy, her space-shaping, her ever forward moving energy.



Q&A

How do you tap into joy in your work?

I find points of progress, both formal and informal, that gives me joy. But also, I try to connect with people, people who are interested in doing something, in trying something, in doing something, in moving forward.

This is all about everyday feminism. So, what's one way you 'feminist' every day?

I affirm women. I find one woman to affirm every day, straight. I can do that on a bad day. I can do that on a good day. I can do it any day.

What is a win that you'd like to celebrate?

Zimbabwe is considering electoral reforms to deliver on 50:50 in direct election seats, the fact that we're having the conversation is a win. Women sitting at decision-making tables at the levels of 50:50 is now a national conversation and not something that is driven exclusively by the women's movements, or the organisation. People will talk about it from the community level in rural communities. There's an appreciation that you can't just have governance without women in it. And I think that that's no longer something that those NGOs are talking about, it's something that is part of our national consciousness.

Despite the soaring levels of violence against women, in this year we have managed to legally, just at a legal level, protect the legal rights of girls vis-a-vis the age to consent to marriage, the age to consent for sex, and the age to consent for SRHR [sexual and reproductive health and rights] – to bring it up to the age of 18, protecting girls, at least at a legal level. I know that we have a lot to do but I think it's a win.

What is one thing around everyday feminism that you are grappling with or seeking answers to?

I'm grappling with how male engagement has been translated to mean substituting women for men. I am grappling with how strategic allyship means removing women and centring men. Yeah, that's what I'm struggling with.

When it comes to everyday feminism, for someone who doesn't know where to start, what would you tell them?

Remove your assumptions. Listen carefully. And lead with kindness. Just start with that. Be a human being before you become a label. Just try and have empathy. For me, equality is about equality between human beings. And I think what we are trying to strive for is to put the being, that being part is what we are working to deliver. We want quality human beings who look at each other from an equitable lens. But if we don't start by being decent human beings, and I'm cautious about that word 'decent,' but if we don't start by trying to be the very best humans that we could possibly be, how can we begin to possibly be able to understand each other? And be able to understand that there's something there that needs addressing? We need to be humans first and then take it from there. Lead with love.

I FIND ONE WOMAN TO AFFIRM EVERY DAY, STRAIGHT. I CAN DO THAT ON A BAD DAY. I CAN DO THAT ON A GOOD DAY. I CAN DO IT ANY DAY.

GLORIA MUTYABA

Beyond the Binary

BY MWENDE NGAO

UGANDA

Gloria Mutyaba is the Programs Director at Freedom and Roam Uganda (FARUG), the oldest solely Lesbian, Bisexual and Queer (LBQ) organisation in Uganda. She is a lesbian, Ugandan feminist and describes herself as a bold and unapologetically feminine woman. She shares her life with her partner, a masculine-presenting teacher with a disability. Together, they navigate a hostile world where their love is not just unaccepted, it's criminalised.

Gloria Mutyaba begins each day as if she's preparing for battle. Living in Uganda, a country where the Anti-Homosexuality Act has turned existence itself into resistance, every step outside her home is an act of defiance.

On the call, she speaks with a warmth and enthusiasm that is both welcoming and disarming. It's easy to tell that she's a great storyteller and a social butterfly by the ease with which she talks and laughs. She is having a great day, having just successfully organised the lesbian pre-conference in partnership with the Global Lesbian Coalition at ILGA (the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association). Still, even with these wins, there's a long way to go. For Gloria, everyday feminism isn't just about empowerment, it's about belonging.

"The reality of queer women is that some of the discrimination and stigma that we are facing everyday comes from women like us. So I want when the song for women's rights is sung, all women are included. That a woman like me, is still recognised as a woman."

Gloria's activism is inseparable from her everyday life. Whether it's enduring harassment in her personal life, fighting systemic discrimination at work, or advocating for survivors of violence, her existence is a protest. Yet, amid the challenges, there is resilience. Despite the constant threats and discrimination, she refuses to back down.

The discrimination starts at their apartment complex, where leering men question her and her partner's relationship.

SOMETIMES BEING A FEMINIST BOTHERS ME BECAUSE... FEMINISM TEACHES YOU TO BE LOUD, QUESTIONING AND UNCOMFORTABLE IN YOUR LIFE.

YOU CAN'T SHAME THE SHAMELESS.

I'M NOW SHAMELESS, AND IT FEELS GOOD TO BE A SHAMELESS WOMAN.

“Because of judgement, abuse starts from where I live. We live in an apartment building and the biggest percentage of our neighbours are men and I’m a very good looking feminine woman while my partner is very masculine, so often you will always get those looks from men of ‘why is this girl with this person?’”

Gloria’s voice breaks when she speaks on the repeated threats of violence her partner faces. Their mornings are fraught with confrontation. Men block parking spaces or make crude jokes.

“Every morning, it’s a rehearsal… How will I navigate this day and come back home safe?” The misogyny and homophobia are palpable, as her partner’s masculine presentation provokes hostility, with men viewing her as a challenge to their dominance saying threateningly, “Oh, you think you’re a man? Let me show you what a man is.”

It’s evident Gloria is family-oriented. She cherishes the life she has built with her little family, and wishes it weren’t up for debate. When she speaks about her partner and child, there is a loving tenderness in her voice, and a clear sense of protection over the life they’ve created together. Yet, like so many other women living at the margins and defying societal expectations, her very existence is questioned.

Gloria was raised by her grandmother, and she recalls a wonderful childhood. Her grandmother, who cared for her alongside a few other grandchildren, doted on her as the youngest and the only girl. Unlike many, Gloria was spared rigid gender role expectations. She was raised to believe that she was deserving and capable, and encouraged to pursue independence with confidence.

Gloria’s grandmother, like many women of her time, was a feminist in practice even if she did not wear the label. As a result, Gloria grew up embodying feminist ideals, without realising it. It was only when she joined FARUG that she truly understood her values had always aligned with feminism.

“Sometimes being a feminist bothers me because… feminism teaches you to be loud, questioning and uncomfortable in your life.”

The reality of living in a deeply homophobic country is that violence is always a whisper away. Like with all violence, women bear the brunt of it. Homophobia has some of its roots in misogyny, and so LBQ women face a specific kind of violence that is geared towards forcing conformity usually through sexual violence.

Gloria highlights a surge in sexual violence, which she calls “the highest we’ve ever seen.” Rape, forced marriages, and coercion into motherhood are wielded as tools to strip women of autonomy. Misogyny also means that LBQ women receive less support than gay men as patriarchy still wins out even here.

This hierarchy of suffering is a reflection of patriarchy within and outside the queer community. Feminine gay men are targeted because their perceived femininity makes them ‘lesser’ in the eyes of patriarchal oppressors. LBQ women, on the other hand, are punished for existing outside traditional gender roles.

“It’s a crime to be a woman everywhere, even within the LGBTQIA+ community,” she says.

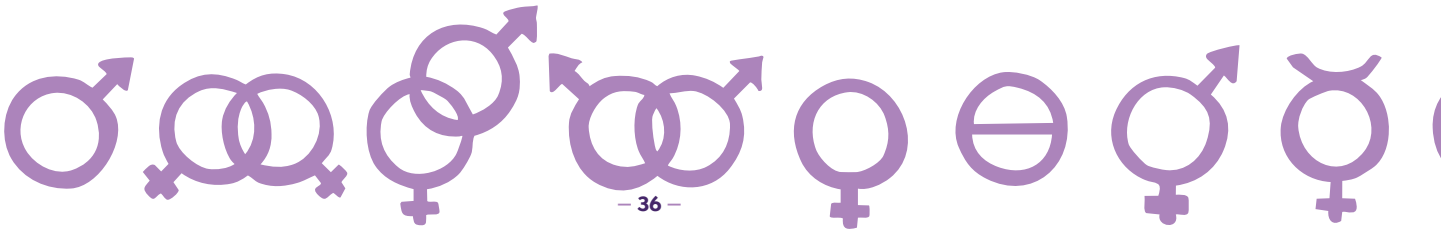
This even extends to the allocation of resources and support as emergency responses are often prioritised for gay men, while LBQ women get less than 1% of the aid. Whether it’s access to healthcare, relocation services, or mental health support, queer women are frequently left to fend for themselves.

She admits that being financially independent and making a decent living has protected her from a lot. Class plays a role in how safe you are in a world that hates you, which shouldn’t be the case because we are all deserving of safety no matter our social class.

“I’ve got friends who have to layer a dress over their masculine clothes just to make it out the door without risking a physical attack. That’s the reality.”

Schools are ground zero for this class divide, with the queer children from poorer backgrounds facing the brunt of the consequences, including expulsion. These attitudes also lend themselves to the concept of ‘gay for pay,’ especially in lower-income areas. There’s a belief that people are only playing at being gay for money and therefore all gay people are rich.

“Some parents, when they find out their child is gay, they’ll say, ‘Fine, but at least date someone rich.’ A friend of mine heard her mother say, ‘Why are you wasting your gayness?’ Like it’s a hustle.”



Another myth she's working to debunk is the idea that all feminists are man-hating lesbians.

"We hate the systems that protect men when they violate women. We hate the systems that put men above us. We don't hate men... **I'm very intentional and deliberate about teaching people that you can be a feminist and live your life the way you want to. You can be a cis hetero, churchgoing feminist. You can be a Muslim feminist. You can be everything else and feminist."**

In an energised tone, Gloria recounts her many misadventures as a feminist woman that will not back down in the face of injustice. Whether it is for a woman who is a stranger being harassed in public transport or standing up for her mother against her uncles, Gloria is clear in her conviction that injustice, especially that is driven by misogyny, will not fly in her presence. Still, she wishes she didn't need to be this confrontational, as it comes with potential violence concerns.

With the rise of homophobic laws in Uganda, organisations like FARUG have been pushed into the shadows. This has meant reliance on well-wishers to keep things running, including office hopping amid higher scrutiny. "Feminist love is something else. These women show up. I don't know how other countries are organising, but from my context, the women in the feminist movement of Uganda have shown up."

Gloria doesn't hold back on her radical belief in a feminist future that is non-binary and inclusive.

"Even within the feminist movement, we're stuck in binaries – good women versus bad women. So **if only we could rethink our binary thinking around feminism, it would change a lot. If only we could understand that a woman can be so many things and can also look like so many things**. They can be masculine, they can be feminine, they can be intersex, they can be non-binary... Once we understand the diversity of womanhood, we can have a truly inclusive feminism."

Gloria's activism and passion drive her to keep envisioning and fighting for a world that recognises and honours everyone's humanity and right to a life of dignity, a fight we should all stand behind.

Q&A

How do you tap into joy in your work?

I'm very intentional about rest, and it's something that has taken a lot of learning on my side. I have come to terms with the fact that the world will not stop because I didn't do one thing. It has been years and a process in the making, but I love that that's the current space I am in right now. Before that, I used to be so scared. Because I'm now being intentional about rest in my work, I'm also more considerate of my colleagues. I'm now checking in more on the people that I supervise. I'm becoming more patient with people and more understanding of the fact that not only my mental health matters, but also other people's mental health matters.

This is all about everyday feminism. So, what's one way you 'feminist' every day?

My everyday feminism is about me fighting for myself and other LBQT women to belong, not only in spaces that have everyone else, but also in women's spaces. That a woman like me, is still recognised as a woman. My everyday act of feminism is I compliment women. I do that effortlessly, and so many times I have said something nice about a stranger and they've come to me and they're like, you don't know what this did to me. As women every day we're navigating a lot of negativity, so it feels so good to just be walking around and someone just stops you and compliments you. .

What is a win that you'd like to celebrate?

The win I am currently celebrating is the lesbian pre-conference at ILGA. It means everything to me because it's been a long-term dream. As an organisation, we've finally been able to spotlight African lesbian organising at an international LGBTQIA+ conference. It's such a win.

Another win for me is that I am intentionally happy. There are things that no longer stress me. I'm free from judgement. You can't shame the shameless. I'm now shameless, and it feels good to be a shameless woman.

What is one thing around everyday feminism that you are grappling with or seeking answers to?

Feminism and religion. I'm religious. I was raised in church, so religion plays a big role in my life. The gospel that is preached in religion is usually very patriarchal. So, what is that intersecting space where I'm able to be feminist and God-fearing at the same time, because I don't want to lose my faith. And I don't want to lose my feminism either. And I don't want to compromise. It's hard.

I'm living so many different lives that there are places where I'm loud and expressive of who I am, and the places where I'm hiding, and one of the places I'm hiding is at church. I've changed ministries to cleaning the toilet because it's the only place I feel safe. Everywhere else there is a lot of politics. There's a lot of good women, bad women. There's a lot of when are you getting married?

The toilet is the only place where nobody cares about you. I also like the humility that working in the toilet brings to me. I've also seen how patriarchy and class manifest based on how people that don't know me treat me when they see me cleaning the toilets. There's also a way this cleaning has made me really align with the politics of unpaid care work.

I care about the people that do the jobs that everyone despises. I'm caring about women in spaces like that. I care about their protection. I care about their health. So now the conversations about economic justice and paid care work, exploitation of women at workplaces, sexual violence at workplaces are conversations I deeply care about because of everything I've experienced.

When it comes to everyday feminism, for someone who doesn't know where to start, what would you tell them?

You start by loving women. You start by understanding women. You start by speaking about the things that affect you. And when you do that, make sure you include all women. Every single one of them.

MARYAM RAHMANI

Acts of Hope

BY ANNE MORAA

AFGHANISTAN

Maryam Rahmani is the Afghanistan Advisor at Womankind Worldwide and has worked to support Afghan women for years. The Country Director for the Afghan Women's Resource Center (AWRC) – a women-led non-government organisation based in Afghanistan since 2009, she continues to advocate for her people wherever she goes, remembering that even simple acts of hope mean everything.

"The thing is that I've always strived to create a platform. So, Afghan women are connected or keep connecting. Right from the local level to those in exile. My main intention is to keep these voices alive."

This is Maryam: always carrying the voices of other women with her. During our interview, she speaks to me with a broad smile, a gorgeous white and black pattern head wrap, her kind eyes not giving away the weight on her shoulders. As the Country Director for the Afghan Women's Resource Center (AWRC) – a women-led non-government organisation based in Afghanistan since 2009 – and Afghanistan Advisor at Womankind Worldwide, she has seen the transformation of the country since the Taliban took over in 2021, yet she continues her work.

Maryam didn't set out to be a revolutionary. In 2010, freshly armed with a degree in economics, she was primed for a career in finance or banking—fields in Afghanistan where women were largely absent. Job offers poured in before she'd even graduated. Yet, in a decision that would change the trajectory of her life, Maryam turned her back on corporate opportunities and chose to work in a small, Afghan women-led organisation.

"I used to work part time in the finance section in this women's organisation, and I kept working in finance just before I realised there were other opportunities on the programme side."

Maryam quickly transitioned from finance into programme development, eventually becoming the organisation's country director. It was a role

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KEEP THESE VOICES ALIVE

she didn't expect to land but one that allowed her to approach women's empowerment in a way few others did.

"I was trying to go and visit the villages that we were working in, the districts and see what actually is needed for women... Rather than applying for the request for proposals which were very strict but didn't fit our context, we tried to have our own assessments and ask for the support to work on those initiatives."

In her time at the AWRC, her background as an economist proved invaluable as she supported women in developing businesses, "If I had no idea of finance, like business plans or financing or basic accounting skills, it would have been a little difficult to support them.... In the beginning, I worked directly with the groups, but later on I trained other team members so that they could do the same."

They worked on shifting markets, pivoting to new goods and services as demanded, with a range of businesses including honey production, beekeeping, dairy production, production of pickles and jams, and so many more. One initiative even connected women with contracts to prepare lunch boxes for office workers and UN staff.

Their work, which focused on giving women the tools they needed to live life on their own terms, was fundamentally changed once the Taliban took over. Many of the organisation's programmes had to be scaled back and faced severe restrictions. She shares that the AWRC had four programmes in education, agriculture and livelihood, advocacy and community mobilisation, and capacity building of local leaders and women leaders, which have now been cut down to only agriculture and livelihood.

"That is the one programme that's still running, and not at a big capacity but at a very basic level. All the other three programmes have been stopped... Afghan women-led organisations are no longer allowed to touch those sectors."

The challenge of being a feminist, let alone a feminist activist, under such a restrictive rule is that even the word 'feminist' may be too much. This aversion to anything feminist, or even supportive of women, has had deep and direct impact on the people and organisations Maryam works with.

"They want organisations who have Afghan women's names as part of their name, to remove them and to rename the organisations. All senior positions must be replaced by men, only the

director can be a woman, but she has to officially introduce a man representing her." This means organisations are forced to find a man to take over the official oversight of any women-led organisations, find the cash to pay for any re-registration and administrative fees, or shut down.

Any resistance comes at a cost. Women leaders in Afghanistan face increasing pressure to comply with the Taliban's decrees or risk losing their organisations entirely. Maryam shares a recent example of a forced re-registration process that costs organisations the equivalent of £1,000—money many simply can't afford.

Long-term, she shares an example of one organisation breaking down under these restrictions. "The man that they introduced has taken over and fired most of the employees. And now, they are not listening to the woman director that introduced him as a representative and is claiming that the ministry has given him the organisation. This is a very big risk that all the women's organisations are facing."

Between raising her three children, running a home in a new country, and trying to support so many different people and organisations in Afghanistan, her responsibilities can sometimes be overwhelming. "I don't have the solution for everything. I'm here and even if I was in the country, you cannot just fight a group that can put you in prison in minutes. So this is the fear that all the organisations are having and the fear of what will happen next year or next month."

Maryam, who relocated to the UK a few months after the Taliban took hold in 2021, is continuing her work in the AWRC, and will always find ways to support Afghan women even in her new role at Womankind. In the UK, she juggles family responsibilities, her role at Womankind, and ongoing advocacy for Afghan women.

Her mornings often start early, aligned with the workday in Kabul. Messages pour in from colleagues seeking guidance on navigating Taliban-imposed restrictions or from donors requesting urgent submissions. By afternoon, her focus shifts to broader international advocacy, bringing the voices of Afghan women to global platforms.

Maryam admits that the work is challenging. She often sacrifices sleep to review reports or troubleshoot issues late into the night. Yet, the mental toll of witnessing the dismantling of women's progress in Afghanistan weighs heavier. For Maryam, the stakes are personal.

I TRY TO ASK ALL THOSE ACTORS AT THE INTERNATIONAL LEVEL TO SUPPORT WOMEN'S VOICES, AND TO KEEP THE WOMEN'S AGENDA AT THE INTERNATIONAL LEVEL FOR AFGHAN WOMEN.

While missing and working to support those at home, she takes advantage of what she has: she can speak in rooms they cannot. **"I try to ask all those actors at the international level to support women's voices, and to keep the women's agenda at the international level for Afghan women."**

From being invited to interviews by Womankind or other platforms based in the UK or globally, she speaks truth to power. She says, "I'm also now part of an Afghan women's group, which is a very old group that is run by a UK parliamentarian and the House of Lords. So whenever I am invited there every three months or so, I always try to remind people that forgetting these women-led grassroots organisations will risk all the efforts that we have worked for the past 20 years."

It is this deep and fundamental connection to the women and communities around her that keep her going in the face of all these challenges. Pragmatism as praxis: she provokes me to think, what can you do with what you have?

Maryam is thankful for even the smallest victories and joys. "My colleague shared a video of a kitchen garden we have established for women. One of my other colleagues who is a business trainer there had worn very colourful clothes and filmed it with a song as a background... All the colleagues appreciated it even though it was a one minute video."

A group of women getting together, seeing each other, and taking a moment to show that they too exist. These are the simple daily actions that make hope possible.

"Even if everything is closed, these women are trying to do what they actually want to do in the context that they are allowed to. They are highlighting their achievements and that one minute film shows that they are still working and they still have hope."

Maryam's work stands as a testament to the power of grassroots action in the face of overwhelming odds. Her commitment to sustainable support for women and community-driven solutions, gives us hope that, even in some of the world's most challenging environments, women's rights advocacy is still possible.

Q&A

How do you tap into joy in your work?

When I interact with like-minded people it's a joy. When I have a meeting with a colleague and they ask me about what's going on in Afghanistan, we spend 5 to 10 minutes talking about what life is actually like there. It is good that they are interested in listening to it, and that they understand. So I feel that I'm not alone, like there are people around who are listening.

This is all about everyday feminism. So, what's one way you 'feminist' every day?

Every day all I do is promote women's voices when I am on any platform, whether locally or internationally. When I am invited to interviews by Womankind or other platforms based in the UK, I try really hard to promote women's voices and that of any platform that I'm involved with, especially grassroots organisations.

What is a win that you'd like to celebrate?

I'm very glad when I see Afghan women have secured scholarships and opportunities to go to safe spaces for education or for discussing their power or moving towards progress. Such opportunities are really contributing to the overall movement.

What is one thing around everyday feminism that you are grappling with or seeking answers to?

I think one thing around feminism is trying to balance the need for what actually is tangible progress and at the same time understanding that change, like whether this change will happen or [not], will take time. Especially when it comes to the context with all these cultural as well as political norms that are not aligned with feminism. It's really hard to push for change.

When it comes to everyday feminism, for someone who doesn't know where to start, what would you tell them?

Start by reading something on what gender issues are, where feminism comes from. And even if they do not want to read, listen to women's experiences and the challenges they face. So listening to women's experiences like their everyday life, their everyday involvement, their contribution, and whether a woman has the choices or the voice that men have.

ANNE AGAR

A New Wave

BY ALEYA KASSAM

KENYA

Anne Agar is the Managing Director at Polycom Girls, a Pan-African feminist organisation that was started in 2004 in response to the sexual violence and exploitation faced by young girls in Kenya. Her feminism is interested in the connections and complexities carried by multiple generations. As she navigates her role as a leader doing this work, she celebrates the differences between each wave, and the grace to be found through sisterhood.

It is a challenging time to be doing feminist work. Anne Agar, who has been leading the team at Polycom Girls, one of Womankind's partners, for the last three months, fully recognises this. It is the reason she is so committed to ensuring it is a safe, open space. When we meet for this interview, Anne has just come from an intense meeting. It didn't begin that way. The conversation with the girls and young women they work with started out positively. But Anne felt it was also vital to hear what they felt was not going well. So she stopped and asked them. Their feedback was incredibly helpful, but as she says, it has put her head in a little bit of chaos.

Just earlier, her male colleague had been severely bullied and trolled online for sharing videos on menstrual health management. All this is being fed by the rise of toxic misogynist influencers gaining more influence amongst young men. This has her questioning their strategy of collaborating with boys and men as gender champions. Anne says, "As a young person at the moment, I am extremely frustrated, and I am angry, and I do not know how to pour that out there without getting anyone hurt." It is important to her that the people in the community are safe, "What drives me as a person [is] the work that I do in the real lives of these particular people. When they go home, are they able to thrive? Or have I put them in more trouble than they already were before they came to this space?"

Anne sits with all of this. She is always grappling with what it means to be a leader in the feminist space, "Your opinion can shape a lot of things

WE DEFY IN OUR SMALL ACTS, IT'S THE WAY WE TALK, THE WAY WE SHOW UP, THE WAY WE WILL QUESTION, THE WAY WE WILL DRESS... IT'S IN EVERYTHING WE DO AND SOMETIMES IT'S UNSPOKEN

WE DON'T ALL HAVE TO UNDERSTAND IT THE SAME WAY, BECAUSE IT ALL TOOK US A WHILE TO SEE THINGS THE WAY WE DO

WE CARE FOR OUR FUTURE

and how people experience a number of things. So you have to weigh it out and think about it critically and sometimes that means not showing up as your authentic self, and just being fluid. So it's a very hard thing to navigate."

This idea of fluidity is one that Anne strongly identifies with. She thinks of herself as, "Someone who makes waves. Sometimes waves are low. Sometimes waves are high, but that will depend on what needs to happen at that particular time." Just as flowing water carries the memories of where it has come from, Anne credits her fluidity to her childhood, "When you grow up in an informal settlement you see a lot of things early... I grew up in Kibera, we experienced a lot of violence, post-election violence." Anne laughs sadly at the memory, and then sighs, "So, I've just been a part of various situations and that informed my understanding that I need to be a wave."

As Anne reflects on her journey, she is like a still pool of water - calm, observant and deeply aware of what floats on the surface and what lies beneath. "Patriarchy is really really deeply rooted and the way patriarchy has survived, it's been generations and generations of practices, norms, that you know they enshrined. And policies mostly address the things that are visible, the things we can see."

It is from the unseen, where the light doesn't always penetrate the water, that her everyday feminism emerges. **"We defy in our small acts, it's the way we talk, the way we show up, the way we will question, the way we will dress... it's in everything we do and sometimes it's unspoken."** This is where she chooses to shine her light, "I celebrate people, I like telling people when they are awesome. I just write to people and tell them, 'you are awesome, I was happy to meet you'. You know just affirmations, according to the Pan African Feminist Charters. I just like affirming people, because sometimes we struggle a lot, being a feminist is like a whole other job, there is a lot of pushback."

Sometimes the pushback comes from unexpected places, "I feel like there is an expectation in terms of behaviour that is expected of younger feminists to older feminists. It's that character of bowing, affirming, not speaking up and sometimes not showing up, like if it does not happen is perceived as disrespect." And then, just as water has many states, liquid, solid and gas, Anne holds space for complexity in this conversation about generations, "There were many others before us and the reason we can identify these gaps is that someone put in the work before us and we are also putting in the work, all this work is valuable and creates

Herstory. So the thing that gives me hope is that we have a lot of solidarity and accountability among ourselves in this generation, we are sorry but we are also not sorry. We are US!"

Behind Anne, as she sits in her chunky knit white sweater, is a large photograph of three young women. Their heads rest against one another, a palm tenderly cupping each of their faces. They gaze directly at the camera, their eyes soft, bold, questioning, all at once. It is a poignant image, "I have been so handheld... I cannot emphasize that enough! From all generations, I have been supported, I have been taught, I have been shown, doors have been opened with me and for me."

Anne returns to the idea of sisterhood. She has a striking ability to hold both the personal and the collective with fluency. Anne's metaphor of waves lingers in my mind. I think about how a wave is made up of a multitude of drops of water, all travelling together, in one direction. For Anne, that direction is clear, "It's not us against each other. It's us against the patriarchy. It's us against the systems of oppression. It's us against the structural systems that continue to oppress and infringe on us. We cannot take our eyes from the target, and what they do is to make us lose focus. The goal is not how different we are. In fact, the beauty is in how different we are, how differently we show up, that's the beauty of it. But how different we are when we hold hands. We are a powerful force, so we cannot let anyone get in between. No! We are not about to let them do that."

The wave has crashed. As we approach the end of the conversation, Anne's voice softens, **"We don't all have to understand it the same way, because it all took us a while to see things the way we do**. We all had our unique experiences with curves, turns and bends that we hold close to our chest, some we cannot even muster words to express and that's fine... maybe next year I will not be seeing things the same way because I'm experiencing different things at the same time and it's okay. So as sisters, we need to learn to extend grace to other sisters who are at different stages of their being because those stages are necessary."

Indeed, water always finds its way. It is beautiful to see oneself through the lens of water; the ways in which it allows for different states of being, different stages of one's journey, for stillness and movement. When you embrace your own fluidity, you realise that the only way forward is through the grappling. And then, because water always finds its path, the wave begins to murmur, to gather, readying itself once more to rise in force. Anne, who refuses to look away from the

IT DOES NOT MATTER IF WE ARE NOT FEATURED ANYWHERE, WHAT MATTERS IS WE SPOKE UP, WE DID NOT TAKE IT BOWING DOWN.

nuance, the complexity, the depth of this work, knows the power of the movement is beyond even now. She says, **“History may not celebrate us in future. It does not matter if we are not featured anywhere, what matters is we spoke up, we did not take it bowing down.”**

Q&A

How do you tap into joy in your work?

It’s not always easy to always see the brighter side of things, but the way I tap into joy... one is gossiping and another is looking at the brighter side of things.

This is all about everyday feminism. So, what’s one way you ‘feminist’ e very day?

You see me I feminist... the way you see me is the way I feminist everyday. The way I feminist everyday is by being defiant. There’s a way we have been programmed, when I say gossiping it’s just telling stories, it’s not talking about people, it’s talking about random things in life, and we’ve been programmed to think that talking about life and things and frustrations and life is a bad thing but... that’s the way of being. That’s how so many people are unwell, because there is no space to vent and express yourself, and I am very conscious about having this space to vent and guard myself and people around me.

What is a win that you'd like to celebrate?

A win I would like to celebrate is the new wave of generations that are coming ahead – how headstrong and opinionated, aware and taking initiatives to learn, unlearn and undo some injustices that have happened. [I] am so proud of that, because we don't care for the visibility, we care for our future.

What is one thing around everyday feminism that you are grappling with or seeking answers to?

One thing I'm grappling with is cross-generational movement building. In terms of previous generations and current generations – there seems to be some type of conflict, and I struggle to coexist with different generations. It's like there is an opinion on young people, and based on that opinion, I also have an opinion on older feminists. So I am still trying to figure out and navigate what a coexisting situation would look like... a coexisting thriving... because they already are coexisting, but now what a coexisting thriving situation would look like.

IF THEY ARE THINKING ABOUT IT, THEY HAVE ALREADY STARTED

When it comes to everyday feminism, for someone who doesn't know where to start, what would you tell them?

If they are thinking about it, they probably have already started, they just are not aware that they have started. And I feel like so many people are feminists, they just aren't aware that they are, because it has not been broken down to a language that they understand. And then there is a lot of publicity that has been done to portray feminism in a negative way, so it makes it hard to associate. But the simple acts of not wanting yourself to be oppressed, you know when you don't want anyone to violate your rights, you speak up for yourself, you can realize and notice when something is unfair, that's feminism.

LILY THAPA

Change that Lasts

BY LAURA EKUMBO

NEPAL

Lily Thapa is Founder of Women for Human Rights (WHR), an organisation that fights for Nepalese widows' rights. Lily also leads a team of 300 as Commissioner at the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), whose goal is 'to take human rights consciousness in every household'. Her agenda is simple: there are no human rights without gender rights and she is committed to making change that is both sustainable in its making and lasts long after you're done.

"The one who speaks on behalf of those people who couldn't come here and raise their voices. That is how I want to introduce myself." I like to think of her as the widow in red who listens and helps.

It is 2:30pm in Nepal, Lily Thapa has carved out an hour in her schedule to share part of her story. Someone drops in, off-screen, to hand her a document, it is clear that Lily is busy. As a commissioner at the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), leading a team of 300, her agenda is simple: there are no human rights without gender rights, "I'm struggling to mainstream the feminist theory and women's issues into the National Human Rights Commission." And she is achieving this, one major policy at a time. The first thing Lily did when she joined the Commission was a gender audit. This resulted in the implementation of the Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) Policy.

Tucked away behind a desk at the NHRC offices, with Nepal's distinctive crimson-red flag hoisted to the right of her chair, Dr. Lily Thapa (PhD) sits with a red scarf draped around her shoulders and red lipstick adorning her lips. Not long ago, widows in Nepal were forbidden from wearing red, donning colourful dresses, wearing jewellery or even eating meat and much more – customs deeply rooted in cultural and religious traditions. Instead, they were expected to wear white and

WHENEVER YOU WATCH TV OR MEDIA, YOU READ THE PAPER OR ANYTHING, YOU HAVE TO HAVE WITH YOU, A FEMINIST LENS. OTHERWISE, YOU CAN'T REALISE WHERE IS THE DISCRIMINATION? WHERE IS THE INJUSTICE?

THE ONE WHO SPEAKS
ON BEHALF OF THOSE PEOPLE
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AND RAISE THEIR VOICES

follow a strict vegetarian diet. “It’s all man-made,” she says. “It’s all meant to control the women. Especially by the men in our patriarchal society. We started advocating that widows can wear any colour of their choice, widows can eat any food of their choice.” A widow herself, Lily started the ‘red colour campaign that became the talk of the town’. Mobilising religious leaders and pushing for change in the code of conduct on colour, slowly, as she puts it, **“gradually, if we do some changes and transformation, it sustains”**. Red isn’t really her colour, she reveals, but she reserves the right to wear it, and, sometimes, she does it in defiance.

A feminist, author, gender advocate, and teacher, for Lily, creating lasting change is more important than radical change. “I do teach feminist theory in colleges. We’ve been running a gender studies [programme] in university so that topic is close [to] my heart. I try to balance the societal values and norms as well because if you just empower the women radically without acknowledging their values, cultures and beliefs, it doesn’t work; it won’t be sustainable.”

Sustainability is at the forefront of Lily’s mind as an advocate. She wants her impact to last, and safe spaces for people to express themselves, to ‘unleash their stories’ – which plays a large role in ensuring this, “I feel very proud and I feel a little satisfied that I created that space for those who have not got that… to raise their voices. **For the last 30 years, I’ve been doing [the] same thing, wherever I go in every village, I created a space. In Nepal we say, it’s a very Nepali typical word, *bethana bisaudis holo* which means ‘the space to showcase your sorrows’.”**

In the 1990s, the People’s Movement of Nepal ousted the Monarchy and instituted a new constitution. “Our new constitution was developed and passed in 2015. Before 2015, ‘daughter’ was not included into the family, in [the] definition of the Family. Then how could you get the inheritance rights? How could you get the identity of your family?” Lily and her family fundraise to educate children, mainly girls, invisibled by the state and neglected by their families. Lily says, “We’ve been supporting more than 1,000 children every year. Especially the daughters of widows, because we know that the widows prefer to send their sons to school, but not their daughters.”

Widowed at 29, Lily found herself in a world of stigma, disenfranchisement and unending obstacles faced by widows. Determined to challenge these injustices, she spent years listening to their stories, gathering data, and advocating for widows’ rights — all while completing her master’s degree and raising her three children as a single mother. All grown up

now, and with children of their own, part of Lily's morning routine is spent with her grandchildren — when she's home and not attending international conferences, or across the country visiting villages. Travelling to rural Nepal, Lily tells me, is paramount to understanding the context many marginalised people are living in. She makes clear her objection to partner organisations not approaching those in the villages, "Sometimes you find other things when you visit the field and feel the need."

Lily has felt the need; speaking candidly about her struggles with mental health, having attempted suicide twice, a pivotal and unmissable part of her morning routine, is meditation. "I'm a very early riser, I wake up very early in the morning and the first thing I never leave — meditation. That's my passion. I do a lot of meditation in the morning because that keeps me real. I work on stressful things every year. I usually meet women with stress, so that comes to me. Meditation is one of the key things that really helps me to de-stress, really for everything."

In the decades she has spent working to improve women's rights in Nepal, Lily says, "I have hardly had any holidays. Sometimes, because I've been wearing a lot of hats now at the NHRC and WHR as a founder, I always worry about the widow's issues." Although Lily's role at WHR has evolved over the years, she is still heavily involved in coordinating conversations, harnessing the power of social media platforms to gather and connect hundreds of women to share their stories. "Lily is the one very fast to respond," she says, quoting a friend. Dedicating time to reading and replying to emails and social media messages is part of her daily routine. It is through listening and attending to the needs of marginalised people that '"within a 10-year period in WHR', Lily shares with pride in her eyes and a smile on her face "...under my leadership, we changed six discriminatory legal policies [with] regard to the widow's rights."

Sometimes, however, some people just don't listen. A few years back, a shocking policy was introduced by the government, stating that 'men who married widows would be rewarded with 50,000 rupees' – 'some pit money' as Lily puts it. The policy was met with passionate objections from society, and they expressed their discontent. "We have to deal with the government and we have had a lot of meetings, but the government didn't listen," she says, her voice dropping at 'government'. It's a new lower register, relatable to all who have been disappointed. The government passed the policy. This did not deter the objectors, "We started having a debate in the universities, in the colleges, with the young

group. We collected and compiled all the positive and the negative remarks from the universities." Based on the contributions of students, rights groups, friends from around the world and using the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) declaration, article one on 'no discrimination on the basis of the marital status' and an annex of thousands of emails, "We made 25 pages of the justification and filed the case to the Supreme Court. And we own that case." The strategies for the movement are key for Lily, and central to that strategy, evidently, is talking about what is happening, and listening to what people have to say – whether that's on social media, over emails, grassroots conversations in the villages, or debates at universities. "Whenever we have some queries, we immediately start a blog on social media and get responses from all over the world from our friends. And then based on that, we do our advocacy... especially on policy advocacy." As of 2024, marriage law in Nepal does not mention a cash reward for men marrying widows.

Listening is key, and how you listen counts just as much. To have a feminist future, you must have a feminist lens. Lily says, **"Whenever you watch TV or media, you read the paper or anything, you have to have with you, a feminist lens. Otherwise, you can't realise where is the discrimination? Where is the injustice? You should learn about feminist values before analyzing."**

With multiple publications to her name, framing is important to Lily. The words we use affect the way we think; the language we choose affects the people we reach. "Nowadays we are quite aware of language that has been used in reports or newspapers – media. We have even changed a lot of our terminology, like 'widow,' in Nepali, we don't use that 'widow' in Nepali. We call it 'single women'. We changed that terminology and we passed that declaration from our constitutions from WHR. And nowadays, even the government is using the same words, ekal mela meaning, you don't need to identify yourself as a widow or a divorcee or unmarried. Why do you need to identify yourself as some other identification? You are a woman. That's all. You are a LGBTQI. That's all." She sits up in her chair, "And men don't have to do anything! You can't even recognise if their wife has died or they are divorced, if they are unmarried, you can't recognise anything! But the women are recognised from their personal experiences, from their makeup, from their jewellery, from their colour... everything!"

From agitating for the use of language that does not make girls invisible, to pushing institutions built on erasing women to honour women's

identity. “I’ve been telling everyone, you have to create your own identity. [Otherwise], in Nepal, you are being identified before marriage with the name of your father. And then brother. Then after marriage your husband, and thereafter, son. Now, I am Lily Thapa. Everybody knows me. I should be identified as myself. I am Lily Thapa.”

Q&A

How do you tap into joy in your work?

I feel very happy, and enjoy when I see women transform their lives.

This is all about everyday feminism. So, what’s one way you ‘feminist’ every day?

I’m quite concerned about women’s issues. I’m quite aware about the issues going on all around the country and all over the globe as well. I try to speak and raise my concern against the feminist values, against gender equality, I immediately raise my voice through many means of media or many means of intercourses. I’m very vocal. That’s why when a journalist, they immediately contact me because there’s some hot issues going on around the country, because I’m totally open and very vocal. Sometimes, my friend said, ‘Oh, you are in an NHRC, you shouldn’t retort against the government,’ [chuckles] and I’m totally open. That’s why everybody quite easily contacts me.

What is a win that you'd like to celebrate?

Human nature is very ambitious. 20 years back, when I look back, thinking of what I have done so far, I thought, if I have changed some laws and organised the groups, then I will be quite happy. Now, another. We are quite ambitious. Getting more and more power to the women. Still there's a long way to go. Nowadays in my last dream, if I have been able to create a Herstory in Nepal in some other way, then I'll be quite happy. And I've been telling my friends that it will be my last project.

When I ask (pressing) if there's any one thing she's particularly proud of, with certainty she shares, "I'm very, very proud and I feel very, very satisfied when I see the widows in the red."

What is one thing around everyday feminism that you are grappling with or seeking answers to?

In feminist movements, there's an individual movement and collective movement. Sometimes it's a concern to the individual, sometimes it's a collective issue. I'm struggling with how to take both in that way. I've been quite grappling with that. The individual or collective movements.

IT'S A VERY SIMPLE THING YOU ATTACH TO YOUR DAY-TO-DAY LIFE

When it comes to everyday feminism, for someone who doesn't know where to start, what would you tell them?

I keep telling my friends in my circle, you don't go with the feminist terminology in the beginning. It sounds [elitist]. It's a very simple thing 'feminist', a very basic thing you attach to your day-to-day life. First you try to make them realise by themselves what is going on in their day-to-day life. How you are discriminating while in your kitchen, how you are discriminated against while in the decision-making level in your workplace. In that way, you can educate them. Then they realise it has been attached to their daily lives, they were quite aware. Otherwise, you just go and train them with the feminist theory and values and it doesn't work.

THANDIWE CHIDAVARUME

Defiance as Strength

BY MWENDE NGAO

ZIMBABWE

Thandiwe Chidavarume is the National Coordinator of Women and Land. Born and raised in rural Zimbabwe, her work involves fighting for women's land rights, teaching rural women to speak up for themselves, uniting them in shared struggle, and amplifying their voices against patriarchy. With her ferocity and dedication, Thandiwe has helped Women and Land become a movement of resistance and transformation.

**Care warning: mention of self harm.*

Thandiwe Chidavarume stands at the helm of Women and Land as its National Coordinator, mobilising rural women to not just seek a seat at the table, but to flip the table over. Born and raised in rural Zimbabwe, she understands first-hand the struggles rural women face as they fight for their land rights.

"We challenge power. We ask questions. We demand accountability."

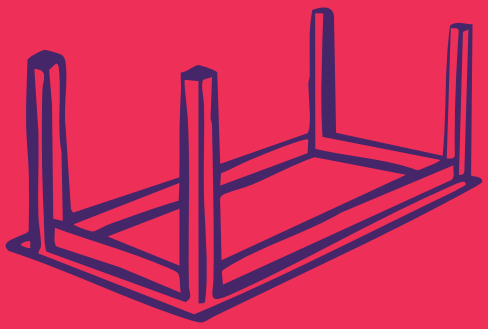
She has a wonderful warmth about her that immediately draws you in and makes you want to listen intently to everything she has to say. But, what she has to say is not always the easiest to hear. Land is an emotive issue and is a driver of patriarchal violence against women, especially rural women.

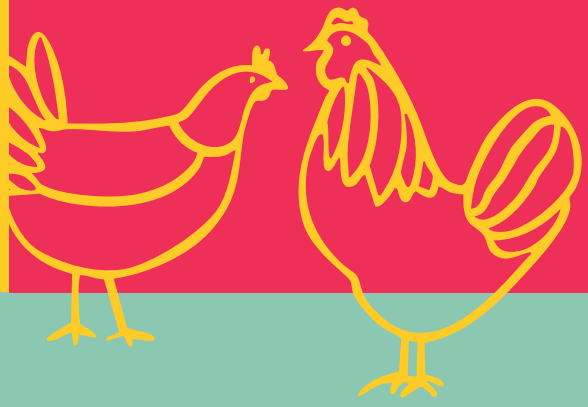
"I grew up watching my mother work tirelessly on our land while my father, who lived in the city, dictated everything, from what crops to plant to how the yields were used," she recalls. This stark disparity planted a seed of defiance in her young mind.

Her father initially disapproved of her questioning nature, dismissing her sharp intellect as mere rebellion. But that defiance became her strength. "He went from hating me, to seeing me as an intelligent child, to the extent that when he doesn't have enough money to pay for our fees,

CAN WE COME UP WITH OUR OWN CULTURE AS WOMEN?... THAT WE CAN USE TO SAY, NO, OUR CULTURE DOES NOT ALLOW MEN TO SHORTCHANGE US. OUR CULTURE IS CALLING FOR EQUALITY.

WE CHALLENGE POWER. WE ASK QUESTIONS. WE DEMAND ACCOUNTABILITY





REWRITE THE NARRATIVE, STRAIGHT FROM THE HOME

he'll start by paying my fees because he said, 'This one is very intelligent, I don't want to disturb her education'." That shift in perception became the driving force behind her activism.

In a society where a woman could once only own a hen, and needed a man's permission to slaughter it, Women in Land has become a movement of resistance and transformation. The pillars of the movement are built on these ideals: teaching rural women to speak for themselves, uniting them in shared struggle, and amplifying their voices against patriarchy.

"We want to raise the voice of the rural woman, the woman who was brought up in a patriarchal society. She was raised by people who were indoctrinated by the doctrine of patriarchy, which does not allow women to be people but to be subordinates of men. They treat us women as children who are told to do this and that with no rights."

The movement's strength is undeniable. Traditional leaders, once dismissive, are now seeking counsel from the women they once ignored. The men who branded them 'marriage breakers' now respect their resolve. "They're beginning to feel our strength, to feel our power, to feel our push," Thandiwe says, a hint of triumph in her voice.

But the road is perilous. Zimbabwe's political landscape is fraught with challenges. Restrictive laws loom large, and organisations like Women in Land walk a tightrope between advocacy and survival. "We challenge power," Thandiwe says plainly. "We ask questions. We demand accountability. And that makes us targets."

Yet the fight continues. For Thandiwe, land isn't just soil – it's survival, dignity, and identity. Rural women, denied ownership, have faced devastation.

"Land is the most important resource that is found in rural areas. And again, the livelihoods that are found in the rural areas are land-based livelihoods. Denying a woman land means you are denying that woman an opportunity to have a better livelihood... You are denying her dignity and shelter because shelter is built on the land. You are denying her a source of belonging because for us as Africans you are said to be belonging to a certain area because of where you are living."

In one cotton-growing district, 15 women took their lives in a single season after their hard-earned harvests were taken by their husbands. "They felt used," Thandiwe says, her voice heavy with grief.

“They tilled the land, they tended the cotton crop and then after harvesting, the men would come and say this is my harvest. Because the land that you have planted belongs to me. So the man would take the cotton balls to the market and sell them. And after selling, the man would decide what he wants to do with the money.”

This tragedy ignited the fight for women’s land rights, pushing Women and Land to lobby in government for a 20% quota in land ownership, a fight far from over as implementation remains an ongoing challenge.

“We want to see equal opportunities when land is being passed out. Women constitute 52% of the total population. We constitute 60 to 70% of the people who are working on the land, and we constitute 70–80% of people residing in the rural areas. But in terms of land ownership, we are less than 20%. We need more...”

In Zimbabwe, feminism is often dismissed as a Western import, a narrative Thandiwe is determined to dismantle. “They say that feminists are haters of men. But I tell them that men can also be feminists. Feminism is the act of supporting women and girls,” she says. She’s quick to remind skeptics that feminism in Africa predates colonisation as our ancestors had matriarchal societies.

Her early experiences made her see feminism as more than a theoretical concept; it was survival, dignity, and a fight for basic human rights. Today, Thandiwe doesn’t just talk about equality, she lives it.

In a society where leadership is often seen as a male domain, she once volunteered to be a village head, defying both cultural and familial expectations. “My sisters-in-law were shocked. They said, ‘My younger sister, how could you be a leader? Village heads are men.’ Then I said, ‘Why not?’ For me, it’s not a thing that was very difficult and out of this world. Because I’m a feminist, I feel that what men can do, I can also do,” she asserts.

Balancing her personal life and activism is a constant juggling act. Her day begins with preparing lunch boxes alongside her children. Once they head off to school, she immerses herself in the intricate realities of rural women’s lives – organising WhatsApp groups, fielding voice notes about legal disputes, and liaising with women’s rights organisations.

The work is exhausting, but she finds joy in small victories. Recently, they helped a woman who had been forced out of her home after her husband’s death. With nowhere to go, she faced an uncertain future – until they secured her land and built her a small house. “That’s a win,” she says, her face lighting up with pride.

For Thandiwe, the biggest obstacle to gender equality isn't just outdated laws, it's deeply ingrained cultural norms. **"Who devised that culture? Who allowed that culture that is abusing us as women? Can we come up with our own culture as women?... That we can use to say, no, our culture does not allow men to beat us. Our culture does not allow men to shortchange us. Our culture is calling for equality,"** she says, frustration evident in her tone.

Her solution? Rewrite the narrative, straight from the home. "We as mothers in the homes, we start by training our boys. I said I'm a mother of three, one girl and two boys. If you come to my home when allocating chores to my children, I don't allocate depending on their sex, I allocate them as children," she declares.

Despite the heavy burden of her work, Thandiwe finds moments of joy. Whether it's laughing over childhood stories with friends, losing herself in a favourite song, or celebrating the achievements of her women's movement, she knows self-care is essential.

Thandiwe envisions a world where equality isn't a demand but a given. Her dream extends beyond gender equality to land rights and climate justice, emphasising the interconnectedness of these struggles.

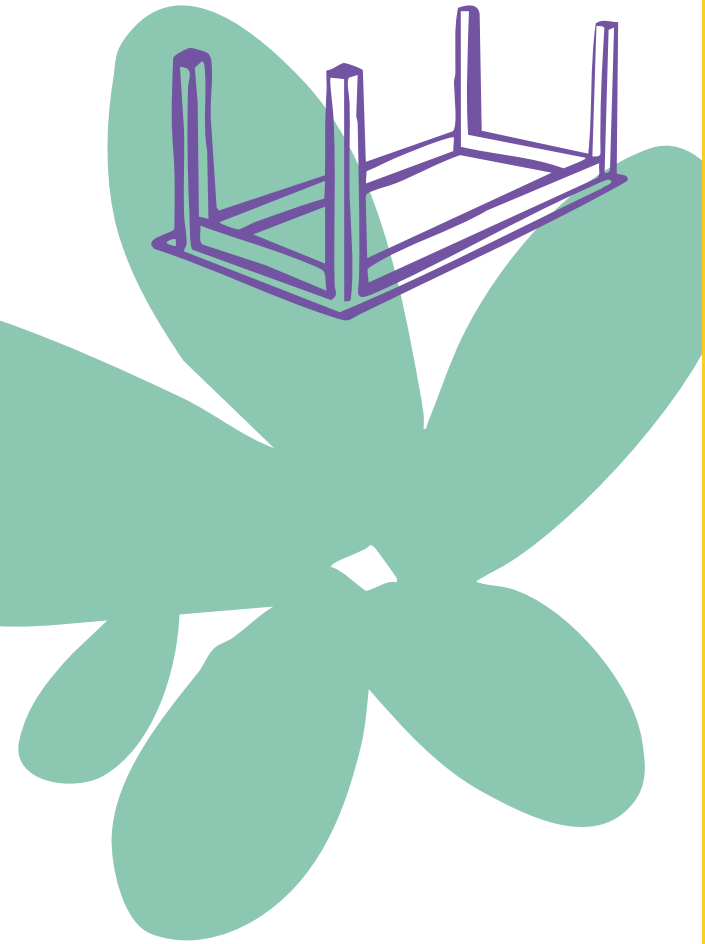
"In southern Africa, we are situated in an area which is very susceptible to environmental disasters like cyclones, floods and droughts. These have a negative impact on the woman and the girl. When there are floods, when there's hunger, there's a problem in the house because the woman, according to our culture, is expected to put food on the table. When the food is not there, then it's a challenge or it's gender-based violence in that house."

Legal frameworks may exist, but implementation remains a challenge. "Our constitution is very good. It recognises the need to have equal access to land for both men and women. But the issue is implementation because of socialisation. The institutions that are giving land are manned by men who are very patriarchal," she says.

Her solution is bold yet simple: change attitudes and mindsets. "You can claim your rights but when society does not believe in those rights, they will look at you and see you as an outcast... we need to change the mindsets of the communities that we are working with so that we can enjoy the rights that are in the constitutions," she insists.

Thandiwe's story is one of defiance, resilience, and hope. She's not just fighting for land rights or gender equality; she's fighting for a future

where women's voices are no longer questioned but celebrated. Her journey is a reminder that feminism isn't just about policies or protests, but about everyday acts of courage that challenge the status quo.



Q&A

How do you tap into joy in your work?

In the Women's Assembly group, we have a day every year where we organise around 5,000 or more of us together. We sit and instead of telling sad stories, we talk about our achievements. And that uplifts our moods. That's a way of bringing some wellness and self-care for ourselves.

This is all about everyday feminism. So, what's one way you 'feminist' every day?

For me, I see everyday feminism as a conscious mind that helps you to always locate women and make sure they are not disadvantaged or shortchanged in the society we are living in, because of patriarchy, capitalism, and all these isms that we have in this world.

What is a win that you'd like to celebrate?

\We have this woman who was abducted and released after so many years. And when she was abducted, she was assaulted to the extent that she bore children at the age of 12 and 13. Good Samaritans helped her escape and she went to a rural home only to find out that her mother had passed on. She then got married. After she got

married some years later, the husband again died and the children of this husband with the first wife chased her from the home.

\We provided some counselling for her because she was very suicidal. We introduced her to the nearest rural women's assembly group in her area and then they were visiting her and we asked for a piece of land from the local authorities. And then we also asked well-wishers to help us to build a small house for her. We managed to do that and there were sisters in the area who came with the kitchen utensils, blankets and food and now she's living happily. So for me, it's a win. We managed to win here. We saved a life. We managed to get land for her and she's happy and she's part of us.

What is one thing around everyday feminism that you are grappling with or seeking answers to?

I look at culture. And I say culture is the challenge to feminism. When I look at culture, I say it's a habit that you started with someone, and then someone said that habit becomes the way of their life. Culture was devised by men for them to control women. So what can we do? As women can we sit together, all of us, and also start to have our own culture that is countering patriarchy? Our culture does not allow women to get land. Our culture does not allow women to speak in front of men. When men are speaking, women should sit down and listen. If you have anything, you wait when you go home, you tell your brother or your husband that on this one, this is my opinion. That's culture.

When it comes to everyday feminism, for someone who doesn't know where to start, what would you tell them?

When you want to talk about or to ensure everyday feminism, you must have a conscious mind that is asking where is the woman? Where is the girl child? What are the opportunities and what are the disadvantages? At every step you must ask questions and investigate. If you're distributing water, where are the women and how many are they? Are we talking of equality? Are we talking of equity and inclusion? All these questions help you to embody everyday feminism.

DIBABE BACHA

Energy in Action

BY LAURA EKUMBO

ETHIOPIA

Dibabe Bacha is the Executive Director of the Ethiopian Women with Disabilities National Association (EWDNA), 'both a disabled people's organisation (DPO) and a women-focused organisation. It provides services to 'women who are visually, hearing, physically or intellectually impaired and those with leprosy'. Beyond this, she wears many hats and wins awards for it. Yet her centre is not the accolades; it's the people. Her work remains the intersection of advocacy, feminism and disability rights, choosing to stay present and active in all the ways she can.

A skilled orator, Dibabe Bacha is a coffee-loving mathematics whiz, and an avid reader. Dibabe lost her sight when she was eight years old and became completely blind. We spoke in detail about her life, work, and the many awards she's received and continues to receive. In our hour-long conversation alone, we discussed four awards. "I don't know who nominated me. I received an email call. I was nominated as one of the top 100 strong African female leaders. I am the one who will be receiving the award on November 26th [2024]."

I prepared for our conversation by drinking Ethiopian coffee which Dibabe enjoys. "I drank mine ten minutes ago. Ethiopian coffee is very strong. We have wonderful coffee." We plan to sit together one day and enjoy it together in person. "I am well known now in my country in the women and women with disabilities movement because of my strong advocacy for feminism and because of my disability activism." As the Executive Director of the EWDNA, Dibabe's impact in society stretches far and wide. "I am always questioning if there is a board meeting, a board election, and always strive for the inclusion of women

I STARTED MY FEMINIST JOURNEY IN SCHOOL WHEN I WAS A CHILD. I LOVED TO ASK QUESTIONS AND EVEN DEBATING ABOUT THIS AND THAT WITH OTHERS, ESPECIALLY ABOUT WOMEN.

WHEN I STARTED SERVING VOLUNTARILY IN MY ASSOCIATION, I HAD NO MONEY, BUT I HAD ENERGY

with disability in those board members. So I'm a board chair in one of the Network of Ethiopian Women Association and I am a board member in the Union of Ethiopian Women and Children Association (UEWCA), one of the other women associations. I have always been struggling, starting from my student time and still am, **I'm always advocating for the full meaningful inclusion of women with disabilities and formal representations and for the representations of women's disability related things."** Dibabe lists the roles she plays in various movements, committees, campaigns, and associations. She was a founding member of the committee for Gender Based Violence campaign, a member and the founder of the Ethiopian Women Peace Group, member of the East Africa Women Human Rights Defenders – she can hardly keep up. And this is not everything.

When she speaks to the recognition she's received over the decades she has dedicated to this work, Dibabe seems to be remembering from an endless list. "I received the Women of Courage Award from the American embassy in my country. I even received an award from the Ambassador of the American embassy. I'm also doing a paper on intersectionality, both the intersectionality between gender disability and leadership. I even attended a World Disability Rehabilitation Conference in Indonesia, Bali."

Even with all these labels she says, "I want to be known in the world as a feminist, an activist, a mother, a leader and a strong woman with a disability."

But where did her journey begin? Dibabe shares, **"I started my feminist journey in school when I was a child. I loved to ask questions and even debating about this and that with others, especially about women.** You know, women like my aunt. I grew up with my aunt, she used to buy a ball for the boys, and I was always questioning why she was not buying a ball for us. I'm the only visually impaired in the family. So I could play everything and I grew up as their child grew up because I was not learning in boarding school so I know what social life looks like, what societies looked like, what society is thinking about female children. So I was always debating and asking why and even I loved to hear the news in my childhood. I even wished to be a prime minister or a president in my country but I changed my mind when I was in Addis Ababa University. There was an election in Ethiopia [and] during that election many students were victimised because of their political attitude, because of their political thought. So immediately I changed my mind from joining a law school. I chose to join a social anthropology school because it would help me try to serve my community."

Dibabe recalls the impact social studies had on her, specifically 'extrinsic and intrinsic satisfaction'. **"When I started serving voluntarily in my association, I had no money, but I had energy. I had a positive mindset for serving my community for free. So I always reminded myself 'for intrinsic satisfaction rather than for extrinsic satisfaction'** because when I counselled members, when I was advocating for and having discussions with my women with disability, you know I saw their level of satisfaction and the hope."

Curious about the history of stigmatisation in Ethiopia of people with disabilities, knowing that most indigenous cultures tend to have long embraced and celebrated diversity – I ask about Ethiopia's unique colonial past in relation to its discomfort with disabled people. Dibabe shares, "When it comes to women with disabilities in our context, it's considered as a curse or a punishment from God because being women plus having a disability is considered as sukul or useless. Starting from the Haile Selassie regime, persons with disabilities were living in one compound as a charity-based model and they received food or clothes from charity, from supporters or from the government. They considered us as a charity-based model. Even the terminology when we look at it for example, we know we used our current, rights-based approach terminology and from the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability. In Amharic, 'person with disability' reads 'አካል ጉዳተኛ'."

I'm not surprised when Dibabe shares that her day starts at 5:30am, "I always pray and talk with my God. After I finish my spiritual activity, I am ready for work or for a meeting and having breakfast with my children. I'm a mother of three children. After having breakfast together, we go to school and I drop my children off [to school] on the way to my office." From emails to group texting platforms, to social media, answering and receiving to phone calls, coordinated safehouses for women encountering gender-based violence, problem-solving budget requests, reviewing project updates, and reading reports, all in the morning. "If there is no meeting all afternoon, I always end up visiting a member's house, especially members having counselling problems, psychotrauma, members who are not at peace with their family members, and especially members having a demanding need for my presence."

Part of Dibabe's advocacy includes urgent intervention, sometimes taking cases directly to court herself, and exposing the gaps in the justice system. "I'm serving as a civil society advisory committee at UN Women.. If there is any health-

I'M ALWAYS ADVOCATING FOR THE FULL MEANINGFUL INCLUSION OF WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES AND FORMAL REPRESENTATIONS AND FOR THE REPRESENTATIONS OF WOMEN'S DISABILITY RELATED THINGS.

related issue, especially sexual reproductive health rights and GBV cases, I directly go to Dr. Mekdes [Minister of Health] even with the hardliner and Social Standing Committee. I'm not waiting for the bureaucracy or the process 17 years later, getting approval. Now, I directly call the leaders and if there are any letters demanding submissions, I send them on Whatsapp or on Telegram channels. My everyday feminism looks like this."

Dibabe has been visually impaired since the age of 8, reading Braille and growing into the woman she is now. The woman who continues to achieve milestones in destigmatising and making space for the voices of women and people with disabilities to be respected, heard, and cared for with the dignity that we all deserve.

Q&A

How do you tap into joy in your work?

Tapping into joy in my work is making connections with others and witnessing the results of my efforts, it brings me delight. Mentoring youth and women with disabilities whether it's addressing problems creatively, fostering growth in others, or producing something significant, those moments of connection serve as a reminder of why I do what I do. I also enjoy taking the time to enjoy the process and celebrating little victories. Spending most of my time with communities is also a way I tap into joy for my work.

This is all about everyday feminism. So, what's one way you 'feminist' every day?

Everyday feminism for me is about intentional choices—how I speak up in conversations, how I support others, and how I challenge unfair norms in my society. In every platform I get to speak, I always represent children, youth and girls and women with disabilities. I embody everyday feminism by being mindful of how I use my privilege and platform. I engage in ongoing learning, advocate for women with disabilities, and practice self-compassion, knowing that feminism starts with how I show up for myself.

What is a win that you'd like to celebrate?

A win I'd like to celebrate is fostering a space where diverse and inclusive perspectives are shared, respected and valued.

What is one thing around everyday feminism that you are grappling with or seeking answers to?

How do I sustain momentum without burning out and how can I stop the backlash of the system?

When it comes to everyday feminism, for someone who doesn't know where to start, what would you tell them?

Start by listening and learning. Read books, follow feminist voices, and engage in conversations. Everyday feminism begins with awareness—examining your biases, speaking up when needed, and supporting marginalised communities in whatever ways you can.

SRILATHA BATLIWALA

Words of Gold

BY ALEYA KASSAM

INDIA

Srilatha Batliwala is a feminist grandmother whose work spans four decades. From grassroots activism to research and policy, grant-making and teaching, she comes alive when talking about feminist movements. A skilled storyteller, she is now on sabbatical taking the space to heal, and to write the Feminist Fables, stories that she's used in the training of young activists at Creating Resources for Empowerment in Action (CREA)'s Feminist Leadership Institute, where she serves as an advisor.

10,000 words of gold. That's what my conversation with Srilatha Batliwala has offered. From stories about indigenous feminists of the armed revolutionary Zapatista Movement in Mexico who pushed for the Women's Revolutionary Law. From Dalit and indigenous women in India forming a powerful movement that in just six months forced the replacement of the age-old ritual of begging for wages they had fairly earned, to what she calls her Lipstick Story where she subverted the feminist fundamentalism in India by wearing lipstick as a personal act of defiance.

Srilatha is a skilled storyteller who combines astute theory and vivid anecdotes, always with playful humour and care. These stories come from her active role in the feminist movement in various capacities across four decades. Spanning grassroots activism, research, policy, advocacy, grant-making, teaching, and creating knowledge resources that have been translated and used by activists and universities around the world; the depth and scale of her work is dizzying. However, when she speaks about the power of feminist movements, her voice rises from deep within her. "I helped build two mass movements that have survived way beyond me. And I mean mass... 50,000 women in the rural women's federation and more than a million and a half slum and pavement dweller women across India."

IF YOU CREATE A SPACE WHERE PEOPLE CAN REALLY THINK DANGEROUS THOUGHTS AND PLAN DANGEROUS DEEDS. THAT'S WHAT THEY NEED.

MAYBE WE'D BRING TOGETHER
A VERY MOTLEY CREW OF PEOPLE
WHO BELIEVE IN EQUALITY AND JUSTICE.

AND WE COME UP WITH A MULTIMEDIA
COMMUNIQUE WHICH USES ART AND FILM
AND MUSIC AND POETRY AND SONG.

IT HAS TO BE A LOT OF FUN, INTRIGUING
AND MAGNETIC.

It's been a tough year for Srilatha so she decided to take a sabbatical to create space for healing. During this period, she's writing the sea of stories that she calls Feminist Fables, stories that she's used in the training of young activists at CREA's Feminist Leadership Institute. "These are stories of profound learning moments that I've had either with the grassroots women I've worked with directly or from the stories others have told me, but have never been recorded." Reminding myself of this eases the weight of turning 10,000 words of gold into a piece that glitters in the unique way that Srilatha's stories do.

Let's start from the beginning; What are the particular circumstances that have shaped Srilatha into who she is? From her particularly South Indian context which had a less rigid form of patriarchy than the North, to having a grandmother who was an indigenous feminist and began converting Srilatha to her brand of feminism when at the age of five; from a father who was supportive of her intellectual journey to an aunt who became a Member of Parliament igniting16-year-old Srilatha's imagination as she accompanied her on the campaign trail, she credits her personal context as uniquely advantageous. However, the social context in India was complicated. "India has this ultimate paradox of having some of the most blatant, cruel and extreme forms of patriarchy... but we also have a history of incredible women resistors. And because we had this long tradition of goddess worship, the idea of powerful women figures is not alien in this culture."

Perhaps this is one of the many factors that made the transformative women's movements in India possible. They broke all the traditional patriarchal models of leadership, and the lessons from these movements are still powerful today. "You know what we discovered? That if you have the brains and the skill not to go to women offering them handouts of various kinds, but simply offering them a safe space to question... a space where they can talk safely, express their anger, and you just tap into that, what the Marxists call the revolutionary anger that's within, this whole edifice (of patriarchy) just crumbles... **If you create a space where people can really... the words I use for this are ... *think dangerous thoughts and plan dangerous deeds*. That's what they need.** How else could we build a movement of the most oppressed rural women—Dalit women and indigenous women— in three years! But it happened and within that short time they were taking on the state, they were taking on their own communities, they were imprisoning rapists." Srilatha laughs heartily, and it's clear to see how much these memories still give her energy.

And now, many years later, she is at a different phase of her life. **"I see myself as a grandmother, a feminist grandmother in the movement, and in my personal life. But the clue about how to be in the movement very much came from the experience of becoming a grandma."** As Srilatha navigated the intense love she felt for her granddaughter with the understanding that she must not transgress into the mothering role, she began reconstructing her role in the relationship, "So I began to start thinking about what clues this experience is giving me about the transition I have to make in other spaces."

Already, Srilatha had made the decision six years before her first grandchild not to take on formal leadership positions anymore, a move that was quite radical at the time, when "People had started talking about how older feminists don't make way for younger leaders... in South Asian languages we say, they 'stick to the seat', meaning the throne." She began asking herself, "Now, how can I model being a grandmother in the movement? And aligned with this, the concept of 'leading from the back'. What does that mean and what does that look like?"

Part of the answer lay in ceding power, supporting young feminists, "What do we mean by young? Do we mean this in the sense of chronological age, or do we mean young in activism, young in accessing spaces of power that they had never had access to before? So you could have a 50-year-old woman who for the first time is getting an opportunity to be a public actor." Another part is in supporting people to develop a new paradigm around leadership that is not patriarchal and not hierarchical, and creating knowledge resources that can fuel change. Srilatha now sees her role in the movement as providing support from behind the scenes.

At this stage in her life, her practice of everyday feminism has evolved. When she was younger, she couldn't decide whether to be a hands-on-activist or a scholar. Then suddenly, she had a realisation that now informs her practice as a grandmother in the movement, "What if I could bring these two together? So **I consider myself as a bridge, as someone who bridges the worlds of theory and practice in a way that empowers younger activists.** Because I always objected to the view that if you're an activist, what do you need with theory? Just do stuff! But that's highly dangerous. Because if you're doing stuff without analysing, for instance, power, what is it that you're trying to change? What are those structures of power rooted in? There's a good chance that your activism will be far less impactful." This work of decoding theory for those who are in action is deeply important

I CONSIDER MYSELF AS SOMEONE WHO BRIDGES THE WORLDS OF THEORY AND PRACTICE IN A WAY THAT EMPOWERS YOUNGER ACTIVISTS.

to her, "For me, that's how it works on a day-to-day basis, so that what you're doing is helping people get a deeper understanding of a particular phenomenon or experience by linking it with a theory, which helps them go to a deeper root cause, and change their strategies as a result."

As if to demonstrate just what she means, Srilatha takes what she's explained and shares an example from her own life, "I think the everyday practice of it is when you take small events, small incidents that occur on a day-to-day basis. I know I've done this a lot with my kids when they were younger." Ever the storyteller, Srilatha paints the picture of when her son was young. He asked about a labour leader who had led a massive strike, and was being criticised for bringing industry to a standstill. Her son asked, "Is this guy a good guy or a bad guy?" And Srilatha saw the opportunity to teach him about labour movements, linking the workers who make sari petticoats to Marx's teachings about the extraction of surplus value. This is something she continues with her grandchildren, who she hopes she has modelled and taught feminist values to. Her grandchildren are very proud of her. Nothing demonstrates this more sweetly than the story of her granddaughter in school, "They were going to talk about child labour and they were thinking of a resource, when she said, 'Ooh you have to ask my grandmother.' So, her teacher said, 'Why your grandmother?' You know, she must have pictured some little

old white-haired woman maybe or whatever. She said, 'No, no, my grandmother is a very famous activist and she knows about all these issues. You know, she has a Wikipedia entry!' Srilatha laughs again, this time in sheer glee. It is admirable the way Srilatha continuously weaves her personal and political life without contradiction, sharing the specific intimacies of each world.

I can't wait to read the Feminist Fables. Already, our one-and-a-half-hour long conversation threw me into a vortex of multiplying Google tabs, leading me down a journey that made me marvel at the feminist legacies around the world, each propelled by everyday women one day at a time. The enduring question that now runs through my blood is: Where am I in my life at this moment, and what clues can that offer about what I have to contribute to the movement? And (most thrillingly) in that context, what will be my own dangerous thoughts and dangerous deeds?

Q&A

How do you tap into joy in your work?

One of the ways I've derived joy is from the stories of resistance. And that's why I feel writing the feminist fables is so important. I also tap into joy by not looking at this as work. But as looking at this as part of a magnificent magical process that I have been permitted to participate in.

This is all about everyday feminism. So, what's one way you 'feminist' every day?

I try to engage with some activity that just keeps relocating me by growing me in some way, I talk to one of the grandchildren and we have a conversation about something they are facing. I talk to colleagues who are still very active. I have a colleague who does this amazing feminist art activism, she has an organisation called Blank Noise and sometimes I participate in some of their actions .... Blank Noise does these actions called Meet to Sleep which is women reclaiming public spaces and their right to be in public spaces without a purpose, just like men loiter and hang around and sleep at parks. So I try take part in those kind of actions. I'll take part in a gay pride

march or something that makes me feel alive and linked to my foundational ideology.

What is a win that you'd like to celebrate?

One is definitely the movements that I helped build and that have survived and grown. The second is the knowledge resources that I've created for activists that have gone all over the world and been translated; the latest one I heard was in Mongolian! So I feel like, wow! These are really helping people. The third, and not necessarily the third in order of importance, because I think this is often a very big challenge for feminist activists, I raised a feminist son and daughter.

What is one thing around everyday feminism that you are grappling with or seeking answers to?

I'm really grappling with how to push back the tide of fundamentalisms and the grip that this traditionalist right-wing discourse has in all our contexts, and the rising trend of popularly elected authoritarians. I mean, I just don't understand. I'm reading, that's one of my acts of everyday feminism is I'm constantly reading, and trying to understand what's going on.

When it comes to everyday feminism, for someone who doesn't know where to start, what would you tell them?

I would want to start with a very compelling message that intrigues them and makes them want to learn more without sort of hitting them on the head with, you know, 'this is all so terrible and you should stand for human rights and women's rights and all that.' People just shut off when you do that... Instead, maybe we'd bring together a very motley crew of people who believe in equality and justice. It has to be a very diverse group, and we have a lab where what we have to do is come up with a multimedia communique at the end of one week, which uses art and film and music and poetry and song and conveys a very compelling message. It has to be a lot of fun, it has to be very intriguing and magnetic. This is how we have to begin to counter the fundamentalist discourse.

DINAH MUSINDARWEZO

Imagining the Future

BY MWENDE NGAO

RWANDA

Dinah Musindarwezo is the former Interim Co-CEO at Womankind. She is Rwandan, born and raised in Uganda and is currently residing in Kenya. Her identity as a Black African woman informs her activism and her life and career are a reflection of an unapologetically Pan-African feminist. She believes feminism is an ideology, one that shapes not just your life, but also all our futures.

I first met Dinah Musindarwezo back in 2015 through a project run by The African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET), where she was the Executive Director. I followed her career when she moved to Womankind, where she rose to Interim Co-CEO, before leaving for new adventures mid-2024 . Her life and career are a reflection of an unapologetically Pan-African feminist.

"If you're not angry about any form of injustice, I don't think you can be a feminist."

When we speak, she is on a break from full-time employment, learning to embrace a slow life and to practise rest as a form of resistance after a very busy couple of years. She describes herself as a "collaborator, strategist, movement builder, sister, and advocate", reflecting the beautiful shades of feminist activism in Africa, where personal and political spheres often intersect.

Dinah is Rwandan, born and raised in Uganda and currently residing in Kenya. Her identity as a Black African woman informs her activism. "I like to call myself a Pan-African feminist but also an intersectional one," she states with conviction. For Dinah, feminism is not just a theoretical framework, it's a way of life. **"Feminism is not a career but an ideology. That once one believes in that ideology, they embody it in everyday life. In the way they live their life, whether it's at home, at school or at the workplace."** She deeply believes that the personal is political.

Dinah's feminist awakening, like most African women, came from recognising how deeply patriarchy was entrenched in her everyday reality, especially with regards to gender roles and discrimination based on gender. Watching her

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mother tirelessly manage the household while her father's needs took precedence, shaped her early understanding of gender inequality.

"I grew up in a family where my mom did a lot of unpaid care work at home. She cared for us and yet if asked what she did, she would simply say 'I don't work'... When I started learning about gender equality, it was clear that she worked more than anyone else in the household."

Dinah's feminist principles led to her refusing a bride price when she was getting married, something that angered her late father and the men in her family. She is still patiently having these conversations with her mother, who like many of her time, struggles to break free from the social conditioning she's accustomed to. "My mother understands gender inequalities from her lived experience, but she struggles to believe that a gender equal world is possible. She almost believes gender inequality is natural." Things have been slow to change in her family, she admits. Yet, she stood by her decision which has since affected her relationship with her father. As she recounts this story, her immense courage and resolve is apparent.

While older generations may not fully align with her feminist ideals, younger family members have embraced social justice principles. "They understand that gender inequality is real and must be addressed," she says, hopeful for a future where the next generation embodies feminist values. In her own home, she is doing her part in how she raises her 10-year-old son. "I try to raise him as a feminist, conscious of power imbalances and respectful of girls' and women's rights. And I recently saw him practise what I'm teaching him," she shares.

"[My friend] was commenting about someone that had gained weight and my son said, 'Oh no don't comment on people's bodies, that's not right. That's body shaming.' And my friend was like, 'What is body shaming and who taught you that?' And he said, 'Oh my mom taught me that'...", she shares beaming with pride. Teaching her son about concepts like misogyny, body positivity and respect for others is one of the ways she is contributing to a future where gender relations are more equitable.

Her drive and direct action approach meant Dinah's early days as a feminist were marked by urgency and idealism, a familiar story shared by many feminists. She entered the movement with the hope of immediate change, only to realise that dismantling systemic inequalities is a long-term process.

As Dinah's career grew, she found herself in leadership positions but faced instances of being undermined or subjected to inappropriate comments for being a woman. "Oftentimes, you're trying to influence policy, and instead, someone comments on your looks," she reveals, shedding light on the gendered challenges women leaders face. "Again, because of the gender inequality that exists and the gender stereotypes, it is somehow believed that it's men who are natural leaders... And as much as most of my years have been spent working in women's rights organisations, where the leadership of women or women being leaders won't be questioned, we also don't work in isolation."

Another obstacle Dinah noted that stands in the way of advancing the feminist agenda and causing the backlash against gains made is the continuous rise of anti-rights groups across the world. Anti-rights groups are well-resourced and well-coordinated in a way that feminist organisations working to challenge them are not. "I think the evidence shows that the resourcing is inadequate and even those that are available oftentimes are restricted, which is not very good for feminist organisations and movements."

Despite these obstacles, Dinah believes in the power of collective action. "It's the everyday acts of feminism that come together as collective action to build a feminist future," she asserts. This involves adopting feminist leadership principles in professional spaces. Her leadership philosophy emphasizes collective decision-making, care, and wellbeing, which she considers essential for sustainable movements.

This realisation that this is a long-term process, has shaped her approach to activism, teaching her patience and the importance of incremental progress. The initial fervor gave way to a more sustainable perspective, acknowledging that true societal transformation requires continuous effort over time.

"When I have been in leadership positions, I have led intentionally, I have led with feminist principles and values in mind and that looks like making sure there is collective decision making... but also centring care and wellbeing of team members...and also understanding that wellbeing is the key to building sustainable action and sustainable movements."

Dinah is deeply committed, because the work of feminism is serious. She is also thoughtful and community-oriented. Her feminism and her thought process are for the benefit of the larger feminist community. These are the qualities that make her a capable feminist leader. She offers valuable insights for young people aspiring to

lead through a feminist lens. She emphasizes the importance of building a support system to share knowledge and best practices, cry together and celebrate wins together. Dinah encourages young feminist leaders to question the current models of leadership and step out of the status quo to ensure that their leadership is informed and guided by feminist values and principles.

“I really think that there is a benefit in getting mentors and leadership coaches and building sisterhood and solidarity with other feminist leaders. That’s something I feel that I’ve benefited from and I think that every person who wants to build their leadership journey can benefit from. And I really believe that there are many people out there who want to give back, who have also benefited from such support and want to lend some support to others.”

Dinah acknowledges that feminist leadership can work outside core feminist circles, but only if there’s commitment to create institutional culture and systems that support feminist leadership. Whether in government or corporate settings, it requires systemic change, including policy reforms and cultural shifts. An individual championing feminist values in a traditional corporate environment focused solely on productivity may find it challenging without broader organisational shift and support. However, with the right commitment, she believes feminist leadership can thrive beyond its traditional boundaries.

Dinah wants to be known as someone who dedicated her life to improving the lives of other women, as well as someone who inspired others to live their lives in a meaningful and joyful way. She envisions a feminist future where there is absence of discrimination and inequalities.

“It’s a future where everyone is thriving. They’re doing what they want to do. They are living how they want to live. It’s a future where everyone has resources they need to thrive and is free from discrimination and violence. Everyone has a voice and they can express it with no fear. A future that is safe for everyone.”

Her approach to everyday feminism is rooted in passion, collective care, and resilience. She advocates for equitable resourcing of organisational movements and envisions a world where feminist leadership transcends sectors, driven by shared values and a commitment to justice. Her advice and experiences offer a blueprint for those looking to embrace feminism in their daily lives, reminding us that change, though gradual, is possible with persistence and conviction.

Q&A

How do you tap into joy in your work?

This work is really not easy and sometimes not safe for individuals pushing to change the status quo. We are dismantling systemic inequalities, so that won't take a short time. And I have learned that I really need to create time to do things that give me joy. So within this work, what gives me joy is the sisters I meet. I feel like the best friends that I have for life are people that I've met through feminist organising. Finding time to pause and reflect also gives me joy. Whether it is to meditate, go out for a walk in nature, play time with my son or spending quality time with people I love. Finding time to do things that feed my soul gives me joy. As you can see, I'm smiling as I talk about these things.

This is all about everyday feminism. So, what's one way you 'feminist' every day?

Ensuring that everyone has space to express themselves, to voice their ideas and express themselves freely with no fear. I practise leadership that is based on trust so that's a practice that I've been really intentional about in all the leadership positions that I've held.

What is a win that you'd like to celebrate?

So the only thing that I've taken away from the winning thing is making women compete for us to be celebrated... For me, that is not feminism. Because if we are celebrating me, you are celebrating me as a woman and because maybe I'm unique. Not because I'm higher than any other woman in the world. It is because it is my time. And deserve to be celebrated for the work that I'm doing.

What is one thing around everyday feminism that you are grappling with or seeking answers to?

What I'm grappling with is how we can think we've progressed and there's better understanding of gender justice and feminism, but yet we're also seeing a lot of backlash at the same time. We're seeing sexist men being elected to be presidents in countries like the USA. So that can really be disheartening. I am also grappling with how we, as feminists, also decolonise our work and practices. We're seeing organisations that claim to be guided by feminist principles, but yet if you look at their everyday practices and organisational policies and how that align with

decolonisation and anti-racism policies, there is still a lot to be done. I'm also grappling with rhetoric versus actions. We say we must centre grassroots feminist organisations and feminist movements but yet when you go to look at how much funding is actually reaching those same grassroots community-based organisations and feminist movements, the funding is still very low. It is as low as less than 1% funding directly going to women's rights organisations and even less going to Global South women's rights organisations and much less going to disability organisations, LGBTQIA+ organisations, young feminists organisations, and others working on intersecting forms of marginalised identities.

When it comes to everyday feminism, for someone who doesn't know where to start, what would you tell them?

I would ask them to identify something that gives them anger. I feel like from anger, we drive passion. And from passion I think we'll have endless possibilities to act. If you're not angry about any form of injustice, I don't think you can be a feminist. So I would simply explain what feminists are trying to do. I would show them how the world is unequal, and hope that from that they can then identify what relates to them the most.

FROM ANGER, WE DRIVE PASSION. AND FROM PASSION I THINK WE'LL HAVE ENDLESS POSSIBILITIES TO ACT.

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To all the feminist activists across the world who every day, demand change and rise up against patriarchy and all forms of oppression.

And finally, to each of you who carry out small acts of feminism every day.

A bold and inspiring book, Womankind Worldwide brings you Everyday Feminism: The Anthology. In this final iteration of Womankind's 'Everyday Feminism' campaign, we celebrate 10 feminists from the global women's rights movement and the feminist ecosystem that Womankind is part of. This collection features the following extraordinary women: Editar Ochieng (Kenya), Sakhile Sifelani-Ngoma (Zimbabwe), Gloria Mutyaba (Uganda), Maryam Rahmani (Afghanistan), Anne Agar (Kenya), Lily Thapa (Nepal), Thandiwe Chidavurume (Zimbabwe), Dibabe Bacha (Ethiopia), Srilatha Batliwala (India) and Dinah Musindarwezo (Rwanda). These feminists practise feminism on their own terms.

Exploring the struggles and victories of these women who have dared to challenge systems of oppression in their unique cultural and political contexts, this book is an embodiment of everyday feminisms. These are the stories of thinkers, activists, leaders and community builders who have expanded the boundaries of feminist thought, addressing issues such as gender equity, land rights, environmental justice, queer rights and labour rights.

Perfect for feminists, scholars, and anyone seeking to understand the diverse, intersectional roots of today's fight for gender justice, this collection invites you to discover the stories of those who shaped change against the odds.

These are not just stories of the past—they are a call to action for the present and future.

Womankind Worldwide is an international women's rights organisation and funder, working with women's rights groups and feminist movements across the world to end gender inequality.

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