African feminists celebrate the 10th anniversary of the AFF

“Women Arise. Feminists Arise. You need a voice... Speak to your soul...” sang Zimbabwean performing artist Kesia Musoni as she welcomed African feminists from across the continent to the Fourth African Feminist Forum (AFF) in Harare, Zimbabwe. One hundred and sixty (160) feminists from 32 African countries are attending the AFF, which is celebrating its 10th anniversary.

Gratitude and celebration marked the opening session of the AFF. “Thank you for coming and for being here. It has taken so much love, thought, work and inspiration to bring us all here. I want to say thank you at the beginning, (rather than at the end), because it is important to always remember to give thanks,” said Jessica Horn, director of programmes at the African Women’s Development Fund (AWDF), the convener of the AFF.

The 10th anniversary of the AFF provides feminists with the opportunity to celebrate the achievements and contributions of feminists across the continent, said Theo Sowa on behalf of the AWDF/AFF Steering Committee. “In no one else sees our achievements, we, as African women feminists, need to celebrate our achievements,” she said.

Acknowledging the 10 women who pioneered the development of the AFF, Sowa said: “These women continue to be incredible and we will never be able to thank you enough; we would not be able to be here today without you.” On behalf of the Zimbabwe Feminist Forum (ZFF), which is hosting the AFF for the first time in the Southern African region, Pamela Mhlanga, noted that for feminists in Zimbabwe, the holding of the AFF provides, “an opportunity for us to re-energise, re-establish and revision the future. It also presents an opportunity for us to learn the lessons from all of you.”

Convening under the theme “Voice, Power and Soul”, the Fourth AFF was preceded by a summit of feminists from the francophone countries and a Southern African Young Women’s Feminist Forum.

“The real achievement of the forum will be our ability to share our lessons, redefine our agenda and our ability to give each other support,” Horn said, reminding feminists from across the continent that “we wake up every day fighting.”

“So many feminist sisters are falling by the wayside, because they are burnt out, getting tired. In this space, we do not have to wake up fighting; we wake up supporting each other.”

She called on the feminists at the Fourth AFF to “walk away feeling proud to be African feminists knowing our sisters have our backs, intellectually, physically and emotionally. “Let’s make really good use of each other; let’s strengthen each other. Let’s be revitalize, replenished when we go away... and, let’s also have some fun.”

News from the national forums

Central Africa Feminist Forum (CAFF)

“Our strength was to call ourselves feminists which is not easy in our region. Feminism is considered a thorn in the African tradition, and to be called “feminists”, is a sign of power that we will go ahead without fear,” said Françoise Mukuku in her report on the Central Africa Feminist Forum (CAFF).

Feminists from 39 countries in the Central African region held their regional forum in 2012. The forum created a safe space for women to share their stories of resilience, and to discuss issues of violence, sexuality and women’s sexual and reproductive health rights.

Uganda Feminist Forum (UFF)

The Uganda Feminist Forum (UFF) is one of the older feminist forums at the national level. The Forum began in 2005 with the Women Leaders and Activist meeting. UFF is hosted by the Eastern African Sub-regional Support Initiative for the Advancement of Women (EASSI).

“We have feminists from all over Uganda and we meet formally and informally. We are Feminists....... Full stop!!

We have feminists from all over Uganda and we meet formally and informally. We have feminists from all over Uganda and we meet formally and informally. We are Feminists....... Full stop!!

Some 28 participants from nine French-speaking West African countries held a one-day summit (April 9) before the Fourth African Feminist Forum to engage with the African Feminist Charter and to re-define their identity as African feminists. The Francophone Forum provided an autonomous space for the women, ranging in age from 20 to 70 years, to reflect on their own terms and to challenge the under-representation of women from francophone countries in feminist spaces.
News from the national forums

Informally,” said Maureen Akatsa-Bukachi.

Movement building, remaining relevant in the face of backlash from fundamentalists and the rise of global conservatism, challenging power in political spaces, among others, have been central themes of the LFFs. A mentoring programme for young women has started and the national forum also focuses on how to reach back to reclaim feminist ancestors.

Liberia Feminist Forum (LFF)

More than 20 women came together to convene the first feminist forum in 2014.

“In Liberia, our obstacle to being feminists and to social change is the “checkpoints” that have remained in place before, during the war and they are still in place. Our aim is to challenge these checkpoints,” said Korto Reeves, reporting on the work of the LFF.

The checkpoints to be removed include women’s lack of access to justice; the under-representation of women in leadership; and the stigma that continues to surround women who self-identify as feminists.

“No woman before 2014 self-identified as a feminist,” Reeves said.

The aims of the LFF are to “raise consciousness, celebrate ourselves and to

The NFF’s successes include stopping the Nigerian Senate in 2011 from passing into law the Indecent Dressing Bill and the forum waged an effective campaign in 2013 to stop the Nigerian Senate from deleting a section of the constitution that linked adulthood for women to marriage rather than age.

Challenges ahead include homophobia following the National Assembly’s passing of the Same Sex Marriage Prohibition Act; growing insecurity in the country due to terrorism; and sextortion – the increasing threat of sexual assault and violence against female students within and around universities and the targeting of female students by male faculty members in exchange for grades.

Mali Feminist Forum (MFF)

The first Feminist Forum in Mali brought together 39 participants to understand the meaning of feminism.

“This is a misunderstood term in Mali and it was difficult to share the African Feminist Charter, especially because of the aspects of homosexuality,” said Djingarey Maiga.

The theme of the first forum was “Connect to Come Together for Change”. Gender-based violence is one of the major concerns of feminists who work with the national committee on GBV. “Mali has no law on GBV and some forms of violence are not defined.

Tanzania Feminist Forum (TFF)

The Tanzania Feminist Forum (TFF) continues with transformative movement building, which has become a theory used in the academic arena.

The TFF is encouraged by the new government’s focus on “returning the resources” to the citizens, but there are still areas of concern. These include funding for feminist activities, sextortion and the roll-back in women’s representation in the Cabinet from 30% to 20%.

Challenges before the TFF include division in the movement on child marriages, same-sex marriages and the backlash from religious fundamentalism. Tanzania offered to host the next AFF.

Zimbabwe Feminist Forum (ZFF)

ZFF was first convened in 2011. One of the main commitments emanating from the ZFF was to struggle against all systems and structural forms of oppression that contribute to “women dying sad”, said Rudo Chigudu in her report on the ZFF. “Healing women’s bodies and souls is part of the ZFF’s political work.”

In 2012, the ZFF’s Research and Documentation Committee met to discuss the issues of governance, politics and democratic change in light of the country’s then constitution-making process.

“Our conversation was not about getting more women into office and to get a piece of the pie. We looked at how to dismantle governments and systems that do not work for women.”

At the end of 2015, the ZFF revisited the Feminist Charter to look not only at the theory, but to reflect on how feminists “should live” the charter in practice.

Senegalese Feminist Forum (SFF)

Established in 2009, the SFF has brought together self-identified feminists from various backgrounds – academics, sex workers, young women, women living with disabilities, women in the rural areas, among others – who had never had the chance to work together, said Codou Bop reporting on the SFF. The “burning issues”

The “burning issues”

"The Light of Women is The Revolution"
Feminists who paved the way - a tribute to our Sheroes

In a moving ceremony, feminists at the Fourth AFF paid tribute to and celebrated the lives of Sister Friends who have become Sheroes for feminist activism in Africa. Through their music, poetry, literature, feminist knowledge and research and activist organising, the lasting legacies of the Sisters who have passed on were recounted in testimonies that spoke of love, strength, feistiness and incredible acts of kindness.

“Chiwoniso was not my biological mom, but she called me daughter. She was an aura of love. Chiwoniso could walk into a room and light it up. The most important lesson I learnt from her was love,” said Amara Brown in her remembrance of Chiwoniso Maraire, one of Zimbabwe’s gifted feminist musicians.

In her tribute to freedom fighter and poet Freedom Nyamubaya, Sithabiso Ndlovu said: “Freedom was a woman who represented every young feminist’s dream of what to be. Before meeting her, I did not have respect for freedom fighters, and the only ones I knew were men. Whenever I met her, I was struck always by how Freedom expressed herself.”

Rosalie Eldora Sindi Medar Gould, affectionately known as Sindi by her Nigerian Sister friends, was described as “selfless” and as a “mentor”. “Many Sisters benefitted from her friendship and wisdom. She was no nonsense, but she also was very kind,” said her long-time friend Iheoma Obibi.

Remembering the young Malawian feminist activist, Mildred Sharra who died too soon, Kerto Williams and Ennie Chipembere noted that “Mildred was a hard-core feminist with lots of feminist energy that sisters remember in sadness, love, celebration.... She worked long hours in different parts of Malawi, challenging issues and talking about things that people would not have generally thought of.”

Ugandan feminist activist Hope Takahirwa was remembered for her dynamism, passion, incredible energy and her spirit of happiness and joy. “She laughed from her belly and her belly laughed. She worked with communities to address violence against women with urgency. She always told women to value women and value themselves,” said Jackie Asilime in her tribute. Her name Takahirwa means ‘We shall overcome.’

Tanzanian feminists honoured the late Bi Kidude, born Fatuma binti Baraka around 1910. She was a Zanzibari-born Tanzanian Taarab singer, rebel, percussionist and sexologist. Bikidude embodied in her essence the theme of the Fourth AFF, ‘Voice, Power and Soul’. Other women remembered and honoured were Miriam Makeba (South Africa), Wangari Maathai (Kenya), Cesaria Evora (Cape Verde), Colleen Madamombe (Zimbabwe), and Sarah Kachingwe (Zimbabwe).

AFF Solidarity Fund Grants awarded to three Zimbabwean recipients

In honour of their contribution to feminist activism, the AFF Solidarity Fund awarded grants of $1,200 each to the families of the late Chiwoniso Maraire and the late Freedom Nyamubaya. Amara Brown received the grant on behalf of the Maraire family and the son of the late Freedom, Naishe was at the tribute ceremony to receive the grant.

The Bulawayo Collective of Young Feminists also received a grant of $1,200 for their passion and commitment to feminist activism. The grant was received on behalf of the collective by Sithabiso Ndlovu.

Rudo Chigudu thanked the AFF for the money, support and feminist solidarity received during her son’s treatment for cancer.
A political economy approach is needed to understand conflict-related gender-based violence

The impact of armed conflict and violence on gender relations, gender equality and social justice remains a critical concern, especially since high levels of violence often continue even in countries transitioning from overt armed conflict, said Dr. Ayesha Imam.

Speaking to the Fourth African Feminist Forum (AFF) in Harare, Zimbabwe on The Political Economy of Conflict-Related Gender-Based Violence against Women, Imam noted that there have been studies of the causes and consequences of armed conflict-related gender-based violence against women on women’s lives.

What has received less attention, she added, is “a gendered analysis of the political economy of conflict and the ways in which political, economic, social and ideological processes intersect to impact and shape the gendered impact of conflict-related gender-based violence against women.”

Understanding the gendered impact of conflict-related gender-based violence, as well as GBV in times of peace, is specifically significant in Africa. The highest levels of violence against women aggregated by region are in Africa, where nearly half of all women, 45.6%, suffer physical or sexual violence, Imam said quoting from a 2009 study by the World Health Organisation (WHO).

Feminists working in the areas of conflict and violence against women, both in theory and in activism, can begin to take a political economy approach by researching and discussing the link between the causes of conflict and violence against women “in the context of structural inequalities mediated by patriarchy at the level of the household or the community, and in global political economies during or in the aftermath of conflict,” Imam said.

This link and analysis also should include the ways in which violations of socio-economic rights in ‘peace’ heighten in armed conflict, situate women in conjunctures of vulnerability to gender-based violence, she added.

“A political economy analysis compels us to understand how the multiple crises generated by economic globalization and development, resultant macro-economic policies, trade liberalization, economic de-regulation and the financial and climate crises and militarization pose new challenges.”

It is important also, Imam added, to have a feminist analysis and framework that helps to “define, in particular contexts, the concerns and the structures and processes that place women in vulnerable situations, and to ensure attention is paid to these in ‘peace’ and development policies.”

Recreating feminist spaces

Does your organisation have soul?

If people in your organisation no longer speak to each other, if you have been stuck in the same position for more than 10 years with no hope for advancement; and there is more concern with structures rather than with the people, then take heed, your organisation has lost its soul.

In a spirited break-away session at the Fourth AFF on Building Organisations with Soul, Zimbabwean feminists Hope and Rudo Chigudu took participants through a series of steps to identify whether an organisation and the individuals that work within them have lost their vibrancy.

According to the two women, there are many feminists and women’s organisations on the continent that “used to be really dynamic, but after a decade or so, these

Hope Chigudu leads participants in soulful exercises...
Feminists must re-define the funding agenda

The changing and shifting funding landscape for feminist activism calls for new strategies and reflection on how feminists can move their varied agendas using resources that have no strings attached.

"Women’s organisations have very little resources, yet they have so much to change," said Abigail Burgeson.

As more and more resources flow from women’s rights and feminists organisations to the big International Non-governmental Organisations (INGOs), how feminists can begin to resource their own work was one of the central questions during the Fourth AFF as the participants reflected on some of the challenges to their work.

"We have lost certain gains and we need to reclaim them. INGOs are setting up headquarters in capitals in the South and are competing for the same funds as women’s rights organisations."

While there is a general recognition of the importance of investing in women, the challenge is how the issues we organise around are being understood in a framework where the question of “what is the return on the investment?” is key, said Happy Kinyili. Kinyili and Burgeson were both panellists in a session on Resourcing feminist organisations: shifting funding landscapes during the Fourth AFF.

In this framework, rights and social change are not on the agenda, Kinyili said adding that the focus is on individual people, as opposed to shifting structural oppression.

Funding partners are forming strategic partnerships with African women’s rights organisations, yet the conversations happen with white men who do not always understand the context and are continuing to ask where are the women? "We may need to begin to ask ourselves, how can we resource ourselves?" said several participants in the session.

Situating the issue of funding within the context one of the themes of the AFF, Voice, Power and Soul, Kinyili noted that “our movements have traditionally been resource by western governments, entities that are capitalists. This impacts on ‘Voice’.

“How do we ensure that our voice is heard in this context, recognising the different histories that come into play? There are moments when our voice is actually heard," Kinyili said citing as an example the ongoing advocacy by the women’s movement calling for the Netherlands-based FLOW to fund the work they are doing.

Participants in the session called on feminists and women’s organisations to change the conversation from the growing demand by traditional donors for the inclusion of men in women’s rights and feminist activism. And while women may set up their own funding organisations, they should be careful not to create the same traditional funder and grantee relationships. When money comes in complicated relationships, does it not break our souls?

The search for resources, demands a lot of effort. "Given the global economic challenges that we are facing it is necessary to review strategies for resources. We may want to mobilize resources at a national level and encourage solidarity between organisations in order to pull together resources," one participant suggested.

"Let’s be more innovative! This includes clearly documenting every little thing that we do," said Burgeson.

Another approach, said a participant to the session is to “influence the donor community so that the work can happen in a way that will solve our problems. Our passion needs to go towards advocating for money that works”.

“When asked when her feminist journey began, Bisi Adeleye-Fayemi, says “I think my journey began when I was a young girl.” She grew up listening to her older sisters and her mother talk about women’s lack of choices and how the world was created for women to live by the rules of men. Learning to question early, she said, defined her path and encouraged her to live her own dreams.

One of her dreams after working in international women’s rights and women’s leadership organisations was to create a space specifically for African feminists. “African women were playing a key role in spaces like AWID, so I began to ask myself ‘why didn’t we have our own spaces’."

Working with a group of 10 African feminists from across the continent, the idea of the creation of a space for the voices of African feminists to define issues for themselves began to move from a dream to reality. Following a meeting in Zanzibar in 2003, Adeleye-Fayemi led the writing of the African Charter of Feminist Principles.

"I was told that there was a need to explicitly put issues down so that there would be no assumptions about assumptions," she said. The first African Feminist Forum (AFF) was then held in Accra, Ghana in 2006 and it adopted the Feminist Charter, which has been translated into French, Kiswahili, Wolof, and Spanish, among other African languages.

The AFF has witnessed the development of national and regional feminists’ forums. During the Fourth AFF, for example, nine countries in West, East, Central and Southern Africa gave reports on the feminist activism spearheaded by national forums. Central Africa convened a regional feminist forum. And since 2006, AFFs have convened in Uganda (2008), Senegal (2010) and
Feminist research in Africa must expand to include new and emerging issues; and, African feminist knowledge should be made more widely available beyond the continent’s borders, said participants to the Fourth AFF.

“. . . I was thinking about doing the intersectional work around disability and embodiment—reenergizing our work in this area . . . We don’t really integrate feminist disability politics into our work on intersectional feminist politics,” said Dr Pumla Dineo Gqola. Dr Gqola added that she began to think about this area more as she listened to Agness Chinimbambwa of Zimbabwe speak during one of the AFF’s plenaries on the struggles of women living with disabilities.

“We also need to think about the place of explicitly creative genres as the source of feminist knowledge creation and imagination. There still continues to be room for thinking about feminist creative work as the core, not the periphery, of feminist knowledge,” she added.

During the session on Feminist Research and Documentation during the AFF, Anthea Taderera (Zimbabwe), Sylvia Tamale and Ruth Ojiambo-Ochieng (Uganda) and Codou Bop (Senegal) discussed their approaches to feminist research, and the principles that guide their methods and methodology.

“My main interest has to do with humanizing our movements,” said Taderera, which sparked a discussion among the panelists and participants on how to make feminist research accessible to all women regardless of their class or lack of access to academia.

During the discussions, participants noted that African feminists need to make their research more widely available, but often financial constraints limit the dissemination of feminist knowledge. “We need to produce our own knowledge which is free and which we do not sell,” said Dr Tamale.

The continent still has the phenomena of “helicopter researchers” who parachute into African communities, extract data from people, and turn it into manuscripts without ever returning to the communities. The information gathered in this way has little benefit.

“The most effective way to work with women who have experiences trauma or violence is to not treat them as objects from which to extract data, but to give these women space and spend time with them as they tell their stories,” said Ruth Ojiambo-Ochieng.

Using feminist methodologies, this would mean that the researcher allows women to talk without barraging them with questions, or even listening to them sing. “Let her tell her story; don’t come with a checklist,” Ojiambo-Ochieng said, adding that feminist research must be “action-oriented”.

“When you go out to do documentation, you must have in mind ‘what is this going to do for women’?”

Women’s bodies have always been a site for control

“‘There is no such thing as a retired feminist’

Zimbabwe (2016). The AFF also has produced the Feminist Organisational Development Tool which helps to operationalise the African Feminist Charter. After receiving the book “Faces of Canadian Feminists” as a gift in 2001, Adeleye-Fayemi thought “wow, why can’t we have this in Africa?” And by 2016, the AFF had produced two volumes profiling African Feminists entitled ‘Voice, Power and Soul’ and it is now working on the 3rd volume.

Reflecting on EFF’s trajectory, Adeleye-Fayemi said she is “absolutely amazed and humbled” by the growth of the AFF. “...It is everything and more than I ever imagined.” The Fourth Forum, which was hosted in Zimbabwe, was the largest since the AFF started.

Reflecting on the question of young feminists and the future, Adeleye-Fayemi said that there is no such thing as a retired feminist. “Whatever spaces we have, have to be protected and nurtured. There are people who paved the way for us. Our work is a continuum; continue to work hard, with dedication and respect the space. It has not been easy.”
“The Boys in Shorts”: Where is the feminist analysis and activism in the humanitarian response?

New and emerging global conversations around humanitarian relief, re-silience and response, in light of the growing number of disasters across the world, pose a new challenge for African feminists, said Everjoice Winn, one of the 10 original members of the AFF working group. “What are our strategies and our involvement in these conversations, these conversations which are largely dominated by ‘white men in shorts’?”

Winn, who has self-identified as a feminist for more than 26 years, told the AFF during her moderation of the plenary session African Feminisms Past, Present and Future, that “disasters are the new normal.

As International Head of Programmes, ActionAid International, Winn sees first-hand the lack of a feminist analysis and activism in the areas of humanitarian response and resilience. “We have seen how every humanitarian disaster affects women disproportionately and it is time we wear the lenses that expose this in a world that already does not recognise women as equals,” she said. “Disasters come on the back of inequality and injustices of the poor, marginalised, and of course, women, who are already at the bottom of the pyramid.

“We live in the existing world that is not lensed at structural inequalities in the world of women. For example, in Liberia, when the Ebola disaster struck, no one thought who was the most affected by this disaster. It was women, of course.

“And, ... when the earthquake hit in Nepal (2015). I saw those inequalities and injustices exacerbated 10 times over in certain communities,” Winn said, illustrating how women’s need for shelters to isolate themselves during their menstrual cycles never factored into the humanitarian response to the earthquake disaster in Nepal. “When the earthquake hit Sindhupalchok Province, all these homes and (women’s) shelters were destroyed. The ‘boys in shorts’ flew in to provide temporary shelter – families received 10 sheets of zinc each which were not enough to rebuild the women’s shelters. The women in Nepal said they needed their own separate three sheets of zinc to rebuild their menstrual sheds.”

“This means if you are gender-blind as a humanitarian responder, you will definitely overlook the needs of women when disaster strikes. The worst part is when these "boys in shorts” come, no one takes the time to talk to women on a bad day, or even on a good day. They talk to community leaders, politicians, heads of households, everyone except the women.

“The ‘boys in shorts’ just think of food and shelter, but forget that women’s pads and family planning pills were swallowed by the earthquake too. The sex workers’ condoms were taken too.”

Winn said that feminist leadership is strongly needed in the humanitarian field, as well as in disaster management which is now in the national policy architecture. Disaster management, she added, is one of the most organised, regulated and structured industries in development which is administered by governments and managed by the big UN agencies like the United Nations Development Programme and the Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

“I barely hear the voices of women and what it is they need from the humanitarian aid. Men have cornered the humanitarian space, conquered and taken over, because women are absent, not present or busy chasing other things. How many of us (feminists) know there is the first ever World Humanitarian Summit on the 24th of May in Istanbul? This is the time for feminist leadership to rise... feminist leadership can change situations, cultures and traditional practices when disaster strikes.”

Women’s bodies have always been a site for control and physical disabilities or had other characteristics that made people uncomfortable. Minorities also were sterilised,” Professor Gaidzana said, adding that sterilisation is used in various ways worldwide.

In China, for example, it was sterilisation for birth control—i.e., so that women would only have one child. In the United States, 60% of the Black women sterilised in the southern state of Mississippi had no knowledge that the procedure was done. Sterilisation often was done without women’s informed consent.

Professor Gaidzana, who also is Dean of Social Studies at the University of Zimbabwe added that sterilisation is still used in various ways to control women’s bodies. “The phenomenon of forced sterilisation has been used in South Africa to sterilise women living with HIV.” Women sometimes opt to be sterilised, because they are not able to afford contraception and sterilisation is presented as the best possible option, because it is offered for free. This practice perpetuates discrimination based on class, age and ethnic minority.

“Our bodies are political playing fields for politicians that are pushing different policies, because we don’t have choices,” Professor Gaidzana said. The reproductive and sexual health of women remains a contested terrain where others decide what is best for women.

“If a woman wants to have a lot of children, then she is considered to be mentally unwell; and, if she does not want to have children, she may be subjected to violence or society will judge her harshly. Children born to a woman without a husband are shunned. This shows that women cannot choose the circumstances for having their children,” Professor Gaidzana said.

Women must reclaim their bodies, she said. “We have to fight and gain control over our bodies and take good care of ourselves. We are busy doing everything except looking after our bodies.”
Feminist diasporas and Pan-African organising across the world

The Black Feminisms Forum (BFF) will connect Black and Afrodescendant feminists from many regions of the world to celebrate the contribution of Black feminisms to knowledge, practice and struggles for self-determination and justice, while building solidarity and collective power. The BFF will convene September 5-6, 2016 in Costa de Sauipe Brazil.

“We may be on different continents, struggling in different movements, speaking different languages, and navigating different daily contexts but in each other we see the reflection of ourselves. It is this reflection that moved women in Uganda to raise and send money to women in Haiti after the hurricane. It is this reflection that links the Afro-Colombian women who are occupying government spaces to defend their lands, to the women of Kenya creating barricades with their bodies to protect their forests,” says Hakima Abbas, BFF Working Group Member.

A disabled woman’s struggle is every woman’s struggle

“Give us a voice and power, and soul will follow,” said Zimbabwian Agness Chindimba in her presentation to the Fourth AFF on how women living with disabilities struggle to find space within the African feminist movement.

The issues that affect disabled women need to be elevated within the global feminist agenda, she said speaking through an interpreter at the AFF. “The disability movement is rooted, like feminism, in the belief that ‘the personal is political’, which means that our experiences of being denied opportunities are not to be explained by our bodily limitations, but by the disabling social environment and attitudinal barriers which form part of our daily lives,” Chindimba said, citing J. Morris’ article on Feminism, Gender and Disability (1998). “It is time that the women’s movement realizes that ‘able-ism’ is practiced routinely by feminists.”

In order for the feminist movement to be more inclusive of women living with disability, venues must be accessible; materials produced in Braille; and interpretation must include sign language, Chindimba said.

Onai Hara (Interpreter) and Agness Chindimba

Next steps: Our big ideas for feminist activism

African feminists at the Fourth AFF developed a set of “big ideas” for moving the feminist agenda forward at the national, regional and global levels.

In round-table discussions on ‘how to start national feminist forums’, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), ‘engaging the African Union’, ‘feminist rituals’, among others, participants moved towards the closing session of the forum with the future in mind.

To broaden the AFF, participants encouraged feminists to use the African Feminist Charter within their countries to start national conversations on feminism and feminist principles, which could lead to the beginning of national feminists’ forums in countries where forums do not exist, as well as for attracting more women, especially younger ones, to established feminists collectives.

AWDF’s director of programmes, Jessica Horn, also noted that going forward, the Feminist Charter will be incorporated into the AFFs so that it is internalised as the basis of feminist activism in Africa.

Looking at the global development agenda which will be driven by the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs),
participants in the SDGs group called on African feminists to interrogate the SDGs to see whether women’s rights have been mainstreamed, and to then prepare a feminist response to the 15-year global development agenda (2015-2030). The African feminists’ response can be developed through a series of dialogues among interested organisations in cooperation with the AWDF. “The response has to happen in 2016, otherwise we will lose out, and it can be used also as an advocacy tool at the national level,” said the AFF SDGs group.

The AFF group on Feminist Africa, a continental gender studies journal produced by a community of feminist scholars, recommended that the journal, housed at the African Gender Institute at the University of Cape Town, be positioned more strategically at the global level as an intellectual, feminist writing space, in order to open up new institutional links for funding and sustaining the journal. AWDF Director Theo Sowa thanked everyone for their contributions to the Fourth AFF and concluded her remarks with a heartfelt thank you to the five women who will no longer serve as members of the AFF Working Group. The five are Sarah Mukasa, Bisi Adeleye-Fayemi, Ayesha Imam, Sylvia Tamale and Everjoice Win.

The Fourth AFF ended in a series of feminist rituals which included a poem written specifically for the occasion by Toni Giselle Stuart of South Africa; the giving of purple and green handmade beads to all the participants as an identifying feature of an AFF Sister; and a healing dance and the beating of drums led by the AFF rituals team.

The revolution is a woman

a collective poem compiled and written by Toni Stuart at the 4th African Feminist Forum, 10th – 12th April, 2016 in Harare, Zimbabwe. The poem uses words, phrases, ideas and thoughts shared by the women throughout the forum.

the revolution is a woman
 abolitionist, radical,
Azania House-occupying, sambok-wielding
Tahir square-protesting raised fist
pumping, bashing,
smashing, tearing
down Patrick’s invisible walls
the revolution is a woman
a hijab-wearing
veil-discarding, veil-
reclaiming
church-going, silent-
praying, God-denying voice
piercing through the
obsidian night
to reach always for the light
on the horizon’s edge
the revolution is a woman
reworking the histories
that have shaped her;
forming the steel of a
broken arm into a power
salute
moulding her violated waist
into an unapologetic
swerving hip
shattering the chains of a
shackled ankle into a
defiant dancing leg

clearing the rubble
under which her daughter’s soul
is buried
her relentless fingers
scratched and bruised
let the light bear this seed,
turning cement into soil
this work that breaks her
heart
this work that feeds her

the revolution is a woman
loving a woman in the
shadows
so she can love her children
with some safety in the light
praying for strength to
defend her love against the
pulpit
arguing for her right to
defend her love against the

the revolution is a woman
who speaks not only for
herself but for her singing
this land is woman’s land
this continent is woman’s
continent
we will never tire
we are proudly queer

the revolution is a woman
born into the light of feminist
fires
standing in the flames of rage
and love
burning tirelessly so her
sisters will not die sad

the revolution is a woman
fighting (loving)
fighting (loving)
fighting (loving)
for the soul of Nigeria, Mali,
Burkina Faso, Uganda,
Ghana, Zimbabwe, Tanzania,
Occupied Azania, Benin,
Mauritania, Zambia,
Mozambique, Swaziland,
Angola, Niger, DRC, Liberia,
Sudan, Egypt, Senegal,
Eritrea, Ethiopia, Liberia,
Cameroon, Chad, Central
African Republic, Kenya,
Burundi, Guinea, Togo,
Rwanda

the revolution is a woman
fighting (loving)
fighting (loving)
fighting (loving)
for the soul of the world

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