



# The Role of Feminist and Transformational Leadership in Movement Building



## A Case Study



AKINA MAMA  
WA AFRIKA





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# Abbreviations

AMwA	Akina Mama wa Afrika
AMWIK	The Association of Media Women in Kenya
AWLI	African Women's Leadership Institute
AYWLAA	African Young Women Leadership and Advocacy Alliance
CBO	Community Based Organisation
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
EAC	East African Community
GDI	Gender Development Index
GII	Gender Inequality Index
LGBTI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender or Intersex
NAWOU	The National Association of Women's Organisations in Uganda
NIMD	The Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy
NOWIP	Network of Women in Politics
NUWODU	National Union of Women with Disabilities of Uganda
POT	Personal Mastery, Organising Skills and Taking Action
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolutions
UWOPA	Uganda Women's Parliamentary Association



# Acknowledgement

*The Role of Feminist and Transformational Leadership in Movement Building in Africa* study report, represents a collective effort that embodies the spirit of collaboration, commitment and shared vision for advancing feminist leadership and movement-building across the continent.

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We are also grateful to our **funding partner**, whose generous support made the development and publication of this report possible. Your belief in our vision and mission underscores the importance of *creating a just and sustainable future where human dignity flourishes*.

To everyone who contributed to this report, directly or indirectly, we are deeply indebted to your labor, insights, shared passion and aspiration for building a gender just and equitable world. Together, we stand stronger.

*Akina Mama wa Afrika*





# Executive Summary

Akina Mama wa Afrika (AMwA) commissioned a study on the role of feminist and transformational leadership in movement-building in Africa, with Kenya and Uganda as case studies. The assertion was that there is limited evidence on the role of feminist transformational leadership in contributing to the development and sustainability of movement-building. The framework for this review is the flagship African Women's Leadership Institute (AWLI) which since 1997 has strengthened the leadership capacity of over 6,000 women feminist leaders that include women from rural and urban areas, sex workers, lesbians, and differently abled women from over 10 countries across Africa. The AWLI seeks to develop a strong cadre of feminist leaders with the practical skills, confidence, and agency to educate, mobilize and organize other women for social change.

## Objectives

1. Examine the effectiveness of feminist [and] transformational leadership in fostering collective action and solidarity among diverse groups within Uganda and Kenya.
2. Analyse the challenges and opportunities associated with sustaining a collective approach amidst the dominance of anti-gender groups and shrinking civic space across the region.
3. Identify strategies for fostering long-term feminist alliances rooted in solidarity and advancing feminist alternatives to a just world.

## Intended Purpose

1. Inform AMwA's strategies for movement building.
2. Shape AMwA's efforts in feminist [and] transformational leadership development.

## Methodology

This study took a feminist methodological approach which was anchored in five principles.

1. Centering the experiences and knowledge of AWLI Alumni.
2. In the design of research tools, being conscious of how questions were framed to avoid predetermined responses or the omission of critical insights.
3. Ensuring appropriate representation of diverse views rather than leaning into confirmation bias.
4. We drew on mixed methods by reviewing existing quantitative and qualitative data from AMwA and engaging alumni to further test and develop the findings of the study.

# Research Methods

1. Focus group discussions with alumni from Kenya and Uganda
2. Literature review of previous African Women's Leadership Institute tracer studies
3. Scholarship on feminist transformational leadership

## Report Structure

This report is structured into four major sections. The first section offers an overview of AMwA, its approach and history, including the AWLI. The second section offers an overview of feminist and transformational leadership, drawing on existing literature on the subject. The third section provides a contextual analysis focussing on Kenya and Uganda, the two countries spotted in this report. This contextual overview informs an understanding of the impact of AWLI, which is the fourth and last section. This final section begins with an understanding of the demographic and sector spread of AWLI participants over the last five years, AMwA's theory of change and how it informs the assumptions that shape AWLI, and finally an interrogation of those assumptions by drawing on a review of AMwA reports and interviews with AWLI alumni from Uganda and Kenya.



**An exciting reunion of women leaders and AWLI alumni at the High-Level Women Leaders Breakfast Meeting- April 2023**



# General Findings

*“AMwA has taught me that it is important for “Myself and my fellow women in politics (some in this room) to ensure to support each other and work in solidarity . Across the different constituencies and the diversities , we can now offer support and share advice with each other to keep us going. Harriet, AWLI Alumni, 2021*

1. All the alumni interviewed attest to the value of feminist and transformational leadership in their personal development, immediate organisations and the networks of which they are part. The reach from the individual to the community is well evidenced, with tangible examples cited later in this report.
2. The curriculum design and content evidently remain fit for purpose, and have contributed to strengthening how alumni understand alliance-building and how that is translated in their extended community. This is clear evidence of knowledge transfer beyond the alumni into their organisations and informing advocacy.
3. The cohort model pursued by AWLI is noted to be the first step in the process of fostering long-term feminist alliances, since feminists are brought into community with others working across sectors in the same country and cross-regionally.
4. The mentorship and community action projects that have been developed as part of AWLI facilitate greater possibilities for advancing feminist alternatives. The Women in Politics Media Expo, the Women’s Lobby Day, The Meet my Mentor Forum and the Inter Party Women’s Platform stand out as powerful examples from Ugandan alumni.
5. In an increasingly repressive environment, “old” approaches such as lobbying and advocacy to a shifting terrain with entrenched actors may not be the most effective way to pursue transformational change. While these approaches remain critical, the alumni reference the role of organic, cross-movement approaches as important for radicalising society to the depth of gender inequality challenges such as austerity, anti-homosexuality laws and femicide.
6. While AWLI has expanded beyond the one-week training model to include other elements, such as mentoring and the action projects, alumni note the value of building a tiered approach to the leadership development programme to recognise the evolution of alumni needs as they transition from youthhood or advance in their leadership journeys, which shifts the nature of the challenges encountered. A tiered approach would mean organising AWLI’s based on where people are in their leadership journey and role.
7. Alumni interviewed argue that it is important to create a virtual community of alumni across cohorts. This approach would also contribute to strengthening feminist solidarity and alliance-building.



# About Akina Mama wa Afrika (AMwA)

Akina Mama wa Afrika (AMwA) is a feminist Pan-African leadership development organization with headquarters in Kampala, Uganda. Our work is rooted in feminist principles and beliefs guided by the Charter of Feminist Principles for African Feminists which define our leadership development program and movement-building activities. We envision a world in which African women are politically, economically and socially autonomous and are champions of change in their lives and society. Our thematic areas of focus include; Women's Political Leadership, Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, and Economic Justice and Climate Action. The organization's work is advanced through feminist and transformational leadership development, feminist research and knowledge building, and policy influence and movement building. AMwA provides strategic direction in key Pan-African networks including NGO CSW Africa, Solidarity for African Women's Rights, and the Gender Is My Agenda Campaign. AMwA also has consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council.





## AMwA Strategic Plan 2021 – 2025

AMwA's 2021-2025 Strategic Plan thematic areas are underpinned by four critical pillars. These themes and pillars mark a slight shift from the 2020 thematic focus areas of **Women in Power and Decision Making, Economic Justice, Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights**, and **Violence against Women** to<sup>1</sup>:

1. Women's Political Leadership
2. Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
3. Economic Justice and Climate Action

## Theory of Change Evolution

By fortifying the earlier assumptions made within the theory of change, AMwA's core focus encompassing gender justice is now guided by four individual goals<sup>2</sup>:

**Goal 1: A Pan-African feminist agenda advanced in political and decision-making spaces:** where AMwA chooses to disrupt the dominant patriarchal leadership and infuse feminist and transformative leadership approaches as an alternative leadership model.

**Goal 2: Feminist alternatives adopted as viable sustainable development models and systems at scale for economic and climate justice:** aimed at illuminating the precarious and yet often ignored connections between the climate crisis and economic and gender justice.

**Goal 3: African women, girls, and gender-expansive persons realise their Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR):** through interventions that promote an intersectional approach to SRHR advocacy by boldly challenging negative social, religious and gender norms and structures that undermine SRHR, strengthening the capacity of African feminists to demand SRHR, and supporting a diverse and inclusive African feminist movement.

**Goal 4: A feminist organisation with a soul that has excelled at learning, creativity, and innovation:** by transforming governance, management, and operational structures, and nurturing a culture of continuous learning and reflection so that AMwA can become a more sustainable, agile, and effective feminist regional organisation.

**The four strategic pillars are:**

1. Feminist and Transformational Leadership Development
2. Feminist Research and Documentation
3. Policy Influencing and Movement-Building
4. Arts and Creative Expression

It will be assumed, even though it is not explicit from reading the strategic plan, that the strategic pillars are seen as key drivers for all the goals set out above as well as the outcomes mapped against some of the goals.

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1 Akina Mama wa Afrika "Extending the Frontiers of Afro Feminism" Strategic Plan (2021-2025)

2 Akina Mama wa Afrika "Extending the Frontiers of Afro Feminism" Strategic Plan (2021-2025)





This study is concerned with feminist and transformational leadership and AWLI, which is seen as a strategic intervention under that pillar. The strategic plan notes that the leadership programme is:

*'the first step of, and an indispensable component of our feminist movement-building toolkit, creating opportunities for awakening feminist consciousness and organising based on solidarity premised on shared values and issues.'*

Secondly, under the policy-influencing and movement-building strategic pillar, engaging with alumni is noted as a strategic intervention. This study will meet its objectives through the assumptions set out in the theory of change. In the section that follows we map the context in which the AWLI approach is intervening.



**Movement building thrives on research and knowledge production**





# Mapping The Context: Feminist Struggles

Continentially (Africa), sub-regional and national governmental bodies have made public policy commitments to gender equality and women's empowerment that are reflected in national laws and continental protocols<sup>3</sup>. 44 out of 55 African countries have ratified the Maputo Protocol/The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa<sup>4</sup> in addition to other international commitments such as the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)<sup>5</sup> and United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on Women, Peace and Security.<sup>6</sup>

The AWLI alumni interviewed for this study observed the following developments in their terrain. There is significant progress on broad knowledge of existing policies on the inclusion of women in African Union bodies and regional economic communities. However, the meaningful engagement of women once in these spaces remains an issue, with all too often a tokenising approach taken to women's representation. In addition, the intergenerational disconnect in feminist movements requires concerted effort to prepare younger women for leadership. Increasing youth-led activism and girl-led activism is also noted as a positive development in the feminist landscape. However, despite the developments on the movement front, from a formal state perspective, participants noted a range of issues that continue to shape the work they do as feminist movement leaders.

**1. Shrinking civic space:** an important area to which Kenya and Uganda are not immune is the global environment, in which governments are consistently limiting civil liberties through actions ranging from regulations curtailing the amount of foreign funding NGOs can receive, to the development of new taxation routes such as targeting digital platforms, as seen in Uganda and Tanzania, and now being pursued in Kenya. In addition, the creation of legislation such as computer misuse acts in countries like Uganda are designed to stifle dissent and expand the laws that sanction arbitrary state surveillance of citizens<sup>7</sup>. This shrinking space is informed by a broader political climate which in Uganda is characterised by a series of changes to presidential term limits, which has given room to curtail, discipline and manage dissent through ever expanding and unregulated punitive measures<sup>8</sup>. While Kenya may appear to be more democratically expansive, the country is characterised by a significant debt burden which has led to a return to the structural adjustment programmes of the 1990s, leading to the widening of the tax base by taxing all basic commodities. The impact of the widening tax base imposes a tax burden on the ordinary citizen, who is already struggling with a high cost of living, unemployment and government over-expenditure.

3 The protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (2003); the Sol-emn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (2004); and the African Women's Decade (2010-2020)

4 <https://au.int/en/treaties/protocol-african-charter-human-and-peoples-rights-rights-women-africa>

5 <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/>

6 <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/wps/>

7 Women of Uganda Network and Association for Progressive Communications, 2021:16

8 Ibid.





Visioning and  
action planning is  
part and parcel of  
movement building




**2. Sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR)** remain a key issue, with both culture and religious beliefs playing key roles in curtailing access to these rights. SRHR debates in both Kenya and Uganda have been animated by resistance to the provision of comprehensive sexuality education in schools to ensure that young people understand the importance of bodily autonomy, which includes, but is not limited to the importance of consent and safe sex. Additionally, conversations about sexuality and sexual orientation continue to gain dominance through legislative interventions such as the 2023 Homosexuality Act<sup>9</sup> passed by Museveni in Uganda and attempts by a Kenyan parliamentarian to pursue similar legislation in Kenya. The mobilisation of sexual orientation as a dog-whistle to curtail other freedoms that protect women and girls' bodily autonomy has been a key feature of the shifting women's rights landscape in the last five years. It is also important to signal the transnational nature of the movements mobilising through various covers, including anti-gender, anti-homosexuality and anti-liberal rights, and which come together in a powerful cocktail of anti-women, anti-Black and anti-migrant movements globally.

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<sup>9</sup> Parliament of Uganda, 2023



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3. **Gender-based violence:** in Kenya specifically, the question of femicide remains an important site for activism and a critical issue that illustrates the backsliding in women's rights. The 2024 national protests on femicide<sup>10</sup> were a powerful illustration of a country-wide concern with the lack of accountability for the increasing murders of young women. AWLI alumni note the underdeveloped focus on emotional violence, citing work done with women on microfinance and savings circles where men continue to exercise control over the resources women accrue from these development groups.
  4. **Intergenerational dialogue and collaboration:** An AWLI alumna noted that young women's representational challenges begin in the youth league of political parties, where young women are pushed to engage with the women's wing, and young women in the women's wing are told to engage the youth league. This ping-pong that young women encounter in their leadership journey leads to a double marginalisation even within the leadership structures of political parties. This marginalisation is also experienced by young women in the civil society, however there are efforts to exercise cross-generational solidarity.
  5. **Unpaid care work:** AWLI alumni noted the disproportionate amount of care work that women continue to do and the limited efforts to redistribute and account for unpaid care work as labour<sup>11</sup>. A Kenyan AWLI alumna noted that 'care work robs us of time that we need to distribute in other aspects of our lives that can benefit us, whether it's in education, improving our skills, or our paid employment. The fact that we don't value care work even at the household level when it comes to the attitude, the norms, and then now to the government policy level. [...] the GDP of countries does not consider the contribution from care work because [...] we don't look at it in terms of monetary value.'



**The AWLI creates a space for connecting with others and thinking together**

<sup>10</sup> Lawal, 2024

<sup>11</sup> Fernandes et al., 2023



# The African Women's Leadership Institute (AWLI)

AMwA's flagship programme the African Women's Leadership Institute (AWLI) is a regional networking, information sharing and training forum established in 1997 which trains African women in their diversities aged between 25 and 40 in critical thinking on gender issues, feminist theory and practice, organisation-building, and resource development. AWLI is therefore always responding to the context within which feminist and transformational leadership and activism is occurring.

AWLI is based on the long-standing model P. O. T. Framework (Personal Mastery, Organising Skills and Taking Action)<sup>12</sup>, outlined below.



**The AWLI creates a space for connecting with others and thinking together**

<sup>12</sup> Tracer Study for the AMwA AWLI Alumni: East and Horn of Africa, 1996-2010 (2011)



**Figure i. AWLI P.O.T. Framework<sup>13</sup>**

**THE P.O.T. (Personal Mastery, Organising Skills And Taking Action) Framework**

 <b>Personal Mastery</b>	 <b>Organising Skills</b>	 <b>Taking Action</b>
<p>Allows participants to locate themselves as activists, to reflect on different aspects of their own lives in terms of practices and development, and to take care of themselves as a critical part of feminist and transformational leadership development</p>	<p>Skills development in strategic thinking and planning, advocacy, policy intervention and organisational development, fundraising, and monitoring and evaluation with the objective of developing capacities for effective use of organisations/ institutions in social transformation</p>	<p>Fostering shared learning, inter-generational dialogue, Oral Her-Story and documentation of good practice, contribution to broader development thinking and improved development practice for a sustainable progressive development agenda</p>



13 Women Leadership in the Horticultural Sector Curriculum Manual by AMWA and Hivos accessed from: <https://hivos.org/assets/2020/06/Women-Leadership-Horticultural-Sector-Curriculum-1.pdf> 15



# AWLI Structure

AWLI has two main features. The first is a one-week residential intensive training programme on feminist and transformational leadership. The second is a mentoring and coaching framework through a peer network of young African women who provide personal and professional support and linkages to experienced feminists who act as mentors for at least one year. The one-week residential training focussed on

1. Personal Development
2. Feminist Theory
3. Unpacking the thematic focus of the AWLI from a feminist perspective.
4. Understanding the policy and legal frameworks
5. Feminist movement building

This framework provides a powerful and holistic feminist grounding for African women to critically define, analyse and articulate their experiences of inequalities and devise solutions for sustained change. The modules developed cover personal development, feminist theory and advocacy planning.

AWLI's contribution to 'collective action' is in supporting the growth and strengthening of the feminist movement on the continent by raising the political consciousness of change-makers, who are provided with the tools, networks and resources to disrupt the status quo in their spheres of influence. The impact of the feminist movement would be considered part of the 'collective good' as it is obtained 'through the efforts of some or all its members'<sup>14</sup>.

Through AWLI, AMwA sees feminist and transformational leadership development as a continuous growth process requiring nurturing through community support, modelling feminist and transformational leadership principles, and the use of mentoring and coaching as tools of continuous development and accountability<sup>15</sup>. This in turn advances the 'solidarity' or 'collective ability' of feminist leaders to 'organise themselves for transformative social change'<sup>16</sup>, for example by advocating for women's rights, political consciousness-raising, and through influence, capacity, and collaboration among political and civic actors at regional and national levels to advance gender-just policies and frameworks<sup>17</sup>. In the next section we unpack and build a shared understanding of feminist and transformational leadership by drawing on literature in the field.

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<sup>14</sup> (Smith, 2010)

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.akinamamawaafrika.org/feminist-and-transformational-leadership-development/>

<sup>16</sup> (Zheng, 2023)

<sup>17</sup> Akina Mama wa Africa (2022) Regional African Women's Leadership Institute Report



# Feminist and Transformational Leadership

‘Feminism and transformational leadership advocates for gender-responsive budgeting, good governance and social accountability and political inclusion. All these three are areas that I have deeply entrenched my work in and boldly speak about in the media.’ – Kenyan alumna, 2024

The hierarchical and unequal power dynamics inherent in what we know as leadership practices and approaches are deeply imbedded in traditional patriarchal forms of authority<sup>18</sup>. As feminist theories and praxis have evolved, the field of feminist transformational leadership has emerged. Central to this approach is seeing leadership as a means of ‘redistribution of power and of responsibilities’<sup>19</sup> through an emphasis on fairness, justice and equity and strives to keep issues of gender, race, social class, sexual orientation and ability at the forefront’ (Barton, 2006). Furthermore, this can be linked to the concept of transformational leadership, where leaders and followers engage with each other to ‘rise to higher levels of motivation and morality’<sup>20</sup>.

In addition, there is a distinction between *feminine* and *feminist and transformational leadership*, with the latter focussed on the political project of equitable power and resource redistribution<sup>21</sup>. Feminist and transformational leadership facilitates the challenging of power structures and is an effective catalyst of social change<sup>22</sup>. There is an emphasis on feminists leading differently to transform the architecture of power within their own organisations and movements, as well as the power structures in the world outside that continue to marginalise and oppress women and deny their human rights’<sup>23</sup>. To do this requires addressing internal power dynamics that promote a more instrumental and managerial approach rather than an emphasis on mechanical management and resource mobilisation skills<sup>24</sup>. Feminist and transformational leadership at its highest level aims to ‘make the practice of power visible, democratic, legitimate and accountable, at all levels, in private and public realms’<sup>25</sup>. In movement building, Batliwala argues that feminist and transformational leadership contends with expressions of power. The material conditions and oppressive socio-economic and power structures cannot be meaningfully and effectively analysed through a feminist lens, without a ‘merged analysis’ of identity-based issues<sup>26</sup>.

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18 Batliwala, 2010

19 Admira (no date), Sec on 8, Management & Leadership: Feminist and transformational leadership, available at [https://www.zenska-mreza.hr/prirucnik/en/en\\_read\\_management\\_leadership\\_8.htm](https://www.zenska-mreza.hr/prirucnik/en/en_read_management_leadership_8.htm)

20 Downton, 1973

21 Bunch in Batliwala, 2010

22 Batliwala, 2010

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

26 Batliwala, 2010; De Vela and Ofreneo, 2009



Organisationally, feminist transformational leadership is concerned with how the visible structure enables the open processing of members' conflicts, aspirations, ideas and problems, rather than driving these into the deep structure. Success is predicated on organisations coming to 'honest terms with notions of internal equality and what they look like in practice as well as moving past fears of tackling internal power arrangements'. Across movements, transformative feminist and transformational leadership will be based on contextually defined and situated feminist ideology rather than a 'universal' feminism. Successes and challenges will be rooted in realising and implementing alternative structures and processes that dismantle non-feminist and oppressive dominant power structures (Batiwala, 2010).



**Winnie Kiiza, the Former and first female Leader of Opposition in the Parliament of Uganda holds a conversation with emerging young women leaders**



# A Glance at the Amwazons

## AWLI Alumni

Since its inception in 1996, over 6,000 African women have attended various one- to three-week institutes and have attested to a deepened grounding in gender concepts and feminist theory, as well as having been conscientised to challenge patriarchy and other forms of oppression and exclusion. Alumni also known as AMwAzons are at the forefront of mobilising the citizens' demand for greater transparency and accountability from their states, securing political victories, shifting mindsets, and unravelling the very norms and institutions at the core of women's inequality and social exclusion. In short, they embody the active citizenry of deep democracy crucial to a more just and sustainable world. Many have created women's leadership institutions, e.g. in Uganda, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Botswana and Kenya<sup>27</sup>. Below, we offer an overview across five years of the number of participants reached across different countries in the eastern Africa region and a sense of their leadership profiles.



**Tekrim, Hindeke and Abebaye share a light moment at the July 2023 Regional AWLI**

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.akinamamawaafrika.org/the-african-womens-leadership-institute-awli/>

## 2021

In March 2021, the AWLI Training Analysis for the Central Region was held in Uganda with participants from 5 different political parties to undergo the AWLI training<sup>28</sup>.

- a) Sixteen women submitted their applications.
- b) All sixteen participants hold leadership positions in the institutions they are affiliated to, as follows:

Institution	No. of Affiliations
Alliance for National Transformation (ANT)	1
Bishop Stuart University Mbarara, NRM	1
Democratic Party (DP)	1
Lira University	1
Makerere University	5
Metropolitan International University	1
National Unity Platform (NUP)	1
National Youth Council (NYC)	2
Uganda Christian University, FIDA Uganda, NRM	1
<b>No. of participants</b>	<b>14</b>

## 2022

In October 2022, an AWLI regional training was held with participants from civil society organisations.

- a) Twenty women submitted their applications. All held leadership portfolios in their organisations.

b) Country distribution was as follows:

Country	No.
Sudan	6
Ethiopia	7
Kenya	6
Uganda	3
<b>No. of participants</b>	<b>22</b>

## 2023

In 2023, an AWLI regional training was held with participants from civil society organisations.

- a) Twenty women submitted their applications. All held leadership portfolios in their organizations.
- b) Country distribution was as follows:


Country	No.
Ethiopia	10
Kenya	11
Uganda	9
<b>No. of participants</b>	<b>30</b>

The overview of alumni reached over the last three years demonstrate three things:

- a) Intentionality on AMwA's part in deepening engagement in specific countries with a specific target group, to test its assumptions about the value of strengthening capacities of specific groups of women and feminists.

<sup>28</sup> AWLI Training Analysis for Central Regional Training, held on 1st-5th March 2021.



- 
- b) A focus on building a regional infrastructure through the regional institutes as part of strengthening solidary building. It is notable that some countries in Eastern Africa are consistently missing from AWLI's such as Tanzania, Somalia, Rwanda and Burundi, and it is important to understand the challenges or choices linked to this absence. It is also notable that there are no continent-wide institutes that have been captured in the last five years.
- c) Finally, the AWLI retains its focus on building leadership capacity. This is reflected in the profiles of the alumni who hold different leadership roles, which ascertains transferability of knowledge to organisations and onward movement strengthening.



**Solidarity and siblinghood transcends time**



# AWLI and AMwA'S Theory of Change

AMwA's theory of change articulates the organisation's philosophy and its interpretation of how they believe change will happen. AWLI and feminist and transformational leadership are an integral part of AMwA's theory of change<sup>29</sup>:

In the section that follows, we test the assumptions noted above using both previous impact reports and interviews with 11 AMwA alumni.

## Impact of AWLI

*'At the heart of AWLI is its dedication to nurturing feminist leaders who are equipped to confront the patriarchal structures and political repression that permeate our society. By emphasising feminist principles and concepts, the institute empowers us to challenge the status quo and advocate for gender equality with confidence and resilience.'* – Ugandan AWLI alumna, 2024



**The AWLI creates a space for connecting with others and thinking together**

<sup>29</sup> AMwA Strategic Plan 2021-2025.



Assumption	Evidence
African women, civic and political ACTORS AND gender-expansive PERSONS ARE willing to participate in the African Women Leadership Institute (AWLI)	Consistent engagement with AWLI, as mapped in earlier sections of this report, is reflective of continued interest in AWLI as an important capacity-strengthening space. The alumni profiles reflect a diversity of roles and positions, including political and civil society actors. However, it is not possible to discern whether gender-expansive people are captured in these numbers and whether the space is set up to facilitate equitable engagement. This is an area for future data capture and analysis for AWLI.
AWLI meets the leadership needs of African women and civic actors	<p><b>An alumna from Kenya noted:</b></p> <p>‘I really like that it [AWLI] focuses on personal growth, that for you to be a feminist and for you to do this work you need to be at the right place mentally. And I also like the aspect of inclusion that even in the early cohorts, we have women who do different kinds of feminism, you know, they’re liberal feminists, they’re radical feminists. There are those in the political sector.’ The view of the importance of personal mastery as critical to feminist work is reinforced consistently across discussions with the alumni, as well as in past documented reports. A Kenyan alumna further pointed out: ‘As a movement, we share power and that comes with a lot of responsibility. It [AWLI] really gave me a perspective or understanding of how I go about the leadership within the movement, but also within the team that I work with.’</p> <p><b>An alumna from Uganda observed:</b></p> <p>‘On an individual level, the emphasis on feminist and transformational leadership has provided me with a deeper understanding of gender dynamics and the tools to challenge patriarchal structures effectively. This approach has enhanced my ability to advocate for women’s rights and inclusivity, fostering a leadership style that is collaborative, empathetic, and committed to social justice.’</p> <p>AWLI has laid a foundation for personal empowerment for alumni by creating a space for learning and conscientisation, through the provision of access to information for the promotion of networks and for building solidarity platforms. For instance, Mwachi (2022), after interviewing Ugandan AWLI alumni, noted that personal development was exhibited at various levels by the participants. This includes becoming more self-aware, enhancing leadership skills, and improving reading and writing skills on issues affecting women (Mwachi, 2022).</p> <p>Alumni increased capacity to make relevant choices because they can analyse the effects of patriarchy and develop appropriate interventions is a distinct outcome of the AWLI training.</p> <p>8 alumni from the June and October 2022 AWLIs reported and have demonstrated improved personal mastery and commitment to personal development. They were equipped with feminist tools and skills in grounding exercises, body, mental health, self-identity, personal strategy development and physical health. Feminist transformational leadership requires serious investment in wellness, self-awareness, and personal development as a path to providing meaningful solutions to women’s leadership. This is crucial in illuminating the relevance and impact of feminist care and wellness for addressing the constant struggle for mental health among feminist leaders<sup>30</sup>.</p>





<p>African women, civic and political ACTORS ARE aware of and interested in their civic duty to exercise political agency</p>	<p>In 2023, several AWLI alumni reported increased participation in thought-leadership spaces and roles using a feminist lens. One AWLI alumna (Tekrim Ahmed) took up an editorial role with a publication and engaged her voice through writing. Others (Ruth Bolo, Nyarath Agola, Tricia Nabaye, Hannah Lemma) actively engaged on TV and other strategic spaces on young women's political participation to amplify women and young women's voices, agency and solidarity<sup>31</sup>.</p> <p>In April 2023, 20 AWLI alumni in Uganda who are seasoned political and civic leaders developed an action plan with three strategic commitments to facilitate the women's agenda during the High-Level Breakfast Meeting held at Serena Hotel in Kampala, Uganda. These commitments included the need to create stronger collaboration between Civil Society Organisations (CSO)s and women political leaders, strengthen the function and mandate of the Uganda Women's Parliamentary Association (UWOPA) and build women leaders' financial and economic capacity in Parliament<sup>32</sup>.</p> <p>A network of young mothers and Community Based Organisations (CBOs) was formed because of AWLI training. This was based on acquired strengths in community mobilisation and coordination of the 65 CSOs in Luwero, Uganda, under the network of the National Association of Women's Organisations in Uganda (NAWOU) (Mwachi, 2022)</p>
<p>Key actors recognise the legitimacy OF AFRICAN women, girls and gender-expansive persons to participate in political and decision-making processes</p>	<p>Some AWLI alumni have gone on to be change-and policymakers and spearheaded gender-responsive policies within national and regional government institutions. It is noted that in November 2022, the 5th East African Youth Parliament resolved to pass the East Africa Community (EAC) Sexual Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) Bill after Julia Muhumuza, an AWLI Alumna, moved the motion to pass the bill with majority house support<sup>33</sup>.</p> <p>Additionally, between November and May 2022, 3 young women political leaders and AWLI alumni in Uganda espoused feminist and transformational leadership principles in the frameworks of their political parties to advance gender-responsive policies<sup>34</sup>. This further contributes to efforts to dismantle patriarchy and transform the system and structures that marginalise women's meaningful engagement in political and decision-making processes. It directly demonstrates that young women are acting individually and collectively to effect gender-responsive policy reform and institutional practices, thereby creating an enabling environment for women, young women and other marginalised groups to thrive in political leadership.</p> <p>In November 2022, 30 alumni from the 2021 and 2022 AWLI cohorts reported having enhanced capacities to advance feminist policy alternatives and take up executive leadership and governance roles. For instance, Esther Okenyuri was appointed as a Senator in the 10th Parliament of Kenya; Patience Nyange was appointed the Executive Director of The Association of Media Women in Kenya (AMWIK)<sup>35</sup>.</p> <p>In Uganda, some alumni have developed targeted training of key populations, such as sex workers, on human rights and personal wellbeing. Other advances by alumni are establishing helpdesks or support centres, and university students providing safe spaces for queer individuals and raising awareness about sexual harassment and its manifestations. This was achieved through poetry shows and short video clips on sexual harassment (Mwachi, 2022).</p>

31 PoD Annual Report 2023 - New Version - 30 January 2024

32 PoD Annual Report 2023 - New Version - 30 January 2024

33 AMwA 2021 and 2022 POD Regional Outcome-Harvesting

34 AMwA 2021 and 2022 POD Regional Outcome-Harvesting

35 AMwA PoD Annual Report 2022







# Conclusion and Recommendations

In this final section of the report, we offer an overview of findings as they pertain to the three objectives this study set out to meet. We also offer some recommendations for future actions for AMwA.

## **Examine the effectiveness of feminist and transformational leadership in fostering collective action and solidarity among diverse groups within Uganda and Kenya.**

As a strategic pillar of AMwA's work, feminist and transformational leadership development under AWLI contributes to the growth and strengthening of the feminist movement on the continent by raising the political consciousness of change-makers, including young feminists, gender justice advocates, women's rights activists and civil and political leaders, who are provided with the tools, networks and resources to disrupt the status quo in their spheres of influence.

AWLI as a framework has offered the space for personal transformation for individual leaders, which has been translated into their immediate communities, such as the organisations and spaces they work in. We can confidently argue that there is clear empirical evidence that the AWLI training is effective in supporting leaders to shift how they lead and organise.

However, we believe that the challenge of examining effectiveness in fostering collective action lies in how AMwA defines movement-building. If we view collectives as groups of people coming together to bring about change and solve problems that cannot be solved by one person or institution alone, then the very ways in which organisations that AWLI alumni are part of work is movement-building in action. If AMwA defines collective action as solely being about those in AWLI cohorts organising with and across each other, then that objective is an accidental rather than a primary focus of how alumni see engagement with their cohort. It is, however, clear that the subsidiary resources that AMwA offers for collective action projects supports to a great degree the consolidation of actions in a focussed way that is directly linked to AWLI. Finally, it is also essential that AMwA sees AWLI within its primary contribution - as a movement-strengthening infrastructure rather than a movement-building tool. In this way, AWLI's contribution is *strengthening* the analysis and approaches of existing movements rather than directly as movement-building. Similar organisations that approach training as a movement-strengthening support as their core mission include CREA and Just Associates. In doing so, the focus of their assessment of success is how knowledge gained enhances existing work as a primary objective, with the secondary objective being whether knowledge gained generates new work and new momentum within movements.






## Analyse the challenges and opportunities associated with sustaining a collective approach amidst the dominance of anti-gender groups and shrinking civic space across the region.

The context for feminist organising remains fraught, and this is complicated by both global dynamics and national factors. At the root of all the global and national questions mapped in earlier sections of this report is the role of gendered labour. Gendered labour is often mobilised to resolve nation- and state-making crisis in ways that limit rather than advance freedom and justice for women and gender non-conforming groups. However, it is also in this context of complexity that most organic and creative resistance occurs. The study illustrated that AWLI alumni have, for instance, been part of the femicide organising across Kenya and remain central to cross-political party mobilisation in Uganda. It is clear, however, that in a context where violence and state repression is a key tactic used by state and non-state actors as well as more coordinated mobilisation of resources by anti-gender groups, feminist organising cannot look the same. The function of AWLI as a movement-strengthening methodology is to make clear the importance of transnational organising, as became apparent with the anti-queer laws evolving across Ghana, Uganda and Kenya alongside decriminalisation laws in Southern Africa. There is an opportunity for AWLI to set aside resources that are strategically designed to support transnational work post-AWLI, rather than those that focus solely on national mobilising. In this way, activists are consistently invited to think of the national in relation to the transnational. In addition, questions of activist safety and security as an integral part of organising and resource mobilisation must feature more strongly in how activists think through change-making in a global context that is more overtly hostile to activists and will mobilise state infrastructure to manage dissent. AWLI can play a role in this in collaboration with institutions that have developed methodologies on collective protection and security, such as partners supported by Urgent Action Fund Latin America, where these methodologies are well developed. There is scope to focus attention on thematic questions on queer and sexual freedoms that are raging across the region and amplify organising through AWLI. This would be linked to Goal Three, on sexual and reproductive rights.

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## Identify strategies for fostering long-term feminist alliances rooted in solidarity and advancing feminist alternatives to a just world.

While feminist and transformational leadership development remains core to AMwA's work, nurturing transformational leaders requires continuous innovation, creativity, and adaptation of tools and approaches. We offer below three recommendations that would strengthen AMwA's mission to develop AWLI as a movement-building strategy.

1. At least one annual continental school as part of AWLI that is focussed on movement-building rather than a thematic focus. Centralising movement-building will ensure that alumni understand that a core purpose of AWLI, and the offer on feminist and transformational leadership, is to support their movement-strengthening efforts as well as enable greater collaboration amongst the cohort. In relation to cohort strengthening, beyond mentorship and coaching, funding for collaborative catalytic actions should be explored as part of the outcomes of AWLI.
2. Strengthening feminist organisations: AWLI's intervention in developing leadership pipelines across organisations is an intervention designed to strengthen organisations and the value of feminist principles in how they are run. In doing so, the underpinning argument is that while feminist organisations are not movements, they are a key constituent actor in feminist movements. However, the process of translating change one individual at a time can be complex in institutions as noted by the study participants. Consequently, there is merit in AMwA reconsidering its initial approach to AWLI's that focussed on senior leadership in organisations on the one hand as well as designing a framework for supporting feminist organisations rather than feminist leaders only as part of its feminist movement strengthening offer.
3. Given the global nature of the challenges that feminists on the continent are facing, there is an opportunity to pilot one collaborative movement-strengthening school with allied partners such as CREA, JASS or others. In this way, rather than delivering an AWLI methodology, it offers an opportunity for strengthening learning, building solidarity actions and amplifying experiences amongst feminists from the majority world confronting similar issues. This approach would directly contribute to movement-strengthening and enhance collective action across borders and regions. Such a school would also be deliberately focussed on tactics and strategies for collective action which makes tracking the efficacy of collective action easier.
4. Finally, there is an influencing role that AMwA could play in a much more focussed way by targeting established political actors across sectors and not just national politics as animated through parliament and local government. Thousand Currents has an existing model of running [academies](#) that are specifically targeted at educating philanthropic partners. This is a model that AMwA could draw on. In this way the alumni would be brought in direct contact with those who influence decision-making in an educative role, rather than in an influencing and lobbying role.



## Conclusion:

Results from this study indicate that respondents generally appreciate the need to bolster feminist movement building in Africa, through feminist transformational leadership approaches. The report underscores the need for capacity strengthening in feminist transformational leadership to achieve movement building considering the challenging landscape faced in feminist movement building across the African continent. Although women and feminist movements are pivotal in catalyzing global, regional and national efforts to address gender, social and development injustices, multiple setbacks compounded with structural issues have affected the growth and sustainability of movement building in Africa. The rising levels of backlash on women/girls rights compounded by deep rooted societal norms and practices have fueled political, and social economic inequalities. Collective organising efforts require sustained approaches in order to address the polycrisis and backlash. Therefore, Feminist transformational leadership capacity strengthening is seen as a pivotal process which grows the power of its alumni in self awareness, personal development, and political consciousness, which is then leveraged to mobilise numbers for alliance building. For this reason, we place enormous importance on fostering feminist transformational leadership capacities of African women and girls as a foundation for achieving collective power.



**Intergenerational exchanges help to strengthen collective agency**



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