



Letters from Nairobi weaved with Love and Solidarity.

A Reflection Space on Movement Building



AKINA MAMA
WA AFRIKA



1.

The Story of Akina Mama wa Afrika: Forty Years of keeping the fire burning!

The story begins, as most revolutions do, with a spark—not a timid flicker, but a bold and unapologetic blaze determined to light up the oppressive shadows of patriarchy. Forty years ago, Akina Mama wa Afrika emerged as a powerful response, a collective refusal, and a reclaiming of power. It was a gathering of women who knew that the chains binding them were not ordained by destiny but forged by deliberate design. *And what is designed can be dismantled.*

To awaken consciousness is no small feat. It demands courage, for it unravels the comforting illusions that protect the status quo. *AKINA MAMA ignited fires in women's minds, urging them to question the systems that silenced, exploited, and demeaned them.* These were not soft inquiries—they were battle cries, summoning generations to reimagine and reclaim their futures.

The fight for liberation was never going to be easy. Patriarchy is a master builder, erecting walls that seem unbreakable. But Akina Mama understood resistance. They cultivated leadership, equipping African women with tools to navigate and dismantle oppressive systems. Knowledge became their weapon, sharp and precise, carving paths through entrenched power structures. They did not merely whisper to power—they demanded change with voices that could not be ignored.

But this was never just about tearing down—it was also about building anew. *Movement building remains the lifeblood of akina mama wa afrika, uniting struggles, linking histories, and weaving solidarities across borders and generations.* In a world where civic spaces are shrinking, this work is not just a strategy—it is survival.

Today, the fire still burns. Akina Mama wa Afrika moves forward undaunted by the weight of the present, knowing that collective action and daring dreams can forge futures where African women stand tall, free, and unbroken.

This is not simply the story of an organization—it is the story of a movement. *it is the story of african women reclaiming their voices, choices, and autonomy.* The fire lit forty years ago remains a beacon, guiding us all toward a horizon where justice, dignity, and love are not dreams but lived realities.

2.

Dear Feminists, you have since forgotten how to breathe...



We write to you with reverence, knowing the battles you have fought, the dreams you have carried, and the toll it has taken on your bodies, spirit and mind. We write to remind you—before all else—to breathe. Deep, steady breaths. The kind that reach the places where wounds have long festered. The kind that remind you of the earth beneath your feet, the sky above your head, and the rhythm of your heart—proof that you are still here. And that is no small feat.

We are here today because others once dared to dream of us. Women, whose names we may never know, sacrificed their own dreams, ambitions, and futures so that we might exist in this one. They fought battles they knew they might not win, for a world they might not live to see. Yet they dreamed, stubbornly, fiercely, because even in the darkest moments, they understood that tomorrow was worth the fight. Their dreams carried a cost—personal, communal, immeasurable. But their sacrifices carved out space for us to stand today. And so, we must ask: at what cost do we now carve out space for ourselves?

If the space you occupy is too small, too stifling for your spirit to breathe, that is a cost too high to bear. We have learned to survive in a world bent on breaking us. In a bid to seek validation from external systems, we have muted parts of ourselves, erased what seemed too loud, too unsightly, too unlovable. And yet, even as we resist, we carry the scars of this silencing. But today, we ask you to reclaim what you have lost. To return to yourself, piece by piece. To embrace the parts you were told to hide, to cradle the parts you were taught to despise. You are whole, even when the world insists you are fragmented.

It takes courage to exist fully in these feminist spaces. They are places where we confront the unexpected, the unknown, and the truths that unsettle and liberate us in equal measure. And yet, how often have we abandoned that bold, radical curiosity, for the familiarity of survival mode? We are so often consumed—by funding cycles, reports, indicators, the endless to-do lists that tether us to the mundane. We forget to notice the small victories, to honor the quiet triumphs, to sit in the power of our collective being.



But let us not forget: feminism is not in the report submitted at midnight, nor in the perfect grant proposal. It is in your breath. It is in your body. It is in the way you hold yourself after a long day and whisper, “You are enough.” It is in the way you challenge that relentless inner critic, daring to say, “I see your shame, and I reject it.” It is in the way you build solidarity—with others, yes, but first with yourself.

This work, our work, is not without its burdens. We carry the weight of histories and futures, of trauma and resilience, of battles fought and yet to come. And still, we must not allow ourselves to collapse at the finish line, teaching those who come after us only how to survive, not how to live. Feminism demands liberation, yes—but it also demands healing. Healing that tends to our wounds as much as it envisions a world where they no longer exist.

So, dear feminists, we ask you to pause. Sit with yourself. Sit with your sisters. Take stock of where you are and who you are, not as a critique, but as a celebration. You are here, not by accident, but by design—one crafted by the hands of those who came before you. You are here, and you are enough. And when you next feel the weight of it all, remember this: the freedom we seek for the world must first live within us. So breathe deeply. Reclaim your grounding. Tend to your wounds. And know that the act of healing is, in itself, an act of resistance.

With love and solidarity,

Feminist Activist and Nyamwathi Facilitator of self-Governance for and on behalf of Kenyan feminists in all their diversities.



3.

Reflections from the Femi-Ninjas of Kenya: Lessons for African Feminists on Enhancing Movement Building.

The story of feminist movement building in Africa begins not in lofty boardrooms but in the marketplaces, the villages, and the hearths of women who have borne the weight of the world. *These are women whose stories are not statistics, whose lives cannot be distilled into reports for international donors. They are the architects of change, yet so often, they are silenced in the very movements built on their blood and sweat.*

'Nothing for us, without us' is a simple declaration, but one that cuts to the heart of what it means to build a feminist movement. How often have we, in our zeal to push forward, spoken for women instead of creating space for their voices to be heard directly? *What would it look like if the grassroots women themselves—not their anecdotes, not their proxies—sat at every table where decisions about their futures were made?* Movement building must center these voices, not as tokens of authenticity but as active agents of change. Let them bring their challenges, their analyses, and their solutions shaped by the contours of their realities. Only then will our movements reflect the diversity of the struggles they claim to represent.

Yet, even as we strive for inclusion, we must confront another truth: *'If there is no enemy within, the enemy outside can do us no harm'* Feminism, we have learned, is not just a theory; it is deeply personal. It lives within us, shaping how we engage with ourselves, our peers, and the structures around us. But how often do we separate our personal struggles from our activism, pretending that the two are unconnected? *How often do we carry unresolved battles into the spaces where we are meant to foster solidarity?*





To build movements that last, we must begin with ourselves. Who am I in this work? What is my role, my value, my positioning? These questions are not abstract; they are urgent and practical. We cannot demand transformation in the world while refusing to examine the fractures within our own selves and communities. This centering of the self is not selfish—it is foundational. It allows us to come into the movement whole and to create spaces where solidarity is not just performative but rooted in mutual respect and shared purposes.

Movements, however, are not fueled by introspection alone. They are forged in the crucible of action, of relentless work that often feels thankless. ‘With our blood and sweat, the movement stands and grows’. This is not metaphorical. The labor of movement building is physical, emotional, and deeply exhausting. There are funding constraints, rising anti-rights agendas, and the crushing weight of personal responsibilities. *Yet, we press on. Not because we are invincible, but because the alternative—inaction—is unthinkable.*

And still, the reality remains: our movements are human, and so are we. There are nights when you leave a strategy session, inspired by the fire of collective vision, only to return home to a house with no electricity and an inbox overflowing with unanswered emails. There are mornings when you wake up questioning if it is all worth it, if the fight is truly yours to bear. These moments remind us that movements are not just grand declarations; they are also the mundane, unglamorous grind of everyday life. To sustain our movements, we must first sustain ourselves.

There is no manual for movement building, and perhaps there never will be. The landscape shifts constantly, shaped by the intersections of crises and the resilience of those who rise to meet them. What we know is this: movements thrive when they are intersectional, when they connect the dots between climate justice, economic justice, reproductive rights, and every other struggle that defines our world. No single organization or individual can do it all, but together, our collective power becomes unstoppable.

Solidarity is the lifeblood of this collective power. True solidarity is not transactional; it is transformational. It is the willingness to sit with discomfort, to confront our privileges, and to extend grace even when it is not returned. It is the recognition that our struggles are intertwined, and so too must be our strategies. *In solidarity, we find not only strength but the possibility of healing—a healing that is as collective as it is individual.*

The Femi-Ninjas of Kenya remind us that movement building is both a privilege and a responsibility. It demands that we honor the shoulders we stand on while paving the way for those who will come after us. It calls us to safeguard our gains, to document our everyday resistances and triumphs, and to remain nimble in the face of shifting challenges. Most of all, it asks us to remember that the power to build and sustain movements has always been within us.

As echoed by Rachel Kagoiya, Executive Director, GROOTS Kenya, Melvine Obola, Programme and Digital Advocacy Associate, Young Women’s Leadership Institute, Ivy Nyawira Wahito, Executive Director of the Resource Center for Women and Girls, for and on behalf of Kenyan feminists, in all their diversities.

4.

Rise, Akina Mama wa Afrika: The Call to Liberate, Heal, and Build.

SISTERS AND BUILDERS OF OUR LIBERATION, we speak to you not as separate voices but as one united in the rhythm of a shared struggle. Ours is a story written in the language of resilience, told by the hands that till the land, the minds that strategize, and the hearts that dare to imagine freedom. Across this vast continent, from bustling markets to quiet village paths, from the echo of boardrooms to the chants on the streets, the drumbeat of our work continues.

But the question now is not just how we sustain it—it is how we transcend it, how we weave together the strands of a movement that is local and global, intersectional and transnational. The challenges before us demand that we become architects of a bridge, one that spans the distances between our grassroots and our global advocacy.

We must also reckon with the wounds we carry, wounds we bring into the very movements meant to liberate us. We are flawed, and our movements reflect this truth. There is harm within, born of silence, of hierarchy, of the inability to see one another fully. But justice begins in the spaces we build. Transformative justice must guide us—not the harsh, reactionary judgment of “casserole feminism,” but a justice rooted in care, in accountability, in the radical empathy that sees harm as a call to heal.



And yet, we cannot ignore the toll this work takes. Feminists, we urge you to embrace the power of rest. Movements are exhausting; we know this because we have felt the ache in our bodies, the heaviness in our spirits. But rest is resistance. *Rest is a strategy. It is what allows us to step back, to breathe, to renew, so we can return to the fight with clarity and strength.* Let us remember that we are not alone in this work, that when one of us steps away, another can carry the banner forward.

There is also the question of resources. Too often, we have looked outward, to donors and external aid, for the sustenance of our movements. This reliance weakens us, makes us bend to priorities that are not ours. *It is time to reclaim Indigenous philanthropy, to return to the wisdom of our communities, to recognize the wealth of knowledge and resources that already exist among us.* The power to fund and sustain our movements lies not in distant capitals but here, in the heart of Africa, among the women who have always found ways to make a way.

And so, as we look forward, we must embrace adaptability. Movements are not static; they shift with the tides of oppression and resistance. We must safeguard the gains of the past, learn from them, and prepare for the battles yet to come. *This is our calling. Akina Mama wa Afrika—to build, to heal, and to dream.*

The power has always been in our hands. Let us wield it boldly. Together, we are the architects of a future where justice, dignity, and liberation are not just aspirations but truths. Together, we rise.

*As echoed by **Sunita Caminha**, UN Women ESARO, Mary Kambo, Kenya Human Rights Commission, Esther Wambui, Zamara Foundation, Groots Grassroots Champion, for and on behalf of Kenyan Feminists in all their diversities.*



5.

Closing Affirmations; who are we?



We are intentional disruptors,
We will bring in the grassroots women **to speak for themselves**,
We will not lose our sense of identity and belonging,
We will endeavor to share our agenda,
Our dreams are bolder than our fears,
We are **breathhtaking organizers** and mobilizers,
We are **re-defining the movement** and despite the challenges
STILL WE RISE,
We are bold and frank,
Our bodies are tired, but **WE STILL MOVE FORWARD**,
This is the time for the shift to happen,
We are allies, think tanks, sisters, **FEMINISTS**
AND THESE CONVERSATIONS WILL NOT DIE HERE!

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Rapporteur: Anne Waruguru Kiai, Lawyer, women and youth worker. (Italicised)





Akina Mama wa Afrika
Plot 1572 Valley Rise,
Chief Close, Off Kira-Bulindo Road,
Bulindo, Wakiso, Uganda

Tel: +256 414 543 681|

Mob: +256 789550803

websites: www.akinamamawaafrika.org

 @amwaafrica

 admin@akinamamawaafrika.org

Linkedin Akina Mama wa Afrika

 @amwaafrica

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