

WEAVING IMPACT

*Systematising Feminist Rapid
Response in a Polycrisis Era*



**URGENT
ACTION
FUND +
AFRICA**

2023 Annual Action Report

FOR WOMN'S HUMAN RIGHTS

Who We Are

We are bold and passionate Feminists allied in solidarity with African Womn's Human Rights Defenders (AWHRDs) for a just future.

As a pan-African and Feminist Rapid Response Grant Making Fund, we have resourced more than 5,200 grants with a geographical presence in all 54 African countries.

We have a strategic physical presence in more than 15 African countries through our staff and board members, and collectively, we speak more than 46 African languages.

Through responsive and creative strategies, we advocate for funding partners to understand, commit to, and actively invest in pan-African and feminist womn's rights activism and rapid responses to urgent situations. With deep and expanding knowledge, experience, and skills in the contexts in which womn's human rights defenders live, organise, and work, we remain alert and agile in responding to the priorities and urgent needs of African womn's rights activists and movements, thus ensuring holistic security, safety and well-being, movement building and strengthening using feminist philanthropic principles and values.

Vision

We envisage an Africa and world where transformative justice is a shared goal so that all African womn¹ in all kinds of bodies, realities, and identities are recognised for their full worth and value, live to their fullest potential, are healthy, and live in harmony with the earth and with fellow human beings.

Values

Respect

Integrity

Organising with soul

Our Ways of Working

Collective and Shared Leadership

Cross-movement and Intersectionality

Openness, Knowledge and Learning

¹ Our use of womn is an act of challenging and replacing traditional ideas of what and who a womn is and can be and the links of women to a system of patriarchy where womn are, in effect, subject to men or a sub-category of men. Womn' for us includes lesbian, bisexual womn and transwomn. Further, womn includes those who are gender non-conforming, identifying with neither gender.

Preamble

Our Roots – A Feminist Commitment to Systematic Progress

Our mandate is to support African Womn's Human Rights Defenders (AWHRDs), particularly feminist and womn's movements, in their actions to sustain and transform their realities. Their work is a crucial building block in envisioning the world we want - where people and the planet thrive, recognising the entire worth and value of African womn in all bodies, realities, and identities. We are fuelling and facilitating the work of AWHRDs through rapid response and influencing grants, feminist knowledge generation, fostering cultures of care and healing, and feminist MEAL. Over the past few decades, feminist activism and womn's rights organising has, and continues to, shift the realities, context, and position of African womn. Restricted democratic spaces, gender-based violence, and anti-rights movements characterise the increasingly hostile environments in which AWHRDs live and practice their activism. With multifaceted and adaptive strategies, our responses prioritised holistic protection, collective care, and healing justice, providing flexible and catalytic resources that support the resilience and sustainability of these movements. As a feminist Fund, our role is increasingly crucial in sustaining movements and ensuring that our resources are flexible, responsive, and aligned with the complex realities faced by AWHRDs. This shift continues to challenge us to be more than funders; it calls us to be enablers of transformative change, ensuring that our support contributes to both immediate needs and the long-term resilience and sustainability of feminist movements across the continent.

Over the past few decades, feminist activism and womn's rights organising has, and continues to, shift the realities, context, and position of African womn. Restricted democratic spaces, gender-based violence, and anti-rights movements characterise the increasingly hostile environments in which AWHRDs live and practice their activism.

As a pan-African Feminist Fund, our commitment to transforming power relations means that the outcomes of our work are as important as the process, and this is core to feminist praxis. Ethical feminist implementation rooted in feminist values includes a constant process of reflection, learning, and evolving to match the complexity of social change. As a result, from 2023 to date, our work has engaged in the process of systematisation.

In an ever-evolving and often unpredictable world, we must adapt and refine our processes to stay effective and authentic to our mission. This adaptability is crucial for navigating complex social and political landscapes.

Systematisation is organising and documenting experiences, strategies, and lessons learnt to deepen understanding of work, improve practices, and enhance capacity to drive transformative social change.

Our Principles of Systematisation

- **Fostering Resilience**
- **Regeneration**
- **Continuous Learning**
- **Collaborative Engagement**

The expansion of the UAF-Africa's role on the continent and the global landscape through crisis response, increased engagement with feminist movements, broader strategic initiatives, and advocacy has been accompanied by growth in the volume of work, staff, and budgets. In 2023, we embarked on a systematisation process to ensure the Fund's effective functioning matches our growth. Through systematisation, we reflected on our leadership model, workflow, and our processes' overall effectiveness. This was to ensure that our diverse interrelated, interdependent parts - programmes, operations, finance, human resources, and partnerships - build collective knowledge, adapt to new challenges, and integrate insights into future planning.

To kickstart the process, we reflected on and articulated our shared leadership model of feminist practices. Throughout the year, the Fund's operations expanded with additional staff, who played a significant role in concretising various existing policies and practices into the operations manual. This manual now includes the budget and work plan central to holistic functioning.

Across the portfolios, workflow processes have been analysed. Streamlining workflow is an ongoing process because of this analysis. We have enhanced the clarity of staff roles across the portfolios, including support lines. Various portfolios at varying levels have embraced tools to track progress and to learn from implementation, including write-up tracking tools, individual weekly journaling, monthly reflection and reporting on implementation, monthly tracking of budget utilisation, and monthly tracking of compliance with donor obligations. Communication material production has diversified to include illustrations, artwork, videos, social media, QR codes, and live engagements.

In 2024, the implementation of the learnings we generated in the year of systematisation will be concretised in the finalisation of the operations manual, communications guidebook and programmes manual. A programme manual will complement the comprehensive communications guidelines to integrate various platforms and streamline the development and distribution of communication materials.

We continue to reflect on change as a process with distinct stages, with 2023 systematisation being a landmark stage. Systematisation continues for us as a Feminist Fund; it is part of our politics—a participatory process of critical reflection and identification of lessons to enhance our mandate and accountability to AWHRDs, feminist activists, WROs, and the movements we serve.



A little rain each day will fill the rivers and overflow.

~African Proverb from Madagascar

The Process of Systematisation Amidst Polycrisis

A transformative change to our realities can only happen collectively. We understand the power we exert as funders and are committed to contributing to change by, first and foremost, disrupting the power relations that exist between funders and activists. This disruption necessitates sharing decision-making and power. We share power with movements by implementing a model of rapid response grantmaking that effectively means that activists define the issues and strategies that deserve funding rather than the Fund imposing its agendas. Our approach to rapid response grant-making and support programmes is guided by insights from activists, ensuring that the needs and gaps identified by movements are prioritised.

Collective and Shared Leadership (CSL) is central in our 2021 - 2030 Strategic Compass as a fundamental leadership approach that grounds our work. Shared leadership distributes roles and responsibilities among multiple team members, enabling collective decision-making and mutual influence to achieve common goals.

Throughout 2023, we solidified our identity as a **reflexive** organisation. The year was marred by poly crisis as the lives of African women were disrupted by environmental disasters, conflict, coups d'états and political volatility. Additionally, there were well-coordinated anti-gender and anti-rights movements across the globe and in Africa. The rise of the anti-gender movement, particularly in East and Southern Africa, has continued to be more visible with discourse and actions in opposition to the concept of gender in the social, political and legal context in opposition to the transformations secured by the struggles of feminist and sexual minorities. Our philanthropic advocacy and healing justice thrust became pivotal amidst polycrisis. Building from the ground-breaking 2022 2nd Feminist Republik Festival, which centred healing offerings and the role of healers, a year of reflection allowed us to continue exploring what infusing healing justice in feminist organising and crisis response means. We embarked on a collective journey of unpacking and sharing the **Healing Justice framework** by re-centring and acknowledging different forms of knowing, producing, and disseminating knowledge. We integrated healers into the imagination and establishment of the Feminist Republik Registry, which focuses on documenting the gendered experiences of AWHRDs, including how they are impacted by and respond to crises.



Knowledge is like a baobab tree; no one person can embrace it with both arms.

African Proverb

Successes

Celebrating Feminist Transformation & Redefining the Path Amidst Crises

Our commitment to clarity and purpose drove significant successes across our initiatives. By establishing a well-defined structure and fostering continuous improvement and scalability, we ensured that every action was adaptive and impactful. This strategic clarity empowered us to refine our approaches in real-time, responding swiftly to the emerging needs of AWHRDs. Central to our efforts was strengthening our grantmaking processes to align with our collective and shared leadership principles. We elevated the voices of women through our feminist response to crises, ensuring that our support was systemic, responsive and rooted in care.

Given a context marred by poly crisis, we increased our investments in the safety, well-being, and collective care of AWHRDs.

Due to continued crises and the rise of anti-rights movements/groups, AWHRDs experienced heightened attacks, including digital attacks and arbitrary arrests. As a result, our highest support, amounting to 28%, went towards supporting defenders in sustaining their pushback/resistance and enhancing their physical security, digital security, well-being, psychosocial support, and collective care.

We further prioritised marginalised groups due to the compounded challenges and barriers they face during crises.

In 2023, we implemented deliberate measures to support marginalised groups, including LGBTQI (Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex) and women with disabilities, amid rising anti-rights movements and armed conflicts. We supported **33 LGBTQI groups** in East Africa to counter the anti-right/gender movement and ensure their safety and well-being. We also supported **23 disability justice groups** across the continent.

Through a process of deliberate reflection, learning, and adaptation, our Feminist Knowledge Leadership team strengthened collaborations with AWHRDs in Burkina Faso, Kenya, South Africa, Sudan, and Uganda, establishing the Feminist Republik Registry documenting gendered experiences of AWHRDs and their communities regarding attacks, threats, and violations they face.

We strengthened our advisors' network to support our trust-based and participatory grantmaking. Over 100 advisors were trained in context analysis, documentation, and reporting to more strongly support AWHRDs during the continent's polycrises. We work with over 200 advisors from feminist movements across Africa for context analysis, due diligence needs assessment, and movement strengthening.

We expanded our footprint to include inaccessible, nascent, and invisible community-based organisations and WHRDs. Through six community engagements in Kenya, **South Africa**, Malawi, DRC, Nigeria, and Togo. We reached out to over 400 **groups** and defenders with 60% of our grants supporting grassroots organisations. Importantly, these engagements deepen our understanding of the needs, gaps, and opportunities within feminist movements, allowing us to respond effectively to their lived realities.

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Aligned with our co-creation mandate, the Feminist Knowledge Leadership team continued creatively transferring politicised knowledge to reflect the lived realities of AWHRDs. Efforts in this regard focused on unpacking and popularising the Healing Justice Framework, conducting a seminar with the Institute of Development Studies with the illustrative animation video in **French** and **English**. These efforts reflected our commitment to integrating reflective practices and adaptive strategies into our operations. Additionally, a reflection piece was produced, titled **"Winning the Imagination Battle – Reimagining Feminist Organising Spaces and Practice"**, - highlighting the 2nd Feminist Republik Festival's focus on healers and healing offerings. To ensure language justice, our work was developed in multiple languages, employing various methods for feminists and activists to access and engage with the knowledge pieces such as illustrations, artwork, videos, social media live engagements, QR codes, and easy-to-remember web links.

We aim to inspire and normalise conversations and practices that widely integrate collective care in Africa and beyond. In 2023, we organised Six Ubuntu Healing Gatherings, providing a vital space for AWHRDs to connect, share and engage in collective healing practices. With 516 AWHRDs registered, each session offered a platform to explore diverse ideas and practices, drawing from the continent's contemporary and traditional richness. These gatherings aim to counter burnout, exhaustion, and the sense of isolation experienced by AWHRDs. Our Ubuntu gatherings featured healing practitioners from various African regions, incorporating different forms and modalities to ensure rich and varied offerings.

We demonstrated our commitment to adaptive strategies and reflective practices throughout the year by addressing urgent crises and supporting movement resilience. The crisis in Sudan is part of a broader global dynamic of proxy wars, governance, and unequal dynamics that have rendered certain peoples 'less deserving' of support. We released a **donor brief** to draw attention to the Sudan crisis, highlighting the crucial role of AWHRDs in Sudan, who have been protesting, organising, and providing life-saving mutual aid despite limited international support. In line with our systematisation principles, we supported spaces for critical analysis of Sudan's situation and collective healing as a tool to build movement resilience.

By aligning our actions with the principles of systematisation, we effectively enhanced our ability to respond to complex challenges, supported resilience-building, and promoted regenerative practices within the feminist movement. We sought to move communities from resilience to regeneration by addressing the root causes of challenges and actively creating positive and sustainable change.

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Building Collaborations

On June 6th, 2023, we joined hands with TrustAfrica to successfully launch the **Harambee~Ubuntu: Pan-African and Feminist Philanthropies (PAFP)** initiative in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, themed “More and Better Resources for Africa’s Development”. This initiative resulted from the July 2022 and **February 2023 Indaba** convenings, where an emerging collective of philanthropic actors met in Naivasha, Kenya, to brainstorm and deliberate on ways to reimagine the PAFP **transformational agenda**.

Since the Harambee~Ubuntu PAFP launch, we have been present at the most influential philanthropic convenings, such as – The East African Philanthropy Conference (Zanzibar), the 4th African Philanthropy Conference, which took place in Senegal, and the recent WINGS forum in Nairobi, Kenya.



If you want to go quickly, go alone. If you want to go far, go together. - African Proverb.

Transforming Grant Monitoring for Feminist Analysis

To strengthen our feminist MEAL, the UAF-Africa MEAL team took decisive steps to integrate a feminist approach into its Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning practices. This addressed the challenges of applying “traditional” top-down approaches to measuring transformative change, which often exclude or misrepresent the voices of key constituents in the process.

For us, feminist MEAL entails:

- (1) Prioritising safety, security & well-being.
- (2) Fostering a storytelling approach.
- (3) Fostering participation and inclusion.
- (4) Acknowledging that transformative change is complex.
- (5) Emphasising learning and building a feminist Future.
- (6) Promoting shared decision-making.
- (7) Centering Movements.



“Feminist MEAL should have simplified, flexible approaches for tracking change and monitoring progress; promote downward accountability to the grantees and upward accountability to our donors; and provide room for storytelling while the MEAL team facilitates the process.”–

MEAL Team.

Feminist Insights and Looking Ahead

Amidst the challenges of multiple crises, we emerged with invaluable lessons and creative solutions. Our commitment to refinement and evolution contributed to solidifying the Fund's relevance and responsiveness to the continent's shifting dynamics while standing in solidarity with movements, collectives, and womn's rights activists.

Understanding that social change is complex and that you owe it to those you serve, the journey of systematisation encountered some inevitable complexities. As we refined systems and operations, challenges became steadfast companions on our transformative journey, underscoring our dedication to our mission and the people we serve.

Through this transformative process, we garnered critical insights that have informed our strategic adaptive responses, all aimed at amplifying our impact and deepening our commitment to feminist principles and the empowerment of African womn.

Branding the politics of our work: The systematisation process spurred the decision to be very clear about what we mean and about our politics, hence the rebranding of Feminist Knowledge Leadership (FKL), formerly Knowledge Leadership, and Transformative Partnerships & Philanthropy (TP&P), formerly Partnerships & Development. Solidarity & Support portfolio was renamed "Sustaining Defenders", a political decision to reinvigorate our mandate and approach that recognises and supports AWHRDs and underscores their critical role as the driving force behind transformative change and in advancing gender equality, justice and womn's rights.

FKL always had a feminist approach to knowledge production and documentation, disrupting how institutionalised patriarchy, colonialism and capitalism have denied, invisibilised and exploited the intellectual work of womn and minoritised communities. We understand that we are not actors studying 'the other' but examining our contexts. We are also navigating our roles as funders, not frontline activists. This positions us in a complex political space where we are held to a higher standard than an "outsider": accountable for not reproducing damaging tropes about our contexts. The renaming was critical, so we are clear about this politics from the naming itself.

The TP&P rebranding represents our unwavering commitment to empowering (AWHRDs) through resource mobilisation, strategic communications, and philanthropic advocacy. Our TP&P strategy encapsulates our audacious ambitions to provide the necessary support and resources for AWHRDs to create bold and longstanding social change. This rebranding reflects our commitment to empowering AWHRDs through strategic resource mobilisation and advocacy.

Operational Expansion and Technological Integration and Response to Anti-gender Movements: Introducing a digital platform for tracking and reporting progress enabled real-time monitoring and data-driven decision making. This prompted the expansion of our operations and the formalisation of policies, enhancing efficiency. Our MEAL team's integration of Salesforce automated email reminders streamlined the grant monitoring process, ensuring timely report submissions and enhancing operational efficiency. Introducing a digital platform for tracking and reporting improved the accuracy and speed of financial operations, reflecting our commitment to leveraging technology for greater efficiency.

In the face of intensified anti-gender and anti-rights movements, systematisation has driven us to increase our efforts in resource mobilisation and the safety and security of AWHRDs. Our Operations team implemented enhanced security measures and developed preventive strategies to protect activists and sustain their movements, demonstrating our resilience and adaptive response to external threats.

Inclusive Evaluation: Involving grantee partners as key informants and allowing for flexible reporting deadlines has improved the quality of evaluations and considered the needs of activists in challenging situations.

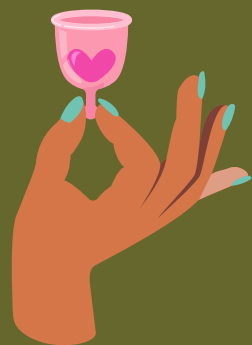
Grantmaking Data

Bolstering our grantmaking processes: Watering our roots to deepen and expand our support to AWHRDs and their formations during crises.



94

Violence Against Womn/
Gender Based Violence



48

Sexual and Reproductive
Health and Rights (SRHR)



24

Disability Justice



55

Economic Justice



56

Environmental &
Climate Justice



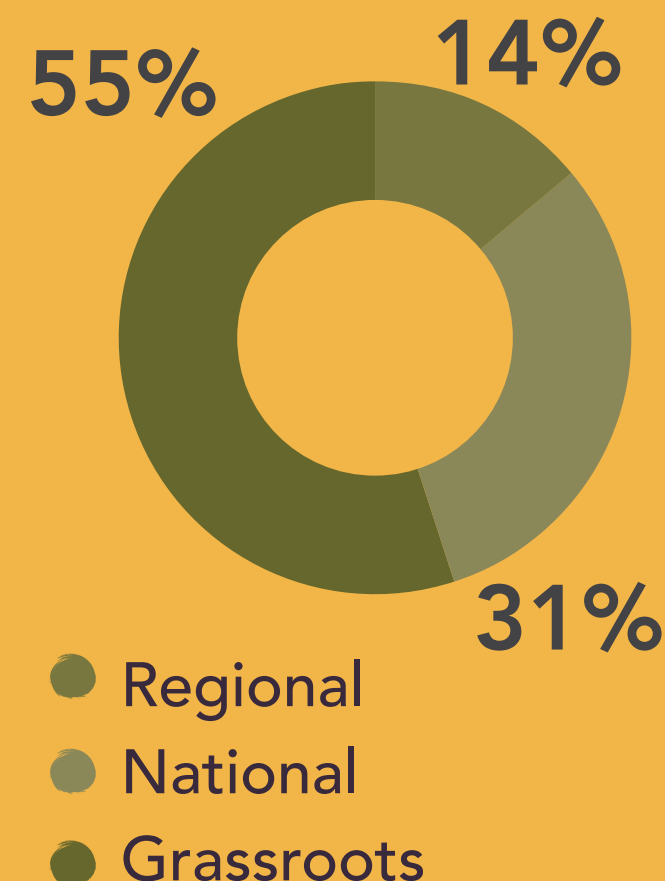
154

Sustaining
AWHRDs and Civic
Engagement

431

Total number of
grants Awarded
in 2023:

3,526,572
Total Amount
invested in grants:



Empowering Voices



" We have always submitted proposals for funding to different organisations, but only UAF-Africa accepted our proposal and timely funded initiatives for womn and girls with disabilities in Mubende district. We are grateful for the flexible support because it made a difference in our lives."

Grantee partner in Uganda.



"This support empowers us to advocate for systemic change, challenge discriminatory practices, and contribute to a more just and equitable society. With this funding, we can make a real difference in the lives of those affected and drive meaningful"

Grantee partner in Egypt.



"It is our place to discuss and solve our issues as womn. Through this support, we have helped six womn from Kiamuringa Village and another from Kimangaru village to reclaim their land that had been grabbed by land barons."

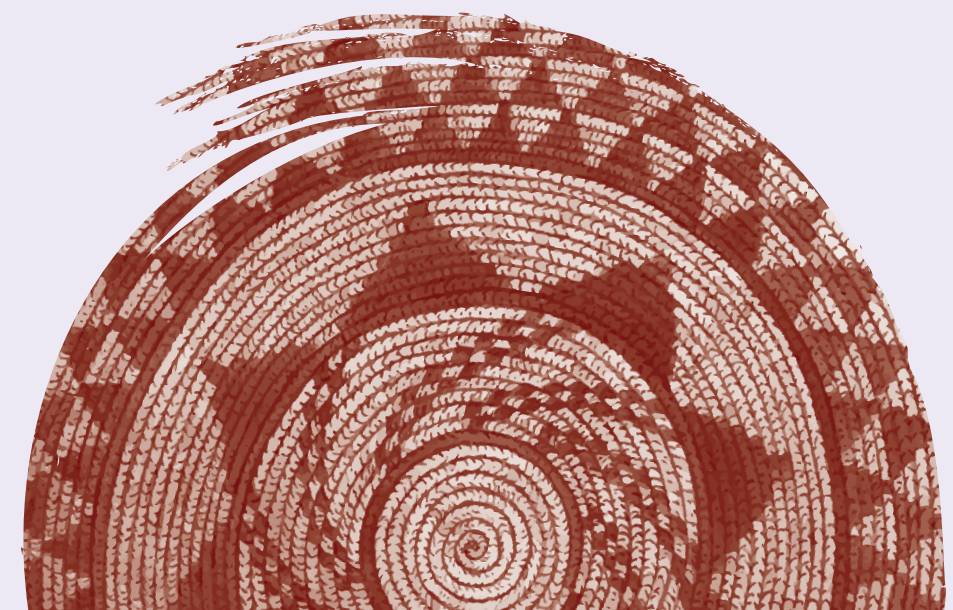
Grantee partner in Kenya.

Conclusion

To bring it all together, 2023 was marked by deliberate systematisation, focusing on organising and documenting our experiences, strategies, and lessons learned for transformative change. With deliberate determination, the Fund built collective knowledge, adapted to new challenges, and integrated insights into future planning. This flexibility remained crucial in swiftly responding to evolving needs and ensuring timely support for AWHRDs. This process deepened our understanding of transformative feminist approaches, enhanced our grant-making processes, and strengthened our partnerships to support AWHRDs more efficiently. From bolstering collective care initiatives to amplifying marginalised voices, we demonstrated our commitment to fostering change across the continent. Emerging stronger and more aligned with our feminist mission, we are poised to continue empowering AWHRDs and advancing towards a just and equitable Africa.



"Prepare now for the solutions of tomorrow." -
Congolesse Proverb





Acknowledgements

Reflecting on 2023, we stand in unwavering solidarity with the African Womn's Human Rights Defenders, whose courage and resilience in confronting crises, injustice and systemic inequalities inspire our collective commitment to transformative justice and feminist movement building in the continent.

We deeply appreciate the tireless efforts of our partners, allies, and supporters who steadfastly supported us in navigating a year marked by polycrisis, resourcing, protecting, and sustaining feminist movements to uphold the dignity and rights of African womn in all their diversity.

To our dedicated team—Staff, Advisors, and Board members—who have embraced systematisation with integrity, we honour your role in refining our practices, deepening our impact, and ensuring that UAF-Africa remains an agile and responsive feminist Fund.

Team Urgent Action Fund Africa!

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