DZUWA

JUNE 2021 VOL II

HONORING LEGACIES OF RESILIENCE, HEALING AND RESISTENCE

A WORD FROM THE FEMINIST REPUBLIK

Launched in July 2020, Dzuwa an online magazine produced by the Feminist Republik aims to highlight the self and collective care practices of African Women Human rights Defenders while creating a platform for knowledge sharing and curation. The Feminist Republik would like to respond to the growing need for African WHRDS to have access to tools, ideas and resources that can enhance their self and collective care as we grapple with the COVID – 19 pandemic, Dzuwa magazine is one such tool. This particular edition features among others, stories of resilience and ideas around healing justice from Disability Justice advocates and activists. These stories uncover opportunities to connect with each other and our communities despite the different regions we are at during this time of crisis.

Dzuwa Vol II focuses on Disability Justice, a term not understood by many. Disability Justice as you will read in some of the pieces herein examines disability and ableism and how it relates to other forms of oppression. Dzuwa Vol II focuses on how Disability Justice can be used as a powerful tool to fight for social change but also how we view and understand disability which is not only limited to access but also how we organize in the community. In Dzuwa Vol II we are "**Honoring legacies of resilience, healing, and resistance**" at a time of crisis and beyond.

In this edition, we honor the experiences of activists during COVID-19, highlight stories of how WWD have been able to heal and care for each other despite the multiple risks they face.

During the period of COVID-19 we have witnessed Women With Disabilities disproportionately get impacted by environmental barriers which have limited their movements, financial barriers which have meant only privileged individuals get what they need and institutional and systemic barriers which have denied them access to basic needs and support.

As we work to curate and share knowledge we gather from different African Women Human Rights Defenders and regions, our call through this magazine is that we move from Disability Rights to Disability Justice, to more collective efforts and re-imagine a world of cross movements that do not leverage on ableism, that prioritizes wellness and starts from the ground up.

Through the poems, artwork and interviews, we envisage that African WHRDs and partners alike will be able to get a more nuanced understanding of how ableism interconnects with all the different movements and other systems of oppression. This edition has been created with support from activists, Disability Justice advocates and defenders curated with support from **Ndapwa Alweendo** a feminist activist from Namibia, **Faith Njahira** a disability Justice Champion from Kenya and **Ekaete Umoh** a Disability Justice advocate from Nigeria who recently joined the Board of Urgent Action Fund-Africa. They have been able to provide invaluable knowledge to Dzuwa Vol II.

We hope you get to enjoy Dzuwa Vol II and Feel free to reach out to us with your views, suggestions and ideas **feministrepublik@uaf-africa.org**.

Shinaz ALI
Feminist Republik Culture Curator, Editor Dzuwa II,
June 2021

DISABILITY JUSTICE: MORE THAN A NAME CHANGE

BY FAITH NJAHIRA

Greetings to my siblings, lovers, elders with disabilities, and our non-disabled allies!
It is my great pleasure to welcome you to this edition of Dzuwa where we make an attempt to elevate and center those with disability and the issues that concern us as a move towards disability justice. I recognize that the term "disability justice" and what it represents might be new to some of us so I will attempt an introduction.

Disability justice was coined by black and brown, queer, trans, non-binary gendered individuals with disabilities in Turtle Island, Northern America. They wanted to call attention to how race, gender, citizenship, use of psychiatric services, visible or invisible disabilities, and even being houseless are crucial factors that shape access to rights as persons with disabilities beyond government policies.

Disability justice as thought of in community by Sins Invalid (a disability justice-based performance project that nurtures artists with disabilities) is guided by the following ten (10) principles: intersectionality, leadership of the most impacted, anti-capitalistic politics, commitment to cross movement organizing, recognizing wholeness, sustainability, commitment to cross disability solidarity, interdependence, collective access, and collective liberation.

In disability solidarity, I would like to offer the words of Patty Berne on disability justice:
"This is disability justice, an honoring of the longstanding legacies of resilience and resistance which are the inheritance of all of us whose bodies or minds will not conform. Disability justice is a vision and practice of a yet-to-be, a map that we create with our ancestors and our great grandchildren onward, in the width and depth of our multiplicities and histories, a movement towards a world in which every body and mind is known as beautiful."

If you are wondering how this concept developed outside of the African continent can serve us, here are my thoughts on how we can engage and adopt disability justice in a meaningful way.

Disability Justice: More than a name change contd..

For the most part, disability work has been funded and guided by international non-governmental organizations with origins away from the African continent. These well-meaning organizations often do not have firsthand experience of dealing with racism internally or share a keen understanding of navigating and confronting the white-saviour mentalities on which they are based. They have not engaged honestly with the systems that keep their work moving such as wars funded by their own governments or their governance structures that maintain hierarchies and often only have white male gendered people making up their numbers of disabled folk in upper management positions. Where various requirements (however contested) by African governments have seen these organizations hiring black Africans for top leadership positions on the continent, these individuals are rarely people with disabilities.

This edition comes to you as a labour of love, the result of so many years of connections on social media platforms where I have seen my siblings with disabilities claim space without waiting for permission from a world that is not designed for our bodies and minds that have disabilities, whether or not they have been validated by the medical system.

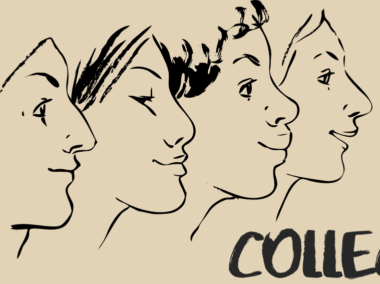
The contributions in this edition have been generously offered during depressive episodes,moments of working through fatigue, new diagnosis, periods of making life altering decisions during a pandemic without an assurance of access to employment, or through periods of chronic pain.

The edition creates space for both fiction and nonfiction accounts of the lived experiences of our contributors and people who feel seen and held in these accounts. You will find pieces from across the continent that talk about cross disability organizing, the realities of disabilities that may only be truly captured in fictional writing, and the frustrations of disabled athletes and deaf womn working in pollution reduction in a world where some disabilities are a direct result of environmental injustices.

The pieces have been shared with great trust that this edition holds them with great love and care. To the contributors who have trusted me and the rest of the team with pieces of themselves, I thank you and hope that you feel truly appreciated.

For the reader with a disability going through this edition, it is my hope that you allow yourself to smile, laugh, cry, and take moments to pause as you read or listen to these pieces that I hope allow us to think about collective liberation. As persons with disabilities, we are often forced to pick which pieces of ourselves we move into spaces with, the added layers of our trans, queer or non-binary identities, or our questioned citizenship often making it that much harder for our wholeness to be recognized. It is my hope that you feel seen through this edition.

For our beloved allies, it is my hope that you allow yourself to be with the discomfort of not understanding what we are talking about in some pieces, of not getting “what the big deal is” about the bits of us that we share here, of realising that a lot more work needs to be done internally to ensure that the harm of individuals with disabilities is no longer from a place of ignorant privilege, and that you read it with love.



COLLECTIVE COMMUNITY WITHIN MOVEMENTS

BY SHINAZ ALI

As I sit down to write this piece, I cannot help but reflect on the challenges we experienced in getting submissions on Disability Justice. Dzuwa's initial plans were to focus on Disability Justice in Southern Africa; a decision that was informed by knowledge gleaned from our grant making programme at UAF-Africa. We rarely ever receive applications from these countries on Disability Justice and I thought that this was an opportune time to highlight the work of Feminist Disability Justice activists and defenders in these countries. In anticipating this issue, I was like a child waiting on a gift, excited at what we would come up with, excited to learn about the work of Disability Justice activists in Lesotho, finding healing practices in Botswana, and increasing my network with activists from Namibia. However, my excitement was short-lived; it started to fade as I embarked on the online outreach. A large percentage of groups and organizations turned out to be more hinged on broader Disability Rights. Where were the feminist activists focusing on Disability Justice? Where were womn's rights activists? Where were the voices of womn who have for years been marginalized? Who is speaking to issues of disability? On whose behalf? Who is caring for the Womn With Disabilities (WWDs)?

That we could not find feminist organizations focusing on Disability Justice made me ponder on how siloed the movement has been; this area of work has been left to Disability Justice advocates. This reality did not reflect Disability Justice's fight against an "independence" where movements exist on their own and depend on themselves. Within the framing of Disability Justice, the Disability Movement should have people/groups who rally behind it just as it should rally behind other movements. We should not isolate disability from racial issues, the feminist movement, SRHR, class etc. Disability Justice, in and of itself, looks at how different systems of oppression amplify one another. So, as we fight against other forms of oppression, we should also be fighting against ableism and the role it plays in greasing the cogs of patriarchy. The lives of WWDs should not be made invisible while we focus on other forms of oppression because they all intersect.

As justice advocates and activists, we need to look at all issues and how they overlap. We cannot solve one issue and leave others pending. This is what Disability Rights has been about; looking at the symptoms of inequity within the Disability Movement and not focusing on the root causes, handling singular issues which marginalize WWDs in isolation without considering the other forms of violation they face as gender non-conforming womn, womn who practice other religions, womnwho are landless, and those who are from other races. The list goes on..

UAF-Africa and the Feminist Republik attempts to bridge gaps when there is an absence of voices in spaces where they should exist and gaps that stem from inadequate funding around Disability Justice work in Africa as well as disunity within the movements. Only about 4% of the funds that UAF-Africa receives to support feminist activists is from donors who are focused on disability work. This in turn limits the reach on this particular area but also minimizes the efforts of the Feminist Republik around collective care and healing justice as financial resource is key to ensuring that care is at the core of Disability Justice especially during the pandemic. COVID-19 has made womn with disabilities more susceptible to mental breakdowns and other psychiatric and health related issues, some caused by isolation. WWDs continuously face challenges in participating in different fora leaving them to look for alternatives to care for themselves. In our pursuit of change, we need not forget that the people who are most affected should be at the center of conversations about change.

> *"In our pursuit of change, we need not forget that the people who are most affected should be at the center of conversations about change"*

COLLECTIVE COMMUNITY WITHIN MOVEMENTS

BY SHINAZ ALI

Disability Justice is hinged on collectiveness (collective access and collective care) as opposed to self-care. Without making the shift from care as sole responsibility to care as defined within Disability Justice, we cannot envisage healing for WWDs. This has become all the more apparent with the advent of COVID-19. We saw how the care of WWDs was left in the gutters, an individual responsibility rather than a collective responsibility.

To move from this to more unity in self and community, we must create a network of collective care where activists are able to share their experiences, learn from one another, and in time heal. Healing as we know is not a linear event; it takes on different forms, takes time, and it takes the community, holding space for ourselves and our communities. How do we form a community of care that recognizes the wholeness of individuals and appreciates whatever they bring to the table in terms of life experiences and lessons? This is the point where cross movement solidarity needs to come into play. Disability Justice calls for a united front.

We have the power within us to create a care web that includes every womn who is affected by the different forms of patriarchy, a structure that looks at WWDs not as womn who require charity but as partners in a solidarity that isn't inherently hierarchical.

In solidarity we need to identify sustainable resources for collective care both within the different disability movements and across. Collective care should not be a place of invalidating the experiences of others. Focusing on collective care doesn't not mean self-care is less important. It asks that we imagine a possible scenario where a WWD is asked to meditate or take time off to rest in a world that already separates her, as one that could further make her feel isolated as opposed to practicing healing, meditating, or taking time off in community which could be a less isolating experience.

In conclusion, there is an urgent need to get resources, both financial and technical, to a level that is conscious of the collective and is linked to Disability Justice. Beyond that, an understanding that allows for womn with disabilities to be able to define what wellness looks like for them as opposed to trying to fix what we assume is broken, is a necessary step forward. All bodies are defined by sexuality, religion, ability among other identifiers. It is my hope that more and more movements will begin to appreciate how linked and interconnected they are and not silo womn especially given the lessons we have learned from the pandemic.

WITHOUT COMMUNITY THERE IS NO LIBERATION - AUDRE LORDE

ABOUT THE COVER MODEL

PHOTO AND NARRATION BY NAMAFU AMUTSE

Agnes Hausiku who has worked with organizations such as the Namibian Association for Differently Abled Womn is currently studying social work and is employed at the Ministry of Mines and Energy in Windhoek as an administrative officer in the procurement department.

She is a firm advocate for disability rights and womn empowerment. Her dedication is evident in the work she does with the National Paralympic Committee on programs that focus on womn in sports leadership and with the Wheel-Ability sports club in Windhoek, where, amongst other activities, she plays basketball. Hausiku is also part of the Namibian Association for Wheelchair Users based in Windhoek, an organisation that champions the rights of wheelchair users, as well as Womn With Disabilities (WWDs).

"If places are not accessible, we cannot expect people with disabilities to participate in everyday activities—navigating school, shopping centers or their communities," Agnes Hausiku notes.

This idea fuels her advocacy for universal accessibility, which she believes would create opportunities for people with disabilities and advance their human rights. For her, a world where universal accessibility is envisioned and realized, is non-negotiable. She wants to see people with disabilities "flourish in environments where they are seen and recognized." She emphasizes that we better the community by fostering the agency and leadership of people with disabilities, as they contribute to the country's economy the same way non-disabled people do. Disability rights activism is an intersectional issue, Hausiku reflects.

"As a womn you are already disadvantaged. Now imagine being a womn with a disability. That's double the disadvantage." This injustice is what motivates Agnes Hausiku to inspire other womn with disabilities by iving her life to the best of her abilities, reaching out to build bridges or take up space and pportunities. The passion that drives her to inspire other womn with disabilities also makes her feel a sense of responsibility to give her work, activism, and everything she cares about her best without sacrificing recreation and self-care.

"The first person that empowered me was my grandmother," she says, "She was the first person to see me and invest in me." Hausiku is intentional about taking up space and being visible in the community because this visibilizes the agency and leadership of Womn With Disabilities and inspires many other womn.

> *"As a womn you are already disadvantaged. Now imagine being a womn with a disability. That's double the disadvantage."*

What Does a World Made for Us Ask of Us? (A Monologue)

by Liz Ombati

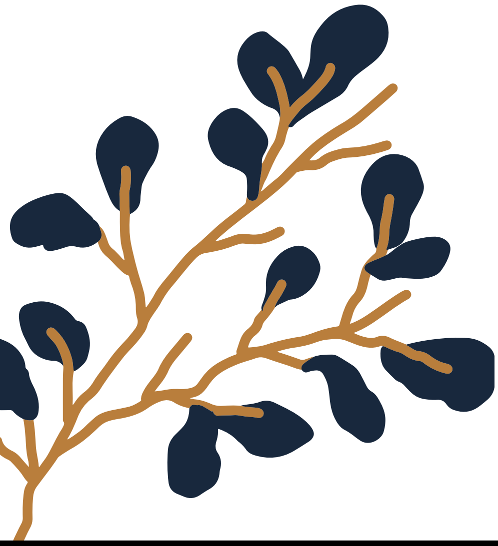
“The way I walk when I am here with you all, fellow activists with disabilities, I feel happy. I don’t feel judged.” Simphiwe, a womn with disability shares her experience navigating daily life with a packed room of fellow activists. She moves from one spot to another to demonstrate her ease and comfort to her comrades, adding, “Outside of this room, on the streets, in my workplace, in church… I have to put up with stares.”

It is not always clear to Simphiwe and her friends if these are stares of curiosity, stares of pity or a mix of both. But these are experiences the people present in the room have to deal with in their day to day lives. As womn with disabilities; gender non-conforming people with disabilities, LGBTI people with disabilities, they understand her. Here, within the safety of the community they have made, where they know that navigating the world as persons with disabilities does not make them less fun, competitive, desirable, complex, they can laugh about it. Not because being on the receiving end of unsolicited scrutiny is less intrusive or depersonalizing but because, in this room, they get to be free to be who they are.

Simphiwe and her fellow activists are not averse to being different. They are as diverse as diversity can be, and they stand out in their beauty, strength, hopes and dreams, anxieties and fears. But, navigating communities where they daily have to confront a society that does not understand this or isn't structured to include them, they learn to brace themselves daily for scrutiny, for public buildings and transportation services that are not inclusive, for micro-aggressions that come in the form of questions and side comments, or worse, for barefaced discrimination when they get turned down for jobs and aggression when their freedom, dignity and right to choose gets disregarded or taken for granted.
The way I walk, when I am here with you all, fellow activists with disabilities, I feel happy. I don't feel judged.

There is a word that describes their experiences. It is called ableism. In basic terms, ableism explains that there are people who look at persons with disabilities as inferior—less in worth and value. The ableist looks at a differently abled person and thinks: "Thank God I am not them." In this way, ableism takes away a little more empathy, and with it, the conceptualization of dignity and equal rights for everyone. It enables hate and discrimination. In an ableist society, an employer asks, "Why should I hire you? Will you be as productive as someone who is not like you?" And in that moment, the one with disability is dehumanized. This interaction is not just limited to the workplace. It is happening in educational institutions where persons with disabilities know all too well what it is like to be a statistic; one of many children with disabilities who are over represented among school going children that are not accessing quality education.

According to the World Health Organization*, having a disability doubles a child's chances of being out of school. Data shows that for much of the continent, less than 10 percent of children with disabilities are in primary school and only about 13 percent get any kind of education at all. Sometimes, the only options available for children with disabilities are schools too far away from home labelled as "special".



While people with disabilities are not averse to being different, the label “special” can often be a copout for a society that wants the easy way out. Instead of making schools accessible for learners with disabilitiies, society opts for “special” schools that alienate learners from their support systems and homes. Children with disabilities should not have to choose between getting an education and alienation from their families, friends, and communities. Guardians and caregivers with disabilities should not have to navigate educational systems that do not anticipate their needs.

The way I walk, when I am here with you all, fellow activists with disabilities, I feel happy. I don’t feel judged.

In this room, where Simphiwe shares her experience, the comrades are clear on the work that needs to be done and united in their commitment to advocating for a more inclusive world womn with disabilities, gender non-conforming folks, and transwomn can exist in their gender and disability diversities. They are a community. They embrace each other. They find their voices as they talk about their hopes and anxieties. Edna, one of the womn tells the group that ableism has defined her work life. Ableism is the reason why she did not apply for a job she desired. Ableism defined her experience as a student navigating the school system in her community.

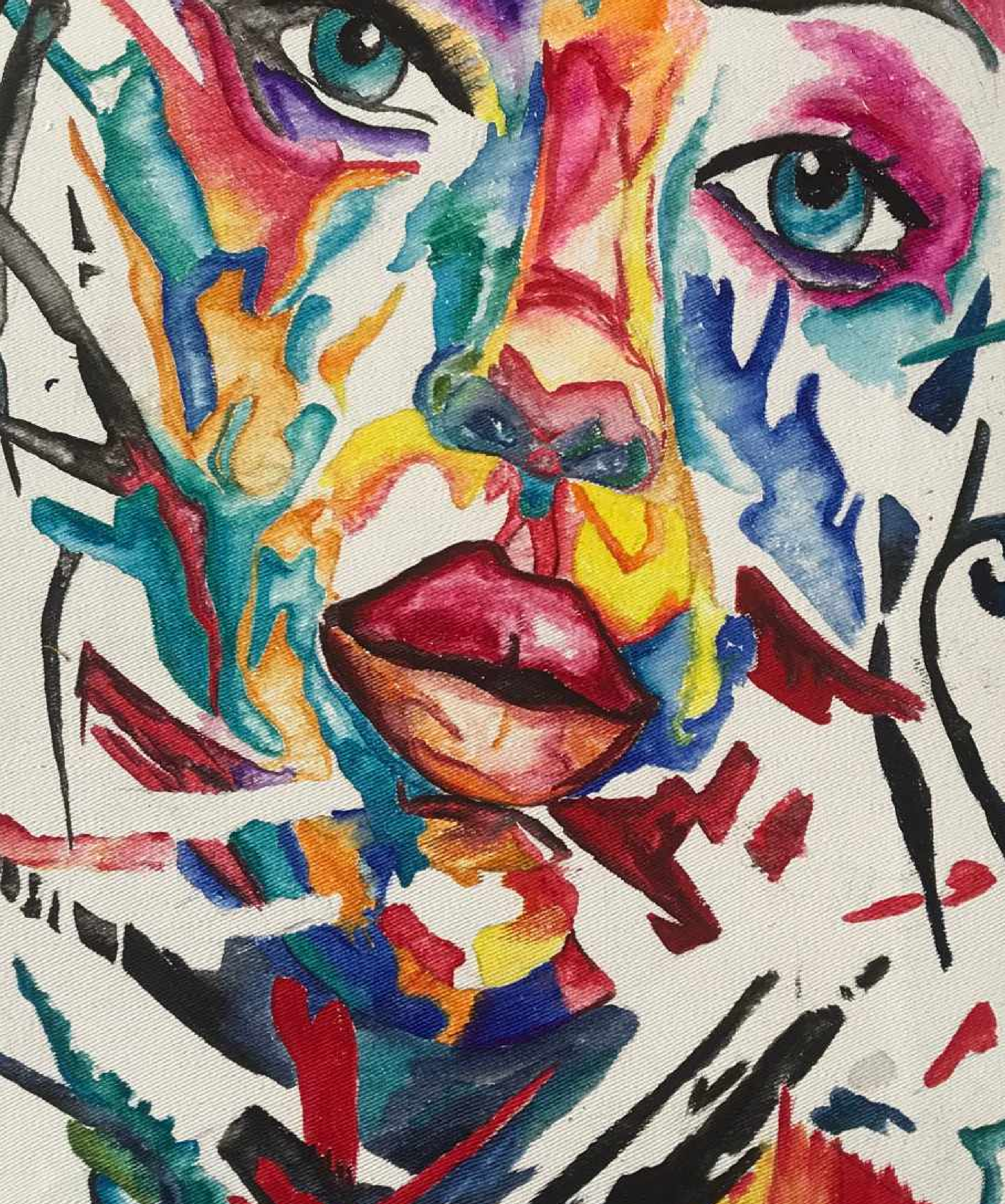
“You ask why I feel that I was discriminated against?” She asks. “Do you remember when we spoke about ableism? Do you remember when we said that ‘they’ did not make their society for us? They made it for themselves. They called themselves the ‘able bodied’. Can I laugh a little? They did not care. Remember they did not care to make education reachable for us. What that did to me, to us, it took away our opportunities at finding work. Then somehow, again, I became a statistic. We became part of research. [’Persons with disabilities are overrepresented among the unemployed. And when they are employed, a big percentage have to work lower cadre jobs’] ...do you remember how education was made inaccessible to us? Work and employment too?” When Njoki pauses her charged speech, the silence in the room is palpable.

A world. That is made for us. A world. Devoid of ableism. A world, where we can walk confidently and comfortably, outside a room of just activists with disabilities, and still feel unjudged. A world. Made For us.

Outside of their safe communities, what does the world that Simphiwe, Njoki, and their comrades envision look like? It is a world that sees them. Hears them. Includes them. It is a world that does not look at them with pity. It is a world that asks, “Our office is four floors up and has no lift, no ramp, who did we make the office for?” A world made for all asks, “Who is the child not in school, who is the person with disability—male, female, LGBTI, gender non-conforming—not accessing this decision-making table? Who is left out?”A world made for all asks all these questions and more. A world that envisions diversity starts addressing the injustice of its ableist systems. This world says, **out with ableism. And it starts now!**

The way I walk, when I am here with you all, fellow activists with disabilities, I feel happy. I don’t feel judged.

*Source: Their World



ALBINISM

Colors are a representation of social construction but my beauty withholds my strength in a world that is blind to my beauty.

I am here and I shall be seen and heard, my albinism is not a curse as portrayed even through history, I may seem to be without color but my face is white canvas for all the beauty in the world.

Miseda_Art

WOMN WITH DISABILITIES AND THE FEMINIST MOVEMENT – ACCESS FOR ALL

BY EKAETE UMOH

Over the years, mainstream womn's movements and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) have not effectively included Womn with Disabilities (WWDs) in their programming, both at the planning and implementation levels, as issues relating to WWDs are purely seen as disability issues and are pushed to the disability movement.

There is no denying the fact that the feminist movement is extremely diverse and rich. However, it is our approach to harnessing our diversities that will tell how strong and cohesive the feminist movement will be

The beauty of the feminist movement lies in creating safe spaces for liberal expression, while collectively pulling together our strength to challenge and disrupt inequality in all its ramifications.

Nevertheless, it is going to be an uphill task for the feminist movement to achieve this collective action of redefining our heritage, if some of her populations are deliberately—or through an act of omission—left behind. Feminist WWDs experience huge barriers and participation restriction when trying to mingle or get involved in the feminist movement or elsewhere because of an impairment they may have.

However, impairment in itself is not reason enough to restrict any womn's full, effective, and equal participation in the movement...

In our commitment to accountability and building a cohesive movement, it is necessary to ask ourselves the reparative question. For instance, where do the barriers lie? These barriers could manifest in the negative attitudes/ discrimination within the feminist movement toward sisters with impairments.

> *" Impairment in itself is not reason enough to restrict any womn's full, effective, and equal participation in the movement.."*

It could also be due to the insensitivity of the built environment which in this case could stop sisters who are wheelchair users from accessing gatherings. It could also be communication barriers both for the deaf and blind sisters. Or, as is sometimes the case, the disability insensitive design and implementation of operational polices and laws that speak to the feminist agenda, all of which can exclude WWDs from participating, because they are often treated as an afterthought or the forgotten sisters.

The continuous struggles for WWDs to gain visibility within the mainstream womn's or feminist movement and the continuous push-back they experience from the feminist movement has caused sisters with disabilities psychological harm which invariably has greatly impacted on their mental health and well-being. Sisters with disabilities are affected each time they are thrown out of spaces which is legally theirs, due to inaccessible environments, gaps in the policy formulations that promote womn empowerment and the general attitude of "You don't belong here", the lack of sign language interpreters for effective participate of deaf sisters, the lack of information/ feminist literature in accessible format (Braille) for blind sisters, and the general lack of awareness of the importance of "reasonable accommodation" and "effective participation".

Some sisters with disabilities have lost confidence in the movement due to exclusion suffered over time, while some have developed poor self-esteem in feminist gatherings, which is a huge loss to the feminist movement. To offer some insight into the extent of the harm our sisters face, womn and girls with disabilities suffer great invisibility not just within the feminist movement but also within the disability justice movement. They are up against patriarchal tendencies within the disability movement and cannot also find space within the feminist movement; a double jeopardy!

In 2014, I was elected the first female president of the Joint National Association of Persons with Disabilities in Nigeria and for over 20 years of the organization's existence, there had never been a female president. The association is a male dominated space with no visibility of WWDs either in their programming. When I expressed my interest to become the first female president of the association I met a lot of resistance from my male counterparts; the eight other candidates were men. The campaign came with a lot of bad media and a lot of gender stereotyping all in a bid to discourage me from contesting. I was also threatened to step down, but I forged ahead and was finally elected. I had on my side extensive knowledge of disability and development and I was outstanding in pushing for the rights of persons with disabilities.

In the end, even though they hated female leadership, they could not hate my knowledge and experience. It became more difficult for those who were resisting female leadership. I also had the support of donor agencies and other partners. I was able to surmount the challenges and deliver programmes and much needed changes for PWDs. But this is by no means what the big picture looks like at the moment for a majority of womn living with disabilities.

The movement needs to shift some focus towards deliberately supporting womn leadership. Womn with disabilities face more challenges and solidarity and strong systems are needed.

Globally, it has been observed that mainstream womn's movements have not been too sensitive to the issues of Womn With Disabilities, and this has amounted to leaving behind at least 20 percent of the world's population who are Womn and Girls with Disabilities (WGWDs). This is because WGWDs make up 20 – 22 percent of a given population. Which means that, for a particular country, whatever the population of womn is, 20 percent of that population are potentially WGWDs. Imagine the amount of loss for the feminist movement that excludes the voices of her 20 percent and imagine the great population loss in global mass mobilization on feminist issues. 20 percent is too huge a number to be ignored in any development agenda that speaks to feminist issues. It would be of great advantage if the feminist movement urgently courts and brings back the lost population of WGWDs.

As womn's movements, our focus is on fighting intersecting discriminations. If we are sincere in our advocacies, we should take our focus off the impairment that WWDs live with and focus on the barriers that worsen their experiences and exclude them.

An example of including WWDs in mainstream womn's movements would be how Urgent Action Fund-Africa has ensured the inclusion of WWDs in their programming. In 2019, when I was invited to launch of the Feminist Republik Platform, I had indicated that I would require a wheelchair and UAF-Africa provided a new wheelchair for me. That was a basic provision for disability-inclusion and it addressed a barrier that could have prevented me from participating adequately.

Also, I have been invited to join the board of UAF-Africa to represent the interests of WWDs, so I currently sit on the board to provide strategic directions for the inclusion of disability components in their work. This is a step that other womn's movements can replicate. We are womn first, before our disability, as such, we should be included in activities and interventions designed by mainstream womn's movements.

Consult and bring to the table WWDs during the design, planning, implementation, and evaluation of projects. Seek expert advice on disability inclusion in all your programs, develop and use the disability checklist in your projects/activities, and finally while putting on the feminist hat, it is very important that you wear the "disability lens" too, so that no sister is left behind.

Furthermore, I'd like to emphasis here that access to the feminist space for Womn With Disabilities is beyond physical access. We want to be visible in the feminist discourse across all thematic areas; we want to contribute to disrupting inequality and changing the narratives! Sisters with or without disabilities need one another. We need to draw from our collective strength to push for an inclusive feminist movement which is safe for all.

Let's now embrace a feminist perspective on disability that is committed to pulling down barriers and creating equitable spaces that accommodate all kinds of diversities.

RADICAL HEALING AND CARE AS TOOLS FOR DISMANTLING ABLEIST NORMS

BY THATHO MPHUTHI

In times of rapid evolution and previously unimaginable changes, life has become a lot more challenging—more so if you are a person living with a disability. Human rights violations have soared in South Africa at our homes, in our schools, and in other spheres of society. Our immediate communities only have a few known voices that advocate for people with disabilities. The deficit is emphasized when we juxtapose this number with those who advocate for people who are non-disabled..

The need for activists and advocates who represent the community of persons living with disabilities has never been greater. This realisation, coupled with the many challenges I have faced and my moments of awakening, have led to the founding of Enabled Enlightenment.
Some context for how the name came to be. I had never been fond of the term 'disabled'. I found it suggestive of an attitude and way of treatment that disempowers a certain group of people in society. Navigating my own community of Chiawelo, Soweto, in Johannesburg, the term managed to become how people described my condition. I was diagnosed with tuberculosis on my right hip when I was a child and later admitted for a biopsy surgery. For many years I have been mobilising and in that time, I have seen all kinds of prejudices and injustices pertaining to inclusivity for persons with various disabilities. I learned to rise above it all. My experience taught me resilience and drove my course against the grain. This is the spirit Enabled Enlightenment embodies in – dismantling the norms that perpetuate ableism.

Through the organisation, my vision is to show that people who live with disabilities are more than that one thing they are unable to do. Enabled Enlightenment's mandate is to awaken others to the abilities of the so-called 'disabled' to showcase to the world their many great capabilities. We need to raise our voices and speak up against the injustices and prejudices that are suffered by persons with disabilities. A good part of my work with Enabled Enlightenment is focused on children. I believe that teaching children about their rights and the rights of others, could phase out discrimination in the near future if this education starts early enough. This is what makes me more passionate. I think it is essential that we educate children about their responsibilities in a world that they share with others. Teaching them body positivity guides assisting them towards a rounded growth and an objective view of the world, irrespective of their backgrounds and experiences.

Within the Enabled Enlightenment program, children are taught to be expressive and use their voices. Children are given a space where they are able to express themselves even when it makes some adults uncomfortable. They are given a space to show care and are educated about their reactions and the effect it can potentially have on their relationships with the people they encounter in a world where people are diverse and differently abled. If people are introduced to this training from an early age, they will grow up understanding that they must prioritize holistic care as a pathway to wellbeing.

Children with disabilities are entitled to this awakening, knowing that they are fully entitled to a space of comfort, relaxation and wholesome healing and care. It is unfortunate that there aren't many exhaustive archives and documentation of the methodologies of healing and self-care, particularly those that have been used by Africans for generations. This has caused us to always rely on Western methodologies, but I believe self-care is something that began with our mothers, and their mothers before them, though it may not have necessarily been called self-care.

What is crucial for us now is to dig up these ancient methodologies and document them. To teach healing to ourselves and others in a way that uses our context. In the same breath, the documentation and advocacy for the rights, abilities, and needs of persons with disabilities need to be brought to light. The time is now, more than ever, to begin dismantling retrogressive norms.

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> *"As a community, and as organizations and stakeholders who are supporting womn's rights movements and empowerment, there is an urgent need to come up with different long-lasting solutions on collective care for our womn and girls at the grassroots level "*

MENTAL HEALTH FOR WOMN AT THE GRASSROOTS LEVELS

BY AMISA RASHID

There is still so much work to be done in creating mental health awareness but, more than that, there is work to be done to ensure that the gains are sustainable when it comes to young womn, girls, and their mental health. My work as a counseling psychologist with Nivishe Foundation, an organization which focuses on building community resilience using mental health and trauma informed programs to drive social cohesion for marginalized communities and informal settlements, has made this clear.

Part of our effort to ensure that we are building communities and societies that prioritize the mental well-being of its individuals is having weekly radio talk shows on matters pertaining to mental health and other societal issues. We work through community radios, using the local community language, to ensure that the information is shared effectively and that there is easy engagement with the listeners.

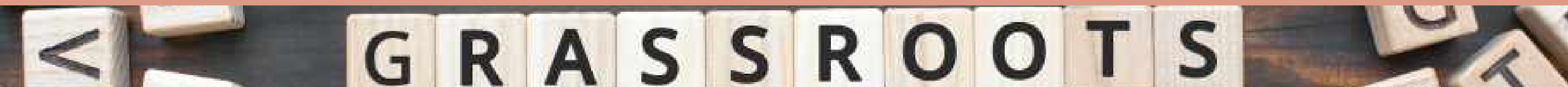
TIn one of our radio programs early this year, we talked about self-care through the lens of mental health, and the demystification of self-care. For so long, self-care has been known to be for a certain caliber and class of people since it is presumed to be too expensive for womn in low-income areas to afford it. One of our listeners called and asked a very reflective question. She wanted to know how one can take care of herself when she has been constantly struggling with one traumatic experience after another. She also mentioned that she knows of womn who have gone through gender-based violence, sexual harassments, family breakdowns, and other acts of harm and abuse, who are wondering how acts of self-care can erase the years of trauma that they have endured.

This was a moment of reflection for me, and as I was empathizing with her and giving her my insights and perspectives based on my background and knowledge, I was brainstorming on how we could come up with collective self-care movements for our communities at the grassroot level that would actually lead to empowerment and that womn in these communities would take up the initiative of owning the movement and progressing with it. Also, how can there be enough resource mobilization from different womn's rights organizations to ensure that such programs are sustainable and would not discontinue due to lack of funding or resources?

Through my work in Kibra and when engaging with womn and girls from other informal settlements and rural areas, I have observed a trend where retreats as a form of self-care are organized for womn working in those communities. It is my belief that more of such retreats should be created since these womn deserve it and so much more. My worry is that there is an unequal distribution of such opportunities. Year in year out, only a specific group of womn with access will go to these self-care retreats, which makes it hard not to think about the womn and girls who are in dire need of mental health support, who are battling burnouts, or who are on the brink of drowning in mental health crises and are not in positions to access these services because of the unequal distribution of resources and opportunities.

My other worry when it comes to self-care and collective care at the grassroots level is that there seems to be only one devised way of self-care which is retreat. As a community, and as organizations and stakeholders who are supporting womn's rights movements and empowerment, there is an urgent need to come up with different long-lasting solutions on collective care for our womn and girls at the grassroots level. One way to do this is by supporting local initiatives and organizations that are working in the same line, which will lead to collective healing at the end of the day. Additionally, womn with disabilities are often forgotten in such initiatives, including their caregivers. One cannot give from an empty cup.
What if the self-care or collective care movements are also designed to support the caregivers of womn with disabilities?More womn will support each other since their cups will be overflowing, which will result in tackling disability injustice as well as bring about the much-desired sisterhood that we are all working towards.

It is documented that there is a link between mental illness and womn going through psychological stressors like economic hardships, loss and death of loved ones, infant mortality, emotional deprivation, overworking, underpayment, sexual and reproductive violence. My challenge to all womn's rights stakeholders is, "What role you are going to play in ensuring that as much as we are focusing on womn's rights and empowerment, we are also ensuring that their mental well-being is taken care of?"



‘DISABLED’ WOMN
BY ELIZABETH NAMWANDI

‘Disabled’ Womn
By Elizabeth Namwandi

Now is the time
for womn with disabilities.
Now is our time to shine.

We were violated, forsaken,
and nobody cares about us!
We were discriminated,
and left behind.

Deaf womn have no voice to shout,
the visually impaired cannot see
the physically disabled suffers limitations,
persons living with albinism are made strangers.

Gender-based violence sought to weigh us down,
human rights were taken away from us,
our freedom of speech was abused.

Unemployment hunts us day by day,
and we have become victims of poverty.
Bad names have become our daily bread.
None would accept our disabilities,
that is why we are marginalized today.

HOW DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMN WITH DISABILITIES IN SPORTS HURTS US ALL

by Palesa Manaleng

“What’s wrong with your helmet?” I look up and find an elderly man who must have been cycling up the hill behind me.
“Aargh, I just need a new one,” I say as I touch the helmet held together by tape.

I also need a new handcycle and funding to go represent South Africa at the upcoming World Championships, but I don’t mention this to him.

Being a para-athlete in South Africa is like being in an abusive relationship. You just keep going back to that lover no matter how many times she knocks you down. And we do this because sports is our freedom, our passion, and we excel at it.

I've been selected to represent the country at three international competitions, one of which is a World Championship but it’s self-funded. I wake up every morning and plan my training schedule while hoping someone will respond to my emails regarding funding.

“Steady, steady, come on girl, don’t give up on me,” I whisper to Miss Billie Holiday, my handcycle, during training sessions.

She’s old and outdated but we don’t manufacture para-cycling equipment in SA which also means we can’t develop the sport in townships or rural areas. A brand new handcycle without spare parts costs about R86 000 (about $6,000), which means a lot of children are excluded from the sport.

If a family has to choose between food, shelter, taking care of medical needs, and buying a handcycle so that a child can take up sports, the choice is quite obvious.

I’ve had Miss Billie Holiday since 2015 thanks to a sponsor and we have taken part in numerous competitions including cycling from Pretoria to Cape Town over the course of ten days.

Over the years, my international ranking has gone from 8th in the world to, currently, 22nd, because I struggle to show up for international competitions. One would think that performance would equal commercial value for a sponsor, but it doesn’t seem to be that way for para-athletes.

South Africa’s wheelchair tennis ace represented the country for years at an international level without sponsorship but with the help of the national federation, Tennis South Africa. When the tennis federation could no longer assist her with going to competitions, Montjane had to figure out how to get to the competitions on her own. And she couldn’t pay her coach any longer, but he continued to train her. It was in 2018, when she was given a wild card to Wimbledon, took what little money she had and went to compete on her own at the competition that South Africa paid attention to her

cont'd...

She was at Wimbledon without a coach because she couldn't afford to take him along. Montjane was the first African womn, non-disabled or disabled to compete at Wimbledon, and she had no support.

In fact, she was already on her heading back from the competition before people started paying attention to her and the media started giving her continuous coverage. President Cyril Ramaphaosa tweeted about her even though she had received no financial assistance from the Ministry of Sports, despite being a top athlete.

The outcry following her return and a series of press tours resulted in the CEO of a South African marketing agency, Optimize, taking Montjane under her wings. Thus, helping to secure sponsorships from ten companies including Nike, Discovery, and an equipment sponsorship from Macsteel.

I have always put in 100% effort in my game. I train hard and practice hard, the only differentiating factor has been my wheelchair. My opponents have always managed to turn quicker and get around the court faster," said the athlete as she received her brand-new tennis chair.

Should top para-athletes have to wait until they make history before they get the recognition they deserve? Should they have to rely on that one history-making moment to escape discrimination in sports?

Para-athletes put the same amount of effort into their sports and excel with little or no help. Yet, it would seem that that's not enough for them to secure the bag and live off their talents.

Acknowledging Generational Trauma and Celebrating Generational Resilience and the Healing Power of Indigenous Knowledge

BY BEAUTY BOOIS

Erasing the histories, cultures, traditions, and even languages of Queer and Heterosexual Black African People (QHBAP) robs us of our heritage and further disenfranchises us as a people. Systems like colonialization, apartheid, and patriarchy were created in such a way that its legacy still weighs down heavily on marginalized people. This disenfranchisement occurs in various ways: some are overtly oppressive and discriminatory and others are structural through laws and policies. Then there's the type of disenfranchisement that takes hold of the mental, emotional, psychological, and spiritual lives of a people.

This mental colonization reflected through internalized sexism, racism, ableism, and homophobia is evident in what marginalized people think or believe about themselves, based on our indoctrination into the oppressive systems that we exist in. Mental colonization enslaves our thoughts, attitudes, values, and beliefs about ourselves and other people who are just as marginalized as we are. This shows up in our relationship with human rights. We are less inclined to think of our rights to equality as womn, as gender non-comforming people, as transwomn, and as people with disabilities, if we do not even understand that we are living within oppressive or unjust systems that make us accept some people as more deserving of a full and complex humanity.

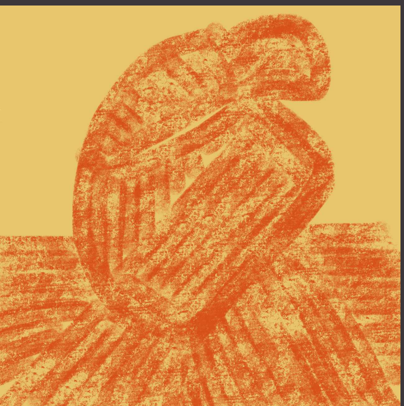
The tools of mental colonization can be found everywhere—in our education syllabus, in our history books, in the media, in literature. These tools feed us with certain narratives that are meant to keep us mentally enslaved. For example, when we look at the media, there tends to be hyper focus on the queer experience as trauma-porn with countless images and stories about the trauma experienced by Queer and Heterosexual Black African People. That, in addition to the systematic stereotyping of QHBAP, compounds these negative self-images, low self-esteem, lack of confidence, and possibly even self-hatred.

While it is important to acknowledge the traumatic events that QHBAP experience within oppressive systems and structures, equal focus should be given to highlighting the resilience, bravery, ability to flourish, uplifting philosophies, and self-care and healing methods that QHBAP practice. Specifically, how these stories inspire us all and enrich our experience. There is a lot that we can learn from the experiences of QHBAP and adopt in our communities. Imagine living in a world that shares images, text, messages, histories, and information about the beauty and triumph of QHBAPs.

In his renowned book, I Write What I Like, Steve Biko writes extensively about the power of Black Consciousness and makes statements such as, “The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed.”

When people who have been oppressed turn their attention toward their potential for greatness, their ability to survive and thrive even in the face of trauma, the realization of their humanity, their empathy, their ability to live harmoniously with nature and the strength of their Ancestors, they take back control of their minds and their lives through self-awareness and personal empowerment. There is an abundance of healing that can be found in remembering the greatness of those who came before us and those who live amongst us presently. When we tell their stories, when we speak of their hope and determination and celebrate their achievements and strides towards obtaining social justice, we begin the process of unearthing the greatness, the resilience, the bravery, and strength within ourselves.

Indigenous Knowledge or as social critic Minna Salami refers to it in her book, Sensuous Knowledge, “knowledge that infuses the mind and body with aliveness, leaving its impact behind like the wake of perfume” is regenerative. This system of codifying is grounded in the traditions and cultural practices of communities. It is through Indigenous Knowledge that African people know the healing power of dance, the importance of oral history through storytelling, the symbolic power of totems, the importance of art and creative expression, and the imperative role that nature plays in our lives and overall well-being. Indigenous Knowledge cultivates our reliance, our bravery, our strength, and our potential. It is healing, it is restorative, it is balanced, it is harmonious, it is mentally, emotionally, and spiritually empowering. It connects us to our rich roots and instills a sense of pride in who we are and where we come from. It acknowledges that our ancestors have offered a road map to freedom and healing for us and for future generations to come.



ARRIVING AT THE COMMON GROUND OF HEALING

BY MELISSA WAINAINA
THE FEMINIST REPUBLIK PLATFORM

We are well into 2021, more than a year into the pandemic, dealing with COVID-19 and the complications it has brought into our lives. It is hard to miss the different layers of oppression and how society has dealt with its most vulnerable.

The discrimination at the intersection between gender and disability has never been more evident, but the issues that affect the lives of womn, transgender, and gender non-conforming people with disabilities predate the pandemic which has only served to worsen it. The economic crisis, social isolation, physical distancing, and other stay-at-home orders caused by the coronavirus outbreak have merely increased the gaps that already exist. More people living with disabilities face poverty, no or inadequate housing, work deprivation, and criminalization.

Disability justice advocates have been sharing how widespread disability stigma, ableism, inequality, and discrimination are for years. It is deeply entrenched within our institutions and structures. Worse, it shows up and intersects with other intolerant, sexist, and exploitative systems

We need to address the unjust legacy of discrimination against people with disabilities. This is a window of opportunity to make our approach people-centered and challenge the discriminative policies, practices, and systemic violations of the rights of people with disabilities.

ARRIVING AT THE COMMON GROUND OF HEALING CONT'D...

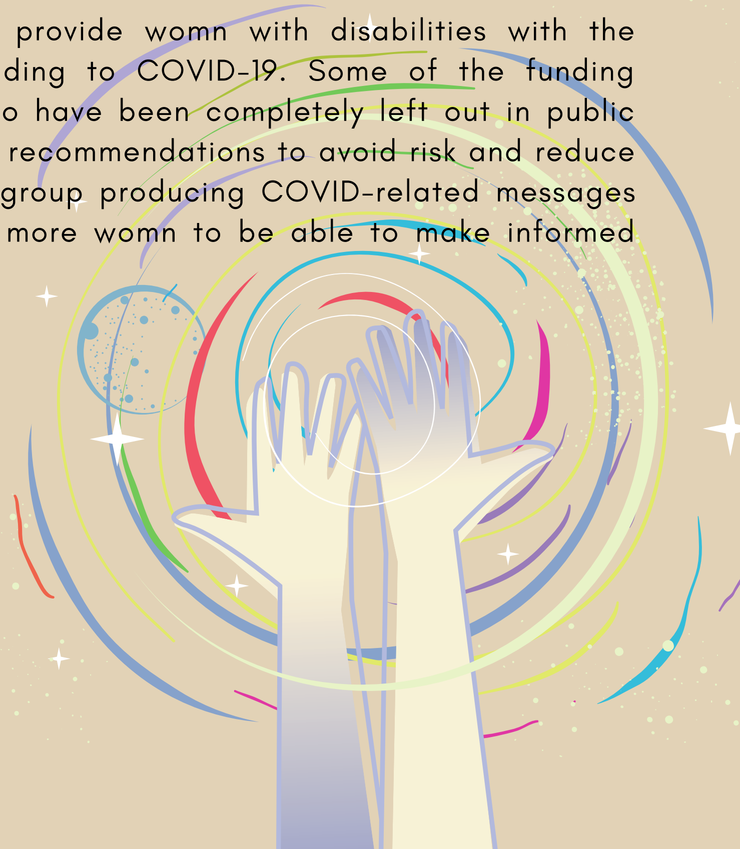
The Feminist Republik began its operations at the height of the pandemic in 2020. We endeavored to make improvements to ensure more inclusion, more access, and more participation in all our interventions. As the world ground to a halt, we found innovative ways to connect virtually through Ubuntu Healing Gatherings. These gatherings introduced a sense of flexibility and creativity that allowed us to be in community with each other. Our sessions were designed to have different translation options available, including Sign language and closed captioning where it was possible. We are increasingly growing our skills and resources to expand convenings and communication channels that are awake to all our needs.

Steered by the leadership and insights of womn disability rights activist members, the Platform is continuing on the path of its creative work to explore how to root radical self and collective care in our individual lives and our movements. The contributions and co-creations ranging from spoken word, blog articles, and visual art from disability rights activists, feminists, artists, facilitators, teachers, and creatives in all of our events and publications have been powerful and rich. They have made it possible to bring together the full and multi-dimensional experiences of feminists and activists to think, learn, and share more about Pan-African perspectives of healing justice. As we navigate the new possibilities emerging, we are intensifying our support towards efforts that fight for political, social, and economic justice, particularly for womn human rights groups that are often excluded. This is one avenue where we are nurturing cultures of care within and across our movements.

It is no different with the UAF-Africa Fund across all its grant call applications. We offer solidarity and support to womn, transgender, and non-binary people with disability. We are working with disability rights activists to support urgent action and situations whilst tending to their need for health, wellness, safety, and healing.

In 2020 at the height of the COVID-19 crisis, UAF-Africa supported over 25 womn with disability rights groups in Cameroon, Burundi, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Nigeria, Tanzania, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Senegal, and Rwanda with flexible, rapid response grants totaling $ 154,000.

Much of the critical work supported efforts to provide womn with disabilities with the necessary information on protection and responding to COVID-19. Some of the funding provided adequate information to deaf womn who have been completely left out in public health messaging to get essential information and recommendations to avoid risk and reduce spread. Other resources were able to support a group producing COVID-related messages into braille and visual aids to extend access for more womn to be able to make informed decisions as they fight the pandemic.



ARRIVING AT THE COMMON GROUND OF HEALING CONTD..

Other than the pandemic, funds also supported young womn with disabilities keen on entering politics and running for office. Womn in elective and decision-making processes are still more an exception than the norm, even more so for womn with disabilities. For no one to be left behind, it is vital to change the status quo that sees womn with disabilities under-represented in all decision-making levels. It is making contributions of this nature that adds up to transformative change. There are so many ways African defenders with disabilities are challenging inequalities in ableist structures and systems. Urgent Action Fund-Africa remains committed to supporting the urgent efforts to advance equity and inclusion.

To see this pledge through, in 2021, UAF-Africa launched a call for grant applications centering disability justice for African womn in a global pandemic.
You may find the link for the grant application here:(https://www.uaf-africa.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/2021_COVID-19-disability-Justice.docx)

It provides ways to address economic justice issues such as unpaid care work, shrinking or loss of livelihoods, demanding a post-COVID-19 economic recovery programme that includes issues womn with disabilities face, and so on. It also welcomes proposals seeking to promote sexual and reproductive health and rights and bodily autonomy for womn with disabilities, be it advocacy campaigns or awareness-raising activities to provide comprehensive and adequate services.

Knowledge is a powerful political tool to help share lived experiences and consolidate evidence to push for change. This funding provision also supports proposals to document the impact COVID-19 has on womn with disabilities to enhance advocacy and visibility efforts.
Finally, this grant call is intentional in ensuring it supports efforts to promote self and collective care especially for those in fragile and conflict areas in Africa.

> **We need to address the unjust legacy of discrimination against people with disabilities.**

“BUILDING TOWARDS DISABILITY-INCLUSIVE AND GENDER-SENSITIVE LEGAL, POLICY, AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS WHICH DELIVER JUSTICE FOR WOMN AND GIRLS WITH DISABILITIES IN ZIMBABWE” – THE JOURNEY SO FAR”- BY ICODZIM

Ensuring disability inclusion is a mammoth task that needs the collaboration and commitment of all stakeholders if we are to attain the goal of effective participation and inclusion of people with disabilities in all spheres of social, civil, economic, political, and cultural life as envisaged in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).

It is quite unfortunate that in Zimbabwe the full domestication of the UNCRPD continues to fall through the cracks of developmental interventions. Institute for Community Development in Zimbabwe (ICODZIM), is a womn-led organization, which is advancing the rights of womn with disabilities across political, social, and economic divides. Since its formation in 2015, ICODZIM continues to take on the task of addressing the marginalization of Womn with Disabilities (WWDs) at the same time upholding the recognition of disability rights by duty bearers and society at large.

Part of this commitment seeks to advance an enabling legal, policy, and institutional framework for the realization and enjoyment of rights by persons with disabilities in Zimbabwe. ICODZIM believes that the time is opportune for Zimbabwe to fully embrace a human rights-based approach to disability. As ICODZIM, we hail the UNCRPD as a great landmark in the struggle to reframe the needs and concerns of People with Disabilities (PWDs) with regards to their rights. It embodies a paradigm shift from a social welfare response to disability to a human rights-based approach.
Thus, it is imperative for Zimbabwe to fully domesticate the UNCRPD in line with the 2030 Agenda of leaving no one behind.

“BUILDING TOWARDS DISABILITY-INCLUSIVE AND GENDER-SENSITIVE LEGAL, POLICY, AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS WHICH DELIVER JUSTICE FOR WOMN AND GIRLS WITH DISABILITIES IN ZIMBABWE - THE JOURNEY SO FAR”- BY ICODZIM

In this article, ICODZIM is sharing some milestones achieved so far in advancing disability inclusive and gender sensitive legal, policy, and institutional frameworks which delivers justice for WWDs. In 2019, ICODZIM petitioned the Parliament of Zimbabwe, calling for the domestication of the UNCPRD. This was after realising the lack of an enabling legal and institutional framework to support the provisions set in the UNCRPD. Resultantly, the thematic committee on human rights has adopted the recommendations proffered and called for urgent domestication of the UNCRPD in Zimbabwe. It was also recommended that the country should craft a new national policy on disability that assumes the human rights approach. This action has qualified ICODZIM to be a member of the thematic working group for the domestication of UNCPRD; an opportunity to continuously lobby and advocate for the full domestication of the UNCRPD. One of the chief reasons for the missing disability perspective in constitutional reforms identified by ICODZIM was lack of participation and meaningful involvement of WWDs in constitution making processes owing to lack of information in disability-accessible formats as well as limited understanding of the constitutional processes.

This has been contributing to the exclusion of WWDs in various constitution amendment processes conducted in Zimbabwe. With support from UAF-Africa, ICOZIM is set to redress this challenge during the Constitutional Amendment Bill 2 process through dissemination of disability accessible information on Bill 2 and mobilisation of WWDs to effectively participate and amplify their voices during the process. This has not only yielded improved participation of WWDs in the constitutional process at all levels but ensured increased appreciation and understanding of disability and gender issues by policy makers and duty bearers especially parliamentarians. Hansard tracking of parliamentary debates by ICODZIM has confirmed growing interest in pushing disability issues by parliamentarians who have been reached.

Realization of rights involves costs, making the work of the organization closely linked to the national budget processes. In 2020, ICODZIM developed the Disability Ten Point Plan priority paper for the 2021 national budget which has resulted in a 4.9% upward shift in the allocation for health and introduction of a standalone budget line to support PWDs. In order to ensure that the 2021 budget translates to service delivery, the organization has introduced the Fiscal Robot Model; a framework currently used to track the implementation of the disability priorities considered in the 2021 national budget. WWDs have been hardest hit during COVID-19 hence the need to prioritise them in resource allocation for a sustainable recovery from COVID-19. Globally, access to justice by WWDs, especially survivors of Gender Based Violence (GBV), have become the order of the day; benchmark and best practice for disability inclusion. Due to this fact, ICODZIM has conducted the first ever national disability rights moot competition with university law schools in Zimbabwe. The competition aimed at advancing access to SRH justice for WWDs and creating an enabling legal environment which guarantees realization of rights by WWDs. In our view, the initiative is contributing to addressing the inequalities that exist in our society. This is also calling for collective action between government, development partners, civil society, and communities at large to turn around the situation. As ICODZIM we say disability is a universal human experience. It should be mainstreamed in all political and socio-economic development processes.

Seeding Community Consciousness, Healing, and Transformation: The Feminist Republik Healing Farm

By Feminist Republik – Staff committee update

The Feminist Republik Platform has been exploring what support systems African Womn Human Rights Defenders (AWHRDs) need to foster holistic security, safety, well-being, and collective care within their lives, organizations, movements, and formations.

With this in mind, we have worked to establish a Healing Farm as a legacy project. Our vision is to have a concrete expression of the Platform's dream to offer AWHRDs a physical space to heal, connect with our bodies in all their forms and realities, with each other, and rejuvenate our depleting energies.

We are pleased to inform you that this desire started to shape up as we concluded the procurement of a parcel of land to host our vision in the Eastern part of Kenya in January 2021! The journey that led us here was long but rewarding, comprising the involvement and stewardship of independent experts and AWHRDs. They played a critical role in selecting the most suitable piece of land for this grand project. We at the Platform uphold the principle of shared leadership. This is reflected in our collaborative work with AWHRDs as well as the methods we adopt in all the work we do. We consistently find ways to ensure that AWHRDs are at the forefront in shaping and articulating the kind of support they need to centre self and collective healing in organizing and movement building.

The land amounting to 13.6 acres is located in Muselele, Kitui county in Kenya. In early March 2021, representatives of the staff Healing Farm committee and Board members at UAF-Africa had the opportunity to visit the parcel of land. They were quite fortunate to connect with the previous owners who took the team through the land's history. These stories are nuggets of history we hope to put together as we share our journey.

We trust that the Healing Farm offers a pathway for AWHRDs to find harmony with the earth. This one-of-a-kind Healing Farm will be a space where we are in touch with the sky, water, and earth, integrating this with our bodies, minds, and spirits as a community. We consider the Healing Farm a living and breathing being seeding our consciousness once again with rhythms of nature that regenerate and nurture us.

Healing Farm update cont'd

> "We trust that the Healing Farm offers a pathway for AWHRDs to find harmony with the earth. This one-of-a-kind Healing Farm will be a space where we are in touch with the sky, water, and earth, integrating this with our bodies, minds, and spirits as a community".

This legacy project aspires to ignite a culture of care and offers possibilities of an Afrocentric experiential encounter rooted in radical care and feminist response to our time's socio-economic, political, and ecological challenges.

Our biggest shared adversary is isolation, as it prevents us from collectively experiencing justice, freedom, joy, and happiness. We hope we can find the common ground necessary to place the utmost importance in radical care, healing, health, and well-being for one and all. Our hope is that the Healing Farm does this and more.

The successful manifestation of this work is only possible if it is co-created. We would love to hear from you on your dreams and visions of what this space could do to support AWHRDs' journeys on self and collective care. Please share your suggestions and ideas. We value them all!

Drop an email to feministrepublik@uaf-africa.org and place this in the subject line: Our Vision for the Feminist Republik Healing Farm!

PHOTOS FROM THE HEALING FARM

MENTAL HEALTH RESILIENCE THROUGH COVID-19 - BY TARIRO TANDI

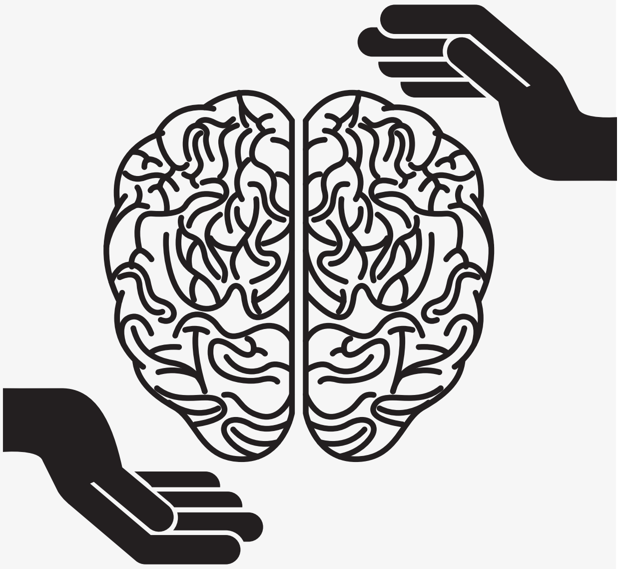
COVID-19 has intrinsically changed the world order and our lives. Due to how the pandemic has directly and indirectly impacted the lives of people, many are struggling with loneliness, anxiety, and depression during this period of uncertainty. One thing is sure though, COVID-19 has forced all of us in one way or the other to pay attention to issues of mental health.

The pandemic has taken a toll on the mental health of many individuals who thought they lived full, healthy, and successful lives. Many have been challenged in their thinking and prior dismissal of mental health disorders as a western concept. They are now beginning to realize that anyone can be affected by mental health disability permanently or temporarily, anytime. No one is immune. Mental health has been elevated into an important issue.

Undeniably, a myriad of people are currently being impacted by COVID-19 in unprecedented ways, but people who already, in addition to the pandemic, struggle with depression, anxiety, and other mental health disabilities are facing a double jeopardy.

Before the pandemic, many who were suffering from mental health conditions were not necessarily afforded the support and care they needed. It was a misunderstood disability that resulted in many being marginalized and isolated in their suffering. The pandemic has had such a detrimental impact on their mental health, yet, there is not much recognition of how people with mental health disabilities are struggling more than everyone else. Now more than ever, it is clear that we need to elevate conversations on mental health to talk about mental health disability.

A number of the public conversations happening around mental health now can trace their origins to the advent of the pandemic. The nature of COVID-19 was such that everyone resorted to social media. Collectively, COVID-19 led us to feel intense shock, confusion, and fear all at the same time. People found themselves overwhelmed which resulted in mass traumatic stress. This has proven to be a gift and a pain all at once.



People found themselves overwhelmed which resulted in mass traumatic stress. This has proven to be a gift and a pain all at once. More people speaking up about their mental health on social media, sharing their feelings and coping mechanisms, has really gone a long way in reducing the stigma around mental health, bringing a general acceptability around mental health disability and recognition that this is a real issue that requires attention. As people are getting more comfortable with disclosing and discussing mental health issues, they are tending to worry less about the stigma and embarrassment attached to it.

In turn, this has opened up channels to talk about mental health as a justice issue that needs to be addressed. In workplaces where mental health was a taboo topic, more and more institutions are feeling compelled to address mental health and wellbeing for their employees so that they are fully supported. Funders alike have found themselves supporting components that address mental health for their grantee partners to ensure that they are supported as they navigate COVID-19.

MENTAL HEALTH RESILIENCE THROUGH COVID-19 CONT'D

There is, however, a potential which will not be fully utilized if conversations remain focused on how COVID-19 has impacted on mental health. One way to shift focus to this potential would be to create spaces where those that already have mental health disabilities can share their coping strategies and resilient tactics. Meaningful progress would require consultation with mental health disability activists so that the lessons that have been learnt over the years are taken into consideration. It will be a lost opportunity if the world isolates this as a moment triggered by the pandemic and is not going to embrace mental health disability as a justice issue going forward.

In this view, the Feminist Republik Platform, like many other institutions and individuals, has been working with mental health disability advocates to publicly champion self-care and collective care strategies. These strategies are helping many build mental and physical resilience for collectives as well as individuals.

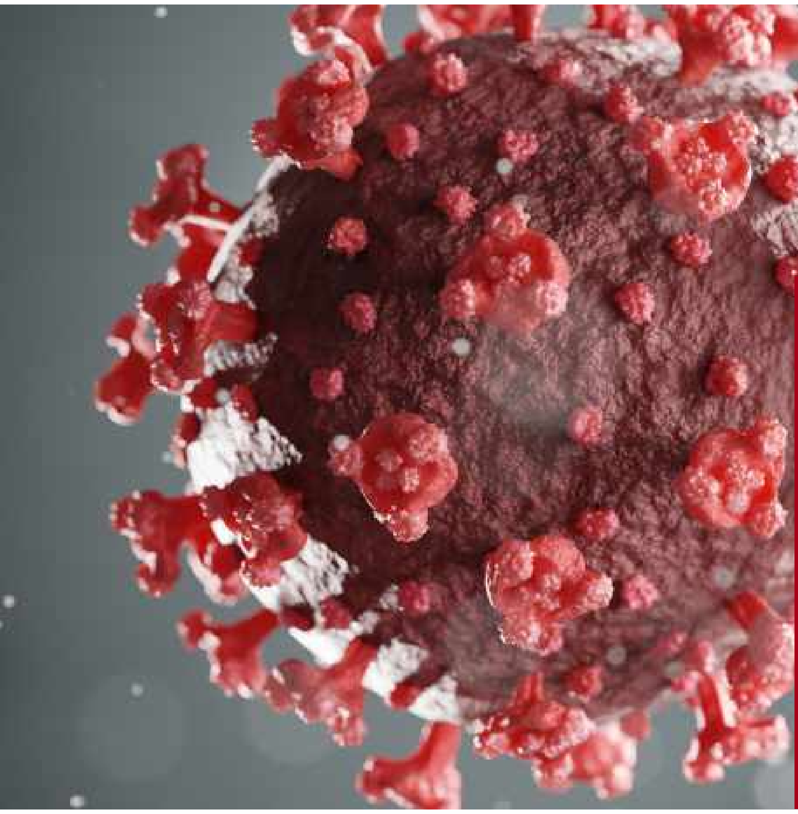
There is widespread encouragement to be mindful about the body and the mind and persuasion to connect with others, be they activists who share the same vision, families, and communities at large for the benefit of our mental health.

The pandemic has afforded us an opportunity to appreciate and understand fully mental health both as a disability and a condition that anyone can be affected by. It is hoped that post COVID-19, this level of acceptability will change the narrative around mental health disability and lead to transformative changes that see mental health disability as a justice issue. Funders alike are encouraged to look at mental health disability not as a result of COVID-19 but as a justice issue that needs recognition and support.


Photos are a form of healing for me

LESSONS AND NUGGETS OF WISDOM DURING COVID-19

By Easter Okech



The lack of investment in quality SRHR services has greatly affected access to rights for womn and girls during the COVID-19 period.

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the inequalities womn and girls from disadvantaged communities and womn and girls with disabilities face. The work Kenya Female Advisory Organization (KEFEADO) undertakes with womn and girls in the fishing industry and with girls with disabilities in learning institutions showed that the Kenyan government during this period did not prepare to engage with the issues faced by womn and girls with disabilities.
We note that during this period, five girls with intellectual disabilities who were out of school were targeted in different counties i.e. Kisumu, Homabay, Siaya, and sexually assaulted. The safe houses which could take them in were also limited due to the lack of human resource personnel qualified to engage holistically with the girls.

One of the cases in Seme Kisumu County, is that of a girl who went in search of a packet of pads donated by a member of the county assembly in a center far away from her home. The girl, who lives with intellectual disabilities, was raped by a motorbike rider and she is currently pregnant. This girl was exposed by the government who whilst shutting down schools seemingly forgot that the sanitary towels provided in school is a critical commodity for many girls from poor households in rural, peri-urban, and urban areas. This health crisis has unfortunately increased sexual violence. One of the challenges faced is the lack of disability-responsive referral pathways which limit quality service delivery to those with different disabilities in Kenya.

The lack of investment in quality SRHR services has greatly affected access to rights for womn and girls during the COVID-19 period. With many of the health facilities not fully functional, the quality of services went down. The local media stations have to be commended for sharing information from communities and we also thank the medical personnel who responded in cases of emergencies in the dead of the night during curfew. However, the lack of effective adolescent reproductive health right services in health facilities ensures skewed information and a number of adolescent girls and young womn, particularly those with physical disabilities, hearing and visual impairments, face ridicule from health personnel whilst looking for access to health rights enshrined in the Constitution of Kenya 2010.

The pandemic has exposed the inadequacies in the health sector in Kenya and we must act as a collective to ensure that critical services like prevention and management of GBV including psychosocial support and SRHR are not pushed to the back burner in health. The quest is to ensure that reproductive health rights for all is put on the frontline. It is to ensure that communities are organized to guarantee that the hub and spoke model for health embraces the issues of gender, diversity, and disability. The key issues which must be addressed are: service delivery points must ensure that health service is a primary health care issue and that SRHR and GBV is embedded proactively at this point of care, and not as a curative health issue. This secures access at points close to those in need so that quality services can be accessed. We recognize that there are existing gaps in terms of self and collective care and continue to seek ways to address them as we work towards making SRHR more just and inclusive.

KEFEADO engages with girls and young women through sports and organizes meetings in the spaces where we play. For the women and girls with disabilities the organization engages them as women with disability rights champions and are supporting women within disability groups to engage in their spaces. The initiatives with these groups needed to be more targeted as the double discrimination on issues with SRHR and even GBV has been noted. KEFEADO is working with the champions to develop engagements that are inclusive of the different disabilities and are undertaken by women and girls with disability. The challenge is that there is lack of investment in disability inclusion by different partners and working for spaces where self-care can be practised that is responsive to women and girls with different disabilities including engagement of their care-givers.

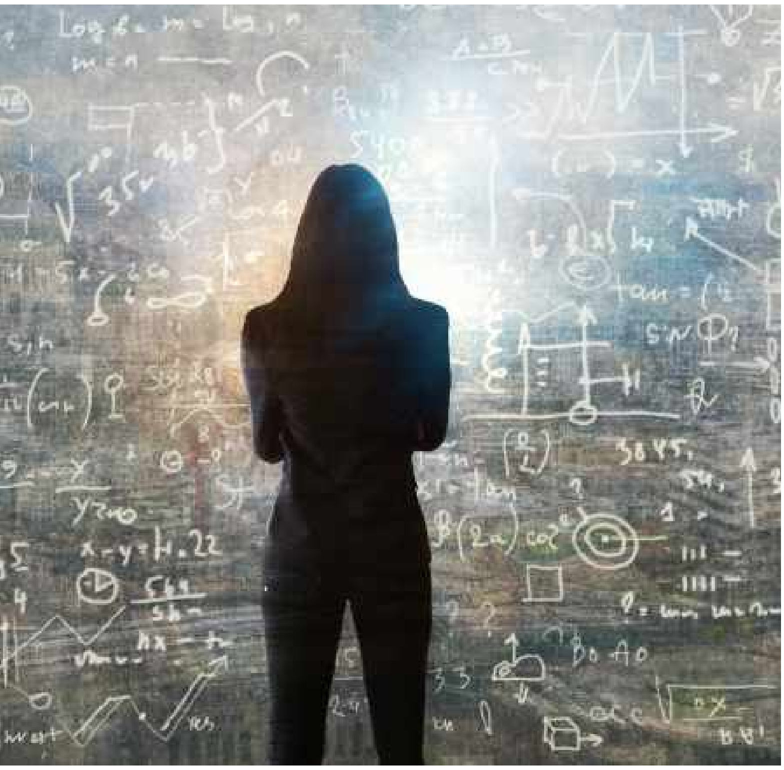
KEFEADO is also challenging the COVID-19 protocols which are not responsive to the needs of persons with disabilities at different points.For instance, it is a challenge for women wheelchair users who have to sanitize especially at communal sanitation points that are not inclusive. How are the protocols looking at their needs and providing alternative processes for them to engage and participate holistically? This has ensured that many women are not participating in different fora, further leaving them behind.

It is also important to note that as womn's rights advocates and communities, we must be woke to the fact that COVID-19 shall be with us for a long time but that does not mean that issues of GBV and SRHR are relegated to the back burner with no investment. Making this mistake could undo a lot of the work we have done so far in our quest for bodily rights and agency for all persons. This space must be protected. Who is ready to push back? I am. Are you?

COVID-19

/XORE /HOM SA/ FREE THE SOUL: RITUALS AND REMEDIES IN DISABILITY JUSTICE

BY FLORENCE /KHAXAS



Rediscovering traditional healing for ourselves, healing for the movement

The indigenous oral history of traditional healing has been shared through dreams, visions, and words of wisdom by our Afrikan mothers and their mother's mothers. Afrikan womn cannot be excluded from the discourse of traditional healing for they have always been at the centre of Afrikan spirituality. Afrikan spirituality connects to Afrikan feminism as they both unpack power, purpose, and love.

Xore /hom sa| free the soul

We free our souls when we let go of judgment and our ego and connect to our vulnerability which opens the doors to creativity. Using creative arts such as music, dance, painting, and writing is a form of soul freedom and healing. When we come to fully accept ourselves for who we are— the journeys and experiences we have, our pain, and our pleasure—we create a space for our vulnerability to comfort us. Sitting with this vulnerability in the stillness of silence is holding space for ourselves and our movements. And with space comes the ability to forgive. Forgiveness as a ritual is as personal as it is political. We take back our power by forgiving ourselves and letting go of situations that have caused great injustice in our lives.

Forgiveness as an act of traditional healing occurs when we write down or otherwise release the things that are not good for us, the things that we hold tight in our heart. By freeing our souls from the trauma, we are not only healing our generation, we are also healing the generational traumas experienced by our ancestors.

We breathe, we free our souls, for we realize we are more than the body that we live in. The song that whispers in the wind wants us to detach from our privileges and ego.

Let go of your body, your thoughts, the voices, the fears, your sight, your abilities, your name, your country.
Be nothing and everything at once.
Be invisible. Become and welcome the spirit. The spirit feels no pain.

Disability justice aligns with these principles of traditional healing too. As we tap into the power of imagination and creativity, we create visibility, healing, and the radical transformation of existing healing practices into ones that are holistic, inclusive, and participatory. For many generations, the realm of traditional healing in Afrika has treated mental illness as a disability and framed it negatively. Afrikan cultural practices have been harmful in their limiting interpretations of disability as the outcome of witchcraft or possession by evil spirits. In many Afrikan cultures, disability has also been seen as a curse or a result of past negative karma. However, today's Afrikan disability justice movement, with its rights-based approaches, dismantles those harmful and limiting beliefs through awareness-raising initiatives. For many, traditional healing is still the most common and most accessible form of health care. As a result, as our understanding of disability changes Western medicine practices, there is also space for traditional and cultural health practices to evolve.

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Disability justice align with these principles of traditional healing too. As we tap into the power of imagination and creativity, we create visibility, healing, and the radical transformation of existing healing practices into ones that are holistic, inclusive, and participatory. For many generations, the realm of traditional healing in Afrika has treated mental illness as a disability and framed it negatively. Afrikan cultural practices have been harmful in their limiting interpretations of disability as the outcome of witchcraft or possession by evil spirits. In many Afrikan cultures, disability has also been seen as a curse or a result of past negative karma. However, today's Afrikan disability justice movement, with its rights-based approaches, dismantles those harmful and limiting beliefs through awareness-raising initiatives. For many, traditional healing is still the most common and most accessible form of health care. As a result, as our understanding of disability changes Western medicine practices, there is also space for traditional and cultural health practices to evolve.

Healing justice creates synergies between the traditional healing movement and the disability justice movements, and in doing so, creates space for intersectional feminist cross-movement organizing.

Intersectional feminist organizing brought me here, to disability justice. Healing justice freed my soul to become self-aware of the world that we live in, and to understand daily practices of power. It has led to the questions: What is formal equality compared to our lived realities? Who has the power?

We are rethinking the way we organise ourselves as feminist activists. Intersectional feminist perspectives awaken an internal urgency to rethink our approaches to inclusivity, diversity, and representation. We need to create healing platforms through our healing justice work for People Living with Disabilities (PLWD) to claim their voices, their ideas, and their leadership. By acknowledging the diversity of the wounds [and of the resilience] that we carry, we work towards a more inclusive present.

I have been thinking a lot about what the most authentic way would be to narrate my story that forms part of the stories of young womn who are marginalized and oppressed. The imagined evolution of the intersectional feminist movement is built from a place that speaks truth to the soul. This imagination cultivates power from our shared experiences of love, heartbreak, survival, joy, pleasure, rage, and discomfort. Each of these experiences ultimately serve the purpose of giving us the power to express ourselves. They allow us to use creativity to question paradigms of survival in different institutions of violence that young womn with disabilities navigate, by naming that violence and by talking within the fluid spaces where feminist organizing happens.

Lessons and Remedies

COVID-19 has made space for new ways of building collective wellness. It has taught us about the urgent need for community-driven responses and it has created clarity on privilege, power, and access. Womn, girls, people with disabilities, PLWHIV, sex workers, indigenous communities, lesbians, and trans people have been on the margins of oppression and COVID-19 challenged us to rethink health and wellness and also economic inclusion. We have been forced to confront how this new reality impacts our collective healing and power.

From this perspective, as we learn new ways of organizing without leaving our physical spaces, disability justice is teaching us to value all bodies and their various abilities. And there is so much learning to be done. The lesson here is to be conscious of the world we live in, contradictions of power and privilege, and the possibilities of transformational power as we stand in solidarity to practice collective care.

African Womn Human Rights Defenders (AWHRDs) can incorporate traditional healing into their lives by incorporating plant-based eating and herbal medicines into their lifestyles where possible, and exploring various energetic therapies, as well as rest. Rest is a form of resistance and resilience in a society that insists that we should always be working. Rest helps our bodies to fight for ourselves and others as we stand up against patriarchy. Friendship and sisterhood are just as important. We need to celebrate each other, validate each other, and show love and acceptance. We need to transform our organizations and incorporate holistic participatory traditional healing practices and knowledge within our movements to prioritize our health and well-being.

> *Disability justice is teaching us to value all bodies and their various abilities. And there is so much learning to be done.*

When I was young, I used to hate pictures...
Pictures would show my right prosthesis leg to be smaller than my left leg...
Pictures would show how I couldn’t stand still nor balance...
Pictures would show how I just can’t stand by putting both my legs close together...
Pictures would show all my flaws...

/XORE /HOM SA| FREE THE SOUL: RITUALS AND REMEDIES IN DISABILITY JUSTICE CONT'D

Rituals
I want to talk about my traditional healing process in my journey to quitting smoking. As human rights defenders, we sometimes find ourselves indulging in unhealthy coping mechanisms such as drinking and smoking, to deal with the emotional and physical toll of the work we do. A few years ago, I had a deep introspection with myself that led me to ask, “What is my duty as a human rights defender if I can't defend myself and the body that is supporting me through all of it?”

Creating participatory feminist healing spaces requires everyone to take ownership of their own healing process and journey. We take responsibility by holding ourselves accountable for our healing process and we do that by seeking out and incorporating holistic and/or participatory traditional healing practices.
For instance, music continues to play a big role in re-imagining spirituality, Ubuntu and sisterhood.

Incorporating certain rituals also can be regenerative. Like participating in spiritual ancestral chants (ideally within a sisterhood) with African drumming or the unity of hand-clapping until it forms a rhythm. Lighting candles is also a great way to incorporate healing rituals into your life.

Another more accessible and timely option is the ritual symbolized in hand washing, washing away the pain, being conscious of our new reality like COVID-19, and the importance of washing our hands as a form of healing and protecting ourselves from the virus.

In retrospect, I realize how harmful habits limit many of my fellow human rights defenders. This has also led me to resolve that if I want to practice community care I should be conscious of the impact of second-hand smoke inhalation. Working in spaces where smoking by human rights defenders is taken for granted, has made me realize that quitting to protect my community is what accountability looks like too.. Caring for my community means defending our rights and health.

Away from these more external practices, traditional healing for me means the act of writing letters to myself asking for forgiveness for the harmful coping strategies I had and setting intentions by envisioning an healthy environment where I prioritize myself by leading a healthy lifestyle as a human rights defender.

I gave myself permission to cry and set an intention. I chose freedom and resilience over fear. I surrounded myself with crystal stones, lit a candle, and burned some sage around me. I had a honest conversation with myself about my values and created new healthy values. Connecting to my ancestors through these rituals, their support gave me the courage to step into my inner power to resist harmful habits.
Intentions are a powerful ritual tool for healing our bodies. Faith in ourselves is just as powerful. Freeing ourselves from addiction opens our hearts to becoming even more conscious activists that prioritize radical and holistic care.

As African Womn Human Rights Defenders, we need to prioritize ourselves and our well-being. We need to speak to ourselves. The answer is within us always. Creating our own rituals daily, protects and grounds us. It creates balance and teaches us to love ourselves a little more each day. Creating time alone for healing rituals teaches us solitude; ways to seek peace in our own presence. Mental health is important. Disability justice teaches us to be kind to our bodies and to care about the impact of our choices on others.

Bodily autonomy and integrity are our inherent rights. Writing about our lived realities will create evidence to hold our governments accountable to protect our bodily autonomy and integrity. Documenting the violations that we experience from our culture and from our government is healing justice.

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Triple Jeopardy: Challenges Faced by Womn With Disabilities in Zimbabwe in the COVID-19 Era.

Agnes Chindimba

In Zimbabwe, people with disabilities are referred to as “zvirema”, a derogatory Shona word.. This crude terminology serves to reinforce and amplify both private and public discriminatory attitudes against persons with disabilities. These behaviours are not unconnected with deeply held beliefs that persons with disabilities are evidence of a family curse, involvement with witchcraft, or acts of evil. All of which can result in the demonization and disregard of womn with disabilities.

In a country that has been battling economic decline for more than a decade, womn with disabilities are left languishing right at the bottom of the economic chain. inIn urban areas they are shunned. In rural areas they are reduced to beggars. As if the situation has not been bad enough, COVID-19’s emergence in 2019 has worsened the problem. The intersection of disability, COVID-19, gender, social and economic class, level of education, race. and religion all play a part in amplifying challenges faced by womn with disabilities in Zimbabwe.

The effect of these overlaps have particularly been evident in the developments around Gender-Based Violence (GBV) here in Zimbabwe.

According to a 2021 report by Deaf Womn Included (DWI), GBV prevention and response programming has neglected the needs, priorities, and interests of womn with disabilities. For instance, this report claims that the lockdown in response to COVID-19 has made womn with disabilities more vulnerable to GBV than ever before. It asserts that because all the focus on health services were focused on responding to COVID-19, womn with disabilities could not access other health needs. For instance, family planning services became expensive in 2020 and womn could not access the services at local clinics which were either closed or did not have the family planning facilities.

Triple Jeopardy: Challenges Faced by Womn With Disabilities in Zimbabwe in the COVID-19 Era cont'd...

This has dire consequences and resulted in high domestic violence cases for womn with disabilities. One womn said, “I went to the local clinic in search of family planning pills and I had challenges passing through the police roadblocks since they required passes. Eventually I got to the clinic only to be told there were no tablets and was told to buy from pharmacies. When I got to the pharmacy the tablets were being sold at USD1 which I could not afford. When I got home my husband demanded sex and I refused because I did not want to get pregnant. There was a big argument at home and my husband assaulted me badly but I could not do anything.”

Lockdowns have made it difficult for womn with disabilities to seek GBV services. Available online counseling is not as inclusive as it would seem because, as is often the case, womn with disabilities are economically marginalized and many do not have gadgets like smart phones or the requisite data. For womn with disabilities who can afford a phone and data, they have to deal with service providers who likely offer online counseling but do not know Sign language making it difficult for deaf womn to access their services.

Access to sanitary products has also become a real challenge for womn and girls with disabilities such that most have resorted to unhygienic means such as the use of cow dung to absorb their flows. Womn who would ordinarily rely on self motivation and industry to pay their bills and meet their basic needs have been pushed into poverty with the closure of informal markets. In Zimbabwe, many who prior to the pandemic earned a living from vending, cross border trade reeled from the decision to close the country’s borders to manage the pandemic.

The pandemic has also deepened the general challenges persons with disabilities experience accessing information. The media has been awash with messages and information on COVID-19. Sadly the information has not been provided in inclusive formats; no sign language, no Braille, no vernacular audios, and of course no large print material for diverse womn with disabilities. This has put the lives of womn with disabilities in danger as they have no adequate knowledge of what is happening around them. This leaves them vulnerable to infection without full information.

While these challenges should be talked about as often as possible, there is also room for conversations about the opportunities that exist as we prepare for the future and build societies better equipped to deal with possible outbreaks with the lessons learnt from this pandemic. COVID-19 has opened room for advocacy on inclusive development programmes as we continue the push for the rights of womn with disabilities. Difficult times open doors for inclusive, strong partnerships with the likes of UN Agencies, universities, media houses, womn rights organizations and governments so that no one is left behind. Above all, these challenges, while entirely avoidable, have made womn with disabilities united and stronger. We are harnessing our strengths and coming up with strategies for inclusion in many spaces post-COVID-19.

Most people in the stadium haven’t laughed so much in their lives.

“That overlapped fool thought they were ACTUALLY racing for the finish line. You can’t make this up.”

* * *

You lift a hand to wipe tears and notice the thing on your neck. It’s an earpiece.

“Please answer this time,” a new voice rings in your head.

“My earpiece fell out. Can you hear me?”

Shock from the other voice. “Can you hear ME?”

“Yes. Why are so many of you trying to speak at the same time?”

Another voice takes over. “We’re your Pit Crew.”

“My...what?”

“Follow the yellow line on your dashboard’s map.”

They are fast. Soon as you pull into the Pit, someone has changed your tyres, refueled you, and lifted your helmet to throw water in your face.

* * *

“So this is my...”

“50th lap,” they say, when you’ve rejoined the track. “The race is 1000 laps long. No one can leave until it ends.Each exit spawns a new entry.”

Car 1 is back, baiting you.

“Don’t bother. They’re in their 400th. You’ll never catch up.”

“What is the point of all this?”

“Honestly,” the earpiece admits, “we just...found it here, and do what we can to avoid getting killed. Please make it to the next Pit Stop.”

After your 60th lap, you do it.

* * *

The air is cool on your face as your helmet hits the ground.

Keep to the white line marking the edge of the track and you can skirt the abyss. Walk that way for long enough and you can enter the pit at the end of the yellow line on your dashboard.

Someone helps you into a bed.

* * *

“Folks, there seems to be more vehicles stopping. The drivers are climbing out. They’re walking...”

Everyone’s eyes are on Tablishment, who shrugs.

“If there’s room for the winners to pass, it doesn’t matter.”

* * *

“Will they go round that track forever?” You ask.

“Probably.”

“Is there anything other than this race?”

“Yes. Other planets, too.”

“Can we go?”

“When we’ve gathered one more person...definitely.”

Diesel- by Kiko Enjani

Your eyes open to four things:
There is buzzing everywhere,
You are wearing a helmet,
You are strapped to a chair,
And your hands are on a steering wheel.

* * *

"If they keep hitting that fool, the vehicle's going to explode." Ess Tablishment remarks.
"So, let it," Spec Tator shrugs.
Ob Server agrees: "Wish the losers would stop avoiding the hole; the race wouldn't be so crowded."
The track and the stadium circled the planet. Outside the track was an abyss, down which they'd once sent some drones. Took them five days to descend.

* * *

Lift your foot off one pedal and a car slams into you. Press too hard on another and you hit the one in front.
Overtaking earns a rude gesture from the other driver.
A car ahead slams into another. You slow down as they both careen off the track and disappear. You will stay in the middle from now on.

* * *

"Watch Numbers 1 through 9!" Server tells the stadium.
Tablishment wonders how many cars would leave the tracks to let them pass. As planned, a thousand drivers lost control of their vehicles to make the five-day plummet: taking several others with them.
A way must always be made for the most deserving.

* * *

You saw them fall into the abyss.
It was no accident; their exit cleared a path. And through it came a contingent, each painted with single-digit numbers.
You break formation and follow Car 8.
Car 9 attempts to overtake, but the huddle closes in and there's a collision.
You ignore the inferno blooming in your wake to look askance at an offender.

"7 BILLION LEAVES 8 IN THE DUST!"
Car 5 slams into your sides, repeatedly. You let them push you towards the edge. They have a better machine:
Heck, they probably even trained for this.
But your lack of experience means your vehicle can sometimes jerk backwards.
A gasp fills the stadium as 5 exits.
Cars 3 and 4 are so shocked they let you pass.
The race is between three of you. More exits happen in front of Car 1. You do not focus on death; the track has been cleared.
An open sprint, you growl like a beast as you will your vehicle forward.
"7 BILLION IS NECK AND NECK FOR FIRST!"
The checkered paint is coming closer. You're leaning forward, choked by your seat-belt. And when your opponent's front becomes your back, scream in triumph while crossing the finish line.
The first out of Billions.

* * *

Interview

ELIZABETH MANG'ENI

Feminist Republik: **look beautiful, what was the turning point? I mean at what point did you decide to have a rethink of your personality and what led to it?**

Elizabeth Mang'eni: I was involved in a tragic road accident in 1994 that led to the loss of my right limb. Since then, I have had to use a prosthesis limb for movement and carrying out my day-to-day activities. Growing up, I faced discrimination from the community, and this had a negative impact on me despite encouragement from family members. It lowered my self-esteem, and this limited my progress.

During my freshman year in the university, I read an article on Farida Bedwei; a celebrated software engineer from Ghana whose life and success story beats the imagination. It wasn't her software engineering profession that blew my mind but her condition. Bedwei was diagnosed with cerebral palsy at the age of one. Cerebral palsy is an incurable neurological disorder that permanently affects body movement, posture as well as muscle coordination. A person with cerebral palsy becoming a software engineer was new to me. Farida found a way to beat her disability and is today considered one of the most powerful womn in financial technology in Africa. She proved that disability does not mean disadvantage. Surely what more motivation did I need then? Since then, I embraced my disability and never looked back. That was my turning point.

FR: **Do you now have a different perspective of yourself and your body?**
EM: If you had asked me this question seven years back, I would have responded without a doubt that my disability is a flaw. But today, I honestly don't think it is a flaw. My prosthetic leg makes me see life from a very different perspective. I get to show those struggling that it's okay to be different. I believe God took something from me and gave me something else in return.

FR: **Where do you draw strength for the ways you go through life today? What is your source of healing?**

EM: God: I testify that prayers do work. Family: support from my parents and siblings motivates me each day. My best friends who make me a better version of myself and, finally, exposure to experiences from fellow amputees.

FR: **Do you feel like pictures have a way of healing the soul? Have your pictures offered some form of healing? If so, what form?**
EM: used to hate pictures. If I took pictures, I would ensure they did not show my disability because these pictures would show my right prosthesis leg to appear smaller than my other left leg. They would show how I couldn't stand still nor balance. Pictures showed all my flaws. Today, I have learned to love pictures because they are some form of healing. I have learned to appreciate the womn I have become and the messages and experiences I share through my pictures. Every day, I hope my pictures inspire others to appreciate their flaws and flaunt them because no human is perfect.

FR: What does healing look like in this instance? Is it in taking and looking at the pictures? Is it posing to have your photo taken? Is it in sharing with others on social media?
EM: Healing is when I share my pictures and experiences. Healing is when people react and can relate to these pictures. This inspires them as they see a beautiful girl with a beautiful smile and big dreams for a better tomorrow.

FR: What healing message would you like to share with womn with disabilities who may be struggling with issues of acceptance?

EM: Be yourself. Your life is your own. You don't have anything to prove to people because this pressure will weigh you down. You don't need to fit in to feel good about yourself. Being different has its cool moments. For instance, when you are vanilla, no one notices but when you are chocolate people get curious. You are the chocolate. You being in this world is not a mistake. Anyone being mean to you because of your disability should be the least of your problems. Be your advocate instead of crying indoors. You are in control of your life. Let go of any embarrassment and fear of stigma.

Why I Fight for a World Free of Ableism

by Françoise Dogomangue

My name is Françoise Dogomangue from the town of Dapaong, in the northern region of Togo. I am a 41-year-old womn with a disability.
I was born into a monogamous family of 8 children; four girls and four boys, the only child in my family living with a disability. While still very young, when I turned eight, I became paralysed in my lower limbs. This made it difficult for me to leave my home and substantial resources were required to send me to school.

Going to school was not easy! My classmates constantly made fun of my uneven gait. On the way to school, I would fall more than two times before getting to class. Despite these obstacles, I stayed strong and obtained the equivalent of A Levels in the Arts and also studied for a diploma to qualify as an Executive Secretary, allowing me to integrate into working life as a primary and preschool teacher.
I am now a mother to three wonderful and bright children, however, my experience of discrimination has continued to cast its dark cloud over my otherwise accomplished life. I have been subjected to incidents of prejudice by my in-laws who did not hide their disapproval of me. They asked my husband not to marry me because of my disability and were even physically violent! The love and commitment I and my husband shared in the beginning kept me strong and we continued our life together; eventually my in-laws gave in and allowed us to get married.

However, this disapproval would, in time, prove too big to surmount. Over time, the phrase "My family was against our marriage" kept creeping into our discussions. This led to verbal abuse, and then came the physical assault. I have become a victim of domestic violence. Turned on by the very person who in the beginning shared a commitment to caring for me, supporting me, and protecting me from discrimination, I suffered a fracture in my right foot that required urgent surgery. This injury, a result of my husband's violence. Worse still, accessing medical care as a victim of domestic violence was a challenge due to a lack of medical infrastructure.

The surgery could not be completed in Dapaong, where I live, and I had to be transferred to the Centre Hospitalier et Universitaire (CHU) Campus in Lomé where I spent 4 months. When I returned to Dapaong, afraid that this violence could take my life, I left my husband's home and rented a room where I currently live with my children.

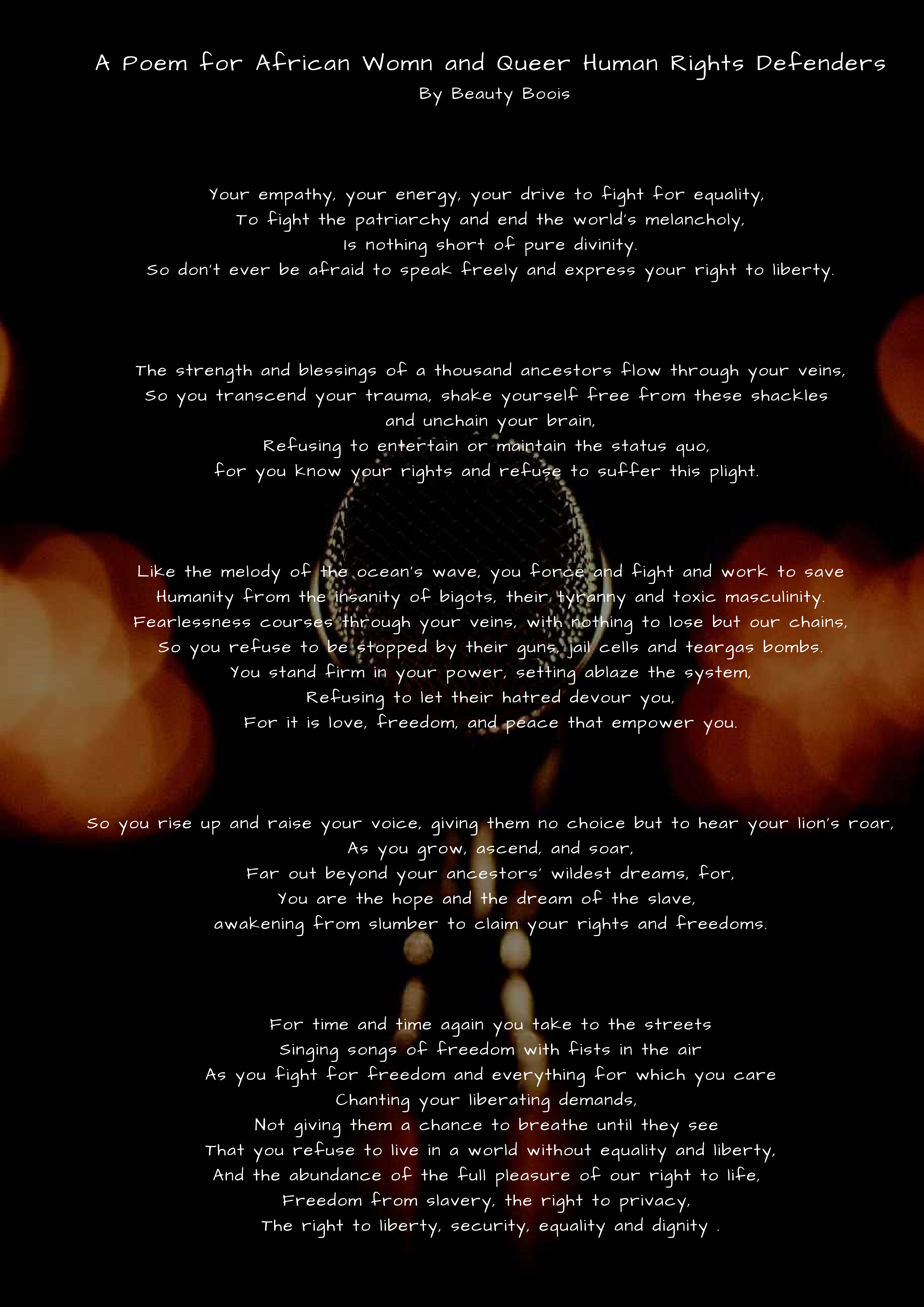
Why I Fight for a World Free of Ableism Cont'd...

Socially, I continue to experience the daily frustrations of navigating an ableist world both as a womn and a mother who often has to encounter and share space with womn who do not live with physical disabilities. Speaking out can be a challenge when these communities do not consider the perspectives of people with disabilities. For these womn, to put it simply, the disabled womn has no place among "able-bodied" womn.

These experiences are the reason I have slowly morphed into an activist. I have decided to break down these barriers by talking about my disability to encourage my sisters who live with these injustices daily. I make them aware of the fact that they should not allow themselves to be discouraged. I advocate for a world where womn with disabilities are free to be economically independent and get the support they deserve. This is what REFED seeks to do.

Yes! The role REFED plays as an organization fighting for womn's rights to lives free of discrimination has allowed me to become this accomplished womn today.
In addition to REFED, we have the Association of Motivated People Living with Disabilities of Tône (APHMOTO), of which I am an active member, and which has worked hard for the integration of people with disabilities with the tireless support of the Togolese Federation of Associations of People Living with Disabilities (FETAPH). These organizations seek to ensure a better world without discrimination.
I organize training on personal development, IGAs such as making soap, bleach, accessories made with African fabrics, and decorative accessories etc.
I am the chairperson of a group of womn with disabilities. I encourage my sisters to practice healing and radical care. And some days, what my practice of radical care looks like is encouraging my sisters to keep smiling and organizing recreational activities for them.

Today, I have confidence in myself and my abilities, which gives me the opportunity to be a role model for other womn with disabilities. I still struggle every day to provide for myself and my children in a world that is ableist but I continue to encourage other womn not to give up this fight. To talk about it is to heal and let go of the hurt discrimination inflicts, to talk about it is to impact society, to talk about it is to grow.
In writing this testimony, I am liberating myself and I would really like this story to rectify a lot of the injustices womn who are living with disabilities around the world face, because so many suffer in silence.



A Poem for African Womn and Queer Human Rights Defenders

By Beauty Boois

Your empathy, your energy, your drive to fight for equality,
To fight the patriarchy and end the world's melancholy,
Is nothing short of pure divinity.
So don't ever be afraid to speak freely and express your right to liberty.

The strength and blessings of a thousand ancestors flow through your veins,
So you transcend your trauma, shake yourself free from these shackles
and unchain your brain,
Refusing to entertain or maintain the status quo,
for you know your rights and refuse to suffer this plight.

Like the melody of the ocean's wave, you force and fight and work to save
Humanity from the insanity of bigots, their tyranny and toxic masculinity.
Fearlessness courses through your veins, with nothing to lose but our chains,
So you refuse to be stopped by their guns, jail cells and teargas bombs.
You stand firm in your power, setting ablaze the system,
Refusing to let their hatred devour you,
For it is love, freedom, and peace that empower you.

So you rise up and raise your voice, giving them no choice but to hear your lion's roar,
As you grow, ascend, and soar,
Far out beyond your ancestors' wildest dreams, for,
You are the hope and the dream of the slave,
awakening from slumber to claim your rights and freedoms.

For time and time again you take to the streets
Singing songs of freedom with fists in the air
As you fight for freedom and everything for which you care
Chanting your liberating demands,
Not giving them a chance to breathe until they see
That you refuse to live in a world without equality and liberty,
And the abundance of the full pleasure of our right to life,
Freedom from slavery, the right to privacy,
The right to liberty, security, equality and dignity .

The Right to Disability

by MICHELE SOJIP

"Your Curriculum Vitae is interesting and your profile matches our job description, but unfortunately, we regret to inform you that you cannot get the job. Our premises are not adapted, and we do not have sufficient funds to create a working space in which you can blossom." Two short sentences that made me feel like my world was falling apart.

I was not unfamiliar with experiencing injustices because of my disability, but this announcement was like a blow to me. Was this what being a quadriplegic was about? Would I now be solely judged by the fact that I move in a wheelchair? Did this disability deprive me of all my rights, including the right to have a job, even though the preamble to the Cameroonian Constitution, the supreme law, provides that one has the right and the duty to work?

It would not be wrong to say that many people with disabilities have experienced injustice. Although official statistics are not known, there is a significant number of people in Cameroon with motor, auditory, visual, sensory, mental, psychic, or other disabilities. In order to improve their living conditions, Law No. 2010/002 of April 13, 2010, on the protection and promotion of people with disabilities was passed. However, it took another eight years, that is on July 26, 2018, to enforce it. While some improvements have been noted over the past two years, there is still a wide gap between the provisions of the law and its implementation.

The inability to attend a court hearing or to access an administrative service due to the lack of an access ramp, hiring an interpreter at one's own expense during legal proceeding, being denied admission to a school because of one's disability, having one's job application rejected although the job applied for is compatible with one's disability, not benefiting from lower rents in public housing, lack of labeling in Braille and in large font size on everyday consumer products. The list of rights that are yet to be implemented and currently exist only enjoyed on paper is long. And what about cases of rape of girls living with mental illnesses? Taking advantage of incapacities? Cases of mistreatment? Physical, moral, or financial abuse? Stigmatization and discrimination?

There are many silent victims who end up excluding themselves from the society, considering themselves helpless, and going along with all kinds of injustice. Living in a society that turns a blind eye to the inhumane treatments womn and girls living with disabilities suffer means not many of them never fully accept their disability and assert themselves. The myth of "abnormality" in disability persists.

Access to justice, to fair treatment, and to equal opportunities and rights does not only imply respect for human beings and the rights provided by the law. It also implies that one must be heard and, above all, understood, which means that one must be fully aware of the rights one is claiming. The decree enforcing the 2010 law is clear on one point. Article 2 provides: "The provisions of this article apply to people with disabilities holding a National Disability Card and who have a potential permanent disability rate of at least 50%."

The right to disability cont'd...

Our struggle is therefore not just about criticizing. We must claim what should be claimed, but also, and above all, it is important to act hand in hand. If people with disabilities stand together in solidarity, then exclusion, devaluation, abuse, and all the other forms of injustice they suffer will gradually disappear. This solidarity must be extended to the whole continent.and in this regard, some countries have made significant progress, particularly in terms of access to transportation and to public places.

Experience sharing is therefore an asset. How was such progress achieved in those countries and how can their approach be replicated in other countries, taking into account the realities and context of each country?

Finally, it is essential to identify the gaps in our legal texts, such as the Cameroonian law, which protects schools, professional and university managers, employers, or directors who discriminate against people with disabilities in admission and recruitment processes or in terms of remuneration.

Today, I have learned to love pictures because they are some form of healing. I have learned to appreciate the womn I have become and the messages and experiences I share through my pictures. Every day, I hope my pictures inspire others to appreciate their flaws and flaunt them because no human is perfect.

LET'S TALK ABOUT SEX BABY

BY MAKGOSI LETIMILE

In 2016, after 33 years as a non-disabled womn, I woke up hospitalized one day and was told I would be living with a disability for the rest of my life, I had no idea what to expect but I made the assumption that it would not be a big deal to live as a disabled womn and then I left the hospital and very quickly realized that the world was anything but accessible. I was not prepared for how this would shift my experience of the world and I certainly did not think that this shift would include dating and sex matters too.

I got on Twitter to rage about how lonely disability was and a stranger responded, "But why would anybody want to be with you? You are disabled." A response that captures the ignorance and harm of ableism, an attitude that much of the world treats as normal.

As a womn in her 30s growing into herself and her sexuality as a new wheelchair user, I decided to change the narrative. I started reviewing sex toys for disabled womn. If the world was so bold in declaring us unworthy, I would be fighting back to say we still mattered.

This is why Wheelsntoys was created, to ensure that pleasure and self-care for womn with disabilities are centered in conversations about disability rights and justice. As a disabled sex worker, my sexuality should never be an afterthought.

Sex is my favorite thing to talk about, to have with myself and others, consensually, of course. I like talking to people about it. I like finding out what makes them tick.

I always say it's not a coincidence at all that I spend most of my time preaching about sex for disabled people, especially disabled womn because the existence of disabled womn is already such a shunned and often lonely experience that dehumanizes us. Non-disabled people are quick to remind us that our disability is not a problem they want to deal with if they can help it.

I want the world to constantly remember that disabled womn also deserve to be part of the conversation. It is part of what the human experience is about. Songs and endless literature have been committed to the cause. Fairytales and folklore compete in shaping our understanding of love and desire. Respectability politics and a patriarchal world want to stake claims on our understanding of, and relationship with, our sexuality. I encounter all of these as a self-identified disabled sex worker.

The discomfort that we feel when we start having conversations about sex is often compounded by the shame that so many of us are taught to have about our bodies and urges. In unlearning these self-hating ideas and shedding our shame, we take control of our bodies and pleasure.

I never pass up an opportunity\to talk about how Wheelsntoys started. My response is always a loud and resounding, "Because disabled sex matters."

We are here. We are disabled and we are sexual beings.

I' am always on Instagram and Twitter talking about sex, laughing about sex, and being about sex. I recommend that you join me especially if you are disabled and unsure about having a fulfilling sex life. We can learn together.

SPOTLIGHT ON DISABILITY RIGHTS FUND (DRF) – ESTHER KYOZIRA PROGRAMME OFFICER DRF

Feminist Republik (FR): Disability Rights Fund is a pioneering and nontraditional funder in its support of disability justice, activism, and programming. What perspectives and insights informed the fund in prioritizing people and womn with disabilities?

Esther Kyozira (EK): I think that question is best summed up by the movement's slogan: nothing about us without us. When the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities created a framework for the world's largest minority group to participate in decision-making, the Disability Rights Fund was born to resource those efforts and was developed through partnership between disability activists and donors. While many donors I've interacted with over the years talk of human rights and equity while holding tightly to the power and purse strings, grantmaking at DRF is based on a participatory model that rests decision-making in the capable hands of people with disabilities themselves.

We appreciate the recognition of the Disability Rights Fund as an innovative model. We just wish that participatory, inclusive, and intersectional grantmaking was less the exception and more the rule! Though the global disability movement numbers one billion strong, only 3 percent of global human rights and international development funding goes to people with disabilities. Even more inequitable is the fact that only 1.5% of funding for womn and girls' rights is focused on womn and girls with disabilities, though we number one in every five womn. This, despite the fact that womn with disabilities experience increased risks of violence, poverty, economic exclusion, and other forms of discrimination. DRF is committed to supporting the efforts of womn with disabilities to advocate for their rights. We do this by applying an intersectional gender lens to grantmaking, by reaching womn and girls with disabilities from more marginalized communities and those with non-majority identities and sexualities (such as ethnic minorities, refugees, or LGBTQI persons), to ensure that no one is left behind. As DRF has grown into the largest funder of womn with disabilities worldwide over the years, so too has the Ugandan movement grown in numbers, reach, and diversity. DRF's most recent round of grantmaking in Uganda resulted in a record number of applications in general, and specifically from organizations of womn with disabilities. DRF grantees representing particularly excluded groups, such as womn with psychosocial disabilities and LGBTQ persons with disabilities, are increasingly visible and building capacities to engage in rights advocacy.

FR: What kind of support and solidarity is the Fund providing womn with disabilities during this COVID-19 pandemic?

EK: Before the pandemic, DRF was supporting organizations of womn with disabilities to drive innovative efforts to end sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), advocate for policies, laws, and budgets to advance their sexual and reproductive health and rights, and build more inclusive mainstream womn's rights movements to make the decisions that concern their lives. DRF grantee organizations of womn and girls with disabilities have not only continued their efforts to advocate for their rights over the past year, they are leading the way. These efforts have included:

- Developing MOUs with national and local police to ensure accessible reporting mechanisms, access to justice, and inclusive services for survivors with disabilities
- Adapting peer support networks to the virtual environment
- Raising awareness about GBV experienced by womn and girls with psychosocial disabilities and intellectual disabilities living in institutions
- Engaging in Generation Equality Forum and Beijing+25 consultations
- Partnering with mainstream womn's rights organizations to end violence against all womn and girls
- Hosting webinars and virtual dialogues re SGBV, SRHR
- Participating in high-level advocacy events (COSP, CSW, etc.)
- Advocating for inclusive social protection schemes and adequate budgetary allocations
- Taking on advisory roles in mainstream feminist fora, such as the Spotlight Initiatives
- Reporting to CEDAW, as well as integrating the voices of WGWDs into CRPD reporting
- Continuing ongoing advocacy in partnership with womn's rights groups, such as passage of pending VAWG legislation in Indonesia (without the discriminatory provisions of Article 104)
- Ensuring that governments and humanitarian actors prioritize inclusive SRHR access in pandemic responses
- Providing paralegal support to womn and girls with disabilities experiencing SGBV

SPOTLIGHT ON DISABILITY RIGHTS FUND (DRF) – ESTHER KYOZIRA PROGRAMME OFFICER DRF

FR: What opportunities does the Fund see in the pipeline when a womn with disability is adequately supported by funders and societies at large?

EK:

- Deliberate targeting and mobilization of womn with disabilities.
- Strategic advocacy to challenge stereotypes and stigma against womn with disabilities.
- Promoting equal access to services for womn with disabilities without discrimination
- Equalization of opportunities for all womn regardless of one's disabilities
- Appreciation of diversity and rights for everyone on an equal basis

FR: Can you tell us a little about the thoughts you have for 'mainstreaming' disability justice in the broader womn's movement?
EK:

- Awareness raising on the rights of womn with disabilities to the wider womn's movement
- Empowering womn with disabilities to be able to challenge other womn in the wider womn's movement
- Building coalitions with organizations of womn with disabilities and the mainstream womn's organizations
- Deliberate efforts instituted by donors to have inclusive funding guidelines that target womn with disabilities.
- Institutional capacity strengthening for both mainstream organizations and organizations of womn with disabilities to support reasonable accommodation and any other capacities required by both groups to appreciate the needs and rights and diversities in humanity.

FR: What words of encouragement would you share with other funders who are sitting on the fence and have not thought about nor prioritized funding the work and activism of womn with disabilities?

EK: Other funders need to acknowledge the double discrimination womn with disabilities face. First, as womn, and also as womn with disabilities. The societal barriers that hinder their effective participation, the stigma of living with a disability, environmental limitations that prevent access, and inclusive information dissemination all deliberately leave womn with disabilities listed among the most marginalized groups in development and society. Womn with disabilities are often excluded from participating in decision-making and development on the pretext that they are too hard to reach, too expensive to the mainstream, and that their needs are complicated. Their organizations are rated as high-risk because they often lack the sophisticated organizational systems in governance, finance, and management capacities typically sought by funders. Donors need to take the risk to give womn with disabilities an opportunity to exhibit their full abilities with financial support and the required capacity-building. For example, at DRF, through the Uganda Capacity Fund, we identify the emergent organizations with no systems and no policies, and support them to grow to the level that enables them to compete with others in mainstream funding. This has contributed to getting more womn's organizations into the advocacy space where other donors find them. If donors are afraid of the risks involved, they could start small and progressively build up.

Before disqualifying an organization of womn with disabilities, funders should ask : What is the risk inherent in NOT funding this organization of womn with disabilities? You'd be amazed at what a small investment can do once it's put to work by womn with disabilities.

What Disability Justice Means to Me

by Stella Nkonya

Disability feminist justice means that there is a space where womn and girls with disabilities are counted and included in all aspects of life. A space where no one is left behind in the development agenda of a country.

Many womn and girls with mental health disabilities face discrimination in their family spaces. They are poorly treated or abused, even as children and internalize the stigma. This absence of safety or safe spaces within their families and communities, among the people they rely on for access to resources and security, can contribute to a decreased capacity to cope with stress later in life.

Through counselling sessions, my work with the the organization aims to reduce the incidents of suicide in survivors of abuse. There are also programs at our organization that allow womn and girls with disabilities to openly speak out when they are in danger.We have a safeguarding officer who receives messages from the whistleblowers in the communities. She links the survivors to relevant stakeholders so that they can access primary justice.

As part of our hands-on approach, in the communities we work with, we have formed groups of womn and girls with disabilities who meet twice a week. At these meetings, they discuss issues of mental health. In addition, we add a focus on wellness by, for example, sharing some movements and practices that can help to relieve stress. These meetings also include conversations around issues of income generation activities.

Talking about sexuality to womn and girls with disabilities is treated as taboo. Even in the health sector, service providers have a negative attitude which discourages womn and girls with disabilities from visiting the centres. Harmful and outdated cultural practices promote the belief that womn and girls with disabilities are not sexually active. When someone with disabilities is pregnant, they are often asked demeaning questions like, “Who did this to you?”. Thus, effectively removing their agency.

In the Malawian context, Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) for womn and girls with disabilities is misunderstood because they are perceived as being unable to consent to sexual activities. Ironically, and horrifically, womn and girls with disabilities are sometimes considered sex objects in some cultures where men with HIV and AIDS rape them in order to be ‘cleansed’ of the virus. These misconceptions, combined with a lack of sex education, can make womn and girls with disabilities particularly vulnerable and unable to make informed decisions about their sexuality.

Beyond this, COVID-19 has further compounded the existing problems, as many people with disabilities, including myself, have been unable to access essential services. Many different factors are responsible for this, including distance, a lack of personal protective equipment (PPE), and social distancing regulations that prevent people with disabilities who are unable to travel alone from accessing services far away from them. Lack of access to information was also a contributing factor, as people were unable to find out where to receive support from stakeholders, government, or other available channels.

If COVID-19 has taught us anything, it is that there is a need to advocate for policy development that is disability sensitive, so that accessibility is built into the development path of our community. We also need to advocate for better and more meaningful representation of womn and girls with disabilities, so that we can use existing platforms to amplify the voices of some of society’s most vulnerable people.

Another lesson from COVID-19 is the importance of self-care and nurturing resilience, both as activists and as human beings. While there are many Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in Malawi that we can partner with, much of that interaction is online, and therefore inaccessible to many people. That’s something that needs to change.

For myself, I make sure that I have time to rest. I make sure that I prioritise time with people who can hold safe spaces for me. For long term resilience and support (for myself and for others), I also make sure that I am part of development spaces and meetings in my community.

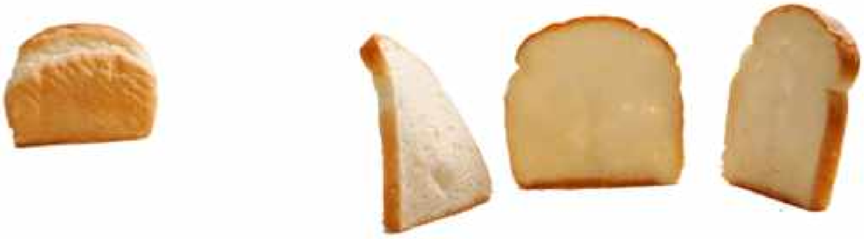
When signs speak louder than words !!!

I am not handicapped, I am handy & capable,
The key word being able,
Though most people would rather label.
I am deaf not unable.
I am deaf but my hands speak.
With my sign I can reach higher peaks.
The world I know I will change,
Plastic to paper I can exchange,
I am deaf but the earth will hear me,
And I protect her with my deaf dignity,
And so she embraces me willingly,
As I learn to embrace my own fragility.
My hands are multi purpose,
Quite different from the surface,
They bind & fold & cut & rule,
They are my voice & my tool.

I can't hear the world but I see it clear as day,
A deaf girl with a bag & a way,
A way to change my life & yours,
And just maybe relieve Earth of her plastic sores.
I do not have all the answers,
But I know I do have a start,
And no matter what happens,
You'll see a paper bag & a smile in my heart.

Let our languages unite,
Together we can win this fight.
Let's replace these plastic bags,
Help & Support Teki paper bags,
Although the way seems too dark,
In Ethiopia we can make our mark.
It is our chance to pioneer.
To the deaf please lend an ear.
An opportunity we have to see,
To us these jobs can really be a key.
Together let us be the light,
Our future can still be bright.

With Love from the Teki Family



> “
>
> DESPITE OUR EXCLUSION FROM KEY PROGRAMS ON YOUTH-FOCUSED HEALTH SERVICES, WE ARE TAKING MATTERS INTO OUR HANDS TO ADDRESS THESE GAPS.
>
> ”

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH IS MORE THAN AN AFTERTHOUGHT IN PUBLIC HEALTH

by Fatima kalima

Sexual reproductive health implies that people have responsible, satisfying, and safe sex lives and that they have the capacity to do so. Here in Malawi, sexual reproductive health is not accessible, especially to persons with disabilities. The main reason is that health personnel often do not know what the specific challenges are because they are simply not making an effort to reach out. For context, in Malawi, we have many NGOs that implement youth-friendly health services. But youth with disabilities are often excluded from these projects. As a result, the sexual health needs of persons with disabilities remain largely unmet. These needs can range from access to information to the provision of clinics and health centres that are disability friendly, without which people with disabilities cannot easily access sexual and reproductive health services.

Despite our exclusion from key programs on youth-focused health services, we are taking matters into our hands to address these gaps. For instance, we held a training targeted at young womn with disabilities where information on sexual reproductive health was made accessible in multiple formats so that no one was left behind. We also use radio programming for community outreach to talk about sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).

We have come to understand that there are a number of misconceptions about disabilities and sexual and reproductive health and rights, some of these shared by people with disabilities themselves. In certain cases, these misconceptions are tied to misinformation about sex or underlying concerns about HIV and AIDS and sexually transmitted infections. All of which are tied to problematic sex education and/or sex education that does not consider the needs of persons with disabilities.

Cont'd..

The work our organization does in bridging this gap is particularly important because womn and girls are vulnerable to sexual abuse. We want to highlight the ways that minimal education around sexual rights can further expose or isolate vulnerable people. In cases where disabled girls and womn are abused by their guardians or those close to them, our organization uses SRHR education to give survivors information about the resources available to them.

The arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic has meant that people with disabilities have experienced and witnessed increasingly complex challenges, especially young womn with disabilities. Increased stress on the healthcare system has meant that hospitals and clinics are less able to provide health services. The impact of this on womn with disabilities has been a lack of access to information and services that they already have a hard time accessing because they are not centered in programs created to address public health shortcomings. For instance, if a womn with disability struggled with accessing inclusive facilities that provide family planning services or safe abortions, this problem was further compounded by the pandemic and worse, stood the risk of being ignored as a pressing problem.

In Malawi, people tend to think that disability is a burden to the family, and, in some cases, relate disability with witchcraft. All of these can contribute to a general attitude that sees people approach disability rights with the charity model in mind.

The underlying belief being that persons with disabilities need assistance to adapt to society, rather than a commitment to making society more inclusive.

This entrenched attitude and a tendency to treat disability rights and justice as an afterthought, has meant that there are no specific or particularly noteworthy ways in which the government has responded to the needs of the disabled community during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Malawian government, like many governments around the world, has been unable to provide safety nets for millions of people who face unprecedented vulnerabilities.

My personal response to this has been to see my disability as a space that allows me to communicate with my community and help them understand what disability rights and justice can look like. My disability is a platform from which I can motivate my fellow people with disabilities to advocate for their rights to full lives and importantly, sexual health services that centre them.

VISUAL IMPAIRMENT

My senses are awake in a world where people can only physically see. My sight however is through my senses, touch, smell and sound. It is my gift not my pain. I am alive and I can see clearly.

DISABILITY JUSTICE PUZZLE

by Zanele mbugua

Deafblindness Awareness Week 21st – 27th June : There is a significant lack of awareness of those with deafblindness, persons who are both deaf and blind. During the Covid-19 pandemic where people are advised to stay home, work remotely and maintain social distance, with loved ones, colleagues and friends connecting over text messages, video calls, emails and social media; the world for those with disabilities and especially deafblindness becomes even more isolating.

1.When did the Feminist Republik launch the first edition of Dzuwa?

2. During Covid-19, what does Tariro describe as being a “gift and a pain” at the same time?

3. How many womn with disabilities groups did UAF-Africa support at the height of Covid-19 in 2020? From which countries?

4. Name three Rituals Florence /Khaxas describes in Free the Soul: Rituals and Remedies in Disability Justice?
What is the title of the book mentioned authored by Minna Salami?

5. What is the title of the book mentioned authored by Minna Salami?

Submit your answers to: feministrepublik@uaf-africa.org

COMMENTS FROM OUR FIRST EDITION DZUWA

"Formidable ! Merci pour ce partage pour nous les francophones il y a des difficultés de pleine participation et d'accès à toutes le informations. Mais nous sommes engagées pour l'atteinte des objectifs nobles de Feminist Republik. Ensemble nous bâtirons un monde meilleur pour tous, mais surtout pour les femmes.Merci bien." – Florence Ouattarra

Translation: "Awesome! Thank you for sharing for us francophones there are difficulties of full participation and access to all information.

But we are committed to achieving the noble goals of Feminist Republik.

Together we will build a better world for everyone, but especially for women.

Thank you."

"Absolutely amazing! thanks for sharing! Nuff respect!!!!" – eloise Burke (Contributor in Dzuwa I)

"LOVE THIS" – VUYELA K LINDIWE (ON FACEBOOK)

"I am so pleased to have been part of this beautiful campaign cheers to many more meaningful engagements in the future" – Elizabeth Maryann

CONTRIBUTORS PAGE

Agness Chindimba (she/her) is Mandela Washington Fellow (2016) for young African Leaders, a disability rights activist as well as a women rights activist. Agness is a feminist and is passionate about issues that affect girls and women with disabilities. She holds a masters degree from Africa University under the African Union Scholarship.

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Amisa Rashid is a counselling psychologist and a mediator specializing in peace building and Trauma Healing. She is the Founder and Executive Director of Nivishe Foundation whose main objective is building community resilience using Trauma informed programs for peaceful social cohesion to her community by creating safe spaces and offering psychosocial support to victims of violence. Being an individual who values inclusivity she has pioneered Nivishe in offering Mental Health services through sign languages.Her passion and enthusiasm in community work led her to be the First runners up in the 2019 annual EANA – East Africa Nubian Awards. She is a professional mentor in Kamilimu, Akilidada and Akirachix that support youth from all walks of life and background in Kenya, especially young women in STEM. **EMAIL: amisarashid@gmail.com**

Agnes Hausiku has worked with organisations such as the Namibian Association for Differently Abled Women is currently studying social work. Agnes is currently employed at the Ministry of Mines and Energy in Windhoek as an administrative officer in the procurement department. Her dedication to the work she does outside her office is proof that she is a firm advocate for disability rights and womn empowerment. She works with the National Paralympic Committee on programs that focus on women in sports leadership and is part of the Wheel-Ability sports club in Windhoek, where amongst other activities she plays basketball.

Beauty Boois (pronouns: they/them/theirs) is a genderqueer, intersectional feminist. They are a psychological counsellor, an author, a freelance writer and yoga teacher. Beauty is also a fierce activist for sexual and reproductive health and rights including sex positivity. Their written work has been published numerous times in the Namibian Newspaper, Sister Namibia, African Feminism, Monochrome Magazine, the Namibian Sun Newspaper and Elephant Journal. Their first novel entitled, |Namgu's Escape Theory was published by the University of Namibia Press in 2020.

Easter Okech is an African Feminist who is a champion for intersectional and intergenerational feminist organizing. This gives her an opportunity to mentor in schools and at community level through groups and different spaces. Her engagement pushes for human rights-based approach that is not heteronormative and thus pushes against patriarchal norms that impede effective participation of women and girls at community level. Easter also shapes the political agenda as trainer for women in politics to ensure budget advocacy has allies to push the gender agenda in both local and national government. As a mentor, she believes that feminist organizing is critical to ensure robust movements that shall ensure equality and equity at all levels.

Elizabeth Mang'eni is a Senior Trade Officer with the Ministry of Industrialization, Trade and Enterprise Development in Kenya and the Cofounder of You4She Initiative. She has dedicated her career to empowering womn and girls with disabilities by promoting local small entrepreneurship, inclusive job skills training, and programs that educate people with disabilities about business management and savings. She is passionate about Entrepreneurship because it gives her the risk to push herself beyond her capabilities to see the development and change, she seeks to have in her society. Elizabeth is an alumnus in the 2019 US Professional Fellow Program on Inclusive Disability Employment, 2018 Australian Award African Fellowship Program, and Young Africa Leadership Initiative-2017 Mandela Washington Fellowship. These programs have enabled her to expand her work on inclusive employment and reproductive health support for young won with disabilities.

Elizabeth Namaholela Namwandi is a volunteer administrator at the National federation of Person with Disabilities in Namibia(NFPDN) and of the National Albinism Association Trust (NAAT) . She is a 30 year old womn with albinism, born in the northern part of Namibia in the village called Omundjalala in Ombalantu , Omusati region. Creating poems and motivational speeches for persons with disability as a way of encouragement is her hobby. She believes that our disability is not our inability.
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Ekaete Judith Umoh who recently joined the Board of Urgent Action Fun Africa is a global disability rights advocate and inclusive development expe with astute analysis of issues relating to gender, disability and inclusi development. She is founder and Executive Director, FACICP Disability Plu an organization that promotes disability inclusion in all gender and developme efforts. Ekaete is the initiator of THE PURPLE CORNER ...a safe space whe feminist intersectional approach is used to addressing SGBV against women ar girls with disabilities. She is currently Secretary at the African Disabili Forum- ADF; Vice Chairperson, West African Federation of the Disable WAFOD;(Gender and Human rights), Chairperson; Disabled People International-DPI African Region. Between 2012 and 2016 she was Vi President, Rehabilitation International-RI for African Region.

Faith Njahîra is a disabled wheelchair-using African womn with muscular dystrophy committed to research and community work guided by disability justice, feminism and anti-ableism. Faith has been an independent scholar and consultant in the areas of disability, sexuality, health & education working with intersectional approaches for the last two years. She founded Muscular Dystrophy Society Kenya in 2013 as a support platform for those with muscular dystrophy and their loved ones. She is a lead cast and co-producer of “For All the Brilliant Conversations”, a film about friendship, healing and navigating trauma. She is currently enrolled in a doctoral (PhD) program with the Centre for Human Rights at University of Pretoria. Through all her work, she strives to ensure that the world doesn’t have the pleasure of imagining that disability and diversity doesn’t exist. Music, nature, the warmth of the sun and time with loved ones bring her joy.
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Fatima Kalima is the co-founder of a disabled youth organization in Malawi. She is currently the programs coordinator at Forum for the Development of Youth with Disabilities (FDYD). Fatima has worked tirelessly in Malawi over the past years to improve the lives of Malawian youth with disability through active participation in the development and implementation of disabled youth focused policies, programs and projects. Fatima also mentors high school disabled youth and volunteers in teaching disabled children and the youth at a community learning centre. Fatima believes in promoting the lives of disabled girls by encouraging them to go to school and speak out when they encounter challenges and abuse.

Florence Flora /Khaxas is a Namibian Feminist writer, healer and women human rights defender. Her activism focuses on disability justice, Adolescent girls and young women's leadership and visibility, indigenous and rural women, LBTQ activism, HIV/Aids, Mental health, VAWG prevention and Economic justice for women. Florence is the executive director of Y-Fem Namibia Trust and also serves on various NGO boards and committees. In her free time, she loves bird watching, mountain biking and aspiring part time farmer to promote food security and economic resilience for black women. She also mentors young feminist activists to become fierce feminist leaders that shift the power imbalance, transform harmful policies and strengthen visibility of marginalized groups through creative expression. Florence promotes creative writing among indigenous and marginalized communities in Namibia.

Kiko Enjani once made a drum out of a mangled plastic bucket. There followed a series of events, ending with the 9-year-old percussionist's exile to the local library.After reading everything in the science fiction and fantasy section, Kiko moved to different countries with their parents before settling in Nairobi, Kenya. They have tried their hand at game development, data entry and music production while pursuing several courses in design.

Liz Ombati is a disability rights self-advocate. Her advocacy comes through her own lived experiences with a mental health condition. She started writing from a very early age, for it was the best way that she could express that which remained unspoken. Writing for her is a form of therapy. Liz uses writing to agitate for change; to draw attention to marginalization, and to call attention to injustices around her. She writes about the anger within her and the frustration of not being able to make the world the best for everyone. She writes to find herself when she is in so much pain and anguish about unfulfilled dreams. Yet, she also writes to express beauty and hope around her. The present, which is a culmination of the many yesteryears. Liz writes about love and desire; about healing. She writes about new tomorrows and new hopes. About sunrises and sunsets. She writes about the promise of an equal world. A safe world for us all. A world that is enough for us all; to partake in its awe and beauty.

Makgosi Letimile is a Disabled Sex Worker, columnist and mother based in Cape Town South Africa. Find her on Instagram: Wheelsntoys where she sells toys for rent due to unemployment resulting from COVID-19.

Melissa Wainaina is an African queer feminist based in Kenya. She is actively involved in African feminist spaces that advance women and gender non-conforming people's holistic security and safety, collective care and wellbeing, healing justice as well as feminist inspired documentation initiatives. She has over 13 years' experience in the non-profit sector having worked since 2006 mainly focusing on sexuality, gender and sexual rights. Melissa has extensive experience in strengthening capacities for more rights-based approaches in transformative social change work. Melissa's work has involved addressing the gendered violence that affects marginalized women and transgender people. She has contributed to expanding the discourse in East Africa around healing justice. She explores the use of art for body positivity, self-expression, resistance and self and collective care. As an artist herself, she enjoys creative writing, poetry, designing jewelry, crafts and photography. She has authored gendered and creative work using pen names Sikiliza and Kamanzi Wainaina. Melissa serves on the Board of Women Spaces Africa, a community-based organization that promotes the sexual and reproductive health and rights of girls and young womn with disabilities in Kenya.
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Michèle SOJIP is a young womn who became quadriplegic following a traffic accident she was involved in 8 years ago. Michèle SOJIP decided to use her reduced mobility to help normalize disability. She created a Facebook page named "Michèle SOJIP—Parlons de Tout" and is the founder and Chairperson of the "Handicapés et Fiers" association whose missions include acknowledging the contribution of people with disabilities, assisting families and especially young girls with disabilities, and promoting the rights of people with disabilities, especially the right to education. As a result, the "My Books" project was initiated in 2019 and aims at offering textbooks to children with disabilities or born to parents with disabilities. Michèle SOJIP holds a Masters degree in Commercial Litigation and Arbitration from the Catholic University of Central Africa, her academic background allows her to work for the progressive development of an inclusive society with an emphasis on fair treatment and equal opportunities and rights. Optimistic and determined, she has adopted the sentence "Every life is worth living" as her motto.

Miseda_Art/ Marylyne Jan Akinyi Miseda is a 26-year-old visual Artist who is the founder of Miseda_Art and co-founder of Strokes of Magic. Marylyne Jan Akinyi Miseda's business was founded in January 2021. Miseda_Art focuses on surrealism art, abstract art, expressive art and art on apparel. Strokes of Magic is a professionally-led art class for Children.

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Instagram: @miseda_art / @strokes_ofmagic

Namafu Amutse is a Namibian multidisciplinary artist who explores art forms filmmaking, photography, directing and writing and works as a freelance photographer and creative director. She is currently studying towards a Bachelor of Education Honors in English and German at the University of Namibia. Her work is fueled by Southern African tradition, feminism and Afrofuturism, with the focus of centering all black perspectives. In October of 2020 she had her first solo exhibition titled 'Bright Eyes into Afrofuturism' and in November of the same year her work titled 'Chrysalis' was featured in the fourth issue of Doek, a Namibian literary magazine, where one of her images graced the cover. You can check her out on :

Instagram: @namafu and see more work

Articles on her Linktree: www.linktr.ee/namafu

Email: namafu.amutse@gmail.com

Ndapwa Alweendo has an MSocSci in Political and International Studies from Rhodes University. She is currently working as a freelance writer, editor and project coordinator for Sister Namibia. Her interests include Namibia's often suppressed feminist history, critical race theory, and public mental health.

Palesa Deejay Manaleng studied journalism at Tshwane University of Technology. While studying she was a journalism cadet at the Witbank News. She interned at the Citizen Newspaper in 2011, she worked as a sub-editor at the Citizen Newspaper (2011-2013). She left and went to intern at the Wits Justice Project (2013-2014) and Clickmaths as a Zulu maths translator. Worked at eNCA (2014) as a junior online writer, she spent the rest of 2014 in hospital recovering after a cycling accident that has left her paralyzed. Once out of hospital she worked for Global Girl Media as a journalism tutor, while working for Wits Vuvuzela as a Sesotho tutor (2015).

She also represented South Africa in three Para-cycling World Cups and has been a para-cycling national champion for 6 years. Since her accident she has also competed in over 30 cycling competitions with the shortest being 46km and the longest distance being 111km. She is currently an online journalist for EyeWitness News, a wheelchair racer and a Para-cyclist.Blog:https://beyondaccessibility.wordpress.com

Stella Nkhonya Chisangwala had polio at the age of 7. She uses crutches and calipers sometimes a wheel chair. She obtained her bachelor's degree in community development despite many challenges. Stella founded a disability rights organisation (Human Rights of Women and Girls with Disability in Malawi and where she is the national coordinator) the formation was against the background of the personal experience encountered during the first pregnancy it was a challenge accessing SRH rights services. She faced stigma and discrimination way throughout her life until she rediscovered the power within herself through a training by AWDF. Stella who is a mother of three biological girls and one adopted girl loves praying, God is her pillar of success. Stella was nominated the UN women Civil society Advisory Group and sits on the steering Committee in the UPR implementation advocacy group. She is an ambassador for young girls with disabilities and loves dancing and singing.

Shinaz Ali-Zaids is a social justice champion and multidisciplinary pundit tabling more than 10 years progressive experience complemented by legal knowledge in African political issues, environmental justice and the funding landscape. Shinaz who i is the Feminist Republik Culture Curator has extensive grantmaking expertise and experience having been with UAF-Africa since 2013. Her professional backgrounds and community engagements have helped root her activism. Shinaz believes in servant leadership and engages in community work when she can. Her deep knowledge of the realities of womn living at the margins of society, especially in urban slums, coupled with her passion of employing theatre and dance as rehabilitation and collective-care tools has seen her working across Africa co-creating with arti-vists in elevating feminist and social justice approaches to achieving longstanding women's rights and gender justice. As a creative, Shinaz finds working out and cooking therapeutic and believes good food heals the body and soul. She is also passionate about financial independence and is an avid entrepreneur. At UAF-Africa, Shinaz has been instrumental in championing the rights of marginalized communities, environmental justice defenders and feminist arti-vists. Shinaz is on Instagram: @nubianqueenbiz_zaids and on LinkedIn: Shinaz Rehema Ali

Tariro Tandi is a human rights lawyer and activist currently working as the Head of Partnerships & Development with UAF-Africa. She is a mental health advocate and blogger spreading awareness about mental health, sharing inspiration and coping skills, finding unique ways to talk about emotion, mental illness, health, wellbeing and life in general. You can find her writings on https://tarytells.com/ and she is reachable on tarirotandi@gmail.com

Thato Mphuthi is a prolific speaker and activist for causes that centre on active citizenry, sexual and reproductive health, unpaid care work vs. decent work, self-care and leadership; among others. She is an ambitious and courageous leader on a mission to make a world-large impact. Apart from her several accolades, it is her heart and passion for driving positive change in the global society that make her the inspirational force she is.

Zanele Mbugua is an African feminist and activist who is passionate about womn's and queer rights advocacy. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology and Sociology from Rhodes University (South Africa) and is currently pursuing a Masters degree in Gender studies and Development at the University of Nairobi. Zanele has lived most of her life in Johannesburg, South Africa, moving back to her home country Kenya in 2018. She is currently the Feminist Republik Champion passionate about facilitating holistic wellbeing, collective care and regenerative healing justice. You can find Zanele on Instagram: @zane_ee and LinkedIN: Zanele Mbugua

Esther Kyozira Before recently transitioning into the role of Chief Executive Officer at the National Union of Disabled persons of Uganda (NUDIPU), Esther Kyozira was the Program Officer for the Disability Rights Fund and the Disability Rights Advocacy Fund in Uganda. Previously, Esther led programs at NUDIPU and coordinated the Hi-tech Project under the Uganda National Association of the Blind. She has also worked to influence key national policies and legislation, such as the National Disability Bill in Uganda, and has been working closely with DPOs to monitor the implementation of the SDGs. She also serves as a representative of women with disabilities on the National Association of Women's Organizations in Uganda and the Representative of PWDs on the Higher Education Students' Financing Board and has previously served on the National Council for Disability as its Chairperson and the Uganda Foundation for the Blind. Esther has a Master of Arts in Human Rights and a Bachelor of Arts in Education both from Makerere University Kampala and a Diploma in Law from the Law Development Center-Uganda.

ICODZIM is a womn led and founded organisation for womn.
The organisation seeks to achieve gender equality by empowering women and strengthen their economic position. Their interventions attempt to address gender norms and equality early in life, before gender stereotypes become deeply ingrained in marginalised womn. ICODZIM therefore promotes womn's rights by creating platforms for womn to amplify their voices and influence policies and decisions which affect them for socio-economic transformation of the lives of women.

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The Disability Rights Fund (DRF) is a grantmaking collaborative between donors and the global disability rights community that provides financial and technical resources to organizations of persons with disabilities to advocate for equal rights and full participation in society. Since 2008, DRF and its sister organization, the Disability Rights Advocacy Fund (DRAF), have funded organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) across the developing world – primarily in Africa, Asia, the Pacific Islands, and the Caribbean – to participate in ratification, implementation, and monitoring of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Website: https://drafund.org/

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