

**URGENT
ACTION
FUND +
AFRICA**

FOR WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS



**FINGER ON
THE PULSE**

**STRATEGIC PLAN
2016 - 2020**

*Where a woman
leads, streams run
uphill*

(ETHIOPIAN PROVERB)

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Appreciating our supporters & friends

The development and writing of this strategic plan was a collaborative effort that would not have been successful without the committed involvement of several co-creators. A special shout out to the fabulous board and staff of Urgent Action Fund-Africa (UAF-Africa) whose dedication to the process has gone a long way in coming up with this plan.

We also wish to recognise our supporters, grantees, advisors and collaborators who contributed directly or indirectly towards the development of this document. We applaud Tom Olila of Strategic Connections, whose expertise and sharp execution guided us through this process.

May all the people that read this plan or hear about it join hands with us on this new leg of our exciting journey!

UAF-Africa team

In her own words...

FINGER ON THE PULSE: Reflecting on our feminist journey thus far...

So much has shifted socio-politically, economically, and environmentally since “**Fire in the Belly 2012-2015**,” our last strategic plan. That period was marked by a revolutionary wave across the continent caused by innovative and provocative civic engagement. We witnessed the fall of three long serving Presidents in North Africa and saw the resolve of a generation keen on change. Accordingly, Urgent Action Fund –Africa (UAF-Africa) has grown in leaps and bounds!

As a rapid response Fund, we track these gains without slowing down. We endeavor to keep a finger on the pulse of the African women’s rights movements. Thus, we remain poised to support women’s human rights defenders (WHRDs) across the continent—particularly those who seek to advance women’s human rights and challenge the status quo.

In the last four years, UAF-Africa has sharpened her grant-making mechanisms. We were the first and only grant-maker to review and disburse a grant within two hours. Days into the Tunisian revolution, before the dust had even settled, the Fund decided to conduct an outreach mission to the country. We wanted to express solidarity with and gain understanding of the women behind the revolution and ensure that their voices were not lost in the

melee. Soon after, we supported the mobilisation of women voters to participate in the post-revolution elections and to ensure that the hard earned gains in women’s human rights remained at the fore of political discourse.

In this time, the Fund enhanced her strategic resourcing status by making grants to Libya, Tunisia, Mauritania, Central African Republic and Guinea; previously hard to access countries, increasing UAF-Africa’s support for women’s rights activism to 48 countries. By evolving into a virtual organisation, the Fund has further leveraged financial support to women’s rights organisations and activists, making a total of 322 grants at a total amount of USD 3.9 million.

As a grant-maker, my most memorable experiences were defined by quick interventions. I mean the kinds that safeguarded the lives and spirit of WHRDs at the personal or community level; activists who stood up for women’s rights and individuals who flout patriarchy. I recall the worldwide mobilisation and outrage of women’s rights organisations when 16-year old Amina Filali from Morocco killed herself after being forced to marry her rapist. The Fund was able to support the advocacy of Moroccan organisations to have the law changed—a law that prescribed such marriages as punitive measures

for rape. I recall the joy when, two years later, the Moroccan parliament repealed the law.

The world was outraged when a 27-year old Sudanese woman was arrested and sentenced to death for apostasy and adultery because of her marriage to a non-Muslim man. Within hours of receiving the news from her network, UAF-Africa responded by supporting an organisation which swiftly mobilised a legal team for the woman. Her freedom was granted when the court overturned the earlier ruling and set her free. For me, these initiatives epitomise the boldness and resilience of WHRDs in the face of subjugation.

We acknowledge that change on the continent has often been paradoxical. For example, certain African countries demand more accountability and transparency from civil rights movements and organisations, and within the same discourse, seek to grant free and unmitigated reign to their governments. Africa is exploring new sources of energy, exploiting existing or newly found mineral resources, courting and embracing new development partnerships while simultaneously struggling with chronic corruption, growing fundamentalisms, misuse of public wealth, and malfunctioning administrative systems. We have a burgeoning and vibrant youth population as well as staggering rates of unemployment and brain drain. Innovation is busting at the hems of our societal fabrics but we grapple with the effects of climate change.

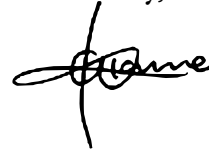
Throughout these changes, UAF-Africa will keep a finger on the pulse of issues affecting and influencing women's rights in Africa. Already, we have redefined our grant-making categories, embraced emerging issues such as climate change and natural resource governance, and invested in technology and communication methods of practice to ensure that we catalyse social change and remain accessible

to support the needs of women and girls on the continent.

To stay within reach of WHRDs, we have built an extensive network of advisors and expanded our presence across Africa. We are accessible and available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year and connect with our constituencies in person and through various media. Our aim is to keep abreast of the daily struggles and successes of women and girls across the continent.

During this strategic planning period, named **“Finger on the Pulse,”** we will let this vigilance guide our thoughts and actions. We look forward to a period of unlimited possibilities, courage, and most importantly, the advancement of women's human rights. We welcome you to join us.

In solidarity,



CAROLINE KIARIE

Programme Officer: Grant making



BACKGROUND & INTRODUCTION

We are... Urgent Action Fund-Africa

Urgent Action Fund-Africa (UAF-Africa) is a pan-African and feminist Fund, established in 2001 in Nairobi, Kenya. Using a rapid response grant making (RRG) model, the Fund supports unanticipated, time-sensitive, innovative, and bold initiatives. These enable African feminists and women's rights organisations to seize windows of opportunity, fracture patriarchy, amplify their voices, enhance their visibility, and become significant actors who can influence policy and law while shaping discourse. This way, UAF-Africa fills a unique grant making niche within the African feminist movement, providing stepping stones to activists as they use their agency and resilience to achieve social, economic, political and environmental justice.

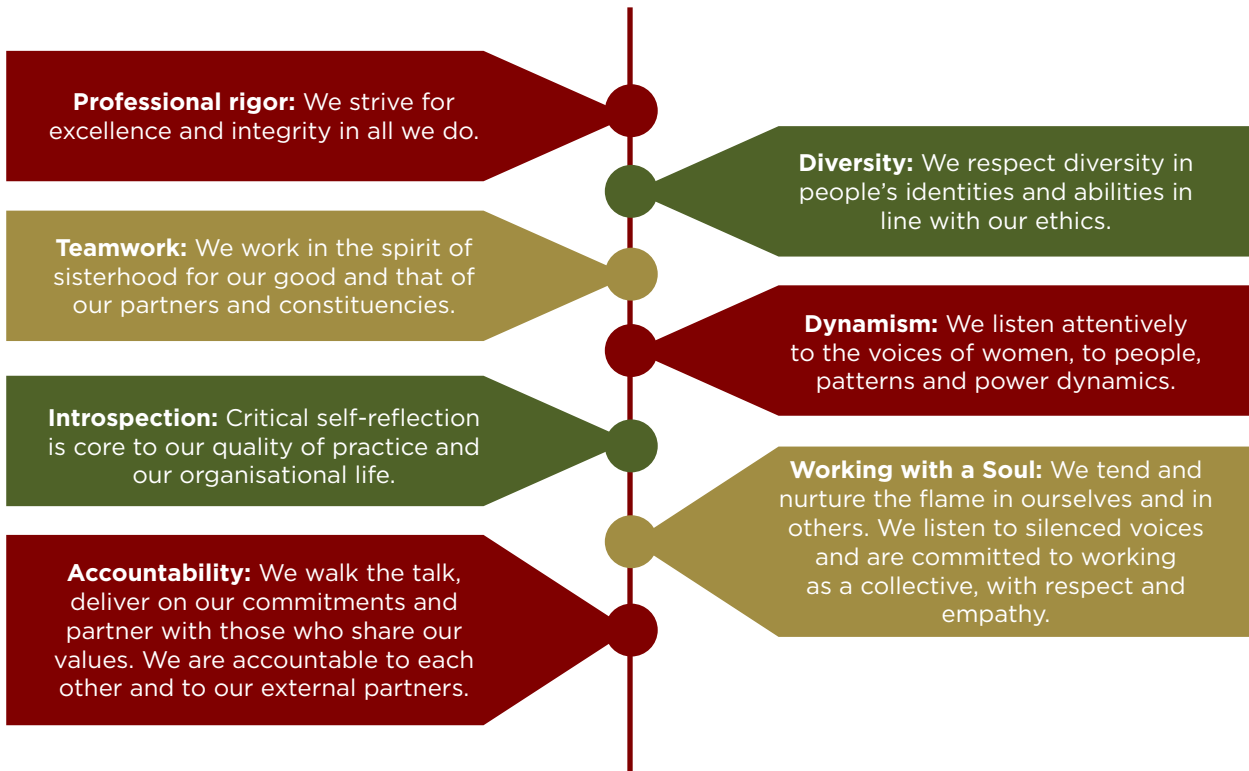
UAF-Africa operates as a virtual organisation with an imprint across five sub-regions. The Fund has a strategic and physical presence in **East Africa:** Nairobi, Kenya; **Central Africa:** Bujumbura, Burundi; **North Africa:** Cairo, Egypt; **Southern Africa:** Harare, Zimbabwe and **West Africa:** Cotonou, Benin. Funding urgently and strategically is a 24-hour and 365-day job and the Fund has acquired the expertise, tools and resilience needed to thrive in this environment. Our high-tech funding mechanisms ensure that we respond to urgent



requests within 24 hours, true to the name Urgent Action Fund-Africa. To date, the Fund has supported over 700 women's strategic initiatives in 48 African countries. Grant applications are accepted in the 5 African Union official languages (English, French, Kiswahili, Portuguese and Arabic).

*We invest in Women's Power to
Change the Status Quo*

Core Values



BACKGROUND & INTRODUCTION

STRATEGIC ANALYSIS: REFLECTIONS & LESSONS LEARNT

OUR RESPONSE: STRATEGIES & INTERVENTIONS

We dream...

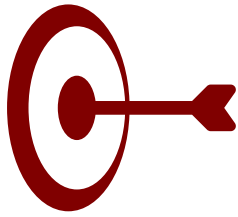
VISION

Of an Africa where women and girls are leading change agents at all levels of society with full access to sustainable resources and opportunities – a world in which women and girls thrive.

We exist to...

MISSION

Fund and catalyse initiatives that improve and sustain women's lives.



Track Record

BACKGROUND & INTRODUCTION

STRATEGIC ANALYSIS: REFLECTIONS & LESSONS LEARNT

OUR RESPONSE: STRATEGIES & INTERVENTIONS

- During the last strategic plan period (2012–2015), UAF-Africa has been able to expand and nurture her base of collaborators, creating strategic partnerships with knowledge-building institutions e.g. Strathmore University’s Governance Centre – **Kenya**, Coady International Women’s Leadership Institute – **Canada**, Harvard Law School – **USA**; media institutions e.g. Her Zimbabwe – **Zimbabwe**, Arimus Media Ltd – **Kenya** and The OpEd Project – **USA**, in addition to an expanded portfolio of grantees, funders and partners. As an example, over the last four years, the Fund’s resources have become more diverse, multi-year and bigger by 30% – thereby affording the organisation peace of mind and confidence in the work she delivers.
- UAF-Africa was the first women’s rights fund to be physically present on the ground in Liberia and conduct feminist research on the Ebola Virus epidemic. The Fund swiftly supported several women’s rights groups in Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone as they sought to turn the tide of Ebola. UAF-Africa catalysed through multi-media several think pieces that were quoted and referenced by multinational policy making bodies, funders and scholars.
- UAF-Africa was the first fund to be present and respond to women’s rights needs during the Tunisian revolution. The Fund buttressed her outreach with grants that supported the mobilization of women to participate in the elections that followed the revolution.
- Furthermore, UAF-Africa’s work promotes inclusivity. The Fund has to date supported, amongst others, indigenous women, young women, pop culture artists, women living with disabilities, and LBTQI groups, enabling them to better organise, strategize and communicate their priorities.
- To date, UAF-Africa has been able to secure the safety and freedom of 96 women’s human rights defenders (WHRDs) who were threatened, bullied, wrongfully incarcerated or harmed by governments, as well as patriarchal, class or homophobic bullies, on account of the activists’ work. For instance, in the DRC the Fund secured the release and facilitated the protection of a WHRD who was harassed and imprisoned by security forces for bringing to light various human rights violations committed by some members of the Congolese security forces.
- The Fund’s RRG funding model allowed us to react to critical and timely issues and create long-term outcomes. One such instance was in Morocco, in March 2012, when Amina Filali, a 16-year-old girl, committed suicide,

drawing national attention. Amina had been forced to marry the man who had raped her. Through our support to the case, in January 2014, the Moroccan Parliament amended the controversial legal article that allowed rapists to escape prosecution by marrying their victims, including that they were under the legal age of marriage of 18.

- In early 2015, through medium-term strategic support of advocacy efforts by civil society, including a powerful 2013 African Women's Leadership conference session hosted by the

Wisdom is like a baobab tree; no one individual can embrace it.

(AKAN PROVERB)

Fund on early, child and forced marriages; the Malawian Parliament adopted the Marriage, Divorce and Family Relations Bill, raising the minimum age of marriage to 18.

- UAF-Africa has contributed to the enhancement of feminist leadership through direct funding, convenings, supporting advocacy and movement building. As an example, between 2013 and 2015 she facilitated the capacity building of 25 young women leaders from Cote D'Ivoire, Cameroon, South Sudan, Malawi and Kenya to embody new ways of being, in order to facilitate transformational change in their countries. The supported women were able to

enhance their financial security and increase their involvement in electoral, peace building and reconciliation processes.

- UAF-Africa believes that knowledge is a key driver of social change and thus produced information and analyses informed by women's lived experiences. To date, we have commissioned several studies and evaluations to fill knowledge gaps and promote learning. These included a study on the psychology/ root causes/mapping of legislative and policy environment of sexual and gender based violence in Mali; Reflections for the field, by **Dr. Florence Baingana** (a Ugandan, feminist psychiatrist and doctor specialised in mental health supported by UAF-Africa to conduct a rapid assessment and gender analysis of the impact and response of the Ebola outbreak in Liberia); a 2015 think piece providing feminist analysis on the crisis situation in Burundi, including recommendations pertaining to the roles that women can play in conflict and post-conflict periods.
- We are in the process of further developing (structuring, systematizing) our Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) systems and practices. So, far, the Fund has explored the use of outcome harvesting to capture and interpret the outcomes of our grants. That is in addition to exploring the use of a change matrix to document the changes we influence through our grants; a pilot trends analysis to triangulate the validity of our trends by seeking the input of practitioners and women's human rights defenders.



STRATEGIC ANALYSIS:
REFLECTIONS &
LESSONS LEARNT

Finger on the Pulse: Overview of the Operating Context

“Politics hates a vacuum. If it isn’t filled with hope, someone will fill it with fear”

(NAOMI KLEIN)

Political context: Progress in achieving women’s rights in Africa continues to be crippled by deep-rooted political inequality, corruption, impunity and increasing insecurity. Further, legal and policy frameworks tend towards oppression, while constitutionalism and the rule of law are seldom implemented. A number of African governments have shrunk civil society space by introducing regressive legal and policy frameworks. Moreover, many justice systems are crippled by a lack of independence, unfairness and injustice. The voice, visibility, and capacity of feminists and women’s rights organisations to address these issues remain weak. There is thus a need to strengthen social movements and the collective power of African feminists and other women’s rights and social justice organisations in order to build powerful movements for women’s rights and hold the state and civil society institutions accountable.

Socio-economic context: Despite the strides made over the years by the women’s movement in Africa towards women’s equality and autonomy, women continue to face various social injustices, such as forced labour, sex slavery, child marriages, as well as sexual and gender

based violence. There is also the political manipulation of culture to entrench patriarchy, gender norms and homophobia. Limited and gender insensitive resourcing of women movements will increasingly continue to affect their ability to confront issues of power and dominance. There is, however, a growing recognition of the need for women’s economic empowerment in Africa – linking access to, and control of resources and/or opportunities to debates on the effects of climate change and the impacts of exploiting extractives and other natural resources.

Technological environment: Advancements in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in Africa have generated greater possibilities to connect women’s and other social justice movements, share data and information, and link people across sectors and regions. These include possibilities to better monitor politically tense situations, report faster on women’s human rights violations, or transfer resources to facilitate urgent and time sensitive interventions. However, such benefits are not universally accessed across the continent, particularly in very rural communities. Additionally, such advancements have been used negatively, for negative surveillance of WHRDs. Advancements in ICTs create opportunities within UAF-Africa for better data management, learning exchange and for the Fund to operate effectively as a virtual organisation.

Ecological context: Over the last decade Africa has witnessed an increase in exploitation of natural resources, particularly within the extractives sector (oil, gas and minerals). These activities continue to have environmental, social and economic impacts that often disproportionately affect women. Women also lack a voice and representation in formal decision-making processes around governance of natural resources nationally and within their own communities. There has also been an increase in the number, frequency and complexity of disasters linked to climate change such as floods and droughts. These often result in severe losses of property and life. Displacements resulting from such disasters have often left women and children

homeless for unpredictably long periods, exposing them to further rights abuses.

Experience Counts: Lessons from our Past

Through the evaluation of her work over the last four year strategic plan, UAF-Africa has learnt a number of important lessons that will inform her future work. These include amongst others:

- Financial (and technical) resources remain critical tools in advancing and protecting women's rights and enabling the active participation of feminists and women's rights organisations in crucial economic, social, political and environmental processes that contribute to shifting of power relations. The Fund intends to intensify her efforts to broaden and stabilise her resource base to guarantee the effectiveness and sustainability of her work.
- The emergent, evolving and unanticipated nature of issues that affect women's rights require a much more adaptive way of working. The Fund will focus more on her ability to identify critical, strategic and urgent, often unforeseeable initiatives that have the potential to greatly enhance women's wellbeing, rather than let her actions be determined by a pre-decided set of categories. She is most effective when operating with an open pool of resources to support such initiatives, rather than with restricted 'boxing' of issues. This is also informed by the fact that rights issues may not always fall into neat categories (themes) and are frequently interconnected.
- The increasingly complex nature of issues affecting women's human rights requires a collaborative approach. This requires creation of linkages and collaborations across sectors, issues and actors. This is also a recognition that women's rights do not exist in a vacuum. UAF-Africa will continue to

connect feminists and women's rights organisations in Africa to relevant stakeholders, resources and opportunities at the local, national, regional and international levels. This includes linkages with actors who can resource activists' work in the longer term once the immediate urgent needs or threats have been addressed with the support of UAF-Africa.

- It is an obvious principle that in order to be effective, one needs more focus. We will apply this norm much more consciously, focusing more on our core business of grantmaking (i.e. Rapid Response Grants), and collaborate more strategically with other actors who offer complementary support to our constituencies. Such partnerships will allow us to dedicate ourselves to identifying and administering grants, and generating knowledge from grantees.
- Strengthening African women's movements requires us to pay attention to the wellbeing of women human rights activists, for instance, by going beyond advocacy and capacity building to encourage self-awareness and resilience.
- Strengthening African women's movements also demands taking succession planning seriously to ensure that women's rights organisations welcome younger women, so that women's movements are receptive to new forms of mobilising and organising
- Human rights activism is neither neutral nor static. It requires ongoing reflections, re-positioning and re-strategizing as well as in-depth research and analysis. Producing and disseminating new evidence and analysis that is premised on the practices and lived experiences of African women requires strategic investment.

*Wisdom does not come
overnight.*

(SOMALI PROVERB)



OUR RESPONSE:
STRATEGIES &
INTERVENTIONS

Theory of Change

UAF-Africa believes that women and girls can end inequality, injustice and impact their societies better if they are well organised (work strategically together, networked), and have sufficient resources (money, skills, knowledge) to effectively seize opportunities for change. We therefore seek to contribute to sustained improvements in the capacities of African feminists and women's rights organisations to seize opportunities to create change.

We aspire to achieve four outcomes...

1. Greater public debate/discourse on critical issues affecting women's human rights and wellbeing (critical analysis and visibility);
2. Better mobilisation and organisation of women human rights actors (strong movement);
3. Existence and submission to enabling laws, policies, institutions, social norms, attitudes, and practices (fair/just power structures and relations);
4. Women participate in critical processes, and decide who acts on their behalf (agency and voices).

In order to realise the above changes, we will...

- **Catalyse and act** – Quickly provide financial and other strategic resources through rapid response grant making;
- **Defend the defenders** – Support African feminists and women's rights organisations to mitigate security risks and build resilience as they act;
- **Analyse and network** – Invest in assessing the landscape to identify opportunities and actors who can effectively engage in creating change;
- **Create and share knowledge** – Share the outcomes of (our) analysis and learning;
- **Build capacity** – Strengthen our organisation,



particularly regarding its funding, staff, culture and systems.

Key Actions

As described in the Theory of Change, UAF-Africa shall engage in and/or support various interventions clustered around the following focal areas:

1. Catalyse and Act (Grantmaking)

As her core business, UAF-Africa will continue to provide financial and technical support through rapid response grants (RRG) to catalyse feminist and women's rights activism. RRGs enable the Fund to maintain the speed and agility needed to address time sensitive issues,

some of which emerge from conflict situations. It will also aim to capacitate women's rights actors to seize opportunities for sustained activism, increase women's engagement in electoral, peace building and reconciliation processes, and enhance public awareness on issues that have an impact on women's safety, security and general wellbeing.

2. **Defending the Defenders**

The main aim of this focal area will be to facilitate WHRDs and organisations to enjoy better safety, security and protection, by increasing their ability to respond to, confront, or avert insecurity. This will in return lead to an increase in the number of women who successfully challenge patriarchal structures

*Brave people and smoke
always find a way out*

(NIGERIAN PROVERB)

and repressive governments. UAF-Africa will support interventions that enable such actors to enhance their financial and programme development capacity; comprehension of, and ability to advocate for integrated security and protection in order to enhance the security, wellbeing and resilience of WHRDs and their organisations;

3. **Analyse and Network (Strategic Analysis, Alliance Building & Influencing)**

This focal area will entail regularly reflecting to identify areas where, and with whom we can co-create change, thus strengthening the quality

of our grantmaking. The Fund will strengthen African women's organising and linking capacity, facilitate collaborations and strategic linkages amongst actors across sectors and levels, as well as increase the general influencing capacity of feminists and women's rights organisations. UAF-Africa will also support the generation and sharing of new knowledge and analysis of topical issues. All the interventions in this category are expected particularly to lead to changes in laws, policies and practices affecting women's human rights.

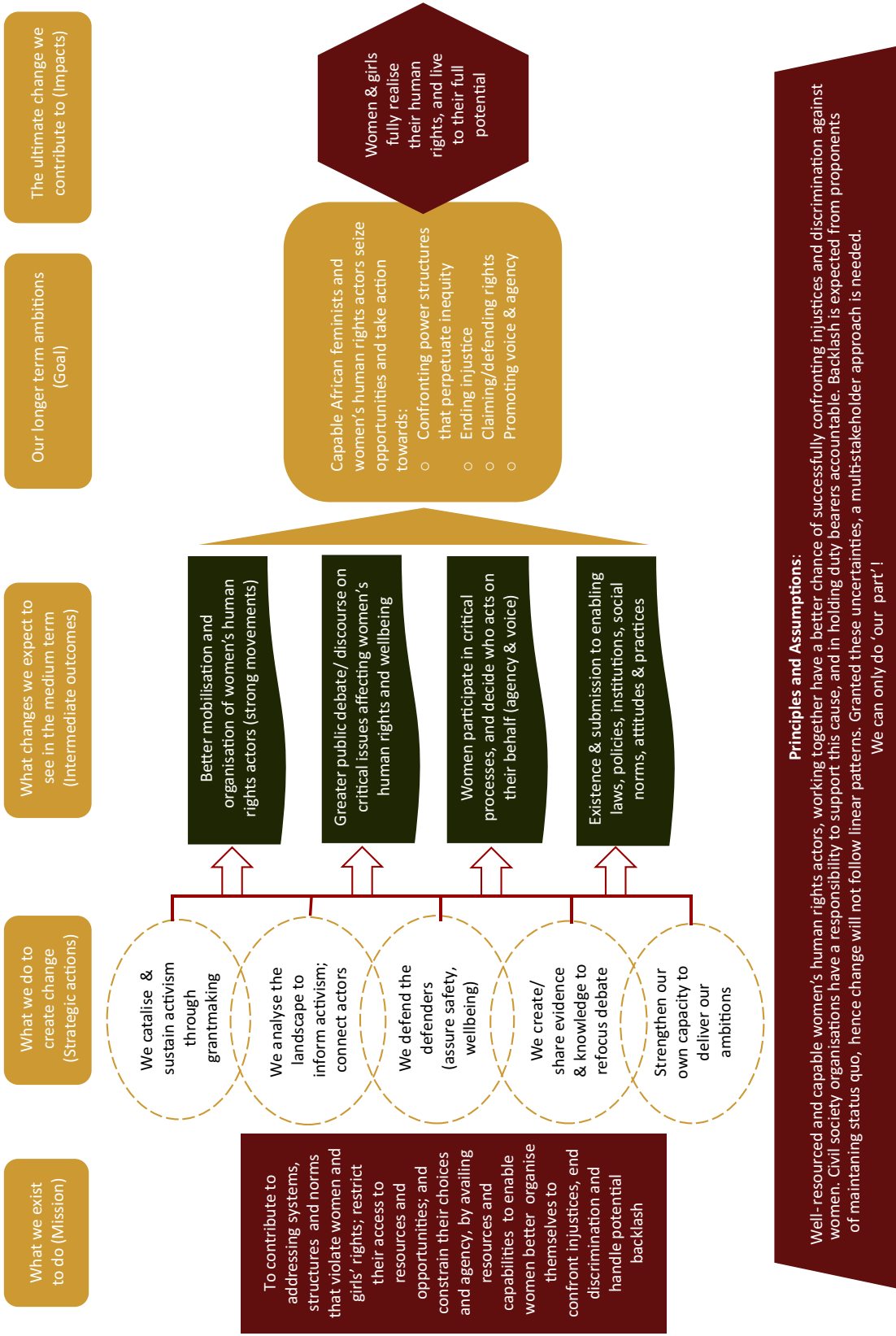
4. **Creating and sharing knowledge**

This will focus on generating knowledge products from the lived experiences of African women and UAF-A's grantees. They will be profiled in order to initiate conversations on critical issues pertaining to women's human rights and to influence policy, perceptions and practice. UAF-Africa will continue to strengthen her external communication and effective engagement with media, not only to profile the work of the Fund, but also to bring issues affecting local African women to international or global attention. This will derive from her grantmaking and will require further development and operationalization of her MEL system, investment in her ICT infrastructure and in her capacity to communicate lessons emerging from her grantmaking.

5. **Building Capacity**

This focal area will strengthen UAF-Africa's internal capacity, enabling her to respond rapidly, strategically and sustainably to critical situations affecting women's rights. Areas of attention will include amongst others diversification of the institutional resource base, strengthening internal systems as well as enhancing the staff complement and wellbeing.

Figure 1: Schematic Representation : UAF- Africa's Theory of Change;



UAF-Africa Executive Board of Directors



UAF-Africa Team

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Design and print production by Centrepress Media Limited.
PO Box 1202, Nairobi 00606, Kenya
Printed in Nairobi, Kenya.

**URGENT
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FOR WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS

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