



# YOUTH STORIES OF CHANGE

INSPIRING ANECDOTES OF YOUTH  
CHANGEMAKERS AROUND THE WORLD

BY THE INAUGURAL COHORT OF THE NGO CSW/NY  
GLOBAL YOUTH FELLOWS

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NGO CSW's Youth Leaders & Young Professionals (YLYPs) and our partner, Women Have Wings, are thrilled to announce the 20 Global Youth Fellows for Gender Equality. We had over 500 applications from young people around the world, and hope that all applicants will continue to work with us. This group of 20 young leaders have been chosen for their dedication to gender equality, the diversity of experience that they bring to the UN, and their ability to inspire others. Our fellows are leading global campaigns to raise the visibility of gender issues, speaking at our events, telling their inspiring stories and supporting efforts to advance global gender equality through a youth perspective. Through the generosity of Women Have Wings, each winner has received an award of \$1,000 to support their work on gender equality in 2024. We are so excited for you to meet them!

This Youth Stories of Change publication illuminates the inspiring anecdotes of youth changemakers around the world, sharing the stories, activism, and advocacy efforts of the first-ever cohort of Global Youth Fellows for Gender Equality. Our Fellows from around the world have contributed their personal stories and activism, featuring art, poetry, prose, narratives, and essays.

### SPECIAL THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNER



WOMEN HAVE WINGS

# AMANDA ARROYO CABEZAS

## FLOWING FOR CHANGE: COSTA RICA'S PIONEERING PATH TO MENSTRUAL JUSTICE

### NOSOTRAS WOMEN CONNECTING - COSTA RICA

When many of us think about periods, we may associate it with discomfort, but for millions, menstruation is a burden. This burden extends beyond physical discomfort, encompassing limited access to clean water, infrastructure, hygiene products, and menstrual supplies.

In 2023, Nosotras Women Connecting, the organization I work for, took on a significant challenge: advocating for the approval of Bill 22.421 Justice and Menstruation. Our goal was to get the bill passed, shift the public narrative around menstruation, and ensure that Menstrual Education became accessible and safe for everyone.



This journey led us to many things, primarily traveling across Costa Rica with our Menstrual Education workshops and spending numerous hours and days in Congress, engaging in dialogues to bring this project to be a real law.

In these places we visited, we heard countless stories, from myths like if you swim in the sea with your period you can attract sharks, to women sharing their experiences of menstrual poverty. We also witnessed other realities such as how women in correctional facilities essentially relied on their support networks, like their family and friends, to bring menstrual products during visits.

In a country like Costa Rica, where Human Rights have openly guided the construction of public policies and social guarantees, it's unimaginable that Menstrual Health was not under any legal norm, with no clarity on how to demand Menstrual Justice as menstruating individuals before the State.

One of the most impactful findings was seeing how many families had to choose between pads or a bag of rice, for the poorest households the purchase of

menstrual products represented up to 27% of their total income. This meant that 112,916 households in Costa Rica had to choose between buying menstrual products or food.

How is this fair? Why had no one legislated on this? How is it possible that our health has a tax that can force people to choose between which basic needs are more important?

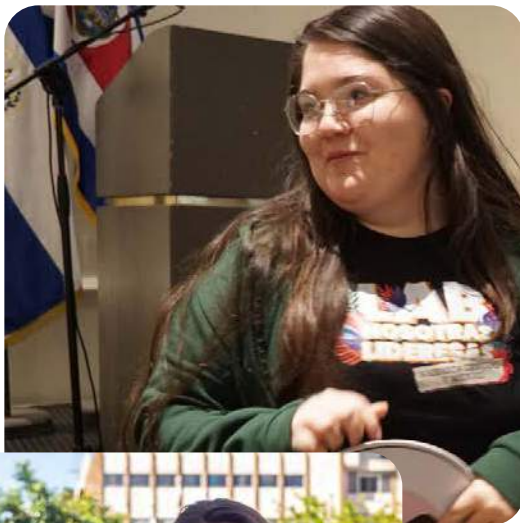
The answer to this question lies in the fact that menstruation has always been viewed as a private matter, not a public health issue. Suppose we allow ourselves to discuss the importance of viewing menstruation in this way. In that case, we may uncover a long path of challenges and entrenched patriarchal structures that have prevented this issue from being addressed publicly, treating it as something personal and laden with stereotypes, myths, and stigmas.

Menstrual Justice can be summarized as the Human Right to have Dignified Menstruation, where women and menstruating individuals can access appropriate infrastructure, hygiene products, clean and safe water, and, of

course, products to manage their menstruation in a way that makes them feel secure and comfortable.

Reading this might make it seem obvious, but the reality is that in Costa Rica, there are more than 22,000 girls and adolescents in menstrual poverty who lack access to these necessities. During our visits to Public Schools, we encountered bathrooms without infrastructure, we visited schools and communities that had gone over a month without water, and in almost every place, girls and teenagers asked us for menstrual products because they couldn't afford them.

Beyond the indignation this should cause us, it should prompt us to consider the social cost. According



to UNICEF Latin America, 1 in 10 girls stop going to school due to menstrual poverty. And what is the social cost of this? When a girl stops studying, we fail to allow them to develop their lives in a free and dignified manner, we are denying them their right to build their lives.

This is why Bill 22.421 was vital for our country. To make this a reality, we worked tirelessly with Congress members, organizations, activists, and other institutions. We spent full weeks going in and out of Congress, presenting data, and creating dialogues. And all this had a positive outcome: on October 27, 2023, the bill was discussed in Congress and unanimously approved. Finally, on December 20, 2023, it was ratified as a Law of the Republic.

Why is this a milestone for my country and region? Because it recognizes the State's responsibility to ensure that women have the right to manage their menstruation freely and with dignity, and where the State must support, favor, and promote policies to make this happen.

In addition to this, the law dictates that:

- The State must conduct awareness and information campaigns.
- Educational institutions, correctional facilities, and centers for refugees and migrants must provide the necessary products for menstruating individuals to manage their menstruation.
- Menstrual products must be included in the Basic Housing Products.
- The state must create statistics and metrics on menstruation.
- The state must guarantee access to menstrual products for those who require them through Health Centers.

This achievement is not only a legislative triumph but also a victory for the equity and dignity of women and all the individuals who menstruate in Costa Rica, it's also a light of hope for the region, especially in Central America. However, the approval of the law is just the first step. The challenge now lies in effective implementation to ensure that every woman and person who menstruates, regardless of their socio-economic condition, has access to dignified and obstacle-free menstrual management.

The story of Menstrual Justice in Costa Rica is a reminder that change is possible. By transcending stigmas and challenging patriarchal structures, my country has set a valuable precedent for Latin America. It is a call to action for other countries in the region to consider the importance of Menstrual Justice and take concrete measures to ensure that all menstruations can be with dignity and without barriers.

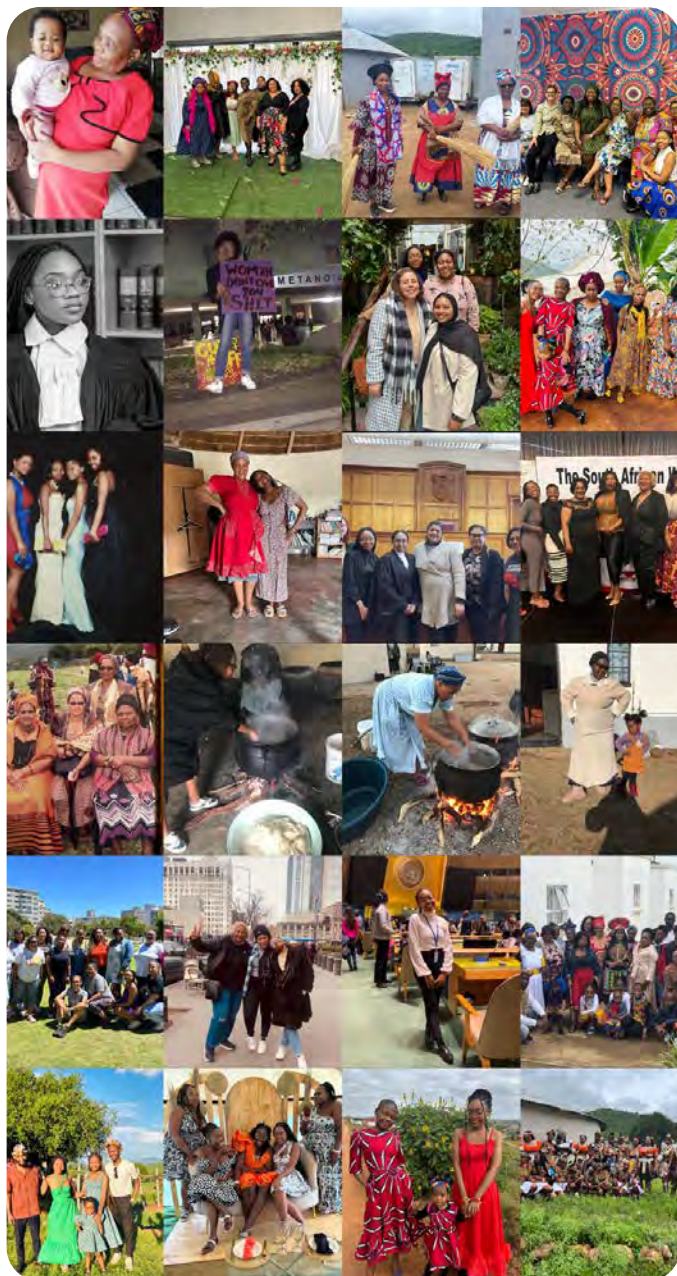




# SENAMILE MADLALA

## BRILLIANT WOMEN

WOMEN'S LEGAL CENTRE - SOUTH AFRICA



It has long been my belief that I am fated to be surrounded by brilliant women.

Born in KwaZulu Natal, daughter to Muzi and Nelisiwe Madlala, I was about three generations away from being refused an education because of my gender. The right to education – a fundamental, transformative and empowering right, denied to the women before me, just because they were women. I spent my formative years being raised by women who were the first graduates in their family, who also had to balance their identities as mothers, wives and individuals. Summer days were spent watching my mothers wash clothes in river water in the morning, hunched over fires cooking in the afternoon, and marking their students test scripts at night. I spent my primary and high school years surrounded by women from all different cultural and ethnic backgrounds who all taught me there was no star that was out of reach and that what seemed impossible, was attainable.

I suspect this is how I became a feminist long before I had the vocabulary to attach to the ideologies, I knew to be true.

However, I had not quite put the active in activist yet.

It would only be years later, that merely two words would lead me down a trajectory of who I would become. "No Afro's."

An arbitrary rule meant to enforce Eurocentric standards in all girls' high school I

attended and what I felt to be a grave violation of my right to dignity. It was the first time I truly questioned authority, put the active in my activism, and engaged how a specific group of girls did not fit the standard of “appropriateness” in a school environment. It would also be the first battle I would lose, and the debate regarding black hair would only be successfully challenged years after I had left high school.

My university experience was littered by important socio-political movements like Open Stellenbosch, Fees Must Fall and End Rape Culture. However, what I would very soon learn, to the detriment of my academics, is that you cannot fight every battle. And yet, I tried/fought. We spent long nights teaching one another and learning from each of our experiences to form what we believe would be an inclusive space. Most times, it felt like we were fighting a losing battle. We would address one issue (language exclusion in classes) and another would arise thereafter (rampant rape culture). It constantly felt like there was always something.

And while, I was getting more and more comfortable addressing all of these social issues, it did beg the question: why bother?

The cynical answer was always the fact that, as a black woman, whether I liked it or not, I was dealt a complex and intersecting card where all social issues intersected and impacted me differently. And it was not to my benefit.

The whimsical answer was the fact that I just simply could not sit back and do nothing. I was raised by women who had surpassed all that they were told they could be, without sacrificing any of their beautifully complex identities. I watched them be the pillars of community and knew long before anyone else could tell me otherwise, that all I wish to accomplish can simply be accomplished.

That is the premise that led me through my activism, my work as a young lawyer trying to create change using feminist principles and the law. Before I was ever educated in universities and books, I was surrounded by women. Women who showed me how worthy it was for everyone to be afforded an education. How imperative a safe working environment was for them. How capable they were to dictate to me what they want from the law. It is their words I carry in my everyday practice, for every battle I go into, it is because I know a woman who has made the first rallying call. I am a culmination of the people I have met and seek to serve.

I have always believed I am fated to be surrounded by brilliant women. I can only hope I am just as fated to make a positive change in their lives.



# MICHÈLE NICOLE MEDZUH SOJIP

## PERSONAL STORY

### HANDICAPÉS ET FIERS - CAMEROON

For as long as I can remember, I've wanted to be a voice fighting injustice, restoring equality where it's been broken. That's what motivated me to study Law. Intelligent, with a head full of projects, in the process of completing a Master's degree but already on the verge of starting my professional career, the young woman in her twenties that I was at this time had what could only be described as a dream life. Overnight, everything changed.

Settled in a car, it was in 2013 that I had a traffic accident from which I emerged a quadriplegic. Disability invited itself into my life, and showed me the way.

"Stuck" in my wheelchair, dependent for every day gesture, with a body that no longer conformed to the "norm", I was soon confronted with the harsh reality of validism. Michèle SOJIP, the woman, the human being, had disappeared to make way for the handicapped.

No longer having the "right physical strength", the "right appearance", the "right aptitudes", for a long time I lived in an environment where anything could be said to me, anything could be done to me, I had to keep silent, and failing to be able to "repair" my body, I had to make efforts not to disturb too much with my difference. Having become a financial burden, I could have died and some people would have been relieved. As I was told, since I was no longer useful, I should have died.

Incomprehension, rejection, stigmatization and psychological violence were all painful experiences for me in my close circle, before I experienced them in society with a deep sense of injustice and anger. Discrimination in employment based on disability, sexism, lack of access to various public services, social exclusion, very often treated as no longer capable of making informed decisions for myself and my body in particular - these are just some of the obstacles I've had to face. A victim of various forms of intersecting inequalities, I also witnessed the deplorable situations experienced by many women and girls with disabilities, some of whom were silently subjected to sexual violence. What's the point of complaining, they said ? Who will listen to us ? Who will believe us ? Who would defend us ?

I had two options. Develop a sense of social inferiority and "stay in my place", or show resilience and commit to normalizing/dedramatizing difference while contributing to the building of an inclusive society where equal opportunities and rights are the rule, where no one is left behind because of their disability.

In 2019, I decided to create the association "Handicapés et Fiers" (Disabled and Proud), through which various actions are implemented to raise awareness about the issues faced by people with disabilities in general, and women and girls in particular. This includes employment, health, housing, promoting a call for more humanism, encouraging women with disabilities to speak out and engage, and promoting inclusion in all areas of society. Six things I am particularly proud of today are :

- The "My Books" program, which for the past 5 years has encouraged the schooling of children living with disabilities. In five editions organized each school year, thanks to various support, we have been able to provide textbooks to about a hundred children, more than half of whom are young girls living in rural areas ;
- The "Visibility" program implemented through social networks. A showcase for personal development aimed at young people from marginalized categories, since its launch in 2019, it has reached over 100,000 young people and invited them to be agents of desired change ;
- The short film produced in 2023 with the financial support of UAF Africa and the African Women's Development Funds to raise awareness about the sexual and reproductive rights of women and girls with disabilities, and whose public screenings are planned for March 2024 in 3 cities in Cameroon ;
- My selection as an advisor for UAF ;
- My selection in the first cohort of the Global Youth Fellows for Gender Equality of NGO CSW/NY ;
- The recent campaign launched for better participation of women with disabilities in political life in Cameroon, given the upcoming 2025 electoral deadlines.

This commitment to the community has enabled me to join various feminist movements, notably the GenEgaliteECCAS movement, and to express myself in spaces such as the XOESE International Forum, experiences which have enabled me to become fully aware of another reality, the double discrimination to which women and girls with disabilities are subject. Discrimination between men and women, and between women and women with disabilities.

Indeed, while there is a growing desire among women with disabilities to see their rights and their person respected, they remain invisible and unheard, even among associations defending the rights of people with disabilities and equality. This exclusion, coupled with a lack of real capacity to engage, perpetuates marginalization and prejudicial stereotypes based on both gender and disability, leads to countless human rights violations, generates numerous inequalities, and impacts on the Sustainable Development Goals.



While it's true that disability induces specificities and confronts singular situations, it's essential to recognize that disability doesn't erase women's identity. Women with disabilities can be found in many different categories, including displaced women, LGBTQ+ women, women victims of violence, rural women, sex workers, women affected by the effects of climate change, and women living in exploitative situations. However, when we look at the actions carried out by or for these categories of women, it is regrettable to note that women with disabilities are excluded. Either they are not mobilized, or they are simply not taken into consideration.

As equality between men and women cannot be achieved without real consideration for the rights of women with disabilities, I'm using my voice and my modest background to convey a message: Disability is a major feminist issue. Far from simply recognizing the realities specific to women with disabilities and the intersectionality of the oppressions and injustices they suffer, far from simply supporting the actions undertaken by women with disabilities, it is imperative to share experience and integrate women with disabilities into feminist movements, spaces and circles, taking particular account of issues of access to meetings, communications and organized events.

Far from simply holding up as role models those who manage to take action, it is essential to take measures that guarantee the inclusion and full participation of women with disabilities in the defense of our human rights. In this age of intersectional thinking, which calls for feminist solidarity that takes account of multiple identities and differences, it is everyone's duty to campaign for inclusive feminist policies, and to adopt practices that put an end to oppression against ALL WOMEN.



# ANGELINE EUGENIA ARIESTANTYA

## MYTHOLOGY WITHOUT AUTONOMY: WOMEN ARE BORN WITH PAIN BUILT IN GIRL UP SOUTHEAST ASIA - INDONESIA

I can hear the ticking sounds from my therapist's office, time keeps moving, the clock is always ticking. But, for me, sometimes, my time does not move and I am always stuck in place. Frozen in time. I was 19 when the assault happened. I don't remember most of it now that I am 24. But what I remember clearly is the ticking sounds from the clock inside that dark room, tick tock tick tock. Sometimes, at night, I still can hear the sounds. Sometimes, in my dreams, I can hear the sounds.

My grandma used to tell me the story of how she wanted to name me Lily. As there's this ancient belief where she was born where Lily is a symbol of purity and joy. On my 17th birthday, my grandma bought me a vase of lily of the valley, as a reminder of her dreams for me. Will she get disappointed once she realizes that I'm not as pure as she thought I would be? That I am no longer that kid. And I will never be pure again, since the day I was assaulted. If she would've known, would she teach me to not trust other people too much?

Would she tell me that the monsters always hide behind the closet or under my bed? Would she tell me that a friend could be a foe. And my friend could be my assaulter.

Since I was in high school, I have attached all my self-worth to my body, probably because I got called chubby a few too many times as a child. As a result, I seek validation even in the darkest alley. You have to be kind to it, and let it be kind to you. My mother always says this to me. Little did she know, she is the main reason that I always feel this way. That she was always the one who shamed me when I ate more than 4 spoons of rice. I just kind of wanted to exist. However, existing is such a tough job when everyone around you blames you for it.

Women are forced into pain. Undeniably, women are in pain – undeniably, some of us are in pain from the day we're born. There are 81 different variations of pain in Bahasa Indonesia.

Different kinds of pain express different connotations: sakit, lara, nestapa, duka sengsara dan luka. Sakit connotes something physical and often emotional; Lara is a nebulous, sourceless form of pain; Nestapa is when the pain is slowly eating you alive; Duka connotes a devastating event, full of grief; Sengsara is derived from a Sanskrit word, when your life is full of pain and suffering. While luka opens to the surface. Luka suggests that the skin has been opened in the making of the wound, and there is some sort of a permanence that comes with it.

To be freed from pain, most women in Indonesia have to replace it with another pain, in a different format. The pain of women turns them into a reflection in the mirror that they no longer recognise. Women are hurt, isolated, silenced, murdered, imprisoned, disappeared, and deported. Women are constantly subjected to pain, pain and pain again.

In Indonesia, 1 in 4 women is subject to gender-based violence. I am that 1 in 4 women. For most people, this is just a statistic. Just a number. Sometimes I just want to scream to the world that my story is not just a number or a mere statistic for people to read in the morning newspaper.



There are some things in my life I couldn't forgive myself for but my assault is not one of those things. My assault taught me to be strong and resilient. But, it also taught me to grieve.

My assault taught me that I am a fighter. But, it also taught me that people are okay with me being vulnerable to them. My assault taught me how to bloom in trials and tribulations. Just like a lotus flower that blooms in the muckiest, muddiest swamps.

After my assault, I realized that there is an urgent need for collective care and action to eliminate violence against women. Within a condition of a high prevalence of gender-based violence in Indonesia, there is a need for a community-based approach that acknowledges the trauma endured. One that integrates trauma-informed support, policy-based advocacy, and programmes in a holistic and empowering manner. Thus, after my assault, I built Girl Up UGM in my campus, Gadjah Mada University, to be a community that actively does day-to-day work to advocate for a safer environment for all, as well as, to advocate for trauma-informed care for victims-survivors of violence. 1 in 4. That's how many girls and women will experience gender-based violence in their lifetime. And that number should be zero.

Five years after my assault, I am now a certified first-responder for Gender Based Violence cases in Indonesia, and ever since I was certified, I have dedicated all my time to provide assistance for victims-survivors of Gender Based Violence. In hope that no one will end up like me, running around in circles with no justice before I've made peace with it.

Ever since Girl Up, not only has my life changed, or my pain has healed. But, my clock started to tick again. And, I am no longer frozen in time and place. Together with Girl Up, we can stop it together.



# RIVERS OF INSPIRATION, WAVES OF TRANSFORMATION: GENERATIONS OF LOCAL FEMINIST LEADERS FOR GENDER EQUALITY



This publication was launched during the **Local and Regional Governments' Day** held in the framework of the **Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)** on Thursday, 14 March 2024. It is published on the [UCLG Women](#) website.

This publication is part of the contribution of Cécile Roth (UCLG World Secretariat), to the series of contributions sharing the stories, activism, and advocacy efforts of the first cohort of 20 [NGO CSW Global Youth Fellows for Gender Equality](#).





# A JOURNEY TO THE STORIES OF THE WOMEN LEADERS SHAPING THE FEMINIST MUNICIPAL MOVEMENT

Forming large waves and ever-expanding rivers, our journeys and stories as Local Women Leaders embody the history of the global Feminist Municipal Movement, amplifying our shared dedication to realizing gender equality.

Weaving alliances across generations and continents, we come together to create inspiration, courage, and joy, while redefining leadership and nurturing reciprocal empowerment.

In times of global crises and renewed challenges to human rights, especially women's rights, we strive for interconnectedness and solidarity: this is how we cultivate our "response-ability" and prepare a brighter world for future generations.\*

\*As envisioned by the biologist, anthropologist, and philosopher Donna Haraway.



# SHARING WISDOM TO RESIST HISTORICAL PROCESSES OF DISPOSSESSION, AND RECLAIM WOMEN'S NARRATIVES

Uncovering the voices of previous generations of women who have resisted injustices, reclaiming their stories shines a light on their resilience and expands their legacy.

## With the stories of:

**FATIMETOU ABDEL MALICK**

(Region of Nouakchott, Mauritania)

**CAROLA GUNNARSON** (Sala, Sweden)

**ANA FALÚ** (UCLG UBUNTU Advisor)

**KATHY JEFFERY** (Collingwood, Canada)

**NADINE GASMAN** (Global Alliance for Care)

# LEADERS BREAKING THROUGH GLOBAL CRISES, NURTURING RESPONSE-ABILITY AND CATALYZING RECIPROCAL EMPOWERMENT

In turbulent times of crises, women and feminist leaders stand as beacons of hope and resilience, cultivating response-ability within our movements and communities.

## With the stories of:

**EMILIA SAIZ** (UCLG Secretary General)

**MARIA FERNANDA ESPINOSA**

(UCLG UBUNTU Advisor)

**TANEEN RUDYK** (Vegreville, Canada)

**TANIA VERGE** (Catalunya, Spain)

**MARIA SOLEDAD CISTERNAS REYES** (Chile)



# WIDENING WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL LIFE, STRENGTHENING MENTORING AND TRANSMISSION, AND RE-MEMBERING THE CONTINUITY BETWEEN CARE AND THE EARTH

Reinforcing the participation of women in decision-making processes opens political life to inclusion and equity, and allows us to articulate caring for one another and caring for our planet.

## With the stories of:

**ROHEYATOU MALICK LOWE**

(Banjul, The Gambia)

**PAOLA PABÓN**

(Pichincha Province, Ecuador)

**PATRICIA MORLA**

(Villa Carlos Paz, Argentina)

**HANAN KAOUD** (Ramallah, Palestine)

**MARIAM DJIMET IBET** (Ndjamena, Chad)

# NEW GENERATIONS REVITALIZING OUR CAPACITIES AND POWER FOR RADICAL IMAGINATION AND TRANSFORMATIVE ACTION

New generations, infused with a spirit of radical imagination, breathe new life into our collective efforts, revitalizing our capacities and power to create lasting change.

## With the stories of:

**ANTOINETTE DE LONDON ATAYI MEPAS**

(Owendo, Gabon)

**FETHIYE KIZAK** (Bodrum, Türkiye)

**VIVIANE OGOU** (UCLG Youth Caucus)

**CÉCILE ROTH** (UCLG)


Together, the stories of LOCAL FEMINIST LEADERS guide us forward on a movement towards collective liberation, where each ripple of empowerment contributes to the formation of large waves of positive change: for A MORE JUST, EQUITABLE, and SUSTAINABLE WORLD.



# SHARING WISDOM TO RESIST HISTORICAL PROCESSES OF DISPOSSESSION, AND RECLAIM WOMEN'S NARRATIVES

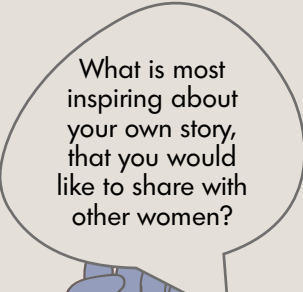
## FATIMETOU ABDEL MALICK

President of the Nouakchott Region (Mauritania)  
Chair of the UCLG Standing Committee on Gender Equality  
Co-President of UCLG




What stories of women have inspired you for your path and leadership?

I grew up in a family environment of learning and education, and I was deeply influenced by the activism of Mauritanian political movements in the 1970s, with my sisters prominently involved at the forefront. These movements championed various causes, including the fight against slavery, feudalism, injustices against women, and social inequalities. **Thanks to the tireless efforts of these movements, Mauritanian women have made significant strides and solidified their roles** in a society that often espouses misogyny. It's a society that has historically marginalized women from development processes and political initiatives.



What is most inspiring about your own story, that you would like to share with other women?



**Perhaps what is most inspiring about my story is the decision to enter politics as a woman in a conservative society, carving out a space for myself in an environment often hostile to women's emergence and development.** This required immense patience, determination, and willpower. My career initially began as a computer engineer, later transitioning into senior administrative roles within the Mauritanian government. In 2001, I embarked on my political journey, becoming the **first female mayor** in Mauritania. I was re-elected in 2008 and 2013, solidifying my commitment to public service. In 2018, I achieved a significant milestone by becoming the **first and only female president of a region** in Mauritania, specifically the Nouakchott Region, the capital of Mauritania. Additionally, I was co-opted as the head of the Mauritanian Association of Regions and was re-elected to both positions in 2023. One of the most notable aspects of this political experience is overcoming formidable opponents from parties with strong Islamic affiliations in each election. Despite these challenges, I persevered and emerged victorious. My primary focus has been on **representing the interests of women globally, with a particular emphasis on African women.** This dedication to advocacy has yielded tangible results. I have held various prominent positions, including the presidency of UCLG Africa, co-presidency of UCLG, and vice-president of the International Association of French-speaking Mayors. Currently, I also serve as **co-chair of the Advisory Group of the United Nations Secretary General on Local and Regional Governments.** In addition, I have received numerous medals and awards, including the FAO medal in 2005, named Champion of Resilience by the United Nations in 2012, Knight of the Order of Honor in 2013 from Congo Brazzaville, Medal of Governance of Cities UCLG Africa in 2015, Knight of the National Order of Merit of Mauritania in 2020 and Knight of the Legion of Honor of France in 2021.

# SHARING WISDOM TO RESIST HISTORICAL PROCESSES OF DISPOSSESSION, AND RECLAIM WOMEN'S NARRATIVES

## CAROLA GUNNARSSON

City Councillor of Sala  
UCLG Special Envoy for Freedom, Solidarity and  
Fighting Violence Against Local Political Leaders  
Vice-President of UCLG for Europe



What stories of women have inspired you for your path and leadership?

All around the world, there are so many women who show us all strength and commitment to make a change. They are fighting for peace, for human rights, for gender equality, for the right to vote and to become a part of the decision-making system, for a better life for girls and women and for a better life for their children. One woman who has inspired me is the advocate and congresswomen Shirley Chisholm who said, **"If they don't give you a seat at the table, bring a folding chair"**. Another inspiring woman is the winner of the Nobel peace prize, Malala Yousafzai from Pakistan. She was shot by the Taliban because of her fight for the right to education for girls. She said "Some people only ask others to do something. I believe that, why should I wait for someone else? Why don't I take a step forward?"

What is most inspiring about your own story, that you would like to share with other women?

My long-lasting involvement in politics and non-governmental organizations has taught me that you must never take no for an answer. I have also always accepted when somebody has offered me a position of responsibility in politics or an NGO. Even if it has sometimes been frightening, and if some people have told me that I will not manage the situation, I know that I will learn how to handle it. **Don't be afraid of making a mistake: we all do. You must believe in yourself and in your skills.** For many years I had a mentor whom I could reach out to and discuss difficult things with. My mentor also helped me to "open many doors". It has been very valuable and useful for me. Now I'm an informal mentor to young female politicians myself.


# SHARING WISDOM TO RESIST HISTORICAL PROCESSES OF DISPOSSESSION, AND RECLAIM WOMEN'S NARRATIVES

## ANA FALÚ

UCLG UBUNTU Advisor

CICSCA, University of Cordoba (Argentina)

Emeritus Professor



What stories of women have inspired you for your path and leadership?

So many stories, individual and collective, have inspired me. The decisive political participation of women, installing a growing recognition of their contributions to society, politics, development, the economy, even with personal costs to their lives. We learned that the **"personal is political"**. Recognize that **we are nurtured by giantesses, that history does not begin with us**, to recognize the leadership and at the same time, the collective, massive configurations that **weave multiple, intergenerational alliances for their rights: to generational alliances, for their rights:** to a life without violence, to recognize care, to a political life; questioning the persistence of the political life; questioning the persistence of an androcentric patriarchy which universalizes one subject: the male, white, young, productive and heterosexual, which leaves out many men and almost all women. It is these stories -individual and collective, courageous, that challenge the traditions of doing politics, of exercising power in local territories, inaugurating new practices and narratives, not exempt of tensions, and are the great inspiration.


What is most inspiring about your own story, that you would like to share with other women?

The stories themselves are the repository of collective construction, this is what makes feminism transformative: **waves of women, piercing the rocks of patriarchy**. I have combined in my life, as a juggler, profession, activism, management, motherhood, as we women do. As Director of UN Women in Brasilia, we developed the **"portrait of inequalities"**. In a country with a "portrait of inequalities", a photograph of racism and its derivatives, in a country with a 49% (IBGE) black or brown population, there were no black women in the UN team. So I defined an affirmative action: for equal training, a black woman would be hired, and if they did not know English, a teacher would be hired. After four years, we had a team of black women. Today one of those young women heads the Brazil office. Trying out pedagogies, to value what is different, to question inequalities, to break down barriers of resistance. **Integrating feminism into territorial policies, valuing women in their differences.** It was not easy: **it was challenging, painful and precious.**

# SHARING WISDOM TO RESIST HISTORICAL PROCESSES OF DISPOSSESSION, AND RECLAIM WOMEN'S NARRATIVES

## KATHY JEFFERY

Councillor, Town of Collingwood (Canada)  
Director, Board of Directors of the Federation  
of Canadian Municipalities (FCM)

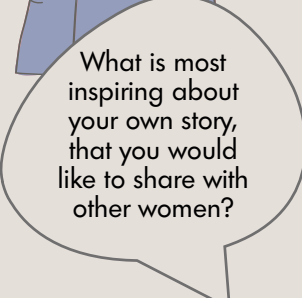



What stories of women have inspired you for your path and leadership?

The stories of the Women's District Caucus of the National Association of Local Authorities of Ghana (NALAG) are of **determination and bravery**. For the first time, the Caucus members are opening new horizons for the women of Ghana by **strategically charting their own course to achieve an increased and truly representative number of women elected officials** in their country. The Caucus members, one each from the 16 Regions of Ghana, have been networking since 2021 to identify their priorities, finalize a strategic plan and continue capacity strengthening to implement that plan.

Resources provided through FCM PMI-WILL and Global Affairs Canada, including training specific to an Advocacy Implementation Plan, lobbying techniques, and mobilization of resources, will help to accelerate women's participation – currently under 10%.

The women traveled up to 12 hours to participate in the sessions and appreciated the access they were afforded to the professional and cost-effective sessions.



What is most inspiring about your own story, that you would like to share with other women?

My early professional experience afforded me numerous opportunities to lead and learn. Then I entered politics. As a fifth-term Councillor in my 17th year of public service, there have been many challenges. Early on, a few men strategized to knock me off Council votes via concocted conflicts – basically bullying me. **It was uncomfortable and scary but just made me more determined to rise above that behavior.**

In 2005 I founded the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) and benefited from the role models, women and men, involved in FCM's leadership. My work at FCM has taught me much. **It was a woman President who appointed me as Standing Committee Vice-Chair in 2006 and paved the way for mentorship and leadership opportunities.**

It is such an honor for me to pay forward that investment for women at home and abroad in my continuing tenures as an FCM Board member and appointments in FCM International programs in Jordan previously and currently in Ghana.

# SHARING WISDOM TO RESIST HISTORICAL PROCESSES OF DISPOSSESSION, AND RECLAIM WOMEN'S NARRATIVES

**NADINE GASMAN**

President of Inmujeres (Mexico)  
Global Alliance for Care



What stories of women have inspired you for your path and leadership?

Throughout my life, I have met many inspiring women for their way of being, living, and thinking, in different contexts and stages. However, I can say that **they have all taught me something and have contributed to who I am as a daughter, mother, wife, friend, doctor, feminist, and public servant.** Moreover, the fact of having worked in other countries has made me more aware of the different realities that we face as women, so approaching the collectives of indigenous women in Guatemala and Mexico, the black women of Brazil, or the diverse women who, from their resistance, in different geographies struggle to be free and recognized, makes me **remember why I am a fighter;** makes me remember why I am a social fighter, and because of that, I am convinced that working every day for and with women is a personal conviction, because I believe in the value of freedom, equality, respect, mutual support and tenacity, which I have learned from all the women who are part of my path.

What is most inspiring about your own story, that you would like to share with other women?

I would like to share with the new generations and, in fact, with all women who fight for equality and respect for our rights, that to **achieve the ideals of a feminist agenda we all need one another,** that only together we can achieve our goals, that working organized, **weaving alliances and building bridges is the key to progress.** Experience has taught me, and from the different trenches in which I have collaborated (public, private, civil society, academia), that listening is an empathetic way to resolve differences and that opening the mind means accepting diversity; that leadership is strengthened when there is a real team; that being a feminist is not rooting struggles or hatred, but a conviction to respect women's rights, to promote us as subjects of the same opportunities, benefits or conditions. **Let us not lose the compass of fighting for equality under false individualistic yearnings.** Together we move forward and together we need each other.

# LEADERS BREAKING THROUGH GLOBAL CRISES, NURTURING RESPONSE-ABILITY AND CATALYZING RECIPROCAL EMPOWERMENT

**EMILIA SAIZ**  
UCLG Secretary General

What stories of women have inspired you for your path and leadership?

My maternal grandmother's family was a family of women with five sisters and a brother (raised in war, heirs of a strong Cantabrian matriarchy). All of them different and very present in my childhood. From the one who took the habits to be able to continue studying or the one who learned by accompanying her own daughter in her studies; to my self-taught grandmother who became a great reader. She cooked in other people's homes until she was able to take over a janitor's office and help the rest of the family. **Her stories and those of the women in my books always made me feel that I could define the role I wanted to play.** I was fortunate to grow up in an environment where relationships empower, where politics was believed in and where associationism was understood as a key instrument of change. For a moment I came to think that these veterans had broken ceilings for me. Glass came into my professional life in a subtle way. **It has been the sorority of elected women from all over the planet, their struggle and their hope that has helped me to take clearer and more decisive steps to defend feminism as a great transforming engine towards a more inclusive and happier world.**

What is most inspiring about your own story, that you would like to share with other women?

My path has been simple, rather I hope that my actions will help those who want to take one more step to break the glass ceilings and facilitate true inclusion. My greatest hope is not that my story will inspire, but to empower more and more of us to break through. **I would love for boys and men to identify with the need for a world that values the happiness of the many more than the success of the few.** A world where security is guaranteed with dignity and respect. Where all girls go to school, **where gender is not a weapon** and individual and collective aspirations are united in an agenda of empowered creative people alike. I look forward to inspiring a new generation of women mayors who can shape territories that care for equality, justice and dignity.





# LEADERS BREAKING THROUGH GLOBAL CRISES, NURTURING RESPONSE-ABILITY AND CATALYZING RECIPROCAL EMPOWERMENT



**MARIA FERNANDA ESPINOSA**

UCLG UBUNTU Advisor

Executive Director of Global Women Leaders for Change and Inclusion (GWLvoices)

Former President of the UN General Assembly

Former Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of Defense of Ecuador

What stories of women have inspired you for your path and leadership?

The stories of indigenous women with whom I have had the privilege of collaborating have been a source of permanent inspiration. Their wisdom, strength and resilience have shaped my perception and understanding of the world.

**These women, with their extraordinary ability to mobilize communities, defend rights, preserve cultures and territories, exemplify leadership that transcends the well-being of their families and communities, impacting**

**global spaces.** Prominent figures such as Nemonte Nenquimo and other Huaorani women from my country have transformed the climate discussion. Her fight for social justice, and her love and respect for nature, have taught me the value of perseverance and the importance of listening to and valuing all voices. The way they face adversity and violence has marked my commitment to equality and the ability to dream to transform. Her example reminds me that **feminist leadership arises from courage, empathy and collaboration.**

What is most inspiring about your own story, that you would like to share with other women?

Reflecting on my more than thirty years in international politics, I recognize that the road is not easy. Discrimination, gender stereotypes, fighting for space in decision-making and building legitimacy have been a constant task. However, progress is not incremental; we must be vigilant against setbacks in women's rights.

**As former president of the UN General Assembly, I understood the value of collective action and diplomacy** for dialogue and management of differences. Regardless of position, we must focus on the common good as our ultimate goal. Our purpose in politics must be to transform and make a difference, which requires strength, perseverance, hard work, and the conviction that nothing is achieved alone. **It is essential to forge alliances, co-create, listen and be empathetic – feminine leadership.** There is no magic, or rather, the only magic is not losing the ability to dream, creativity and imagination.

# LEADERS BREAKING THROUGH GLOBAL CRISES, NURTURING RESPONSE-ABILITY AND CATALYZING RECIPROCAL EMPOWERMENT

## TANEEN RUDYK

Councillor, Town of Vegreville (Canada)  
Past President of the Federation  
of Canadian Municipalities (FCM)

What stories of women have inspired you for your path and leadership?

I thank my mom and my sister for being both supportive and challenging me to seek higher and dream bigger and not being surprised when I do. I learned from teachers Jeanette and Lisa to value my mind and trust my heart and expect excellence when the effort is expended. I appreciate my councilmates Jenny and Natalia for demonstrating the value of doing the research and working tirelessly. I value Lisa and Bev for seeing in me what I needed to be reminded of that my perspective was worth sharing. I respect Carole and Rebecca for **leading with their hearts and their minds, embodying transformative leadership**. And I love my three daughters for **being kind and tenacious and trusting their own voice** to lead them on their journey.

What is most inspiring about your own story, that you would like to share with other women?

Being asked to provide leadership has happened when I've been confronted with major life events, most notably when I was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. My neurologist advised I should rest and avoid stress as much as possible... So I decided that I should run for Council: a decision that has changed the trajectory of my life. I wanted to burn brightly with all the time that I had and **ensure that I shared my gifts, learned new lessons, and found joy in places and at tables I had not joined yet**. And thank goodness I did.






# LEADERS BREAKING THROUGH GLOBAL CRISES, NURTURING RESPONSE-ABILITY AND CATALYZING RECIPROCAL EMPOWERMENT


## TANIA VERGE

Minister for Equality and Feminisms,  
Generalitat de Catalunya (Spain)



What stories of women have inspired you for your path and leadership?

The stories of the feminist activists who in the '70s and '80s lit the fuse of the feminist movement in Catalonia and exercised civil disobedience to challenge the current legislation and the judicial system, opening new horizons on the right to free abortion, contraception or sex education. This combative spirit of the feminist movement in Catalonia is what gestated, on the occasion of International Women's Day, the feminist general strikes in the fields of labor, education and care, with the slogan **'If we women stop, the world stops'**, which have taken place in various years since 2016. We are because others were. And if today there are structures of equality in governments and feminist public policies, it is thanks to this collective struggle of women, an inspiring struggle that is increasingly intergenerational and more intersectional.



What is most inspiring about your own story, that you would like to share with other women?

I hope that my story will inspire fellow women leaders around the world in the vital commitment to the feminist struggle from all spheres. From grassroots activism, to influence the political and social agenda. From university teaching and research with a gender perspective, to create critical awareness in students and shed light on the causes and consequences of inequalities. From consulting to public institutions to accompany the design or implementation of feminist public policies. Or more recently from the government, as the first Minister of Equality and Feminisms, **leading the feminist transformation of the country, with equality policies that respond to both immediate needs and structural issues** that impact the lives of women, with an intersectional approach, in alliance with the feminist movement. Because together we are stronger.

# LEADERS BREAKING THROUGH GLOBAL CRISES, NURTURING RESPONSE-ABILITY AND CATALYZING RECIPROCAL EMPOWERMENT

## MARIA SOLEDAD CISTERNAS REYES

Former Special Envoy on Disability and Accessibility for the United Nations

What stories of women have inspired you for your path and leadership?

As the song says, **"I've been moved by a lot of women, women of fire, women of snow..."** My mother, María Ester, and my grandmothers, Carmen and Griselda, were powerful inspirations in perseverance, capacity for dedication, and hard work. Then, my elementary school teachers: Marcela, Nelly, and Zita María, impressed me with their thoughts, charisma, and love of teaching. Angélica, a friend's mother, has been a teacher in fortitude for daily life with joy and tenderness. My daughters, Javiera and Michelle, have been the very embodiment of love in diversity. Throughout life, **many women, especially women with disabilities and older women, have contributed to my spirit by seeing them overcome barriers and creating new realities of love and peace.** I am grateful to all of them for contributing to my integral development as a human rights advocate.

What is most inspiring about your own story, that you would like to share with other women?

Since childhood, **my inspiration and "navigation chart" have been the value of justice,** and I have fought to achieve it in various fields. Constant study and analytical deepening, always in connection with civil society, are the key to the sphere of **human rights,** where creation is constant. Conviction and commitment are required, allowing one to rise when facing difficult moments. Being ethically correct is decisive in facing different crossroads.

These experiences have surprised me in terms of what I can do myself to contribute to the world I live in and improve the condition of many women, especially those who are invisible. Thus, as a product of the public education system of my country and based on my principles, I became the **President of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities at the United Nations,** combining my professional expertise with my condition as a blind woman.



# WIDENING WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL LIFE, STRENGTHENING MENTORING AND TRANSMISSION, AND RE-MEMBERING THE CONTINUITY BETWEEN CARE AND THE EARTH

**ROHEYATOU MALICK LOWE**

Mayor of Banjul (The Gambia)

President of the Network of Local Elected  
Women of Africa (REFELA)



What stories of women have inspired you for your path and leadership?

The commitment of women and girls to fostering gender equality in their respective communities and governing their territories in Africa represents a critical aspect of social, economic, and political development across the continent. This dedication manifests in various forms, from grassroots activism to participation in political processes, and **plays a significant role in challenging and changing gender norms and policies.** The Local Elected Women's Network of Africa (REFELA) plays a key role in building the capacity of African women and strengthens their resolve to the struggle for gender equality.


Women and girls across Africa are leading and participating in initiatives aimed at addressing **gender-based violence, advocating for girls' education, and promoting women's economic empowerment.** In the realm of governance, there has been a notable **increase in the number of women holding political office,** though the numbers still fall short of gender parity. Women politicians and leaders advocate for policies and legislation that promote gender equality, protect women's rights, and address issues such as domestic violence, child marriage, and access to healthcare and education.

Women's and girls' advocacy groups play a pivotal role in influencing policy at both national and regional levels. Education is a key area of focus for women and girls committed to gender equality. This includes advocating for girls' right to education, working to ensure that educational environments are safe, inclusive, and free from discrimination. Economic empowerment is equally critical. This includes initiatives aimed at **improving women's access to financial resources, training, and markets,** and advocating for policies that support women entrepreneurs. Women's economic empowerment is key to reducing poverty and promoting gender equality at the community and national levels and their efforts are critical to achieving sustainable development and a more equitable future for all.

# WIDENING WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL LIFE, STRENGTHENING MENTORING AND TRANSMISSION, AND RE-MEMBERING THE CONTINUITY BETWEEN CARE AND THE EARTH


## PAOLA PABÓN

Prefect of Pichincha (Ecuador)  
President of the Consortium of Provincial  
Autonomous Governments from Ecuador (CONGOPE)  
Vice-President of UCLG for the Forum of Regions



What stories of women have inspired you for your path and leadership?

The stories of the popular feminist women of the Province of Pichincha have inspired my career and leadership. They are women who follow the legacy of struggle and dignity of Dolores Cacuangó and Tránsito Amaguaña, two Ecuadorian indigenous leaders who deserve global recognition for having promoted bilingual intercultural education, the fight for land and the participation of women from indigenous peoples and nationalities. **The political work to eradicate gender violence, defeat patriarchy, and achieve social justice for rural and indigenous women occurs under extremely difficult conditions.** They take the time to train, organize, work and care for the land, train other women, and in conditions of time poverty and material deprivation, they are fighting against social inequalities, the accumulation of wealth, corruption, and at the same time, they are driving attention to political inequalities, gender violence, racism, and discrimination.



What is most inspiring about your own story, that you would like to share with other women?

**My roots are popular, and I am a feminist. For popular feminist women, exercising power means recovering the agenda that seeks to transform patriarchy and promote social justice.** Elections allow us to place ourselves as women in the public sphere in a visible way. We can have a voice, we can have discourse and we have a whole historical baggage – which comes from the historical struggle of feminism – that gives us the possibility of addressing the practical needs and gender interests of the large majorities. If we have a democratic vision of government, we can step by step with feminist collectives and organizations, dismantle the patriarchal structures of ethnic and social domination and combat with policies and services the advance of the extreme right and the anti-rights ideologies. We can carry out inclusive, comprehensive and sustainable management in government. **From public management, we can lead processes of change.**

# WIDENING WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL LIFE, STRENGTHENING MENTORING AND TRANSMISSION, AND RE-MEMBERING THE CONTINUITY BETWEEN CARE AND THE EARTH

## PATRICIA MORLA

Vice President of the Municipal Court of  
Accounts, Villa Carlos Paz (Argentina)

What stories of  
women have  
inspired you for  
your path and  
leadership?

The stories of many women in my family, in politics, in civil associations, in science have left their mark on my life, but I especially want to pass on the stories of two **women from history who influenced me and guided my work**: Anne Sullivan and Helen Keller. Their story forged my vision in the struggle for rights because thanks to Anne's courage, initiative, passion, vitality, talent and generosity - a teacher who was the only one able to give a child with a disability a chance - Helen managed to establish contact with the outside world and was the first deaf-blind person to get a university degree, developing her professional career as a successful writer and political activist, hand in hand with Anne, **advocating for the rights of women and vulnerable people and fighting for world peace, opening new horizons on true inclusion.**

What is most  
inspiring about  
your own story,  
that you would  
like to share with  
other women?

My social and community work, mainly linked to the **defense of the rights of persons with disabilities**, has given me the tenacity, perseverance and dedication to achieve objectives in the spaces I have had the opportunity to lead. We women have virtues that we must develop because we know how to listen, we are empathetic, **we know how to put ourselves in the shoes of others to collectively search for solutions.** These virtues were the ones I put into practice in my work and which led me to public positions as a municipal official and later as an elected official. In a world accustomed to the fact that political and social decisions are made by men, it is essential to empower ourselves. **To reclaim our space** by capacitating ourselves, establishing strategies and with clear objectives is the way to break down stereotypes. I hope that my words will inspire fellow women leaders around the world in the struggle and perseverance of egalitarian spaces.




# WIDENING WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL LIFE, STRENGTHENING MENTORING AND TRANSMISSION, AND RE-MEMBERING THE CONTINUITY BETWEEN CARE AND THE EARTH

## HANAN KAUD


Councillor, Ramallah (Palestine)

Member of the UCLG Standing Committee on Gender Equality



What stories of women have inspired you for your path and leadership?

The stories of Ms. Janet Michael's electoral win as the first Mayor of Ramallah in 2005 marked an inspiring milestone in feminist governance and ecological responsibility within a colonial context in Palestine. Her establishment of the Environmental Department in 2008 aimed to green Ramallah by **expanding green spaces, drawing on indigenous knowledge and practices, and signifying a movement to culturally care and re-establish relationships with our land.** The successive municipal councils advanced this commitment by empowering its departments through shared experiences and participation in international conferences, all while blending arts, music, and ecology into community life, enhancing women's leadership roles within the municipality and at the community level. The cultural department, led by women leadership, ensures active engagement of women and youth in cultural, artistic, and economic empowerment. The Children's Municipal Council is **a testament to this inclusive, progressive vision, empowering young people in governance** and nurturing an eco-conscious future generation. This strategy not only strengthens community steadfastness but also supports the Palestinian self-determination movement.



What is most inspiring about your own story, that you would like to share with other women?

My story aims to inspire global leaders, emphasizing the profound impact of education and leadership in advancing community participation and transformative democracy in governance. Dreaming of council membership in Ramallah since childhood, **I recognized education's pivotal role** in connecting across sectors. This journey is deeply rooted in feminist and anti-colonial beliefs, where love and care for people and land are inseparable from our quest for justice and liberation. My contribution to establishing the 'Community Participation' department within Ramallah Municipality was a step towards actualizing these values in governance, fostering a space where voices, especially those marginalized by colonization and systemic barriers, are heard and valued. **Amidst the recent war on Gaza, my commitment to these principles has only deepened, driving efforts to integrate environmental conservation with social justice, integrity, and liberation.**

# WIDENING WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL LIFE, STRENGTHENING MENTORING AND TRANSMISSION, AND RE-MEMBERING THE CONTINUITY BETWEEN CARE AND THE EARTH

## MARIAM DJIMET IBET

Municipal Councillor, Ndjamena (Chad)

President of the Chad section of the Network of Local Elected Women of Africa (REFELAT)

What stories of women have inspired you for your path and leadership?

The story of the defamation of a group of women activists from the political party in power by a group from another party to discourage them. **This defamation united them until they won their case.** Since then, when there is an action to be taken, I make a good number of people aware of it before I act, to ensure the success of the action.

What is most inspiring about your own story, that you would like to share with other women?

What inspires me the most is that I married and had children early, but even while they were very young, I was able to continue my studies and make a success of my life. Although there is now a law prohibiting child marriage, it still exists. The lesson to share with children and young people is: if you want to succeed, you need a goal, an objective, and a firm will. **Women can reconcile caring for a household and children, and work.**





# NEW GENERATIONS REVITALIZING OUR CAPACITIES AND POWER FOR RADICAL IMAGINATION AND TRANSFORMATIVE ACTION



## ANTOINETTE DE LONDON ATAYI MEPAS (Owendo, Gabon)

What stories of women have inspired you for your path and leadership?

At the top of the list of women who have inspired my career and my leadership is my late mother. Orphaned at the age of 17, before she left this world, this woman forged my character and passed on values that to this day guide my steps and direct my decisions as a social and political actor. In the political arena, I was influenced by two **leaders who shaped my vision of political women**. Firstly, the late Edith Lucie Bongo Ondimba, former First Lady of Gabon, spared no effort for the well-being of orphans, persons living with HIV AIDS and children living with disabilities. Through OPDAS, an organization of Central African First Ladies committed to the fight against HIV/AIDS, she left her mark. In the same vein, Jeanne Mbagou, former Mayor of the municipality of Owendo, was also a role model for me, through **her ability to listen, her closeness to her colleagues and her capacity for courageous decision-making**. As a native of Owendo, she is a person from whom I have learned a great deal, and with whom I was lucky enough to take my first steps in politics as a young elected official. I can't finish without mentioning Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, the first woman President of an African state, Liberia. As a young woman in a man's world and a patriarchal Africa, she was an inspiration to me.

What is most inspiring about your own story, that you would like to share with other women?

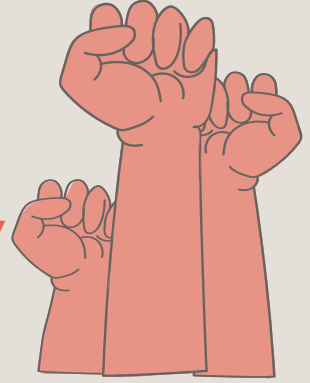
The most inspiring story I would like to share with others is undoubtedly the election that made me **one of the three youngest elected women in my country, Gabon**, at the time of my election in 2018. Although there was some **skepticism about my presence on the list of my political party, due to my youth**, during the campaign phase, I never stopped believing in myself and telling myself that the paradigm could change, that young people, and particularly **young women now have their part to play in the political arena**, and that it was only on this condition that the issues we face could be taken into account. For days on end, we had to meet people, talk to them, and present them with our vision as young people committed to the development of our beautiful municipality. Through initiatives and personality, I was able to convince people (even within my own political family) and this enabled me to be promoted to Deputy Mayor of the 2nd arrondissement of Owendo. This story reminds me that, **as women, we must aspire to the possible and even the impossible**, provided we give ourselves the means and work towards our dreams and projects.



# NEW GENERATIONS REVITALIZING OUR CAPACITIES AND POWER FOR RADICAL IMAGINATION AND TRANSFORMATIVE ACTION

## FETHIYE KIZAK

Responsible for the Gender Equality Unit,  
Directorate of Women and Family Services,  
Bodrum Municipality (Türkiye)



What is most  
inspiring about  
your own story,  
that you would  
like to share with  
other women?

I have a dream of an equal world and I will continue to work for the implementation of policies that will eliminate the gendered division of labor. **We women come together not because we are oppressed in the same way, but to change the world with a similar perspective.** Feminism is very real and important because it offers this opportunity. We want to change the gender regime not because we are subjected to common discrimination, but because we dream of a common world, because the gender regime exposes us to discrimination no matter where we are in this system. Feminism is about the will to eliminate all forms of discrimination.

Today, Bodrum Municipality has a Gender Equality Commission, a Directorate of Women and Family Services, a Women's Counseling Center, a Women's Shelter, a Local Equality Action Plan, and a Violence Attitude Document. And the feminist mentors who stand by Bodrum Municipality and their radical imagination and transformative power of action have been and continue to be instrumental in this.

Feminist activists, with whom we have walked and will continue to walk together, so glad I have you... I am so glad we exist. **I have experienced how to get stronger, how to increase my capabilities, and how dreaming makes it easier to continue on the road by walking the road with women.** Long Live Our Feminist Struggle!

# NEW GENERATIONS REVITALIZING OUR CAPACITIES AND POWER FOR RADICAL IMAGINATION AND TRANSFORMATIVE ACTION

**VIVIANE OGOU**

**UCLG Youth Caucus**

**Founder of La Puerta de África – Think-and-do Tank Juvenil**

What stories of women have inspired you for your path and leadership?

The stories of my grandmother and mother highlight their roles as feminist trailblazers. My grandmother was among the first women to pursue a divorce in Spain after the transition. After nearly three decades as a housewife, she re-entered the workforce and, upon retirement, embarked on solo travels around the world. Similarly, my mother displayed remarkable courage by moving to Côte d'Ivoire alone, initiating a grassroots cooperation project focused on health. **A rebel against injustice, she utilized her influence to bring visibility to the most vulnerable.**

What is most inspiring about your own story, that you would like to share with other women?

I aspire to inspire my fellow sisters and women leaders worldwide with my own journey of perseverance and dedication to humanity. From a young age, I stood against injustice, even staging a (brief) hunger strike at the age of seven. **My activism began at 14, and by 25, I ran in national elections to advocate for the rights of migrants and youth.** Presently, I leverage my influence to bring visibility to the cause of Black people.



# NEW GENERATIONS REVITALIZING OUR CAPACITIES AND POWER FOR RADICAL IMAGINATION AND TRANSFORMATIVE ACTION

**CÉCILE ROTH**

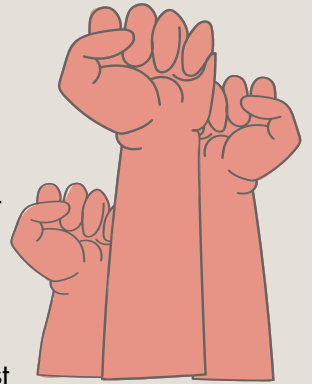
**Partnerships, Policy and Research Officer, UCLG**

What stories of women have inspired you for your path and leadership?

**The women who guide my dreams are our ancient and present witches, the wise women who nurture**

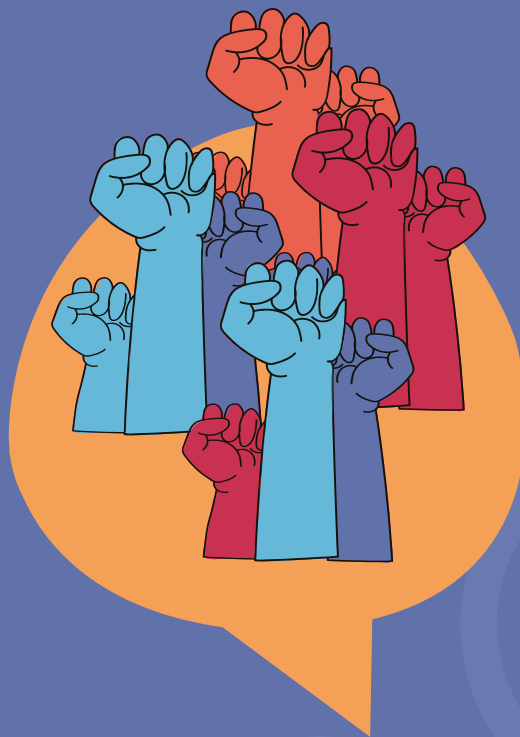
**sisterhood** and care for plants, animals, and the landscapes of our hometowns around the world. They are the healers of our bodies and souls, the ecofeminist activists, old and young, (re) known and forgotten. They are the local women leaders, the mayors, the workers in local public services, and the community organizers, who offer us the legacy and the future of the Feminist Municipal Movement. They are the writers, the poets, the historians, the lawyers,

and the singers, who open the world wide with their words of courage. The artists and the dancers who sculpt our imaginations towards resistance. **And all the women who for generations and generations have nourished powerful anger against injustices and cultivated love and joy in making our world livable.**



What is most inspiring about your own story, that you would like to share with other women?

So far, my story connects heritages in France and Finland, a childhood in the colors of wild rivers and the Caribbean Sea, and a profound dedication to uncovering the forms inequalities take across urban spaces, territories, and regions – with dreams of contributing to local and global movements for social justice and equality. **Echoing the courage to which I aspire, I hope we expand our collective capacities to travel beyond fear and frontiers, and widen our aspirations and imagination.** I hope we facilitate deep social and political transformations, and inspire other young women and local leaders to dare to travel across identities, languages, social classes, professions, passions. To travel across mountains and seas, across ideas, organizations, and practices. To travel together through life and this world with solidarity and generosity. To travel to make ourselves free, while nurturing trust in our leadership and immense hope in our power for transformation.



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# MARINA CSIKOS

## AIN'T I A GENDER PROFESSIONAL?

PHIREN AMENCA INTERNATIONAL NETWORK - BELGIUM/HUNGARY



**ILLUSTRATION BY ESTERA, A ROMANIAN-GERMAN YOUNG ROMA FEMINIST**  [@ESTERA.ARTS](https://www.instagram.com/ESTERA.ARTS)

About 173 years passed since Sojourner Truth addressed her iconic question to white women in the U.S. "Ain't I a woman?". 173 years and women of color still struggle to take their well-deserved spaces within the feminist and women's movements. We can talk about business, academia, politics, or any other professional sector, women of color are still trying to find ways to raise critical questions about meaningful representation and equity.

Over the last few decades, efforts striving for gender equality have generated great changes and improvements all over the world. There are more and more



women in business who have gained amazing success and shaped the way we think about leadership. It was not too long ago when women did not even have the right to vote, however, nowadays we can see women prime ministers, EU commissioners, and public servants. Besides business and politics, we have witnessed the undeniable contribution of feminist scholars in academia who shaped how we approach science and how we conduct research.

While feminism has been developing and changing, the world recognized the need to train gender experts who acquire the necessary knowledge and practice to help advance societies and resolve contemporary issues. Fortunately, there are countless universities where gender studies departments, training, and courses open their doors for people who decide to dedicate their careers to fighting for gender equality. However, what we still fail to see even within this relatively new professional field, is that regardless of our efforts to build equal societies with inclusive labor markets, we still maintain inequalities within us, gender equality professionals.

*I am a gender professional. I am a feminist. And nonetheless, Roma. My identities shall never be taken away from me.*

There is still this clear picture in front of me when I first entered the class at the Gender Studies Department. People with big smiles were excited to start the introductory session and the new academic year. And there was me, already feeling weird around these people. This feeling, however, was not so unfamiliar to me. This feeling has followed me throughout my whole life.

*The Outsider. The Stranger. The Other.*

I have been the only Roma in the classrooms and spaces throughout most of my academic years, so I kind of used to this feeling. If I am being honest, with the years I even started to like the feeling, and I think I embraced it. The feeling of being an outsider is not so unfamiliar for women of color. Many of us even mastered it and turned it into our power. Even though during my master's studies I felt the most included, inspired, and understood in an academic environment, the feeling of being an outsider has followed me all these years sometimes stronger, sometimes not so much. Not so surprisingly, the feeling just grew when I graduated and found myself in the labor market. Actually, after a few years of being in a more or less inclusive environment at the university, getting into the labor market felt like I got back to the "reality" again.

There was I in this big world, questioned by white feminists about my abilities as a Roma person and a gender expert. There was I, listening to women developing research and policies for Roma women who have no clue about the experiences

of Roma women and girls, and yet trying to educate me about it when I challenged them. When I offered my professional help, they respectfully thanked me and sent an unspoken message with their face: "Do not worry, we got this!". In those moments, I asked myself, "Ain't I a gender professional?". "Ain't my knowledge and experience as valuable as yours, or any other white woman's?".

These questions have never left me in the past years. They are following me like my own demons. However, these demons are not mine. They are the demons and racism of those white feminists who do not see me as equal to them, only because I proudly say I am Roma feminist. And yes, I say it proudly because, throughout my whole life, people were trying to convince me otherwise about my culture's beauty and value, trying to hold me down in schools while I prepared for exams, when I spent hours writing articles in the library, or when I questioned their white lies in the books. Sometimes, it is also painful to see the opportunities I never got. If you are a woman who knows what she puts on the table and the table still seems to be empty in the eyes of those who have the power to help you achieve your dreams, you know what I mean. You can work twice or even three times more than your privileged peers, and you can have innovative ideas and great critical thinking skills, if the people in power do not value you, they will hold you back.

Roma gender professionals are an essential part of the societies. Europe just simply cannot ignore the more than 12 million Roma people on this continent, and the millions outside of Europe. Europe has no chance to not care about Roma women and girls, as they have been contributing to Europe's cultural, political, gastronomical, academic, and economic heritage. And the world should not hold back, but rather give Roma gender experts spaces and opportunities to use their unique and inevitable knowledge on gender and intersectional issues. Because after all, we are not only Roma, women, and feminists, but we are also professionals who are the owner of knowledge that is essential to today's societies.

Until the world is busier maintaining racism, sexism, ableism, homophobia, etc. than recognizing the potential and value of women of color including Roma women as gender professionals, we cannot talk about valuable and effective changes in gender equality. We, women of color gender professionals asked too long the same question "Ain't I a gender professional?" It is time to claim our spaces and honor our foremothers' efforts and sacrifices by standing strong and showing solidarity for our own and other people's liberation.



# ISHA MANDAL

## BREAKING SILENCE AND WEAVING STRENGTH

CENTER FOR MIGRATION AND GENDER JUSTICE (CMGJ) - NEPAL

In the tapestry of courage, a thread unwinds,  
Woven by youth, fierce and kind.  
They rise from the shadows, voices strong,  
No longer silent, breaking the wrong.

Through the pixels of screens, a movement takes flight,  
Digital warriors, weaving hope in the night.  
#WithYou they chant, in a symphony of care,  
Anonymity blooms, a sanctuary rare.

On Instagram's canvas, a healing spell,  
A palette of strength, where survivors' dwell.  
Artistic whispers echo, breaking the chains,  
Empathy paints over the scars and the stains.

Twitter, a battlefield, where words are the sword,  
Young advocates fighting for justice, not ignored.  
In threads of truth, they spin a tale,  
Of resilience, courage, beyond the veil.

YouTube, the storyteller, in visuals untold,  
Capturing narratives, both cautious and bold.  
A montage of survival, a testament profound,  
Breaking stereotypes, empowering all around.

Now on TikTok's stage, a rhythm and rhyme,  
Short, impactful stories in snippets of time.  
Dances of change, echoing loud,  
Youth no longer silent, breaking the shroud.

A movement local, now globally heard,  
Inspiring millions with each poignant word.  
Solidarity not just a phrase, but a deed,  
Inclusivity the anthem, for all those in need.

No insensitivity in their quest,  
Just a heartfelt call to be our best.  
Addressing the issue, with humour and tact,  
A revolution kindled, nothing held back.

From local whispers to global roars,  
Breaking down barriers, opening doors.  
In every corner, a spark takes hold,  
A testament to the resilient, the brave, the bold.

In the series of change, these stories unfold,  
Youth changemakers, hearts of gold.  
Anecdotes of strength, resilience, and grace,  
Creative support, a compassionate space.

For every survivor, a beacon they find,  
In the youth-led movement, a flame unconfined.  
Together they rise, an unstoppable tide,  
Transforming darkness, where hope shall abide.



# HADIQA BASHIR

## STOP CHILD MARRIAGE (ART PIECE, FOLLOWING PAGE)

GIRLS UNITED FOR HUMAN RIGHTS (GUHR) - PAKISTAN

I am the survival of child marriage and I am working against child marriages in the tribal belt of Pakistan. We are working on education and we have enrolled 150 girls in "girls go back to school "campaign In certain marriage situations, monetary transactions occur where the husband may have significant control over the wife's choices. There are concerns that this dynamic could lead to exploitative scenarios, such as selling the wife to another person or subjecting her to servitude. The painting also shows that I am actively engaged in addressing climate change and have planted 400 trees through the "one girl one tree" and also working on SRHR.









# ASHNA BASU

## MY STORY

### YOUNG MEDICAL WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION - AUSTRALIA

Amidst the horns and hollers of Kolkata, our car pulled up to 45 AJC Bhowse Road - the AMWI Mission Hospital. My grandmother, Dr Tulsi Basu, was instrumental in the creation and operation of the Association of Medical Women in India's Mission Hospital, which treats impoverished women and children. To help sustain and improve the care provided to these women and girls, my grandmother often canvassed people internationally for donations and assistance with her cause. She met people through her role as Vice President of AMWI and Regional Vice President (Central Asia) of the Medical Women's International Association (MWIA).

One of these people was the Young Forum Chair for MWIA at the time, Dr (now Professor) Gabrielle Casper. Gaye and Tulsi were fast friends and corresponded often. They saw each other at MWIA congresses, and Tulsi even wrote of me in her letters to Gaye.

My grandmother died in 2006 when I was 12, but her spirit and legacy lives on. I know she's watching over me, because she guided me towards Gaye without our knowledge.

As a medical student, I became involved in the Medical Women's Society of New South Wales - years later, I now serve as President. The society and our central committee are made up of outstanding, warm and wonderful women. Gaye was one of these women, and took me under her wing. During a phone call in 2020, I mentioned growing up in New Zealand - which took Gaye by surprise. On a whim, she asked if I was related to a Tulsi Basu? After realising she was close friends with my grandmother, we spoke for hours exchanging stories.

Two years later, I became the Chair of Young MWIA - the very role Gaye held when she met my grandmother. In this role, I represent medical women under the age of 40 globally. As an advocate for gender equity, I work towards equity not just for women in medicine, but also the women, girls and gender diverse people that we treat, and in society at large.

Talking to Gaye, reading through my grandmother's old letters, and visiting the hospital to which she dedicated so much of her time and energy, reminds me of the shoulders on which we stand today, and the enduring community of people who have advocated for gender equity throughout the ages. I'm so grateful for women like Gaye who continue to guide and protect young activists for equality. I'm grateful to the women I work with in MWS NSW and MWIA who come together as a team to support each other, while supporting women and girls around the world.

I believe in harnessing the power of our different experiences and backgrounds to continue making progress as a collective. It's a privilege to join the NGO CSW/NY Global Youth Fellows for Gender Equality, and to collaborate as a community towards our common goal.



# HILUX FOKOU NGOUMO

## EMPOWERING WOMEN AND GIRLS: MY JOURNEY AS A HEFORSHE ADVOCATE

### MIFALI - CAMEROON

In a world where gender equality remains an elusive goal, my journey stands as a testament to the power of advocacy and action. My name is Hilux Fokou Ngoumo, and I am proud to be a HeForShe advocate. From the small streets of Cameroon to the global stage, I have dedicated my life to championing the rights of women and girls, striving to create a more equitable and just world for all.

My journey began with a deep-rooted commitment to social justice and equality. Growing up in Cameroon, I witnessed firsthand the disparities and injustices faced by women and girls in my community. Whether it was the lack of access to education, healthcare, or economic opportunities, the pervasive effects of gender inequality were impossible to ignore. Boys are not left aside by these challenges; the status quo of society leads many boys into depression, forced to wear a garment given by society.

Driven by a sense of duty and compassion, I embarked on a mission to challenge the status quo and uplift the voices of those who were often marginalized and overlooked. In 2010, I co-founded the "gShe Platform," a pioneering initiative aimed at addressing gender, sexuality, society, and health issues among adolescents. Through innovative programs and grassroots outreach efforts, gShe reached millions of young people, sparking crucial conversations and catalyzing change at the local level.

But my advocacy did not stop there. From launching community-based campaigns with Women for a Change Cameroon and Mifali to partnering with local clinics to provide essential services to women and girls, I have been relentless in my pursuit of gender equality. Through Mifali, an adolescent-led movement, my peers and I have campaigned tirelessly across Cameroon, raising awareness about education, sexual reproductive health rights, climate action, and gender-based violence.

At the heart of my advocacy is the HeForShe movement, a global solidarity movement for gender equality launched by UN Women. As a proud HeForShe advocate, I believe that true gender equality requires the active involvement of men and boys as allies and advocates. Through training programs and awareness campaigns, I am challenging traditional notions of masculinity and empowering young men to stand up for women's rights.

My journey is not just about individual accomplishments, but about collective impact and lasting change. From local communities to international platforms, my voice resonates as a powerful force for justice and equality. As I reflect on my journey, I am

Join me as I share the story of my journey as a HeForShe advocate, and together, let us stand up, speak out, and take action for gender equality. For in doing so, we create a world where everyone has the opportunity to live their fullest lives.

– From a young age, I was acutely aware of the disparities and injustices faced by women and girls in my community. Raised in Cameroon, I observed the gendered norms and cultural practices that perpetuated inequality and discrimination. Whether it was witnessing girls being denied access to education or seeing women relegated to subordinate roles in society, these experiences deeply impacted me and fueled my determination to create change.

One pivotal moment that solidified my commitment to gender equality was witnessing the struggles of my 2 older sisters. Despite their intelligence and ambition, they faced numerous barriers in pursuing their dreams. Seeing their resilience in the face of adversity inspired me to become a vocal advocate for women's rights and empowerment.

Moreover, my interactions with local community leaders and activists further shaped my worldview. I was fortunate to engage with individuals who were passionate about social justice and equity, and their mentorship played a crucial role in shaping my values and aspirations. Through their guidance, I learned the importance of empathy, solidarity, and perseverance in the fight for gender equality. One person of such whose work continues inspiring me to advocate is Dr. Zoneziwoh Mbondulo-Wondieh, who has dedicated her life to fighting against all sorts of injustices faced by women and girls around the world. Her passion and dedication keep us young people moving.

### *Grassroots Advocacy and Community Engagement*

Armed with a newfound sense of purpose, I embarked on a journey of grassroots advocacy and community engagement, finding a home within Mifali dedicated to empowering young people and advocating for gender equality.

My introduction to Mifali came in 2019 during a workshop on Intimate Partner Violence (IPVs), where I first encountered the term "*Gender-Based Violence (GBV)*." It was a transformative experience that opened my eyes to the pervasive nature of gender-based violence and its devastating impact on individuals and communities. The stories shared by survivors of abuse fueled my determination to take action and become a vocal advocate for gender equality.

Within Mifali, we were united by a shared commitment to leaving no one behind. Together with my peers, I engaged in a wide range of activities, including education campaigns, community workshops, and awareness-raising initiatives.

community workshops, and awareness-raising initiatives. Through interactive sessions and educational materials, we empowered individuals to recognize and address the root causes of gender inequality, including harmful gender norms and societal attitudes.

Our efforts extended beyond the confines of traditional activism, encompassing innovative approaches such as digital advocacy and social media campaigns. By leveraging the power of technology, we amplified our message and reached a broader audience, sparking meaningful conversations about gender equality and social justice.

One of our most impactful endeavours was the organization of community workshops and training sessions, where we provided individuals with the knowledge and tools to advocate for gender equality in their own lives and communities. These events fostered a sense of solidarity and empowerment, empowering participants to become catalysts for change within their social circles.

We collaborated with local organizations and other stakeholders to implement sustainable solutions to gender-based challenges. Whether it was advocating for policy changes, organizing community clean-up drives, or providing support services to survivors of gender-based violence, our efforts were diverse and multidimensional.

### *HeForShe: Redefining Masculinity*

As a proud advocate of the HeForShe movement, I am committed to challenging traditional notions of masculinity and promoting a more inclusive and equitable society. Central to this endeavour is the recognition that gender equality is not just a women's issue—it is a human rights issue that requires the active participation of men and boys.

My journey as a HeForShe advocate began with a deep introspection into my own beliefs and behaviours. I realized that I had internalized many harmful stereotypes and expectations about masculinity, which not only limited my own potential but also contributed to the perpetuation of gender inequality. Determined to break free from these constraints, I embarked on a journey of self-discovery and transformation.

Through training programs, workshops, and awareness campaigns, I have sought to redefine what it means to be a man in today's world. I have challenged the notion that strength is synonymous with dominance and that vulnerability is synonymous with weakness. Instead, I have embraced empathy, compassion,

and respect as the hallmarks of true masculinity.

One of the key aspects of HeForShe is the promotion of positive male role models and allies. By showcasing the stories of men who are actively working to dismantle gender stereotypes and support gender equality, we inspire others to join the movement. Whether it's speaking out against sexism, advocating for equal opportunities, or simply listening to and supporting women and girls, every action counts.

Furthermore, I have sought to engage men and boys in conversations about privilege, power, and responsibility. By fostering dialogue and reflection, we can create spaces where men feel comfortable challenging traditional gender norms and embracing more equitable ways of being.

For us, HeForShe is not just a campaign—it is a call to action for men and boys to become allies and advocates for gender equality. By redefining masculinity and promoting positive male role models, we can create a world where everyone has the opportunity to thrive, regardless of gender.

### *Impact and Achievements*

Reflecting on my journey as an advocate for gender equality, I am humbled by the significant impact we have been able to achieve. Our efforts have touched the lives of countless individuals and communities, driving progress towards gender equality on both local and global scales.

Through our grassroots initiatives, we have directly reached out to over 9000 young people, sparking crucial conversations and empowering them to become agents of change in their own communities. Additionally, our reach extends far beyond these direct interactions, with countless more individuals impacted indirectly through our advocacy efforts.

One of our most impactful initiatives has been the training of young people and local NGO workers around East and Central Africa to be Trainers of Trainers on Reproductive Health. By equipping individuals with the knowledge and skills to educate others, we have created a ripple effect that extends far beyond our immediate reach, reaching communities and populations that would otherwise have been inaccessible.

Furthermore, I have had the privilege of leading delegations of young people to speak and voice out their concerns at several international conferences. These platforms have provided us with a powerful opportunity to amplify our message and advocate for policy changes that benefit young people, particularly in areas



such as reproductive health, education, and gender equality.

In addition to our advocacy at the international level, we have also been actively involved in lobbying for policies affecting young people in our country. Whether it's advocating for comprehensive sexual education in schools or pushing for legislation to protect survivors of gender-based violence, our advocacy efforts have had a tangible impact on the legal and social landscape.

### *Challenges and Lessons Learned*

My journey as a HeForShe advocate has been marked by numerous challenges, some of which have come from unexpected places, like my own circle of friends. It's not uncommon for me to face mockery and skepticism from peers who question why a boy like me would be interested in advocating for women's rights. They often ask, "Why are you a feminist? You're a boy."

At first, these comments stung, and I found myself questioning my convictions. But as I've navigated these challenges, I've come to realize that standing up for what's right is more important than seeking approval or fitting into societal expectations. It's taught me the importance of staying true to my beliefs, even in the face of opposition.

Moreover, these experiences have highlighted the deep-seated misconceptions and stereotypes that still exist around gender equality. It's a reminder that the fight for gender equality is far from over and that there's still much work to be done in challenging harmful attitudes and beliefs.

Through it all, I've learned valuable lessons about resilience, perseverance, and the importance of staying true to oneself. I've learned that not everyone will understand or support my beliefs, and that's okay. What matters most is staying true to my values and convictions, even when it's not the popular choice.

### *Future Directions and Vision*

Looking ahead, one of my greatest hopes is to see a shift in attitudes towards gender equality, particularly among young boys and men. I believe that by engaging boys in conversations about feminism and gender equality, we can foster a greater understanding of the issues at hand and encourage more inclusive and compassionate attitudes.

There's a concept in African philosophy called "Ubuntu," which emphasizes the interconnectedness of all beings and the idea that "I am because we are." It

underscores the importance of collective responsibility and solidarity in creating a better world for everyone.

I envision a future where more boys understand and embrace this concept, recognizing that advocating for gender equality isn't just about fighting for women—it's about creating a more just and equitable society for all. It's about recognizing that when one group is marginalized or oppressed, it affects us all.

To achieve this vision, I am committed to continuing my advocacy work and empowering more boys to become allies in the fight for gender equality. Through education, awareness-raising initiatives, and grassroots activism, I hope to inspire a new generation of boys who are passionate about creating positive change in the world.

My role as one of the first cohort of the 20 Global Youth Fellows of NGO CSW/NY taught me how all of us count in this fight against inequalities and how each of us is important in finding the solution. It taught me from the stories of my peers how local solutions can drive changes in the communities. As I continue my journey as a global Youth Fellow, I am hopeful for a brighter future for all women and girls in all their diversities. I know we will make it to the end, we will not fall as Gender Equality advocates, but we will continue thriving.

So, I invite you to join me in this journey. Whether you're a boy, a girl, or anyone in between, your voice and your actions matter. Together, let's challenge stereotypes, break down barriers, and create a world where everyone is treated with respect and dignity.

Let's educate ourselves and others about the importance of gender equality. Let's speak up when we see injustice and discrimination. Let's support initiatives and organizations that are working towards gender equality.

Together, we can make a difference. Together, we can create a world where everyone has the opportunity to live their fullest lives, free from discrimination and inequality.

The time for action is now. Will you join me?

I am a boy; yes, I sometimes have to let down my emotions and cry!

I am a boy; yes, I support women's empowerment to the fullest!

I am a boy; I don't mind going deep and explaining for hours why we all need gender equality!

I am a boy, of course, I am a He4She!



# MARDHIA JAMAL HUSSEIN

## IMPACT STORY

### IMOK-INDEPENDENT MEDIA ORGANIZATION - IRAQ

As a young lady hailing from the mountains of Kurdistan, I take pride in my journey marked by big dreams, significant steps, and notable achievements. Despite facing numerous challenges and obstacles along the way, I am pleased with how far I've come. The journey is undoubtedly a tough one, and having the right support, motivation, and inspiring words has been crucial.

In the face of limitations, I found strength in questioning and challenging societal norms, particularly matters related to Gender Equality. Born into a traditional and regulated society, where norms are deeply influenced by both religious and legal frameworks, I embarked on a journey of self-discovery. The process involved frequent brainstorming sessions and asking myself challenging questions. This introspection led to profound answers and significant achievements in my life. I recognized the importance of pushing boundaries and questioning established norms to pave the way for positive change, especially in the realm of Gender Equality.

Moreover, my academic and professional accomplishments speak volumes about my commitment to making a difference. From earning a Bachelor's degree in Petroleum and Energy Engineering to participating in prestigious programs like the Community Engagement Exchange Program and the European Forum Alpbach, I have consistently strived for excellence. Winning the Falling Wall Labs competition for my project on air pollution and serving as a Youth Fellow for Gender Equality further underscore my dedication to creating a more equitable and sustainable world.

In my role as the founder of the Green Dream voluntary group, I have been instrumental in spearheading impactful initiatives focused on environmental conservation, climate change, leadership, and women's empowerment. Through this platform, I have successfully advocated for positive change and empowered young individuals to become leaders within their communities.

My story is a testament to the fact that even in conservative environments, one can challenge the status quo and work towards creating a more inclusive and equitable society. The journey is ongoing, and I am determined to continue making strides in breaking barriers and promoting positive change in my community.



# LILA MANSOUR

ART PIECE

BC ARABIC LEGAL SUPPORT CENTRE - CANADA



# ADITI PADIYAR

## PLATFORMING THE VOICES OF DISENFRANCHISED WOMEN BY SHARING SPACE

### WOMEN FIRST INTERNATIONAL FUND - INDIA

Power can only be shared when it's redistributed equitably by those that have all of it among those that don't. In the meantime, those of us in the middle with access to platforms like the UN CSW, Women Deliver, UNFCCC and more have to platform the voices of the women and girls that deserve to have their voices heard just as much as the rest of us with access and privileges that rightfully belong to us all. I work for a feminist group - Women First International Fund - that rallies with women from South Asia and East and West Africa that work tirelessly to amplify the voices of disenfranchised girls and women in their community. Modern feminisms can be alienating to girls who don't have language, education and urban systems which isolates them even further from reaching their potential. Visibility in a world trying to erase you in itself is power and the lives of thousands of women have been transformed from being told they matter, simply from being heard.

Quite like Maya Angelou and Rosa Parks - we must all stand for right to access for every woman; like Medha Patkar - stand with the native women farmers of hinterlands; like Urvashi Vaid - for our comrades in our joint fight against the oppression of queer people; and like Savitribai Phule, the mother of Indian feminism who fought for the girl child's right to education - be unapologetic, radical feminists with our personal politics and principles firmly rooted in intersectional values that challenge patriarchal structures and rally for an equitable and just world for girls and women.

India is a middle income country with a substantial economic gap between the urban rich and the poor. So our socio-economic issues are not only deeply intersectional but geographically diverse. Upper caste women are often seen leading the struggle for the rights of DBA - Dalit Bahujan and Adivasi (lower caste, aboriginal and tribal) women and the opportunities, funds and activism that arrive from such a platform never reaches the linchpins of the movement.

Young Indian feminists today are more empowered to speak their truth and hold space for themselves as they enter a world at the cusp of climate disasters and heightened violence against women. Feudal government, patriarchal culture, lack of employment opportunities, gender-based violence furthered poverty, laws that encroach on our bodily autonomy, no social protection in the unorganized sector and lack of unified international platforms to demand our human rights are some of the many critical women's issues in the world right now.



Sharing space is the only way to helm feminism on the right course as young feminists who have carved a path for themselves. Trans women, sex workers, domestic workers, teen mothers, widows, young girls of all religious identities, women of various caste identities, the list goes on but it is only when every woman has access to resources to empower herself in an inclusive movement that stands for all voices are we are creating a platform for young feminists to feel safe, seen and fully actualised. None of us without all of us!



# SHRUTI SINGH

## YOUTHS OF TODAY, WHAT IS CLIMATE CHANGE?

### FIJI WOMEN'S RIGHTS MOVEMENT - FIJI ISLANDS

The youths of today,  
Some now work  
some they lay ,fazed all hazed  
Some say 'oh look at all what has changed'  
The temperature flares high  
Even birds no longer soar sky-high  
'Cause of the roar airplanes make  
for economy has to grow says man today  
Or else our trade shall fall  
no work will be caused

Really? Wonder the countless without a job...  
Sighs the refugees due to the wars  
Quivers the children cause they're cold  
Women fathom as they are shadowed into gallows  
Rumbles nature because she's hurt...  
For all had ill-treated her

Her trees were rooted and her grass were burnt  
Man said 'oh cultivation was the way for civilization  
to run ahead'

Now that's just news. A breaking one at that  
as the space becomes limited  
Poverty stuck the poor to poorer  
Millionaires became billionaires

'Will they contribute a little here' ,the government  
wonders.

The pandemic had stuck  
A time where all came to halt  
The hustle and bustle came to a hush  
Nature once again bloomed  
The animals now roamed freely  
As greenery reappeared  
A lesson to be learnt perhaps

That time had to be given to Earth again ,to suffice  
If only the trash had' not been scattered  
The land had not been abandoned  
For industries to showcase their power

through the high and mighty towers of pride or was it  
greed?  
only to dump their waste into the innocent ocean  
where the creatures now trapped in  
where water is now contaminated  
Fisherman getting sick and sick of their catch  
Only to take home more than they had to  
To earn a living they say

Sea levels now rising

The lands now being devoured by the furious waves  
The people being forced to relocate their homes, culture  
now fading

caused by the glaciers now melting  
faster than they ever had...

The youths muster courage to make their suffering known

For the youths of yesterday complain  
'it wasn't like this in our days!'

People now struggle and even strangle to survive just  
another day  
The humans have advanced but so has their problems I say  
As they fail to take the blame for the disturbance now array  
It was her, no him, maybe them, they say

In the end all suffer and fall to the cycle that repeats again  
and again

Youths of today it's your time to rise!  
To come together and look each other in the eye  
despite the mountain of differences many claim to have

United is the time to be

to address and create strategies to battle even the littlest of falls  
and mishaps in being

The youth yesterday have passed the baton down to us

We will have to restructure it  
before it gets lost in the now hollowed Earth  
What will the youth have tomorrow,  
Did you ever think oh youth of today?



# TAHINA BOOTH

## SCORING FOR EQUITY: A STRATEGIC PLAYBOOK FOR POLICY CHANGE IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

### GRASS SKIRT PROJECT - PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Amidst the lush landscapes of Papua New Guinea (PNG), a crisis simmers beneath the surface—a crisis of gender-based violence so pervasive that it stains the very fabric of society. A woman falls victim to violence every harrowing half minute. An entrenched patriarchy, underscored by a chilling statistic—41% of men in PNG admit to rape—casts a long shadow over women and girls, whose voices are stifled by systemic abuse and silenced by the clanging chains of cultural oppression.



The Grass Skirt Project (GSP) emerges as a harbinger of hope and a catalyst for profound policy change. Guided by Tahina Booth's unwavering vision, GSP aims to leverage the universal language of sports to dismantle these oppressive structures, aiming to transform attitudes and catalyze gender equity—a mission critical for the future of PNG and a call to action for global policy change makers and philanthropic visionaries.

This is not about offering equal resources; it's about recognizing that equity is about the justice of tailored support, addressing the individual hurdles faced by those marginalized by gendered violence and educational disenfranchisement. Consider the youths: over 80% are thrust from formal education by year 9, and for girls, early marriage ensnares 8% by age 15, a figure that triples by age 18, propelling PNG to the top of the Pacific region for teenage pregnancies.



GSP's narrative weaves a potent story of transformation, pulling into its embrace men and boys to champion a new form of masculinity—one that prizes empathy and nurturing over aggression and dominance. The Hevea Cup isn't merely a rugby tournament; it's a metaphor for the synergy of genders collaborating for common goals. Gymbox isn't just a gym; it's a sanctuary where burdens are lifted in unison, and individual growth is celebrated as a collective victory.

These programs are more than grassroots initiatives—they are blueprints for policy reform, templates for sustainable development, and compelling evidence for the efficacious allocation of funding. They underscore a crucial truth: gender equity is not a peripheral issue but a central pillar for societal advancement.

It's time for policy change makers and global funders to recognize the power of sports as a transformative agent for gender equity. The GSP, with its proven track record, deserves not just commendation but material support. Investing in programs like Gymbox and the 10 Million Strong Leadership program is investing in the future leaders of PNG—leaders who will view women as equals and stand as allies against gender-based violence.

In backing organizations like GSP, we have the opportunity to rewrite the playbook for gender relations in PNG and beyond. Each story of transformation—be it Tim's ascent from the depths of unemployment and ill health to a community beacon, or Hud's journey from a spectator to an aspiring educator—illustrates the immense potential of targeted interventions.

Policy change makers, the call to action is clear: your influence and resources can fuel this movement for gender equity, driving systemic change, and fostering environments where every individual has the resources they need to thrive.

The Grass Skirt Project is not just changing the game; it's redefining the very arena where policy, funding, and local action converge. Let us not miss the chance to be part of this monumental shift. Together, we can ensure that gender equity in PNG moves from the periphery to the center stage, transforming potential into policy, and policy into progress.



# CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL OF OUR GLOBAL YOUTH FELLOWS!



**SHRUTI SUHANI SINGH (16)**

**Fiji Women's Rights Movement**  
**FIJI**



**TENDO RACHEAL (24)**

**RTN Digital Agency**  
**UGANDA**



**CÉCILE ROTH (26)**

**United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG)**  
**SPAIN**



**AMANDA ARROYO-CABEZAS (27)**

**Nosotras Women Connecting**  
**COSTA RICA**



**LILA MANSOUR (24)**

**BC Arabic Legal Support Centre**  
**CANADA**



**ISHA MANDAL (25)**

**Center for Migration and Gender Justice**  
**NEPAL**



**ADITI PADIYAR (32)**

**Women First International Fund**  
**INDIA**



**TAHINA BOOTH (38)**

**Grass Skirt Project**  
**PAPUA NEW GUINEA**



**MARINA CSIKOS (30)**

**Phiren Amenca International Network**  
**BELGIUM/HUNGARY**



**ASHNA BASU (29)**

**Young branch of the Medical Women's International Association**  
**AUSTRALIA**



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NGO  
PERU



NICOLE MICHÈLE MEDZUH SOJIP

**Handicapés et Fiers**  
CAMEROON



DANIELLA SOLANO MORALES (32)

**CIPAC**  
COSTA RICA



MOUFEEDA HAIDAR (31)

**Restless Development**  
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**Mongol Ecology Center**  
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MARDHIA HUSSEIN

**IMOK-Independent Media Organization in Kurdistan**  
IRAQ



HADIQA BASHIR (21)

**Girls United For Human Rights**  
PAKISTAN



HILUX FOKOU NGOUMO (19)

**Mifali**  
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