“We must unite to challenge the Status quo” says Mrs. Kaliya

In this year’s General Assembly for FEMNET members held in May, a new board was elected. Mrs. Emma Kaliya was unanimously re-elected to serve as the Chairperson of the FEMNET Board for a second term. In an interview with FEMNET’s Communication team, she speaks about her vision for the organization and other critical issues.

Congratulations for being re-elected as the chairperson of FEMNET to serve a second term. What do you envision as FEMNET’s impact in the region in the next three years? I envision a FEMNET with strong membership across the region and through its membership is able to make inroads at national level.

As a strong FEMNET member, having been part of the network for 17 years, how do you gauge the progress of women rights in the region within the areas that we work in? There is so much progress, though the women’s movement does not seem as strong as it was soon after the Beijing conference. Women’s rights NGOs working alongside our governments, have made so much progress in several areas including:

- More responsive legal frameworks. Most members’ states have succeeded in domesticating CEDAW and other human rights instruments. Having our own Protocol – the Maputo Protocol - is one of the milestones we should always be proud of.
- Emerging negotiated spaces despite the ever shrinking space of CSOs/ Women’s Rights Organizations. We appreciate the way some Member States have opened up participation of NGOs during different forums like the Gender Pre-Summit forum held prior to the AU summits, the regional fora at UNECA, the African Women’s Caucus during the annual UN CSW and other UN platforms.
- Progress has also been registered in women’s leadership that include among others, women in politics and decision making. Looking back to 1995, who may have known that Rwanda would come out
of Genocide and become the global leader in women representation in Parliament? Many other countries in Africa have made similar progress though they may not have the numbers as compared to Rwanda as it stands in 2017.

Since inception almost 30 years ago, FEMNET has impacted greatly on the lives of women and girls in Africa, what are the three main challenges that still hinder the full realization of gender equality and women’s rights in the region? Strong patriarchal ideologies aimed at maintaining the unjust systems persist in all countries. In addition, the slow economic growth continues to put women and girls in a vicious cycle of poverty and at the same time contributing to high levels of gender-based violence. The poor resourcing of the national gender machineries and women rights organizations also hamper progress.

Over the years, FEMNET has persistently lobbied high-level policy making platforms like the African Union on formulating policies for gender equality and women’s rights, have these efforts borne fruit? What do you think still needs to be done for these policies to be fully impactful? There is need for our principals to demonstrate strong political will like the case of Rwanda, then there will be total adherence to implementation of various policies and protocols that have been put in place, otherwise it will remain business as usual. At national level, those charged with the responsibility of implementation must make sure that there is no selective implementation and enforcement of policies and laws within their mandate. Member States must also ensure the allocation of adequate resources and adhere to gender-budgeting principles.

With progressive policies such as the Maputo Protocol that seek to fully ensure gender equality and women’s rights, what must African governments do to fully deliver these policies like the Maputo Protocol to the women and girls of Africa? Our African governments must put in place awareness programs aimed at changing patriarchal attitudes and cultural beliefs. They should also invest heavily in girls’ education in order to build a strong future generation of women. Above all, they must ensure that the national budgets are gender-responsive so as to cater for practical and strategic gender needs.

Women and girls in Africa have been aggressively strategizing, mobilizing and organizing for rights and equality for over three decades, still there are glaring gaps of gender discrimination and violence against women across the continent, what must we do differently to ensure that these gaps are permanently bridged? There is need to continuously and consistently empower women so that they are assertive and able to challenge stereotypes. We should also lobby our governments to ensure enforcement of laws and pronouncing of stiff penalties on GBV perpetrators to deter any would-be perpetrators. We need to strengthen multi-sectoral and human rights based approaches in our programming.

What are the opportunities you see for FEMNET and her members within the regional and global frameworks to amplify the call for the full realization of gender equality and women’s rights in the region? The strategic positioning of our members is something we should continue to leverage on and engage local and national governments. FEMNET should also continue to advocate for more spaces for our
engagement (both invited and negotiated spaces) at the AU and UN level – though funding challenges often limits our physical participation. Through strategic and collective policy advocacy we must continue to hold our governments accountable to existing commitments.

As the newly re-elected Chairperson of the FEMNET Board, what is your message of solidarity and resilience to FEMNET members across Africa on the agitation for gender equality and women’s rights? I would like to call upon members across the continent and the Diaspora that there is need to work in solidarity regardless of language, colour ethnic grouping and any other status if we want to succeed with the FEMNET agenda. We need to have a common approach to challenge the status quo, “United we stand, divide we fall” but we can only succeed if we have national programs that are well aligned to the national agenda of the country, likewise the Africa and global agendas. This is the time for us to rise up and support the spirit of the SDGs of Leaving no one Behind.

FEMNET’s Briefs

African Women and SDGs
From 3rd – 5th May 2017, FEMNET convened close to 200 advocates for gender equality and women’s rights – drawn from 35 African countries, for the first and biggest Pan African Women’s Conference since the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015. The convening came at a time when gender gains, underpinned by the ratification to international treaties and conventions on gender equality by African governments, continue to be eroded. African women’s rights organizations and movements embarked on a strategic roadmap to safeguard and build on gender gains, as well as to interrogate the SDGs implementation process that will ensure that women and girls are at the centre of the effective follow-up, and monitoring and implementation of the SDGs.

- African Women’s Key Priorities & Strategic Roadmap towards Safeguarding Gains in the 2030 Agenda (SDGs)
- #FemmeAfricaSDGs

- Check out Photos on FEMNET’s FB, Flickr and Google photos
**FEMNET’s 7th General Assembly**

FEMNET held her tri-annual General Assembly on 5th May 2017 to review the impact of FEMNET’s work over the last three years and identify innovative and forward-looking strategies to respond to emerging issues that affect African women and girls. FEMNET also gets to elect her Board Members during the General Assembly.

- FEMNET welcomes a newly elected Board of Directors

**Africa Liberation Day**

On 25th May – which is also designated as Africa Liberation Day, FEMNET joined other pan-Africanists in a moderated discussion to reflect on *Towards a new Wave of pan-Africanism in Light of Growing Violent Extremism*. The day was also a commemoration and celebration of the life of Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem – a pan-African luminary remembered for his famous slogan *"don’t agonise, organise"*.

**Safe and Inclusive Cities Conference (SAIC) 2017**

FEMNET joined a panel discussion on 'Gender Transformation and Cities', highlighting the consequences of inadequate urban planning – especially to women and girls.

- Read Blog on [Gender Transformed Cities](#)
**SRHR in Mozambique: Young Women Stand Up to be Counted!**

FEMNET’s recent training of trainers on SRHR advocacy targeted young women in Mozambique leading community mobilization and advocacy efforts at the national and local levels. The training culminated in young women in Mozambique collectively calling for the elimination of violence against women and an end to harmful practices such as early forced child marriages and female genital mutilation. In a united and strong declaration, the young women resolved to continue amplifying their voices in a strong communiqué.

- Read the full Communiqué [Young Women Stand Up to be Counted: Our Key Priorities](#) capturing the key demands.

**Women’s Rights and Tax Justice**

On the 13th and 14th of June 2017, leading movers and shakers from across the world came together in what was the first dedicated global convening on women’s rights and tax. FEMNET participated as the only pan-African women’s rights organisation putting dedicated work into macroeconomic policy and tax justice for the women and girls of Africa. The purpose of the meeting was to come up with common positions on the intersection of women’s rights and tax – an area that has seen the women’s issues excluded from the narrative yet the international financial architecture has a very direct impact on the lives of women and girls more so in the global continent where Africa for example loses a conservative figure of $50 billion annually. Together there was a definition of tax justice issues and their impact on women and girls and a progressive narrative with a substantive strategic approach for joint action was developed and a communiqué from this process will be shared as soon as it is finalised. It is a first step in the long journey to reclaim tax as a tool for redistributive economic justice for women and girls. [Read a detailed Storify on the Convening](#).
Tackling FGM & Child marriages beyond the statistics

By Marylize Biubwa

Over 80% of Female Genital Mutilations (FGM) in 30 African countries with high prevalence is performed on girls under the age of one.

More than 2 million girls and women alive today have undergone FGM in countries where the practice is highly concentrated. 14.2 million Girls are married-off annually according to a UNICEF report in 2013. These girls are married off before they attain the legal age of consent which is 18 years and above. To many unconcerned people, these are just mere statistics. But to me, as a women’s rights advocate, these are facts and figures that really matter.

My journey as a young feminist activist and as an intern at FEMNET has positively boosted my experience. Before my interaction with FEMNET, I was quiet ignorant of statistics. Even though I used to acknowledge that these violations did happen, I just did not imagine that they were this prevalent. A training course I attended on Sexual & Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) in 2016 organized by FEMNET was an eye opener for me mostly because it made me realize that I have a role to play in ending these two vicious cultures that endanger the lives of women and girls in African communities.

At the African Union Summit in Addis Ababa in January 2017 in an opportunity granted by FEMNET, I interacted firsthand with victims and survivors of FGM and forced child marriages. This was a great eye-opener for me as a women’s rights advocate. I was brought to tears as I listened to them narrating their experiences. What was even more heartbreaking was the fact that these girls had big dreams for their futures despite the broken and poverty stricken backgrounds they came from. They were not chanced to achieve their life goals because shortly after FGM, they were married-off to men way older than even their grandfathers! In this tender age, they are forced to then take up responsibilities for motherhood.

From a personal perspective, these experiences have taught me that the differences between all these things and really doing something about it is assumption - assuming that because I think things are okay, they actually are okay., now I know better!

Thanks to FEMNET, my knowledge and capacity on these issues has been considerably increased. I organize better, I articulate these issues better and most importantly, I have access to tools that enable and ensure positive results in this fight against FGM and forced child marriages. I am so honored get a chance to derive my experience from the most experienced FEMNET staff members who are driven by their passion to better the lives of women and girls across the continent. Thank you FEMNET for empowering me!

Marylize Biubwa is an Advocacy Intern at FEMNET
We must enhance the multi-lingual approach to gender equality  
By Hellen Kinyanjui

Gender equality in whatever language still translates to the same thing – equal access to rights and opportunities regardless of gender.

In my experience of working with FEMNET as a bi-lingual translator and interpreter (French/English), and from my encounter in this area of work I have realized that language barrier is one of the major hindrances to achieving gender equality in the society.

This largely narrows down to education. In Kenya for instance, the constitution requires one to have a degree to run for public office. Most girls drop out of school before completing their Primary school level. One of the reasons for this is the fact that they are married off when they attain puberty because of retrogressive cultural practices. If we have so many girls dropping out of school and thus illiterate, how then do we address issues about gender equality while illiteracy still remains a major factor facing our women and girls today?

In Africa, where women continue to suffer discrimination and violence, it is home to over 50 countries and over 1000 languages. Majority of these women only know their mother tongue. They thus have no voice in matters concerning them and neither do they know if their rights are being violated. This is because they cannot communicate in mainstream official languages and this is a major barrier.

Within projects and strategies that support women’s empowerment and emancipation, education should be a major focus so that women break language barriers and they are able to articulate their own visions and speak out about their problems. Education is information, and language is communication. When there is no communication, there is no understanding, thus zero possibility for addressing social issues.

When we agitate for gender equality, there should be more awareness about languages. It should and must be taught in schools to the young generation.

In the workforce, diversity of languages must be key in fighting gender discrimination and achieving equality. Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world. Providing women and girls with equal access to education, health care, decent work, and representation in political and economic decision-making processes will fuel sustainable economies and benefit societies and humanity at large.

Hellen Kinyanjui is the Bi-lingual intern at FEMNET
Communicate!  
Communicate!  
Communicate!  

By Mwende Muya  

Before joining FEMNET, I worked with young women in the hopes of building a movement. Efforts were frustrated mostly by lack of unity and commonality. The experience was disappointing to say the least. Working in FEMNET’s communication department has helped me find the missing component. Top on the priority list is Communication.

Communication creates a sense of understanding and relation which further strengthens synergy. Young women need to amplify their voices as they agitate for their needs and rights. Depression is the second leading cause of death among 15-29-year-olds. It could therefore be argued that the youth are mostly affected due to challenges relating to their economic and social rights. This is why communication is important – unless young women communicate about their needs and build collaborations around them, we shall be affected negatively.

Communication creates awareness, interest and sparks reactions. It is the backbone of our work towards gender equality. It informs those unaware and corrects the ignorant. Some of the greatest campaigns, of which FEMNET was a key partner, have succeeded due to strategic communication approaches.

Campaigns such as #JusticeForLiz in 2013, “My dress my choice” in 2014 and the ongoing #BringBackOurGirls have all gathered considerable impact because of how they were and are still being communicated to the specific targets.

The Women’s March organized in 2016 in the United States to reinforce solidarity with women in the US and globally was marked virtually across all Continents of the World in many countries. It was a loud statement of solidarity for women’s rights across the world that reminded the newly elected Trump administration and the world at large that oppression of women in any form is not acceptable.

Communication also creates a footprint which makes it easy to document events and occurrences. Through both mainstream and digital media, one is able to spark interest, disseminate information, create awareness on gender issues and also analyze their impact. Documenting stories ensures that women share experiences and form bonds which boost movement-building.

As a young woman eager to do my part from the experience I am getting at FEMNET, I can say for a fact that three things matter the most in the work that we do; Communication! Communication! Communication!

Mwende Muya is a Communications intern at FEMNET.
Free ONE YEAR MEMBERSHIP to FEMNET!

Write your way to a Free FEMNET membership!

In keeping up with a tradition of building solidarity and strengthening Networks, FEMNET is providing a one-year FREE membership subscription to a respondent with the most compelling Women & Girls Rights story submitted between the months of June & July 2017.

The story submission may be:-

- Compiled and presented in any form of written prose
- On any topic/subject of women’s rights
- May be compelling and inspirational to the work of ending gender discrimination and violence against women
- FEMNET Members and non-members are welcome to submit.

A FEMNET membership could translate into:

- Free & vibrant information & communication on regional and global processes on women’s and girls’ rights
- Opportunities for capacity building platforms on women and girls rights in Africa
- Vast and critical networking & solidarity building platforms on women and girls rights in Africa

NB: Send your submissions to: femnetgen@femnet.or.ke /PS. Start your Subject line with; “WIN FEMNET”

Deadline for Submissions: 31st July 2017

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