



Her Story

**OUR JOURNEY:
ADVOCATING FOR THE RIGHTS OF AFRICAN WOMEN**



**The African Women's
Development and
Communication Network**



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Compiled by:
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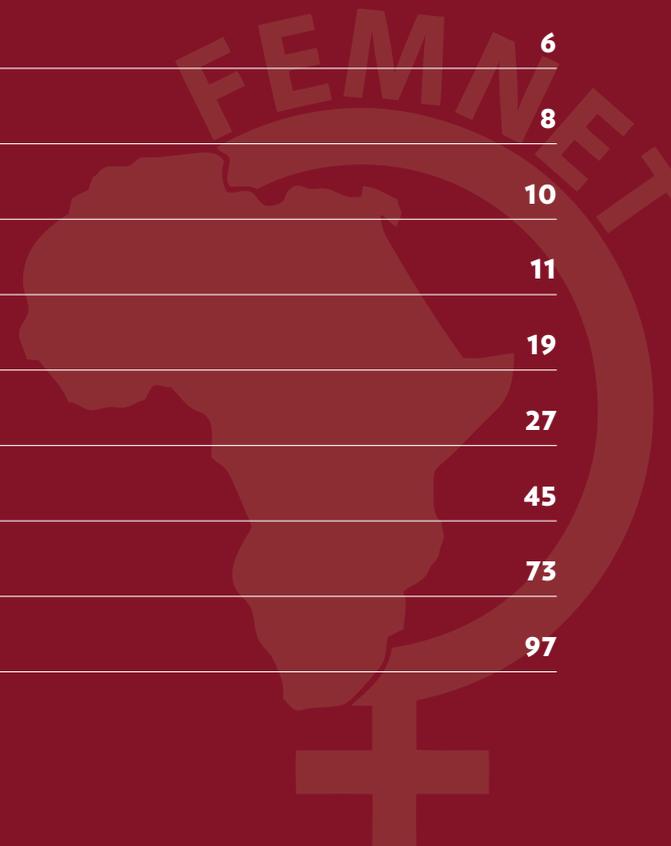
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Acknowledgement

'... diversity makes for a rich tapestry, and we must understand that all the threads of the tapestry are equal in value no matter what their color.'

Renowned African-American poet, author, actress, and civil rights activist Maya Angelou once said, diversity makes for a rich tapestry, and we must understand that all the threads of the tapestry are equal in value no matter what their color.'

The journey of weaving FEMNET's story began as a dream that culminated into this rich and diverse recollection of experiences and memories by the founders, members, staff of FEMNET and friends of FEMNET.

FEMNET wishes to acknowledge with much appreciation the efforts and commitment of several people that worked tirelessly to the success of documenting *Herstory*.

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DINAH MUSINDARWEZO
Executive Director, FEMNET

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We would also like to appreciate all who have rendered different services to FEMNET at one point or another, including consultants, printers, suppliers, translators – to you all we say thank you for journeying with us!

Enjoy the read and share with us your feedback by email to communication@femnet.or.ke

In sisterhood,

DINAH MUSINDARWEZO

Executive Director, FEMNET

Acronyms

AAI	<i>Action Aid International</i>
AALAE	<i>African Association for Literacy and Adult Education</i>
AAWORD	<i>African Association of Women Research and Development</i>
ABSF	<i>Africa Biotechnology Stakeholders Forum</i>
ACCORD	<i>African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes</i>
ACDHRS	<i>African Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Studies</i>
AISGWG	<i>African Information Society Gender Working Group</i>
AMARC	<i>World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters</i>
APC	<i>Association of Progressive Communication</i>
ARSC	<i>Africa Regional Steering Committee</i>
ASF	<i>African Social Forum</i>
AU	<i>African Union</i>
AWCIN	<i>African Women and Child Information Network</i>
AWD	<i>African Women's Decade (2010-2020)</i>
AWDF	<i>African Women's Development Fund</i>
CCP-AU	<i>Centre for Citizens' Participation in the African Union</i>
CECORE	<i>Centre for Conflict Resolution</i>
CEDAW	<i>Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women</i>
CEEWA	<i>Council for Economic Empowerment of Women in Africa</i>

CIDA	<i>Canadian International Development Agency</i>
CIDA-GESP	<i>Canadian International Development Agency – Gender Equity Support Project</i>
CONGO	<i>Conference on Non-governmental organizations</i>
CSOs	<i>Civil Society Organizations</i>
CSSDCA	<i>Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Cooperation in Africa</i>
CSW	<i>UN Commission on the Status of Women</i>
CTA	<i>Technical Centre for Agriculture & Rural Co-operation</i>
DANIDA	<i>Danish International Development Agency</i>
DAW	<i>Division for the Advancement of Women</i>
DFID	<i>Department for International Development</i>
DVV	<i>Adult Education Development Cooperation-Germany</i>
EAC	<i>East African Community</i>
ECOSOC	<i>United Nations Economic, Social and Cultural Council</i>
EU	<i>European Union</i>
FAWE	<i>Forum for African Women Educationalists</i>
FEMNET	<i>African Women's Development and Communication Network</i>
FERFAP	<i>Federation of African Women's Network for Peace</i>
FGTT	<i>FEMNET Gender Training Team</i>
FIDA	<i>Federation of Women Lawyers</i>
FIFA	<i>International Federation of Association Football</i>
FK	<i>Fredskorpset</i>
FLS	<i>Forward Looking Strategies</i>
GA	<i>General Assembly</i>
GEAR	<i>Gender Equality Architecture Reform</i>

GFW	<i>Global Fund for Women</i>	SADC	<i>Southern African Development Community</i>
GSWG	<i>Gender Strategies Working Group</i>	Sida	<i>Swedish International Development Agency</i>
GTZ	<i>German Agency for Technical Cooperation</i>	SOAWR	<i>Solidarity for African Women's Rights</i>
HBF	<i>Heinrich Boll Foundation</i>	TAMWA	<i>Tanzania Media Women's Association</i>
ICAE	<i>International Council for Adult Education</i>	UAF-A	<i>Urgent Action Fund-Africa</i>
ICCO	<i>Inter-church Organization for Development Cooperation</i>	UN	<i>United Nations</i>
ICTs	<i>Information and Communication Technologies</i>	UNDP	<i>United Nations Development Programme</i>
IPPF	<i>International Planned Parenthood Federation</i>	UNECA	<i>United Nations Economic Commission for Africa</i>
IWARAW	<i>International Women's Rights Action Watch</i>	UNESCO	<i>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization</i>
KANU	<i>Kenya African National Union</i>	UNFPA	<i>United Nations Population Fund</i>
KULU	<i>Women and Development Denmark</i>	UNGASS	<i>United Nations General Assembly Special Session</i>
MEGEN	<i>Men for Gender Equality Now</i>	UNHCR	<i>United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees</i>
NABW	<i>National Association of Business Women</i>	UNICEF	<i>United Nations Children's Fund</i>
NEPAD	<i>New Partnership for Africa's Development</i>	UNICEF/ESARO	<i>United Nations Children's Fund, Eastern and Southern African Region</i>
NGO	<i>Non Governmental Organization</i>	UNIFEM	<i>United Nations Fund for Women (now UN Women)</i>
NGOCC	<i>Non-Governmental Organization Coordinating Council Zambia</i>	USAID	<i>United States Agency for International Development</i>
NGOCSW	<i>NGO Committee on the Status on Women Geneva</i>	WEDO	<i>Women Environmental Development Organization</i>
OAU	<i>Organization of African Unity (now African Union)</i>	WHO	<i>World Health Organization</i>
PAC	<i>Partnership Africa Canada</i>	WIDE	<i>Women in Development Europe Network</i>
PAP	<i>Pan African Parliament</i>	WILDAF	<i>Women in Law and Development in Africa</i>
PC/GA	<i>Programming Conference and General Assembly</i>	WSF	<i>World Social Forum</i>
PFA	<i>Platform for Action</i>	WSIS	<i>World Summit on Information Society</i>
PRSP	<i>Poverty Reduction Strategy and Papers</i>	ZARD	<i>Zambia Association for Research and Development</i>
PSC	<i>Peace and Security Commission</i>		

Foreword



It gives me great pleasure to write this Foreword, and especially to celebrate the fact that I have had a part to play in the FEMNET *Herstory*. Indeed, my own personal, professional and political growth, struggles, challenges and victories have many parallels with the FEMNET *Herstory*. As we reflect on the journey we have come the last thirty years, we see a clear pattern of growth and development that is reflected in the personal, national, sub-regional and global achievements of the women's movement.

In the decade of the seventies, most of us experienced great awareness of and dissatisfaction with the disadvantaged and unequal status of women and started grouping to fight together. Although concepts such as women's emancipation were still vague, they nonetheless found fertile ground in the lives of women who were looking with hope at the possibilities of a better life. The most rewarding experience of that decade was the grassroots women's movement, through which women individually and collectively sought to better their lives. Through these group movements, women were sensitised to know they had rights and they did not have to passively endure discrimination. I was personally a beneficiary of the women's grassroots movement, which gave me the courage to fight injustice, developed my innate leadership abilities and sharpened my determination to help other women to change their situation.

The decade of the eighties witnessed a coming of age of the women's movement, propelled by the activities and the spirit of liberation that came with the United Nations Decade for Women. The encounters between women of different countries, regions and continents, united in the struggle against gender inequality were greatly energizing, even for women like us who were operating within repressive political systems. In Africa, the struggle was like swimming up-stream, confronting deep-rooted patriarchal systems that dominated social, cultural, economic, religious and political systems. The gains were small, but the women's spirit was strong and it helped us inch forward, small steps at a time. The global pressure for change helped to chip off the resistance of the patriarchs and allowed women small spaces to improve their lot.

My involvement in the leadership of the women's movement came in the nineties when the environment in my own country Malawi changed and created space for the mobilization of the women to go beyond dancing to engagement in life transforming and empowerment activities. The hunger and thirst that women of different social, economic and cultural standing had for empowerment resulted in the birth and rapid growth of a women's movement that greatly impacted not only the women but entire communities. Women's voices started emerging and that decade witnessed the positioning of women in business, government, corporate, religious, legal and legislative structures in critical numbers. The jury was out that women could do as well as men, given the opportunity.

The flowering of the women's rights movement came in the new millennium as the world agreed that women were ready to take their equal positions with men in all spheres of human endeavor. Although many promises were made and broken, through global and regional conventions, declarations, plans of action and treaties by Governments, State Parties under the United Nations and regional coalitions over the last three decades, still women have inched their way into the patriarchal systems bit by bit. My sister Ellen Sirleaf Johnson was the first African woman to join the scores of women Heads of State and Government around the world, thus breaking the myth against African women's political leadership. I have followed her footsteps and I believe soon others will follow as we prove to the world that women are different but of equal value and abilities with men, starting with the girl child all the way to State Houses.

In this second decade of the twenty-first century, we celebrate the women of Africa and the world, who have kept the fire and hope of a better world for all alive. It is no longer guess work that women hold more than half the sky and that we will transform the world. There is now evidence that the ideals of equality,

development and peace that formed the foundation of our struggle since the birth of the global women's empowerment movement in Mexico City in 1975 can only be achieved through equal partnership between women and men at the levels of family, community, nation, region and the world.

FEMNET has been at the centre of the campaign for gender equality in the last three decades. My association with FEMNET started in 1993 as we prepared for the Third World Conference on Population and Development, held in Cairo and intensified in 1994 as we prepared for the Beijing Conference. The journey through the sub-regional, regional and global conferences, consultations and the follow-up offered many opportunities to serve, network and influence decision-making, legislation and implementation of key commitments. In the last 10 years, I have served in positions that have given me the leverage to influence national, sub-regional, regional and global policies and politics, including the implementation of key conventions and plans of action. In my present situation, I accept the responsibility for influencing my peers in top political leadership to honour and keep their promises to women. The women of Africa can rest assured that I will make a difference at the Africa Union, the United Nations, SADC, in Malawi and at every institution where I sit, to demonstrate that women can do as well or better than men, and also to continue to advance our struggle for equality, development and peace.

JOYCE HILDA BANDA,

President of Malawi

September, 2012

Introduction

As a pan-African organization, FEMNET's work is implemented in about forty countries in Africa, through its membership and focal point organizations. The secretariat is located in Nairobi, Kenya. Within the framework of its vision and mission of promoting gender equality and women's empowerment, FEMNET continues to operate as a regional network working as an interface between civil society organizations (CSOs) working on women's advancement and key stakeholders such as governments, international organizations like the United Nations (UN) and other development agencies.

The presence and voice of African civil society and in particular that of African women, has been strengthened through the work of FEMNET, particularly as a member of the African Union (AU)/CSOs provisional working group that developed the Protocol establishing the Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC) for the AU and participation in the process of developing the Africa Union Gender Policy and a member of the African Women's Rights Observatory. In 2007, during the first ECOSOCC General Assembly FEMNET was elected as one of the eight (8) African CSOs to serve in the Assembly.

In the last 24 years, FEMNET has been at the fore, strengthening the capacity of African women to use human rights commitments to influence programmes and structures of regional and international bodies. FEMNET has a unique training model in gender mainstreaming, which is applicable to the twelve priority areas outlined in the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action. FEMNET also continues to mobilize and build capacities of African women to participate in regional and global forums such as the African Civil Society Forum, the World Social Forum (WSF), World Summit on Information Society (WSIS), the bi-annual African Union Summits, the annual sessions of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), the Conference of NGOs (CONGO) and Civil Society Voices

for BetterAid with the aim of amplifying the voice of African women and capacity to influence policies and decisions that impact their lives.

As a membership-based network, FEMNET has identified Focal Point organizations, most of which are national networks of women's organisations, in the five sub-regions of East, West, South, North and Central Africa to act as the contact points at the sub-regional and national levels. These work with FEMNET to remain connected with over 255 organizational and individual members.

By and large, FEMNET desires a strong African women's rights movement that is actively engaged in the development processes in Africa at all levels. Advocacy, communication, networking and information sharing are essential for collective organizing, transfer of skills and knowledge and movement building. The history of the women's movement and in particular that of the women pioneers is loosely documented. There is a strong need to document the history of the women's movement in Africa that highlight key women players that have contributed to the movement so as to inspire young upcoming women activists.

FEMNET is proud to document her journey through this book titled *Our Journey in Advocating for the Rights of African Women*. It is envisaged that the well documented story of FEMNET will be a credible source of knowledge on the women's movement in Africa which will be easily available as a point of reference for researchers and women's rights activists.

This book critically analyzes the happenings, contexts and links FEMNET's story with the journey of the women's movement globally and regionally, beginning with the 1984 Arusha Regional Preparatory Conference to the 1985 Nairobi Third World Conference of Women, the 1994 Dakar and the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action Conferences and the African Women's Decade (2010-2020).

We believe this book will contribute to the body of knowledge on women's rights movements in Africa and will be a learning tool and a source of inspiration to both national and regional women's rights organizations. ***If we do not tell our stories, who will?***

The Third World Conference on Women, 1985, Nairobi, Kenya

At the United Nations General Assembly of 1983, the Kenya Government had won the bid to be the host of the Third World Conference on Women, to be held in Nairobi, in July 1985, together with what had become the traditional NGO Forum (which had also been held alongside the First and Second World Conferences on Women in Mexico in 1975 and Copenhagen in 1980). The Kenya Government consequently embarked on preparatory activities for the two events in December 1983. An NGO Organizing Committee was convened by the Ministry of Social Services in December 1983. This Committee was constituted by representatives from all key women's NGOs, international NGOs that had consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations, prominent women leaders and Church based organizations. Dr Eddah Gachukia was elected the Chairperson of the Kenya NGO Forum Organizing Committee.

In 1983 I went back to the University of Nairobi, after serving for 10 years as a nominated Member of Parliament. I was teaching and that is when the Kenya NGO Organizing Committee called me and said I had been elected again in my absence to lead the Kenya NGO's Organizing Committee for Forum 85. The NGO Forum was bigger than the Intergovernmental Conference and the Kenya Government was very uncomfortable about hosting the NGO's by that time due to the uncertainty of who would attend the meeting. As the process of planning for these events continued the Government became more and more uncomfortable and that is one of the jobs I would never ever want to do again.

Dr Eddah Gachukia



The Kenya NGO Co-ordinating Committee elected its leaders and assigned special responsibilities to the members according to their interest, thematic expertise and skills. Thirteen thematic and management committees were constituted, to mobilize and prepare Kenya women for their participation and hosting responsibilities for the Global NGO Forum and the official Third World Conference on Women. The thematic and management committees reported to the NGO Organizing Committee on monthly basis and the Co-ordinating Committee reported to the overall Conference Steering Committee, chaired by the Minister of Social Welfare, at that time, Hon. Kenneth Matiba.

By the time Kenyan women attended the Arusha NGO Forum, they had already mobilized Kenya women in all the provinces, organized provincial workshops,

gathered information for the national paper and organized a National NGO Forum at Egerton College (now Egerton University), Njoro, Kenya in August 1984. Consequently, Kenyan women in Arusha took a leadership role in shaping the African women's priorities and contributions to the Forward Looking Strategies (FLS), based on the review and encounters with Kenyan women.

The NGO Forum and the Africa Regional Preparatory Conference for the Third World Conference on Women, in Arusha, Tanzania, October 1984

It was the last day of the NGO Forum preceding the Governmental Fourth African Regional Conference on Women. This was the special regional conference where Africa would develop its own Forward Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women up to and beyond the year 2000. About 50 women from different parts of Africa (mostly from Kenya and Tanzania) had just completed the NGO Forum '85, which had been convened by the NGO Forum Secretariat in New York. Dame Nita Burrow, the Convenor of the NGO Forum, was the key facilitator of the Forum. With her was Virginia Hazzard, then working for UNICEF Africa Regional Office in Nairobi. UNICEF was the main sponsor of the African women at the NGO Forum.

Among the Forum '85 participants were a big number from Kenya. The presence of the Kenyans had a special significance, because they had already organized a national forum and developed National Forward Looking Strategies to share with African women at the regional level. They therefore had already set the agenda for African women's discussions.

The final plenary of the NGO Forum was the historic moment that sparked the conception of FEMNET. The plenary received the draft report of the Forum and then came the question of who the draft belonged to, who would finalize it and what the next step in the process would be. Most participants thought it was obvious that it belonged to them. Dame Nita Burrow and Virginia Hazzard, maintained that it belonged to the NGO Forum in New York as the convenor



of the Arusha NGO Forum. In the end a committee of participants based in Nairobi was assigned the task of finalizing the report, copies of which would go to the partners: NGO Forum, the participants and the sponsors, including the UNICEF Regional Office. However, the debate lit a flame for African women's identity, solidarity, unity, self-direction and ownership.

Output One: The NGO Forum produced the NGO Arusha Forward Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women up to and beyond the year 2000. The content of these outcomes were to guide African women even as they contributed to the discussions during the Global NGO Forum. They also contributed to the official output, which was the Africa Regional Forward Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women up to and beyond the year 2000 (Arusha Forward Looking Strategies).

The Challenge: It was a moment of reckoning that African women had no machinery that could own the report and take charge to distribute it to African women! It was that shocking realization that drove several participants to a caucus meeting immediately after that session. We met in a corridor, all of us highly animated. Our sole purpose was to correct that untenable situation. In that meeting, we created the African Women's Task Force. Dr. Eddah Gachukia was designated the Chairperson, Njoki Wainaina the Co-ordinator and there were representatives from the Central African Republic, the Gambia, Botswana, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Mali.

Output Two: The formation of the African Women's Task Force. The Terms of Reference for the Task Force were to:

- ensure African women are mobilized, briefed and facilitated to attend the NGO Forum and Third World Women's Conference in large numbers
- organize an African women's preparatory conference before the Global NGO Forum to prepare them for active and meaningful participation in the global meetings
- create a long-term machinery for co-ordinating African women's development, communication and solidarity, beyond the Nairobi conference

With that, the meeting ended and the majority of women left for their homes, while those in the Government delegations and those from the NGOs with consultative status with the UN remained for the Fourth Regional and Preparatory Conference.

According to Dr Eddah Gachukia: *It all started in Arusha, the venue was chosen to host the African Regional Conference for the End of the Women's Decade. At that time we were all scattered. The African women were sent to Arusha by whichever development agency was interested. In Kenya we were very fortunate to have UNICEF; in other countries it was either UNICEF or some other agency. They could sponsor only a few of the NGO Women to go to Arusha.*

The End of the Women's Decade (1976-1985) Conference

In Arusha, the majority of African women participants in the NGO Forum were hearing about the Women's Decade (1976-1985) for the first time. The women of the world were already preparing to come to Nairobi in their thousands to present their issues and to review progress made during the Decade. How could African women's issues be on the agenda, when they had never even heard about the Decade, let alone participated in its programme? The African Women's Task Force was therefore charged with the responsibility of mobilizing, informing and ensuring African women attended the NGO Forum '85 in their thousands, and to ensure that their issues were not sidelined.

Challenge: The only members of the African Women's Task Force who were in one place after the Arusha meeting were those in Kenya (the chairperson and the co-ordinator). The heavy mandate of the African Women's Task Force rested squarely on their shoulders, on top of the heavy responsibilities they carried in the Kenya NGO Coordinating Committee. Thanks to the support of the development partners in Nairobi, including UNICEF Africa Regional and Kenya Country offices, the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) and its network of Family Planning Associations all over Africa, Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and others, the African Women's Task Force managed to disseminate the information about the NGO Forum, the issues for discussion, the activities at the Forum, sources of funding for those seeking sponsorship, the logistics of the Forum and the offers of home hospitality by Kenyan women.

The African Women's Encounter

Although it was not possible to organize a preparatory meeting six months before the NGO Forum '85 as the Arusha participants had recommended, the Task Force organized a pre-Forum event titled the African Women's Encounter, hosted by UNICEF at the UN Complex in Gigiri, in Nairobi, on July 6, 1985,



just before the NGO Forum '85. This colourful event was attended by over 500 African women and deliberated on the priority issues for African women, prepared the African women to take leadership in the NGO Forum '85, confirmed and expanded the Task Force and reaffirmed the need for creating a machinery to keep African women connected, in communication and sharing experiences.

In the months following the Arusha meeting, the two Kenyan Task Force members worked tirelessly to mobilize African women, using the networks of the regional NGOs based in Nairobi, Government contacts, the IPPF network of Family Planning Associations, and opportunities at regional and international meetings. The Kenya NGO Organizing Committee mobilized home hospitality, liaised with all known African women's organisations to share the information on the Nairobi NGO Forum '85 and prepared African women to share in the

glory of hosting this land mark event. In spite of communication difficulties in the region, the information got to the entire continent through telexes, letters, telephone calls and individual sharing as witnessed by the presence of African women at the Encounter, the Nairobi NGO Forum '85 and the End of the Decade Conference.

Output: The African Women's Encounter confirmed and nominated additional members of the African Women's Task Force, elaborating further its Terms of Reference, which included creating a machinery to keep African women linked with each other, sharing ideas and following up on the recommendations made under the Decade's themes of Equality, Development and Peace. The expanded Task Force met several times during the time of the NGO Forum '85 and the Third UN Conference, which followed the Forum. Expectations and passions ran high, and the 'Spirit of Nairobi', which had infected most participants of the Forum and the Conference; created a lot of hope that great things were going to happen.

Challenge: After the African Women's Encounter and the Nairobi NGO Forum '85, it took another three years before the African Women's Task Force could meet again, but the team in Nairobi kept alive the African women's dream of a regional machinery to keep them connected. The Task Force members used every opportunity for travel in and outside Africa to promote the concept of a regional machinery and to identify organisations that would be recruited to join. Task Force members lobbied UNICEF to support a secretariat and it was set up at the UNICEF Regional Office, giving it the advantage of such facilities as telephone, fax, telegram, office space, stationery and connections to countries through UNICEF Country Offices. Thanks to this and other support from other development partners, the conference that founded FEMNET was finally held in April 1988 at the UN Centre in Nairobi, hosted once again by the UNICEF Regional Office.

The Nairobi NGO Forum, 1985

The Nairobi NGO Forum '85 was the greatest thing that ever happened to the women of Kenya. It placed them and their programmes in the global limelight and gave importance to the movement that in the past they had taken for granted as a grassroots norm. Through sixteen committees working for 18 months, they had prepared the women of Kenya to put their issues at the forefront. They had organized hundreds of events ranging from exhibitions, field visits, workshops, hospitality functions, home hosting, tours and excursions. The women of the world saw in Kenya examples of what the women's movement could do and many useful lessons were learned. The Nairobi NGO Forum '85 of 15,000 women from over 100 countries was a happening like none other, and for the women of the world as well as the Kenya women, nothing would be the same again!

The process of organizing the NGO Forum '85 and Third World Women's Conference created in Kenya the awareness of the importance of women and particularly the power they wield. Women in all corners of Kenya had been mobilized, sensitized and organized to receive the women of the world. The field visits organized for delegates to visit women's development projects, including water, environment, agriculture, economic ventures and livestock within a radius of 200 kilometres around Nairobi proved a great experience for Kenyan women and the women of the world alike. The media coverage of the events was very good and Nairobi and its environs witnessed the potential of women power! The women of the world saw for themselves the efforts Kenyan women had made in changing their own lives through improved livelihoods, leadership development, education and decision making, among others.

These encounters with the grassroots women, the experience of their warmth and hospitality and the powerful messages of solidarity shared in song, dance, verbal and non-verbal gestures set the stage for the sharing and interactions at the NGO Forum '85 and the Conference. It came to be called *The Spirit of*

Nairobi. It was cherished for many years by all those who participated; but it was not lost to the patriarchal political system that if women were united around a cause, they could change the world.

Output: The women of the world took away with them the *Spirit of Nairobi*. The women of Kenya, however, got the backlash that deliberately and decisively fractured, destroyed and quenched the women's movement – an onslaught from which Kenyan women have never fully recovered.

Challenge: The backlash was so swift and unexpected that it left Kenya women wondering what had hit them. The political forces set some women up against others and scattered the NGO Steering Committee soon after the Conference ended. The Committee never even met to review the success in hosting the Conference. Government agents were used to frustrate every effort of the women to regroup. Meetings were cancelled and the war on the NGOs and individuals who led them was waged from invisible sources. It was in this volatile environment that the registration of FEMNET was being pursued, and it became an uphill task, since there was hostility, suspicion and under-currents that suggested that women's activities were subversive.







FEMNET Foundation Meeting

This FEMNET foundation meeting was held at the United Nations Complex in Nairobi in April, 1988 and was attended by over 50 women from over ten countries both Francophone and Anglophone. The keynote speaker was Sara Longwe, who in her presentation introduced one of the most radical concepts of that time - 'Empowerment' and the framework she had developed for assessing the levels of women's empowerment. She used her framework to assess the levels of empowerment of the Nairobi and Arusha Forward Looking Strategies (FLS), which were the main output of the Regional and Global Forums and Conferences of NGOs and Governments.

The meeting mandated the Nairobi-based members of the Task Force, which had been strengthened with additional members from Nairobi based women's organisations, to develop a constitution and propose a programme for the next three years. Elizabeth Okwenje, then working as a consultant developed the first programme and proposed a constitution, tailored after those of some of the NGO partners based in Nairobi. This period of struggle brought out the best of the Task Force and the professional friends in Nairobi. It was a time of giving - talents, money, ideas, time, friendships, meeting places and solidarity.



My paper analyzed the Arusha Declaration of 1984 and the Forward Looking Strategies of 1985 using my 'Women's Empowerment Framework', now popularly known as the 'Longwe Framework'.... In the 1980s I called the framework I used, 'Women's Status Criteria' because the mere word 'empowerment' brought goose pimples to believers of 'women in development' at both civil society and governmental levels. I deliberately used these criteria in order to make some general observations about women's development projects in Africa, and of the implications if FEMNET was to become involved in promoting development projects which are more addressed to women's issues and the improvement of the status of women. Sara Longwe

Output: The FEMNET foundation meeting adopted the name and the concept of the Network, which by that time had become popular and which was a perfect response to the ideas and aspirations which African women had since Arusha. It also elected an interim Board, headed by Dr Eddah Gachukia, and appointed Njoki Wainaina the co-ordinator. Further, it decided that the Network would be headquartered in Nairobi and mandated the Nairobi-based members to pursue its registration as a regional NGO according to the laws of Kenya.

Being a resource person and the fact that my paper resonated with feminists and representatives of UN and Bi-Lateral Development Agents present, I was asked to write the report in such a way that it could be used as a political report, which was later converted into a proposal. It is during the writing of the Launch Report that I established the acronym 'FEMNET'. Njoki Wainaina was then the coordinator and I was co-opted into the interim board of FEMNET to represent Southern Africa, with Eddah Gachukia as the interim Chairperson. Sara Longwe

Challenge: The deliberations of the African women's meetings were beginning to form an interesting pattern. Participants would come to the meetings with a lot of enthusiasm, deliberate on issues, develop elaborate plans of action and recommendations, delegate follow-up to the Kenyan members and then leave for their homes, in as many countries as their membership. Once back home, most never shared with others the outputs of the meetings and almost never communicated with the other members of the Task Force or the Co-ordinator. At one time the Secretariat did not know whether some members were alive, and indeed one member passed on and the secretariat kept sending communications to her without knowing. Language had also become a major challenge as members of the Task Force or the Interim Board were either French or English speaking and none were bilingual. This challenge persisted for many years as the secretariat had inadequate resources to translate all materials into French, making FEMNET seem like an English speaking sub-regional network that marginalized or excluded French, Arabic and Lusophone sub-regions.



Gladys Mutukwa states: "I was a participant and speaker at the very first meeting in Nairobi held by a few of us to discuss the need for such an organization.

At the end of the meeting we decided we needed to set up an organization to address specifically the issue of communication and sharing experiences."



Memorable individuals:	
Aida Giddy	<i>UNICEF Regional Director and later FEMNET Board Member, Egypt</i>
Mary Racelis	<i>UNICEF Regional Director</i>
Virginia Hazzard	<i>UNICEF Kenya Country Office, supported FEMNET for many years</i>
Baquer Namazi (Mr)	<i>UNICEF Kenya Country Director, ardent supporter of FEMNET</i>
Sara Longwe	<i>Keynote Speaker at FEMNET Founding Meeting; coined the name 'FEMNET' and longest serving FEMNET board member (1988-2003)</i>
Elizabeth Okwenje Lwanga	<i>Consultant, drafted the first FEMNET Constitution</i>
Gladys Mutukwa	<i>Zambian Consultant and participant at the FEMNET founding conference and donated her fees to the Network</i>
Dr Eddah Gachukia	<i>Chairperson of the Interim FEMNET Board</i>
Njoki Wainaina	<i>Co-ordinator of FEMNET Secretariat during the formation stages</i>

Developing Networking Tools for FEMNET

The earliest need experienced in the life of FEMNET was for networking tools to keep the Task Force members, the general membership and partners informed of the activities and progress made in various areas. *FEMNET News*, a quarterly publication of the Network, was initiated in 1989. The content of *FEMNET News* was a wonderful indicator of the progress made in the three years of its life. From the technological age of the Telex, to the era of the fax and now the age of the Internet, *FEMNET News* was a tool through which the

Network communicated and shared information with its membership. During the process to Dakar and Beijing the sister publication, *Our Rights*, was initiated and was another key tool, published bi-annually and covering issue-oriented articles as opposed to news and up-dates. FEMNET continued to publish *FEMNET News* and *Our Rights* newsletter up to 2010, when it was decided to merge them into a journal known as *The African Women's Journal*. The Journal features more analytical and well researched articles from FEMNET members and partners across Africa on diverse issues related to the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment. The Journal is a signature publication by FEMNET throughout the African Women's Decade (2010-2020), providing critical information, case studies, best practices and real-life experiences and stories of African women and their persistent pursuit for equality, peace and sustainable development.

Output: *FEMNET News'* quarterly publications and its coverage of current thematic or topical issues of importance at a given period were a key indicator that the Network was alive. They have always been part of the displays, advocacy and promotional activities of the Network. In the last decade, the FEMNET website (www.femnet.co) has become a key communication tool.

Challenge: The greatest challenge to effective networking is the one way communication from the FEMNET Secretariat to its membership. Pleas and requests for news, up-dates, information and materials from readers often go unanswered. Many recipients never even acknowledge receipt of materials. In the early years of the Network it was very difficult to cover countries unless staff travelled there. The culture of with-holding information has always been a major challenge, not only in sharing information but also in expanding the Network to include more members in a country.

FEMNET's Registration

The process of registering FEMNET took another three years after the launch and proved a most painful and frustrating experience.

The period 1982-1992 in Kenya witnessed the era of political repression, dictatorship and one party state rule that was totally allergic to freedoms, human and people's rights. By the time FEMNET was conceptualized, the national leadership had already suppressed the women's movement and all social movements. Political gatekeepers were posted everywhere and there were suspicions even between activists. Nonetheless, the FEMNET Interim Board members based in Kenya lobbied and pleaded with Government partners who had the authority, in order to get the registration. In this environment in which Government regarded the NGO movement as potentially subversive; this struggle yielded no results.

Following the founding meeting, FEMNET continued to receive the support of donor partners, but without registration it could not be considered a serious partner. In order to receive donor funding, FEMNET had to be hosted by the sister NGO, the African Association for Literacy and Adult Education (AALAE). The hosting arrangement helped FEMNET to undertake some critical activities, including the promotion of the Network, representation in key thematic and advocacy meetings at regional and international levels and keeping alive the connections with members of the Network. This continued for nearly two years as the Interim Board members struggled with Government agents who were determined not to register the organization, along with many others. The political environment in Kenya had by then become highly oppressive, characterized by detentions and intimidation of anybody suspected of involvement in rights based activities and movements. Individuals were intimidated and threatened and those working in Government were afraid of losing jobs or even worse consequences.

Challenge: In 1990, the Interim Board met and gave an ultimatum that either the Kenyan team resolved the registration issue or the Office be moved elsewhere. The donor partners also joined in pressurizing for a solution. The Kenya team, comprising Interim Board Chairperson Dr Gachukia, the Co-ordinator Njoki Wainaina, Ruth Oeri of the Women's Bureau and Paul Wangoola of AALAE finally devised a plan. They registered FEMNET as a women's group in Westlands, Nairobi, which gave them legitimacy to open a bank account and operate, according to the regulations of the Department of Social Services. Two years later, the struggle for the second liberation was won with the end of the one party state dictatorship and finally FEMNET was registered as a regional NGO.

The FEMNET Gender Programme

The FEMNET collaboration with UNICEF brought the benefits of being among the first organisations in Africa to develop the capacity for gender mainstreaming. In 1989, FEMNET started collaborating with the UNICEF Regional Office to develop the Gender and Development approach. Soon afterwards, the CIDA office in Nairobi provided the grant and technical assistance to train key Kenyan women and men in Gender and Development. A team from the Coady Institute in Canada came in and trained 25 participants, 12 female and 13 male, as trainers in gender and shared with them the gender training modules and frameworks. Soon after, the trainers formed the FEMNET Gender Training Team, which for many years trained in Kenya. This programme cemented the FEMNET relationship with UNICEF at national, regional and international levels and the FEMNET Gender Training Team was recognized internationally and invited to train in many countries in Africa and internationally, including Malawi, Zambia, Swaziland, Uganda, United States and Iran. The FEMNET Gender Training Team was founded on the principle that gender is about women and men, and therefore was among the first programmes to include men. The Team was invited to conferences around the world to present the gender approach.

Challenge: After many years, the FEMNET Board decided that the Gender Programme, which had remained primarily Kenyan based because of funding, needed to become an autonomous Kenya Organization. The Programme was constituted into the Collaborative Centre for Gender and Development, as an autonomous entity following a parting that was not particularly cordial. As a result with it went many years of experience, expertise and skills, which could have, with better strategic management, continued to put FEMNET on the global highlight as a gender resource centre. The Gender Collaborative Centre has for many years been at the forefront of key political and strategic developments in Kenya, from which FEMNET's credit may not have been sufficiently recognized/ credited. The FEMNET Gender Training Team (FGTT) was never the same again, even though members continued to train in different countries.

The FEMNET effort to build a regional gender programme was a struggle as most donor partners were not keen on funding regional activities. While funding for the country programmes was much easier to get; FEMNET members were not passionate about the programme. In spite of the difficulties, FEMNET managed to organize activities in a number of countries, including a Gender Trainers Conference in Zambia, Seychelles' Gender Training in partnership with the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE), Training of Trainers in Malawi, Training for USAID staff in Washington DC, and Training of Trainers in Swaziland. The FEMNET Gender Programme was at its zenith during the Fourth African Regional Conference and NGO Forum in Dakar and the FGTT played key roles in mainstreaming gender in the African Platform for Action, organizing a Gender Trainers Panel, sharing of materials and training experience and spearheading the creation of gender programming capacity building. Under the sponsorship of FAWE, the FGTT developed the gender analysis tool known as the ABC of Gender Analysis, which is used by teachers, writers, scholars, artists, the media and others to assess the gender responsiveness of learning materials and programmes. The gender programme produced several publications including; *The Road to Empowerment*, *Delusions: Essays on Social*

Construction of Gender, *Gender Trainers' Directory*, *The Gender Trainers' Manual*, *the Strategies for Effective Lobbying* and a trainer's video "Who is Awaited", which is still in a class of its own as a training tool. Publications such as *Delusions: Essays on Social Construction of Gender* that are still relevant need to be re-printed.

Output: The modules, materials, videos and frameworks acquired or developed at this time continue to be used in gender programmes in the Africa region, by the FGTT. In FEMNET they are still in use for training in the Men to Men Programme.

The Girl Child Initiative

In 1990, the UNICEF Regional Office for Eastern and Southern Africa, in partnership with FEMNET, initiated an eight country study on the situation of the girl child. FEMNET produced the synthesis of the study, which attempted to distinguish trends and patterns in the education systems (and in the wider society of the eight countries), which militated against effective education of the girl child and women. This study was the beginning of a collaborative process between FEMNET, UNICEF/ESARO, Governments and the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE), which was initially hosted by FEMNET but quickly developed into the leading NGO focusing on female education in Africa.

The girl child initiative developed into a high impact programme at regional, sub-regional and country level consultations. It included such activities as documentation, production of advocacy and lobby materials, research and development of case studies. Countries in which the girl child activities were undertaken under the FEMNET/UNICEF partnership included Botswana, Burundi, Ethiopia, Madagascar, Somalia, Sudan, Kenya and Uganda. Other countries that participated in the initiative were Mali, Burkina Faso and the Central African Republic; the activities undertaken there were facilitated by

another FEMNET partner, the African Association of Women Research and Development (AAWORD). Other donor partners who came in to support the initiative included Oxfam, Christian Children's Fund in Canada and UNESCO.

Output: The girl child initiative became the most unique area of African success in the process and outcome of the Africa and Beijing initiatives (1993-1995). The inclusion of the Girl Child as a critical area of action was successfully advocated from country, sub-regional and Africa levels. It featured as one of the 12 critical areas in the African Platform for Action adopted in the Africa (Dakar) Preparatory Conference and eventually in the global (Beijing) Platform for Action (1995). The findings, strategies, recommendations, materials and tools developed under this programme became the source of ideas and concepts for the formulation of the Girl Child Action area in the African, and later Beijing Platform for Action.

FEMNET Needs Assessment Survey in 1991

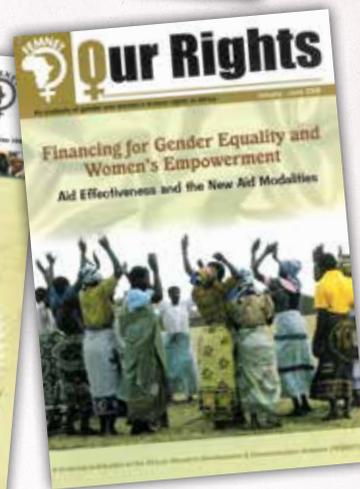
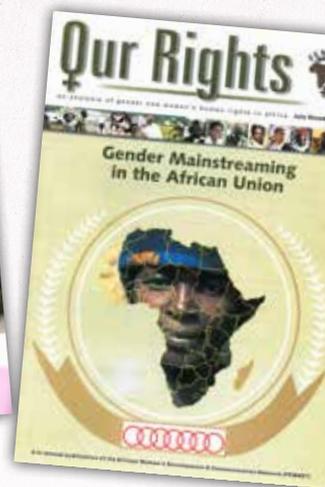
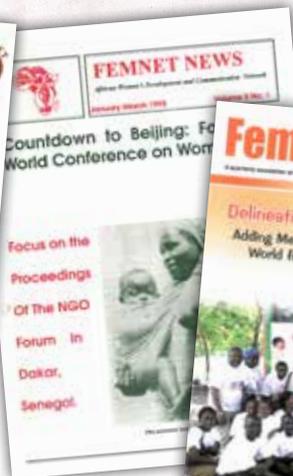
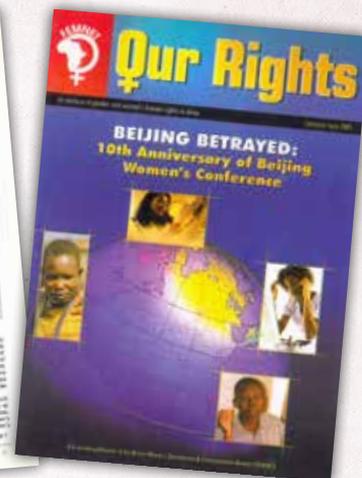
In 1991 FEMNET received funding from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) to do a close space needs assessment, on the basis of which it would develop its programme. The needs assessment survey was undertaken in 17 countries: Burundi, Cameroon, Cote d' Ivoire, Egypt, Gambia, Kenya, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The choice of these countries was based on the presence of Interim Board members, active membership and contacts.

The needs survey had the objectives of promoting FEMNET and the concept of networking between African women; recruiting national umbrella organisations to become FEMNET Focal Points; up-dating the information on women's development activities and the break-through in improving the situation of African women; identifying the priority needs that could be met through collaborative efforts; identifying resourceful persons and organizations; gathering data and getting materials; and making or renewing networking

connections with key individuals or organisations. The survey revealed that the economic, social, political and legal situation of African women generally had not changed much in the period since the adoption of the Forward Looking Strategies, adopted by the Third World Conference on Women in Nairobi in July 1985. In the critical areas of health and education, and concerning the economic, legal, political, social and cultural status, major constraints still existed. While there had been slight improvements in the provision of health care, women continued to perform very poorly in the labour market. The ambiguous legal status of women, discrimination, unequal treatment, dubious interpretation of customary law and non recognition of domestic labour - all remained key constraints in most countries.

A review of the NGO movement revealed that while the NGO movement was firmly grounded, it was dogged by many problems including weak grassroots reach, uncertainty in mobilizing resources, poor relationships with Government, unwillingness to work together with other NGOs, with-holding of information, inefficient operations and confusion in mandate as a result of pressure from Government and donor partners. There was an awakening to the need for the empowerment of women and the establishment of new NGOs that were focused on the higher goals of empowerment and professionalism. NGOs were increasingly being recognized as key partners with Government, in spite of mutual mistrust, competition for resources, bureaucratic resistance and poor co-ordination of efforts.

Output: The needs assessment identified the priority areas for FEMNET action and formed the basis for the discussions at the first FEMNET Programming Conference in October 1992.



The First FEMNET Programming Conference and General Assembly, October 1992

The First FEMNET Programming Conference held in Nairobi from 5-7 October, 1992 was attended by 96 participants from 15 countries, representatives of regional civil society organisations based in Nairobi and of 15 donor partners. It was a meeting with a difference: in the way it delved deep into the detailed agenda of gender equality and the involvement of African women in spearheading the transformation of African societies to embrace the principles of gender equality and respect for the human rights of women. It had a unique timing, coming seven years after the Nairobi NGO Forum and Conference on Women and just three years before the Beijing Conference. It was a wake-up call to African women that soon they would be expected to meet the rest of the world and account for the gains in the implementation of the *Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies*.

This Programming Conference identified 8 priority areas of needs that would be addressed by the Three Year Programme (1993-1995). These included women's empowerment, legal rights, evolution of a new concept of women's development, management skills, NGO co-ordination and collaboration, relationships with Governments and donors, research, documentation and dissemination and representation of women. Strategies for achieving the objectives were elaborated and sub-regional priorities were discussed. Conceptual and technical inputs were made through key thematic papers to give participants additional knowledge and tools for improved programming at regional and national levels. The conference tackled the themes of gender, empowerment, democratization, health, environment and food production, women's agenda for peace; information, communication, networking and research. Additionally legal rights of women and international conventions governing them were elaborated upon. Constraints, and strategies for addressing them, were enumerated and the factors influencing the situation were discussed.



Thematic priorities including safe motherhood, maternal, mental and other health concerns were discussed. The thematic area of the Girl Child was introduced and discussed in the context of education, health, nutrition and child labour. Recommendations were made to remove the disparities between the male and female child. Food production, the environment, peace and the effects of war on women and children, the vital role of information sharing, communication, networking and research were also discussed. Presentation of papers was followed by discussions where additional ideas were generated and recommendations made. These recommendations formed the basis for the development of the three year programme for FEMNET and its partners. Speakers, discussants and resource persons were selected from all the sub-regions and the encounters between participants were rich and fruitful.

Output: Programming Conference and General Assembly set a trend that has been maintained since then, where every three years or so the FEMNET membership meets to review progress made, review new trends and approaches and current needs and priorities for the next programming period. The reports of these Conferences are the most informative and detailed account of the needs, priorities, issues and strategies for action for gender equality, and the empowerment of women in Africa.

Output: The First FEMNET General Assembly was an opportunity to look back at the achievements of the Interim Board, appreciate them and hand-over to a fresh team that would take it to greater heights. The General Assembly reviewed and adopted the FEMNET Constitution. The first Board was elected to replace the Interim Board, with few changes as members wanted to give the Board an opportunity to impact the Network, after struggling so long with its registration.

Challenges: The FEMNET General Assembly (GA), recognizing the challenges posed by inadequate communication channels, language, distances and inadequate resources, accepted the constitutional provision - it created a management committee to oversee day to day operations of FEMNET. GA appointed a committee of 15 Nairobi-based members, selected as representatives of their organizations, which were all members of FEMNET. The Terms of Reference for the Committee were broad and included the management of the programme, staff and resources of the Network. Four years on, a bitter FEMNET Board was to scrap out this outfit, accusing it of usurping the powers of the Board.

The Process to Beijing Conference and NGO Forum

The FEMNET preparation to participate in the process to China was first discussed at the first Programming Conference in 1992. In that event the participants noted the need to closely monitor the implementation of the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies; review what has been achieved; identify new priorities and chart the way forward. The Conference urged that it was necessary for FEMNET to consider the partnerships to be established in order to implement various programmes. In the discussions looking back at the Nairobi FLS and looking ahead, the participants pointed out to the need for awareness creation, lobbying for Government support for the implementation and tackling poverty which was seen as the greatest hindrance to the implementation of the FLS. This was to be done by lobbying Government policies to be gender responsive, and the restructuring of economic systems to make them gender responsive. On the road to China, they recommended the formation of a FEMNET committee to chart the way. Further, they recommended the provision of guidelines for the compilation of country reports, spear-heading their compilation; and that FEMNET organizes an African NGO meeting to develop a strategy for their participation in China.

Looking back to this period, it is amazing to note how the FEMNET membership had such foresight and how this placed FEMNET in the leadership of the African NGOs in this process. These recommendations were followed to the letter and in the next two years FEMNET entrenched her leadership and received global recognition as the African NGO Focal Point for all the preparatory activities for the Fourth Africa Regional Preparatory Conference and NGO Forum (Dakar) and the Fourth World Conference on Women and the NGO Forum (Beijing).

The process was structured to start with national level activities and move to sub-regional, regional and global levels. At each of these levels activities included appraisals, studies, researches and meetings to share the findings, develop strategies, make recommendations and agree on the priorities to be shared at

the next level. It was critical for the all levels to get the information in good time to undertake the activities promptly. One of the undertakings of FEMNET was to ensure that its members received this information speedily.

Output: The African Regional Steering Committee (ARSC) for the Africa and Beijing Process. The Regional Steering Committee for the process towards the China Conference was named during the FEMNET Programming Conference in 1992. It had 24 members present at the Programming Conference and 11 proposed organisations that were not represented. It also included representatives of collaborating UN agencies including UNICEF, UNIFEM and the African Training Centers for Women at UNECA and UNDP. In March 1993, the NGO Forum Planning Committee meeting in Vienna, Austria, mandated FEMNET to be responsible for preparing and co-ordinating African NGO activities toward the African Women NGO Forum in Dakar, the Fifth Africa Regional and Preparatory Conference, the NGO Forum and Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing.

The framework for the preparatory process for the Beijing Conference was borrowed from *The Tribune* and shared with FEMNET readers via *Our Rights* newsletter. This was a publication that was started specifically to disseminate information on the process to Dakar and Beijing.

Sub-regional Preparatory Meetings

The significance of the Networking under FEMNET came to the fore in the preparatory process to Beijing. Sub-regional activities were scheduled before and after the regional conferences, to gather the information, share, synthesize, develop strategies and make recommendations to share at the regional conference level. The Southern African Sub-region was the most active of all the African Sub-regions. In the process to Beijing, it developed the Sub-regional NGO Platform for Action and shared it at the NGO Forum in Dakar (1994).

Gratitude is also expressed to International Women's Rights Action Watch (IWRAP) that worked with its feminist partners in the Southern African sub-region. This document was chosen by the NGO Forum in Dakar as the starting point and a committee worked on it to refine and expand it to reflect a regional outlook. This then became the African NGO Platform for Action, which was adopted at the NGO Forum. Due to logistical and other problems, the draft Inter-Governmental Platform for Action could not be produced. The African NGO Platform for Action was instead adopted as the zero draft by the African Regional Preparatory Conference, largely due to the cordial relations that had developed between the NGO and Governmental delegations. The diligence of the Southern African Sub-regional Network served the whole region well in this historic process under the leadership of Sara Longwe, who was the Vice-Chairperson for FEMNET-South and also an active member of IWRAP.

Output: The African Platform for Action (1994) which included the priority action on the Girl Child, had a very strong NGO influence and the NGOs became important partners with Governments and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, as the process moved to the global level.

The Fifth African Regional Conference & NGO Forum in Dakar, Senegal, 1994

The preparatory process included meetings at the national, sub-regional, regional and global levels. FEMNET kept its membership informed as information flowed from the global, regional to sub-regional and national levels. FEMNET became a member of the global NGO Forum Planning Committee and was represented by the then Chairperson, Njoki Wainaina, and Soukeyna Ba, representing the Senegal Hosting Committee. FEMNET also hired a full time Co-ordinator, Safiatu Singhateh, a seasoned organizer, to manage the planning and co-ordination of the African women's participation in the process. The Senegalese Committee was responsible for the logistics of the NGO Forum and was supposed to work closely with the Government Committee.

The FEMNET mandate was to organize and facilitate the participation of African women; and facilitate national, sub-regional and regional activities in preparation for the Dakar and Beijing NGO Forums.

FEMNET organized a meeting of the Africa Regional Steering Committee (ARSC) in January, 1994 in which members agreed on the process, activities and responsibilities at the national, sub-regional and regional levels. The ARSC also mandated the Dakar NGO Committee to undertake the planning and organizing the logistics of the NGO Forum and also the local resource development for the Forum. The Committee also mapped out channels of communication and collaboration between the secretariats in Nairobi and Dakar, including site visits and courtesy calls on the Government of the day. In addition, the ARSC undertook to publicize the Forum and encourage the participation of African women from all countries of Africa.

Within the nine month period of the co-ordination role, the secretariat had communicated with national and indigenous NGOs in 48 countries, disseminating information on the up-coming NGO Forum, the Regional Conference and the World Conference in Beijing. Information was communicated through letters, the monthly bi-lingual journal Our Rights, the FEMNET quarterly FEMNET News, faxes, telephone, other organization newsletters and dissemination through meetings. At the international level, other than the region, the secretariat had tried to link up international organisations with African national and indigenous NGOs so that the former could provide support to the latter from a bilateral level in order to facilitate their participation at the African NGO Forum and regional preparatory conference.

The African NGO Forum Report, paragraph 64, p 20, November 1994

The response to the Forum was very good, although the requirement for pre-registration was largely ignored especially by some groups in the countries in the Western sub-region. Many countries had also held national, sub-regional and thematic preparatory meetings and the interest in the Dakar NGO Forum was almost explosive as a bigger number of participants turned up than envisaged.



Outputs:

- The African Regional NGO Forum was attended by more than 3,500 women from 48 countries and more than 20 regional networks. Over 45 workshops and roundtables were conducted in addition to several pre-Forum workshops. There were 230 exhibition stands and a variety of artistic and cultural events. The Forum was represented by a diversity of women including, rural, urban, grassroots groups, young women and girls, women with disabilities, professionals from different sectors, politicians, cabinet ministers, first ladies, dignitaries and some men. It was the richest gathering of women in the history of NGOs in Africa. It was a spectacular display of intellect, colour, costumes, fabrics, music, art, posters, crafts, and education materials. It was three days of continuous artistic performances from a variety of African cultures.
- The opening and closing ceremonies were graced and virtually dominated by the Government and United Nations dignitaries, and were colourful and lively, beautified by song and dance.
- The Report of the African NGO Forum in English and French, which included the African NGO Plan of Action and suggestions for the African Platform for Action based on the 12 Critical Areas of Action, was developed and adopted by the ARSC for implementation.
- The NGO Forum proposed amendments to the African Platform for Action and had planned to use the document to lobby during the Conference. Due to unforeseen logistical circumstances this was not possible, this document then formed the 'Zero Draft' of the Africa Regional Preparatory Conference.
- The Girl Child Critical Area of Action had been included in the Africa Platform of Action and the next hurdle was to ensure it entered the Global Platform for Action - it was adopted!

Challenge: Dakar marked the most challenging moment for FEMNET. The facilitation process was dogged by many problems including political interference and domination by the Government leadership, poor co-ordination between the FEMNET Dakar and Nairobi offices, donor interference, inefficiencies and lack of transparency in the management of resources between the two secretariats. The greatest challenge was the overwhelming response from African women and the NGOs. Women just turned up in Dakar, most of them without prior registration. The ARSC had planned for 1,500 participants but the final count was close to 4,000. Facilities were planned for 15 workshops and instead 45 were held. All facilities were stretched, registration forms, bags, materials, hotel rooms, meeting rooms, printing, photo-copying, interpretation - every possible service was stretched beyond its limit or ran out. In the end, there was bitterness, frustration, finger pointing, dissatisfaction and criticism of FEMNET as the easiest target of attack.

Few participants ever learned the truth about the forces that were at play in Dakar but the crisis with the African Regional Preparatory Conference and the subsequent developments regarding the women's leadership in Senegal and at the UN African Center for Women in Addis Ababa absolved FEMNET of blame for the problems in Dakar. The most important factor was that FEMNET came out of the Dakar NGO Forum and Preparatory Conference stronger, more confident, with a unique experience, a wealth of materials and the renewed mandate to continue leading African women towards Beijing and beyond.

The Road from Dakar to Beijing

This was the period between the African Regional Conference and NGO Forum in Dakar (1994) and the Global NGO Forum in Huairou, China (1995). So many activities happened in this short time that by the end of this period FEMNET had become of age and entrenched herself as the undisputed co-ordinator of African women's participation in regional and global events. For instance, Sara Longwe represented FEMNET in the global NGO drafting team in New York to draft the Global NGO SPlatform for lobbying governments in the Beijing process.

The end of the Africa NGO Forum and Conference marked the beginning of a new process of preparing African women to participate in the Beijing meetings, including the Global NGO Forum and the Fourth World Conference on Women. FEMNET was representing and co-ordinating African women for participation in the NGO process, as well as the Governmental process. The NGO process involved working with the NGO Planning Committee, based in New York, which was responsible for overall co-ordination of the NGO Forum. The Governmental process involved liaison with the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) which was responsible for organizing African participation in the Fourth World Conference on Women and the UN Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW).

A Pre-Beijing Planning Meeting was held in Nairobi in January 1995 and was attended by representatives of several regional networks to strategize for the process to Beijing. The meeting decided to take advantage of all United Nations and Intergovernmental meetings to mobilize and involve African women in planning for participation in Beijing. The meetings included the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women scheduled in March 1995 in New York, the Regional African Women Leaders' Meeting in Addis Ababa in July 1995 and the Sub-regional meetings in South, East and West Africa. The strategies for intervention at these meetings included:

- Reviewing the Draft Global Platform for Action in relation to the Africa Platform for Action
- Lobbying for the inclusion of the critical issues of concern to African women to be included in the global Platform for Action
- Agreeing and planning activities that Africa should undertake at the NGO Forum in Beijing
- Enlisting support for setting up the on-site task forces in Beijing to manage African women's activities.

The preparatory activities for the Beijing meetings kept FEMNET on her toes as the Secretariat strived to hold the NGO preparations together while participating in regional, sub-regional and national activities. Decisions made at the NGO Forum Secretariat in New York were quickly dispatched to the regions for implementation.



At the United Nations level in New York, African women working with different agencies and many of them members of the NGO Gender Working Group continued their lobby at their level as the Global Platform for Action was being formulated. Through their advocacy and behind the scenes technical interventions, the critical area of the Girl Child entered the Global Platform for Action (PFA). For FEMNET, this was the culmination of a campaign that had started five years earlier.

Outputs:

- United African Position on the Global PFA. The process achieved a strong partnership between African NGOs, Governments and the UN and resulted in consensus on the African stand regarding the Draft Global Platform for Action, which at that point had been distributed for discussion and which had been discussed at various stages, resulting in the change of areas where there was no consensus. The meetings also resulted in the expression of financial and technical support by the UNECA and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to streamline the process to Beijing.
- The Programme for Africa Tent at Huairou: FEMNET had come of age! A programme for the Africa Tent was created through a consultative and participatory process, which included the creation of a technical working committee, secretariat support to all registered African participants to get new accommodation reservations, identifying resource persons to represent Africa in the plenary sessions, planning activities for the African cultural day, calling for more activities for the Africa Tent, developing and publishing a comprehensive programme for the Africa Tent.
- The process to Beijing generated materials including banners, posters, books, videos, photographs and fabrics from all corners of Africa. Sadly after the Forum, in an attempt to undermine the vast conscientization process achieved, the Chinese Government did not allow any of these materials to be carried back. Among the materials produced for the Forum was a booklet on the Girl Child, which contained essays, poems and citations by African girls from several African countries, which had been sponsored by UNICEF.

Challenge: Barely a month to the Global NGO Forum, the Chinese Government decided to change the venue of the NGO Forum venue from Beijing to Huairou, a city about 100 km outside Beijing. The site was ill equipped for a Forum of over 30,000 participants. The last minute change of venue threw NGO Forum organizers into a crisis, arising from the far reaching changes which included: the decision to organize events around regional tents, the inclusion of regional cultural days, the inclusion of a programme of plenaries with varying technical themes, the substitution of the original hotel accommodation reservation forms with new ones for the hotels around Huairou, etc.

The African Women's Participation in the Global NGO Forum in Huairou, China, 1995.

Over 4,000 African women participated in the Global NGO Forum in Huairou, China. The African Women's Tent was one of the most active and colorful places in Huairou.

The presence and participation of a critical mass of African women in the NGO Forum in Huairou was the first reward for the co-ordinating efforts of FEMNET. The African Tent was an organized hive of activities. The lessons learned in Dakar served well for Huairou and African women put their best foot forward and presented impressive performances. Right from day one of the Forum, African women met to put into action the plan for ensuring the smooth execution of the regional agenda. Committees were formed with membership based on sub-regions, linguistic representation, skills and expertise. The activities were managed through:

1. Daily briefings to share experiences, report back on events, progress and interesting happenings
2. The African Regional Steering Committee was responsible for pooling together the conclusions from various thematic workshops at the Africa Tent and global plenaries

3. The thematic Workshop Committee made up of thematic co-ordinators was responsible for putting together ideas and issues to be discussed at the thematic workshops
4. The Africa Tent Committee was responsible for overseeing the organization, decoration and maintenance of the Tent, which in the nine days received many distinguished visitors
5. The Plenary Committee ensured Africa's participation and representation at each plenary session as key presenters and discussants
6. The Information and media committee was responsible for collecting information and producing a daily *Up-date Newsletter* on Africa's participation and performances. The newsletter was e-mailed to African countries and also circulated at the Forum
7. The Cultural Events Committee was responsible for organizing the African Cultural Night at the Forum
8. The African women at the Forum also participated in the Market Place, in workshops, exhibitions, global thematic and Diversity Tent activities.



Outputs:

- In the Global NGO Forum African women were very visible. The Africa Tent was a bee hive of activities through-out the nine days of the Forum
- The African Grassroots Rural Women's Network was launched
- The Widowhood Network was also launched
- The Africa Region made substantial input into the global campaign against the World Bank policy; and the statement was read by an African woman
- A round table conference between NGOs and donors on strategies for cooperation and collaboration was held
- The African Region organized a tribunal against the workings of the World Bank and the IMF in which grassroots women prosecuted the case against the two institutions for not addressing issues through their national governments
- The African Region successfully lobbied the inclusion of the Girl Child as a critical area of action in the Global Platform for Action
- The African Government delegations were very progressive in the removal of the brackets and in supporting issues of global concern. This was partly due to the job well done by women NGOs during the regional and national preparatory meetings
- Commitment on NGO and Government cooperation in the implementation of the Global Platform for Action was renewed.

The content of the many activities African women participated in revolved around the critical issues discussed in the Dakar NGO Forum (1994), now brought to the global forum for sharing and for building consensus on the action required at different levels. The plenaries were divided into four clusters, namely: overview and analysis of the global trends; critical analysis of strategies and mechanisms for mainstreaming women's issues; sharing of the agenda for future collective action; and commitment to the future. This was the final plenary in which the UN agencies met with NGOs to discuss their visions and commitments to a human centred development agenda. Each plenary had discussants from each region and the ARSC had a chance to front its top thinkers and speakers.

The African women attending the Global NGO Forum in Huairou ended their discussions with an analysis of the constraints that have hindered the achievement of the development goals, which included: gender inequality, poverty, structural adjustment programmes, militarization, deforestation, dumping of toxic waste and pesticides that destroy the environment, high population growth, poor governance, indifference of donors to gender biased use of resources, language barriers and exclusion of young people from leadership. In spite of these constraints, African women endure, provide for and sustain their families and communities. Contrary to the image portrayed and would-be expected desperation, they continue to provide the vision and hope for Africa. Collectively they have the power, the human qualities and the experience to transform Africa, if given the chance.

Vision: African women are committed to; reclaim, reconstruct and transform Africa on the basis of gender equality, giving credence to the principles of democracy and human rights, mobilizing and utilizing human and other resources and; to take their rightful place in the global agenda, on the basis of equality with other nations, from now into the future, in partnership with our men, girls and boys. Articulated in the final African Plan for Action at the close of the Global NGO Forum, at Huairou, China, September 5, 1995.

Challenge: FEMNET once again left Huairou with a packed agenda to keep African women co-ordinated in the implementation of the African and Global Platform for Action. The process to Beijing had taken over three years and sapped the energies of NGOs, Governments, donor partners and other players. It marked the end of an era of strategizing, advocacy, lobby and consensus that was unprecedented. The challenge now was to translate strategy into action.

The Chairperson, Njoki Wainaina, in a note for the 1995 Annual Report wrote: . . . *The year 1995 has gone into the history of FEMNET as the year in which we faced our greatest challenge, the greatest threat and the best opportunity to prove who we are and what we stand for. We can look back with immense satisfaction as we reflect on the outcomes.*

The year started on the low note of dissatisfaction, criticism and near crisis arising from the logistical problems with the Dakar African NGO Forum on Women and the United Nations Regional Preparatory Conference for which we unfairly took a lot of the blame. Perhaps this is a good point in time to note that FEMNET was not responsible for most of the things we she got blamed for, but be that as it was.

On the positive side, the meetings, events and consultations in Dakar motivated, activated, educated, energized and challenged African women to aspire for higher levels of performance in Beijing, so much so that we entered 1995 with renewed



vigor and a highly positive spirit. Consequently, in 1995, NGOs were focused back home, to report back, mobilize support and prepare for Beijing. The network was fully alive with action.

The post Dakar events at national, sub regional and regional levels were a reflection of determination, team spirit, common purpose and commitment. The remarkable performance of African women NGOs at the NGO forum '95 and the UN Fourth World Conference on Women was a culmination of these commitments. It was the greatest reward we could have received for all the struggles we have endured since the inception of FEMNET. The vision African women had in Arusha and Nairobi was beginning to crystallize into concrete action.

The review, analysis, discussions, reflections and sharing that happened in the process towards the NGO forum '95 and the Fourth World Conference on Women boiled down to the basic message that we must act now! Our continent, its women, girls and the rest of the population are in serious crisis and there is no time to waste. The only way to avert total disaster is by concrete action by each individual, family, community, organization, government, and collectively as the peoples of Africa and the world. The hope for the future lies in our ability to involve women and girls in concrete initiatives to transform their own lives.

We at FEMNET have re-dedicated ourselves to make our contribution in the areas where we can make a difference. We have demonstrated the power of networking; and we all continue to improve, encourage and promote the concept and practice of networking and communication for the advancement of women.

The achievement of gender equality remains the vision that will guide our struggle and contributions. Our efforts in building skills and capacities for gender mainstreaming; advocacy for the girl child; the monitoring of the implementation of the African and Global Platforms For Action, of CEDAW and other relevant conventions; advocacy for the inclusion of women at all levels of decision-making; and, building a strong data base on women of African remain our top priorities.

We commend our network members for their efforts in making 1995 a memorable year, and invite them to celebrate with us the achievements, even as we face the challenges for the future together. Let each one of us strive even harder to ensure that each day we contribute, in big and small ways, to the empowerment of women and girls, and to the march towards gender equality, development and peace. This is our mission.

The End of an Era

Beijing was the end of an era that started with the First Conference on Women in Mexico City in 1975. In the ten years of the Women's Decade (1976-1985) and the Road to Beijing (1986-1995) the world had changed in many ways. The technological advancement had been phenomenal: from telexes to e-mails for fast communication, from the post office to the satellite, from the darkroom to the instant processor of photos and all the other technological changes. The world had truly become a global village and the technological superhighway brought developments that were completely unimaginable looking back when the African women sat in a corridor in Arusha in 1984.

On the flip side, African countries had been hard hit by globalization, structural adjustment programmes of the World Bank and the IMF, political repression in many countries, the brain-drain as African professionals sought greener pastures in the North and elsewhere, political conflicts and wars. Among the negatives was also the backlash after Beijing. The patriarchal and fundamentalist forces had started fighting to claw back the gains achieved in Beijing. The one factor that remained constant was that the unequal and disadvantaged status of women relative to men, meant they were the most affected. This challenge kept FEMNET and the women's movement energized and determined to fight on.

The Chairperson, Sara Longwe, in her Foreword for the Second Programming Conference and General Assembly Report (1996) captured FEMNET's work beyond Beijing as follows:-

The women's movement in Africa faces a considerable task in the next decade. The international commitments in [the] 1995 Beijing Declarations and Platform for Action are nowhere more important than in Africa, where gender gaps are large, pervasive and persistent. Very similar great promises were made in the previous 1985 Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies but during the intervening decade, African women have seen little advancement. The proportion of women in parliament has not increased. Gender discrimination is rampant. In some countries, and in some areas of endeavour, gender gaps have increased and the material position of women has worsened.

We must learn the lessons from past disappointments, and redouble our efforts. We have learnt that some governments' international commitments are meant more for an international audience, rather than for home consumption. Our task is therefore to push governments to meet these commitments, to monitor progress, to take independent action, and to seek the assistance of the development community in this work.

We must take advantage of changed circumstances. There is a wind of democratization sweeping Africa, with governments being pushed to increased accountability and participation in decision making. And there is the growth of civil society. In particular, the women's movement, in the shape of gender oriented NGOs, has seen a spectacular growth

in recent years. This provides the climate and the momentum for improved programs for women's advancement.

FEMNET can play a key role in mobilizing and co-ordinating the African regional NGO movement in this historic task. FEMNET is the organization to give the African sisterhood their international voice and purpose, in mobilizing and collaborating on the real issues of gender oppression which remain the major burden for African women. FEMNET can provide the vehicle for regional action on such major issues as genital mutilation, bride price, polygamy and patriarchal inheritance.

This report of the programming Conference shows FEMNET's development of this line of thinking. FEMNET attempts to pull together the main elements in a strategy of action, by networking and capacity building, and contributing to democratization, to push for increased gender equality, and to monitor national and regional efforts.

In this effort, the women of Africa need the support of international development agencies, the support of gender oriented NGOs and most of all the support of the women's movement worldwide. The women of Africa are on the move! Please join us!

Second FEMNET Programming Conference, 1996

The Second FEMNET Programming Conference was organized a year after the Beijing meetings. The weight of the responsibility placed on FEMNET by the African women NGOs meeting in both Dakar (1994) and Huairou in (1995), coupled with the fact that its programme was in its eighth year, necessitated an evaluation. The evaluation was to critically assess the management functions to review its achievements and failures and recommend the measures to be taken to improve future management performance. The evaluation was to inform the deliberations at the Second Programming Conference and General Assembly. The evaluation focused on the FEMNET Focal Points and members of the Board, using questionnaires and face to face interviews.

The evaluation was not completed in time for the Programming Conference but the preliminary findings were presented. The study rated FEMNET programme, management, structure, relationship with Focal Points very highly. The one area of weakness was the connection with grassroots, which according to the study was occasioned by the poor out-reach of Focal Points to women's groups. Participants of the Programming Conference discussed the findings and confirmed the recommendations, which basically were suggesting that FEMNET maintains the programme priorities, structure, but improve connections with sub-regional and national Focal Points. The study made the following recommendations:

1. Develop a new Mission Statement to guide FEMNET's programme in the next decade
2. Establish sub-offices in each sub-region (Western, Central, Eastern, Southern and Northern Africa)
3. Publications: expand *FEMNET NEWS*, start a FEMNET Journal and publish relevant books. Establish printing facilities at the secretariat to make FEMNET self-supporting in printing
4. Computerize the Documentation Centre. Publicize its existence and materials available

5. Continue to develop Regional Gender Training Programmes relative to African socio-cultural contexts
6. Secretariat staffing: Head of Finance and Administration needed immediately. Documentalist needed as soon as possible
7. Funding: FEMNET should seek long term grants (5 years) with a view to becoming more self-supporting and seeking subventions from governments. FEMNET Secretariat should assist sub-regional offices in acquiring funding. In such cases 20% should go to FEMNET Secretariat for administrative costs.

The FEMNET Second Programming Conference was held at the time when African women NGOs, Governments and the UN systems were still digesting the outcomes of the Beijing conference, particularly the Platform for Action. The connections and networks created during the process to Beijing were still fresh and consequently the Programming Conference enjoyed the patronage of the UN Undersecretary General and Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, Mr K Y Amaoko and the Secretary General of the United Nations Fourth Conference on Women, Beijing 1995, Mama Gertrude Mongella.

The Conference was attended by 60 participants from FEMNET Focal Points, regional networks, OAU, ECA, donor partners and individual members, from over 15 countries. They worked in three groups to propose FEMNET priorities for the next three years, to appraise FEMNET structure and leadership and review the implementation of the Global and African Platform for Action. The structure of the discussions was: an appraisal of the current situation, the needs as felt by the network and recommendations for FEMNET action in the next three years. On programme priorities they recommended:

1. Communication and Networking
2. Monitoring and advocacy for the implementation of the African and Global Platform for Action
3. Advancement of gender equity and equality
4. Institutional capacity building and resource development.

On the *structure and leadership*, the working group reviewed FEMNET'S organizational structure including the roles and functions of the General Assembly, the Board, Sub-regional offices, Focal Points and the secretariat, fund-raising, membership fees and the constitution. This working group seemed to have more questions than answers and ended up recommending that the same structures be maintained and that many of the issues such as communication channels, fund-raising, relationship between FEMNET and the Focal Points need further exploration and the cultivation of relationships based on the realities of each situation.

The working group on the *Implementation of the Global and African Platform for Action* reviewed the reports presented by participants from different countries and concluded that in many countries, the structures created for the Beijing process were still in place, even though relationships between NGOs and Governments varied between countries. They developed a tool for information gathering for use by the FEMNET membership and suggested the institutional frameworks for sharing the information. They recommended that members gather the information and that FEMNET take a lead in the synthesis and sharing of the information.

Partnership with Donor Partners:

One of the features of FEMNET networking was dialogue with the donor partners through round tables and other events. The presence of representatives of the donor partners at the Programming Conference was an indication of the specialized relationship FEMNET had created with these partners.

The Programming Conference spent one extra day to discuss networking among NGOs in the follow-up to Beijing. The objectives of the meeting were to exchange information on post-Beijing follow-up initiatives under the European Commission *Bringing Beijing Back Initiative*. The meeting received information on projects supported under this programme in Africa, introduced

the work of Women in Development Europe Network (WIDE) and introduced the EU development cooperation regarding the follow-up to Beijing. The meeting received reports from NGO partners who had benefited from this programme, among them several FEMNET Focal Points. The meeting learned of the areas of focus for EU development support and the objective of the Beijing follow-up, which was to encourage women's NGOs to be in contact with European delegations in their countries. The meeting further advised NGOs on how to engage with their governments to ensure that the European Union development and trade policy positively impacts on women. The event was sponsored and facilitated by WIDE on behalf of the European Union (EU).

Outputs:

- The Second Programming Conference reaffirmed the role of FEMNET as a collective effort of the regional secretariat, sub-regional offices, focal points and individual members. They affirmed that together they have tremendous capacities and even greater potential. They affirmed that they are FEMNET, they own FEMNET and will make FEMNET work.
- The Programming Conference was followed by the General Assembly, the business meeting where a new Board was elected and Sara Longwe took over as the new Chairperson to steer FEMNET in the new era.

Challenge: The vibrancy generated just before and during the FEMNET Programming Conference and the General Assembly gradually fizzles out as participants get back home to their country and organizational set-ups. There is usually a sense of dependency on FEMNET to keep the action going and with an exception of a few Focal Points and one sub-region; the follow-up action and implementation of recommendations are primarily considered the responsibility of FEMNET.

Keeping Beijing Promises

The period 1996-2000 was focused on the implementation of the African and Global Platforms for Action. It was a time of collaborating with partners among the NGOs, the UN, OAU, monitoring the implementation of the Platform, taking the message of Dakar and Beijing back to the grassroots and forging new partnerships. FEMNET had come of age and was the undisputed co-ordinator of the African NGOs follow-up. The co-ordination of activities centred around the FEMNET programme, the activities around the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) and the Sub-regional offices.

Following the Second Programming Conference and the FEMNET evaluation in 1996, a decision was made to change the FEMNET programming framework from three to five years. The rationale was that the Programming Conference would be held in the third year of the Programme cycle, allowing the membership to evaluate the programme mid-term and make suggestions for the next cycle, in time for it to be meaningful in the design of the future programme. Additionally, there would be time for them to contribute ideas for the current programme, and take home any plans for proposed activities.

In the transition period 1996-1997 there was funding for only the communication and networking programme. The recognition of FEMNET as the focal point of African Women's NGOs kept the Secretariat and some of the Board members busy with co-ordinating and follow-up activities, on other agency resources. The FEMNET chairperson and Secretariat staff participated in the planning of the *African Women and Economic Development: Investing in Our Future* to mark celebrations of the UNECA 40th year which focused on the implementation of the Dakar and Global Platforms for Action. In collaboration with WIDE, FEMNET also organized a workshop to assess the progress in the implementation of Dakar and Beijing PFAs.

Outputs:

- The Secretariat developed the five year programme 1997-2001 along the priorities proposed by the evaluation and the Programming Conference. One of the unique features of this period was the commitment of the staff. Having overcome the turbulence of the Dakar to Beijing co-ordinating process, they stood together as a solid block and weathered the storms of uncertainty
- FEMNET remained very visible and its role, contributions and in-puts were recognized by key players in the UN, AU, NGO networks and other institutions
- The FEMNET chairperson in her personal and FEMNET capacities was appointed to the Governing Council of the African Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Studies (ACDHRS), a regional NGO based in the Gambia
- FEMNET continued to receive donor support from:-
 - the Carnegie Corporation (for the Communication Programme)
 - German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ) for the Global Dialogue process
 - Inter-church Organization for Development Cooperation (ICCO) for organizational development
 - United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) for the gender programme
 - Board of the Global Ministries
 - Consultancy services (as a strategy for short-term fund raising while awaiting the outcomes of long-term fund-raising) were offered to Austcare, Emory University through Ford Foundation.



The support of these partners was very crucial as it helped FEMNET navigate through this time of great expectations from the network, the African women's NGOs and the supporters of the follow-up to Beijing.

Memorable Funding Partners and their Staff (1995- 2001)

<i>Funding Partner/ Financial Year</i>	<i>1995</i>	<i>1996</i>	<i>1997</i>	<i>1998</i>	<i>1999</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>2001</i>	<i>Contact Person</i>
Ford Foundation								
Carnegie Corporation								O. Akin Adubifa, Programme Officer
UNDP Malawi								
Partnership Africa Canada (PAC Canada)								Engudai Bekelle, Coordinator- PAC Africa
Global Ministries								Elizabeth Calvin, Executive Secretary, Women & Children and Jorge Dominges, Executive Secretary, Youth & Young Adults
UNICEF								Misrak Elias, Senior Advisor, Gender & Development
ICCO Netherlands								Corrie Roeper, Coordinator Overseas relations, Horn of Africa & Middle East Unit
The African Training for Leadership and Advanced Skills								
UNFPA Malawi								Lalan Mubiala, UNFPA Malawi Representative
UNFPA Swaziland								Tomoko Nishimoto, Resident Representative
WIDE								Benedicte Allaert-Information Officer/ EC Fund Administrator
Ministry of Foreign Affairs- Netherlands								T C Fogelberg, Director Special Programme, Women & Development
UNESCO								
INTERNAT								
KIT Netherlands								Marguerite Appel, Women & Development Training Programme
EARTH COUNCIL								
UNDP								Dr Achola Pala Okeyo, Senior Adviser, Ms Viola Morgan, Gender, Regional Office for Africa
UNHCR								Joyce Mends-Cole, Senior Co-ordinator for Refugee Women, & Gender Equality
Shaler Adams Foundation								Margaret Schink, Executive Director
Emory University								Abdullahi A An-Naim, Director Project on Cultural Transformation
European Union								Angela Heerens

<i>Funding Partner/ Financial Year</i>	<i>1995</i>	<i>1996</i>	<i>1997</i>	<i>1998</i>	<i>1999</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>2001</i>	<i>Contact Person</i>
GTZ								Reine Förster, Coordinator, Global Dialogue
UNIFEM								Nyaradzai Gumbonzvanda, Regional Director for East and Horn of Africa
Global Fund for Women								Kavita Ramdas, President
HBF								Aseghedech Ghirmazion, Director (Regional Representative)
Mwengo								Ezra Mbogori, Executive Director

Challenge: The period after the Beijing process had witnessed major donor fatigue and it was in that environment that the FEMNET Secretariat was raising funds for the five year programme. It was also at this time that the Executive Director, Safiatou Singhateh, also decided to move on to take a position with the World Health Organization (WHO) in Harare, Zimbabwe. This caused the Board to bring Juliette Dworzak, the Chairperson of the Trustee Board to act as a Caretaker. Juliette is a seasoned administrator and she oversaw the hiring of a new Executive Director, Lynn Muthoni Wanyeki, a Canadian/Kenyan. Wanyeki came to FEMNET at its lowest point in terms of resources, but she brought in vital energies and creativity in fund-raising.



FEMNET aspires to see an African Women's collective leadership for equality, peace and sustainable development. For this organization to reach this point since its inception we must revisit its roots so as to see the foundation laid for it to mushroom in the way it has so far. The following are the exclusive interviews conducted by Fatma Alloo (former FEMNET Board Member, 2003-2010) and Carlyn Hambuba (former Head of Communication at FEMNET, 2008-2012) with some of the founding members namely: Dr Eddah Gachukia, Njoki Wainaina, Sara Longwe, Prof. Norah Olemba, Dr Pamela Kola and the immediate-past chairperson Mama Koite Doumbia.

**Dr Eddah Gachukia,
FEMNET Founding Member and Chairperson (1984 - 1992)**



As one of the founder members, Dr. Eddah Gachukia recalls: 'It all started in Arusha in 1984. The venue was chosen to host the African Women's Decade Regional meeting. At that time we were all scattered. The African women were being sent to Arusha by whichever development agency that was interested. In Kenya we were very lucky to have UNICEF who sponsored a few of the women to go to Arusha.

In 1984 the Economic Commission for Africa, in conjunction with the UN agencies held a Regional Preparatory Conference in Arusha and the government and women's organizations met there to prepare the African position for the Third World Conference on Women which was to take place in Nairobi in 1985.

I was part of the Kenyan official government delegation, but I had also been elected the Chairperson of the Kenya NGO Forum Organizing Committee.

My involvement with the women's Decade started in the First Women's Conference in Mexico City in 1975. We decided to have our own women's network with a clear agenda of peace and development in spite of raging debates within the global women's movement trying to push us to adopt the agenda of equality then.

Why were we underlining development? We argued that if one wants to develop society they should develop the women and that was our slogan. If you want children in school educate the woman; households are changed by the mothers. That was part of my approach and from there the issue of women's health. I was part of the family planning movement from very early on. The African American Institute invited me to a very critical Forum in the USA before Nairobi '85 where I addressed the congress and for one hour and explained the situation of women in Kenya and our priorities for development. This was a sensitization mission for North Americans and particularly for the NGOs and the African-American Women's Lobby.

Then came Nairobi :

According to Dr Gachukia: It was fantastic! Until then I had been nominated by the President to be in parliament for 10 years (1974-1984), which had focused me on women and children. Before then I had been a University lecturer. My agenda was to make the voice of women heard in Kenya's Parliament.

I had also been the Vice President and National Secretary of Maendeleo Ya Wanawake in addition to being a member and the Chairperson of the National Council of Women of Kenya (1976 to 1979). It was due to some of these capacities that I was the head of the Kenyan delegation to the First Women's Conference in Mexico in 1975. The Women's Bureau in Kenya had organized women in the provinces and facilitated the prioritization of women's development needs.

As a Member of Parliament (1974), going to Mexico, representing the Government position and attending NGO meetings enlightened me very much indeed. The women from India particularly have played an important role in expanding my consciousness. I became a civil society activist consciously then, although in my life journey I had always reacted to injustices.

At that time (1975) however, we were too naïve and raw to come back and pursue issues. In those days you had to try and talk very carefully on issues affecting women because you didn't want to jeopardize the situation of women. You wanted to put the agenda of women and children in a manner that did not threaten your male politicians. It is no longer the case now.

By 1985 a lot of things had changed. In the Kenya NGO Organizing Committee for the Nairobi Forum we created a small but very forceful organization. The highlight of the Nairobi Forum was a day for visiting women in rural areas. Through site visits the international women's movement saw how many miles women travelled to fetch water in North Eastern Province, Rift Valley and Kitui. They came back and said YES, development was the pertinent theme. They were humbled. They, like the grassroots focused women's group identified water as the main issue among rural women.

The story of one Socket: an anecdote

Let me tell you where it all started, my life is very long. I was teaching at Secondary School level in 1960 during the colonial period. I had come from Makerere University very enlightened on the issues of colour bar-racial discrimination. I remember working with my husband in the Thika Secondary School, a Missionary sponsored School. Even in the Christian school there was demarcation of where Europeans lived and where Africans lived. We wondered if this was a government or school decision.

This particular year the school was allocated money by the Government to put up two houses, one for an African and one for a European. The designs were totally different. We challenged this at a staff meeting. Then teachers of a visiting school came home for tea as our visitors, together with our headmaster and other white teachers who were involved in sports, because my husband was a sports teacher.

In our house we had one socket in the sitting room where they were sitting. I decided to take an electric kettle into the sitting room and asked somebody to move over so that I could plug in the kettle.

Afterwards the headmaster asked me, "Why did you boil water in the sitting room?" I told him it was the only socket we had in the house. The African house had only one socket.

The European houses had everything you can think of because in your kitchen, obviously you have a fridge, cooker, place for ironing and all the plugs, everywhere at the corridor and sitting room. They even had a hot water system for baths and showers. It was thought that Africans should be content to boil water with a sufuria (pot) then pour it into a bucket for use. This was how racial discrimination was entrenched in our institution.

That calculated defiant act on my part won our family the kind of house we preferred. But I did take on many other issues of racism then for I had learnt that struggle does pay off.

The awakening created in Mexico continued and in the Second World Conference on Women in Copenhagen (1980). I was part of the official government delegation again but however sneaked out to the NGO Forum '85 and experienced real issues within the women's movement and how other countries were tackling them. That is where we realized what the Women's Decade was all about. I remember my daughter who was in high school asking me, Mommy what is female circumcision? It was a hot issue with northern feminists.

They accused us of being complacent. However, African women came out strongly to say to their northern sisters that, when our children are malnourished, when many mothers die in childbirth, yet you choose to go under our skirts to identify our problems. We argued that banning female circumcision would force it underground and government would not be able to effectively stop it. We did not want little babies and girls circumcised. What we wanted was sensitization and educational campaigns in communities where this was happening. The northern feminists disagreed with us. However, they preferred militarization, an issue that continued to be divisive within the movement for many years.

In Beijing we had consensus on the 12 Critical Areas of Action and we had our impact, especially having put the girl child issue on the global agenda. Gertrude Mongella of Tanzania was the Secretary General of the U.N. Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 in Beijing, China, while Njoki Wainaina led the NGO conference.

By then many women's organizations had mushroomed on the continent and our strength in advocacy very effective. FEMNET had played a catalyst role and had moved on to establish a very strong forum of Ministers of Education in Africa FAWE (Forum for African Women's Educationalists) here in Nairobi, an

organization of policy makers in education. Other women led initiatives included the Green Belt Movement launched by Wangari Maathai and the Kenya NGO Water for Health programme both dating back to 1977.

Retrospect on the Women's Decade (1976-85) and The Veranda

The Women's Decade played a very critical role, not for Government but for the women. Women's awareness came to the fore and they had the official space to organize, network and mobilize each other. We also had some women from the UN - like Virginia Hazzard from UNICEF then, that were extremely good, very supportive and action result-oriented which in return pushed us also. When we formed the Kenya NGO Organizing Committee, we did not have an agenda. However, we soon began to understand our role and organized ourselves for the meeting in Arusha. When we came back from Arusha, we had an additional mandate to help African women to organize themselves to come to Nairobi. It was myself, Njoki Wainaina and Norah Olembo, just the three of us. After the Nairobi Forum, we had to create FEMNET and I remember sitting over nights to write proposals and constitution to register FEMNET in order to have an office space, but in the mean time we used to meet here. This very veranda - is where FEMNET was born.

THE VERANDA WHERE FEMNET WAS NURTURED INTO A REALITY!

I have been here since 1974 and opened a kindergarten. Now we cater for 380 children. Njoki was incredible ask her about this veranda. The three of us worked very hard and Njoki gave in so much time and creative imagination. Mobilizing was one of the things I did. Intellectual thinking and proposal writing belonged to Njoki Wainaina and Elizabeth Lwanga Okwenje. Njoki would accompany us to the donors and some would listen to her because I was not a diplomat myself. Then we targeted the women in the development agencies and many of them were very supportive. Our driving force was how to get maximum voices from

the Africa Continent at Nairobi ('85) and beyond for at that time the African woman's voice was not heard in the international arenas.

We even opened our homes so that African women who could not afford the money to stay in hotels could stay with us. We were not short of offers so it was a very touching experience. Our agenda was common because after going back home from Arusha ('84) the women had brought up their priorities and therefore, for every workshop that took place in Nairobi, African women participated effectively and even provided leadership. We were able to allocate ourselves to the various activities of the NGO Forum. We were no longer disorganized. What is more, it was from the heart on a voluntary basis that we built this movement on the Continent and beyond.

I became the first Chairperson of FEMNET (1984-1992). We had an Interim Board which had members from different countries in Africa, among them were Aida Gindy from Egypt, Coumba Marenah of the Gambia, Marie Therese Kpowka from Central African Republic and also Trustees such as Mary Tandon from Zimbabwe, Dr. Pamela Kola from Kenya, Miriam Matembe from Uganda, Nirvana Khadir of Egypt, Ruth Oeri representing the Kenya Government (Ruth was the Head of Women's Bureau and now she lives in the USA) and Paulette Dissaud (Ivory Coast).

Dr. Gachukia set up FAWE in 1992 and is now retired. She oversees the family owned Riara Group of Schools which started with 1 kindergarten, but now has 2 kindergatens, 2 primary schools and 1 high school for girls. In October 2012, the Riara University began operating, offering courses in law, education, business and foundation studies.

Njoki Wainaina,
FEMNET Founding Member and Chairperson (1992 - 1996)



As Coordinator of FEMNET from 1984 to 1992, Njoki Wainaina, together with Eddah Gachukia, played a crucial role in establishing FEMNET in Nairobi. She states: 'I grew up with my brothers in a household which believed in equality so until I got married, my attitude was that men and women were equal. I trace that awareness to my own childhood. I grew up in a family of ten, seven girls and three boys. My parents were campaigners for the rights of women. My father believed in women's rights and my mother too. Actually my parents were classmates and Dad always told us how Mum was the one who performed better

in school. We learnt to do the chores that were not meant for girls so we became the laughing stock of the community where we grew up in Kiambu District, Kenya. As we grew up, we learnt that there were no chores just for boys or girls. We herded cattle and goats, built fences, dug and did all the things that boys do.

For me, equality is in my heritage. In school, girls were not expected to compete with boys but I did, because that is the way I grew up. As a young adult, I became more aware about racial discrimination than I knew about gender discrimination because in school, the *wazungu* (white) teachers were treated differently from the black teachers. Even in buses and trains, there were separate places for Africans, Asians and Whites. As a little girl growing up in the family, we were valued equally. Interestingly my brothers grew up in the same environment as me but they are as patriarchal as any other men, because of the privileges patriarchy gives them. Their women allow it because the women grew up in families where men ruled. Marriage as an institution in our culture can at times destroy a person's resolve.

I learnt about gender discrimination in marriage because I got married into a totally different kind of family. That's where I found out that boys had privileges and girls were supposed to serve them. My greatest shock came before I joined the women's movement, when I joined the Africa Adult Education Association. We were invited to a conference in Addis Ababa in 1975 and I needed a passport.

When I went to the passport office, they told me that, to get my passport I needed my husband's written permission. I went home that evening very angry, drafted a letter for his signature and I just said to him, 'sign!'. I thank God it was a one-time requirement! That was my first encounter with gender discrimination. The other time is when I started working for the

Government. I was informed that as a married woman, I could not be employed on permanent terms. It was at the Ministry of Lands and Settlement, which had been newly created.

When I started working with the Department of Settlement, it was a period when land was being transferred from the white settlers to the blacks who had lived as squatters and workers for the white people on that land. I observed that in changing from land squatters to owners, there was something that the new land owners had to unlearn. There was need for conscientization - the need to decolonize the mind so that they would see themselves as freed people. I realized that the education of adults required a deeper understanding of why and how adults learn. I worked there for three years 1969-72, after which I felt the need to go back to university to learn more about how adults learn.

I finished at the university at the beginning of the Women's Decade in 1974, when the Government was mobilizing women groups to use them as channels for development. I was inspired and encouraged by strong women like Martha Kasing'a from Machakos and Anna Kariuki from Nyeri. I was then working with the Food and Agriculture Programmes for Better Family Living (PBFL) promoting functional literacy. The women's movements in Kenya made so much impact at this time because of the attention the Government was paying to working with groups as an approach to rural development. The colonial masters were leaving and the women's groups, like other progressive groups, started contributing money to jointly buy land. In central Kenya there was land consolidation, which also displaced the landless, among them the Mau Mau fighters who came back from the forest, only to find that their land had already been taken. The land problem became one of the thorniest of problems. This is also the time when women

“My work at that time was focused on the integrated development as an approach for improving the lives of rural people. There was growing consciousness about the factors that caused poverty because there were resources like land but people were still going hungry.”

discovered that they could own land, because traditionally, women didn't inherit land. Society was in a flux.

My work at that time was focused on the integrated development as an approach for improving the lives of rural people. There was growing consciousness about the factors that caused poverty because there were resources like land but people were still going hungry. The main concern at that time was how to ensure a better life. Women's groups were concerned about improving their livelihoods because there were so many expectations from both the family and society. We started becoming aware of the injustices in the division of labour. Cash crops for instance belonged to men while food crops were for women. Men took the best land and planted cash crops. Women worked in the cash crops but the men received the payments. Government would give resources like fertilizers and extension services for cash crops but nobody was giving inputs to increase food production. The injustice of the production system at that time became so manifest that women were left with minimal resources and heavy responsibilities. The women's group movement was the topic of the dissertation for my MA degree from the University of Hull in England in 1977.

I had been influenced a lot by the development theory of Paulo Freire and his revolutionary thinking, including his famous book, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, about functional literacy. I embraced his methodology in training for transformation and this still applies to date. I like training people to analyze their problems and think critically why they are happening; then encouraging them to take action, reflect on the action and plan further action. We also had the chance to work with two pioneers of this approach in Kenya, Sally Hope and Anne Timmel, who were working in the functional literacy programme under the Catholic Churches. They worked with

communities with this transformational approach, which was grounded on the principle that every person has the power to transform themselves. Nobody can transform another, but they can help them along the way. I saw the women transform themselves by forming groups and contributing money to carry out their projects, like buying land. Today when you look at the areas where women bought land at that time, you will find a lot of development.

At that time women grouped to buy land. The laws then demanded that a women's group had no legal entity to own land. To overcome this hurdle women then resolved to register land using the names of their sons/husbands. Today these are prime locality lands proudly owned by those sons and husbands. This is a bitter struggle indeed!

So when in 1984 we started preparing for the End of the Decade activities, Kenyan women had experiences to share with the women of the world. When we went to Arusha, we realized that the 1976-85 UN Decade for Women was ending and most women on the African continent had not even heard about it. By that time in October 1984, Western women were already preparing to come. They were going to come to Nairobi, talk about their issues, dominate and control the meetings, while African women would be passive observers. So in Arusha we decided to have an African women's conference before the Nairobi Forum to prepare African women for participation. We constituted ourselves into the *African Women's Task Force* to ensure that African women came to Nairobi in great numbers and were ready to put our agenda forward in the NGO Forum.

I had witnessed the feeling of togetherness of women and the power it could generate. So in 1984 in Arusha when Eddah Gachukia was elected the

“
The African Women's Encounter was an exciting and colourful event. We shared with other African women everything that we had done, the concept and the strategies we were going to use.
”

Chairperson and I the Co-ordinator of the African Women's Task Force, we had both the commitment and the passion to drive us. I was then working with the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), which was very supportive of our efforts. We used its network of Family Planning Associations, mobilized women everywhere in Africa using telephones, meetings, telexes and letters to send the information out to African women. We talked to three women from UNICEF: Mary Racelis, the UNICEF regional director (East and Central) and Aida Giddy who was her predecessor. The third person was Virginia Hazzard. She was working with the Forum Secretariat in New York and later worked at the Kenya Country Office of UNICEF. They made it possible for us to raise money and hold the African Women's Encounter at the UN Complex in Gigiri, Nairobi, just before the Nairobi Forum.

The African Women's Encounter was an exciting and colourful event. We shared with other African women everything that we had done, the concept and the strategies we were going to use. They approved of our ideas and expanded the Task Force to accommodate women from other countries. We met several times during the time of the NGO Forum, but we realized that at every meeting we would have people from different countries but these meetings were very fluid, so you worked with whoever was there.

We managed to think through the structure of the organization we wanted, which was a women's organization that was non-governmental. We also knew the difficulties of communicating within Africa. We needed the support of other regional NGOs that had already established themselves like the IPPF, which had its offices in many African countries. I was working with IPPF then and we requested them to allow us to use their network. We were also charged with the responsibility of registering the organization in Kenya.

“Everything FEMNET is, does and achieves fits into what we dreamed about. It is the fulfilment of a dream for an African women's machinery to keep African women connected with each other. We dreamt that one day our voices would be heard and listened to in the places of high authority and command.”

The registration was the most difficult process. When Kenya agreed to host the End of the Decade Conference in Nairobi, they did not know what they were agreeing to and many times in the preparatory process Government threatened to cancel the event. At that time also Madame Nita Barrow, the Chairperson of the NGO Co-ordinating Committee in New York was summoned frequently to Nairobi by the Government. We once wrote a bitter letter at midnight to the Government from Eddah's house, reminding them that they were the ones who

committed Kenya to host the Forum and actually convened our NGO Organizing Committee. After the NGO Forum, what they had seen frightened them, because it showed the political class the power of the woman. From then on, they came up with a destruction strategy for the women's movement. Government took over the Maendeleo ya Wanawake, one of the leading NGOs with membership to the lowest grassroots level, and tried to make it part of the ruling political party - KANU.

Some of the prominent women's leaders were then used as a whip to destroy other women. The Kenya NGO Organizing Committee was never allowed to meet again, even to evaluate how the NGO Forum they had worked so hard to organize had fared. Wrap-up meetings were cancelled at the last minute with no explanation. There was persecution of individual women leaders and great suspicion among different women's organisations. The women's movement was targeted for destruction. We were trying to register FEMNET at this time when the environment was much polluted.

Our registration of FEMNET was opposed by the government with claims that we had not consulted them. We had decided that it was going to be a network. Sara Longwe coined the name FEMNET. By that time, the networking concept had grown. After a lot of struggle, we went to

the African Association for Literacy and Adult Education (AALAE) and they agreed to host us administratively, including receiving the funds we raised.

Our mandate lasted six years to the birth of FEMNET. It was a struggle through which we managed to host the African Women's Encounter just before Forum '85, bring thousands of African women to the Forum, keep the idea of an African women's NGO co-ordinating structure alive and register the Network. FEMNET was finally born in Nairobi. It was thanks to Sara Longwe's genius, creativity and exceptionally conceptual mind that it was named **Feminine Network (FEMNET)**. Elizabeth Okwenje of Uganda, Gladys Mutukwa of Zambia, Aida Giddy of Egypt and Coumbah Marenah of the Gambia are some of the pioneers who, along with Dr Gachukia and I, worked endlessly to make the dream a reality. Over the last twenty-six years, FEMNET has been part of my life. Everything FEMNET is, does and achieves fits into what we dreamed about. It is the fulfilment of a dream for an African women's machinery to keep African women connected with each other. We dreamt that one day our voices would be heard and listened to in the places of high authority and command. We strategized that our quest for empowerment, equality and respect of our rights would be on top of every important agenda for development, in our families, communities, nations and the world.

The registration struggle was particularly painful because those who opposed it were not men but women. In the end the men are the ones whom we found most helpful. There were women who wanted to replace us, not to do what we did but to glorify themselves. One time, our personal bank accounts were analysed after claims that we were getting a lot of money. But those were the resistance strategies of a patriarchal structure that feared the liberation of women.

I have struggled with personal issues but nothing can be as painful as the struggle that we had to go through to get FEMNET where we have got it today. It is even ironic that we were struggling with women, who were being used by men to destroy our own movement. I had always assumed that as women we were

involved in the same struggle for liberation from gender inequality. However, I realized that we as women are as different as different can be. I realized that even the colonialists would never have succeeded if they had not been assisted by some of us. Perseverance is the trademark of this movement, but the current generation of women do not even know that once upon a time there was such a struggle. That is why it is important to tell our stories.

In 1990, CIDA-Canada gave us a grant to study the needs of women in several countries. This formed the basis for the first FEMNET Programming Conference in October 4-8, 1992. After FEMNET was registered and we got funding I took up a job in Malawi as a Technical Advisor in family planning in May 1992. After serving FEMNET as a volunteer for more than six years, I needed the space for personal growth and advancement. Later that year I was elected the Chairperson of FEMNET. Today, as I look at where we are and the gains that we have made; I am totally convinced that our struggle has paid back. The Kenya Constitution demands that at least a third of those in Government, political and public offices must be women. The women who have stood up and are being counted may not have ever heard about the women's movement, but the fact remains that they are beneficiaries of our struggle, and are making a difference. The situation has changed and we do not have a movement the way we did. But now women can stand side by side with men and be recognized. That is part of where we wanted to go, where women and men can work together with mutual respect and equal opportunity.

If the clock was re-wound, I would still sacrifice for the movement and for my children because I get the satisfaction of being a mother, grandmother and rights activist and a witness to the gains from the empowerment of women. The journey was worth it. My vision for African women is that they will be valued and treated as equals with men and in partnership enjoy harmony, lasting peace and development.'





PHOTO GALLERY

**Sara Longwe,
FEMNET Founding Member and Chairperson (1996-2003)**



'In April 1988, I was invited to the launch of FEMNET as a consultant to give a keynote paper which linked UN agreement documents with the government policies on women's empowerment. My paper analysed the Arusha Declaration of 1984 and the Forward Looking Strategies of 1985 using my *Women's Empowerment Framework*, which is now popularly known as the *Longwe Framework*¹.

At that time in the 1980s I called the framework *Women's Status Criteria* because the mere word 'empowerment' brought goose pimples to proponents of 'women in development' at both civil society and governmental levels. I deliberately used these criteria in order to make some general observations about women's

¹ A title used by Oxfam Gender Training Manual

development projects in Africa, to show the implications if FEMNET was to become involved in promoting development projects which are more addressed to women's issues, and the improvement of the status of women.

So, I looked at the two UN outcome documents to assess the development strategies for women, relative to men. Would their **welfare** be at the mercy of charity work, would they have **access to** factors of production, would they be **conscientized** enough to be aware of the patriarchal underpinnings that shaped their subordinate social status - would they **mobilize** themselves to take **control** of their lives against the patriarchal ideology and cultural socialization that surrounded them? The analysis is summarized in the table below, which shows that there was some variance between the two UN documents in their approach to uplift the wellbeing of women relative to men and that most of the criteria was along welfare and access to limited factors of production, hence the Beijing process was kicked in ten years later.²

Dimension of Strategy	Percentage of Each Dimension		
	NGO FLS	Arusha FLS	Nairobi FLS
Control	4%	2%	13%
Participation	22%	11%	26%
Conscientization	26%	4%	6%
Access	9%	28%	15%
Welfare	22%	18%	32%
Neutral	17%	38%	8%
	(N=23)	(N=57)	(N=47)

Key: 'N' gives the number of 'Basic Strategies' which were assessed in terms of the *Women's Status Criteria*. FLS = Forward Looking Strategies

² See Sara Longwe's paper at the Launch of FEMNET (1988), From Welfare to Empowerment: The Situation of Women in Development in Africa, A Post UN Women's Decade Update and Future Directions. A paper presented at the NGO African Women's Task Meeting, Nairobi, April 11-15, 1988

Resource person to board member

Being a resource person and the fact that my paper resonated with feminists and representatives of the UN and Bi-Lateral Development Agencies present at the launch, I was asked to write the report in such a way that it could be used as a political report, which was later converted into a proposal. It is during the writing of the Launch Report that I established the acronym 'FEMNET'. Njoki Wainaina was then the coordinator and I was co-opted into the Interim Board of FEMNET to represent Southern Africa, with Eddah Gachukia as the interim chairperson. FEMNET eventually held its first General Assembly in 1992, in Nairobi. I stood for the post of chairperson but lost to Njoki Wainaina. I was instead elected as one of the five regional vice-chairpersons and I continued to represent FEMNET South (Southern Africa).

The Southern Africa sub-regional office was the Zambia Non-Governmental Organization Coordinating Council (NGOCC), a member of FEMNET and it was very active. There were many sub-regional thematic groupings and national organizations that were pushing for establishment of gender machineries at the highest level to understand women's demands. The Zambian women civil society organizations were no exception, which began writing shadow reports to government reports to UN as women's driving force. FEMNET began to attend the CSW preparatory meetings in New York as the lead facilitator of the African Women Caucus and in Dakar at the African Regional Preparatory Conference for Beijing (1995) and AAWORD (Association of African Women in Research and Development) played the role of a local anchor prior to the conference.

Activist Consultant and Chairperson

In the meantime, whilst on the FEMNET Board, I continued my consultancies under Longwe, Clarke & Associates, and worked with various development agencies. It was during this period that I was engaged by UNICEF to assist them come up with a global gender training manual on women's empowerment using my framework. It was after this consultancy that my *Women's Empowerment Framework* was adopted by many women's organizations including the then upcoming Tanzania

Media Women's Association (TAMWA). FEMNET then was the guiding network building synergies at pan-African and international levels. FEMNET also produced her own gender training manual, which incorporated my gender framework amongst others.

At that time UN bodies were committed to promoting women's empowerment and invested in it actively. Women within the UN system believed in the women's cause and saw to it that this force was unleashed. Nairobi became a centre for consultancies and very soon the region began to feel that FEMNET was becoming Nairobi-based.

Hard Times

By then Eddah Gachukia, one of the founders had left FEMNET to set up the Forum for African Women Educationists (FAWE) and Njoki was in Malawi as a freelance gender consultant. So, FEMNET had a hard time to fundraise for her capacity building and networking programme. At one time senior personnel were seconded from regional CSOs like AALAE to temporarily manage the organization. However, after the global NGO Forum selected FEMNET to coordinate and mobilize the African women CSOs for the Beijing Platform for Action process, we needed to mobilize for it. We had to change some senior personnel due to either non-availability of work permits, language issues or work styles. I continued to wear two hats in the absence of a substantive executive director, so I took up both roles as Chairperson as well as an honorary Executive Director. We agreed that any member going for any duty would promote FEMNET. The then Chairperson of the Board of Trustees Juliet Dwarzak, even came to Nairobi from Sierra Leone (during the civil war there) to temporarily hold fort as an honorary Executive Director (without pay).

FEMNET had a communication person called Joseph Igbiniedion who during the hard times was most helpful. He made FEMNET use ICT as an effective communication tool. The ICT helped the sub-regional vice-chairpersons, the Board and members to caucus over issues and send in their thoughts. He set up

FEMNET's first website and produced two hard glossy copies of the newsletters (*FEMNET News* and *Our Rights*) through a do-it-yourself-printing in-house, which cut down on production costs tremendously. This also kept the visibility of FEMNET in the regions, because I distributed copies wherever I went to attend meetings and conferences, including during my consultancy missions. I had learnt this visibility tactic from TAMWA with its newsletter *Sauti ya Siti*, which its members and staff carried wherever I met them.

Woes of a regional administration

Being based in Lusaka, I tried to pass through Nairobi whenever I was invited for conferences and workshops regardless of the destination. I was a remote control Chairperson. In fact, my motto was to behave like a swan in a pond that looked calm and graceful but paddles like mad below the water.

Pressure from the region was building up to steady the organization and to employ a bilingual executive director. Eventually she (Lynne Muthoni Wanyeki) was employed - she was bilingual and a Kenyan. The funding increased and FEMNET received more funding including core-funding from European organizations such as Sida and ICCO. This state of affairs boosted FEMNET's image as well as its Secretariat - having a young, bright and bilingual Executive Director was an asset. The Francophone Africa members were pleased and I was glad as the Chairperson.

However, the down size of having a centralized office was that the frenzy and exciting dynamism within the office died down. I observed that the working environment became individualized, everybody routinized to their stipulated work and the interpersonal relationships became too formal. Many decisions were being taken in the Nairobi office and the chairperson and her Board met increasingly infrequently and as a result, the Board began to be marginalized by its Secretariat. FEMNET began to face the challenge of organizational functionality of a network whose Board is scattered all over Africa.

You can say that I have been the longest continuity person in the FEMNET Board since 1988:

1988-1992:	Served in the interim board.
1992-1996:	Vice Chairperson responsible for mobilizing FEMNET South
1996-2003:	Chairperson of FEMNET
2003-2010:	Served in the Board as an Immediate Past Chairperson.

Achievements

Here below are some of the many achievements of FEMNET and the movement she has generated since 1988:

- i) My 'Women's Empowerment Framework' was adopted and after some years became part and parcel of the women's movement. This was significant for FEMNET members to understand the paradigm shift from charity to empowerment at continental level.
- ii) FEMNET became one of the main global regional bodies to organize African women for the Beijing 1995 process. This process was very crucial in terms of movement building and later what happened in Beijing in terms of African women's visibility and their input in the 'way forward' for the Platform for Action. The girl-child issue, which initially appeared in the African Dakar Platform, became a rallying point in Beijing.
- iii) FEMNET's coordination at CSW in New York annually. In the past, African women civil society organized themselves in the UN corridors, but now women have official space at CSW; and FEMNET plays that coordinating synergy role within the regional women's movement.
- iv) FEMNET at the World Social Forum and African Social Forum has also played its role and participated in debates in the feminist movement and Charter of Women.
- v) The African regional groupings like AU, ECOSOCC, SADC, EAC and ECOWAS have had inputs from FEMNET and have been involved in the formulation of some of their policy documents. Gender mainstreaming

and research within these bodies and the government have also been landmarks of FEMNET.

- vi) The Men to Men project which was founded by Njoki Wainaina is another benchmark of FEMNET. It has raised the bar in terms of men talking to men on gender violence and how patriarchy contributes to this scourge, thus raising awareness among men. GTZ, UNIFEM, CIDA-GESP and HBF have played a very crucial supportive role in this project with financing aspects.
- vii) The FEMNET publications that have come out have shown FEMNET's role in not only communication and education; but also in debates over gender issues and developmental issues of Africa.

So overall, I would say the growth has been tremendous. The path has not been easy. Resistance has come from both men and women thus pushing us to understand the depth of the culture of patriarchy. The challenge is tremendous and we do have a long way to go still. As for myself, my first journey emanated from the Zambia Association for Research and Development (ZARD), of which I'm a co-founding member from its inception in 1976. My second journey has been FEMNET. My third journey has been my gender consultancy activist work under Longwe, Clarke & Associates. My fourth journey has been the recognition of my feminist work by being awarded the 2003 African Prize for Leadership from the Hunger Project, which I shared with Maeza Ashenafi of Ethiopia for her work on young women's legal cases. The award money (US\$50,000) has been used to support mothers to seek justice in a court of law for their children who were defiled by known persons; to assist a mother on a case where her young daughter (a mother of a two year-old boy) was allegedly gang raped and strangled whilst in police custody; and offering nutritious breakfasts twice a week to children in need.

Much has changed in terms of the rights of women, but much still needs to change regarding empowerment of not only women, but also the continent as a whole. We have yet to come into being as free peoples.

**Mama Koite Doumbia,
FEMNET Chairperson (2003 - 2010)**



First of all I would like to welcome the *herstory* initiative because we have a duty to record for posterity. It is normal to leave behind footprints before bowing out - people like to make changes but often these changes are according to their own thinking. Every organization needs to stop at some point and reflect on the way already covered, that is what enables organizations to move forward.

I came to know about FEMNET in New York in 1998 when we were organizing the African Women's Caucus. I was representing my organization, the National Trade Union, as I was the Chairperson of Women Workers.

In 2003, Muthoni who was at that time the Executive Director of FEMNET gave us invitation letters to attend the FEMNET General Assembly (GA). When I went back to my country, I submitted the invitation letter to my organization. A fee had to be paid; my organization though agreeing that it was a noble cause, said it was not in a position to sponsor my participation. So I wrote to FEMNET thanking them for the invitation. At the last minute, I received a message from the director who informed us that a number of countries had been sponsored, including Mali - that is how I came to attend the 2003 FEMNET GA.

The Trade Unionist/the Pan Africanist

My participation in the trade union movement reinforced a position that I had held since I was in school. Back then I was an activist, I was one of the leaders in high school. When I started teaching, I am a teacher of history and geography; I started trade union clubs in schools. I did my university studies in France through a scholarship. When I came back I became the first woman Inspector of Youth and Sports which is a government job. I brought trade unionism into my job as Inspector. I mean, I acted as a trade unionist in my position as Inspector. I was elected as the first woman Secretary General of my trade union, and have been in the union for the last 30 years.

In 1960, Mali and Senegal had formed a Federation after they got independence. Our Heads of State had a common vision for a united Africa and it is this vision which brought us into the Federation. However, owing to political competition, the Federation collapsed in 1961. In 1962, the Government of Senegal asked Malians to go back to Mali. So we all went back to Mali, our home country.

Personal background

I have four brothers, and I am the only daughter to my parents. I also have only one daughter and she also has one daughter and four sons!

The first thing was that I suffered a lot in my marriage at the beginning. I was married into a very traditional family though my husband was educated (he is an Electrical Engineer specializing in air conditioning). I had challenges because I lived with him in a large family. There were a lot of issues, a lot of quarrelling with my sisters-in-law, my brothers-in-law, with their parents, because I was the only working woman in the family. So I was very misunderstood, I didn't receive any support. Fortunately my job allowed me to afford two house helps. One helped me to take care of my kids because I do not have a sister. The other woman did the cooking. When I came back home in the evenings I used to be very tired and often had conflicts with my husband because he wanted me to cook for him. I also had to supervise my kids' homework and improve my own learning. As I was helping my kids, I would be reading at the same time. I have always tried to improve myself. It was not easy. Most of the time, I would read late into the night.

In the trade union, I was fortunate because there were men who helped me. Unlike what people think it is men who helped me a lot. When I was elected Secretary General, I was pregnant. I told them that I was not going to manage to combine my family life and the job. They said that they needed my vision. They said that they could see that I was very committed and they wanted me to lead the organization. I was reluctant because as one woman among all these men, in an organization dominated by men, I wasn't very sure. Some of them really caused me a lot of problems. They challenged me and I wanted to meet this challenge. So I started with the trade union and had my baby. I would carry him on my back to work, put him next to me, and nurse him. In brief, that's how I lived. Slowly I won the confidence and trust of my colleagues and they pushed me to higher levels of leadership.

When I joined the trade union, I noticed an attitude which was against women getting involved. I really fought very hard with men and women and my only weapon has been my commitment and conviction. So up until now, it is the trade union which continues to support me.

Nonetheless, the first women's organization in my trade union was created by myself because I felt that if we stay behind the men, not only will other women not join, but also our concerns will never be taken into account. I put in place the women's committee that I headed for several years. I sourced a lot of donors who helped women to build their capacity, to set up women's cooperatives, and to train women at all levels.

In the beginning, my husband could not accept my involvement but over time and a long hard struggle, I made him understand the kind of satisfaction I gained from the work that I was doing. I had family aggravations and my satisfaction was coming from being with my colleagues and comrades. Secondly, I told him that people had confidence in me even though I was a woman. So I had to live up to that trust. I told him that he should support me instead of creating problems for me. Despite his male pride, he started to understand me, to support me, to allow me to travel on duty. And often he would even take care of the kids. He would even give me pocket money, when I travelled and money for my personal expenses.

Then there was also the matter of the children. My children didn't give me any problems but I worried for them. When I travelled I was not at ease. As a mother, whatever the case, you don't feel comfortable leaving behind your children in a situation. It was my sister-in-law who would call me to find out where I was. When I came back from my duty travels, my children would not leave me for a moment because they needed some affection. They would often massage my feet and would say, 'mum you're so tired'. Whatever my activities, I have always made sure I know what my children were doing. I have always had a keen interest in the studies of my children. Whatever I earn, I give it to my children.

I paid for their education, I provided for them, whether it was food, clothes or travelling. I sent two children to study in France. They are now both married and have children. I have other children at the university, one got married, and the youngest is also at the university doing political science. When I asked him why he chose political science, he said he wanted to be like mum, an activist! All the others are in technical fields, but he did humanities like me.

Together with my trade union activities, I have also been involved in the women's association movement. For example I was elected Education and Culture Secretary for the Coordination Committee of the Women of Mali. I was also elected Secretary in charge of External Relations. I was a member of the Peace Culture Commission. I was a member of the Commission for the fight against female genital mutilation and other harmful traditional practices. So I've worked a lot with women's organizations. Thanks to my experience, I have represented women at several meetings both nationally and internationally. So my life is not only limited to the trade union movement. I have very actively worked for the lives of Malian women and I belong to many coordination commissions for women.

I have received many awards in Mali. Both Presidents of the Republic have given me awards. I have also received awards at the continental and international levels, When you receive all these distinctions, there are things you must not do. You have to be very careful with anything which can damage your reputation. In Mali I was given a nickname, and this is a secret! They call me Iron Lady. Everybody calls me Iron Lady. This is because when I start something I must see it through. I don't get lost in unnecessary things.

The FEMNET encounter

I didn't know anybody in FEMNET. They told me, 'We need a West African lady, a Francophone. This morning we saw you discussing and we know you have a very good vision. If we propose you as a candidate for FEMNET, will you accept?' My reaction was: 'Oh I don't know! It's too big for me. It's an African

network. I can't. I know my trade union world and the West African women's movement, but this world I don't know it.' The ladies insisted that it's not difficult and that I will manage. 'We know you have the strength, courage and all that it takes.' Apart from 'Good morning' I didn't know another word in English.

So I prayed to God to give me the strength and health required to be able to do my term. I believe God has heard my prayer because I did my first term and then a second one, thanks to you all. It wasn't easy. It was very hard, particularly the first few years. But we stood firm. At some point, FEMNET almost collapsed but we have all worked day and night. We travelled so many times to come here (Nairobi). We have held meetings everywhere, throughout the night till dawn, to be able to keep the ship together. It wasn't easy.

When I came to FEMNET, I was also anxious because I had never worked with Anglophones. With all that we say about each other, I was asking myself, 'Am I really going to succeed?' It's true that we have the same issues but we don't have the same culture. We don't have the same type of education, the same environment, the same society, the same way of life, the same way of understanding things. So frankly, the person whom I was really afraid of in this work was Fatma Alloo. She had some experience with FEMNET. I didn't know the network. But to tell you the truth, today the person I like the most on the Board is Fatma Alloo.

We have gone through very difficult times, we had heated discussions, but she has always respected me. She has always come to me to share her ideas. Even when she felt there were problems, she has always talked to me from the bottom of her heart. That's why I like her and appreciate her today. That's the only reason.

Reflections

Although it is true that I have enjoyed a lot of consideration and received a lot of awards, I have also faced a lot of problems, though I'm really satisfied. When I came to FEMNET, after my election, I went back to my country. I wrote to all the women's organizations that I knew inviting them to join.

What really moved me was the attitude of the First Lady of Mali. She inquired, 'I heard an announcement yesterday, do you know that lady?' People told her that they knew me and that I was an activist. Then she asked if she could see me. I went to see her with many books about FEMNET. She said she had listened to the announcement and that she wanted to congratulate me. Then she asked me what FEMNET is? So I explained to her very briefly the activities of the network and gave her some of the publications of FEMNET. She said she hadn't understood a lot, but it's an honour for Mali. And she said because of that she was going to support me. I therefore wrote to the President of the Republic, to the Prime Minister, to everybody.

The second satisfaction for me was when I received the Minerva Award from Italy. I was celebrated by Malian women. The Ministry of Gender organized a big event in conjunction with women's organizations, the media, with a lot of entertainment, we sang and danced. They paid tribute to me in many speeches. That day what really moved me is that the Minister of Gender said in her speech, 'This Award was not given to Mama but to Mr. Doumbia (He was sitting next to me) because it's thanks to him that you got that leadership and if I'm recognized internationally it's because my husband has not held me back.' All the women thanked him. Today he is cited as an example in all meetings.

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I have benefited from FEMNET and vice versa. Back home, the President of the Republic recognizes FEMNET, not Mama or Mrs Doumbia! During our meetings, when the word gender is mentioned, he says, “Be careful, FEMNET is here!”

That day he told me, 'Mama I didn't know that was your destiny. I'm sorry for all that I did to you. I didn't know that the world was going to recognize you for all the effort that you made. Today I am satisfied.' I don't even know how to explain that. My children were so happy. They said, 'Mum despite all the suffering we went through during your absence, now we are very happy about this award'. In Addis Ababa I received the 'Chevalier du Mérite Africain' award, when I was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. All that brings joy.

I have done my time and I am very satisfied because I feel I have been useful, I have made my contribution both in Mali, in Africa and internationally.

So I have benefited from FEMNET and vice versa. Back home, the President of the Republic recognizes FEMNET, not Mama or Mrs Doumbia! During our meetings, when the word gender is mentioned, he says, 'Be careful, FEMNET is here!' When there's a meeting and the members of the high table are all men, I challenge them. Everybody is careful when I am around. They say, 'We must have a lady with us, otherwise we'll have problems with FEMNET'. That's good, because people know what we want. So I have made an impact on them and that means I've been useful.

**Prof. Nora Olembo,
Founding Member of FEMNET (1985 – 1992)**



Prof. Norah Olembo is one of the founders of FEMNET. She was at the centre of FEMNET activities from its inception and was the rapporteur at most of the conferences and NGO fora and is the author of many FEMNET reports including Arusha, Nairobi, Dakar and the first FEMNET Programming Conference. In her own words she says she was the right hand woman/secretary

for Dr Eddah Gachukia at the time Dr Gachukia was Chairperson of FEMNET. Prof. Olemba is a renowned biotechnologist in Kenya and Africa, and is currently the Chairperson of the Africa Biotechnology Stakeholders Forum (ABSF).

In FEMNET, I started as Secretary to Dr Eddah Gachukia during the preparation for the Third World Conference of Women and NGO Forum in 1985 held in Nairobi. At the time of forming FEMNET, we wanted to have something that would empower African women in the form of a network. A network is what we wanted. We also wanted the youth to be involved, because by empowering women you empower a nation. We saw FEMNET as a powerful network for women in Africa. The dedication was amazing. Somehow the timing was good. There was extreme excitement from the women and we felt effective and we even terrorized our men. Empowerment of a woman results into empowering a country. If a woman is given a chance to excel, her family benefits. However, in olden days women were looked down upon. Women did all the house chores while men just sat and smoked a pipe and waited to be served by a woman. Men woke up and just sat on a stool under a tree while women did all the work.

My father encouraged us to work hard, and it was good, that coming from a man and we obeyed it. The attitude of men towards women has to be improved; women are not just tools but are a society that can contribute to the wellbeing and welfare of the entire society. I am happy, however, to note that there is slight improvement, and now we have female presidents in Africa. Numbers-wise, women are more than men, such that they don't need to consider themselves vulnerable, and women own everything including the men. The African woman must be a highly empowered woman.

My inspiration was emancipation of women in Africa. When we heard stories of other women that have succeeded we thought we can help through a network. FEMNET must from time to time call on women to come together and assess what has been achieved so far - are women empowered, are girls going to school? I would real love to come back on board in FEMNET.

The Beijing Conference

It was held at the right time. Women came to share, and demand. They put down things they wanted to see. Meeting halls were full. Women were up very early to go to the meetings, they talked about emancipation, empowerment, and gender equality - being treated equally with men and being able to participate in economic development initiatives and also be able to inherit property. We felt high and we were jumping around. But during the last meeting we reminded ourselves that we are going back to our countries. One lady who had been leading the meeting said 'don't forget what you have learnt here, go and implement it back home'. I remember her message very well.

I want to see the African woman becoming fearless and being assertive in school, church, parliament; and prove that they are human beings and can stand up to anything.

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At the time of forming FEMNET, we wanted to have something that would empower African women in the form of a network... we saw FEMNET as a powerful network for women in Africa. The dedication was amazing
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**Dr Pamela Kola,
FEMNET Founding Member and Resident Trustee (1996 – 2007)**



First of all I would like to say that those of us who belonged to a number of organizations were the ones given the opportunity to prepare women who were going to attend the meeting. I happened to be the president of three very important organizations. The Young Developers' Organization, University Women's Association and the vice chair of another organization and I was a member of WILDAF before FEMNET came to Kenya.

I was working with children although I did work in secondary schools and did a lot at the university. I decided to study early child education and specialized in that. I became the head of the kindergarten unit as the most highly qualified for that position because at that time, graduates did not want to associate themselves with teaching. But now people are appreciating that children must be taught properly. It was a church run school. I had a passion for women and children since I was young and my mother really loved us. My childhood was in Kisumu until I went to High school. So I was very much a rural girl with seven brothers and four sisters.

Our parents had four boys before a girl came in. My brothers were cooking and did house-hold chores like sweeping and fetching water. As we grew up, we knew that in the morning we would share duties. So as we grew up, we did not know which roles belonged to women and which ones were categorically for women because we shared duties.

My parents were the loveliest couple because they were Christians. They shared a lot. My father was trained as a missionary and then started leading classes. When we wanted something, mum would tell us to wait until dad came, because they shared everything.

Issue of gender

I started noticing that some girls did not have access to what we had. I was being told it was because they were girls and would go away from their homes. I witnessed early marriages and discrimination from some families where girls were not given as much as boys. But our parents educated us to the level we wanted. My sister got married but realized that she needed to go back to school and further her education. But it was for us to decide what we wanted. I got married after I had done all the things I wanted to do in my life.

FEMNET was formed by those who realized that women had to be empowered. I was called because we were very much involved. Margaret Kenyatta, President

Kenyatta's daughter, chaired the Government Conference. It was very congenial to work with her. After that a few of us were invited to the NGO meetings. Our first meeting was in Gigiri. We continued to be there until we got a place of our own. There were no plans for activities we wanted to do, thus no one was really acting as the leader. Then at one of the meetings, we had an interview and that is how Eddah Gachukia got in.

The NGO Forum was represented by Eddah, who was like a driver taking us exactly where we wanted to go. Women opened their doors to visitors and the numbers doubled. That was something good. That opened doors for women not only in Kenya but everywhere. I was not so aware then. I had attended a university meeting about gender. That is when I knew there was discrimination about women and my eyes were opened to why certain things were being done to women. We realized that there were rights, but that women didn't seem to know them. We started discussing.

At first I was in the management committee of FEMNET and stayed there for quite some time. Then I was a resident Board of Trustees member from 1996-2007. Having been one of the founders, I have personally taken a keen interest to make sure that it follows the path of our visioning and keep the pan African dream alive. Otherwise it would be like seeing your own baby going astray and you do nothing. I never want to see it being different from what we meant it to be. The journey has been worth it indeed.



"It is very gratifying to see how FEMNET has evolved over the years to become an indispensable body linking women's organizations in Africa, and to the outside world. In my international work within civil society and the United Nations, FEMNET has been a point of reference on African women's participation in important global initiatives. It has always been a source of joy and encouragement knowing how FEMNET started as a tentative idea for an African women's network. Congratulations to the many women of different generations who have nurtured and grown FEMNET to what it is today." *Elizabeth Okwenje Lwanga, Uganda*

My Story with FEMNET: Building a Pan-African Movement of Women Together

Fatma Alloo, Secretary and Member of the FEMNET Executive Board representing Eastern Africa (2003-2010)

'In 1988 my colleagues and I founded Tanzania Media Women's Association (TAMWA) as a national body which would advocate for the rights of women using media as a mobilizing force. SAUTI YA SITI (Voice of woman) was born as a woman's magazine on the International Women's Day March 8, 1988.



We had worked day and night on the floors of my flat to birth this magazine. We believed that we needed our own media forum to voice our concerns and become a pressure group within our society. At that time in Tanzania we had one government radio station, one government newspaper, and one party newspaper.

Tanzania mainland had no television while Zanzibar had the oldest colour Television on the continent. Mwalimu Julius Kabaraga Nyerere was our Head of State and we took pride in building our nation which we termed 'Ujamaa' meaning working together in unity and supporting one another by any means available. Pan-Africanism was our goal and it is in this context that TAMWA was born.

The Nairobi UN Conference had taken place in 1985 but I had not attended as I was growing up from a personal heartbreak and let us just say I was yet to be nurtured politically. As coordinator of TAMWA, I received an invitation from FEMNET to attend the first annual general meeting in Nairobi in 1992. I was excited for as a believer of Pan-Africanism, I wanted to play a role at a regional and pan-african level to build the women's movement. It is in Nairobi that I met Madame Gachukia and Njoki Wanaina of Kenya, Sara Longwe from Zambia and many others from the continent. There was excitement in the air and we dreamt of myriad possibilities; but our main focus was to emerge as a force to be reckoned with in our continent.

Over the years and looking back, that we have certainly achieved. In the initial years I was not very active in playing my regional role as I was spending all my energies building the national movement - TAMWA.

To the credit of the founder members of FEMNET, they had seen my potential and patiently nurtured me into a full-fledged active member whereby since then I have been playing my role particularly in building a pan-african movement of women. I clearly remember how we could not comprehend what the other part of the continent was saying due to the colonialist language divide, but gradually we learnt the language of tolerance out of which beautiful friendships have emerged over time.

Networking became important as a tool and the more we built the more complicated the problems became; but what is amazing about FEMNET is the dedication and commitment of members who swam against all odds to make sure the organization remained vibrant

It is also to the credit of the founders that even though they were no longer on the Board, whenever the organization got rocky, and when called upon, they were there to make sure that it did not suffer a shipwreck.

As we celebrate 24 years in the form of this book I just want to reiterate that we do not tell enough of our stories. If we do not, then who will? This initiative was a hard struggle to get it into action but with perseverance it is now a reality. The stories of FEMNET are told by various women of Africa. Within it are the dreams of Africa but also *Herstory* of where we came from. This is a recorded *Herstory*. It is recorded for those who will emerge as movers and shakers of the situation of women in society. As long as patriarchy prevails these voices must keep on speaking. We are the richest continent and yet why are we termed poor? Why are we termed a continent of gloom and doom?

We must challenge these notions and expose the agendas of those who want to keep our continent down. They know that the force for global change is in our continent as it has been the birthplace of humanity. They also know that when we arise, the sky is the limit and to reach it, unity and collectiveness is our strength.



The voice of Bob Marley keeps chiming.....Africa unite.....and as women we say Aluta Continua!

The Men Who Supported Our Struggle for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

Male support for gender equality remains a controversial issue among feminists and the diversity of opinions and perspectives have been discussed earlier in this story. For the women leaders whose stories we have told and whose personal journeys have been intertwined with that of FEMNET, male support came in different forms and circumstances but whatever the case, it made a tremendous difference. There were those men who offered and freely gave their support because of their commitment and belief in the principles of gender equality. There were those who were reluctant supporters but who found they had no choice in the matter; and there were those who were compelled by circumstances beyond them. There were also the opportunists who jumped on to the band wagon. Whatever the case, FEMNET's *Herstory* includes them and recognizes, lauds and appreciates them for the critical roles they played. A few of them come to mind:



Daniel Gachukia - Eddah's husband is one man who was very much part of our struggle and yet was never intrusive. He had a knack for being there when you needed him and then out of your way when you needed to be on your own. I remember he was always there for Eddah. When she had very important assignments he would be there even to run errands for her. He would give advice when it was required and keep his distance when it was not. He and Eddah opened their house for the women's movement and we always met there, enjoyed their hospitality and we were made so welcome it seemed the natural thing to do. We would work there all kinds of hours, day and night, especially in 1984/85 when we were

organizing (and many times agonizing over) the Forum. Their generosity was beyond comprehension and even their children had graciously accepted the intrusion into their home.

The Gachukia home was the headquarters of the women's movement in those years. Naomi, Dr Gachukia's personal secretary was a constant member of our team, together with Joyce Kang'ethe, who eventually became the first FEMNET Secretary, as they ran myriads of errands for us. The Gachukia home, with its lovely and spacious garden was the venue of many big and small parties. It was the venue of the dinners for the African Women's Encounter, several dinners during the NGO Forum, the dinner for the first FEMNET Programming Conference and many cocktail parties. Their strong social network was ever at our disposal for donations for these events, but their contributions as a family were immeasurable. As we tell this story, we honour the Gachukias, their children and grandchildren, whose support made enormous difference in the making of FEMNET and in the shaping of the African women's movement.

The Verandah - There was something about that verandah that was very special. We tended to congregate there whenever we had difficult issues to deal with. It was beautiful and inspiring looking out on to the garden and the vegetation there. Many plans, proposals, strategies and counter-strategies were formulated there. The women's movement had actually taken over our lives for a while, and the verandah was the place we often met. That verandah provided a permanent space for thinking and writing, mainly because the NGO Committee, and later on the African Women's Task Force, had no permanent offices.

Baquer Namazi - was the UNICEF Country Director at the time when we hosted the Foundation Meeting for the Network later named FEMNET. He adopted us and our vision, provided funding for our activities, gave us an office at UNICEF, hosted the Foundation Meeting at the prestigious UN Conference at Gigiri and paid for the Co-ordinator to work part-time at the Network office. When the space at UNICEF was no longer available, he gave FEMNET a grant

to pay for one year's rent; gave us our first computer; TV; office equipment and furniture to set us up as an independent office.

He was the first head of agency to use the FEMNET Gender Trainers' Team. Through the collaboration with UNICEF Kenya Country Office, we tested the FEMNET Gender Training Model to the lowest level of community projects, involving water, health, child to child and the Bamako Initiative, which was a model for distributing basic medicines at the community level. Baquer Namazi believed in us and actively promoted FEMNET among his UN peers. Through his office we were linked with the UNICEF regional and international offices and we became pioneers of the international Gender Programme with UNICEF support.

Roy Clarke - imagine he calls himself Mr Sara Roy Longwe! He is Sara Longwe's husband and partner in their consultancy firm Longwe, Clarke & Associates. When you read Sara's story, you know what qualities are required to cope and there, you have Roy. He is a writer in addition to being a gender consultant, trainer and activist. He has a way of rubbing male chauvinists, patriarchy and gender insensitive politicians the wrong way. He wrote a satirical column for a Zambian newspaper for many decades and in one particular issue he touched some raw nerves and he was nearly deported. He and Sara had to go into hiding and it took a global campaign to get his tormentors to chicken out. For FEMNET, Roy has been part of everything that we did because he is Sara's partner and a key supporter and role model for men who support, and are not afraid of, women's empowerment.



Joseph Igbiniedion - was FEMNET's Communication Officer in the period just after the Beijing Conference. He is credited with introducing ICT to FEMNET and creating the first website. Joseph was the first male professional staff that FEMNET hired, and his pleasant and very calm personality enabled him to fit into the highly

female dominated space and programme. He had great confidence and was always ready to answer those who wondered why he had chosen to work in a dominantly female space. Sometimes there were confusions when he went to represent FEMNET at media related conferences, because he was logistically classified as female until he appeared on the scene! He took such errors in his stride.

Paul Wangoola - was the Executive Director of the African Association of Literacy and Adult Education (AALAE), in the years FEMNET was going through the agonising process of seeking registration. It was Paul who offered to host FEMNET, facilitating the receipt of a grant from CIDA. Paul served in the management committee for several years before it was disbanded. In that period, Paul contributed to the setting up of a number of policies and systems and the appraisal of the FEMNET programme, and was ever present to offer technical support in the areas of policy, systems and programmes. FEMNET benefited greatly from his personal and professional contributions and the regional experiences and network of AALAE. Sadly, AALAE died a slow death and ironically FEMNET replaced it as one of the African Focal Point for CIVICUS and the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE).



INSPIRATION

Joyce Banda Ascends to the Malawi Presidency



On April 7, 2012 Her Excellency Joyce Banda became the second female African President, following the steps of Ellen Sirleaf Johnson of Liberia. This was the culmination of a journey of more than three decades, starting almost at the bottom of a pit. She learned about women's empowerment from the ashes of her broken marriage and climbed systematically, often very painfully, to the pinnacle of power, where she is to-day. Hers is one of the most inspiring stories of perseverance, patience, courage, commitment, confidence, vision, focus and charisma that combined to propel her through the murky waters of male dominated structures, betrayal, compromise and shaky political alliances that characterize African political leadership.

The women's movement can rightly claim the mentoring and nurturing roles of this great daughter of Africa. From the early years as a young wife and mother, living in Kenya as the wife of a Malawian diplomat in the early eighties, she found solace and mentorship in the women's group movement that had spread like wildfire in Kenya. It was from these women's groups that she learned that women had rights and she did not have to endure marital abuse as a norm. On return to Malawi, she exited the abusive marriage and eventually married Justice Richard Banda, the man who helped her regain her confidence, self esteem and personal purpose. She imported to Malawi the passion of women's empowerment through grassroots women working together and when the political dispensation in Malawi changed in the late eighties, she founded the National Association of Business Women (NABW). This organization is credited with totally transforming the situation of women in Malawi. Through an integrated programme offering training, credit, mentoring, business management and other skills, many women individually and collectively rose from the depths of poverty and attained positions of renown as seasoned entrepreneurs and business magnates.

NABW became a household name among Malawi women and men and soon was recognized as an important national institution. NABW mentored professional women to rise through the ranks to head key institutions and women were also appointed to head parastatal organizations and corporations. Her family connections also gave her a strategic position, which she used for advocacy and to lobby for women's representation at the highest levels. She too was appointed to key professional and business positions through which Malawi people developed a positive attitude towards women's leadership.

Her association with FEMNET dates back to 1993 when FEMNET started mobilizing African women for the African Regional Conference and NGO Forum in Dakar. At that time she was the Executive Director of NABW and she was actively involved in mobilizing and preparing women NGOs to participate in the Southern Africa sub-Region network and later the Dakar NGO Forum.



She played a leading role in the Dakar Conference and was elected to the Forum of African Women Entrepreneurs (FAWE). In 1996 she attended the second FEMNET Programming Conference in Nairobi.

In the same year she was the central figure in the planning and organization of a historic event called 'Bringing Beijing Back to Malawi', a five day NGO Forum, attended by over 1000 women, men, female and male youth from every corner of Malawi. This event was fashioned after the Dakar and Nairobi Forums, and was motivated by the FEMNET initiative to follow-up the Dakar and Beijing Platforms for Action. The success of this event sent ripples in the political and professional circles that said something about her influence and mobilization skills. She worked closely with Njoki Wainaina during the latter's consultancy

in Malawi. In the year 2000, she entered active party politics and served in many pioneering leadership positions that demonstrated her capabilities and personal commitment to the welfare and rights of the Malawi people, including young women and men. In 1998, she won the African Prize for Leadership from the Hunger Project, which she shared with President Chissano of Mozambique. FEMNET joined the rest of Africa and the world to celebrate her through an article in *FEMNET News*. She used the prize money to start the Joyce Banda Foundation, which runs a number of schools, including one for girls and others for disadvantaged children in communities in Zomba, her home area. She eventually ran for Parliament, became a minister, held the prestigious position of Foreign Minister, then Vice President and to-day she is the President of Malawi. Her progression to the top has been gradual, systematic, sure and divinely ordered.

FEMNET mobilized support for her in the difficult period she went through when she was Vice President. This journey to the top was long and full of potholes. Many in Malawi will recall the agony she went through in her tenure as the Vice President, when she was marginalized, humiliated, called names, shunned, isolated and persecuted by those in leadership and positions of influence. She endured all that standing on the strength of the Constitution, and eventually she took the position that was rightly hers at the passing on of the late President Bingu Wa Mutharika. She inherited a nation at the brink of economic collapse, but the divine power that has propelled her to the top will give her the wisdom, knowledge, skills and courage to lead the Malawi nation out of the quagmire, back to the progressive and steady nation it is destined to be, under her leadership.



New Look FEMNET Secretariat

This period witnessed the era when the baton of leadership was passed from the generation of the FEMNET founders to the next generation of young, dynamic, energetic, focused and very creative women. The new FEMNET Executive Director, Lynn Muthoni Wanyeki, was the youngest Executive Director in the history of FEMNET:

I am a strong believer in the saying 'money follows good works', for us at FEMNET we had to work hard and prove that our efforts were worth being sponsored. FEMNET was a regional mechanism for the African women and their response to the African Union Protocol made a mark. For example, our efforts were demonstrated in the African Union support, with the help of the African Women Caucus and African Women Development Trust we were able to get our first big donor for the Five Year Programme – the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida). The work at the African Union led to our second donor, the African Trust Fund.

I derive the passion from being a woman and the urge to make the world a better place. The African women's movement has diversified from economic empowerment and review of traditional practices to other areas of empowerment, due to the efforts of FEMNET. A regional mechanism was the focus of the FEMNET foundation to help women fight for their rights and empower them.

Lynn Muthoni Wanyeki, FEMNET Executive Director.

The other memorable members of staff were Alice Munyua, the Communication Officer who transformed the FEMNET communication materials, especially *FEMNET News* and *Our Rights* and other publications that are still in vogue more than a decade after she moved on to a new career.

Mary Wandia was the memorable Advocacy Officer who became the face of FEMNET at the African Union (formerly Organization of African Unity), the UN and all key action points in Africa and abroad, where gender issues were being negotiated and lobbied. She was so passionate about her work that she became an inspiration even to her seniors.

Rose Akinyi, has been the anchor at FEMNET Secretariat from 1995 to date as a diligent and committed administrator working closely with seven different executive directors.

Outputs:

- The African Union (AU) work done by FEMNET in collaboration with other key partners, played a big role in pushing for the AU Protocol on the Rights of Women and made an impact on African women.
- *FEMNET News* continued to be the tool for FEMNET communication among the Network members and for highlighting key activities in which FEMNET was providing leadership. In January 1999 *FEMNET News* got a new look, where the English and French versions were combined to cater equally for French and English readers in Africa and world-wide.
- FEMNET developed and adopted a new look logo.

The New Millennium

When the Third Women's Conference adopted the *Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies* for the advancement of women up to and beyond the year 2000, the new Millennium seemed very far away. Fifteen years later, the same players were still struggling with the same issues of equality, development and peace;

and the verdict was that the situation of women relative to men had not been transformed significantly. The passion with which FEMNET had continued to pursue its mandate had not waned and in spite of many challenges, the Network persisted.

FEMNET had been recognized by the UN, Women's regional networks, NGOs, the OAU and other key partners as the leader of the women's NGOs in Africa. In spite of serious funding constraints FEMNET managed to use its limited resources and those of other agencies to carry out its co-ordination, communication, networking and capacity building mandate. Every opportunity was used to create more connections and to respond to the needs of those who sought collaboration, information, connections and partnerships.

Five years after the Beijing meetings it was time once again to look at the achievements made and the constraints to the implementation of the Platform for Action. FEMNET had, true to her mandate, concentrated her efforts on the follow up, and in all the programme areas, efforts had been focused on the African and Global PFA.

The year 2000 witnessed the highest level of networking for FEMNET and other African networks as they prepared for the Beijing Plus Five Review Process. Once again activities were organized at national, regional and global levels and FEMNET became the source and conduit for critical information in content and process. FEMNET was also the Africa Regional Coordinator of the Global Dialogue on Poverty Eradication through Social Innovation and Networking, organized by the German International Development Agency (GTZ), as part of the Expo 2000, held in Hannover, Germany.

Advocacy had mushroomed with the new and highly visible role FEMNET was playing towards the end and the beginning of the millennium; and in the year 2000, FEMNET staff and volunteers served in high profile committees and participated in over 30 events at regional and global levels. The activities

demanded high levels of networking and partnership building as the key themes of FEMNET programming jelled in response to the needs of the many events that were happening, and the demands for information that came with greater visibility. The FEMNET Secretariat and Resource Centre became hubs of visitors and requests for data, information and connections.

FEMNET initiated an internship programme that became an important mentorship programme for young women and a few men from different countries serving in different programme areas. Through this programme FEMNET benefited from the energies, ideas and creativity of this generation of women and men. On the whole FEMNET survived and functioned in this period with financial support only for its core operations and for the communications programme. The advocacy and capacity building programmes were made possible by the additional contributions and inputs of time, skills and other resources from the Boards of Directors and Trustees.

Commission of the Status of Women and the Preparatory Committee for UNGASS 2000

Five years after Beijing, the world was to converge again for the United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) held in New York. The meetings of the Commission of the Status of Women and the Preparatory Committee for UNGASS which was held in June 2000, served as the opportunity for the FEMNET Board, the executive director and representatives of some of the FEMNET Focal Points to review the situation in the Secretariat and the Network. The process through CSW, Preparatory Committee and the UNGASS brought together key women's NGOs who worked together to give Africa and African issues visibility. FEMNET provided technical, co-ordinating and facilitating roles to enable African NGOs to attend and participate in these meetings. FEMNET was represented in the Conference of NGOs (CONGO), the global body that co-ordinates NGOs that have consultative status with the UN.

Outputs:

- FEMNET Website was redesigned to increase the utility of electronic communication within the Network and externally. African women's NGOs also created a network website and listserve called *Flame*, a networking tool for regional and international sharing to enable increased African women's participation in the review process and the dissemination of the outcomes of the process. The *Flame* partnership produced *Women Action* - a daily conference newspaper at all the key conferences and meetings.
- FEMNET built strong networks with other African regional and thematic partners that generated synergies and visibility for the African women and their issues. The key partners included:
 - Association of Progressive Communicators (APC) Women's Programme
 - African Women and Child Information Network (AWCIN)
 - Inter Press and Gender Links in South Africa
 - Collaborative Centre for Gender and Development, Kenya
 - Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA) Kenya,
 - Women in Law and Development in Africa (WILDAF)
 - Federation of African Women's Network for Peace (FERFAP)
 - African Information Society Gender Working Group (AIS GWG)
 - Centre for Conflict Resolution (CECORE), Uganda
 - Council for Economic Empowerment of Women in Africa (CEEWA)
 - Women and Law in Southern Africa (WLSA)
 - African Association of Women for Research and Development (AAWORD)

The new look *FEMNET News* and *Our Rights* with the combined French and English versions continued to be used as key networking tools to communicate both process and content of the many activities happening in the African region as well as the international levels.

- FEMNET also acquired a new logo.



Challenge: In the intense preparatory process of the CSW, Preparatory Committees and the Beijing Review Process, the age old language and cultural barrier between English and French speaking African women's groupings resurfaced and created serious constraints to the process. Lack of professional interpretation and translation services, the lack of orientation for African women participants, the drawn out process and negotiations within the Governmental lobby groups made the process difficult and less effective. This was resolved after some discussions but it is a perpetual challenge that needs to be addressed through a long-term strategy.



The New Kid on the Block! Men for Equality with Women

The period between 1999 and 2000 witnessed the up-surge of interest and action on the critical area of Violence against Women. Through-out the world NGOs and governments took up activities around this area. In Africa, one of the interesting developments around this theme was the mobilization of men and the organization of male marches against violence on women and girls, notably the 'One Million Males March' in Cape Town, South Africa; and a similar march in Kenya, led by the Movement for Men for Equality with Women, led by Rev. Timothy Njoya. Similar initiatives were reported in Namibia, Malawi and Zimbabwe.



Through the initiative of the FEMNET immediate Chairperson Njoki Wainaina, who had started a *Men to Men* initiative in Malawi, the Board approved the proposal to create a regional network for mobilizing men to support women in the fight against Gender Based Violence. This was in keeping with the FEMNET gender agenda and came in at the point when the Gender Programme had stalled due to inadequate funding. The programme received support from UNIFEM and GTZ, and once again put FEMNET on the global list of innovators. In the preparatory process of the 2004 Commission on the Status of Women Session, FEMNET was invited to serve in the Expert Committee meeting and Njoki Wainaina was one of the expert speakers at the CSW.

Output: The Network on Men against Gender Based Violence struggled to take off and eventually only two countries managed to create national programmes. The Men for Gender Equality Now was adopted in name and content by the national networks in Kenya and Malawi.

The strategy of working with men to end violence against women is increasingly getting international recognition. In 2007, MEGEN participated in the Ashoka Changemakers Competition where organisations across the globe showcased their work in combating GBV under the theme of *"No private matter! Ending abuse in intimate and family relationships"*. A total of 243 organisations from 46 countries participated and MEGEN was the only initiative from Africa which made it to the 15 finalists and was finally voted second among the three winners. The Changemakers Award was a cash prize of US\$ 5,000.

Challenge: The issue of male involvement in the feminist movement is a controversial one and opinions remain divided as to whether men can genuinely and sincerely be partners with women in situations in which the men are the beneficiaries of gender oppression and patriarchy. The positions for and against are unyielding but FEMNET's decision to give the approach a chance was supported by the majority. This continues to be an issue in the feminist movement and there are many who still doubt and suspect the motives of male involvement, arguing that those involved are opportunists, capitalizing on the popularity of the approach, encroaching on women's space and taking resources that are allocated to women and appropriating them for male benefit. The challenge is for those men working in this space to prove the sceptics wrong by demonstrating the benefits this approach brings to gender relations and equality for women. However, FEMNET's constitution does not allow men to stand or vote in elections of board members in order to avoid men usurping the decision making roles of the organization in a still patriarchal African society.

Participatory Communication for Advocacy

The anxiety that had preceded the New Millennium and what it would portend for humanity was soon replaced with a new vitality in the global development, economic and political arena. One of the areas of great interest was the Information and Communication Technology (ICT), which had taken the world by storm; and in which most African women had inadequate skills and knowledge. The activities around the World Summit on Information Society (WSIS) dominated FEMNET activities for almost five years. This programming period was a buzz of activities relating to information, communication, technology, advocacy and networking that placed FEMNET at very high levels of visibility and leadership in Africa and global levels.

FEMNET in partnership with like-minded organizations, Association of Progressive Communications (APC) African Women Jicho Communication, the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC) and International Press Service conducted a five day workshop on Participation Communication for Advocacy. The workshop aimed at equipping East African women's organizations with the basic tenets of participatory communication and media techniques; and to establish institutional capacity for use in consolidating a reliable communication network among African women's organizations. This was the first of five workshops proposed in different sub-regions and it covered techniques for print, radio, video and ICTs.

The World Summit on Information Society (WSIS) provided a unique opportunity for key stakeholders to assemble at a high-level gathering to develop a better understanding of the ICT revolution and its impact on the international community. It aimed at bringing together heads of state, executive heads of United Nations agencies, industry leaders, civil society organizations and media representatives in a single high powered event. The Summit was to discuss the roles of various partners in ensuring smooth co-ordination of the practical establishment of the information society around the globe, and use of

ICTs would also be at the heart of its preparations. The anticipated outcome of the Summit was to develop and foster a clear statement of political will and a concrete plan of action for achieving the goals of the Information Society, while reflecting all the different interests at stake.

FEMNET as part of the African civil society was involved in the elaborate WSIS preparatory process involving three preparatory conferences and a two-phase Summit, all spanning a period of three years. The Civil Society Caucus of which FEMNET was a member, met at all these events, organized in diverse countries and cities including Bamako, Geneva and Addis Ababa. The WSIS Gender Caucus was formed during the African Preparatory Meeting in Bamako in 2002. Its mandate was to share information and ideas on strategies to ensure gender equality goals were included and to ensure women's participation in WSIS. The WSIS Gender Caucus included women and men from governments, government agencies, UN agencies, CSOs and the private sector. Additionally an NGO Gender Strategies Working Group (GSWG) was formed as one of the sub-committees of the Civil Society Co-ordinating Group. FEMNET was one of the five global networks that constituted this sub-committee. The aim of GSWG was to share information on the activities around the WSIS and other gender and ICT issues pertaining to women NGO initiatives and to develop women's lobbying positions and strategies around the WSIS, within the CSO and Gender Caucus.

Output: FEMNET received high visibility, recognition and improved its capacity for co-ordinating and facilitating, and providing technical expertise at different levels. These activities happened at the time FEMNET was seeking donor support for its programme; and the happenings greatly added to FEMNET's clout and confidence as the leader of the African women's participation at regional and global levels.

Third FEMNET Programming Conference and General Assembly, 2003

The Third FEMNET Programming Conference and General Assembly should have happened before the new millennium but it never did. Although the programme developed at the Second Programming Conference had been implemented with some encouraging outcomes, the funding situation had been very weak, causing the Secretariat to operate on very tight austerity measures, including seeking consultancy opportunities to keep the network functioning. In the period after the second programming conference, FEMNET had experienced internal political problems that had tainted its image. The follow-up to the implementation of the Beijing and Dakar Platforms of Action had offered many opportunities on which FEMNET could piggy-back networking and capacity building interventions; as a result of which its image had greatly improved. The Executive Director, Muthoni Wanyeki, had done a very good job of advocacy, fund-raising and improving the image of FEMNET at regional and international levels.

The follow-up to the PFA culminated in the Beijing Plus Five Special UN Session and the preparatory process was deeply involving. The same period witnessed the transformation of the OAU to the African Union (AU) and FEMNET was also engrossed in this process for almost five years. Other key engagements of this period included the partnership with GTZ and the Kenya Government in the mainstreaming of gender in the Poverty Reduction Strategy and Programme (PRSP), using Kenya as a case study. It was also in the same period that the FEMNET Programme Men against Gender Based Violence put FEMNET in the global limelight as one of the pioneers of male involvement in the fight for gender equality. This was indeed an era of many happenings, in which FEMNET enjoyed global and regional visibility.

By the year 2002, when FEMNET got the major financial support for its five year core and programme funding, many exciting activities had happened to keep the FEMNET and African women's spirits up. One such event was the

process towards the WSIS already discussed and the process of transformation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to the African Union (AU), in which FEMNET had played pivotal roles. It was therefore on this high note that the third FEMNET Programming Conference was held, in August 2003.

The process of implementation of the Platform for Action, the Beijing Plus Five Review and the preparatory processes that had ensued had continued to refine the women's equality agenda and to give African women more boldness and clarity in dealing with their issues. The spirit of the time was well reflected in the welcome remarks by Honourable Njoki Ndung'u, Nominated Member of Parliament and a leading gender crusader in Kenya, Africa and internationally, when she said:

As a pan-African network, working towards African women's development, equality and other human rights, which was set up in the late eighties, obviously FEMNET-like the African women's movement in general - has gone through many ups and downs. That we are here today, representing African women's organizations in every sector and from every part of the continent is a testament towards the determination of African feminists and gender activists to keep our movement and our movement's organizations not only alive, but changing and growing.

The boldness with which the FEMNET agenda for the future was determined was exemplified by the Conference theme, which was *The African Feminist and Gender Agendas: What Gains, What Losses*. The highlight of this Conference was the opening of the debate on the issue of African women feminism, a topic that many considered sensitive and divisive, even among women. The opening address by Hon. Njoki Ndung'u quoted earlier challenged African

women and men to make time to constructively examine what we have done so far. She re-tracked the road from the approach of women in development to gender and development, and the gains that were accrued from both. She suggested that it was time to critically interrogate the weaknesses of the gender and development approach, and see whether another shift was in order. She suggested that it was time to analyze and see what had been lost and what had been gained through the approach. She recounted some of the gains, for example that African women have moved from a focus on micro to macro level economic advocacy, increased women's political participation, the right to 50% representation in the AU's Commission, the advocacy process around the AU process, the inclusion of women in the peace negotiations in a number of countries and the gains around recognition of sexually based crimes against humanity and the reproductive health rights. The critical questions were, where do we go from here; the linkages between the work we do at different levels; how do we make better use of the regional women's networks and build the African women's movement?

Ever since the founding of FEMNET, Sara Longwe has been the conceptual expert, critical thinker and leader. It was she who gave the Programming Conference the key to understanding the feminist and gender agenda. In her speech during the opening session she noted,

the work of FEMNET has mainly been concerned with pursuance of acceptance of feminism in the gender and development approach in the African context, as part of the strategy for achieving full advancement of women (i.e. empowerment). Here feminism is defined and understood by the author as an ideology of belief in gender equality between women and men with a commitment and political will to take action in order to end gender discrimination and women's oppression.

Sara Longwe also summarized that the contemporary literature on gender discourse often categorizes feminists according to other social ideologies they

subscribe to such as:

- **Liberal feminist** – believer of women's emancipation through reforms of rules/ regulations.
- **Marxist feminist** – believer in the Karl Marx ideology of ending domination of the lower class by the bourgeoisie, so women's freedom is linked to workers' control of the means of production through a revolt.
- **Socialist feminist** – believer in social revolution for equality that includes women as activists alongside men.
- **Radical feminists** – strong believers in feminists distancing themselves from men and creating their own relationships, because they believe that men are bent on oppression and control women each time they are allowed into the women's environment or their initiatives.

Facts show that persons who are genuine feminists tend to conduct themselves according to their beliefs on gender equality between women and men; and they have high political zeal to the elimination of any forms of women's oppression. For instance, in any male dominated (patriarchal) setting, such a feminist will always fight and speak out against women's oppression, even at the expense of her personal gain such as a job promotion or friendship. The flip side of genuine feminists are the persons that I refer to as 'gender technocrats', who lead a life contrary to the feminist principles they profess to believe in. Such persons sometimes may pose as 'gender specialists/ experts'. For instance a seemingly 'gender aware person' chooses to continue to live in an abusive marriage/ relationship (e.g. as a battered wife/mistress) or a 'gender expert' distances herself from addressing gender issues in her professional work for fear of losing a job/promotion and therefore resorts to watering down the feminist agenda.

In view of the given purpose of FEMNET, the definition of feminism and the distinction between a genuine feminist and a gender technocrat, outlined in the tables are examples of some gains and losses with regard to pursuance of feminist and gender agendas. The gains and losses are compared between some of the gains and losses of FEMNET as an institution on one hand and African women on the other since the mid-80s.

SOME OF THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF FEMNET SINCE ITS INCEPTION IN 1988

1. Interface role

This has been exemplified during the UN and AU consultative processes, e.g.

- The African regional focal point in the Dakar/ Beijing Platforms for Action (1994-95)
- One of the convenors of the African women's caucus, during the CSW in New York (from 1996) and one of two African NGOs invited to the commemoration of NGO CSW-Geneva (2003)
- Representative on discussion panels on whether or not to have the Beijing+10 conference proposed by the New York and Geneva NGO-CSW Committees (2003)
- Collaboration with the ECA to disseminate the Beijing+10 evaluation tool (2003)
- African representative on the WSIS Bureau (2003)
- One of the lobbyists at AU for gender mainstreaming (Addis Ababa, Tripoli, Dakar, Durban, Maputo, etc.)

2. Vanguard role

- Member of the generic international CSOs based on its gender & feminist interests: e.g. Conference on NGOs (CONGO), CIVICUS, Civil Society Advisory Committee of Commonwealth Foundation, ICAE, APC, AMARC, ASF, etc.
- Multiplies: French and English publications and their circulation; receipt and disseminations of email messages concerning women's issues
- Facilitates online discussions on African Women's Rights Protocol and NEPAD.

3. Significances for African Women

- Acceptance of the gender concept
- Development of national gender policies/strategic plans after agitation;
- The regional/global meetings acted as a catalyst to influence feminist language in governments' international agreements.

AU summits agreed to:

- Establish gender parity of commissioners (Durban, 2002);
- Adopt the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (July 2003);
- Enhance African Women's Committee for Peace and Development (AWCPD) to be the AU Women's Committee (AUWC), an advisory body to the AUC Chairperson on Gender and Development issues (Maputo, 2004);
- Establish a regional gender policy (2008);
- Enhance/upgrade the AU Gender Unit (2008).

The Programming Conference discussed African women's civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights; the rights to development, peace, and reproductive rights; specifically analyzing the trends, priorities and strategies that have been used in different sub-regions. Four technical papers were presented and they formed the basis for group discussion on areas where the future FEMNET programme should focus. The group discussions were structured to respond to the question of approaches, agendas and programmes, structures, allies and strategies for bridging the gaps with the grassroots women's movements. The Programming Conference (PC) also received a report of the external evaluation of FEMNET - this had been carried out in the period preceding the PC, to inform the PC in its decision making process.

Outputs:

- The third PC Recommendations affirmed the findings of the external evaluation and confirmed that FEMNET was on track in pursuance of its mandate. This guided the FEMNET Board and Secretariat in the formulation of future programmes, and in managing the Network.
- The PC Report made very good reading.

Election of Francophone Chair: A Major Turning Point

The General Assembly that followed the Programming Conference was a major turning point. In nearly two decades of FEMNET existence, the leadership of FEMNET had remained in the Anglophone (Eastern and Southern Africa) region. This had been a major issue of contention among Francophone members and it reared its ugly head many times, threatening to disrupt the African women's unity. The Dakar Conference, critical African Women's Caucus sessions at the CSW in New York, and even past FEMNET PCs and GAs had experienced tensions and divisions because of this issue. The GA of 2003 was an opportunity to change that as it was then mandatory for the chair to move either to the central, northern or western sub-regions, all of which were predominantly French speaking. The election of Mama Koite Doumbia as the

fourth FEMNET Chairperson was a historic event that marked the maturity of FEMNET to a women's network with which African women from the five sub-regions could relate.

The FEMNET GA elected Mama Koite Doumbia - the first Francophone Chairperson. This was a turning point as it completed the process of making FEMNET a truly bilingual network and also bridged a gap that existed for two decades since the foundation of FEMNET in 1988.

In Mama Koite's words: I started going to New York in 1998 it was my first visit to New York. I started participating in the meetings of the African Women's Caucus like other African women with CSW. In 2003, Muthoni, who was at that time the Executive Director of FEMNET, gave us invitation letters to attend the FEMNET General Assembly. When I went back to my country, I submitted the invitation letter to my organization. As it had to pay a fee, my organization said that even if it was a noble cause, it was not in a position to sponsor my participation. So I wrote to FEMNET thanking them for the invitation. At the last minute, I received a message from the Director who was advising us that a number of countries had been sponsored, including Mali. That's how I attended the 2003 FEMNET GA.

When I came to FEMNET, I was also anxious because I had never worked with Anglophones. With all that we say about each other, I was asking myself, 'Am I really going to succeed?' It's true that we have the same issues but we don't have the same culture. We don't have the same type of education, the same environment, the same society, the same way of life, the same way of understanding things. You know, we didn't have the same way of understanding issues. And that's normal because we don't come from the same region. We don't have the same education and experiences.

Challenge: One of the greatest challenges that FEMNET has faced in her close to thirty years' lifetime is in the membership and representation. Ideally, Focal Points within the sub-regions should know each other and network at that level. In the period leading to the PC and GA, they are supposed to consult and propose candidates for election. These names are supposed to be submitted to the Secretariat ahead of the GA. However, this hardly ever happens and the representatives tend to consult only when they are at the PC. This poses a great danger as it opens up the possibility of persons who have no knowledge of the Network, and even somebody who does not subscribe to the ideals of the Network, getting elected into the chair. Mama Koite could have been that person, because in her testimony she did not know FEMNET, and women in her sub-region did not necessarily know her. During that election, the participants from the other sub-regions were very nervous about what was happening, but the control was in the hands of the Western and Central Sub-regions (there were no representatives from the North), the position of the chair revolved in the sub-regions. We are very glad that she turned out to be a great African woman leader!

From OAU to AU and NEPAD

The transformation of the OAU to the AU, is one of the processes that impacted FEMNET in very significant ways. The AU process involved FEMNET and other African Regional Networks in a process of advocacy, lobby and technical intervention which resulted in the review, discussions, recommendations and strategies for intervention to ensure the entrenchment of a gender perspective in all the institutions and instruments of the AU; including:

- Peace and Security Commission (PSC)
- The Pan African Parliament (PAP)
- Economic and Social Council (ECOSOCC)
- The New Partnership For Africa's Development (NEPAD)

- Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Protocol)
- Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Cooperation in Africa (CSSDCA)

FEMNET's activities around the AU spanned a period of nearly three years in which together with other women's Networks, they undertook a diversity of advocacy activities to ensure that the institutions and instruments of the AU were gender responsive. In addition to the advocacy undertaken around the key AU Meetings and functions held around the Durban Declaration (2002), the Dakar Strategy (2003) and the Maputo Declaration (2003), the consultations around these events analyzed, recommended and lobbied gender mainstreaming in the different instruments and structures of the AU. In addition to these consultations, FEMNET organized a regional strategy meeting which was attended by African women networks and organizations. The regional consultation brought together representatives of African women's networks; international NGOs; media; prominent African women, including Graça Machel, the high profile gender crusader, President of the Community Development Foundation of Mozambique and former First Lady of Mozambique; scholars; parliamentarians; staff of the AU and UN; scholars and eminent persons from all regions of Africa. The meeting resulted in a detailed analysis of the gender responsiveness of the instruments, structures and programmes of the AU. Further, the meeting explored the opportunities, entry points and developed strategies for African women's inclusion and participation. Finally the meeting proposed an action plan based on the mandates, specialization and positioning of the different organizations and networks.

FEMNET also organized a Regional Training Workshop for African Women's Organizations in September 2004. The objective of this workshop was about enabling African women to use international law and policy for development, equality and other human rights through advocacy at regional level. The workshop aimed specifically at raising awareness of the relevance of the AU,

within the African women's movement and to build their capacity for advocacy within the AU and its specialized mechanism. This workshop specifically focused on the AU and its mechanisms; Gender Gaps in the AU, opportunities for working with the Pan African Parliament and parliaments for the advancement of African women's rights; building strategic alliances between women's organizations and the civil society organizations in Africa to advance women's rights and also developed plans of action at sub-regional networks and national NGO levels.

A key development was the formation of a network for lobbying and campaign with the AU Commission by AU member states to ratify the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa. The network known as Solidarity for African Women's Rights (SOAWR) was established by FEMNET and a number of other regional networks, including CREDO for Freedom of Expression and Associated Rights, Equality Now, Oxfam Great Britain, Fahamu, WiLDAF and other regional networks.

Outputs:

The Reports of the Regional Consultation and Training are among the most comprehensive resources on the AU, its instruments, structures, limitations, suggestions for gender mainstreaming and details of the women's organizations, experts and networks that are involved in advocacy for African women's rights.

A publication titled 'Gender Mainstreaming within the African Union (AU): A Proposed Framework for Action' was published by FEMNET, based on the activities undertaken by the African Women's Movement in the advocacy and capacity building process.

Challenge: The networking role that FEMNET was increasingly expected to play with the visibility it had received greatly increased the demands on the Secretariat. FEMNET received at least 20 requests for contacts, information, assistance, and direct involvement in the programmes and projects of other African NGOs, including African women's NGOs. Given the relatively small professional capacity at the regional secretariat, this placed a demand on FEMNET's time that was hard to meet, even when some pressure was relieved by Board members who were willing to travel, make presentations, assist with lobbying and other interventions. The need to expand FEMNET's professional capacity at the regional secretariat remained a challenge, even after the hiring of a programme manager to deputize for the executive director. In the meantime, FEMNET continued to benefit from its internship programme, with several interns serving with FEMNET's core, advocacy and communications programmes.

Theme on the Girl Child at the 51st Session of the CSW

The 51st Session of the UN CSW was special in that it focused on the PFA Critical Area on the Girl Child. The theme of the session was '*The elimination of all forms of discrimination against the girl child*'. More than 200 young people attended the Session to speak about issues ranging from sexual violence, prostitution, reproductive health rights, trafficking of women and girls, education, forced and early marriage and labour. Other topics included HIV/AIDS as it affects women and girls, gender discrimination, female genital mutilation, the experience of girls in conflict and post conflict situations, as well as the status of Palestinian women. The opening address was made by Quilinta Nepaulus, a 17-year old South African girl, who reminded the world that in spite of progress made towards women's empowerment, violence against the girl child continued unabated. Once again FEMNET was at the helm of the preparatory and facilitation initiatives at regional level and at the African Women's Caucus.

The Session reviewed the progress made in the implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 of October 2000. This resolution was the first of its kind to address the issues of women and girls in armed conflict, acknowledging that women should be actively involved in the maintenance and the promotion of peace and security. The implementation of Resolution 1325 was replete with many challenges, among them the lack of knowledge and awareness of the Resolution and lack of political will by states in implementing the agreed commitments. Additionally, relevant actors lacked resources both human and financial that are needed to enhance women's capacities and skills to enable them engage effectively in the peace processes.

The conclusions of the 2007 Session included a set of recommendations for governments, intergovernmental bodies and other civil society institutions that are to be implemented at all levels. FEMNET devoted one issue of *Our Rights* in January-June, 2007 to the 51st CSW Session on issues of the African Girl Child.



Njoki Wainaina reminisces:

I once studied a course on NGO management and one of the theories I learned was about the life of a typical NGO. It suggested that every NGO that survives the test of time (many die in infancy, childhood or teenage) goes through periods of a rock bottom experience, then climbs gradually and reaches a pinnacle of success. They may level out for a little while and then go gliding down the hill again until they hit rock bottom and once again start the arduous climb up. The period between the FEMNET Third and Fourth Conferences were characterized by the plateau and the fast glide. As FEMNET was busy responding to the myriads of demands, needs and pressures that came with the benefits of solid funding, visibility, involvement and commitment to

its goals, there were areas of engagement that were suffering, one of which was the building of team work at the Secretariat and the other was the maintenance of relationships between the staff and the Board. The other major change of the period was the exiting of the Executive Director, Muthoni Wanyeki, who felt the need to change careers after successfully bringing FEMNET and its programme to a level of stability especially regarding its funding. The Programme Manager, Therese Niyondiko, took up the Executive Director's position in an acting capacity. It was in this context that the Fourth Programming Conference on Women was held. The Executive Director who was hired turned out to be the wrong choice and had to be relieved of her responsibilities by the end of her probation period. In the brief period of her engagement, FEMNET had further accelerated the glide down the hill.

Fourth Programming Conference and General Assembly, 2007

A major positive development was the continued fundraising activities around the proposal on the PC and GA. The proposal was circulated to our partners including the Ford Foundation, HBF, DANIDA, CTA, CIDA-GESP and Francophonie and Oxfam-NOVIB to mobilize resources. However, this was challenging since the policy of most donors does not support core institutional costs per se. Fortunately, by September 2007, when the fourth PC and GA was held, FEMNET received tremendous support from Oxfam-NOVIB. The PC and GA brought together over sixty FEMNET members and partners from all over Africa to assess the gains and losses with respect to African women's development, equality and other human rights and strategize on how FEMNET can and should respond to these issues over a three year time period. As with previous PCs, the fourth PC was also meant to review FEMNET's governance structure and management performance and to elect new Board members to represent their sub-regions on FEMNET's Executive Board and Board of Trustees.

In spite of the challenges, with Sida support, FEMNET was able to implement several programmes and projects as planned. The decision to expand FEMNET's professional capacity at the Regional Secretariat equipped FEMNET with a nucleus of professional staff whose impact was felt in the systematization of FEMNET's work. FEMNET maintained its commitment to mentor young people in the women's movement and continued to engage interns to work in FEMNET's core, advocacy and communications programmes and in the period from March 2008 to May 2009, FEMNET hosted a bilateral associate expert from Sida, Åsa Eriksson, who left a lasting legacy with her work with the Men For Gender Equality Now (MEGEN) programme.

The period of turbulent resulted in the Programming Conference being perhaps the least inspiring in the history of FEMNET. The spirit of gloom that had afflicted the Secretariat permeated the Conference. The Programme took the set format of official opening, interactive presentations and group discussions. The theme of the conference was *'Enhancing African Women's Leadership'* and the key themes of the presentations were: rights to development and peace, reproductive and sexual rights, economic and cultural rights and civil and political rights. The presenters were selected from the Secretariat and four sub-regions.

Outputs:

- The PC recommended a continuation of the priorities of the last programme with additional thematic focus on sexual and reproductive health rights, including HIV/AIDS and gender based violence, which had been introduced in the previous programme.
- The General Assembly elected a new Board in which Mama Koite Doumbia was re-elected Chairperson. Fatma Alloo retained her position as Secretary, Elsie Muhimuzi was elected Treasurer. The sub-regions elected members to the Board and the Board of Trustees to complete the combined Board of 15 persons, of which the immediate past chairperson and the executive director were *ex officio*.

FEMNET IN THE WORDS OF SOME FORMER EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS AND QUOTES BY STAFF

Lynn Muthoni Wanyeki, FEMNET Executive Director (1999-2006)

'I had just landed from abroad in 1998 and there was the urge to work with women, I was bilingual. FEMNET advertised for the position, at the time I was applying for the executive director's position. I was 27 years' old. FEMNET at that time was marred by controversy and being young I wanted to change the whole system.

When I first got into FEMNET, it was a problem because at that time I was 27 years' old and the requirement was 30 years and above. My age was of concern but they later gave me a chance to prove that it's not the age that matters. I am a feminist and have a legal background - this is what kept me going while at FEMNET.



At the time, FEMNET had only one functional programme that is communication, with one programme officer and a few support staff members. FEMNET had serious financial problems; there was a paucity of funds to sustain all our activities which led to lack of enough staff. Another problem was the political issues at FEMNET.

The African women face a lot of challenges: poverty, lack of social policies, lack of dignity/autonomy/choice for women that range from violence against women, sexual violence and lack of education.

I am a strong believer in the saying "money follows good works", for us at FEMNET we had to work hard and prove that our efforts were worth being sponsored. FEMNET was a regional mechanism

for the African women and their response to the African Union Protocol made a mark. For example, our efforts were demonstrated in the African Union support, with the help of the African Women Caucus and the African Women Development Trust, we were able to get our first donor who was Sida. The work at the African Union led to our second donor, the African Trust Fund.

I derive the passion from being a woman and the urge to make the world a better place. The African women's movement has diversified from economic empowerment and review of traditional practices to other areas of empowerment, due to the efforts of FEMNET. Regional mechanism was the focus of the FEMNET foundation to help women fight for their rights and empower them. I recollect the lovely and patient staff members, especially the support staff. Mary Wandia was an inspiration to me, can't forget her, she may have left before I came in to FEMNET but she was my inspiration at FEMNET.

The African Union work done by FEMNET - I feel we played a big role in pushing for the AU Protocol and made an impact on African women, even though we did it together with other players in the industry.

Working with FEMNET in the secretariat gave me a chance to meet with other member groups in different parts of Africa. It gave me a chance to exchange my culture with different African cultures during functions organized by FEMNET, for example I have good memories of the West African women in their vitenges and head gears.

I still fight for women's rights in Africa, by ensuring they are empowered. For example, I was with the African Feminist Forum until 2009, I was also the Global Women Fund advisor, not to mention that at the Kenya Human Rights Commission, we have a gender policy which has given me a chance to work with the women, especially on women and land reforms. A lot needs to be done on the relation between customary law, traditional and civil laws, women and economic planning and gender implications on tax laws.'

Norah Matovu, FEMNET Executive Director (2008-2011)

I joined the FEMNET Secretariat as the Executive Director in July 2008. I have since been inspired by the enormous and significant contributions of African women in transforming their lives, their status, their communities and the politics of the entire continent in the last twenty years. In 1988, FEMNET was basically one of the few regional networks for women organizations. By 2008 many more have been established mainly focusing on specific themes like leadership, women's and girls' education, women's and girls' health, sexual and reproductive rights and the environment to mention a few. In addition FEMNET membership which started with about twenty member organizations and a few individuals, by end of 2008 it had over 255 member organizations and about 70 individual members spread out in 37 countries in Africa.

With two decades of mobilizing, movement building and organizing around African women's rights we have a strong network of women organizations and individual activists in over 37 countries in Africa. Using our experience, resourceful network and influence in the region, FEMNET is determined to reach out to women in all the 53 countries by 2010. In every country there is some form of network of women organizations, research group or activists that we have interacted with through lobbying and advocacy work at the regional or international levels. These provide the entry points for building trust and confidence and to facilitate networking and partnerships that will benefit women in each of the countries in Africa.



It is evident that African women generally, and the membership, appreciate the catalytic role that FEMNET continues to play to amplify the voices and actions of African women, to influence critical decision making processes and create linkages and partnerships that enable a wider outreach, increased visibility and enhanced movement building efforts as African women organizations unite towards a common agenda.





MEMORABLE QUOTES BY STAFF

What inspires me is my commitment for my work and gaining more experience on women issues which I know benefits me and my family I want to see more women in parliament. **Grace Wambui**

My experience has been great, I have learnt to appreciate that we all have something to say on GBV based on our individual upbringing. The stories from the men who at one particular point practiced GBV and have now stopped, resonates in my heart. **Kennedy Otina**

I envisage a FEMNET with membership in all African countries, a FEMNET that has positively impacted on African women. I also want to see more African countries ratify and implement the AU protocol on women's rights. **Carlyn Hambuba**

The fact that all the staff members at the Secretariat work together as a team with so much understanding inspires me greatly. I feel so much at home when I spend the five working days in the office with them. Also, to know that there are many people out there, especially women, who benefit from the work that FEMNET does whether alone or in partnership with other organizations. **Rose Akinyi**

FEMNET has opened my eyes to great opportunities and I have learnt so many things relating to women's rights and feminism. FEMNET moving to her own offices (The African Women Power Centre) is a dream I hold dearly and pray that it comes to pass. **Rachel Kagoiya**

Every day I feel obliged to do something or make an important input into processes that will ensure a better life for all men and women - FEMNET made me understand why women suffer discrimination and the draconian practices that I believe my late mother suffered from before and after marriage. I want this to change. **Martin Odera**

When I look at the pace of FEMNET's progress over the last seven years that I have been serving FEMNET, I wonder where this organization will be in the seven years to come. **Jean Simbayobewe**

Despite commitments by government, and despite decades of research, advocacy, capacity building and so on by and other women's rights organizations and activists - from the national to global, it can be discouraging to see that only the surface has been scratched. We should however take solace in the understanding that were it not for these selfless sacrifices and back-breaking work, the lot of African women would have been worse. To all FEMNET members, staff, partners, friends, gender activists young and old, I doff my hat! **Roselynn Musa**

FEMNET is an important part of the African women's movement. We must ensure that African women's rights organizations and activists continue to thrive, continue to speak truth to power, and never shy away from the difficult conversations. Change will come. We must never tire. **Naisola Likimani**

It is powerful to know that I have been part of a movement that is led and driven by African women to fulfill the mandate of delivering for those who hold up half the African sky and make up half of the African earth - African Women! **Nebila Abdulmelik**

My dream for FEMNET is that it will be a self-sustaining organization that will not depend on donors. Then we can make changes in a concerted way in women's lives. **Mary Thiang'au**



What inspires me is how FEMNET staff work in harmony and without conflict thus enabling them to work on promoting women's rights in Africa. **Margaret Ndung'u**

List of FEMNET Staff over the years...

Department	Staff
Administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Joyce Kang'ethe, Secretary (1991 – 1996) - Fridah Omulama, Personal Assistant to the Director (1994 – 1998) - Rose Akinyi, Executive Office Manager (1995 - to date) - Grace Wambui, Receptionist (1997 – to date) - Margaret Ndung'u, Office Assistant (2000 - to date) - Richard Mutahi, Driver (1995 - 1997) - Mary Mugane, Office Driver (2000 – to date)
Advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sarah Macharia, Gender Programme Officer (1995 – 1997) - Mary Wandia, Advocacy Officer (2002 – 2005) - Roselynn Musa, Advocacy Programme Officer (2005 - 2008) - Naisola Likimani, Head of Advocacy (2009 – to date)
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Joseph Igbiniedion, Legal & Communication Officer (1997 – 2001) - Alice Munyua, Communication Officer (2001 – 2003) - Christine Butegwa, Communication Officer (2004 - 2007) - Carlyn Hambuba, Head of Communication (2008 – 2012) - Mary Wandia, Documentalist (1999 - 2002) - Rachel Kagoiya, Information Manager (2006 – to date) - Agnes Mubima, Bilingual Secretary (2000) - Elvire Chumbow, Bilingual Translator (2000 – 2005) - Jean Simbayobewe, Bilingual Translator (2005 – to date)
Executive Director	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Joyce Mangvwat (1994 - 1995) - Safiatu Singhateh (1995 - 1997) - Juliette Anne Dwarzark – Acting Director (1997 - 1998) - Lynn Muthoni Wanyeki (1999 – 2006) - Maty Diaw (September 2006 – February 2007) - Therese Niyondiko - Acting Director - (2007 – 2008) - Norah Matovu Winyi (2008 – 2011) - Dinah Musindarwezo (2011 – to date)
Finance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Jamleck Kimemia, Assistant Accountant (1995-1997) - Joyce Karimi Gatangi, Finance Administrator (2000 – 2001) - Bhajan Plahe Bhanotl, Finance Administrator (2002 to 2003) - Martin Odera, Finance Manager (2004 – to date) - Mary Thiang'au, Finance Officer (1999 – to date)
Programme Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Therese Niyondiko (2005 – 2007) - Aicha Tamboura Diawara (March – August 2009) - Roselynn Musa (2011 – to date)

HOW HAS FEMNET BENEFITED HER MEMBERS, BOTH PERSONALLY AND PROFESSIONALLY?

GROOTS International has benefited enormously after our former Chairlady's, Augustine Quashigah's, first encounter with FEMNET. We have intensified our empowerment of women through workshops and seminars. The outcome has found women in leading roles all over the country. With the new leadership, Regina Degadjor is leaving no stone unturned by making sure outcomes of seminars/workshops are well implemented - knowledge is power but applied knowledge is the key to success. Every woman counts. With dedication, God's favour and direction, we in FEMNET will be the change agent for the women of Africa. Asante sana and keep up the good work.

Regina Degadjor, Chairlady, GROOTS International - Ghana

I had the opportunity to serve on the Executive Board of Directors of FEMNET from 2003 to 2006 and that led me to join the FEMNET team and gain from the dynamic energy generated by FEMNET and its members, as well as to apply my knowledge and skills within a growing institution. I consider a team-oriented environment crucial to individual and collective success. One of my privileges during this period was the setting up of the Focal Points of FEMNET in the Indian Ocean Islands – this facilitated the islands in building a strong relationship with FEMNET and gain from its expertise through its publications and regular communications. FEMNET has played, and continues to play, its role as a 'shepherd' who brings together and leads women and their organizations in Africa.

Homa Mungapen, Bahá'í Faith - Seychelles

Since becoming a member, I have benefited immensely by being able to relate to issues of women rights not only from a national level but also regional and global levels inspired by resource materials and newsletters from FEMNET. I have also attended some regional and global meetings which have expanded my horizons and channelled my passion for the defence of women's human rights, through constructive networking, community organizing and also in creating tools to engage government to implement policies to eliminate violence against women e.g. our organization is in the fore front of mobilizing other CSOs, CBOs, and other

stakeholders to contribute to the national discussion and input into the Beyond 2015 campaign: THE WORLD WE WANT. *Bose Ironsi – Nigeria*

I have been a member of FEMNET as an organizer and later joined as an individual member. FEMNET has been a source of information on various aspects concerning women's rights. She has also given me exposure to what women are engaged with in the African region. I attended the Sixth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VI) in Belem, Brazil in 2009 – specifically the youth and adult learning workshops. *Sophie Nguji –Kenya*

As a member of FEMNET, the League of Women for Education (LIFE-Cameroon) has benefited from the reinforcement of capacity of its members through training based on the national plan through the focal point of FEMNET- Cameroon, today known as WANET, as well as at regional level. It has also benefited from the experiences of other women from the region through the communication that FEMNET continues to send our way. It has also enabled our organization to see how women can organize themselves in order to fight for their cause. *Valentine Makou Kapoko, Executive Secretary, LIFE-Cameroon*

WANET, formerly known as FEMNET Cameroon, has greatly benefited from FEMNET membership in the following ways:

- At advocacy level:- WANET has contributed to fast-tracking the process of ratifying the African Union Protocol on the Rights of Women in Cameroon, working closely with the Ministry for the Advancement of Women and Family (MINPROFF). WANET has also contributed to the Campaign for Accelerated Reduction of Maternal Mortality in Africa (CARMMA) which has benefited Cameroonian children aged 0-5 years who have received free anti-malaria care, mosquito nets and a free vaccination program for those children against poliomyelitis where they also received vitamin A.
- Communication:- Thanks to FEMNET's support, a database on Cameroon CSOs was established. The network has also benefited from the experiences of other women and women's CSOs in the Africa region through the information that FEMNET continuously shares in its publications via the Journal or electronic messages.
- Capacity building:- WANET has benefited from FEMNET's expertise on several trainings both at national and regional levels, which helped in capacity building among its member organisations through debriefings.

- In terms of visibility:- As FEMNET Focal point in Cameroon, the WANET network has benefited from its representation at national level ; it has also hosted, through FEMNET, the regional consultation meeting on aid effectiveness prior to the High Level Forum IV.
- In the area of financial support:- WANET has benefited from FEMNET's financial support in the amount of USD 2,000 in order to hold its General Assembly in May 2009, among other supports.
- At personal level:- FEMNET has made us true leaders. *Valentine Makou Kapoko, Coordinator, FEMNET Focal Point in Cameroon*

We are honoured to say briefly how we have benefited from FEMNET as members: FEMNET is an organisation which strengthens capacity building for women's in communication. It is an administratively well organized organisation. We have discovered a very important secret in FEMNET since it has already made many publications. It has achieved so many capacity building activities among several national, international women's organisations.... FEMNET is a very credible, visible organisation.... *Madame Bibyshe Takubusoga Mundjo, Actions pour la Réinsertion Sociale de la Femme « A.R.S.F. »*

My professional life has been fundamentally shaped by FEMNET. I am one of the pioneer gender trainers trained by FEMNET in 1993. Thereafter I was given several assignments to conduct training on behalf of FEMNET. The work became quite substantial that I eventually decided to become a full time consultant on gender issues. As they say, the rest is history. The bold decision saw me expand my horizons to other areas of consultancy which have sustained me for the last 20 years working as an international consultant with NGOs, UN organisations and governments. This has seen me travel the globe to as far places as Azerbaijan, Georgia, USA, United Kingdom, Darfur Sudan, Namibia, Swaziland, Ethiopia, Somaliland and many more. Having chosen this path, I eventually took a Master of Arts degree in Gender and Development Studies at Kenyatta University and was the first graduate of the Department in 2010. Since January 2012, I have also been a part time lecturer at the same department. I have also immensely benefited from the FEMNET Resource Centre in doing my academic and consultancy work. Needless to say, the gender work has been of immense personal benefit at the family and inter-personal level where I practice what I preach. *Dr. Okumba Miruka (Kenya)*

A NARRATION BY A WOMEN'S RIGHTS ACTIVIST:

Roselynn Musa, Programmes Manager, FEMNET

How did you become an activist for women's rights and human rights in general?

Born into a family with fewer boys than girls and where the boys were hardly involved in house work whatsoever, I was sensitive to the unfairness in gender roles at an early age and hated it with a passion.



This was compounded by my growing up in a society where girls' education was not seen as important, but I was fortunate to have parents who were educated and thought otherwise. My parents seemed to have a lot of confidence in me and had no uncertainties about sending me to school hundreds of miles away from home and the pampering of family members, and amidst a culture I had never been exposed to. Also in high school, as a prefect, I frequently tutored junior students by offering my time before and after school. Despite some initial hiccups and nervousness over the challenge of this new exposure, my passion for accomplishment drives me to overcome any obstacle and achieve success in every area I venture. Through this I gained a great deal of knowledge and life experience, and the ability to deal with difficult situations and to live alone in another country. I owe much of my competency in college to that aspect of my life.

Motivated by that early experience, I have remained strongly committed and I

derive great satisfaction from encouraging girls, not only to go to school, but to know that they can achieve whatever they put their minds to. In school, I used to challenge the notion of boys studying technical drawing and the girls needle work and domestic science - but no one listened to me. However, in reminiscence, I think it is an indication of the innate passion that has continuously given me the power to propel social change in an often unjust society.

My joining FEMNET has enabled me to put into practice my skills; and to motivate and inspire the same thirst for knowledge that was instilled in me through the kind of education I received growing up.

Education has always been an important aspect of my life. While in high school I took what to me then were interesting courses. I enjoyed the arts and was involved in many extra-curricular activities such as drama, general knowledge and debating. I was an active member of several clubs and societies, such as debating and drama where I served as either treasurer or vice president. The position of president was a reserve for the male students and I resented that. This exposed me to discussions on topics around gender equality and unfairness. Some of these activities often involved travel to other parts of the country. Despite the time consuming practices for rehearsal and practice, I was able to maintain an excellent grade.

How did you come to know about FEMNET?

I worked at BAOBAB for Women's Rights before joining FEMNET. BAOBAB had employed me as a Research Officer for a year. You will agree with me that a year is not a long time, so when my contract was about to end I was getting nervous and started responding to job adverts. By the time the one year lapsed my employers had not only renewed my contract, but had offered me a position as Programme Officer. I was excited because I really enjoyed working at BAOBAB. Three months into my new position I received a letter of invitation to an interview from FEMNET. At this time I had forgotten that I had applied

and what position I had responded to their call for applications. I rummaged through my old files and went for the interview and was eventually offered the position of Advocacy Officer. Leaving BAOBAB was a painful decision for me to make, but my bosses and colleagues were very supportive and understanding of the opportunities that FEMNET presented. I had never had a chance to work out of my country before, and therefore I was really excited and couldn't wait to start my work.

There is no doubt that both higher education and work experience are important for employability. Many students want to go to university and graduate with a degree which can fill their resume. However I believe that passion and work experience have greater value than a degree. These factors contributed to me gravitating towards FEMNET. The staff was welcoming and very approachable. Each of them showed a keen interest in me always taking me under their wing to teach me about the various tasks, and assisted me to settle in effortlessly.

What motivates you to do the work that you do because you clearly have a passion?

Throughout my educational career my ears have always pricked up at the mention of words like 'women', 'rights' and 'justice'. As mentioned above, parts of my education and pastimes have been a means to exploring the subject of women in society. Naturally when the time to choose a thesis project came, I made sure that I did mine on women's rights.

Added to this is my insatiable appetite for learning. For example, a couple of years ago, I realized that I could use skills of a second language, French, both to enhance my work and also for personal interests. This has been intensified by

my love for facilitation and my drive to serve and make a difference right here on my own continent. But it is important to remember that skills are only of benefit if you put them to use to help humanity.

When I started my first job in a women's rights organization in Nigeria I knew without a doubt that I had chosen the right path. It felt like my natural habitat. My work has never felt like unwarranted labour, but rather an opportunity to learn and serve.

“
...the maxim for us is 'Forward Ever and Backward Never'. This will be the best way to pay tribute to our mentors, and build on the legacy they have passed to us
”

The FEMNET journey is very much a movement of women trying to organize and effect change for betterment of life. Twenty three years after FEMNET was formed, in your opinion has there been a change or improvement regarding women's empowerment in Africa? Do you feel that this journey is worth it?

If my response to this question was 'no' I am sure you would have followed it with one asking me what I am still doing at FEMNET. The truth is that I believe the journey has been worth every inch of the way. Like most journeys it has been long and hazardous. Sometimes we get a flat tyre or even develop engine problems. And like they say, nothing good comes easy, otherwise we will not attach any value to it. We definitely still have a long way to go. What we have achieved so far is like scratching the surface if we consider how much more we need to do to get to the destination we are headed. So for me each step has been worth the pain, even if we are not seeing as much progress as we would have wished, each step is moving us nearer to our goal as we are slowly inching

towards it. So the maxim for us is 'Forward Ever and Backward Never'. This will be the best way to pay tribute to our mentors, and build on the legacy they have passed to us.

When you reflect on your life, what would you say are some of the major achievements you have made personally and professionally?

Muthoni Wanyeki was the director when I joined FEMNET in 2005. She is someone who, I can say without fear of contradiction is feminist to the core. Muthoni's method of leadership, as it was with my bosses at BAOBAB, was such that she lets you be your own person. This is exemplary. The confidence they had bestowed in me provided me with the opportunities and practical experiences that would aid me tremendously in pursuing my dreams, and reveal paths I might otherwise never have discovered.

My joining BAOBAB and FEMNET was by design. Prior to working in an organization for women's rights I had a much skewed view of what was women's rights. I was soon to discover that the more I became engaged, instead of becoming bored and tired, I became more energized and active. I was stimulated to think of the world and see it with a different focus - the women's lens as we say in women's rights parlance. Suddenly, I was thinking of everything in this fashion.

It turned out to be the fulfillment of my dream. It enabled me to work in an environment with people who share similar interests, providing me with an opportunity to contribute to a belief and ideology that reached a broad audience of people who subscribed to it, and believed in it no matter whose ox is gored!

In the long run, I want to be even more versed in the issues that affect women negatively and what we can do to address them. One step I have taken to achieve this is to contribute to research and knowledge dissemination in the areas of women's rights and gender equality. My work with the African Women's

Development Fund as Information and Documentation Officer gave me a good grounding for this, and I am building on this foundation with the PhD Research I am currently pursuing at Kenyatta University.

That is the main reason I've gone back to school and am seriously working towards a doctoral degree in Social Science. At this juncture, I would like to appreciate FEMNET for giving me the opportunity to further my education even as I am engaged in advocacy and building capacity for women. My research is on whether, and how, the African Union has been 'people driven' as is stipulated in its visions, using implementation of commitment to women's rights and gender equality as a yardstick. I strongly believe that research-based evidence is a powerful tool to enact change, and I look forward to adding my cent's worth as I gather data for this work.

Work is such a major part of my life that I find it difficult to balance work with other aspects of my life. I enjoy working at FEMNET because the organization has made my work a passion as well as a hobby. All of these experiences have helped to shape me. I have faced many challenges, balancing work with schooling, and have willingly given my time.

I have had the opportunity to work with mentors and colleagues who are wonderful, and who have had an influence on my life and work. I would one day like to give back what they have given to me. I hope that when my goals are realized, I will be able to provide something even more meaningful to improving the lot of women.

“ I have had the opportunity to work with mentors and colleagues who are wonderful, and who have had an influence on my life and work... I hope that when my goals are realized, I will be able to provide something even more meaningful to improving the lot of women. ”

FEMNET Turns Twenty

The Year 2008 was a particularly important year as FEMNET celebrated its 20th birthday. In the period between the PC and the beginning of the Year 2008, a new Executive Director in the person of Norah Matovu from Uganda, previously FEMNET Treasurer joined the Secretariat. Norah hit the ground running in her drive to re-energize the Network with new steam. The Secretariat had adopted a new five year Strategic Plan whose goal was to continue the work in the three programme areas - communication, advocacy and capacity building, using new creative approaches and strategies.

At the global level, Barack Obama had become the 44th American President, making history as the first African American to become president. This threw Kenya into the limelight because of his Kenyan ancestry. The African women's advocacy activities around the AU, CSW, UN and the third High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness and the Doha International Conference on Financing were among the high profile activities that dominated FEMNET activities in this year of celebration.

In Kenya, a Coalition Government had been constituted following the worst political crisis to affect the nation since its independence from colonial rule. The Men for Gender Equality Now, the FEMNET partner in the work with men against gender based violence, was one of the NGOs that was involved in offering support to the post-election violence survivors in three locations in and around Nairobi. The 2008 Olympics had put Kenya in the global limelight, because of the sterling performance of its athletes who won five (5) gold, five (5) silver and four (4) bronze medals. Of these two of the gold medalists were women. This achievement rallied the nation together in celebration which also gave the nation positive publicity globally.

One of the highlights of this celebration year was the recognition that there were many more women in leadership at different levels on the continent compared to the situation 20 years ago. Countries like Rwanda had a 53%

female representation in the country's legislature setting the pace for all other African countries. In 2007 Africa produced the first female president in Liberia, a country emerging out of a war situation. Uganda was the first country in Africa to have a female vice president. Literacy levels in Africa had generally improved as more women and girls had access to basic, secondary and tertiary education; improving their opportunities for more secure employment. Access to health services had also improved significantly, though it was still so disappointing that infant and maternal mortality rates remained very high in most countries in Africa due to preventable diseases. We celebrated these achievements; and at the same time we remained conscious that there was still a lot of work to do. Gender disparities in all spheres of life persisted despite the impressive progress in the advancement and empowerment of African women. Increasing poverty levels in most parts of Africa, the persistent wars and disputes that had resulted in large populations of refugees and internally displaced persons - majority of whom were women and children - and the spread of HIV/AIDS and its impact had all combined to erode the many improvements registered in the last two decades. This was manifested in Kenya during the post-election violence which resulted in the displacement of over 20,000 citizens, loss of life and property and the disintegration of societal cohesion. The situation generally increased women's vulnerability to all forms of violence - physical, sexual and psychological. This situation therefore made it impossible for FEMNET, its membership and partners to be complacent. As FEMNET celebrated, there was also recognition that there was a lot that had to be done if Africa was to transform the lives of more than 50% of its population - the women of Africa. The good news was that the concerned activists were many - the feminists and women's rights campaigners had increased in great numbers over the last 20 years - and together we were confident of making a break through.

The year 2009 was very busy with major activities such as preparations for the Beijing +15 review in full gear. FEMNET as part of the Africa NGO Task Force for the Review, played a central role in mobilizing African women to participate in the official national level review; as well as the parallel review processes of

the implementation of the Beijing commitments since the last review done in 2004/2005 (Beijing +10 Review).

An External Institutional evaluation by FEMNET's core institutional funders, Sida and Oxfam Novib, reaffirmed FEMNET as a viable organization with a relevant mandate. The key recommendation made was the need to strengthen the National Focal Point organizations to ensure that the structure of the Network supports it to deliver on its mandate of reaching out to all women in the 53 African countries.

The Year 2010 was highly eventful at different levels. At the level of the UN it was the year of the Beijing +15 Review, the Millennium Development Goals +10 and the year of the review of the implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325. On 2 July, 2010 the UN General Assembly voted unanimously to create a new entity that will accelerate progress in meeting the needs of women and girls worldwide. The establishment of the UN Entity for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women, also known as UN Women, was the result of many years of negotiations between UN member states by the Gender Equality Architecture Reform (GEAR) campaign. FEMNET was until 2009 the focal point for the whole of Africa; when it was agreed that another organization be selected to carry out the campaign in Francophone Africa, as FEMNET focused on getting support from Anglophone countries.

At another level, the year started off with the preparations for the 2010 FIFA World Cup hosted by South Africa. This was the first time for an African country to host a World Cup and Africans everywhere shared in the pride of being host to the world. Civil society organizations used the opportunity of the global presence to accelerate their advocacy on issues of human rights, and to advocate fair trade arrangements for sustainable development.

This period was also marked by the emergence of African women trail blazers vying for political leadership at the highest levels, including Brigitte Kafui Adjamagbo-Johnson of Togo; Madam Fatima Ahmed Abdelm Mahmoud, the

first woman running for the presidency in Sudan's political history; and Pascaline Kampayano and Alice Nzomukunda of Burundi. In Guinea-Conakry, Rabiatou Serah Diallo was appointed President of the National Transitional Council, a body charged with the responsibility of managing the transition from military to civilian rule. In Mozambique, Monica Macamo made history when she was unanimously elected the first Speaker of Parliament. It was an exciting year for African women in politics.

The Launch of the African Women's Decade (2010-2020)

African Union (AU) Heads of State and Government declared the years 2010 to 2020 the 'African Women's Decade (AWD)' at their February 2009 session in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The main goal of the Decade is to ensure that governments follow through on their commitments to gender equality and women's empowerment from the grassroots to the continental level. The Decade is being organized under the theme *Grassroots Approach to Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment*.



The African Women's Decade was officially launched at a colorful ceremony on 15 October, 2010 by the President of the Republic of Kenya, H.E. Mwai Kibaki. In attendance at the launch were the Africa Union Commission Chairperson H.E. Jean Ping; the Director of the Women, Gender and Development Directorate at the AUC, Litha Musyimi-Ogana; the Deputy Secretary General of the United Nations, Asha-Rose Migiro; members of the Diplomatic Corp resident

in Kenya; several ministers of gender and women's affairs from various African countries; several first ladies; officials from the African Union and the regional economic blocs; representatives of civil society organizations drawn from over 40 African countries and numerous grassroots women leaders. FEMNET supported 105 delegates drawn from 35 countries to be at the launch ceremony of the AWD. The women left the ceremony energized, inspired and committed to be champions for the goals of the decade in their respective countries.

Prior to the continental launch of the AWD, FEMNET on behalf of the SOAWR Coalition coordinated the preparations and execution of the NGO Forum in collaboration with other women's organizations based in Kenya. The one-day Forum was held on 10 October, 2010. As a result, over 250 women, mostly from the grassroots, were facilitated by different actors to participate in the NGO Forum, learn about the Decade and contribute to the key messages contained in the Women's NGOs 10-10-10 Communiqué. The Communiqué was used as a lobby document by CSOs to influence the outcome of the Gender Experts meeting and that of the African Ministers of gender and women's affairs held on the 11-12 and 13-14 of October, 2010 respectively. Elements of the communiqué, in particular the emphasis on recognition of the role grassroots women play in national development, were adopted by the ministers into the Nairobi Declaration, the main outcome document of the ministerial meeting.

FEMNET is dedicated to working with other key actors such as the AU Gender Directorate and the UN Economic Commission for Africa to keep the Decade alive in Africa. FEMNET has thus positioned herself strategically since the declaration of the AWD to be a lead African women's organization popularizing the Decade and its aims through its constituents, more so at the grassroots level.

FEMNET continues to strengthen and consolidate its unique role as convener of African women organizations at key decision making levels and fora, and has continued to use the AWD as a platform for further strengthening women's communication, networking, advocacy and organizing in order to contribute

significantly to the agenda for peace, equality and development in Africa.

Fifth Programming Conference and General Assembly, 2010

On the 16-18 October, 2010 FEMNET held its fifth PC and GA in Nairobi, Kenya. The two-day PC was held under the theme *The African Women's Decade: Expanding our Dreams to achieve Gender Equality and Women's Advancement*. Through presentations, speeches, poems, skits and discussions, FEMNET members and stakeholders took stock of the achievements of the Network in the last three years, and also highlighted the challenges. They noted emerging issues within its operating environment and considered the programming priorities for the Network at the start of the African Women's Decade (2010-2020).

The PC took place immediately after the continental launch of the AWD 2010-2020 at which women and men drawn from all parts of the continent and the diaspora participated in the colourful ceremony to celebrate the successes of African women in the last 15 years since the fourth World Conference on



Women held in Beijing, China in 1995. AWD is timely and significant in not only celebrating the successes of African women, but also in galvanizing new energies and commitments to deal decisively with the longstanding challenges that women and girls face on a daily basis on the continent.

The PC was attended by 120 participants drawn from 32 countries; and notably, all former chairpersons of FEMNET were in attendance at the fifth PC/GA: Dr Eddah Gachukia, Njoki Wainaina, Sara Longwe and Mama Koite Doumbia.

FEMNET members and partners also had an opportunity to discuss the draft Strategic Plan (2011- 2013) for the organization. It is the usual practice for members and partners of FEMNET to undertake an analysis of the operating environment of the Network, and to identify the opportunities and threats that may impact positively or negatively on its plans. The members also reviewed the functioning areas, and those that require further development in the ensuing programming period. On the basis of these discussions members identified the following focus areas as drivers for consolidating the work of the Network in the next three years (2011-2013):

1. Women in leadership and governance
2. Women's economic empowerment and rights
3. Sexual and reproductive health including protection of women's bodily integrity and dignity, and addressing the endemic problem of violence against women in Africa
4. Women, the media and ICTs
5. Institutional strengthening of women's organizations and networks in Africa.

FEMNET remains focused on its core business of facilitating networking, communication and the interface between women's organizations and networks on the one hand, and other key actors in the public and private sectors, and within civil society whose actions and decisions impact on the lives of African women.

It's often quoted that *Success is a journey, not a destination*, and that every step in

this journey is marked by achievements, challenges, threats and lessons learned for future improvement.

FEMNET desires and is committed to continue expanding, building upon and advancing the communication, advocacy and training approaches towards gender equality and women's empowerment; while remaining true to our mission: *African women's collective leadership for equality, peace and sustainable development.*

Our 24 years' achievements would not have been possible without the resilience and commitment of the African women. We appreciate all the financial, technical and moral support from the membership of the Network, our partners within the region and in other parts of the world, including donor partners and friends of the women of Africa.

You have entrusted us with an enormous task; and what keeps us going is the confidence you exhibit in what we do. As we embark on another decade of women's organizing for peace, equality and development we need your ideas, support, commitment, direct involvement and partnership more than ever before as we embark on the construction of the Africa Women's Power House in Nairobi, Kenya. It shall be a symbol of solidarity, togetherness, love, passion, compassion and hope for our continent.

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has. Margaret Mead (Author of *Coming of Age in Samoa*)

FEMNET in 2012...Our 1984 dream come true!

CONCLUDING REMARKS FROM THE CHAIRPERSON, SYLVIE JACQUELINE NDONGMO

The Spirit of Nairobi has over the years definitely become the spirit of Africa and through FEMNET, that spirit is gradually changing the world.

Evidently, we have come a long way. The journey has been arduous and laborious, yet we will remain undaunted until we transform the world we **have** into the world we **want**. The journey that started decades before 1975 in Mexico, and saw us through Copenhagen in 1980, Nairobi in 1985 and Beijing in 1995, and other key milestones in the history of the women's movement globally and particularly in Africa, did not happen by coincidence. It has been a tale of sweat, blood and tears. This long journey has been full of huge challenges but at the same time a very rich and inspiring experience, worth all the sacrifices.

I am humbled and inspired by the spirit of self sacrifice, cooperation and camaraderie that characterized the movement; yet from all the accounts we have read, it was not easy at all. There were challenges both at the personal and organizational levels. I cringed when I read the challenges that the founding members of FEMNET, and by extension the

women's movement in Africa, faced and noted with dismay that these same challenges have remained with us. They stare us in the face and dare us. But, just like those early stalwarts we will never give up. I am consoled when I remember that over the years, through the leadership of FEMNET, African women have embarked on the long and challenging journey of building a strong and vibrant feminist movement in Africa, and have today been able to create spaces and make their voices more audible. They have moved from 'The Gachukias' Verandah' to the AU and UN Headquarters where they are still working hard to be part and parcel of the construction and management of the continent and of the entire world.

While commending the efforts of the pioneers of the movement that dreamed of a better world with women as key players, and who have made incredible sacrifices to bring her to this level; I would like to enjoin us to keep in mind and never forget that this is a continuous process that we need to keep watching and pushing closely in order not to lose the gains we have made. Most importantly, to keep up the battle as lots of challenges still persist, and may damage all the efforts made so far if women are not vigilant and even more determined than before.

Our founders did not then, and we will not now, cower before:

- Violence against women which is a serious threat to sustainable development
- The trafficking of girls which has become a modern form of slavery for Africa, and is a real danger for the continent
- The new phenomenon of land grabbing in the name of foreign investment which dispossesses and dislocates populations with severe consequences, especially affecting rural women
- The high illiteracy rates among women, discriminatory legislation, social and cultural obstacles, and inadequate leadership and management skills which hinder women's freedom of choice and mobility in the socio-economic context

- Women's exclusion from decision-making processes at community level, and within political parties, public institutions and professional organizations resulting in the neglect of issues of greatest concern to women.
- Increased poverty. Data shows that the proportion of sub-Saharan Africa's population living on less than US\$ 1.25 a day has increased in the last three years
- The persistent patriarchal social norms, gender insensitive legislations and the limited political will to promote women's empowerment. This relegates women to high levels of discrimination and vulnerability to food insecurity and disease, and is a violation of their human rights.

Recalling with great hope that African Heads of State declared 2010-2020 as the African Women's Decade as a means to accelerating implementation of commitments made to women's human rights, FEMNET intends to build on the solid foundation laid by our founding members in the framework of the Decade to make greater efforts on strengthening movements in Africa, both thematically and organizationally; and to engage more with young women and grassroots women. I strongly feel members need to own the organization and from their respective places play a key role in the construction of a stronger network. The importance of networking, communication and experience sharing at all levels cannot be over emphasized. We all have a role to play and we all have something to contribute, no matter how small.

I will not forget the youth strata which is critical if we really want to take our movement forward. For that reason, in the next three years we will also give greater attention to building women's leadership through the FEMNET internship and other mentoring programmes.

“ *...over the years, through the leadership of FEMNET, African women have embarked on the long and challenging journey of building a strong and vibrant feminist movement in Africa, and have today been able to create spaces and make their voices more audible.* ”

Most recently, FEMNET has embarked on another journey, that of building the *African Women's Power Centre*, which will provide a safe space where African women from all walks of life, can meet (physically and otherwise) and interact to generate new ideas, strategies and actions for change. It will be a space where we can tap into the potential that exists in our diversities, and pool our energies to co-create a better world for all. The land where the Centre will be located has been acquired and we are in the process of embarking on the construction. We invite you to join us and walk with us - together let us build strong-lasting bridges, brick by brick for the future generations as we transform the status and position of women in Africa.

FEMNET has been able to be where she is today through concerted efforts with partners far and wide. At this point therefore, I would like, on behalf of the Board of FEMNET (both past and present), staff and the entire membership of FEMNET, to thank them for the constant support to our organization, both in cash and in kind, through thick and thin, in good times and bad times, when we were high and when we were low. Those words of kindness and encouragement have kept us going and sharpened our resolve.

” I would also like to thank all those who have worked tirelessly to document this memorable *Herstory* which is a veritable source of inspiration for the women's movement and for the younger generation; and all the members of FEMNET throughout Africa for their presence and their daily sacrifices to make Africa a beacon of peace.

Last but by no means least, AWDF deserves special thanks for supporting this project in particular and several before it; and also for future support because we know it will not abandon us mid-stream.

PHOTO GALLERY





A MATRIX ON FEMNET'S JOURNEY: FORMER CHAIRPERSONS, EXECUTIVE BOARD & TRUSTEES AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS

	<i>Years</i>	<i>Chairperson</i>	<i>Executive Board</i>	<i>Trustees</i>	<i>Executive Director</i>
Phase 1: Conception and Laying Ground (fundraising)	1984 - 1991	Dr. Eddah Gachukia (Kenya), Interim Chairperson between 1984-1988 Ms. Njoki Wainaina (Kenya), Coordinator of the African Women's taskforce and later Interim Chairperson (1989-1991) Ms. Joyce Umbima (Kenya), Interim Coordinator (1989-1991) Other key people in founding the Network: Sara Longwe (Zambia); Elizabeth Okwenje (Uganda); Gladys Mutukwa (Zambia), Aida Giddy (Egypt), Coumbah Marenah (The Gambia)			
	1992 - 1995	Ms. Njoki Wainaina (Kenya)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms. Fatma Alloo (Tanzania) • Mme. Marie-Therese Kpwoka (CAR) • Mme. Mukayiranga • Ms. Aida Gindy (Egypt) • Ms. Sara Longwe (Zambia) • Ms. Mmagauta A. Molefe (South Africa) • Mme. Coumba Marenah (The Gambia) • Ms. Grace Baquette • Mme Oumou Toure (Mali) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hon. Miria Matembe (Uganda) • Prof. Paulette Dissaud • Ms. Mary Tandon (Zimbabwe) • Mme. Fall Coulibaly • Dr. Pamela Kola (Kenya) • Dr. Nirvana Khadir • Ms. Ruth Oeri (Kenya) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms. Seko Phiri – Acting capacity (a short stint in 1993) • Ms. Joyce Umbina (a short stint in 1993) • Ms. Joyce Mangvwat (September 1993) • Ms. Safiatu Singhateh Acting capacity (1994-1995)
Phase 2: Mobilization of members and curving the niche for engagement (management structures)	1996 – 2002	Ms. Sara Longwe (Zambia)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms. Opportune Santos (Togo) • Mme Elvire Beleoken (Cameroon) • Irene Muloni (Uganda) • Mme. Saida Agrebi (Tunisia) • Mme. Maryvone Ntsame-Ndong (Gabon) • Ms. Margaret Mensah (Namibia) • Ms. Coumba Marenah (The Gambia) • Ms. Adar Abdi Fidow (Kenya) • Mme. Aissata Kane (Mauritania) • Ms. Doufi Namalambo (Namibia) • Ms. Njoki Wainaina (Immediate past Chair) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms. Juliet Dworzak (Sierra Leone) • Ms. Kibre Dawit (Ethiopia) • Mme. Saida Benhabyles (Algeria) • Ms. Beatrice Gakuba (South Africa) • Ms. Mary Nyandovi Kerr (Malawi) • Mme. Bro-Grebe Genevieve (Cote d'Ivoire) • Dr. Pamela Kola (Kenya) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms. Safiatu Singhateh (1996-1998) • Ms. Juliet Dworzak, Acting capacity (short stint in 1998) • Mr. Joseph Igbinedion, Acting capacity (1999) • Ms. L. Muthoni Wanyeki (<i>joined in August 1999</i>)

Phase 3: Programme Development & Increasing Visibility (counting gains)	2003 – 2006	Mama Koite Doumbia (Mali)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natasha Primo (South Africa) • Norah Matovu Winyi (Uganda) • Augustine Quashigah (Ghana) • Elise Muhimuzi (DRC) • Fatma Alloo (Tanzania) • Ms. Sara Longwe (Immediate past Chair) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kibre Dawit (Ethiopia) • Pamela Kola (Kenya) • Opportune Santos (Togo) • Consolee Mukanyiligira (Rwanda) • Mercy Siame (Zambia) • Homa Mungapen (Mauritius) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms. L. Muthoni Wanyeki (<i>completed 6 years period of service in September 2006</i>) • Ms. Maty Diaw (<i>September 2006 – March 2007</i>)
Phase 4: Enhancing capacities & programme activities	2007 – 2010	Mama Koite Doumbia (Mali) – re-elected	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms. Fatma Alloo (Tanzania) • Elise Muhimuzi (DRC) • Dr. Triphonie Nkurunziza (Burundi) • Celestine Navigue (Cote d'Ivoire) • Chalbi Hassania Drissi (Tunisia) • Iman Mandour (Egypt) • Homa Mungapen (Mauritius) • Ms. Sara Longwe (Immediate past Chair) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mercy Siame (Zambia) • Assumpta Umurungi (Rwanda) • Linda Mugisha Tumusiime (Uganda) • Mary Okioma (Kenya) • Astou Sylla Ndeye (Senegal) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms. Therese Niyondiko, Acting capacity (<i>March 2007 – June 2008</i>) • Ms. Norah Matovu Winyi (<i>July 2008 – 2011</i>)
Phase 5: Leveraging on Strategic Moments & Forging Ahead	2011 to present	Sylvie Jacqueline Ndongmo F. (Cameroon)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Onanga Germaine nee Nguenoni (DRC) • Patricia Munabi Babiiha (Uganda) • Souad Belaazi (Tunisia) • Margaret Ali (Malawi) • Emma Kaliya (Malawi) • Célestine Navigué (Core d'Ivoire) • Mama Koite Doumbia (Mali)- Immediate past Chair 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mary Okioma (Kenya) • Fatima Ahmed (Sudan) • Assumpta Umurungi (Rwanda) • Astou Sylla Ndeye (Senegal) • Imane Belghiti (Morocco) • Sally Chiwama (Zambia) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roselynn Musa, Acting capacity (<i>July – November 2011</i>) • Dinah Musindarwezo <i>December 2011 to present</i>

NB: Programming Conference that have shaped the programme activities and seen election of new Board members

- First Programming Conference and General Assembly: 5th – 8th October 1992
- Second Programming Conference and General Assembly: 2nd – 6th September 1996
- Third Programming Conference and General Assembly: 6th – 8th August 2003 (*Theme: “The Feminist and Gender Agendas: What gains, what losses?”*)
- Fourth Programming Conference and General Assembly: 26th – 28th September 2007 (*Theme: “Enhancing African Women’s Leadership”*)
- Fifth Programming Conference and General Assembly: 16th - 18th October 2010 (*Theme: “The African Women’s Decade: Expanding our Dreams to achieve Gender Equality and Women’s Advancement.”*)



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