

Feminist Generations in West Africa



*Activists share their views
and make recommendations
for the Generation Equality
Forum*



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July 2020

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Introduction

Feminist movements in West Africa

In West Africa, many feminist groups and movements promote the social, economic, political, health, legal, and civic rights of women and girls. Young voices are emerging with new energy to build a more just society, one that respects sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). In the streets or on social media, young feminist activists are denouncing the ravages of unsafe abortions, taking action to prevent child marriage, providing adolescent girls with leadership skills or facilitating their access to sexuality education, and starting conversations with adults, particularly men and traditional leaders. These young people are pushing the boundaries and, in so doing, often taking risks.

Equipop is convinced that these young activists need our support - now, more than ever. We must ensure that their voices are heard in all the spaces where future policies affecting them are made, be it at local, national or international level.

Amplifying the voices of young West African feminists: A strategic priority for Equipop

Equipop has worked with young people in West Africa for 20 years. Recently, young feminist activists have emerged to join the fight for women's rights on the continent, one of several anti-colonial struggles. In order to better understand their vision for national, regional, and global change, Equipop organized a meeting in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso in November 2018. Prior to this meeting, Equipop issued a call for expressions of interest, resulting in more than 130 applications in less than a month. Some 30 young feminists from Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, and Senegal were selected and met for four days to talk together, formalize messages and create joint actions.

Since then, Equipop and these young feminists have worked together to create a fruitful partnership, uniting efforts and complementary strengths to act locally, nationally, and internationally as part of a global ecosystem dedicated to advancing women's rights. In this partnership, the young feminists bring many strengths to the table: their grassroots knowledge, relationships with local and national actors, and ability to involve citizens and politicians. In turn, Equipop provides technical and financial support while bolstering ties to various civic, activist, and institutional spaces.

Equipop and the young feminists share a common challenge: consolidating an alliance in order to benefit their mutual interests. Equipop aims to ally with progressive change-makers who share its feminist values because such partnerships vitally underpin the success of its mission. The young feminists, in turn, clearly expressed a need for support for their collective actions in the French-speaking world and an interest in Equipop's tools and methodologies.

2020: A survey in Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire

Building on these shared objectives, Equipop partnered with Sciences Po University in Paris and Women Forward International, a research platform hosted by the Aspen Institute in Washington, DC. This partnership made it possible for five Sciences Po graduate students to interview young women's-rights activists in Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire. Their responses form the basis of this publication.

Survey Methodology

- **Two countries:** Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal
 - **Interviews with 47 people:** 25 in Côte d'Ivoire and 22 in Senegal
 - **12-day field study:** January 14 to January 26, 2020, in Abidjan and Dakar
- Over 100 hours of recorded interviews**

The interviews document the young feminists' personal journeys as activists and the women's rights issues they prioritize in their countries. The women and men talk about their preferred modes of action, the difficulties they encounter, and the strategies they use. The interviewers asked several questions that this publication answers: How can young feminists' collective actions generate more equality locally, nationally, regionally, and internationally? How are their rising voices perceived? How do these activists articulate and conduct their actions in sometimes hostile contexts? And, above all, how can Equipop and the international donor community support their actions and advocacy?

West African Feminists Share their Views

Gender inequality: Systematically questioning it

The young feminist interviewees prioritized three broad gender-equality issues: gender-based violence, women's economic empowerment, and education, particularly comprehensive sexuality education. All those interviewed expressed concern over a lack of women's awareness about their rights, as well as the difficulty of enforcing laws, as evidenced by how hard it is to enforce bans on female circumcision. Many interviewees also emphasized the overlapping nature of various oppressions and the need to consider the specific situation of certain groups of people, such as rural women or lesbians. Finally, even within each of the two countries, the interviewees had regionally-specific demands and struggles. In western Côte d'Ivoire, for example, female genital mutilation is a major issue, while the lack of schooling for girls and forced marriage are big issues in the north, and access to land a priority in the south.

All the young feminists talked about the interdependence of these challenges; they also emphasized the need to deconstruct a number of gender roles instilled during girls' and boys' socialization within the family and at school, and among adults in the workplace. They talked about needing to transform a system that creates and maintains inequality, instead of trying to tackle each problem with a siloed, disparate approach. Their analysis advocates for strengthening the feminist ecosystem, promoting actions at different levels of society, and strengthening links between changemakers.

Common demands and multiple feminisms

"As a Senegalese woman, an African, and an ethnic Fulani, I situate myself within intersectional feminism. Without even realizing it, from the beginning my writing had an intersectional angle. That is important. In my mind, there is no single African feminism, but rather several. For example, we have [Ngozi Adichie] Chimamanda in Nigeria, me in Senegal, and many other feminisms in other countries. There are as many feminisms as there are women."

NDEYE FATOU KANE • 33 YEARS OLD, NOVELIST, ESSAYIST, YOUNG GENDER-STUDIES RESEARCHER, AND WINNER OF THE 2018 "YOUTH UNDER 35 MOVING THE FRENCH-SPEAKING WORLD" AWARD, SENEGAL

The survey results highlight a variety of individual and collective feminisms and their definitions. Most interviewees identified as "egalitarian" and "universalist" feminists. Some also claimed membership in Afro-feminist movements, insisting on taking their country-specific issues and region into account.

Interviewees unanimously underscored the importance of letting feminists set their own agenda; this implies that assistance should move away from traditional project-based approaches and pre-defined goals. The interviewees sometimes regretted that project activities went in a different direction than the one local feminist movements wanted. Respondents of all ages stressed the importance of facilitating intergenerational feminist dialogue to ensure that activists' stories and legacies are shared, and to bring together historic and emerging struggles in West Africa, such as the rights of LGBTQIA+ people.

“One of the main demands of my feminist generation is to create a civic space for inter-generational dialogue so that we can benefit from our elders’ experience and build our own capacity. The previous generation was much tougher; they did not have all the resources that exist today, such as mobilization through social media. Young feminists must be trained in public speaking and advocacy so that they can be more assertive.” AMINATA BADIANE THIOYE • 29 YEARS OLD, NATIONAL YOUTH ALLIANCE FOR SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND FAMILY PLANNING, SENEGAL

Modes of action and mobilization: Between social mobilization and political advocacy

The interviewees identified several modes of action and defined their modalities, targets, levels, and channels. The feminists emphasized the importance of changing mindsets, first at the family level, and then in schools or occasionally in religious education, because they think that patriarchal norms should be deconstructed in these two key primary areas of socialization.

Activists take quite diverse actions as individuals or groups. For example, an activist blogger may be an influencer who challenges the authorities through her subscriber community. This can be compared to a community-group activist who prefers taking direct and collective action, for example, by intervening in a very concrete way against with child marriage.

“I felt like a feminist and I wanted to do something online, through social and other media that would allow me to express my positions publicly. I wanted to start a news business, but I lacked funds, so I started an NGO, Opinion Éclairée (Informed Opinion), before I set up an online newspaper, Le Média Citoyen (Citizen Media). Members of the NGO write articles for Le Média Citoyen. My goal was to publish articles that promote the work of editors and to give voice to women in the media. It was important to create a space where a woman’s point of view could be conveyed. Therefore, several articles allow women to speak out every week. At the same time, I manage an informal collective, the Salon des Femmes Journalistes (Salon of Women Journalists). The collective brings together young female journalists, bloggers, and journalism students. We organize bi-monthly meetings with these women to address leadership in journalism and other important topics for women in Côte d’Ivoire. Even if all of the group’s members do not claim to be feminists, they want to know more about their rights and women’s leadership in their profession. Since this is an informal collective without an official status, it is hard to find sponsors and funding. The Salon des Femmes Journalistes is self-financed through member contributions and my own money.”

NESMON DE LAURE • 35 YEARS OLD, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF LE MEDIA CITOYEN, AN ONLINE NEWSPAPER, AND FOUNDER OF OPINION ÉCLAIRÉE, AN NGO, CÔTE D’IVOIRE

These two areas of action - social mobilization and political advocacy - are essential and inseparable. Awareness-raising actions help build up public opinion in favor of gender-equality issues and thus exert pressure on policymakers. Political advocacy translates the demands and aspirations of communities into public policies and legislation. For this reason, working at both these two levels in a coordinated fashion is crucial. From an operational point of view, this requires funding actions that combine awareness-raising with political advocacy.

“The more women understand politics, the more they get engaged. Why get involved? I think engagement involves the idea of leaving what I call “the social world” in order to enter the political world; unfortunately, we remain in the social world too much. But how and when can we impact politics if we do not move into the decision-making spheres, if we do not create organizations and political parties, or if we do not challenge the dominant political discourse?” LAETITIA CARELLE GOLI • 29 YEARS OLD, BLOGGER AND EDITOR, CÔTE D’IVOIRE

A need to network to make a movement

Faced with multiple feminist movements, and their individuals and group dimensions, several interviewees highlighted a need to create civic spaces for activists and feminist groups where they could consult one another and share their thoughts. However, traditional calls for projects, and their limited budgets, do not facilitate this kind of networking. On the contrary, they tend to create further division among feminist groups.

“Feminists need to come together, to try to unite and support each other on every project that affects women’s rights. In Côte d’Ivoire, I think we should imagine a kind of “House of Feminism,” or “House of Afro-feminism” or a “Women’s House” like in Senegal – a civic space that would bring together feminists from around the country, or even just Abidjan. There would be literature about feminism in Africa, and a space for debate, for sharing ideas and making things happen. Young girls could come and learn about feminism in this space. I think such a place is necessary, because Ivorian feminists need to coordinate their efforts and educate others about feminist topics in order to change mindsets.” MEGANNE LORRAINE BOHO • 25 YEARS OLD, CHAIR OF THE IVOIRIAN LEAGUE OF WOMEN’S RIGHTS, CÔTE D’IVOIRE

Setting up adaptation strategies for challenges

As everywhere else in the world, on a daily basis, feminist activists in West Africa have to face various types of resistance to their commitment and the ideas they champion. Among their difficulties, the interviewees cited:

- Donor-imposed constraints
- Complicated power relationships with the authorities
- A lack of civic spaces that facilitate intergenerational feminist knowledge-sharing and non-profit networking
- Substantial commitments of personal time and effort
- Significant risk of threats, online harassment, and other perils

How can we support young feminists in the run-up to the 2021 Generation Equality Forum?

The question of how to support young feminist movements lies at the heart of the 2021 Generation Equality Forum convened by UN Women and chaired by the governments of France and Mexico. The forum will launch six action coalitions that will aim for “real impact on achieving gender equality and rights for girls and women.” The full participation of feminist groups and movements is required to achieve this ambitious goal because they provide a view of reality, a vision rooted in concrete issues that women and girls face, a view that differs from that of governments. One of the action coalitions will be dedicated to “Feminist Movements and Leadership.” The recommendations that follow, drawn from interviews with feminists from Senegal and Côte d’Ivoire, are addressed to the governments that will lead the action coalitions, and to the French government to inform its feminist foreign policy. Of course, these recommendations can inform any nation that seeks to bolster gender equality and women’s rights.

Facilitating networking between activists and feminist groups and creating the conditions for intergenerational dialogue

Feminist groups and activists need civic spaces where they can talk and strategize about joint advocacy and mobilization efforts. While several such civic spaces exist in English-speaking regions, they are absent in West Africa and the French-speaking world due to a lack of resources for building and bringing such spaces to life. As a result, French-speaking feminist voices, particularly those from French-speaking West Africa, are mostly missing from international processes and fora.

Co-designing public policies with West African feminist activist organizations

Feminist organizations and movements help make gender equality a political subject; they also help make feminism a project for society. Therefore, feminist organizations should be considered legitimate partners in public-policy design processes and invited to join to help identify real needs and craft appropriate and fair responses. In this way, we can move away from a siloed, programmatic approach toward the inclusion of feminist networks and the design of more effective and just development and international solidarity policies.

Adapting funding mechanisms to make it easier for local feminist organizations to access resources and achieve genuine societal and political change

As numerous studies and reports attest,¹ human-rights and feminist organizations especially are underfunded, particularly small, local groups. Moreover, when such organizations do access funding, it is very constrained, which limits their impact. Therefore, donors should revisit their funding modalities, and especially their partnerships with feminist organizations, in order to find ways to provide more support to women's rights organizations in all their diversity, and to promote feminist groups' ability to collaborate for long-term political and societal change. Some of these ways might include developing a genuine financing ecosystem that supports a wide variety of groups, including small and medium-sized local organizations, and offering operational funding alongside project funding. Prioritizing flexible and long-term financing that could sustain organizations throughout their efforts to achieve structural changes in social and gender norms would also be helpful, as would supporting national and transnational alliances between complementary actors, lifting co-financing requirements for projects, streamlining reporting systems, and modifying project monitoring and evaluation systems.

Actively supporting young feminist participation during international fora

Civil society and especially feminist organizations and networks from French-speaking West Africa often face three major difficulties that prevent them from making their voices heard in international processes and fora: a lack of financial support, a lack of political support, and a linguistic barrier, since most discussions and negotiations take place in English, a language in which few activists are fluent. However, the participation of these organizations and networks in the Generation Equality Forum is essential, as is their inclusion in developing content for the action coalitions.

1. Rapport du Haut Conseil à l'Égalité (2019) 'Où est l'argent pour les droits des femmes? Une sonnette d'alarme' [High Council on Gender Equality (2019) 'Where is the money for women's rights? An alarm bell']; AWID (2019) 'Toward a feminist funding ecosystem: A framework and practical guide'. Available at <https://www.awid.org/publications/toward-feminist-funding-ecosystem-framework-and-practical-guide>

Aminata Badiane Thioye



Twenty-nine-year-old Aminata Badiane Thioye, a project manager for communication, advocacy, and campaigns, works for the Alliance Nationale des Jeunes pour la Santé Sexuelle et Reproductive et la Planification Familiale (National Alliance of Youth for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Family Planning) located in Dakar. As a gender and human rights specialist, Aminata defines herself as an activist and a feminist who fights for women's rights.

Aminata deplores the fact that the term “feminist” has a negative connotation, even within engaged women’s circles. She stresses the need to better explain feminism’s issues in order to rally more women to the feminist cause and believes it important to adapt the feminist struggle to the realities of her

country, without putting aside changes taking place elsewhere in Africa or internationally. Her commitment to feminism took root at university, where she co-founded a non-profit organization that promotes women’s universal access to education and to positions of responsibility within student-led organizations. Her group also aimed to combat sexual aggression by students because such acts often serve as a first step toward sexual harassment in the workplace.

Through her professional and community engagement, Aminata promotes better, human rights-based health for women by combatting maternal and infant mortality; she also alleviates menstrual insecurity. Aminata leads actions that target girls in both rural and urban areas.

In addition, Aminata also promotes family planning and its social, economic, and political benefits. For example, family planning methods mean a mother can take as much time as she needs between her children's births, directly affecting her health and/or professional life. Aminata believes it is crucial to disseminate information to young people, so she organizes peer-group discussions about sexual and reproductive health.

According to Aminata, in order to successfully mobilize wider public opinion, Senegalese feminists must take ownership of the concerns of Senegalese women, and make demands that reflect women's everyday difficulties. For example, in community awareness-raising sessions, women often talk about polygamy and its direct link to economic violence, issues insufficiently addressed by feminists, unfortunately.

Aminata is also working to improve security in public spaces to make them safer and more used by women. For example, she combats street harassment because it strongly affects women who work outside the home; they often arrive at a workplace last and leave it first in order to avoid dimly lit and deserted streets.

Although the Senegalese government has initiated a national dialogue with women's civil society organizations, Aminata finds it unfortunate that often only the older generation of feminists is consulted. She stresses the need to set up a civic space for intergenerational dialogue so that young feminists can benefit from the older generation's experience and thereby build their own capacity. Aminata thinks that the older generation of feminists was much "tougher." The new generation of activists has great potential, but does not strategically use new mobilizing and influencing resources, such as social media. Now is the time to mobilize all feminists, of every generation, and to train citizens how to speak and advocate in public.

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The more feminists there are,
the stronger they are.
All support is welcome,
whether local or international,
because it bolsters the
credibility and legitimacy
of the struggle for women's
rights. All women and girls
should know that injustice
will not prevent their
success if they unite, dream
big, and work hard.
”

Dior Fall Sow



Dior Fall Sow grew up with a mother committed to defending women's rights, one of the pioneers of Senegalese feminism. Even though perceived as anti-religion and westernized, these pioneers fought on and made progress. Dior inherited her mother's determination to protect women's rights. As a lawyer and magistrate, Dior first worked as the Director of Supervised Education for Senegal's Social Services agency, then as Head of Legal Affairs for Sonatel, a leading telecommunications company. She was the first woman to be appointed as a public prosecutor (or district attorney) in Senegal. She also officiated at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda for eight years. Now based in Senegal, Dior continues her national, regional, and international consulting work for the International Criminal Court and in other African countries.

Dior has made Senegalese legislation her battlefield. She defends human rights, particularly those of women and children. With a group of women, she co-founded the Association des Juristes Sénégalaises (Association of Senegalese Lawyers) in 1974; the organization carries out humanist and feminist values awareness-raising and education among young people.

Dior finds it difficult to define oneself as a feminist in Senegal. Yet her inspiring journey shows that it is possible to achieve societal progress when women hold positions of responsibility or have a role in decision-making. For her, it is all about courage. So, when she was assigned a magistrate position in Saint Louis, northeast of Dakar, and people suggested that she should instead stay near her family in the capital, she absolutely refused

to do so. As a working woman, she never let anyone else dictate her conduct and always rejected both gender-based discrimination and favors.

Dior promotes an African feminism that takes Senegalese social and cultural values into account. She followed this direction when she created an NGO, *Le Réveil de la Femme* (Woman's Awakening), that informs Senegalese women about their rights. For African feminism to succeed, local influencers and changemakers must be considered. Thus, since Dior knows that religious authorities in her country wield influence, she has worked with Islamic scholars to find ways to defend a woman's right to exercise parental authority. Dior believes that the question of rights must escape purely legislative and political framings in order to bring about real social progress. For this reason, she believes that civil society has an essential role to play as a watch-dog, whistle-blower, and to maintain pressure on public authorities.

All of Dior's professional and activist work aims to ensure that everyone knows their rights. Last year, she helped pass a bill to criminalize rape. She thinks society must stop blaming victims and dialogue more, to realize "that rape is a pure and simple destruction of the human person." She notes that the consequences of rape are disastrous for survivors, and more generally for society, and that now is the time for the entire society to understand the new law. That understanding will come from an effort to translate the law for the general public, and raise awareness of its meaning, for the law only makes sense if it is understood.

Dior also wants her country to honor the international commitments it has made. Consequently, she fuels her thinking and advocacy with African legal references such as the Maputo Protocol, a text written by African countries in an African environment that must be applied for the benefit of African women. Senegal ratified the Maputo Protocol, which stipulates that safe medical abortions should be allowed, but so far this right has not been enacted into Senegalese law.

Dior trusts young people and that equal contributions from men and women will change mindsets. For this to happen, young generations must understand that they have an important role to play in the country's development. They must acquire values and important principles such as faith, determination, solidarity, and intellectual honesty.

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Democracy is the sovereignty of the people, men and women, and if one of these two pillars is out of balance compared with the other, our democracy will be unsteady. Therefore, the two entities must be equal, balanced. Solidarity must be established between men and women. The question of rape, and of abortion, should be questions for all of society. Development concerns the whole nation.

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Élysée Lopez Leroux



Élysée Lopez Leroux, a 37 year-old man, has been committed to gender equality for over ten years. Born into a family with more women than men, Élysée was educated in a feminist environment. His great grandmother, a respected village judge in western Côte d'Ivoire, serves as his model. Élysée believes that one of society's major challenges centers on women's lack of access to senior positions in government and the workplace.

Élysée is particularly committed fighting HIV/AIDS. In 2001, he co-founded the Réseau Ivoirien des Jeunes Contre le Sida (Ivorian Youth Network Against AIDS, or RIJES), and has served as its executive director since 2008. Although promoting women's rights is not

RIJES' primary objective, the network acts on a number of related issues. Élysée began to raise awareness about feminism among his family and peers, especially colleagues from RIJES, in order to create more partnerships with women's rights organizations.

Élysée notes that the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Côte d'Ivoire increasingly affects women: already two-thirds of HIV-positive people are female. He thinks social norms are the primary cause of this situation, because women have less decision-making power within couples; they cannot force men to use condoms during intercourse. Other explanatory factors include overall low condom use and the persistence of polygamy. Often,

women simply cannot afford to buy condoms. However, these social norms seem to be slowly changing. Élysée believes action is needed on two fronts: improving girls' and women's access to education, including sexuality education, and promoting their economic empowerment so that they can have better professional opportunities and some independence.

Élysée observes that it is somehow easier for a man to claim to be a feminist than for a woman. He notes that many men accept his engagement, making dialogue possible. When talking with other men, Élysée takes time to explain the importance and relevance of egalitarian public policies such as gender parity. In addition, Élysée regularly sees situations where others listen to men more than they listen to women, even when talking about gender-equality issues. This power dynamic maintains men's monopolization of public discourse; it also dissuades some women from engaging in feminist struggles even though they are the most affected.

In Abidjan and other towns in Côte d'Ivoire, RIJES leads awareness-raising campaigns and implements advocacy projects. Actions focus on integrating comprehensive sexuality education in school curriculums, fighting HIV/AIDS and violence toward women and girls, and promoting the right to health and education. Since the activities are mainly dedicated to young people, Élysée emphasizes the importance of using social media and radio to convey messages. Recently, RIJES also launched a project to advocate access to safe abortion, because Côte d'Ivoire currently only allows abortion in cases of rape and incest. These restrictions lead to clandestine abortions that endanger women's lives. Élysée and his RIJES colleagues are fighting to change the law.

“

What motivated me since I was little, was that I was always with my aunts. I grew up with them and they were role models for me. In my family, we even had a grandmother who worked as a judge. And after her death, everyone paid homage, saying she was fair, impartial. At the time, I said to myself, if it's a woman who did that, other women can, too. And then there's the fact that very early on, when I got involved in the fight against HIV/AIDS, we saw the HIV epidemic predominately affect women in Côte d'Ivoire, very strongly. This was because of unequal power relations between men and women, and the fact that women could not negotiate using a condom in the same way.

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Fatou Ndiaye Turpin



For more than twenty years, Fatou Ndiaye Turpin has promoted and defended Senegalese women's rights. In 1995, Fatou attended the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. As a feminist activist, she was instrumental in the adoption of a gender-parity law in 2010 and in a revision to the Family Code in 2013; the latter gave women the right to transmit nationality to their child and to their husband. More recently, Fatou has joined women who demand justice in her country and who have mobilized to make rape a felony rather than a misdemeanor.

Fatou began her career as a Senegalese government official. In 1995, she founded the Association pour le Développement de la Femme et de l'Enfant au Sénégal (Association for the Development of Women and Children in Senegal), aiming to create an environment conducive to women's and girls' empowerment. Her NGO engagement is essential for Fatou because she believes that it is not enough to pass new laws in order to improve women's everyday living conditions. For this reason, with her colleagues and activist friends, Fatou educates young women about sexual and reproductive health and rights, especially contraception.

Fatou wrote her graduate thesis on the place of young girls in local governance bodies, using a case study featuring the Sport and Culture Association.

Since 2015, Fatou has led the Siggil Jigéen network. The network brings together NGOs in 14 regions to improve the status of Senegalese women. One of its network members, Alliance Droits et Santé (Rights and Health Alliance) works to strengthen women's political participation in public life by informing them about their rights and giving them tools to fight gender-based violence. Through this network, Fatou and her team support more than 12,000 women in fields such as sexual and reproductive health, research, youth leadership, literacy, vocational training, microfinance, and poverty alleviation. So much progress shows that, through a commitment to Senegalese society and coordinated grassroots interventions, it is "possible to achieve what seemed impossible." However, Fatou points out that the Senegalese feminist movement is in a critical phase, and that if we are not careful, a generation gap will grow very quickly. Therefore, she wants to promote more dialogue with the new generation.

Although Fatou has observed some improvement in the Senegalese legislative system, she regrets that new, progressive laws lack enforcement. On many occasions, she has found that the government makes big promises at the international level, but, once back home, does not align those promises with national laws or build on them with civil society. Therefore, Fatou embarked on a collaboration with Senegalese parliamentarians. With her colleagues, she hosted public hearings for presidential candidates in 2019. Having been involved with these changemaking efforts for many years, Fatou sees her work raising awareness and advocating among national and regional institutions, such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECO-WAS), as a way to establish egalitarian gender relations in Senegalese society, with a view to building a more just and sustainable society.

“
Community involvement is essential, because it is not enough to pass new laws to improve the everyday living conditions of women. With commitment from Senegalese society and coordinated grassroots interventions, we can achieve what seems impossible. We are now in a critical phase for the Senegalese feminist movement. If we are not careful, a generation gap will grow very quickly. It is necessary to create the conditions for dialogue with the new generation.
”

Hyaceinthe Coly



Hyaceinthe Coly is a 31-year-old young man from Dakar who considers himself a feminist and is not afraid to say so. Since December 2019, he has worked as the executive secretary of the Réseau des Jeunes pour la Promotion de l'Abandon de l'Excision et des Mariages d'Enfants (Youth Promoting the Banning of Excision and Child Marriage Network, or RJPAEME). It was as a young scout that Hyaceinthe got involved with women's rights, supervising youth activities and advocacy actions.

In 2014, Hyaceinthe attended a global conference to promote a world free of female genital mutilation (FGM) and child marriage, the Girl Summit in London. Upon his return

home, he organized a workshop to report on the Summit to 25 youth women's rights organizations which work to end gender-based violence and FGM and to promote sexual and reproductive health and rights. After the workshop, attendees set up the Réseau des Jeunes (Youth Network) with about 30 youth organizations to promote bans on excision and child marriage. The network was officially recognized in 2016. Today, it brings together at least 30,000 people from across the country through various awareness-raising campaigns and activities. Member organizations work in different areas but share a common commitment to the rights of girls and women in Senegal.

The RJPAEME network works in Senegalese regions particularly exposed to FGM, Kolda, Sédhiou, Matam, Kédougou, Ziguinchor, and in border areas, because neighboring Guinea and Mali have no laws against female circumcision and child marriage. On Dakar's periphery, a multicultural group of inhabitants comes from various regions that also practice FGM. Often the pattern is the same: girls are sent to a region to visit "an aunt" in a village and they can be excised under pressure from their grandmothers and/or female excisors. Hyaceinthe emphasizes the importance of advocacy and communication to combat this harmful practice. The RJPAEME network works with former excisors, community workers, religious leaders, and young community leaders.

After four years at the head of the RJPAEME network, Hyaceinthe handed over its presidency to Sophie Ndiaye Sy and moved to the position of executive secretary. He has a Master's degree in Project Management and continues his engagement with the network and other organizations in his spare time. He chairs the Health Commission for the National Youth Council, calling on the government to increase the budget earmarked for youth support. In 2019, Hyaceinthe also joined the Collectif Doyna (Doyna Collective) as advocacy manager.

Building on his long-standing feminist commitment, Hyaceinthe was appointed Ambassador of the international "He For She" campaign. The ambassadorship allowed him to meet many activists around the world at several international conferences. In Addis Ababa, for example, he participated in a high level panel with religious leaders at African Union headquarters.

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Today, our organization works a lot with men, to change their idea of manliness and move toward positive representations of masculinity, but this is very difficult in Senegal. We receive threats, pressure, and insults, but we continue our work and we hope to be supported and carried forward with others who believe in what we do.

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Laetitia Carelle Goli



Laetitia Carelle Goli, a 29-year-old Ivorian, works as a blogger and newspaper editor. Previously, she worked as project manager and political advisor in the Gender and Feminism unit of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation. Over the past four years, Laetitia has participated in several individual and group actions as a feminist activist.

Her engagement with feminism stems from her personal experience as a woman and thinking about the status of women as she became familiar with feminist works from the United States. Laetitia began taking action by creating a blog that addresses everyday issues that affect women in her country. She then encountered feminists from Côte d'Ivoire

and other countries. Together they formed a network to share ideas, support one another, and conduct online activism, primarily through social media. Laetitia believes that it is essential to discuss feminist subjects online, and to denounce violence against women and help survivors when they feel that they cannot speak out because of social taboos.

Laetitia firmly asserts her feminist position, explaining that, in her life, the more she asserted herself as a feminist, the more adverse reactions made her determined to continue an activist agenda. Despite criticism of feminists, sexism, and ambient misogyny, Laetitia knows that it is necessary to disseminate and strengthen feminist thinking. She identifies

with intersectional feminism because she believes that all inequality arising from differences in gender, social origin, or skin color are linked in the feminist struggle.

At the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Laetitia carried out exploratory studies to understand local issues; she also conducted awareness-raising and advocacy actions. She aims to improve women's representation in politics, such as when she mentors young women in order to spark and strengthen their interest in politics by teaching them how the world works. She believes it is essential for women to participate more fully in politics and not remained confined to what she calls "the social world."

While the mentoring program primarily reaches young women living in urban rather than rural areas, it does reach out to women from different social backgrounds and integrates other marginalized groups, such as LGBTQIA+ communities.

In addition to her work commitments, Laetitia spends a lot of time and energy online. The popularity of her blog translates into invitations for her to appear in the media and to speak at conferences about women's lives and feminist movements and thinking. By speaking out, Laetitia aims to deconstruct stereotypes about women and feminism.

In 2017, she actively participated in setting up a feminist network launched by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Alliance des Femmes Engagées pour le Changement (Alliance of Women Committed to Change, or ALFEC). ALFEC focuses on strengthening female leadership in politics. Because it is based on social solidarity, the network helps activists organize collective actions that denounce gender-based violence by making it visible; ALFEC also assists survivors of such violence when institutional aid is lacking. In addition, ALFEC collaborates with other NGOs. Thus, Laetitia thinks that it would be interesting to create an online platform to bring together all feminist groups and individual activists in order to facilitate communication, avoid duplicating efforts, and reach all Ivorian

women. She is about to launch the Académie de Politique, an association that aims to foster a political and trade-union culture among women via digital media. In the future, Laetitia plans to create a library of feminism.

“
In Côte d'Ivoire, there is a multitude of NGO networks and women's organizations, but they are not necessarily aware of each other's actions. There should be an online platform that links up these activists, that helps them join forces and act collectively. I would like, for example, to create a library of feminism in order to open a civic space where activists could share ideas and knowledge.
”

Maimouna Astou Yade



Maimouna Astou Yade, a 30-year-old Senegalese feminist activist, volunteered as a 16-year-old to protect street children in her city, Kaolack. Now a lawyer by training and a former student of international relations and geopolitics, Maimouna has always believed it important to help others. She got involved in politics in 2009, working first for Senegal's Ministry of Youth, followed by the Ministry of the Solidarity Economy and Micro-finance. Since then, she has been involved in fighting gender-based violence.

While studying law at Dakar University, she discovered that many childhood friends and other women in her social circle were victims of gender-based violence: some were victims of sexual mutilation, others had to leave school early to support their families. She also observed that the university, like her elementary and high schools, exacerbated the inequality of wealth and luck. Aware of her privilege, she shared her room with several students who had left their native villages to study in Dakar. She then decided to cofound a student-led group of young women delegates to represent female students' needs and demands with the university administration.

In her feminist approach, Maimouna takes care to consider the specific realities of women in Africa and of women of African descent. For example, she strongly advocated against FGM at the Pan-African Young Leaders Forum while running the Club des Jeunes Filles en Population et Développement (Club of Young Girls in Population and Development). She followed those efforts by setting up anti-FGM programs in the most rural areas of Senegal. She was also a founding member of YWA Senegal, and its first president before leaving in 2015. Maimouna created J-GEN Women Global Entrepreneurship, an organization which was inaugurated in November 2017, to address employment issues in Senegal and women's integration in the labor market. Through this organization, and in partnership with the Ministry of Employment and Vocational Training, Maimouna launched a program to support young Senegalese women entrepreneurs.

In addition, Maimouna intends to strengthen women's participation in political and civic life. J-GEN Women Global Entrepreneurship will soon launch a project to integrate gender equality into local governance in order to increase the number of women standing in municipal elections. This will be the first initiative of its type at the local level, initiated and led by a young feminist organization.

“
Sexual and reproductive health issues have always been sensitive. The new generation of feminists must lead this fight. Feminist civil society organizations complement public authorities. The government can enact political and social measures, and set up specialized civic spaces. Feminist groups can bring people out of their homes and take them to these centers to discuss subjects and change perceptions.
”

Meganne Lorraine Boho



Meganne Lorraine Boho is 25 years old. She has identified as a feminist since she was a young girl, even though she did not understand the meaning and implications of the term until she became a teenager. She began to question social norms while quite young, and was herself, later on, a victim of sexual and domestic violence and harassment. In both her personal life and when she worked as a digital consultant for the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Meganne was exposed to personal testimonies and overwhelming statistics about gender-based violence. This exposure prompted her to more actively help women survivors who lack adequate support services. So she began volunteering to give advice to young women in her community.

Meganne has also participated in many programs and training courses, including attending The Study of the U.S. Institutes (SUSI) on Women's Leadership in the state of Delaware, and the Young African Leadership Initiative (YALI) in Lagos and Dakar. Having completed these programs, Meganne now volunteers as a coach to help other young women enter them. In 2015, she joined SEPHIS, an international, apolitical foundation that promotes female leadership. As its Regional Director of Communication and Fundraising, she worked on the SEPHIS National Tour for Women's Empowerment, a traveling caravan that crossed Côte d'Ivoire to meet young women and teach them about gender-related issues. Meganne's strong commitment to social action and ability to inspire

women in her community and internationally was recognized in 2019, when she won The Diana Award.

Since then, as president of the Ivorian League for Women's Rights, Meganne has dedicated her energy to the struggle for women's rights and to fighting domestic, sexual, and gender-based violence towards women. A committed feminist motivated by a desire to change the perception of women's role in society, she works through the League, which grants a prominent place to education about feminism and provides legal, psychological, and social assistance to survivors of sexual and other physical violence. Meganne passionately believes that assistance to women survivors, in addition to being a goal in and of itself, also plays a key role in creating trust between society and women in order to break their silence and protect them and their rights.

Out of more than 5,600 applicants, Meganne is one of 300 young leaders selected in June 2020 to participate in the Women Deliver Young Leaders program. She will receive two years of training around the world and resources that will allow her to develop programs for girls', women's and youth health and rights. She will also participate in the world's largest conference on gender equality and girls' and women's health and rights, the Women Deliver 2022 Conference. Among her many long-term projects, Meganne also plans to take political action in her country.

“
Mindsets are the biggest obstacle in our efforts to combat violence against women. Some think that, since we are a feminist group, we are in a war of men against women, or that we want to destroy couples. What everyone should know is that reducing feminism to household problems takes away its essence. In feminism, there is a right to education, a right to access decision-making bodies, a right to end dangerous practices such as female genital mutilation and forced marriage. There is a multitude of issues that our society needs to think about before rejecting the struggle for women's rights.
”

Morel-Imelda Kouadio



Morel-Imelda Kouadio, a political science student since 2015, is currently working on a Master's degree in International Relations and Diplomacy. In 2018, she committed to supporting Cavodquiva, an Ivorian NGO that takes care of young girls harmed by trafficking, slavery, and/or sexual exploitation. She also runs a blog called Imelda Thinks That where she publishes articles about feminism and the lives of Ivorian women. With over 1,500 readers from countries across the world - Canada, Côte d'Ivoire, France, Mali, Morocco, the United States - she openly discusses gender-based violence, mental health issues, and women in politics.

Morel-Imelda believes that family and school most influence society; she also believes in the power of education to change mindsets. For this reason, two of the topics that she would like all schools in her country to teach comprehensive sexuality education starting at a very young age, in particular learning about consent, and sexual violence prevention.

For this grassroots activist and blogger, women's and girls' sexual and reproductive health and rights lie at the heart of societal issues. For example, tackling menstrual precarity requires greater action, so Morel-Imelda regularly helps collect feminine hygiene

products for free distribution to women who cannot afford them. She also meets with young women who have suffered trafficking and sexual exploitation. These meetings convinced her to fight for guaranteed access to education for all young girls.

Having had an opportunity to do an internship at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Morel-Imelda wants to continue working in politics in order to obtain more ambitious quotas for Ivorian women's political participation. While current law stipulates that at least 30% of senior government positions must be filled by women, that is not enough by itself to achieve parity.

Morel-Imelda thinks that feminists in Côte d'Ivoire do not necessarily need outside, foreign support to advance women's rights in her country. The impact of foreign NGOs is too often limited to capacity building when it should enhance long-term education. Supporting feminist groups according to their own agenda, in a sustainable way, should be prioritized.

Morel-Imelda remains committed to expanding access to education; she feels it is key in the fight for women's rights.

“
Politicians can act, but I think the family unit must be influenced more, because we spend the most time with our families and in school before we join society. You only spend a few hours outside, if “outside” means in society. Therefore, values transmitted within the school and family most strongly educate and shape mindsets. Nothing is innate really, and that is why the education you receive at home, from family, instills ideas and opinions that will be decisive. Then, when you enter society, you either can or cannot leave behind those notions. It becomes up to you to make use of what society gives you. You can always take what you like, and what you want to change.”

Ndèye Fatou Kane



Ndèye Fatou Kane is a 33-year-old Senegalese feminist. Her feminist commitment arose from a desire to make visible, and document, the thinking and actions of feminists in her country. Upon returning to Senegal after spending eight years in France, she found that less attention was being paid to historic Senegalese feminist figures. So, she decided to research them. Initiated as a personal project, her research prompted her to pursue gender studies. Now she is particularly interested in the actions of young feminist activists in Senegal.

Ndèye Fatou's research reveals the difficulty feminist pioneers have in passing the torch to younger generations. She believes that the older ones should reach out to the youngest

and that Senegalese feminists needed to reappropriate their Senegalese feminist heritage in order to lead future struggles.

Based on this observation, she wrote a book in 2018, *Vous avez dit féministe?* (Did you say feminist?), about what it means to be a feminist in Senegal today. She found inspiration in texts by feminists from around the world, from Simone de Beauvoir to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Mariama Bâ, without forgetting Awa Thiam, author of the first book to map feminisms in Africa (*La parole aux negresses*, 1978). Ndèye Fatou investigated Senegalese feminist actions and Afro-American theories, with intersectionality as a background, wondering why these movements did not interact more frequently and more audibly in Senegal.

In her analysis of possible reasons, Ndèye Fatou argues that feminism in Senegal is seen as a Western movement and rather elitist, academic even. In fact, many women in Senegal have deviated from feminism because they say it is too academic and out of touch with reality. However, they are feminists without knowing it, according to Ndèye Fatou. She thinks that these representations need to be deconstructed by looking for prominent figures in Senegalese history that can also be considered feminists.

Informed and inspired by her reading, research, and activism, Ndèye Fatou says that she identifies with intersectional feminism. Although broadly speaking, intersectionality is fundamentally a legal theory, it is a very useful tool to visualize oppression suffered by women at all levels of society. According to Ndèye Fatou, there is no such thing as a single African feminism; rather, there are several. Thus, although gender issues and the struggle against patriarchy concern all women, the experience and activism of Senegalese women in Africa will not be the same as that of African-descended women in Europe, some of whom will face other forms of discrimination, such as racism. The important thing is to show solidarity between feminists who share two fundamental struggles: women's sexual freedom and their economic independence.

Ndèye Fatou finds the feminist milieu of Senegal effervescent, but lacking structure and civic spaces to bring together the different combats. For example, while the Yewwu Yewwi movement pioneered women's struggle in Senegal and structured Senegalese feminist movements, she notes that today, young Senegalese feminists do not yet share a culture of networking for joint actions. Young people remain motivated nevertheless; when they mobilized to fight sexual violence - taking actions that led to a law criminalizing rape - new groups emerged and young feminist activism surged on social media.

For this reason, Ndèye Fatou launched a Twitter hashtag, #BalanceTonSaïSaï, that went viral. The hashtag echoes #BalanceTonPorc, the French equivalent of #MeToo, but instead of being oriented towards the victim, it denounces the aggressor, sexism, and sexual violence. Ndèye Fatou believes it important to maintain pressure on these issues in Senegal, particularly to ensure that the new law criminalizing rape gets enforced.

Discussing the feminist ecosystem, Ndèye Fatou highlights the quality work that NGOs carry out in support of Senegalese activists, while pointing up a tendency to infantilize women in gender-equality programs. She reminds us that we must pay attention to different realities, work hand-in-hand, meet organizers in person, and see how to help them.

Ndèye Fatou currently follows the evolution and actions of Senegalese feminist movements from Paris, contributing from a distance, for example, to a campaign against sexual harassment in public transport (#BulMaRissu). She plans to return to Senegal, to put her theoretical knowledge into practice and to support these movements more directly.

“

In Senegal, the word “feminism” is often associated with a French legacy, and therefore is perceived as a western idea. We need to deconstruct the negativity that has built up around the term and we have to dig deeper into our history. Feminism did not start with Simone de Beauvoir: instead, we had queen mothers, and women warriors in Senegal, and I think they, too, were feminists. Unfortunately, for many a feminist is the woman who went to university. There is historicization to be done.

”

Nesmon De Laure



Nesmon De Laure is editor-in-chief of an online newspaper, *Le Média Citoyen* (Citizen Media), in Abidjan, where she was born in a working-class district. Her family, although from a rural area in western Côte d'Ivoire, bucked the prevailing trend and valued education for young girls.

Nesmon has always been a committed feminist without necessarily knowing it. Her activism began with a hunger strike in 2008. Since then, she has worked for freedom of expression and to mobilize women online. As a journalist, she experienced gender discrimination at work, and believed that she was not promoted because she was a woman.

Therefore, in 2017, she created an informal group, the Salon des Jeunes Femmes Journalistes (Salon of Young Women Journalists) that brings together journalists, bloggers, and journalism students. She periodically organizes meetings with these young women to discuss topics such as women's leadership in journalism and at work, women in politics, and security.

The Salon has no formal structure or office; it is financed by membership fees and Nesmon's own funds. In 2019, she founded an NGO, Opinion Éclairée (Enlightened Opinion); its members, also journalists, write articles for *Le Média Citoyen*. Nesmon stands

for social justice whether through the NGO, her work for the online newspaper, or her statements on social media. She wants to give women a voice in the media, strengthen their leadership, and increase their participation in politics.

Nesmon believes that the activism of feminists in Côte d'Ivoire is found in groups that defend women's rights and carry out actions that can be considered feminist without declaring them as such. She regrets that national policies do not align with feminist goals; she also laments the patriarchal vision that underpins representations of women. As a single mother, Nesmon speaks out against the stigma and marginalization of single mothers, a subject which receives little attention from the Ministry of the Family. It was not until an annual May 1st speech by the General Union of Workers in Côte d'Ivoire that the public heard that single mothers are heads of families, independent, and deserve a fair salary. Nesmon believe the latter is essential because social freedom comes from economic freedom.

In her role as editor-in-chief, Nesmon aims to guarantee journalistic independence, which impacts the editorial line of her online newspaper. For example, she regularly refuses funding proposals from donors who want favorable articles in return. Members of Opinion Éclairée can hold any political opinion and write on any subject they choose. Nesmon continues to report on the lives of women in all parts of the country. Since her family came from a rural community, Nesmon knows that access to sexual and reproductive health services poses a real challenge, especially in the eastern part Côte d'Ivoire, where hospitals lack and the population must seek treatment in neighboring Ghana.

So Nesmon reported on a village in this border region, shining a light on the need to rehabilitate a hospital that ensures access to safe childbirth. This new visibility in the media attracted funding from a foundation and led to hospital renovations - a victory for the feminist Nesmon.

“

In a way, Le Média Citoyen meets a need to assert myself because I worked in editorial offices in large newspaper companies for a long time, but found that I was not always in the job that I deserved. I could not always choose my subjects. I stayed in newsrooms for a long time without being promoted as I deserved. At the time, I received many awards for my work, I was among the best on the team, but I didn't receive a salary increase or new position. For example, I was never appointed editor-in-chief. Therefore, I created Le Média Citoyen, a newspaper that fulfills my expectations because I want to express myself. I make sure that there is at least one article per week about women, or about subjects that concern women. I lead my struggle as a feminist through the media and that online site.

”

Shayden



Shayden is a 28-year-old Ivorian singer who participated in “The Voice Africa” in 2016. She is also a radio host on the Nostalgie station. She identifies as an Afro-feminist and takes action in the arts and media, her primary domains. Her feminist consciousness awoke during a tour of West Africa with “The Voice Africa.” She found women poorly represented in the world of music and saw that they should speak from the front of the stage more. Therefore, she works to make the Ivorian cultural and musical industries more inclusive.

Shayden also campaigns against the devastation of gender-based violence, especially domestic violence, as she was deeply affected by the murder - femicide - of one of her female friends. Shayden learned that 70% of Ivorian women experience domestic violence during their lifetime; it is a scourge that affects all social strata. Therefore, Shayden launched the Speak for Her campaign to expose the lack of dissuasive Ivorian laws against sexual harassment. She also organized a march in Abidjan with the support of a local legislator. This awareness campaign resonated internationally.

As an engaged artist, Shayden created in 2017 the Lili Women Festival, a 100% female festival that gives voice to all women. The annual event features concerts and music, dance, painting, theater and writing workshops, all opportunities to catalyze creativity in a community of women artists and make them aware of the roles they can play in society. More than 600 people attend the free concerts every year and about 20 women participate in the workshops.

Shayden's goal for these encounters between artists, the media, and the public at the festival workshops is to change perceptions of women and gender equality. For this reason, some workshops promote, for example, positive images of singers in video clips and positive images of women that reflect local criteria for beauty. The festival is popular because of Shayden's extensive reach through social media, but the challenge remains to find funding for event logistics and volunteer professionals to lead workshops. At present, Shayden and a few NGOs fully fund the festival.

Shayden laments the lack of institutional support given to women when they initiate an artistic event that is not just an entertainment. Every year a theme is chosen to bring the festival to life: domestic violence, young girls' education, a variety of subjects that generate heated debates in society.

In the future, Shayden wants to contribute more to the education of young girls by setting up a mentoring program and sporting meets.

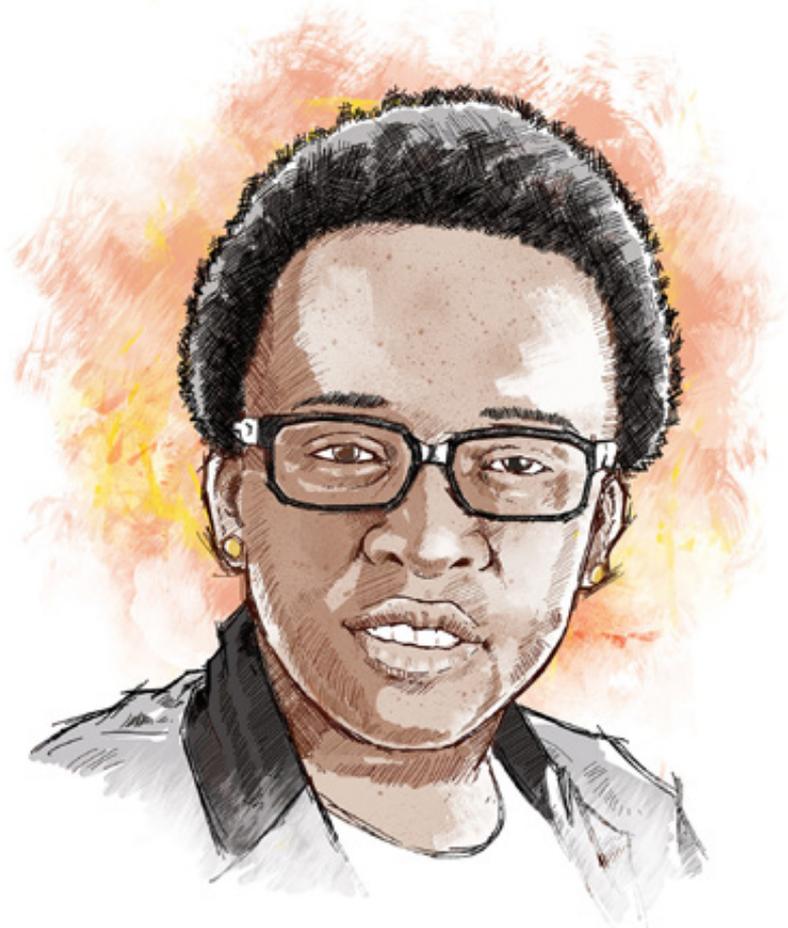
“

They will never encourage this kind of project here in Abidjan. I have nothing against the government or anything; I'm just being honest, that's the way it is. Here, we tend to encourage anything that is fun, and that means do not ask real questions, they don't want debates. As long as it's fun, as long as it doesn't make people think, they'll finance your project, but when it is an engaged project like mine, the tone changes. The festival does not receive funding because it may accurately reveal everything that is wrong with society. For the moment, every year, I have to work hard, I mean I have fifteen million jobs at the same time and try to manage certain things. I use my network, created through quite a few radio and TV appearances. I can count on some people who may not have money to give me, but they can lend me equipment. It's really, let's call it "love money" and my own money. There is no company or institution that finances the festival.

Whenever I am asked about the festival, the question always is: "What do you get out of organizing an event that has an impact? Out of all these social activities which use up all your money and ultimately make it even more complicated to achieve your goal of encouraging a new generation of artists?" I think we live in society and that you shouldn't be dancing when people are doing badly. That makes sense to me. It doesn't seem to make sense to everyone, though. Of course, I need money and people are afraid when you say you need money, but nothing gets done without money. I move forward with what little money I have, I can do without, but very quickly, the bigger it gets, the more you have to have money.

”

Sylvia Apata



Sylvia Apata is 28 years old. Her feminist consciousness emerged at a young age, when she refused to limit herself only to girls' games. Now a lawyer and substitute international relations teacher, she also considers herself an online activist. Her blog allows her to educate thousands of people as she denounces discrimination and rights violations suffered by women, especially African women. Since March 2019, she has served as the Côte d'Ivoire contact for the International Service for Human Rights (ISHR), an NGO dedicated to promoting and protecting human rights based in Switzerland; she also collaborates with several local NGOs and groups. However, noting that many of the latter had been instrumentalized by the

politicians in power or their opponents, Sylvia decided in August 2019 to create her own organization, *Citoyennes pour la Promotion et la Défense des Droits des Enfants, Femmes et Minorités* (Female Citizens for the Promotion and Defense of the Rights of Children, Women and Minorities, or CPDEFM), an apolitical activist organization that aims to show adults what young people can do.

Since its inception, Sylvia's NGO carries out actions to combat violence against women, children, and racial and sexual minorities. In November 2019, its members led an investigation into domestic violence in two districts of Abidjan: Yopougon and Cocody. Their survey revealed that 70% of women in these

localities had experienced domestic violence. Since then, members use loudspeakers to speak out against domestic violence every Saturday at markets; they also provide information about assistance that is available. In addition to increasing public awareness, they would like to train the police. Often, when a woman tries to make a domestic violence complaint, having overcome her fear, her family, her priest or pastor, and her entire community, she still has to face untrained police officers who do not know how to accept her complaint, and who sometimes react violently instead.

Sylvia and her colleagues also work alongside rural women in southern Côte d'Ivoire; soon they will operate in the northwestern and western regions, too. Sylvia believes that launching microfinance programs to “empower” the women of these territories is insufficient; they must also be able to purchase land and possess title and deed. They also need to be trained to manage their affairs and, for those who want to, learn how to set up or participate in cooperatives.

According to Sylvia, women confront sexism in all areas of their lives: no one is spared. In schools and at universities, which she knows well, women are considered inferior. Students lack information about their rights and sexuality; many have to deal with unintended pregnancies. In addition, many female students face sexual harassment, so Sylvia would like to develop an app that allows women and girls to denounce their attackers and find help. This is one of many projects Sylvia is working on with her organization. It needs funding, but there are not many doors that she can knock on.

“
I believe that, although we come from different continents, which implies sometimes different realities, feminism has no borders insofar as the status of women unfortunately remains the same in all societies: that of beings who are inferior. However, as African women, we sometimes live even more specific realities because of our customs and traditions, often demeaning to women, and because of our relationship to our bodies, scarred by colonization. I therefore consider myself a universalist-Afro-ecological feminist.
”

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