

# The Power of Strengthening Capacity of African Feminists: Case of Uganda's African Women Leadership Institute (AWLI) Alumnae

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## ABSTRACT

This study sought to establish the impact of leadership development on creating more socially just systems in which women's rights and gender justice are realised – first by practicing the knowledge acquired as individuals and within their organisations, including movements for change within communities. Specifically, the objective of the study was to explore or examine and document the extent which AWLI participants acquired new knowledge and skills and how the same manifested in the implementation of the post training activities including their community action plans, from an impact lens. The study is an exercise in feminist epistemology and ontology – analysis by doing – tracing and mapping the contributions of AWLI's feminist movement in Uganda. The analysis comes from the ground up, reflecting the feminist commitments to self-awareness and reflexivity, generating new knowledge, building organisations and movements, and transforming society. The study conceptual framework borrows from Kirkpatrick Model (1996) four steps for evaluating learning. A mixed approach to the study was adopted where 21 AWLI participants were purposively targeted using an online self-administering survey with follow up interviews via skype calls. On knowledge acquisition, 97.0% interviewees reported that the training had imparted them with new knowledge and skills in feminist leadership. All interviewees reported that the training was useful and relevant in advancing their personal feminist development agenda while 90.9% found the training to be useful and relevant in advancing their organisation agenda. Additionally, all the interviewees reported to have implemented the training to advance their personal and organisational development agendas. Indeed, the participants acquired new knowledge and skills on transformational and feminist leadership, based on the feedback received. Evidence suggests that the AWLI participants have changed how they look at every occurrence in their life which has generally changed their perception hence becoming more optimistic in life. For young feminists, they have become more emphatic and more aware of the patriarchal social norms that exist in their societies. Additionally, there is demonstrable evidence that the participants have taken up leadership roles in championing women issues in their communities including building capacity of other women and appreciating other women. For young upcoming feminists this will go a long way in building a movement of young feminists who understand women's human right issues, and a cadre of young feminist who can influence other young women hence building a strong movement at the community level. Evidence also suggest that some participants have gained confidence to publish feminist knowledge products. Self-awareness and instilled transformational and feminist leadership have had a direct impact in the organisations that the participants represent. Gender-focused programming has also been strengthened where gender-focused issues are integrated in programmes. For marginalised populations such as sex workers organisations, the training helped in building their capacity, especially on their rights. The mainstreaming of gender in recruitment and remuneration processes within organisations will ensure that organisations remain inclusive and gender conscious in their human resources packages. The AWLI also had an impact within the feminist ecosystem in Uganda where 8,885 were influenced.

**Keywords:** Feminists, Feminist Leadership, Feminist Theory, Organizational Development

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## I. INTRODUCTION

It is evidenced that the Africa woman has become bold towards championing her rights. More women and girls are demanding that progressive normative frameworks translate into transformative shifts in their political, economic, and social-cultural status. Through these efforts, to date, many African countries have been reported to have taken steps to amend and abolish laws that discriminate against women and girls in areas such as political participation, access to land, education, and protection from harmful cultural practices (such as early marriage, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), access to education, access to health services employment, and other social welfare services. Additionally, Africa has seen a decline in maternal mortality rates, and an increase in girl's education, an increase in women's political participation and the creation of several implementation mechanisms at the national level such as gender directorates, gender desks, gender focal points within key ministries charged for ensuring gender mainstreaming in all government sectors (UN Women, 2018).

While tremendous efforts have been recorded, it has not translated into tangible positive outcomes for women and girls in their daily lives. This is a result of a myriad of factors that are both political, social, and economic. Many African countries continue to face challenges of implementing the progressive laws and policies. Women continue to face discrimination in matters of personal law such as marriage, inheritance, citizenship/nationality, access to property and land. Women are still battling with meaningful participation and influence in political processes, and economic structures that are able to deliver inclusive development for its supposed beneficiaries. Sexual and reproductive health and rights remains a key issue with both culture and religious beliefs playing key roles in curtailing access to these rights. On the other hand, women and girls still face violence, domestic and otherwise, that men unleash on them.

In keeping the vision of a world in which African women are politically, economically, and socially autonomous, that Akina Mama wa Afrika (AMWA) has continued to strengthen the leadership capabilities of young African women through her flagship programme, the African Women's Leadership Institute (AWLI). The AWLI is a regional leadership development institute that seeks to equip African women between the age of 25 to 40 with knowledge and skills in critical thinking on gender issues, feminist theory and practice, organizational development, and community transformation. The AWLI has four main features: (i) convenes one week residential intensive training on feminist and transformational leadership every year in Africa, (ii) provides mentoring and coaching through a peer network of young African women that provide personal and professional support and linkages to experienced feminists that act as mentors for at least one year, Continuous learning spaces and IV Networking and Policy Influence opportunities. The AWLI programme seeks to develop a strong cadre of feminist leaders with the practical skills, confidence, and agency to educate, organize and empower other women and communities to work together to solve problems and challenge discrimination, marginalisation, and sexist oppression in the private and public sphere. It also offers a feminist analysis of leadership as a process of inspiring leaders towards political, economic, and social autonomy.

Since the AWLI was launched in 1997, more than 6,000 women have participated in the training at national, sub-regional and regional levels. The AWLI is one of the most ground-breaking leadership institutes that have transformed personal, collective, organizational, national, and continental leadership. The AWLI boasts of being the bedrock of a significant number of African women change makers in private and public spaces through its transformative training interventions and alumni support mechanisms. The alumni bear testament to the positive impact of the AWLI in their personal and professional lives having deepened their conceptual and theoretical basis of feminism and its relevance to development in Africa.

## II. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The objective of the study was to examine and document the extent which AWLI participants managed to acquire new skills and knowledge, and how the same manifested in the implementation of the various CAPs, from an impact lens. The study is an exercise in feminist epistemology and ontology – analysis by doing – tracing and mapping the contributions of AWLI's feminist movement in Uganda. The analysis comes from the ground up, reflecting the feminist commitments to self-awareness and reflexivity, generating new knowledge, building organisations and movements, and transforming society. In this regard, the study was guided by the following overarching learning questions: (i) to what extent did the AWLI participants acquire new knowledge and skills? (ii) to what extent did the acquired knowledge and skills have a personal impact in their lives? (iii) to what extent did the acquired knowledge and skills contribute to organizational changes and (iv) to what extent did the acquired knowledge and skills have an impact in the feminism ecosystem.

In terms of the study contribution, Srilatha Batliwala (2011) argues that the concept of feminist leadership, has been widely discussed, described, and analyzed. But the last thirty years of feminist experiments with building alternative organizational forms and leadership practices needs to be interrogated

and theorized, particularly in light of the far deeper understanding of power and organizational behavior that has emerged during this time. She argues that this task assumes urgency given the widespread use of terms like leadership and leaders, particularly in the context of social justice and women's empowerment; but even more because entire programs of leadership development, or leadership building, have been framed and launched without adequately analyzing the past decades of experience and struggle in creating feminist leadership practices or re-framing our concepts with the advances made in fields like power analysis and organizational theory. She points out that this could be because that leadership is one of those ideas that is considered self-evident, and hardly in need of explanation or deconstruction – or perhaps because it is one of those hard to define phenomena that is clearest when it is absent. In this regard, this study attempts to connect existing capacity building frameworks, such as AWLI, and how such frameworks contribute to social justice and feminist's leadership including articulating a more rigorous conceptual framework for evaluating such efforts. We hope that the findings will help feminist organizations and capacity builders on the same, as well donors interested in advancing effective feminist leadership to look more critically on how to support similar interventions in future.

It is envisioned that the findings will form part of AMWA's knowledge base aimed at shaping feminist leadership in Africa. More specifically, the findings will provide AMWA with the practical experiences from its AWLI alumnae on how the knowledge acquired contribute in shaping feminist's lives, structural features at organizational level and the social impact at community level. Most at times, these efforts go unpublished or unrecognized at international level (Rawwida *et al.*, 2015). We hope that the findings will also help shape AMWA's approach in delivering similar programmes in future.

### III. LITERATURE REVIEW

As Shawna Wakefield (2017) argues, the complex threats to women's rights today, particularly in societies dealing with poverty and inequality, require leadership that positions not just individuals but rather a critical mass of them to lead the way in shifting oppressive power dynamics that keep such harmful systems in place. Despite the contributions made by women by the time they reach political office, the barriers to their effective leadership and to leadership without perpetuating and patriarchal and hierarchical norms, are still high. Over the years, African Governments have made significant commitments towards gender equality and women's empowerment including several continental instruments <sup>1</sup> to accelerate implementation of all commitments. These continental frameworks are complimented by important global frameworks, to which many African Governments are signatories <sup>2</sup>. Despite the achievements, there are still huge inequalities in the political, economic, and social status between women and men. Sexual violence and exploitation, the unequal division of unpaid care and domestic work, and discrimination in public office, all remain huge barriers.

It is evidenced that the Africa woman has become bold towards championing her rights. More women and girls are demanding that progressive normative frameworks translate into transformative shifts in their political, economic, and social-cultural status. Through these efforts, to date, many African countries have been reported to have taken steps to amend and abolish laws that discriminate against women and girls in areas such as political participation, access to land, education, and protection from harmful cultural practices (such as early marriage, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), access to education, access to health services employment, and other social welfare services. Additionally, Africa has seen a decline in maternal mortality rates, and an increase in girl's education, an increase in women's political participation and the creation of several implementation mechanisms at the national level such as gender directorates, gender desks, gender focal points within key ministries charged for ensuring gender mainstreaming in all government sectors (UN Women, 2018).

It is without a doubt that the role played by feminist movements transnationally and nationally has played a key role in opening political spaces for women, including advocacy at the global and regional levels which has resulted in international conventions and agreements that provide the basis for women's political participation, establishing feminist political parties and providing leadership training, funding, and other forms of support to women candidates (Rawwidah *et al.*, 2014). The spaces for the advancement of women's political representation include "temporary special measures" such as quotas, reserved seats and appointments, civil society, and local governments as "entry points" into politics (UNDP, 2016). The numerous challenges faced by women in politics; family and domestic responsibilities, social and cultural stereotypes, women's own "internalised" stereotypes, unequal access to education and political knowledge, lack of access to campaign financing, political party gatekeepers (old boys' network) personal safety, and

<sup>1</sup> The protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of women in Africa (2003); the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (2004); the African Women's Decade 2010-2020; and the UN Security

<sup>2</sup> The Convention on Elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and girls (1979), the Beijing Platform for Action (1995), and UN Security Resolution 1325 among others

the “double” bias against women from marginalised groups.

While feminist movements have contributed to transforming inequalities between men and women, there are continuing and increasing gender differentials within and across countries. Women still have unequal access to fundamental human rights, such as food and shelter. Their bodily integrity and sexual and reproductive rights are deeply contested. Women perform the lion’s share of care and social reproduction, are segregated into low-paying occupations, and earn less than men for work of equal value. They have unequal access to and control over economic resources, such as land, property, and credit. Gender gaps are evident in such areas as health, education, employment, poverty, entrepreneurship, decision-making, and the impact of environmental degradation. Violence against women in its many manifestations continues in epidemic proportions (Rawwida *et al.*, 2014).

Leaders can influence others and shape institutions and social norms, and as such they can enable the realization of women’s rights and gender equality as they lead (Chin, 2007). Bell Hooks (2014) points out that there are many examples where women (like many men) have been more concerned with their own authority and power than developing relationships with – and being accountable to – diverse groups of people who comes from different political perspectives. Srilatha (2011) argues that internalised sexism – “deeply embedded and internalised patriarchies, - is at times reproduced by women themselves. Based on this argument, this study is more concerned with the kinds of leadership most likely to create more socially just systems in which women’s rights and gender justice are realised – first by practicing the knowledge acquired as individuals and within their organisations, including movements for change within communities, rather than focusing on formal politics. Additionally, there is also the crucial importance of social relationships and the need to understand how individuals energise and inspire each other. This study is informed by thinking on leadership as a collection relational capacity bring forth new realities and to shift and focus collective attention around transformative leadership (Sengue, 1990; Scharmer, 2009). In summary, the study considers transformative and feminist leadership for women’s rights as a relational process of people working together to transform systemic oppression against women and other marginalised genders, for the realization of women’s rights and social justice for all. The fundamental proposition is that, with the right knowledge and skills, a strong relationship between practices of personal and collective transformation – use of knowledge and power for positive change, and creative collaborations that influence social norms, deep cultures, structures, and processes are necessary for transformative leadership to advance women’s rights.

Key fundamental question that the study aims to address is whether transformative leadership can be developed in individuals and groups, or do some people have an innate ability to lead in a transformational way. Based on this understanding, the study is guided by the conceptual framework highlighted in the next section.

#### IV. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

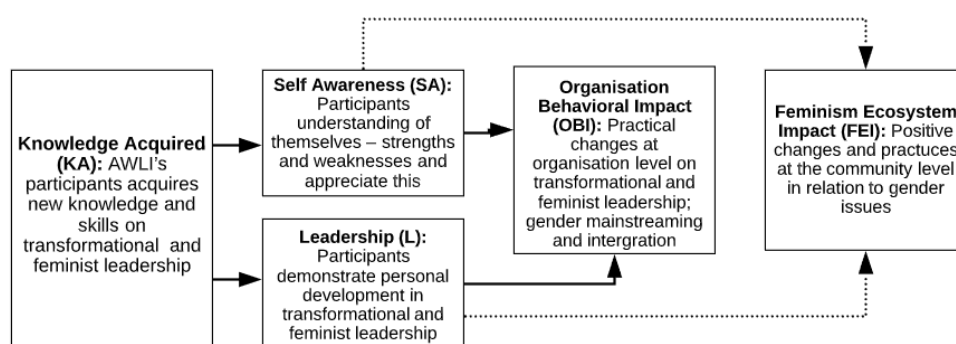


Fig. 1. Study conceptual framework/Source: Author’s construction building on Kirkpatrick’s model (1996).

The study conceptual framework borrows from Kirkpatrick Model (1996) four steps for evaluating learning. The model provides one technique for appraisal of the evidence for any reported training program and could be used to evaluate whether a training program is likely to meet the needs and requirements of both the participant and the organisation they represent (Smidt *et al.*, 2009). For this study, the model was reconstructed to accommodate the evaluate needs and questions, i.e., as opposed to focusing on the three evaluative elements – reaction, learning, behaviour and results, the reconstructed model focused on the learning and behavioural impact or results at individual, organisation, and feminism ecosystem. In this regard it assumes that if learners report to have acquired new knowledge and skills from the AWLI training, then this should result to personal behavioural changes which should manifest to organisational changes. If

this is realised, then one should expect the same to have an impact to the communities – feminism ecosystem.

## V. APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

### A. Study Instruments

The study consisted of an online-administered questionnaire. The questionnaire designed used several questioning techniques. The study employed five-point Likert scaled questions, multiple choice rating questions, dichotomous questions, open ended questions, and open ended and single answer questions, respectively. Categorical scaled and dichotomous questions provided easiness of understanding and flexibility. Specifically, the instruments were developed to assess the extent which the respondents reported to have acquired, adapted, and applied knowledge on the following modules which were taught during the training, in line with AWLI's training curriculum. Guides were developed to guide the literature review process including Key Informant Interviews.

### B. Sampling Procedure

Considering that the study population was few and known, the study adopted a non-probability sampling technique. In this regard, 27 participants who attended the AWLI in Uganda were purposively targeted to participate in the study. The list of participants was drawn from the training participants list. In total, 21 participants (78) participated in the survey enough to generalize the findings.

### C. Data Gathering

The study was administered online by use of survey monkey. Follow up interviews were administered via skype and telephone interviews – in total 6 skype and telephone follow up calls were made. A review of relevant literature was also conducted – this includes the AWLI training report, the AWLI training curriculum, Pre, and Post assessment reports, among other relevant literature. Data collection took place between April 2020 and May 2020, whilst approximately 15 min were required to complete the online questionnaire.

### D. Data Analysis and Presentation

By use SPSS Version 23.0.0, quantitative data analysis results were presented as descriptive statistics (frequencies and range) and summarized in tables, bar-graphs, pie-charts, or line graphs. Percentages were computed for categorical variables. Representativeness was maintained by weighting any statistics that apply to the survey population (such as percentages) by the inverse of the probability of selection of any given survey respondent. Percentages calculation was based on values provided in nominal scales (e.g., yes/no responses, Likert scale etc.). Percentages were computed using the weighted number of cases that provide a given response as the numerator, and the total weighted number of cases as the denominator. Single response variables may add up to a maximum of 100 percent, while multiple response variables may total to more than 100 percent. Qualitative data from follow up calls was analysed using Nvivo to map-out emerging themes from the data whose findings was triangulated with quantitative data before making conclusions during reporting.

## VI. FINDINGS

### A. Participant Characteristics

The study sought to understand the characteristics of the AWLI participants prior to the training. This included the participants selection criterion adopted in selecting the 27 participants out of the 129 applications, participants AWLI enrolment motivation factor, feminism leadership challenges faced by the participants prior to the training and plans to implement the acquired knowledge and skills from AWLI. The understanding of these characteristics was deemed important in understanding the journey of the participants in feminist leadership and the impact of AWLI in their journey as women feminists for the last seven months after attending the AWLI in September 2019.

### B. Participant Enrolment

In total, 129 applications were received to enrol for the AWLI. Out of this, 27 applications were considered through a rigorous screening process conducted by AMwA. The participants had to be between the age of 18 and 40 years; LBQ women, women affected by HIV/AIDS; women interested in strengthening their leadership capabilities; women with exemplified leadership in their organisations, communities or have stood for elective office.

The selected 27 participants have been practising feminist leadership for at least five years (Range 1 – 10 years). In the application, participants were asked reasons why they wanted to join the programme. Acquiring the knowledge and skills to be able to write and publish articles on women empowerment was a drive for some. Additionally, a section felt that the AWLI opportunity will enhance their knowledge and skills hence creating more opportunities that will support their meaningful involvement in national and regional dialogues including responding to various needs that affect women in their communities. The AWLI was also viewed as an opportunity for the participants to join the feminist network, build respectful relationships, learn, and work for complementary actions that promote gender equality at both local and national level with large network of women leaders using integrated approaches. They envisioned that AWLI would enrich them in understanding gender parity advocacy and learn how to better and more easily “recruit” and influence more women in decision making positions so as to advance the push for gender parity in all sectors and aspect of life.

*“...Women leadership is an area where the government of Uganda has made tremendous strides. This is attributable to several international and regional laws and policies that Uganda has ratified as well national laws, all of which advocate for gender equality. For instance, the 1995 Constitution, Uganda Vision 2040, The equal opportunities Commission Act, The Maputo Protocol, CEDAW, among others. A considerable number of government institutions are committed to addressing the challenges faced by women. What is missing, however, is how to integrate existing initiatives with policies and research as to bring about impactful change. Therefore, joining the AWLI will provide me an opportunity to engage in innovative programming and to network with other female peers...”*

Further, a section of the participants envisioned that by joining the AWLI, they will hone their skills in transformational leadership, especially for those who reported to be already in leadership positions. They believed that the training programme will prepare them well to lead effectively as women leaders and to champion women issues in their capacity so as to challenge societal beliefs that women can never become better than men.

*“...I wish to join the leadership institute because I believe that the fastest way to change society is through investing in women and enhancing their individual leadership potential. Thus, I am interested in exploring the importance of women in leadership and understand how to grow my leadership potential. As a young dynamic lawyer, passionate about social justice and equality, sometimes it seems impossible to find motivating stories in the news. For every article published or news aired about gender inequality, on its heels you will find others that examine persistent high teenage pregnancies, sexual harassment at places of work and maternal mortality. Connecting all the dots, one quickly sees all issues lie under the umbrella of gender bias or inequality. Hence, this training program will prepare me to understand the frames of judgment and skills needed to effect positive change in a wide array of settings and transform cultures, organisations, and institutions through effective leading...”*

For a section of the participants, especially emerging young women feminists, this was an opportunity to acquire the right skills but most importantly to learn from other feminists who have been championing women issues for years, including sharing practical ideas and experiences. Through interaction, and joining the feminist network, they believed that will get inspired even more.

As mentioned before, only 21 out of the targeted 27 participants completed the survey. Of those who responded to the survey, majority were from Community Based Organisation (40.9%), Local NGOs (27.3%) and regional organisations (9.1%). Regarding the interviewee’s designation, majority reported to be volunteers (23.81%) and programme officers (23.81%). 9.52% were Programme Managers and Executive Directors. All the interviewees reported to have been advancing women’s empowerment, women rights, and gender equality for 1-15 years. With 31.82% advancing the same between 3-5 years, 22.73% between 1-2 years. Fig. 2 and 3 below illustrates this in detail:

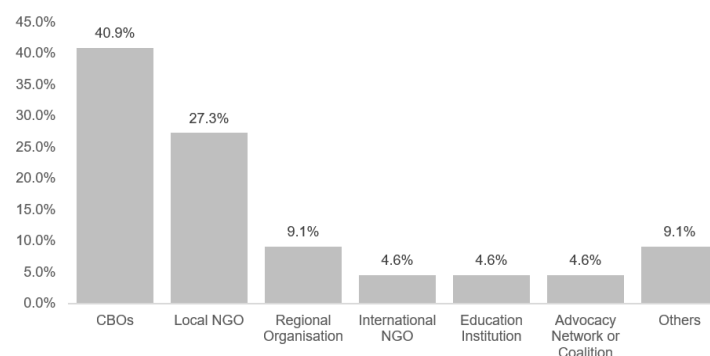


Fig. 2. Participants nature of organizations.

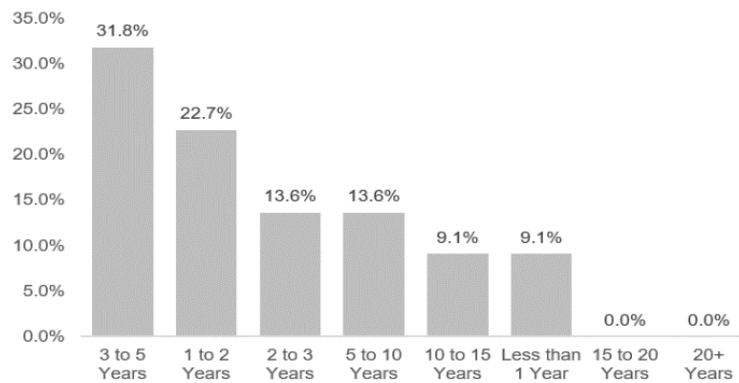


Fig. 3. Participants years of experience.

### C. Feminist Leadership Challenges faced by Participants prior to the AWLI

When asked about key leadership challenges they face in their work as a feminist leader, several issues were mentioned. A section reported to have challenges relating with male subordinates and female bosses. Community negative perception on women leadership was also echoed. Cultural and traditional beliefs that favour men in most communities, especially in the rural area was termed as toxic and a barrier to advance women agendas. Local men leaders in the communities were perceived to participate in change activities to pursue their own political interest hence less supportive on issues related to women advancement. Additionally, communities were reported not have a clear understanding on the difference between gender equality and women emancipation which calls for more efforts directed towards mindset change. Also tied to the community's traditional beliefs and culture, lack of believe and support from men towards feminism advancement was cited as a barrier towards gaining support and penetrating spaces to challenge the status quo, especially in spaces mostly dominated by men. In a way, this has manifested to negative attitude from men who feel challenged. The communities were also reported to have low knowledge and skills on feminism issues which has led to lack of support or buy-in from a section of the communities. Religious beliefs have been a barrier especially in advocating safe legal abortion and sexuality education. Efforts are faced with resistance especially in settings that are highly dominated by men who are religious and belief in community cultural beliefs. Cyber bullying was also cited as a barrier especially where the focus is given to women's dress code as opposed to the message being portrayed. Other challenges cited included: unresponsiveness from targeted stakeholders, lack of self-esteem from most women, gender-based violence in families and places of work, unsupportive women in the society, fear of harassment from the security personnel during peaceful demonstrations, and Little or no involvement of the LBQ human rights defenders in most spaces of the feminism circles.

### D. Participants Knowledge Acquisition

In general, interviewees reported that the training had imparted them with new knowledge and skills in feminist leadership. 86.36% tend to strongly agree while 13.64% tend to agree. Additionally, 81.82% strongly agreed that the training was useful and relevant in advancing their personal development, while 18.18% agreed to the same. Further on the same, 59.09% strongly agreed that the training was useful and relevant in advancing their organisation agenda, while 31.82% tend to agree. 4.55% neither agreed nor disagreed while the same 4.55% disagreed.

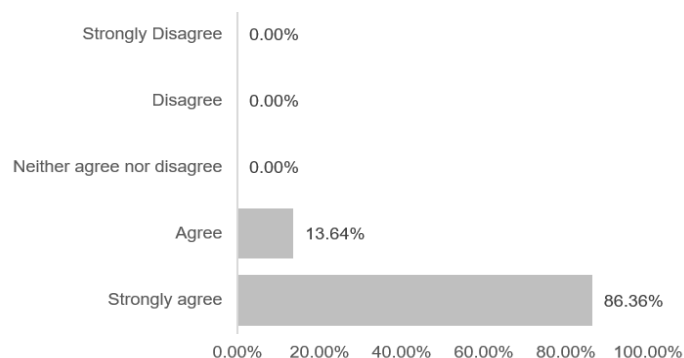


Fig. 4. Knowledge acquisition as expressed by participants.

On the modules that were found to be most useful by the participants in advancing their personal development agenda, the module on personal development was highly rated by 86.36% of the interviewees. Both modules on transformational leadership (77.27%) and Feminist advocacy and movement building (54.55%) were also highly rated. Feminist theory (27.27%) was the least rated in this regard. Regarding the most useful and relevant module in advancing interviewees organisational agenda, both women's human rights (72.73%) and transformational leadership (72.73%) were reported as the most useful modules, respectively. The module on feminist advocacy and movement building was also highly rated by 59.09% of the interviewees. Feminist Theory (22.73%) was the least rated in this regard. Figure 7 below illustrates this in detail.

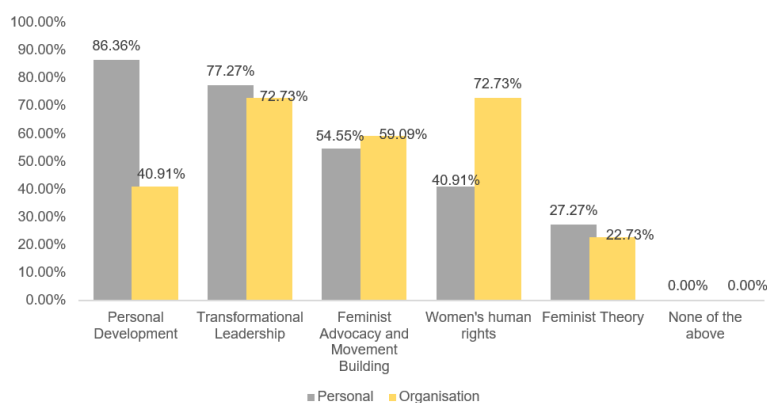


Fig. 5. Most useful and relevant modules for personal and organization development.

### E. Implementation – Personal and Organisational Development

Implementation in this regard refers to adaptation or adoption and application of the acquired knowledge and skills from the AWLI. The study sought to understand whether the interviewees had implemented (adapted or adopted and applied) the acquired knowledge and skills in advancing their personal and organisation development agendas towards advancing feminism. In general, all the interviews strongly agreed (47.62%) or agreed (52.38%) to have implemented the acquired skills and knowledge in advancing their personal development agenda regarding feminism. On the other hand, 90.48% reported to have implemented the same in advancing their organisational development agenda (strongly agreed 47.62% and agreed 42.86%); 9.52% neither agreed nor disagreed. Fig. 6 illustrates this in detail:

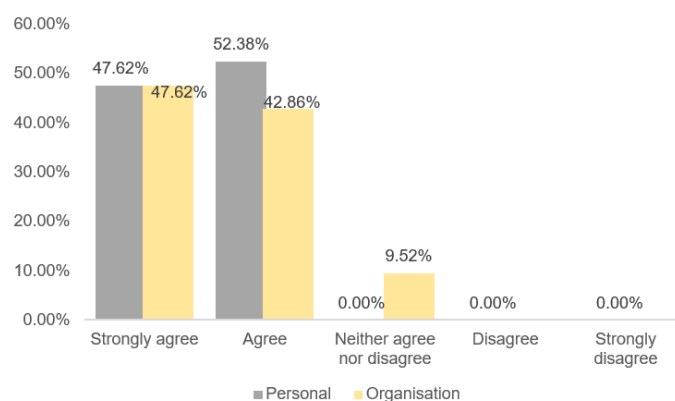


Fig. 6. Implementation – personal and organizational development.

80.95% of the interviewees reported to have capitalised on the knowledge gained from the personal development module to advance their personal agenda. Other modules that were reported to be useful in this regard include the transformational leadership (80.95%), women's human rights (66.67%) and feminist advocacy and movement building (52.38%). Feminist theory was the least mentioned (38.10%). For organisation development, women's human rights (78.95%) were reported to be applied highly by the interviewees. Other modules applied in this regard include feminist advocacy and movement building (68.42%), transformational leadership (63.16%) and personal development (47.37%).

Personal development was exhibited at various levels by the interviewees. This include becoming more self-aware, enhanced leadership skills and improved reading and writing skills on issues affecting women. Regarding self-awareness, lesbian feminists report to have deeply identified themselves and are free to share their voice on issues that concern them. They have learnt to appreciate and pay attention to their bodies which has enhanced their general self-care routine. There is also a focus in paying attention to one's



history and freely voice it out because of the realisation that power comes from a strong sense of identity. Interviewees have changed how they look at every occurrence in their life which has generally changed their perception hence becoming more optimistic in life. Additionally, they intend to pursue their career goals of becoming lawyers to provide legal services to women who need these services. Their knowledge around feminism and gender issues has so far grown which has made them improve in their speech and debates on issues affecting women.

*“...My knowledge has grown, and I have flourished in speech and debate because today I have a wide understanding of what women go through and what we need. I was awarded best Speaker overall and winner public speaking competition at Elle Parle Debate and speech competitions in March 2020. This has put me in the limelight of debate circles an opportunity I am now using to infest all young leaders, speakers, and debaters with Feminist knowledge...”*

They have also become more emphatic, while others have become more aware of the patriarchal social norms that society has normalised over the years. This has helped them to add their voices to different campaigns that advocate for elimination of such norms. They have learnt to appreciate themselves and value other women in the society. This has led to establishment of women-based movements in their communities. On the same note, they have learnt how to speak their mind about issues affecting women.

*“... the training instilled in me the power of agency, which has helped me to speak out my mind and views about anything that affects me as a woman and other women out there. An example is when I was having family wrangles. My uncle wanted to take over my late dad’s land and cattle. I somehow managed to secure the cattle for my little brother. This is because I was able to speak confidently and firmly in front of the Local leaders during the meeting and gave in my submissions against my uncle’s behaviour.... In summary, the advocacy knowledge has helped me to push forward my dreams of fighting for women’s rights...”*

Further, the AWLI is reported to have instilled influencing leadership skills to the participants: *“...As a leader there’s great change in how I look at leadership. Before I considered leadership as a position but today, I know that leadership is about influence...I have been able to reflect on my personal development plan where i am able to set my priorities, acquire a new skill, build my support network, habits to drop and to celebrate. I have also adopted the six core feminist principles (agency, choice, sisterhood and solidarity, public and private dichotomy, sex, and gender, the personal is political) ...”*

After the training, participants were attached to mentors who were supposed to walk with them through the feminist leadership journey. The study investigated participants experience with their mentors and how it has shaped their feminist experience. Despite challenges related to both mentees and mentors being busy which affected their engagement, especially for mentees living upcountry, the mentorship programme recorded tremendous impact. The mentorship programme is reported to have pushed mentees to be better persons intellectually by challenging them to read articles on feminism. Mentors went to the extent of purchasing books for their mentees. Mentors also helped their mentees to conceptualise and effectively implement their community action projects, by strengthening their voices around policy and law related subjects aimed at addressing inequality that exists around women’s rights. This was a journey of learning, relearning, and unlearning that helped built self-confidence among some of the mentees. Additionally, the mentorship programme also strengthened mentees’ leadership skills which has helped improve their personality such as being proactive and building positive relationships. Despite the success of the mentorship programme, mentees recommended the need of having more meetings and get-togethers with their mentors including creating more networking opportunities to strengthen the programme even further.

The study sought to understand the specific examples of how the participants had implemented the acquired knowledge and skills in their organisations. Training and mentorship of staffs were reported to have taken place. Gender has also been mainstreamed in organisations. Women support networks have been formed. Improved programming especially in integrating women issues has also taken place.

The skills acquired have been used in designing concepts, programmes, and training materials. Additionally, the staffs have also been trained on women’s human rights and personal development, including advocating for promotion of women rights at workplace: *“...The information, skills and knowledge acquired was applied in the development of organisational training manuals on transformational leadership. I participated in development of a leadership training manual for community-based action teams (COMBATS) for projects in Tororo, Amudat and Kitgum districts...”*

The acquired knowledge and skills have been used to reach out to other women in the community: *“I am currently actively involved in the activities of Femme Talk West Nile I serve as the Programs Director. In all our programs plans we are paying close attention to personal development of the persons we work with. Educate them about the Rights of women and grow them into transformational feminist leaders just as the AWLI did for me. In all this I have used the feminist movement building skills acquired through the AWLI ...”*

For feminist sex workers organisations, sex workers have been trained on their rights and a wellness centre put in place: “...*Our organization is a feminist sex work led organization. My contribution was training women sex workers on their rights plus advising our leader to set for us a section for selfcare at the office. As I talk now, we have a wellness centre where healing justice activities are conducted. I am engaged in managing the wellness centre, training women on feminism, leadership, and human rights...*”

Gender has been mainstreamed in different organisations. Women have also been given a voice to lead and make decisions: “...*My organisation's mandate is to promote social economic rights for all. However, I have on several occasions drawn its attention to the unique challenges' women face. When organizing an event, I ensure the panel is gender sensitive and give priority to a woman, something that is positively welcomed...*”. For organisations that never used to give opportunities to young women in running projects or make decisions, young women have been given a voice and elevated to leadership positions: “...*My organisation used not to give opportunity to young women to take full responsibility in running projects or even hold a position involved in decision making. After my training, I discussed with the Executive Director about transformational leadership which she appreciated and currently we have three departments being headed by young women leaders under mentorship and guidance of the Executive Director. Young women are being given opportunity to learn leadership skills and feeling like they belong to the organisation, and their voices matter too...*”

Gender has also been mainstreamed in the recruitment and remuneration processes within organisations.

“...*NUWODU is an Organisation for women and girls with disabilities. It is feminist in its leadership and employment. I was given the supervisory role for the incoming interns and volunteers. Feminist leadership at AWLI helped me learn the type of leader I wish to become and being given the supervisory role has helped me cultivate that leadership. I am more hands on with the volunteers and interns but not in a micro-management sort of way. I let them make independent decisions and seek my help where necessary. I aim to empower them into round individuals with practical skills and knowledge attained from the leadership training...*” For organisations that paid men more than women for the same type of jobs, the remunerations have been harmonised. “...*In my organization men were always paid more than women yet women work extremely hard. After attending the AWLI I took my staffs through the feminist theory modules and the remuneration package has to be harmonised. Today we are all paid equally. For me this is one way of achieving Gender equality...*”

#### F. Implementation – Feminist Ecosystem Impact

The feminist ecosystem in this regard referred to the communities that the trained participants interact with. The study aimed at investigating the trickle-down effect of the training to the communities. In total, in a span of seven months alone, 8,885 were reported to have been influenced or trained by the trained participants. For example, because of the training, the interviewees reported to have developed concepts, programmes and training materials that targeted women entrepreneurs in their communities. Additionally, sports girls have been supported to stand up for their rights. On the other hand, women refugees have also been targeted to join existing movements where they are able to identify and report social injustices.

“...*Well, I have managed to understand concerns of women in my community and devise ways on how to help and make them appreciate their worth as women. In the women community group that I am a member, I use the knowledge gained to empower women to know their rights in their homes and what they need to do in cases of their rights being violated, and that of their daughters. I have also used to knowledge gained to train and empower young women in my organisation. I have also used the knowledge to train women refugee leaders in Kiryandongo district in leadership and being able to identify women pending issues in their settlement and how to be able to tackle the issues especially those related to Gender Based Violence and forced marriages. This has helped them know their rights and appreciate what they can do together as women...*”

Key populations such as sex workers have also been trained on human rights and personal wellbeing: “...*I conducted a training targeting 15 women sex workers on promoting human rights and personal wellbeing. Many a times women who engage in sex work are arrested without evidence to prove they are sex workers. Sadly, they must accept the charges because they are not aware of their rights...*”

Help desks or support centres have also been established and university students engaged: “*We started up the first queer feminist ART studio, a safe space to grow our feminist journeys. We are putting up a queer mother's desk and legal desk...*”. University students have also been made aware about sexual harassment and its manifestation. This was achieved through poetry shows and short video clips on sexual harassment. The opportunities helped university students to open and speak freely about their situations. If continued, such efforts will go a long way in reducing cases of sexual harassments in universities: “...*Today at least 90% of the average Makerere university student know about sexual harassment and its manifestations because of the poetry shows and conversions I held during implementation of my CAP...*”

A network of young women mothers and Community Based Organisations (CBOs) were formed because of the training. Through this network, young mothers can share issues affecting them with their peers and mentors: *“...I coordinate a network of 50 young mothers that was formed because of the feminist training attended. Through this network, young mothers’ voices are heard. One of my strengths is community mobilisation and coordination and through application of the knowledge on movement building, NAWOU has a strong network of CSOs in Luwero district with a membership of 65 groups, 1,950 individual members whom I coordinate...”*

Lastly the knowledge gained has improved capacities in feminist research which helps in generating evidence to inform evidence-based advocacy: *“...Feminist advocacy is based on facts and research. Through my work I collect evidence-based data on women’s economic experiences within Luwero that is analysed and used to inform advocacy on women’s economic rights at local, national, and international level...”*

## VII. CONCLUSION

This study was more concerned with the feminist leadership most likely to create more socially just systems in which women’s rights and gender justice are realised – first by practicing the knowledge acquired as individuals and within their organisations, including movements for change within communities, rather than focusing on formal politics. In this regard, we conclude by saying that indeed the AWLI had an impact to the participants themselves, the organisation they represent and the feminism ecosystem. Despite the achievement, it can be noted that the study took place seven months after the AWLI took place in September 2019 and therefore there is a possibility that the impact of the AWLI could be greater in a few years to come. This conclusive remark is based on the intermediate and immediate as reported by the interviewees which have been documented in this report.

As mentioned, indeed the participants acquired new knowledge and skills on transformational and feminist leadership, based on the feedback received. This manifested in them becoming more self-aware: knowing their strengths and weaknesses which has shaped their personal and professional development. Evidence suggests that the AWLI participants have changed how they look at every occurrence in their life which has generally changed their perception hence becoming more optimistic in life. For young feminists, they have become more emphatic and more aware of the patriarchal social norms that exist in their societies. This has helped majority of them to add their voices to different campaigns that advocate for elimination of such norms.

Additionally, there is demonstrable evidence that the participants have taken up leadership roles in championing women issues in their communities including building capacity of other women and appreciating other women. For young upcoming feminists who were targeted, this will go a long way in building a movement of young feminists who understand women’s human right issues, and a cadre of young feminist who can influence other young women hence building a strong movement at the community level. More practically, prior to the training, participants had wished to join the AWLI programme so that they can gain the confidence and skills to produce feminist related knowledge products through writing and publishing articles. The evidence acquired in this study indicate that indeed some of the participants reported to have confidence to publish knowledge products of which some have used the knowledge acquired in drafting proposals, refining strategies, writing blogs

Self-awareness and instilled transformational and feminist leadership have had a direct impact in the organisations that the participants represent. Through these efforts, structural changes have taken place aimed at ensuring that these organisations are more inclusive and gender sensitive. Additionally, gender-focused programming has also been strengthened where gender-focused issues are integrated in programmes. For marginalised populations such as sex workers organisations, the training helped in building their capacity, especially on their rights. Wellness support centres have also been introduced which will cushion and provide counselling services to these communities. This will go a long way in building sex workers self-esteem and building a movement of sex workers that understands their rights. The mainstreaming of gender in recruitment and remuneration processes within organisations will ensure that organisations remain inclusive and gender-aware in their human resources packages.

Lastly, indeed the training had an impact within the feminist ecosystem in Uganda, especially in communities where the participants come from. In total 8,885 community members have been influenced in one way or another. Training of sex workers within the communities on their rights is an example. If continued, these efforts will contribute towards nurturing a community of sex workers who are aware of their rights, hence building their self-esteem. With the introduction of help desks or support centres at the university, university student’s awareness on sexual harassment and its manifestation will continuously be built. Additionally, the network targeting young women and community-based organisation will continuously provide spaces for young women to interact and share their experiences with their peers. This

will contribute towards a building a string movement of young women who not only understand their rights, but also value other young women in the communities.

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