

# FORWARD

## Raising Our Voices

The African Diaspora Women's Forum:  
Showcasing Diaspora Engagement in  
Development in Africa and the UK

**25 July 2015, London**

In partnership with:





# ABOUT THE LEAD ORGANISATIONS

## FORWARD (Foundation for Women's Health, Research and Development)

FORWARD is the leading African women-led organisation working on female genital mutilation, child marriage and maternal health in the UK and Africa. For over 30 years we have been committed to safeguarding the rights and dignity of African girls and women. We do this through community engagement, grassroots partnerships, international advocacy, training and research.

FORWARD is a consortium partner of The Girl Generation.

Find out more – [www.forwarduk.org.uk](http://www.forwarduk.org.uk)

Follow us on social media – [@FORWARDUK](https://twitter.com/FORWARDUK) [f](https://www.facebook.com/FORWARDUK) FORWARDUK

For more details, contact: FORWARD, Suite 2.1 Chandelier Building, 8 Scrubs Lane, London NW10 6RB

Tel: +44 (0)20 8960 4000

Email: [forward@forwarduk.org.uk](mailto:forward@forwarduk.org.uk)

## The Girl Generation

The Girl Generation is a social change communications initiative, providing a global platform for galvanising, catalysing and amplifying the Africa-led movement to end FGM, building on what has already been achieved. We are also our members and partners: a global collective brought together by this shared vision. We seek to inspire organisations and individuals, including youth, across the most affected countries in Africa and beyond, to end FGM in one generation.

The Girl Generation supports grassroots organisations to strengthen their social change communications to end FGM, building on The Girl Generation vision and values, and multiplying the message of hope we promote. We catalyse and amplify the voices of the African movement, linking them together and to wider global audiences. We are building a critical mass for change which will help to unlock regional, national and international commitments, to increase resources that can sustain and scale up these efforts, and end FGM in one generation.

Find out more – [www.thegirlgeneration.org](http://www.thegirlgeneration.org)

Follow us on social media – [@TheGirlGen](https://twitter.com/TheGirlGen) [f](https://www.facebook.com/THEGIRLGEN) THEGIRLGEN

Become a member – Email us for more information: [info@thegirlgeneration.org](mailto:info@thegirlgeneration.org)





# CONTENTS

Introduction 05

Harnessing the Role of the Diaspora in Regional  
and National Development 07

Diaspora 'Doing Development' – Strengths,  
Successes and Challenges 08

How Diaspora Organisations Can Shape  
Sustainable Development 11

Using Communication to Support Social  
Change in Africa and the Diaspora 13

Sharing Funder Insights on Supporting  
African Women's Organisations  
in Africa and the Diaspora 16

Reflections and Insights  
from the Forum 19

What Happened Next 20

**Appendix 1:**  
Conference Programme 20

**Appendix 2:**  
Speaker Biographies 22



# INTRODUCTION

“Whatever we do to contribute to the development of girls and women in Africa, we must be clear that we are representing African girls and women, not speaking for them.”

Pontso Mafethe, Comic Relief

FORWARD organised the first African Diaspora Women’s Forum on 25th July 2015 in London, in partnership with The Girl Generation. “Raising Our Voices: Showcasing Diaspora Engagement in Development in Africa and the UK” brought together 80 women from across the UK, all active in the promotion of gender equality, human rights and development. The event offered a platform for African diaspora women to share, network, and take stock of the valuable work of participating organisations and individuals. Moderated by BEN TV journalist Ekanem Robertson, the forum also provided an opportunity to strategise and discuss how to further maximise the impact of interventions led by African Diaspora women, including how to motivate young women in particular to contribute to their countries of origin.

Speakers included economists, civil society activists, campaigners, media experts and key UK funding partner, Comic Relief. All shared insightful presentations prompting animated discussion.

The forum opened with a tribute to FORWARD founder Efua Dorkenoo, OBE, who sadly passed away in October 2014. Efua was a pioneer of the movement to end FGM in the diaspora, raising this taboo subject at the United Nations and going on to shape the World Health Organisation’s work in the field. Efua remained a staunch campaigner against FGM throughout her life, nurturing young campaigners and a new, diaspora-led programme on FGM: The Girl Generation.

“Her vision saw the creation of our organisation all those years ago, and we will remember her with great respect, for a sister who has left us but who has left behind a lasting legacy and movement amongst so many to work together to end FGM.”

Adwoa Kwateng-Kluyitse  
Head of Global Advocacy  
and Partnerships, FORWARD



# BACKGROUND TO THE FORUM

“We have to change the narrative of Africa and promote a true picture of the continent.”

Ngoné Diop, Senior Gender Adviser for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA)

The African Diaspora Women's Forum represents the culmination of ten years of work to bring together African diaspora women in the UK. It was a process that began with a series of conversations between FORWARD and African diaspora women's organizations and professionals. By the time of the 2011 FORWARD conference, “Mobilising Young African Women in the UK”, a general consensus had formed around highlighting the contribution of African diaspora women to their host communities, and increasing their power to influence policies affecting African women both in the diaspora and on the continent.

Diaspora organisations offer unique links between countries of origin and host countries, providing valuable insights that can be tapped into for development initiatives aimed at bringing about social change. In the context of new United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, this is an ideal time for African diaspora women in the UK to strengthen their contribution to the empowerment of women and girls in Africa and their host countries.

Diaspora organisations and individuals have been instrumental in advocating for human rights and sustainable development in their countries of origin, often fostering supportive, long-term relationships with local partners. However, the focus of diaspora work to date has tended to be on a smaller scale, focusing on individual families or local areas of origin. The key role of African diaspora women's organisations in a number of development initiatives, such as the establishment of the African Women's Development Fund in Ghana, has received little recognition. Similarly, the major contribution of diaspora remittances is rarely acknowledged in the calculation of total development interventions. Yet according to the World Bank, diaspora remittances to sub-Saharan Africa totalled nearly \$33 billion in 2014, compared with \$25 billion in bilateral Official Development Assistance.

The role of African diaspora-led organisations is now being recognised in the UK. In 2009 Comic Relief, with the support of the Department for International Development (DFID), launched the Common Ground Initiative aimed at supporting small and African diaspora-led organisations to increase their role in international development. This initiative provides a valuable backdrop to the African Diaspora Women's Forum as a platform to enhance the visibility and opportunities for collaboration, networking and engagement of African diaspora women's organisations and individuals in development activities on the continent of Africa and the UK.

# HARNESSING THE ROLE OF THE DIASPORA IN REGIONAL AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

“Africa is and should be seen and portrayed as a ‘rising continent’”

Ngoné Diop, Senior Gender Adviser for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA)

Ngoné Diop shared critical insights into the current context of African countries, highlighting the economic potential of Africa despite the many challenges that are often cited as blighting the continent. She reiterated that there is a rethinking of Africa's development by both African institutions and citizens. Referring to the continent-wide development framework, Agenda 2063, which aims to transform Africa into an integrated, peaceful, prosperous and dynamic force in the global arena, she said: “At the turn of the millennium, Africa's GDP was \$600 billion; thirteen years later it was \$2.2 trillion, representing the fastest economic growth in history. It took China 12 years to double GDP per capita, India 17 years, the US and Germany between 30 and 60 years, and Britain 155.”<sup>1</sup>

Diaspora remittances are critical to millions of African citizens, helping them to build their resilience and cope with poverty and many other challenges. However, the diaspora also represents a treasure trove of human capital, which, with the right incentives and support, could make a major contribution to the drive to create a new Africa. However, that contribution is contingent upon a firm understanding of the African development landscape and on the diaspora acknowledging its limitations. And it is only through viewing the development landscape through a gender lens that diaspora women can recognise the significant additional challenges they face in engaging with the transformation of Africa.

## HOW TO ENCOURAGE A MORE EFFECTIVE DIASPORA CONTRIBUTION TO DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA:

- Share inspiring success stories that defy negative portrayals of African progress — for example, diaspora women investing in less traditional sectors, such as extractive industries or agribusiness
- Highlight interventions drawing on diaspora expertise — for example, the Ebola outbreak in West Africa, in which the high number of diaspora health professionals could bolster the continent's weak health infrastructure
- Illustrate the diaspora role in influencing host country foreign/development policies and interventions, through strategic alliances with national parliaments and regional governance structures
- Seize every opportunity to change the narrative about Africa and promote positive images of the continent



<sup>1</sup> UNECA's Executive Director; Mr Carlos Lopes

# DIASPORA 'DOING DEVELOPMENT' – STRENGTHS, SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES



“How do we change the narrative in a positive way, especially when we don’t want to see Africa as one country? We need to communicate better about Africa.”

*Atuki Turner, Executive Director, MIFUMI*

Three African diaspora women’s organisations provided an overview of their experiences of building bridges with Africa in the course of their work on social development and the rights of African women and girls in Africa and the UK. They reflected on the critical issues and challenges faced.

FORWARD Executive Director **Naana Otoo-Oyortey** started the conversation with insights into the organisation’s 30 year history in Africa and the UK, working on the interconnected areas of female genital mutilation (FGM), child marriage and obstetric fistula. All are now key rights and health issues for large international development agencies. **Christine Olaniyan**, Director of the Pan-African Development, Education and Advocacy Programme (PADEAP), highlighted refugee camp projects on poverty alleviation, citizenship and reproductive health rights, focused on empowerment through education, building bridges across Africa and with the diaspora, and informing the policy development process. MIFUMI Executive Director **Atuki Turner** discussed the organisation’s 20 year’s of experience campaigning against gender-based violence and promoting the rights of women and children, highlighting its success in tackling the issue of ‘bride price’ in Uganda. MIFUMI’s approach encompasses primary school education, the provision of shelters for women and advocating for by-laws against bride price in three Ugandan districts.

## THE FORUM PROCEEDINGS COVERED A WIDE RANGE OF ISSUES, FROM WHICH TWO SETS OF GUIDING POINTS EMERGED. THE FIRST SET OFFERS USEFUL APPROACHES TO MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN THE LIVES OF AFRICAN WOMEN AND GIRLS. THESE INCLUDE:

- Uphold the dignity of Africans
- Enable, support and amplify the voice of African girls and women in policy spaces, regardless of their location  
Capitalise on networks to make use of expertise in the diaspora and in Africa
- Work with and enable African communities and grassroots organisations to take action on issues affecting them
- Build on national and international partnerships (PADEAP is Pan-African; MIFUMI works in the UK, Uganda and across eastern and southern Africa; FORWARD works in the UK, five African countries and is part of several Europe-wide partnerships)
- Hold governments, institutions and diaspora organisations to account for commitments made in support of development and change
- Adopt a human rights framework to tackle violence against girls and women and intersectional issues including race, gender, location and age
- Adopt a Pan-African framework and a holistic approach to promote long-term, sustained change, based on nuanced analysis of issues affecting African girls and women



The second set of points distils strategies for success that have enabled pioneering, women-led groups to strengthen their capacity and operate as effective development organisations.

These include:

- **Adopt a strategic approach:** PADEAP uses Pan-Africanism to deconstruct the neo-colonial power relations inherent to international development; FORWARD commits to long-term partnerships with small, grassroots organisations building their capacity to ensure local level changes in social norms; MIFUMI targets traditional leaders and policymakers in relation to the legal protection of women's and girls' rights.
- **Break taboos:** FORWARD's work on FGM in the early 1980s provoked death threats against its founder. In 1999, MIFUMI opened an advice centre for victims of domestic violence, before the Domestic Violence Act of 2010. MIFUMI was also the first organisation to launch a legal campaign against the customary bride price as a cause of violence against girls and women. It was a fight of 21 years before positive legislation was passed.
- **Continuous innovation:** FORWARD held the "First Study Conference on Genital Mutilation of Girls in Europe" in 1992, supported the establishment of the first clinic in the world to provide specialist FGM health services at Northwick Park Hospital, and conducted the first study of the prevalence of FGM in the UK, in 2007.
- **Invest in leadership and partnership:** all three organisations invest in their target groups, involving girls and women in programme design, undertaking participatory research and evaluation, and developing their leadership capacity to ensure their participation as advocates and change agents, thus giving them a voice at policy level.
- **Evidence-based action:** MIFUMI and FORWARD draw on rigorous research to inform and assess projects, programmes and advocacy work.





The forum also identified a number of common concerns. The first relates to the need to constantly challenge **negative stereotypes** held about African and diaspora organisations - that they are small, focused on narrow issues and are unable to scale up. This perception creates additional barriers to accessing significant and sustained funding. Most women-led diaspora organisations have been adversely affected by **funding shifts and cuts**, and by newer funding procedures, including tendering and commissioning. What funding there is tends to be small-scale and short-term, while increased competition for funding from larger, mainstream organisations has hindered the growth of diaspora partnerships.

A second concern is the **lack of visibility, involvement and strategic clout** of diaspora women's organisations in shaping the development policy agenda. Speakers highlighted the need to strengthen diaspora advocacy action to engage more effectively with policymakers in the UK and Africa.

A third concern is the failure of established diaspora women's organisations to build the **capacity of younger African women** by sharing knowledge of development issues in Africa.

Plenary discussions identified a number of key issues, including:

- Difficulty of establishing a strong collective voice while also reflecting the diversity of Africa and its diaspora members
- Need to collect data and evidence to support a more nuanced analysis of problems and potential solutions, including identifying groups and countries being left behind
- Need to work with the African Union to overcome artificial, post-colonial barriers between different groups in Africa, which have proved divisive and unhelpful to progress
- Need to make better use of technology and communications to highlight complexities of issues under discussion
- Need to reiterate and continuously demonstrate diaspora organisations' value in development work
- Need to broaden UK diaspora collective beyond the current London-based, male-led majority

### IDEAS FOR YOUNG WOMEN SEEKING TO INITIATE NEW ORGANISATIONS AND MOVEMENTS

- Learn as much as possible before taking the first step. Research what needs to be done, create links with and learn from existing organisations and campaigners, and recognise that progress will take time, belief and commitment.
- Think outside the box. Respond to others and work together to avoid overlap and develop more than a piecemeal / ad hoc approach.
- Research and learn about the local context and focus on the positives rather than the negatives.
- Challenge the status quo and seek to influence policy. Turn challenges into opportunities to develop political clout.



# HOW DIASPORA ORGANISATIONS CAN SHAPE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

“In 2013, African diaspora communities sent \$32 billion to Sub-Saharan Africa, as compared to \$26.2 billion of Overseas Development Aid.”

Elvina Quaison, AFFORD

Elvina Quaison, Engagement and Policy Officer at AFFORD, discussed Women and Remittances in Africa, noting that initial policymaker interest in the diaspora contribution to development focused on the significant financial remittances made to Africa by diaspora communities.

Because women tend to earn less than men and often lack full control of their finances, total remittances by diaspora women to Africa are less than those of men. However, women's remittances are more consistent and often include in-kind contributions that enhance their position in 'home' communities. This provider role has given diaspora women increased influence and decision-making power in their communities, which can positively impact women in countries of origin.

An illustration of this shift was provided by Zainab Nur of Haayat Women Trust, who addressed the issue in her presentation 'Diaspora Women Supporting Local Development Initiatives'. Hayaat Women Trust began as an informal group of Somali women in Cardiff, offering support to newcomers to the UK and to communities in Somaliland. Building on this early initiative, a second generation of Cardiff-based Somali women set out to formalise their mothers' informal support structure by setting up a registered charity, scaling up to deliver a range of services, including maternal health and mental health capacity building for health workers in Somaliland. In 2014, the trust was awarded the United Nations Gold Award, which 'recognises the best to inspire the rest' for volunteer work and civil society projects linking Wales and Africa.





“In terms of demographics, the African continent is rapidly heading towards becoming the world’s largest and most youthful labour force. With almost 200 million young women and men aged between 15 and 24, Africa has the youngest population in the world... and will be 1 billion strong by 2040.”

GEEDA’s 2015 submission to the EU Gender Action Plan for International Development

GEEDA co-founder [Patricia Lamour’s](#) presentation on “Quality Girl’s Education as a Key Channel to Growth and Development” emphasised the importance of free, high quality education, without which Africa’s young workforce cannot perform its role in sustaining growth and change. Patricia noted that many girls in particular do not have access to high quality education, despite several African countries having signed the Maputo Protocol. Article 12 offers a vision of high quality education for girls.

GEEDA maintains that effective education must be holistic. In addition to academic learning, girls need to be prepared for economic success, to learn about their rights and about gender-based violence, and to have their needs both in and out of school addressed. Girls need to be mentored in order to build their social and cultural capital; they need to expand their horizons; and they need leadership opportunities. An education that addresses multiple aspects of the formal and informal learning process will better prepare girls to succeed in the workplace and to participate in the development of Africa.

The plenary discussion focused on practical suggestions for how the interventions of diaspora organisations and individuals could bring about change. These included:

- Strategic advocacy, targeting key dates such as International Day of the African Child, to raise awareness in schools about the rights of African girls and young women
- Staff-training days can be opportunities to equip teachers and education personnel with insights on the rights of African girls and young women
- Use of consistent, evidence-based messaging and data such as accurate scale maps of Africa, to illustrate the sheer size and diversity of the continent
- Building links with other activists and associations, such as Zonta and Soroptimists, to help shape the development of their agenda
- Engaging in decision-making by joining diverse groups to catalyse change and influence policy makers to support the development agenda
- FORWARD should reach out to African diaspora women and organisations that face similar challenges but were not part of the Forum

“We need firm evidence, both in terms of how to create change, and what change has been made.”

Naana Otoo-Oyortey, Executive Director, FORWARD

### **FACTORS AFFECTING THE LIFE CHANCES OF AFRICAN GIRLS**

- Childbirth is the number one cause of death for girls aged 15-19 (WHO)
- A child born to a literate mother is 50% more likely to survive past the age of 5
- Educating girls leads to fewer child or forced marriages
- 14 million girls under 18 will be married this year (UNFPA)
- Educating girls boosts wages and narrows the gender-pay gap





# USING COMMUNICATION TO SUPPORT SOCIAL CHANGE IN AFRICA AND THE DIASPORA

“African girls and women, whose stories are marginalised by mainstream media, need to use the interconnected world we live in to their advantage and to believe their ideas matter. To have an impact, African women should be setting the agenda by blogging their ideas, opinions and discussing issues such as sexism, repressive traditions and social norms. Blogging, even from the margins, has the ability to impact mainstream discourse”.

Minna Salami, blogger

The next session discussed the role of social change and communication in disseminating messages of change in Africa and the diaspora. It featured award-winning blogger [Minna Salami](#); film maker [Leyla Hussein](#), the author of the BAFTA-nominated documentary *The Cruel Cut*; and Global Director of *The Girl Generation*, [Dr Faith Mwangi-Powell](#).

In her presentation “Blogging from Africa and the Diaspora”, Minna Salami outlined her preferred way to raise consciousness, by documenting and discussing a broad range of women’s stories online. Her argument is three-fold. First, in the patriarchal world in which we live, there have been systematic efforts (both subtle and very direct) to prevent women communicating. Secondly, a ‘neutral’ perspective is, in reality, a male perspective and thirdly, women’s voices have been miscommunicated, under-communicated or not communicated at all. Yet women’s communication is vital:

- When women speak up, they reveal the problems they face, and in so doing challenge existing norms and the status quo that undermines them
- Communication builds empathy and understanding, which can lead to change
- Women are the original communicators through storytelling, by which messages have been passed down through the generations





In her presentation “Using Film as a Campaigning Tool”, Leyla Hussein pointed out that using the first person narrative to voice her experiences enabled her to express her agency and challenge the status quo on FGM. The film maker’s work is rooted in her work as a psychotherapist with The Dahlia Project, where she helps to create safe spaces for survivors of FGM to come to terms with the trauma of this violation of their rights. A discussion of her BAFTA-nominated documentary, *The Cruel Cut*, was made to expose the common misunderstandings surrounding FGM both within and outside affected communities. It also touches on the insensitivity with which FGM is often addressed in the statutory sector.

Similarly, she used clips from her film *Bridget Christie Interviews Leyla Hussein* about FGM to illustrate the lack of empathy for and distortion of African women’s stories by the mainstream media, highlighting the need for African women and girls to use available tools of communication to support change by expressing their own views on the issues affecting them.

Faith Mwangi-Powell, Global Director of The Girl Generation stated that the increased use of digital media and social change communication, including film, to articulate the challenges faced by African women is changing societies for the better. Faith stressed the role of social change in spearheading an end to FGM, and called upon the diaspora to act as a catalyst for change not only by investing and raising money, but by spreading knowledge and awareness of FGM and other human rights violations through new digital media, to change the social norms that support those violations. By communicating relevant information, insights and data, and focusing the conversations on positive stories of change, the diaspora can challenge current narratives about African women and the issues that affect them.

Faith emphasised that the diaspora should not become desensitised by their frequent exposure to exploitative and demeaning images of Africans, but instead should allow themselves to be disturbed by them and thereby take action to change these narratives.

Diaspora organisations possess a range of communication tools with which to support change on the African continent — by articulating theories of change, by capturing lessons learned, and by measuring and sharing success stories. However, such efforts will only have an impact where a positive, collective African voice is in control of its own narrative. A diaspora collective would also be better able to maximise resources and expertise, and to empower partners and allies to take action.



**"The question," she concluded, should be, "how can I engage and reach out to others to promote the change we want?"**

Many participants reaffirmed that, regardless of location, African women need to keep raising their voices. Sexist, sensationalist or derogatory media reporting on issues such as FGM and other forms of violence against women and girls has a profound negative impact, preventing women and girls in Africa and the diaspora from reporting abuses of their rights for fear of judgement or further threats of violence.

**"To transform existing power dynamics through communication, you need to listen and understand the people at the heart of any intervention before designing programmes and projects."**

*Dr Faith Mwangi Powell, Global Director, The Girl Generation*

### **SOCIAL CHANGE COMMUNICATIONS AS A CATALYST FOR CHANGE**

Social change is the alteration of mechanisms within the social structure, characterised by changes in cultural symbols, rules of behaviour, social organisations, value systems, norms and values. Social change is underpinned by:

- Change for action
- Gender analysis
- Critical reflection
- Participation by all





# OPEN SPACE SESSION

The Open Space Session was an important part of the forum's sharing and learning component, enabling participants to explore additional issues and to suggest ways to advance the African Diaspora Women's Forum agenda. These issues and suggestions will help inform the Forum's programme of work going forward. The session also provided an opportunity for participants to make personal commitments regarding their own contribution to meeting the Forum's goals.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR THE AFRICAN DIASPORA WOMEN'S FORUM:

- Share learning about working with men
- Expand project work to include South Sudan and support implementation of FGM legislation in Nigeria Gender analysis
- Identify individuals to act as gatekeepers and focal persons for UK diaspora communities (engaging, for example, with existing platforms such as youth from DRC)
- Invite policymakers to the next Forum meeting
- Create network of safe spaces across the UK, broadening focus from London  
Create a Pan-African women's forum to share learning and create a collective voice
- Coordinate regular meetings where diaspora women can pool resources and share strengths so their voice is no longer silenced







## PARTICIPANTS' COMMITMENTS:

- To identify and work with young people in the African diaspora on development issues through the UK's National Citizen Service and similar schemes
- To change the narrative, focussing on commonalities to create a united voice
- To reach out to members of the diaspora who have not been included in discussions (around FGM) to date To galvanise young people in student-run organisations/clubs/unions to take action



## SHARING FUNDER INSIGHTS ON SUPPORTING AFRICAN WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS IN AFRICA AND THE DIASPORA

“When racism and sexism collide, feminists call it the theory of intersectionality, but for black women it’s just known as Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday...”

Pontso Mafethe, Comic Relief

**Pontso Mafethe**, Women and Girls’ Manager at Comic Relief, closed the day’s discussions with insights from her experience of funding women’s organisations in Africa and the diaspora. Her vision of the Forum’s future is that it acts as a development platform to help to draw together many of the ideas and issues that had been discussed in the course of the day. Pontso emphasised the need for a feminist perspective in analysing the challenges and daily realities faced by African women, whether in the UK or in Africa. She noted that in the context of the diaspora, African women are both a minority defined by race and, in the UK development sector, judged on the basis of their gender.

In the African context, efforts to transform the lives of women and girls is by its very nature political – long-term, sustainable change cannot be achieved unless development actors understand and address the structural basis of patriarchal norms, poverty and injustice that constrain girls and women. African women must be in a position to lead these critical changes, demonstrating that we have a voice and a role to play, as well as the skills, capacity and creativity to sustain change.



# Lessons Learnt Funding African Women Diaspora Organisations

“Billions of pounds have been spent over the decades addressing the immediate needs of women and girls in Africa - and these interventions have been important and remain important as an entry point. However, we cannot hope to bring about long-term, sustainable change if we don't understand and address the structural reasons why women and girls here, there, everywhere, remain constrained by norms, traditions, wars.”

Pontso Mafethe, Comic Relief

A summary of lessons learnt in the funding of African diaspora organisations touches on six key areas:

1. **Lack of information** - African diaspora women's organisations are doing a huge amount of work, but it can be **difficult to find specific information** about them and their ongoing projects. This makes it easy to assume that they are not doing much!
2. **Mission drift** - organisations established to offer support and services in the UK must not **lose sight of their original mission** when identifying opportunities to work in Africa. Rather, they should use the expertise gained from their work in the UK to develop partnerships in Africa.
3. **Respect Africa-based partners** - Diaspora organisations must be careful not to become **a black version of the existing development paradigm** by assuming that simply living in the UK amounts to knowledge and experience.
4. **Know thyself** - organisations should acknowledge their strengths and address their weaknesses, seeking to fill gaps through **organic growth**.
5. **Know your niche... and build on your expertise** - African diaspora women's organisations do a number of things particularly well, and differently from other organisations. **Find your niche, stick to it, and make sure everyone knows it.**
6. **Acknowledge diversity** - the diaspora (like Africa) is not homogeneous, and all African diaspora women will not share the same priorities. **Explore the differences in what we do and build synergies to maximise impact.**

## The Role of African Diaspora Women's Organisations in the Development of the Continent

Pontso noted that there are limited opportunities to hear the voices of African women and if we do not seize those few moments, other actors will. Diaspora women therefore have a responsibility to speak on behalf of girls and women in Africa whenever possible. However, we must always be clear that **we are representing African girls and women, not speaking for them**. Equally, diaspora women cannot take a lead on the change issues affecting African girls and women, unless they are clear about what those issues are and how to jointly approach them.



# Reflection on Issues to be addressed by the African Diaspora Women's Forum

It was agreed that the timing was right for a strategic and joined up action by African women leading on areas such as FGM. There is political will in the UK to support women's rights in Africa and the women's movement's efforts have ensured girls and women's rights are enshrined in the new Sustainable Development Goals. As there is also political change across African countries, and support from donors that specifically focus on the diaspora, African diaspora women must come together to ensure this opportunity is not lost. African diaspora women have an exceptional opportunity to take a lead in key areas in relation to women and girls' rights. To that end, the forum identified several focal themes:

1. **Area of focus** - whether thematic or geographical, it is crucial for each organisation to identify its area of expertise and build partnerships with complementary organisations.
2. **Brand recognition** - help people understand what your organisation brings to the table.
3. **Deep understanding** - be able to demonstrate unique, evidence-based knowledge and technical expertise of context, issues and groups you work with.
4. **Funding** - avoid reliance on actors with mis/preconceptions about what 'African-ness' means, i.e. weak track record, weak financial systems, absence of monitoring and evaluation etc. Seek alternative sources, such as African businesses in the UK and on the continent, as well as diaspora philanthropists.
5. **Speak out** - the voices of African women are rarely heard discussing their priorities, on their terms. Diaspora women must leverage their frustration with the development sector status quo to be more vocal about the issues important to them, using evidence-based claims to support a position.

## POSSIBLE AREAS OF ACTION FOR THE AFRICAN DIASPORA WOMEN'S FORUM

- Represent diaspora issues of concern to the public, decision-makers and funders, and advocate for change
- Create a resource on African diaspora women's organisations and their work
- Provide technical support for diaspora organisations
- Develop learning resources for sharing experiences, learning and best practice within and beyond the diaspora women's sector
- Nurture links based on mutual respect between African diaspora women's organisations and women's organisations on the continent, to strengthen the movement
- Identify synergies between diaspora and non-African organisations to build mutually beneficial partnerships

"If you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together."

Pontso Mafethe, Comic Relief

## REFLECTIONS AND INSIGHTS FROM THE FORUM

“Make the most of this opportunity to question, challenge and learn. It is important that you share the learning with people who weren’t able to attend, to spread the ideas further, and raise our voices higher. From my perspective, this is not the decade of women but the century of women!”

Sohier Elneil, Chair of the Board, FORWARD

The African Diaspora Women’s Forum brought together more than 80 women representing organisations and individuals keen to learn about, share experiences of and contribute to issues affecting African development. The following summary of emerging issues, recommendations and critical questions will inform and shape the future work of the forum.

- African diaspora women’s organisations working in development need to have an unwavering commitment to the issues they tackle. They need to be brave, strategic and innovative, building genuine partnerships and base their work on evidence.
- Diaspora women’s organisations have been particularly affected by funding shifts and cuts, while facing increased competition for funding from large, mainstream organisations. This scarcity of and competition for resources has hindered the building of strong diaspora partnerships.
- Diaspora advocacy action must seek to challenge negative stereotypes, improve visibility and engage more effectively with policy-makers in the UK and Africa.
- Shifts in the role and position of African diaspora women as a result of their financial and social remittances could result in increased influence and decision-making power, with positive impacts for women in countries of origin.
- Access to quality education and life-long capacity development in Africa and the diaspora will help sustain growth and change on the continent.
- African diaspora women’s organisations must build on gains made in raising the profile of taboo issues in the UK and on the continent, to reach out to younger women to replicate their success with other development issues.





# Key Recommendations

The forum identified a number of important recommendations. In summary, African diaspora women's organisations should:

- Use social channels to accelerate change on the African continent, highlighting measurable success, articulating theories of change and capturing lessons learnt.
- Unite around clear, collectively-understood goals, to take action that leads to measurable results, achievements and change.
- Aim to represent but not speak for African women and girls, always acknowledging the limits imposed by that role.
- Articulate what they do well and differently from other organisations, in order to achieve policy change.
- Stay informed about the development landscape in Africa and respect the expertise of local partners.



# WHAT HAPPENED NEXT

Since the African Diaspora Women's Forum, some of the participants have followed up on the commitment they made on the day:

- Angela joined FORWARD's Youth Advocates Programme and has been organising FGM-awareness events at her university, inspiring other young people to speak out a stand against FGM.

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=BssgCir9wXY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BssgCir9wXY)

- Althea has organised FGM awareness sessions to be delivered to students in Higher Education Institutions in which she works.
- Eliza is more committed than ever to changing the narrative and amplifying African women's voices and stories.

[www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/apr/04/women-africa-stories-change](http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/apr/04/women-africa-stories-change)

Get in touch to share your news and activities since the African Diaspora Women's Forum or, if you need support, email: [Kekeli@forwarduk.org.uk](mailto:Kekeli@forwarduk.org.uk)

The Girl Generation, co-host of the African Diaspora Women's Forum 2015, met with diaspora organisations and individuals working on girls and women's rights issues in Africa in April 2016 to introduce The Girl Generation and share their new strategy. This meeting was also an opportunity for The Girl Generation to hear ideas about accelerating change to end FGM using the power of communication.

The next African Diaspora Women's Forum is scheduled to take place in December 2016. This safe and empowering space will allow African Diaspora Women to share learning and ideas on Sustainable Development Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

[www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/gender-equality/](http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/gender-equality/)

If you want to help steer the next African Diaspora Women's Forum, get in touch with FORWARD for more details of a meeting to be held in July 2016.

Email: [Kekeli@forwarduk.org.uk](mailto:Kekeli@forwarduk.org.uk)





# APPENDIX 1: CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

TIME	PROGRAMME
<b>2.30 – 2.50</b>	Welcome: Ekanem Robertson, BEN TV Opening Remarks: Sohier Elneil, Chair of FORWARD Tribute to Efua Dorkenoo: Adwoa Kwateng-Kluytse, FORWARD
<b>2.50 – 3.10</b> Keynote Speech	Ngone Diop, UNECA - <i>Harnessing the Role of the Diaspora in Regional and National Development</i>
<b>3.10 – 3.55</b> Session 1	<b>Diaspora 'Doing Development' – Strengths, Successes and Challenges</b> This session will provide an overview of some of the African diaspora organisations working in social development in Africa and the UK and examine some of the issues these organisations face. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Naana Otoo-Oyortey, FORWARD FORWARD's 30 year Journey in the UK and Africa</li> <li>• Christine Olaniyan, PADEAP Building Bridges across The Continent and with The Diaspora</li> <li>• Atuki Turner, MIFUMI Responding to Violence Against Women and Children in the UK and Africa</li> </ul>
<b>3.55 – 4.40</b> Session 2	<b>How Diaspora Organisations Can Shape Sustainable Development</b> This session will explore the space for and role of the diaspora in the current and up-coming frameworks for development such as CEDAW and the Sustainable Development Goals. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elvina Quaison, AFFORD Women and Remittances to Africa</li> <li>• Zainab Nur, Haayat Women Diaspora Supporting Local Development Initiatives</li> <li>• Patricia Lamour, GEEDA Quality Girls Education as a Key Channel to Growth and Development</li> </ul>
<b>4.40 – 4.55</b>	Tea & Coffee Break
<b>4.55 – 5.40</b> Session 3	<b>Using Communication to Support Social Change in Africa and the Diaspora</b> This session will look at the role of communication in disseminating messages of change. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minna Salami, Ms Afropolitan Blogging from Africa and the Diaspora</li> <li>• Leyla Hussein, The Dahlia Project Using Film as a Campaigning Tool</li> <li>• Faith Mwangi-Powell, The Girl Generation Social Change Communications as a Catalyst for Change</li> </ul>
<b>5.40 – 6.55</b>	Open Space Session
<b>6.55 – 7.10</b>	Closing Address: Pontso Mafethe, Comic Relief
<b>7.10 – 7.15</b>	Closing of Events
<b>7.15 – 8.00</b>	Live music: Networking and Drinks Reception

# APPENDIX 2: SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES



**Atuki Turner** is a women's rights activist and Founding Director of MIFUMI, a development and women's rights NGO based in Bristol. MIFUMI works in Uganda to secure the basic rights of rural people, through education, health and income-generating schemes, and the protection of women from domestic violence. Atuki helped raise the profile of domestic violence in Uganda and her campaign on 'bride price' has resulted in interest from activists and academics. MIFUMI is currently involved in joint research with the universities of Bristol and Warwick. Her activism led to her being nominated one of 100 world Torch Champions for Millennium Development Goal Number 3 on Gender Equality and Empowerment. Atuki is also a writer and is currently making documentaries to raise awareness of women's issues and change social attitudes. [www.mifumi.org](http://www.mifumi.org)

**Christine Tominke** is Director of PADEAP (Pan-African Development Education and Advocacy Programme) and has 15 years' experience working in community grassroots-led human rights work. A development economist by training, Christine has worked in Uganda and northern Nigeria. PADEAP supports pan-African voices and grassroots, women's, youth, migrant and cultural movements in their struggles for change at the local level. She has published research on the utilisation of skilled birth attendance in Northern Nigeria and its contribution to the high levels of maternal mortality. Christine holds an MSc in Economic Development and a BA in Economics and Politics. In addition to her role with PADEAP, she is also Chair of Imkaan, a UK-based black feminist organisation that addresses violence against women and girls, and a Member of the Board of the League for Human Rights, based in Jos, Nigeria. [www.padeap.net](http://www.padeap.net)



**Elvina Quaison** is Engagement and Policy Officer at AFFORD, coordinating a European Commission-funded partnership project focusing on the diaspora response to humanitarian situations in 'home' countries. Elvina has worked with diaspora organisations for over 15 years. In 2011, she managed AFFORD projects enabling diaspora contributions of skills and knowledge by volunteering in Ghana. She also managed a project facilitating diaspora entrepreneurs' goals of setting up businesses in Ghana. Following this experience, she followed suit and lived in Ghana for over three years. Elvina brings her knowledge and deep interest in the UK African Diaspora to her work with AFFORD. [www.afford-uk.org](http://www.afford-uk.org)

**Ekanem Robertson** is an on-air personality who uses her media position to influence and campaign for causes concerning women. She is one of three hosts of the television programme, The Woman on BEN TV SKY 182. Ekanem writes for the Woman Watch page of the UK-based community newspaper, Nigerian Watch, and is Membership Secretary of the Nigerian Women in Diaspora Leadership Forum. She studied law at the University of London and was called to the Nigerian Bar in 1985. She has a long-standing involvement with Contact for the Elderly and Sickle Cell Champions, and is a Children's Champion for AFRUCA (Africans Unite against Child Abuse), a UK-based charity. Ekanem is also a popular MC on the diaspora circuit. Her areas of special interest include counselling and coaching, mentoring, events management and research. [www.bentelevision.com](http://www.bentelevision.com)



**Dr Faith Mwangi-Powell** is Global Director of The Girl Generation. Faith comes from a community-health background, with expertise in gender issues and sexual and reproductive health. She holds a Master's degree in population policies and programmes from Cardiff University and a PhD in women's economic development and fertility behaviour from Exeter University. She has published in renowned peer-reviewed scientific journals on sexual and reproductive health (including FGM), community health and palliative care, mainly focusing on resource-limited settings. Dr Mwangi-Powell has 15 years' senior management and strategic leadership experience, including as Executive Director of the African Palliative Care Association, Executive Director of FORWARD and, her most recent role, Chief of Party and Country Director for the University Research Company, Kenya (a global company dedicated to improving the quality of health care, social services and health education worldwide). [www.thegirlgeneration.org](http://www.thegirlgeneration.org)

**Leyla Hussein** is a trained psychotherapist, blogger (Cosmopolitan, The Guardian, The Huffington Post) and a multi-award winning campaigner on FGM. She co-founded Daughters of Eve and advises the UK-wide Tackling FGM Initiative, the Desert Flower Foundation and the Honor Diaries Organisation, and sits on Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary advisory group on Honour-Based Violence. She also sits on the Board of Directors for Safe Hands for Girls, a non-profit organisation working with Survivors of FGM based in the US and Gambia, and is a consultant for The Girl Generation Program and Chief Executive of Hawa's Haven. Leyla Hussein is also a community facilitator at Manor Gardens, where she now runs the Dahlia Project, which she set up in 2013. It is the only counselling service for FGM survivors in the EU. Her documentary on FGM, The Cruel Cut, made with Channel 4, received numerous awards. [www.mayacentre.org.uk/dahlia-project-survivors-fgm](http://www.mayacentre.org.uk/dahlia-project-survivors-fgm)







**Minna Salami** is a Nigerian-Finnish writer, speaker and commentator. She is the founder of Ms Afropolitan, a blog with a pan-African, feminist leaning. Minna is a member of the Guardian Africa Network and a Board Member of UK Charity for Books' Sake, as well as a Guardian contributor. She is listed as one of Applause Africa's 40 African Change-makers under 40, one of Nokia's 50 Remarkable Women Connected by Nokia and listed by Eelan Media as one of the Top 100 Most Influential Black People on Digital/Social Media. She is a TEDx speaker as well as a pundit, speaking across the UK as well as internationally. [www.msafropolitan.com](http://www.msafropolitan.com)

**Naana Otoo-Oyortey MBE** is Executive Director of FORWARD, the lead organisation in the UK tackling FGM. With over 30 years' experience on gender and women's human rights, she provides expert advice to the UK government on women and girls and to the European Parliament on FGM. Naana has previously worked with the International Planned Parenthood Federation and the Commonwealth Secretariat. She has been instrumental in work on child marriage and champions the rights of African girls and young women in rural and urban poor communities. She holds an MPhil in Development Studies from Sussex University and was honoured for her work on women's human rights with an MBE from the Queen in 2009. Naana was also listed in The Power 1000 of London's most influential people in 2013 and 2014. She is a board member of ACORD and President of the Board of the End-FGM European Network.



**Ngoné Diop** is Senior Advisor, Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, at the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) and was previously Chief of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Section. Ms Diop is a macroeconomist and gender expert with 23 years' experience in economic policy planning and management, engendering development, poverty reduction strategies, economic/macroeconomic policies and public finance. Prior to joining UNECA, Ngoné led the Poverty, Growth and MDG Cluster at the UNDP Gender Team, Bureau for Development Policy in New York. She has also served as Advisor on Rwanda for the UK Department for International Development. Ngoné is a Board Member of the Agency for Cooperation on Research and Development (ACORD). She holds a BA and a Master's Degree in Economics, and a DEA (In-depth Research and Study) in Economics/Economic Policies and a 3rd Cycle Research in Economics from the University of Aix-Marseille III. [www.uneca.org](http://www.uneca.org)

**Patricia Lamour** is an international education and gender expert who has taught and led educational institutions in the Gambia, Germany and England. Beginning her career pioneering work with girls in schools, she trained as a youth and community worker and science teacher. Headhunted to join London's former regional government, she became a leading race-equality adviser in London and helped pioneer local government and civic engagement and the promotion of African history. Patricia has undertaken gender mainstreaming assessment and independent evaluations of programmes funded by UNICEF, Action Aid, the EU and DfE. Currently, she is an Equalities adviser to Ofqual, the national exam regulator. Patricia is Director of the Aspire Education Group, which co-designs solutions to raise attainment and develop young leaders. She is co-founder of the Gender Education & Enterprise Development for Africa, a Diaspora women-led network and consultancy, and an alumna of the UCL Institute of Education. [Twitter: @GEEDA\\_blog](https://twitter.com/GEEDA_blog)



**Pontso Mafethe** is Women and Girls Programme Manager at Comic Relief, where she has worked for the last 12 years. Pontso describes herself as a frontline child, of South African, Zimbabwean and Mozambique parents, born in Zambia, and schooled for a time in Botswana. She has a rich and varied professional life, having previously worked for International Planned Parenthood and ActionAid in the UK, and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature in Southern Africa.

With Comic Relief she works with, and is fiercely passionate about, women's rights and organisations. Pontso is not a fan of pink and has no desire to see it reclaimed, and is training to be a helicopter pilot in her spare time. [www.comicrelief.com](http://www.comicrelief.com)

**Dr Sohier Elneil** is Chair of the Board of Trustees of FORWARD and an internationally recognised Consultant Surgeon in Urogynaecology and Uro-neurology. She is a consultant to the World Health Organisation, a member of the NICE Guidelines Committee on neurogenic bladder and bowel dysfunction, and Honorary Senior Lecturer at the Institute of Neurology, Lucy Cavendish College, Cambridge and University College Hospital London. Dr Elneil also supports various women's rights organisations and was featured on the Equalities and Human Rights Council 2009 Muslim Women Power list. Dr Elneil is also Chair of the Board of Trustees of the Fistula Foundation and a Board Member of EngenderHealth, both US-based organisations.



**Zainab Nur** is a second-generation African woman born to immigrant parents in Wales. In 1995 she trained as a professional social worker and worked in various sectors including Mental Health and Children's Services. Since 2011, she has worked to address some of the disadvantages faced by African Diaspora communities in Wales, co-founding the Hayaat Women Trust, which provides advocacy support and involves Diaspora communities in international development work. She has been instrumental in mobilising African women to assist in international link projects with the Trust's partner organisation in Somaliland. Zainab is also a Trustee of FORWARD, and has been involved in the protection of African women's rights, including establishing better health services for those that have undergone female circumcision. [www.hayaatwomentrust.org](http://www.hayaatwomentrust.org)

**Address:** FORWARD, Suite 4.7, Chandelier Building, 8 Scrubs Lane,  
London NW10 6RB

**Telephone:** +44 (0) 20 8960 4000

**Email:** [forward@forwarduk.org.uk](mailto:forward@forwarduk.org.uk)

**Website:** [www.forwarduk.org.uk](http://www.forwarduk.org.uk)

**Twitter:** @FORWARDUK and @FOWARD\_Youth

**Facebook:** FORWARDUK and Young People Speak Out Against FGM\_FORWARD UK



FORWARD is a UK registered charity.  
Charity Registration number: 292403    Company Number: 01921508

In partnership with:



**The Girl Generation**

Devon House, 58 St. Katharine's Way,  
London E1W 1LB