

FEROZA CREATING AFRICAN WOMEN LEADERS

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Thanks programme director for that warm welcome.

To the Principal and Vice Chancellor of UNISA, Professor Makhanya, to the Chairperson of the Unisa Women's Forum, Dr Kumalo, to all the deserving award nominees and to the distinguished audience. Greetings. All protocol observed.p0;

I must mention that as a former employee of the institution, having been part of the College of Sciences for five years straight from articles, it is rather heartwarming for me to be back. I am still not used to saying former because a big part of me still feels like this is home.

As I was approaching the gate, my hand instinctively moved towards my armrest to reach out for my staff card. Fortunately, I remembered just in time that the lecture is in this building, that I would not need to pass through the gates.

The timing for me to be here, during Women's month on this platform in particular could not be more appropriate. My sincere gratitude goes to the Unisa Women's Forum for entrusting me to deliver the 2018 Feroza Adam Memorial Lecture on the topic "**Creating African Women Leaders**".

I must confess, apart from my time at Unisa, I do not recall hearing the name Feroza Adam. I was pleasantly surprised to learn that Feroza hailed from the South of Johannesburg, just like I do. Her being from Lenasia and I from a township called Evaton where both my parents still reside. We both studied at Wits University and share a common passion for the empowerment of women. It is quite ironic her untimely death in a car accident was on Women's Day – just after being elected in parliament and a few days before her 33rd birthday – it is at this point that our stories start to diverge.

On my 33rd birthday, the African Women's Movement (AWM) had its official launch which saw over 300 women professionals in attendance. As the founder and President of the organization, it becomes important for me to share the organization's origins in light of the topic at hand.

It started with the simple question whose relevance or irrelevance thereof is debatable:

"How come when men meet, they talk about everything else – including business. Whereas, when women meet, they talk about everything else, except business?"

As I have mentioned, the relevance or irrelevance of this question debatable and there are a myriad of reasons we can certainly come up with collectively. My guess would be the roots of most such reasons would stem from patriarchy. My point is that through the said question, I was motivated to make a few calls to my peers to ascertain the viability of a platform that is **deliberate** about changing the status quo amongst women. In 2016, I started a whatsapp group in this light and within a month, the group had about 200 women – most of them young – and they called for a meeting.

The first meeting was held on 10 September 2016 by an abandoned mine shaft in Soweto, a stone throw from Soccer City. The attendees each brought treats from home which we all shared – the entire engagement was a collective effort. It was a lovely meet and greet, everyone was in good spirits. At the end of the day, we were all faced with the question – where to from here?

The establishment of a non-profit company became inevitable and there was an expectation from the ladies that I would be the one to keep the momentum going. I off course being somewhat naïve about what that entailed, I obliged. Little did I know at the time, my life was about to take a substantial detour. I grew grey hairs within a few months.

Right from the start, it was clear that the ladies in the group were no ordinary young women. Among these women were doctors, lawyers, actuaries, academics, chartered accountants – you name it. It was clear from the conversations that these were emerging women leaders, emerging **African** women leaders.

As the organization evolved, it became our vision to prepare these emerging African women leaders to occupy leadership roles of authority. Considering the topic today, we at AWM strive to actively contribute towards the **“Creation of African Women Leaders”** in the best way we know how given the resources available to us.

When preparing for this lecture, I happened to come across the history of the cast iron three legged pot I have seen from my childhood (to date) being used to prepare feasts at traditional gatherings. I was surprised to learn that these pots arrived in Africa with early explorers in the 17th century and replaced clay pots that were used prior.

You may wonder what a cast iron three legged pot has to do with the “Creation of Women Leaders”. Well, I wish to share with you today my thoughts of what I perceive to be the three key ingredients pertinent in the creation of effective African women leaders. These have been informed by my own experience - and that of others, through reading, observation, through listening to the thousands of women I have had the pleasure of engaging with as a result of the AWM platform. These ingredients are:

1. Education
2. Self-development
3. Community development

In the African culture, the food makes the event. The host can get everything wrong – just not the food. Just like the meals prepared using the cast iron three legged pots, where the community gets together, where typically the men lend a hand when an animal is slaughtered, the women peel the vegetables at and tend to the pots. Likewise, the deliberate creation of effective African women leaders requires the collective effort of community members.

I believe that success, where gender equality is concerned in Africa depends on the right mix of Education, Self development and Community development. Please allow me to elaborate.

EDUCATION

Our former President and icon of our modern history, Tata Nelson Mandela once said “Young people must take it upon themselves to ensure that they receive the highest education possible so that they can represent us well in future as future leaders.”

I recognize that where formal education is concerned, I am preaching to the converted. There is substantial research domestically and internationally that shows the positive effects of formal education and will not dare bore the distinguished audience with these statistics.

The other day at an AWM event with 55 attendees of the caliber mentioned earlier, we put the famous picture from the Women’s march on 9 August 1956. We asked the attendees, for a prize of course as motivation, to name all the women in the picture. As most of you may be aware, it was the picture with Rahima Moosa, Lilian Ngoyi, Helen Joseph, and Sophie Williams-De Bruyn. Exactly zero of the attendees could name all of the women. In all fairness, I need to point out that most of our members are typically between 25 and 40 years.

In a separate event, we further asked the ladies whether they knew the demarcated wards they reside in or the names of their councilors. Exactly one person knew – not surprising for a person actively involved in partisan politics. We also asked the ladies if they knew of the Department of Women, I am happy to report most of them certainly did. However, most did not know – at the time we did the exercise – who the Minister of the department was. This was when the Honourable Minister Susan Shabangu was still with the Ministry of Women just before Minister Bathabile Dlamini took over early this year.

As a movement, we then decided to embark on a project to educate our members about the history of women, domestically and internationally. The objective was simple – in order for us as a gender to know where we are going, we need to understand where we come from. It is in this context where as young women, we can truly understand and appreciate our generational role in achieving gender equality.

According to the 2017 World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Index, globally, Iceland, at number 1, is leading the pack in narrowing the gender gap. As a young African woman, it is quite encouraging to see Rwanda representing the continent at number 4 – South Africa is ranked number 19.

However, I would be doing the audience injustice by merely citing these rankings without providing context.

On 24 October 1975, Icelandic women went on strike to protest wage discrepancy and unfair employment practices. At the time, women earned less than 60% of what men earned for the same amount of work. Ninety percent of Iceland’s female population participated in the strike. Almost 43 years later, they continue to enjoy the benefits of their efforts and remain consistent and continuously engaged in ensuring the status quo is maintained.

Coming closer to home, I was particularly intrigued by the incredible success story of the cleanest country in Africa, Rwanda. When reading about the country’s success story and of their achievements post the genocide in 1994 that saw over Wea million people die in 100 days, as a movement, we had to see this for ourselves. After the genocide, approximately 70% of Rwanda’s

population was female. Faced with ensuring their families' survival, these women stepped to reconstruct their country.

Today, Rwanda has a stable and remarkably corruption-free government, where women hold key leadership roles and whose policies are cited as a model for gender inclusiveness. Furthermore, over the last decade, the country has averaged a GDP growth of nearly 8% - the South African GDP averaged just over 2% in the same period.

In an effort to educate ourselves of this miracle, the Deputy President of AWM, Phindile Yende-Llale and I ventured to Kigali in November 2017 to experience Rwanda for ourselves. We landed in Kigali just after midnight and were shocked to see ordinary women still up and about walking in the streets without any fear. During the day, we witnessed how clean the city is – just as we had read. What we were seeing before our eyes was just beyond our imagination.

Phindile and I were fortunate enough to visit the Kigali Genocide Memorial as well as the parliament that comprises of 64% of women. We soon learnt of Rwanda's National Women's Council whose highest structure forms part of the general assembly where such representatives are not representing the interest of any political party but solely those of women. This structure is entrusted with keeping women issues alive in parliament; ensuring that the issues around for example Gender Based Budgeting and Gender Based Violence are adequately and effectively dealt addressed.

This was a sobering to us in light of our own parliament that comprises of the National Assembly as well as the National Council of Provinces: structures which are both strongly influenced by partisan politics. The issues of women tend to be mostly a tick box exercise.

Subsequent to our visit, we launched the AWM Women's Learning Expedition in Kigali Rwanda from 24-26 May 2018 which saw 26 women from South Africa venture to another African country with the sole purpose of learning; to say to the women of Rwanda "teach us how". We believe this approach fosters a more united self-reliant Africa.

I must credit the active involvement of the Rwanda High Commissioner in South Africa, H.E. Vincent Karega as well as our High Commissioner H.E. Nkosinathi Twala who welcomed and supported the initiative from start to finish as well as lending their voice to the documentary we shost of the event.

The success of the initiative has propelled AWM to continue with the project. We are excited at the number of sponsors and partners we have managed to secure for the 2019 Women's Learning Expedition – an opportunity that came as a result of our initiative to educate ourselves.

SELF DEVELOPMENT

I would like to share one of my favourite quotes by an ancient Chinese philosopher and writer which reads:

"Knowing others is intelligence; knowing yourself is true wisdom. Mastering others is strength; mastering yourself is true power."

In creating African women leaders, it becomes that much more important for us to realise the power of understanding those whom we serve, but most importantly, understanding ourselves. As a leader, knowing your strengths enables you to hone them and knowing your weaknesses enables you to supplement them.

The funny thing about my biography that was read earlier is that I was forced to get it updated quite recently when I was nominated for the South African Institute of Chartered Accountant's 2018 Top 35 under 35 competition. I choose my words carefully by saying getting it updated because all credit goes to a special friend of mine whose artistry with the pen is quite exceptional – fundamentally so more than mine. The point is, I knew myself enough to know someone else can do it better.

At AWM, I truly believe that my Deputy, Phindile Yende-Llale is the heart of the organization and we complement each other so well. Phindile just returned last week from the YALI Mandela Washington 6 week programme at Clarke-Atlanta University in Atlanta – an initiative by the US Embassy.

As young African women, Phindile and I have become each other's rock and work really well together. I am bit more mechanical in my approach to handling matters whereas she is a bit more compassionate. She's the mother of the organization so to speak and one thing that is clear to both of us is that we need each other. Our relationship works mainly because we are both comfortable with who we are and continuously invest time and effort in developing ourselves.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The period of the Women's Learning Expedition in Rwanda coincided with Africa day, on Friday 25 May 2018 – this was by design. The period also coincided with Rwanda's Community Work Day, called Umuganda on 26 May 2018. As part of the Learning Expedition programme, the delegates participated in Umuganda - translated as 'coming together in common purpose to achieve an outcome'.

This legislated community day occurs on the last day Saturday of each month and this is the time the communities – as per demarcations similar to our ward system.

Explain what we did.

It is developments such as these that make Rwanda a beacon for women empowerment not only in Africa, but the world over. It is clear when assessing the developments in Rwanda that the political leadership in the country took serious heed to the clarion call of the 'Upright Man' Thomas Sankara who said on the occasion of the erstwhile "International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women" I quote:

"Posing the question of women in Burkinabè society today means posing the abolition of the system of slavery to which they have been subjected for millennia. The first step is to try to understand how this system works, to grasp its real nature in all its subtlety, in order then to work out a line of action that can lead to women's total emancipation. In other words, in order to win this battle that men and women have in common, we must be familiar with all aspects of the woman question on a world scale and here in Burkina. We must understand how the struggle of the Burkinabè woman is

part of a worldwide struggle of all women and, beyond that, part of the struggle for the full rehabilitation of our continent. Thus, women's emancipation is at the heart of the question of humanity itself, here and everywhere. The question is thus universal in character."

As I begin to conclude,

Faroza Adam, in many ways applied the ingredients I have discussed. A fearless, relentless and a dedicated young woman leader, who in her short life an exemplary life.

Her pursuit for education, even seeking to do so beyond our borders when she pursued to study International Relations and Diplomacy in the Netherlands is indicative of her commitment to educating and actively developing herself.

The use of her time, effort and skills to serve the various women empowerment bodies throughout her short life is testament of her commitment to serving her community.

Therefore, let us look no further to find ideal examples when seeking to inspire young women in our collective efforts to create effective African women leaders.

Thank You