Role of New Media in Advancing Gender Harmony (Gender Equality)

Wale Idris Ajibade

The Learning Curve

One of the most important areas of progress made in the last few decades is the advancement of women across cultures. This has happened with the power of social media, which made it possible to create a network of hundreds of thousands of followers and to communicate with them, regardless of technological knowledge, thorough blogs, and audio or video podcasts. Current technology makes it possible for an idea to spread very quickly (“go viral”). At the African Views organization, we use several types of new communication technology devices to connect and advocate for causes within our mandates. One of the goals of African Views has always been to establish a consensus on a sustainable strategic solution for effective localization of the universal agenda on Gender Equality in Africa with its Anti-Violence Against Women Act (AVAWA) advocacy.

African Views facilitates a collaborative global intelligence initiative for the advancement of women and girls. Together, and collaboratively, African Views works with several organizations in various countries and has formed satellite organizations to promote programs and services advancing the status of women. Many of our partners have traversed all the continents to attend the CSW conferences. The CSW (Commission on the Status of Women) is the principal global intergovernmental body exclusively dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women. A functional commission of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), was established by Council resolution 11(II) of 21 June 1946. The CSW is instrumental in promoting women’s rights, documenting the reality of women’s lives throughout the world, and shaping global standards on gender
equality and the empowerment of women. African Views conducts annual parallel events as an ECOSOC-accredited non-governmental organization to support the agenda of the CSW in achieving its goals for improving the status of women ending violence against women. African Views promotes sustainable development strategies for effective localization of the universal agenda on gender equality in Africa, and other regions of advocacy such as the Caribbean and the US through its Anti Violence Against Women Act (AVAWA) advocacy.

From 2010 to 2014, African Views Organization has hosted more than 500 episodes of the AV Teleforum, of which 250 were dedicated to topics covering the advancement of women featuring experts on various aspects of the subject from around the world. AV Teleforum is a virtual forum that connects local individuals to global resources, overcoming barriers of distance, costs of travel, and resources by allowing people to take part in a professionally moderated and coordinated forum conducted by phone and compatible VOIP apps from the comfort of their private domain. The audience can listen live online, on social media platforms, smartphones, mobile devices, or the radio. Audiences can ask questions in writing and verbally; it is a platform to teach and learn, as well as merely share information about local-scale challenges and connect the global community to explore and find common interests and support worldwide in real time. All these experiences have prepared us all to engage with historical, contemporary, and future challenges on gender issues more objectively. We see the recent phenomenon with Zoom during the COVID-19 Pandemic. However, this has been going on for a long time and African Views Organization was at the forefront of this trend.

Role of Technology

The Teleforum is not just about talking. It is about consensus, action, intelligence gathering, surveys, education, capacity building, monitoring, and evaluation. Though the process has always been accompanied by dynamic technical challenges, the results and effectiveness achieved have exceeded all expectations. The Teleforum education, experiences, and presentations from various leaders in their fields are what led to the global call to support AWA as a sustainable strategy for peace and security in Africa.

Instead of relying on treaties that have no effect, we are considering another approach that can mobilize society through a more effective awareness and by effectuating attitudinal and behavioral changes from within. In order for the vision for ending violence against women to become a reality, countries must be morally and legally committed to controlling violence against women within their own domestic laws. The AWA provides a solution that some people have interpreted as the missing link and have agreed to support because they see it also as an effective and sustainable strategy for effective localization of the universal agenda on gender equality in Africa.
Advocacy

The AWAAVA provides countries with the opportunity to formulate a detailed plan on how they will implement the existing legal provision for women in its constitution. The AWAAVA is therefore a comprehensive national action plan that includes programs, policies, and procedures for fulfilling a country’s mandate to protect and empower women as written in its constitution. For example, the constitution of Egypt states: “The state commits to the protection of women against all forms of violence and ensures women’s empowerment to reconcile the duties of a woman toward her family and her work requirements.” In this case, Egypt’s AWAAVA will be Egypt’s national action plan, guiding policies, procedures, budget, and institutions responsible for meeting this constitutional mandate. The AWAAVA also serves as an impetus for developing a comprehensive national strategy as well as for updating judicial, legislative, enforcement, and budgetary policies to address complex challenges of violence against women and other specific needs for healing with emphasis on the rehabilitation of victims and advancing gender equality measures. This detailed action plan is published for domestic and international review and updated annually.

AWAAVA is essentially an “act” of accountability on the need to respect a country’s obligation to the contract with its society. The AWAAVA complements to CEDAW, Maputo Protocol, I-VAWA, DEVAW, and AWAVA. Its self-determination procedure makes it easily embraced in developing societies. AWAAVA is original, nonintrusive initiative and adopting the process will improve women’s condition dramatically without compromising the integrity of the country within the international community of nations.

The Power of the Constitution and the Importance of Gender-Sensitive Policies

Moreover, the constitutionality of every law and every act of the government is one of the most important political principles of democracies and universally accepted rule of legal norms. Because constitutions are understood to be the supreme law of the land, they must be respected, and their implementation must be prioritized. The parliamentary or congressional approval requirement and the harmonization of the implementation of the AWAAVA with institutions designed to enforce it are not as complicated as if it were a bilateral or multilateral interventionist ratification agenda.

Milestones Reached

In the area of education for women, the AWAAVA has helped create good models that governments could replicate and scale up. These include those piloted by international Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and humanitarian agencies working
collaboratively and connecting through African Views Teleforum. The African Views women’s education model has been widely successful. A good example is the Learn as you Earn Advancement Program (LEAP) Uganda project. The LEAP model works in partnership with vocational schools and provides tremendous opportunities for adults and young people alike, and especially for individuals who otherwise would be hindered by a lack of money or daily childcare responsibilities, which today remains the main cause of dropping out of school in sub-Saharan Africa. Evidence from our research suggests a need for remedial, basic, informal, and technical education as well as vocational and formal reentry into formal education system. Remedial education programs would enable those who missed months or years of formal education to acquire an age-appropriate education to help them complete their primary or secondary education, rejoining their age cohort at an appropriate stage in the process. Basic and informal education would be targeted at those who had missed formal education and did not want to rejoin the formal school system, because of age or other issues. These individuals might nevertheless benefit from basic literacy and numeracy and basic computer skills and data entry. The added technology provided opportunities for data collection and resource allocation to beneficiaries.

Since its inception, the AVAWA has been on a steady growth trajectory. The number of women signing up to join this local government area has grown exponentially, and membership currently stands at around 6000. This number continues to rise. Members meet regularly as we continue to emphasize the role of women and document the need for women’s empowerment and advancement to protect women and girls in the region. We also developed an app that allows the women at risk to keep a journal or diary and share their various experiences with peers. The app also has an emergency prompt that enables them to send a direct alert to the police when in danger. Nevertheless, we have concluded that their problems are mostly rooted in financial abuse or poverty. We understand that poverty is more than just a lack of money, and we are putting in place structures for education, capacity building, and psychosocial programs. These women are registered with the organization, and each has been given an ID card. The digital identification system allows us to track subjects more easily and provides other benefits to members. We were able to negotiate with the United Bank of Africa (UBA) to accept this ID as valid for opening a bank account for each of the members. Several women who were previously committed to the old tradition of Susu are now registered bank account owners.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, the AV Teleforum has helped to identify, survey, recommend and implement solutions to socioeconomic issues women face. New media and technology have also helped to formulate possible ways and means to address the local challenges. With access to global intelligence through technology and social media, women at-risk have access to immediate support to navigate or address through the abuses and other challenges they face locally.
Given these challenges, the Teleforum facilitated the formulation of specific solutions to each challenge; on the issues of lack of financial empowerment people suggested the establishment of vocational training programs for women and the inclusion of women in politics.

We were able to identify and provide effective solutions with the help of the Teleforum we conducted over the years. For example, to address financial difficulties, we provided access to bank loans, not micro-loans, but tailored loans to occupations within a cooperative, we established vocational training programs, and we encouraged forming a voting block and participation in local politics. We also use the data collected to engage and advise relevant organs of government to provide counselling and support for victims as well as establish legal departments that focus mainly on advocating for legislation against social practices that harm women such as early child marriages, breast pressing, feet bidding, and female genital mutilation. Finally, we advocate for the dignity of rural women and we advocate to businesses operating locally to for uphold a global ethical standard and professionalism as enshrined in the policies established under the corporate social responsibility agenda.

African Views Organization stands on the principle that the society as a whole will improve and benefit if its institutions are used to support women’s empowerment and advancement, which should be a central focus that includes protecting women and girls, fostering child development, and safeguarding society and its moral recovery, infrastructure development, cultural reconstruction, and economic sustainability. The AVAWA is guided by African Views and we hope to benefit from the development programs offered by UN Women and of the institution and civil society program on an international scale.