



Irise Annual Gathering 2022

"Feminist Leadership connects personal freedom with collective freedom. It prioritises working together and having accountability."



On March 12th 2022 we brought together our community across the UK and East Africa to share learning and inspiration.

Over 100 people signed up to join us including young activists, charity professionals, MPs, researchers, partner organisations and our own staff, board members and volunteers.

We celebrated key successes to date, including:



Directly supported over **100,000 young people** affected by period inequality and their communities



Raised over **1 million pounds** of investment to end period poverty and shame



Supported **287 organisations** to address period inequality in their work



Built a community of over **174 small organisations and grassroots groups** across 7 countries

This Annual Gathering focused on exploring our collective approach and understanding of Feminist Leadership.

The event was opened by **Linda Baines** and **Deborah Asikeit**, Chairs of the boards at Irise International and Irise Institute East Africa respectively. Linda described the event as the start of learning journey to formalise Irise's approach and commitment to feminist leadership- which will continue to influence everything that we do including our governance, policies, and processes. Deborah described Irise Institute East Africa (IIEA)'s work across Uganda and the East Africa region to bring together likeminded groups and organisations, making IIEA so much more powerful than they would be alone.





Nketchi Adeboye

Empower Period Forum Co-Chair,
Software Engineer and Trustee at
Women Working Worldwide.

Session 1- Setting the Agenda- How young people are leading the movement to end period poverty and shame in the UK was led by **Nketchi Adeboye**, co-chair of the youth-led Empower Period Forum, a collective of young people across the UK working to end period poverty and shame in their communities and nationally.

To date the forum has engaged over 1,000 young people in training, events and mentorship and supported 50 young people to lead social change initiatives in their own communities. They believe that young people are uniquely placed to end period stigma within a generation.

Nketchi focused on the importance of inclusion in the Forum's work and making sure that all voices were heard in consultations about how to end period poverty and shame in the UK. She also shared Roger Hart's Ladder of Young People's Participation (below) describing the important of genuine shared decision making between young leaders and the institutions that support them. Finally, Nketchi shared her own reflections on what she had learned through her involvement in the Forum's recent work to develop and lead a national campaign to put young people's voices at the centre of work to end period poverty and shame in the UK. She described the importance of international and cross generational dialogue in building her understanding of the issues the forum was addressing and challenging her own perspective and views in a positive way. Her ideas of feminist leadership were also challenges as she considered the values and approaches of both western and African feminism-questioning whether feminist leadership could take many forms depending on the context. She ended with the thought that we should be advocating alongside people rather than for them, enabling them to find their own voice, platform and power.



"You are not an advocate for someone, you are an advocate alongside other people"

Nketchi



Lillian Bagala
Regional Director at Irise
Institute East Africa



Patricia Humura
Programme Manager, Irise
Institute East Africa

Session 2: Period Justice- How IIEA are empowering girls, young women and local leaders to drive the change they want to see was led by **Lillian Bagala**, Regional Director at Irise Institute East Africa, and **Patricia Humura**, Acting Programme Manager at Irise Institute East Africa.

Lillian started the session by outlining how IIEA use a transformative feminist approach in their programme design focused on how to strengthen structures that enable women to participate in decision making processes and invest in young women who have a passion to create change in their communities.

Patricia described how Irise Institute East Africa are bringing together over 95 organisations through The Period Equality Network (TPEN) to share learning and work together to end period poverty and shame in their communities. They are creating a collective that can work together and grow together- building a movement that can advance period justice in East Africa.



Anna Adeke, a Ugandan lawyer and Member of Parliament representing women in Soroti District, shared how she has been advocating with IIEA for the Ugandan government to make tangible budget commitments to meet women and girls menstrual needs. She is also working with Lillian to mobilise more women MPs to champion period equality in Uganda.



A member of TPEN, **Gráce Françoise Nibizi**, Founder and Director of Santé Communauté Développement spoke about her work in her own community in Burundi to end period poverty and shame, including adapting programmes to ensure that all women and girls even those who can't read and write can access information about their bodies.

“Irise has not only given us funding but visibility and a community to learn, share and be better together in taking action against period poverty, advocating for period friendly communities.”

Kaligiirwa Bridget Kigambo, at just 24 years old, is the Director of Girl Power Connect and part of TPEN. She has received a small grant and mentorship and training through Irise.



For **Session 3: Feminist Leadership- what is it and why does it matter?** we welcomed two external speakers to share their experiences and expertise with us. **Angella Assimwe** is lawyer and human rights defender. She is also CEO of The Voice Consults Ltd. **Patti Whaley** is a UK based charity professional with over 30 years experience as a senior manager and trustee for organisations like Amnesty International, Action Aid and the British Institute for Human Rights.



“Feminist Leadership is authenticity, self-awareness, self-care and accountability- it is power sharing...it is a journey of continuous learning and reflection...Feminist Leadership connects personal freedom with collective freedom. It prioritises working together and having accountability.”

Angella shared how in her own life she did not get Period Justice and became pregnant as a teenager following sexual abuse. At the time there were no conversations about periods and she didn't realise she was pregnant. She emphasised the importance of getting information to girls and of spaces like Irise where they can share their stories. It was through information and mentorship that she was empowered to overcome the challenges she faced.

Patti shared Action Aid's Ten Principles of Feminist Leadership- in their Theory of Change poverty results from unjust power structures so you can't eliminate poverty without addressing those underlying power structures- charity should no longer be about making things better but about fundamentally changing the way the system works. Feminism is not about putting women first but about analysing and changing the systemic power structures within our societies across gender, class, race and disability and any other system of exclusion. Feminist leadership builds a more explicit awareness of power and how it is being used.



“Feminist Leadership is a path, not a magic shortcut- it should be uncomfortable and inconvenient...As we encourage disagreements, decisions will become more difficult, however our decisions will be better ones...If you constantly find that you are the smartest person in the room, you have failed at feminist leadership.”

Patti shared some practical examples of how she applied Feminist Leadership to governance processes including:

1. Enabling leaders of Global South offices to meet separately before larger global meetings so that the larger, better resourced and often more experienced leaders from offices in the Global North were less dominant in subsequent discussions- the main meetings became richer for everyone as a result.
2. Changing the order in which people are invited to speak in meetings to prevent more influential speakers from inadvertently shaping the whole discussion or inviting people to write down their thoughts before anyone speaks.
3. Monitoring who speaks and for how long to inform action to make sure all voices are heard.
4. Practising respectful listening- listening not just to understand but to potentially acknowledge that the speaker may be right.
5. Becoming more comfortable with disagreement and opposing views and recognising that sometimes it's important to live with disagreement and build an understanding of what is underlying it- the aim is to have better, more creative and respectful disagreement so that you make better decisions.
6. Learning to separate "judgementalness" from being wrong

She ended by reminding participants that systemic privilege is least visible to those who have it so it's particularly important for them to say the word feminism and remind themselves that they are trying to change the power system and use their power in a more inclusive way. The aim is not to be better but to be transformative.



Action Aid's 10 Principles of Feminist Leadership

1. **Self-Awareness**
2. **Self-care and caring others**
3. **Dismantling bias**
4. **Inclusion**
5. **Sharing Power**
6. **Responsible and transparent use of power**
7. **Accountable Collaboration**
8. **Respectful Feedback**
9. **Courage**
10. **Zero tolerance**

Our final Session was a **Roundtable Discussion** to draw out key learnings from the event, chaired by longstanding Irise Advisor, **Dr Lata Narayanaswamy**.

Lata kicked off the discussion by highlighting the challenges of inclusion in times of crisis.



“Very often the challenge is not to see questions of voice or enabling environment or inclusion as optional add-ons to think about once we have done everything else.”

Panelists shared their own thoughts on feminist leadership:



“Feminism is not just about female empowerment, but empowering every marginalised and disenfranchised group.”

Mandi Tembo- Zimbabwean Researcher



“Feminist Leadership is about dismantling existing structures that oppress people and breaking the bias. Its not just about women, everyone can be a leader- you don’t need to be in a leadership position to be a leader.”

Nengi Ayika- Policy Advisor



“We need to be intentional when it comes to leadership, if you have opened a door to get where you are, never close it behind you. We need to always reflect on our actions. Sometimes we shine when we dim our light and let others shine...It’s about empowerment not power over.”

Anne Sizomu- Development and Public Health Professional

Other points raised were:

- The importance of working from the grassroots up rather than top down. If we include those most affected by the issues we address in the interventions we develop and programmes we run we have more impact.
- Making sure its quite clear why its called Feminist Leadership and why it’s important because the term can be seen as radical and exclusive.
- How collaboration and inclusivity are the critical ingredients of Irise’s approach
- Believing that things can change and can get better is at the heart of feminist leadership
- Multi-level working within Irise at the local, national and global level and the importance of remembering the importance of the grassroots and that ultimately, we are here to support people in their communities whatever level we are working at.