



THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM: THE QUESTION OF FEMINIST REMUNERATION & PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT.

On 9th October 2023, **Akina Mama wa Afrika, FAIR SHARE of Women Leaders** and **We Are Feminist Leaders**, was elated to hold the second session of the learning series on "Feminist Leadership Under Construction". This series is part of conversations that aim to explore how we operationalise the feminist revolution and how exactly we can put our feminist principles into action in the workplace. In our second session, we focused on remuneration and performance management, with speakers Jackie Asiimwe (CivSource Africa), Ennie Chipembere (ECLC & Humentum) and Maxensia Nakibuuka (Lungujja Community Health Caring Organisation).

With 100+ participants, we unpacked some of the assumptions, power dynamics and feminist possibilities when it comes to recognising and compensating labour within an organisation. This summary shares some of the key questions discussed, insights and resources shared for ongoing exploration of the topic.

Discussions

Too often, money is the elephant in the room - and feminist organisations are not always the exception! So why do we need a feminist approach to performance and management?



Our first speaker, Ennie shared a personal story of being passed over for promotion despite being compensated at the same level as the new hire. She reflected on fighting for equity in a senior role and how she did not advocate for herself for fear of rocking the boat. Ennie also shared insights on socialisation and following protocols in organisations and realising potential disadvantages for marginalised groups. **"If we do not support those who feel that they are being disadvantaged within the system, it means a lot of abuses, discrimination, abuses are not taken care of."** Therefore, when talking about feminist approaches, it is collective action and change for the greater good. On feminist approaches to salary and benefits, Ennie recommends that organisations must consider feminist principles of fairness, inclusivity, equity and representation to address the challenges faced by employees who take reproductive breaks such as maternity leave.



Jackie Asiimwe shared her struggles with salary negotiation, vulnerability and power dynamics. ***“Salary is very secretive, it’s a conversation that starts in the interview room with the employer and a lot of times, you hear what you’re worth and if you want the job, you shy away from actually saying your worth because of fear of losing the job”.***

In addition, Jackie also spoke about the three elements reflected in salary, including value, security and appreciation. But can salary truly provide security and stability in an insecure global financial market, volatile political environment, and shrinking civic space? Many of us are always one salary away from vulnerability. And when your salary comes from a system that devalues an individual and is extractive of the human elements in the work, what could make it ‘fair’ or feminist? Salary and value in a global financial system devalue human work, leading to stagnant salaries and gender inequality.

A leader [head of an organisation] believes staff bring equal value despite unequal pay, and seeks to redistribute resources. In line with this philosophy, CivSource implements a rotational leadership model where each one of the staff members gets to act as CEO for 4 months. During that time, they are given full powers to decide and lead the team, for them to experience and grow their leadership and for the team to experience new leadership. They also get compensated for the extra load of work they have. Another element of their approach is that the team page on the CivSource website does not have job titles but rather the value they hope they bring to the table when they work together. “Do we see our colleagues as people or a means to an end?” a question Jackie left us reflecting on.



Maxensia Nakibuuka spoke about an intersectional approach to performance management and compensation. She shared a personal story of loss and resilience, highlighting the importance of accessibility and accommodation in the workplace. Maxensia shared an example of how “[For disabled candidates]

Interviewers question candidate’s performance before meeting and judging their fitness for the job.” Employers discuss the challenges of accommodating an employee with disabilities. The interviewer’s intimidating language towards disabled applicants raises concerns about accessibility and inclusivity.



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Reflection questions

1. What are some feminist ways of measuring performance (before we even get to deciding on salaries and appraisals etc)?
2. What are the advantages or disadvantages of different salary models (role-based, location-based or needs-based) for your organisation?
3. How are different kinds of work valued in your organisation, and do these distinctions reproduce patriarchal or ableist structures? For example, are public-facing roles valued more highly than e.g. administrative work?
4. How do we free ourselves from traditional, i.e. capitalist and colonial ways of performing and assessing performance?
5. What needs to happen so that disadvantaged workers are not left behind? Should it be dealt with at the government level?

Recordings of the session can be found [here](#) - and we are providing both **audio** and **video** files.

A few resources were also shared during the session including:

1. [Change Ready, The CivSource Way — CivSource-Africa \(civsourceafrica.com\)](#)
2. [Strategies for Building an Organisation with a Soul — Strength + Solidarity \(strengthandsolidarity.org\)](#)
3. [Purposeful Case Study](#)

Thank you to our speakers and everyone who joined us for sharing their knowledge and energy with us!