



AWDF

SCENARIO STORIES



FOUR SHORT STORIES
IMAGINING THE FUTURE FOR WOMEN IN AFRICA



AFRICAN WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT FUND

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01. A Desirable Future Flourishing City Gardens



Mariam drew the curtains back from the window leading to the road, leaning her head out to take in her first school-free breath. She had graduated from university yesterday, 29 August 2030 and celebrations were in order. Over a decade and a half ago, her country had agreed along with the entire membership of the African Union –that committing to girls and women’s education was not an unavoidable priority, but an exciting investment in the future.

In 2017, the newly elected government of President Chiedza Bah - the country’s first woman head of state - made sure women’s rights was at the top of the agenda, and that true democracy breathed life. A healthy governance framework invested in the full participation of all citizens, particularly marginalised groups, was firmly put in place.

The government began to pay more than lip service to women’s education by fully resourcing universal access to high school and college education while developing public educational institutions – in urban, rural, suburban, peri-urban areas – all across the country. Government also collaborated with ethical business, civil society groups and feminist scholars to implement innovative, well-resourced and responsive courses that were flexible to meet the needs of a diverse range of communities. Teams of Africa’s leading teachers and creative thinkers had come together to design options for model curricula that incorporated feminist approaches to thinking, learning and communication as well as coaching and mentoring programmes. Slowly but surely, people’s belief systems and attitudes began to change for the better becoming more peaceful and accepting of difference.

As people’s minds changed so did their views on gender. Old gender stereotypes were abandoned in favour of more open, empowered ways of thinking about people’s capacities. Women’s role in the historical development and future of the continent was now fully recognised, and women and girls’ participation a standard part of public life. This practice was also reflected in media and popular culture where girls and women created and witnessed more nuanced interpretations of their experiences. By 2030, the government covered 90% of the country with this radical and inclusive educational infrastructure where girls and women could safely assert themselves.

As part of the national curriculum, funding was invested in developing the technology sector, and the government prioritised ICT training for girls and women. Mariam herself had begun developing apps while in secondary school, carrying this knowledge into university. In fact, she was mentored through her program by a leading Ugandan mobile app developer who was part of the first wave of women tech social entrepreneurs in the mid-2010s – an experience that introduced her to a deep network of African women pioneering communications technology for women’s rights and for social good. It was at university that she met a range of students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds and identities who took classes in ICT and worked together to create new platforms

that provided universal access, improved the daily quality of life and protected the human rights of all citizens.

This was one of the most memorable times of Mariam’s life. As a young woman in a wheelchair, Mariam’s own focus was on technologies for women with disabilities. All the apps she was developing with her young women’s tech collective, Jua Tech, used devices run by wind, solar energy or biofuel. The majority of energy production was now renewable, produced low carbon emissions and, largely diminished the need for continental debates on climate change. This was now such a common part of life on the continent so much so that people had forgotten what the diesel generators sounded like. It was such a stark difference from the era of electricity riots in her childhood, when government power supplies failed and fuel prices reached so high in many African countries that people took to the streets, no longer able to earn their meagre livings.



It was due to these societal transformations over the years that Miriam – like so many young people – was able to tap into available resources and start a business. The Ministries of Labour and Technology worked together with regional economic communities, the Environmental Protection Authority and multinational companies to develop and implement protective laws and policies that limited the exploitation of employees and resources and ensured that trade relations were solid, mutually beneficial and comprehensively structured. Through active engagement with these laws

and policies, an inclusive and exciting workforce developed across 65 per cent of the continent. Access and availability of financial resources in the country became diverse, universal and egalitarian with a well-integrated and effective infrastructure. This led to an incredible decline in poverty and enabled rural communities to sustain themselves more fully, easing the push for migration to crowded cities. They also benefited from widespread access to justice mechanisms that were universally accountable and transparent.

Land used to be something everyone fought over- and more often than not - what government and business people grabbed for their own use. The majority women-parliament had taken steps to stop this. Land reform, promised since independence and revived in the 1990s with a focus on women, was finally bearing fruit. Women not only accessed land, but rightfully owned land across the country. The reforms also meant that there was equitable access and ownership for all citizens. As a direct result of the work of women who lobbied over the last three decades for sustainable protection over Africa's forests and water bodies, a large percentage of land was arable. This increased peaceful relations and drastically reduced conflicts over scarce natural resources. Similarly water became universally accessible and safe to consume.

Mariam knew that the lives of women like her – living with disabilities in the poorer areas of the city – had not always been so full of opportunity. The movement of differently-abled Africans was strong now, with pioneering feminists like Aissatou Cissé and Agness Chindimba breaking ground, demanding political voice and helping build solidarity with other women to put the human rights issues on the African agenda. They say that women political leaders don't always prioritise the needs of women but in her country this was not the case.

Family structures – especially through the spread of ICT – began to shift to embrace digital and virtual forms of kinship, making family structures diverse and suited to individual and collective needs. Of course, there were still naysayers who called for a return to something they called culture or to religion that put men firmly back in the driver's seat. Despite this, youth and feminist movements were robust and growing in impact. They built their base of allies including in the progressive faith communities to build respect and support for cultural ideas that were tolerant, adaptive and anti-patriarchal.

President Bah's government also focused on participatory and fair access to resources. Women's health was a priority. There was a growing network of public wellness women centres run by government and staffed by fantastic healthcare workers who she always found were supportive of her own concerns as a young woman in a wheelchair. The wellness centres combined the best of global holistic health practices with indigenous knowledge on women's health and rights. Not only did the healthcare systems lead to a massive decrease in maternal and infant mortality but also many of her friends had gotten great information and support on sexual health. The centres were particularly effective in helping combat the rise of cancers in East and West Africa through cancer screening and treatment programmes. Her mother had recently survived cancer with holistic health support just down the road from their family home. She didn't have to go to India to access treatment as they used to. Mariam was always encouraging her mother to eat healthily- fresh vegetables, fruits, country rice and fish soup- and her mother would joke that her attitude was just like her grandmother in the village!



Although Mariam was still young and had relatively little money, she always chose to buy locally farmed vegetables from one of the women's agricultural cooperatives. Everyone knew that genetically modified foods were linked to the spike in cancers on the continent and also made farmers spend a lot of their money every year to buy pesticides, fertilizers and even seeds from the big companies. An activist organisation in her own country had listened to the grievances of farmers and managed to win a court case against the use of GMOs - which had taken the right of farmers to own their own seeds away.



This case set a precedent across other African countries to reject the production of genetically modified foods by big multinational corporations. Mariam still remembers the numerous street protests against the corporations and boycotts of their products. Times had changed! Mariam's local government representative was in her 30s and very interested to get all the residents of the area engaged in activities that supported the local economy and benefited the environment.

This inspired Mariam to start thinking of developing an app to link all the women urban organic farmers in different neighbourhoods and create an information zone for people wanting to buy locally farmed vegetables and fruits.

She also wanted to share knowledge around easy tech solutions people could use to get better yields.

Day one of her life beyond university, and Mariam was feeling excited.



Mariam drew the curtains back from the window leading to the road, leaning her head out to take in her first school-free breath. As soon as she felt the polluted air fill her lungs, she regretted doing so. She choked, coughing profusely. Mariam had graduated from university yesterday, 29 August 2030, and she should have been happy. However, her first instinct was to cry. Her education had been a feat of pure will and sacrifice.

She sat and began thinking about President Eugene Okech, the man who had taken over the country back in 2017 and refused to release the reins of leadership. To think, there was such an intoxicating excitement during those December 2016 elections – when her country was poised to elect Chiezda Bah as the first woman president.



The world was watching in awe as movements of young people, women of all ages, people with disabilities, LGBTIQ activists, informal sector workers- had all managed to mobilise to transform education, healthcare, land, employment and governance.

Bah was set to ride in to victory. And then Okech, supported by a paramilitary squad, launched a coup and violently took control of the country. It all went downhill from there.



School had been particularly difficult. Her passion was in technology but she wasn't able to learn new ways to code nor was she given a chance to develop her own apps. She had been so excited when she was first taught the coding basics in secondary school. They had even had a visit from a Uganda woman app developer who inspired her to get involved in technology. In university, Mariam wasn't challenged in the classroom. When class did meet, she was completely uninspired by the boring and irrelevant lectures and having to recite about European civilisation and Britain's role in the Second World War. Teachers had no incentive to do any different because it wasn't safe to do so, they were poorly paid, and therefore, rarely turned up for work. When they did show, many extracted money from students and some even tried to force students to provide sex in

exchange for the promise of passing exams. The only passionate lecturers were the ones taken over by the promise of heaven. On a regular basis, her Physics professor would start quoting religious texts and telling students to abandon science and turn to God. Many of her teachers were also preachers or Imams, filling every street, kiosk, and public form of transportation in the country. They loved teaching messages on the subservient role women must play – at all costs to their health and happiness – for the men in their lives.

The religious leaders were all men who focused on spreading fear, terror, disconnection and violence to their growing congregations, particularly when it came to nonconformist persons like the LGBTIQ communities. Women, youth and differently-abled people were also oppressed. Mariam - a young woman who was a lesbian, differently-abled, intelligent and free-spirited – was a dangerous combination for sure.

A handful of women students had tried to organise against this abuse of power at her university but their efforts were reported by a group called Men Against Women Empowerment (MAWE), who are well-financed by the Global Fund for Men. The women were jailed indefinitely as conspirators.

It had taken her nearly a decade to complete her college education. Not only was school tuition ridiculously expensive, classes could be shut down at a moment's notice. You'd see the military officers blocking the front gate with their guns and pointing everyone to return home. One of the few decent paying jobs, which her fellow classmates were all vying for was as a Watcher. There was a surveillance centre in every neighbourhood in the country – where employees would scroll through hours of real-time footage and report suspicious human behaviour to the police.

“Radicals” suspected of plotting against the government would have their footage screened on national television or on all media platforms.

Since electricity was irregular and Mariam’s family could not always afford fuel for the diesel generator her mother taught her how to string together junk parts in just the right way to create their own forms of power. It was this ancestral, intuitive and innovative knowhow that spurred Mariam to start a young women’s technology collective, Jua Tech, during university. Along with her sister

collective, they found a hideaway spot in the neighbourhood not too far from the e-waste landfill. It was where the dispossessed found home among other unwanted things - the only place they could guarantee their privacy.

Government restrictions on citizen organising meant that Mariam and her friends had to use a number of different aliases, frequently change their passwords, and constantly upgrade and expand the security architecture for all

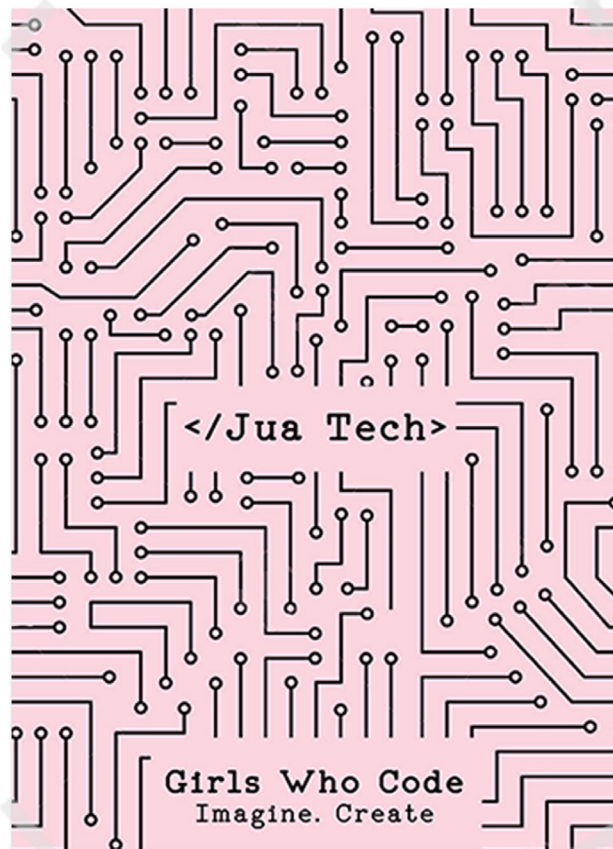
digital data and communications.. Their safety was always in question and travel for Mariam to the landfill could prove difficult due to the lack of wheelchair-friendly spaces within the city. In Jua Tech, they worked together to weave the memorised codes into apps they could post on the AfriFEM Net, an embedded digital network. They set up a satellite location that linked them to women’s rights defenders across the world. They would meet there to share their stories of life on the ground and to learn and exchange on developing and improving apps. They wanted to help other repressed communities on the

continent and around the world to develop their own forms of language for progressive project building.

Following the lead of the IMF, World Bank, WTO and AGRA, Okech’s administration tightened already exclusionary and discriminatory policies. Economic, trade, agricultural, environmental and security policies were overturned overnight - and most public services were shut down or privatised. The country’s resources were taken over by private businesses

run by high ranking military personnel, religious leaders and wealthy bankers. Together the state, religious institutions and banks formed an alliance called The Trinity. No one was safe, especially if opposing Okech’s rule of law. In this permanent state of domination, power was only in the hands of a few corrupt and morally bankrupt men. The country’s farms and agro-processing plants were owned by The Trinity. Small-scale farmers were tenants on what was once their

property. On top of that, they were being forced to be dependent on genetically modified seeds. With The Trinity snapping up all the country’s land and charging citizens like overpriced tenants, homelessness was widespread and growing. Food insecurity was at its peak and many people across the country could not afford to eat healthily. In many places, water was largely unavailable. Over policing of the country’s communities living near water bodies sparked daily conflicts over rights to access this resource.





Where found, water cost on average 300 per cent more than it did when Mariam was growing up. Everyone was fighting for more space and paying excessively for each little bit.

In secret, people would whisper to one another about how they had all become the country's YOYO – where “you're on your own”. Many were forced to pick up small trades just to get by.

The hustle was not easy. There just weren't enough jobs to go around so many went the informal route – tech fraud, identity theft, sex, drugs and weapon trafficking, money laundering or organ harvesting. Many – like her younger sister and brother's niece - risked life and limb on that long, perilous journey to become an undocumented migrant worker in Brazil, India and China where people claimed there was work.

Family structures mirrored the political system. Men dominated all realms of decision-making and treated women as breeders and caretakers of children and the home. This rhetoric was strongly enforced by religious and cultural fundamentalist leaders who spoke frequently about women being the “evil, weaker sex” and men's manifest destiny to rule over everyone.. Violence against women and girls in all forms was normalised and accelerating by the day.

It was dangerous to not only be a woman but to be one with a mind and voice to change the social condition of women and anyone who was non-conformist. Due to this, many women elected to be single (if given the opportunity), while others ran away to rural communes where women protected one another as best they could.

Sadly, Mariam's mother had been diagnosed with Stage 3 lung cancer the year before. She hadn't had a physical check-up since 2018 before the clinics and hospitals were privatised by The Trinity. Medical insurance rose 500 per cent and to pay out-of-pocket was a death sentence. People didn't have the luxury of getting sick. When the medical staff on the Cancer Ward visited her mother's room, they only committed to two things: professing that she “give it to God by his grace” or blaming her for not coming to the hospital sooner.

Day one of her life after university and she was resolved to try and change this. Against all odds, Mariam had chosen to stay in her country and fight for a better future.



Mariam sat peering out the window of her zero energy unit home. Her curtains drew themselves automatically at exactly 8.00 a.m. as they were programmed to do every morning. She was in deep thought about how life would be, had they still maintained the old education system. In hindsight, she would have graduated from university yesterday- 29 August 2030. She may have been worried about finding a job. She sighed as her kitchen gadgets finished fixing her breakfast.

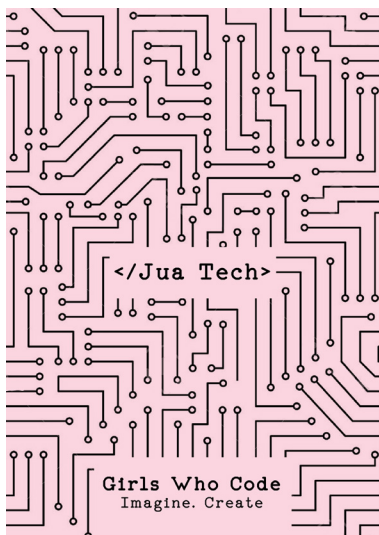
Back in 2017, Mariam could see nothing but flames. The country was on fire. Grass burned beneath the feet of those who had grown tired. Clinics, schools, and places of worship were abandoned. The markets were empty. The country's few wealthy families had fled, having stolen from the country's treasury to sustain their lifestyle in exile. Their extravagant homes

were looted, leaving only shells good enough to shelter the few surviving animals roaming the streets. She shuddered, remembering how they were invaded by a foreign super power for not relinquishing their precious rare earth minerals that were used in the technology industry. For five years, they took control of her country and led violent and anguishing drone attacks, rolling back progressive gains feminists, human rights defenders and community movements had struggled for a century to achieve.

No one was safe under the sophisticated surveillance technology. Thousands risked their lives and stole away in the night travelling on dangerous routes to places fabled to have streets paved with gold. Access to materials needed to sustain life – safe and healthy water, food, shelter and work – were cut off and unavailable to most people.

A brutal competition for resources was the only means of survival in her country and in other nations on the African continent.

Eventually there was nothing left to lose. Passionate about exercising their hopes and dreams of seeing a different future, women and youth began organising in pockets that spread across the country. Mariam and her feminist collective, Jua Tech, created tech cells within the most rural and urban resource-strapped areas of the country. They worked to thread together a subversive coding system developed in real-time and used it to hack into their attackers' system, completely turning it against itself.

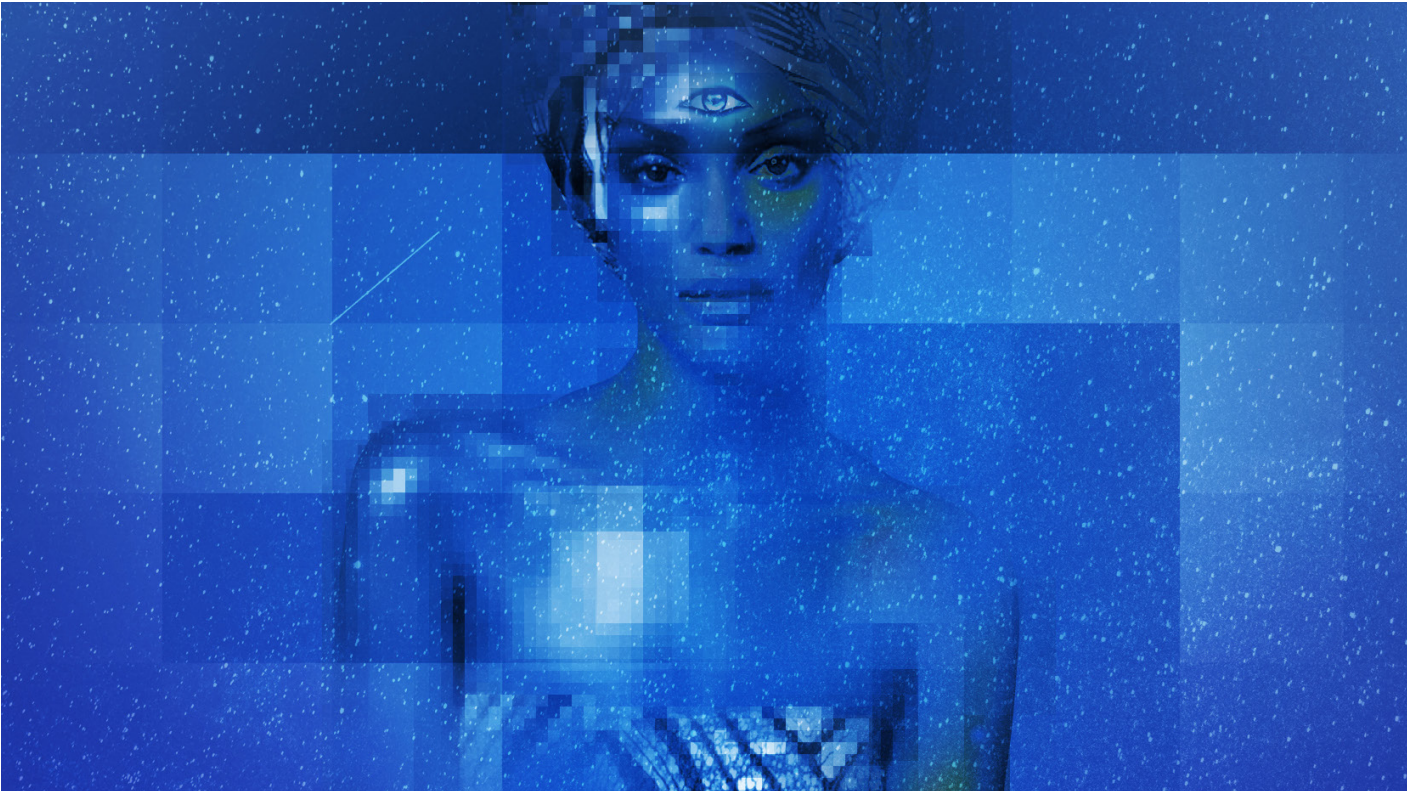


Over the next three years The Sentient Being was configured, with an infrastructure of emotional intelligence founded on the philosophy of Ubuntu – the idea that our humanity is bound up in each other. Mariam and her friends would create and memorise certain gestures, verbal and tonal expressions from their social interactions and make these expressions into digital codes. They lovingly weaved their expressions into a string of symbols they used to create coding language for the system. The new system sought to completely replace the ruling power structure - of dominance, dishonour, destruction and death – with a tech enabled structure of love, compassion, harmony, health and happiness. Building a WiFi facility from electronic waste,

the Jua Tech collective became an expansive virtual network using AfriFEM Net to expand the depth and reach of The Sentient Being.

They shared the codes and helped other marginalised communities in their country and on the continent to build their own codes. The network's energy grew and influenced more people to transmute their emotional consciousness from competition and isolation to the virtues of goodness, kindness, and togetherness that The Sentient Being upheld. Her country's new reality was created through the energy and emotion of a brave, beautiful movement led by women and young people.

The Sentient Being replaced the old education system by integrating knowledge with technology so that it was available everywhere and at all times to all people. Learning was now intuitive, continuous and individualised but for the collective good. The sentient technology radically remixed human relationships – the capacity of humans to learn, adapt, communicate and create new forms of imagination – much like how the Internet did in the 1990s. The internet was once also a military technology – used to track, control and access information and resources in acts of warfare. And yet through access, participation and innovation, the internet evolved into a network of knowledge production where people could access different ways of thinking and being. The sentient technology became the only real form of government needed as it guaranteed accountability. The need for laws had been absolved. There was no more use for traditional power structures and their discriminatory and exclusionary policies. As the connections amplified outside the country, they led to a critical questioning globally about the significance and functionality of governments and, finally, a push towards self-governance began. The whole world was now taking their cues from the African continent and integrating holistic wellness for all life forms.



International definitions of “work” had been challenged by African feminist academics, and when sentient technology arrived, those archaic definitions were swept away with them, leaving a world that recognised the effort of everyone’s labour. People engaged in work that was meaningful and made them happy. Previously manual tasks were fully automated, lifting the burden of most care work from women. The care labour that remained was shared and everyone helped to looking after each other with the spirit of togetherness. Money was abolished since the sentient technology allowed all communities and traders to connect through its system. Bartering and exchange of services became the equivalent of buying and selling. Everyone received what they needed to ensure constant wellness.

For decades international institutions and environmental agencies had formed a joint agreement to enforce the banning of anything that degraded the environment. Recycling of all the world’s waste developed. However with the global inequalities still in existence at the time, this system was not working too well.

With sentient technology, there were now ways for human beings to live without negatively impacting the earth.

The Sentient Being enabled a system for extracting water from the atmosphere that helped preserve all water bodies while still making it available to all without discrimination. Mariam was part of an urban organic farming collective that was working with the earth to produce new variations of fruit, vegetables and grains for sustenance, allowing the planet to recover from years of abusive use. Land was now intuitive and self-protecting, it was owned and governed collectively.

Sentient technology enabled the development of new social structures where physical and virtual connections between “family members” were not necessarily biological and were based completely on choice. Because everyone was allowed to choose their families and connections, there was no real notion of dependency. Family became a concept that extended beyond genetic markers and Mariam’s own family included close friends she connected with through her technology work and other members of her organic farming collective.



These new forms of social groupings and norms initially attracted resistance from traditional leaders and conservative religious organisations who began to organise against the dismantling of patriarchal roles. They objected to the sentient technology, warning of hellfire and damnation. The sentient technology did not comprehend violence and destruction, and therefore, these violent sentiments had no opportunity to grow.

If it wasn't for the Sentient Being, Mariam's chosen mother would have died. She had been diagnosed with an advanced stage of lung cancer during the height of the drone attacks. At that time, no quality healthcare options were available since most public services in the country had been destroyed.

A group of Ugandan feminist biomedical engineers linked to Mariam through AfriFEM Net, told her about a cell regeneration microchip that would help her mother to heal. The chip would also regulate her medication treatments and monitor her health daily. This was the power of sentient technology. It could speak to each person's direct condition and assist one to live her best life. Women now fully in charge of their reproductive decision-making, could use the chip to monitor their hormones, menstruation cycle, capacity to get pregnant or not, and overall wellness.

Mariam looked out of her window at the weather. Today she was harvesting beans from her small garden. Breathing in she felt that it was, like all days, a world full of possibility

04. A Transitional Future The Concrete Rose



Mariam's window was leaking sound. She didn't have to lean her head out to hear the familiar hums of life filling the street, the strange quiet stutter of new cars running on biofuel, chat from portable televisions broadcasting political debate and the calls of Imams for prayer, they were the sounds of African city life. This mix of religion, political difference and technological progress was the soundtrack of the life of a young African woman in 2030.

Mariam graduated from university yesterday with a degree in Web Development, and additional training from taking online courses in New Technologies. Through this she had founded a women's technology collective - Jua Tech. Mariam's educational success – like so many other young people - was due to student movements who had advocated for young

people to play an active role in deciding about their education, and through this the direction of their future. Every school, no matter where you lived, was equipped with quality, well-resourced facilities including computer labs. Ethical business partnered with governments by also investing in public education programs, facilities and resources and universal education for all people.

Tech, it felt, was the one area where there was possibility. With the launch of The Great Commons in 2020- Africa's biggest online job market – anyone with digital skills could find work and earn a good income, and also explore their capacity for innovation. African women led the sector, connecting through AfriFEM Net. This online network included the developers behind women-led mobile phone company- now the second largest in East and southern Africa.

It also hosted developers of the mobile money app EsusuYou, which was especially popular among rural women farmers.

There was also a downside to the accessibility of technology. Mariam and other young women were often left vulnerable to online abuse, and as an outspoken feminist, she was constantly being attacked. Many of her friends had personal information, identities and money stolen. Feminist activists were lobbying for better regulations around digital technology to address these issues of harassment, intimidation and violence against women.

Mind you she thought, twenty years ago, it had been so much worse.

In 2018, Africa's view of Europe as the "land of dreams" began to falter as the British economy crashed under Brexit, anti-migrant sentiment rose across Europe and the African Union stood by passively as migrants drowned in the Mediterranean. African migrants began shifting their routes, heading into the Middle East and Brazil in search of opportunity and safety.

The world was shifting on its axis.

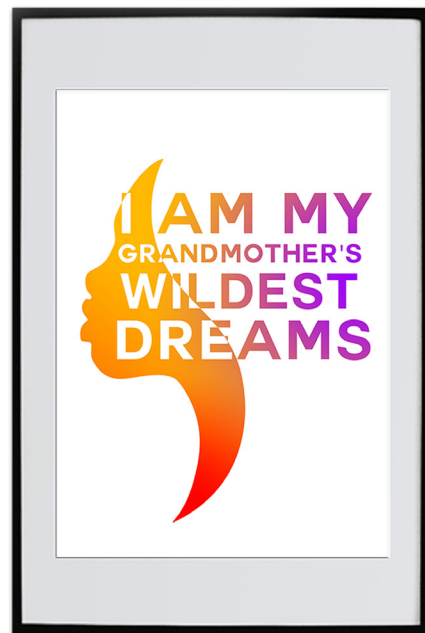
Life was very unstable then. Work was largely non-union especially in the Export Processing Zones in cities across Africa, which prohibited labour organising. Europeans frustrated with limited economic options took part in another "Scramble for Africa" – buying property in major African cities and land in rural areas. The more privileged Africans living abroad returned home, establishing businesses and raising the price of real estate further. A growing number of Afro-Chinese – largely poorer and abandoned by their Chinese fathers – began to assert their new identities

Political repression was the name of the day as the state cracked down on dissident citizens. Women's rights defenders and LGBTIQ activists were not spared. Student activism on

South African campuses spread to universities in Uganda, Kenya, Nigeria, and Egypt. People began to actively question religious fundamentalisms, although Christian hate preaching and bombings in the name of Islam were a regular occurrence.

Looking outside again Mariam heard the sound of a popular progressive pastor blaring from someone's headset. A few years ago a regional campaign called "My church, my right" emerged, led by a Pan-African Women's Church based on laboratory interpretations of scripture. Mariam herself had helped develop an app that allowed Muslim feminist groups to better organise and spread progressive literature. However, religious hardliners still preached that women were subordinate to men, and spread a message of inequality, violence and discrimination that seemed formidable due to the alliances between fundamentalists in Africa, a Republican U.S.A and Wahbabi actors across the world.

Times had changed a bit. Well, maybe not enough.



Although the continent was still ruled by men, there were more and more women taking political office. Political parties began to allot a quota of 50% parliamentary seats to women after women's rights organisations led a

successful regional campaign to implement laws on parity. Women presidents were no longer a rarity, but they also often worked in isolation. Unfortunately, politics was still overrun by the love of money, and rising to political power depended on wealth.



Cheidza Bah had been elected president of her country- the first woman under 40 to lead an African country. She was also an owner of the continent’s fifth largest telecommunications company.

Women were getting richer- slightly. A few countries had gotten serious about economic policies that worked for women, and starting to recognise women’s labour at home and in the informal sector. But activism was still needed.

Mariam thought about the irony: Sexual and reproductive health policies had finally expanded to support women’s right to abortion, healthy choices about their bodies and freedom from violence. Activism started decades ago by feminists continued and more young people were aware of their rights, and active as peer educators supporting more empowered ways of thinking about their bodies and sexual health. And yet the social and economic environment of their lives meant that many still couldn’t live out this autonomy.

HIV infection rates persisted in young African women, propelled by transactional and forced sex.

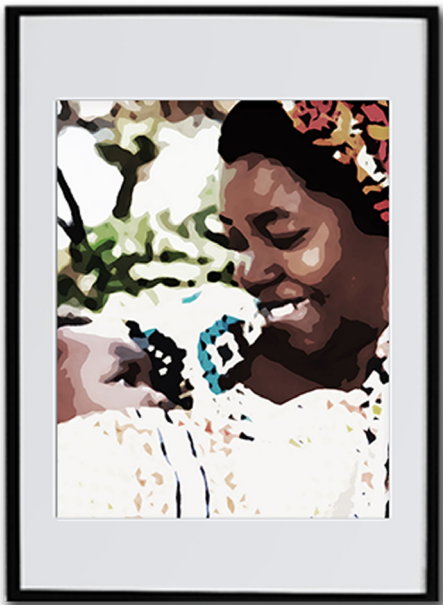
Mariam knew how much power social movements could yield- she had seen it around land rights. Growing up land had been a major source of conflict. Her own family home was nearly taken during a land grab by a government minister. Many other women farmed on increasingly small plots as big business controlled the rest. Still, people were not staying quiet. There were demonstrations all over Africa calling for land reform. Eventually government had to concede. Five years ago, the Ministry of Land put in place a new land reform management policy to ensure equitable distribution of and access to land in some countries.

Not all issues were resolved though. Energy supply throughout Africa remained unstable. Governments had pushed for hydro-electricity, however the demand for energy kept rising with industrialisation, urbanisation and decreasing rainfall. Energy was such an issue that inexpensive alternative sources of energy was at heart of women’s activism around ending poverty.

Mariam’s own community was still dealing with the effects of the regional water crisis, which came to a head a decade before when almost all water became privatised and incredibly expensive. People were literally thirsty and turned to cheap brightly coloured artificial juice when they needed a drink. A health crisis took hold. Kidney disease spiked and along with it the trafficking in kidneys for transplants. Going to the doctor was expensive and so people even sold their kidneys to raise money for managing other illnesses. Most foods on the market were now genetically modified, highly processed and high in sugar. It was no surprise that many of her friends were overweight, and many diabetic. A lot of women’s organisations were now focused on food justice.

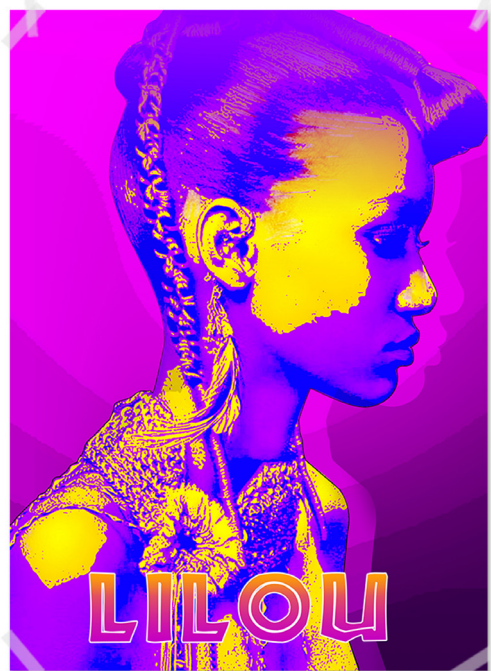
Mariam herself was part of a growing number of vegetarians, who tried to grow their own food and also return to healthier African traditional foods.

Sadly cancer was becoming a leading cause of death across the region. In response to a large number of women's rights activists surviving and dying of cancer, African women's groups began to prioritise cancer as a health advocacy concern. Eventually a few countries took note. Rwandan, South African and Kenyan Ministries of Health were looking at piloting widespread domestic cancer-response services. Positive women's groups added support to these initiatives with their legacy of working on HIV-related cancers. Women's groups pushed for alternative therapies and started to raise awareness about stress, nutritional and environmental risk factors.



Mariam started to cough and quickly shut the window— she couldn't afford to get sick. She was genetically predisposed to develop cancer and her own mother's fight with the disease had left her with terrible memories of an inept health care system that did very little for the sick and ordinary in their world.

Her own mother's death from cancer left a bitter taste in her mouth, and though she actively protested for better access to healthcare, at times their fight against a system so obviously rigged against those without a lot of money seemed futile.



When she felt down music lifted her spirits. Her favourite independent artist at the moment was Lilou whose song "I be feminist o!" was the most downloaded track by an African artist. Lilou spoke up against attacks on women in the city, using music to spread her message. As a young woman in a wheelchair, Mariam knew the danger that the city held if you couldn't run fast. But she loved that young artists were also speaking out now to make the streets safer through music and art-activism.

A day after graduating from university and Mariam felt ambivalent. Her future had promise, but she knew that there would also be struggles ahead.



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