

AWRA Report: Participation in CSW69 Week Convenings & Strategic Engagements

New York and Washington, D.C. | March 2025

Overview

In March 2025, the African Women Rights Advocates (AWRA) actively participated in a series of high-level events and strategic dialogues organized during the 69th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW69). While not part of the official CSW program, these convenings—hosted in collaboration with The Vavengers, legal partners, and other civil society actors—provided a vital platform to spotlight systemic global disparities facing FGM survivors in healthcare and legal systems, advocate for survivor-centred policies, and build momentum for sustainable, community-led action.

AWRA's leadership was prominent across all three convenings, reinforcing our commitment to movement-building, narrative power, and strategic alignment between African grassroots actors and the global advocacy space.

Event 1: New York Convening

Date: 17 March 2025

Venue: WilmerHale Law Firm, New York

Theme: *Mapping Global Healthcare and Legal Disparities Facing FGM Survivors*

Capacity: 50 participants

Key Highlights:

- AWRA's CEO and Co-founder, **Naimah Hassan**, featured as a panellist alongside global experts and donors. Her contribution underscored the lived realities of African survivors navigating healthcare and justice systems, while calling for holistic, decolonised, and culturally responsive policy frameworks.
- The panel, chaired by **Sema Gornall** of The Vavengers, included esteemed voices such as **Sir Max Hill KC**, **Dr. Leyla Hussein**, **Susan Gibbs**, and **Milosz Palej**.
- Discussions illuminated structural gaps, including lack of survivor-centred services, limited legal recourse, and underrepresentation in decision-making spaces.
- The event began with a screening of *"What if you knew"*, a campaign video that challenged attendees to reflect on systemic inaction.
- The convening concluded with a vibrant networking reception, fostering new collaborations between funders, survivors, and policy advocates.

AWRA Contribution:

- Provided critical framing around how policy and philanthropy must be reoriented toward **African-led, survivor-driven solutions.**
- Advocated for greater investment in feminist intermediaries and trust-based funding mechanisms to support long-term change.

Event 2: High-Level Roundtable Exchange

Date: 18 March 2025

Venue: New York City (Private Location)

Capacity: 10 select participants

Purpose:

To create a safe, off-the-record space for deep reflection and dialogue among leading African and diaspora anti-FGM activists. This roundtable, recorded for an upcoming AWRA-led documentary, focused on **funding challenges, sustainability, and survivor-led movement strategies.**

Key Participants Included:

- **Domtila Chesang** (AWRA, Kenya) – Spoke on the cost of frontline activism and the need for trauma-informed, well-resourced advocacy ecosystems.
- **Jarai Salleby** (Frontline Women Fund) – Shared funding ecosystem perspectives and called for dismantling top-down philanthropy models.
- **Naimah Hassan** (AWRA) – Framed the need for a unified African feminist strategy to influence global funding and advocacy narratives.

Roundtable Outcomes:

- A shared agenda to pursue collective donor engagement and narrative influence ahead of UNGA 2025.
- Agreement to establish a working group focused on mapping funding flows to FGM survivor-led groups globally.

- Strengthened cross-border solidarity between African continent-based and diaspora-led efforts.

Event 3: Washington, D.C. Convening

Date: 21 March 2025

Venue: King & Spalding Law Firm, Washington, D.C.

Theme: *Mapping Global Healthcare and Legal Disparities Facing Survivors of FGM*

Capacity: 50 participants

Key Highlights:

- A follow-up to the New York convening, this session deepened the analysis on global disparities and emphasised **action-oriented solutions**.
- AWRA Co-founder **Mam Lisa Camara** (West Africa Lead) and **Naimah Hassan** participated as expert panellists, sharing regional insights from The Gambia and across the continent.
- Lisa's interventions highlighted how policy inaction, colonial legacies, and inadequate legal infrastructure perpetuate cycles of harm for survivors.
- The convening was also an opportunity to build traction for **launching the legal and healthcare disparities report** at UNGA 2025.
- The Q&A session catalysed meaningful conversations about justice systems, mental health support, and the power of storytelling in driving legal change.

Strategic Engagements Outside Convenings

1. Meeting with Wallace Global Fund (Susan Gibbs)

AWRA held a private meeting with Susan Gibbs to explore future funding partnerships, long-term support strategies, and opportunities for movement-building. Discussions emphasised:

- Sustainability planning for AWRA's grassroots network.
- Domtila's research and storytelling work.

- Upcoming advocacy moments, including UNGA 2025.

2. Meeting with Equality Now (Divya Srinivasan)

A debrief on the newly launched Global FGM Report, to which AWRA contributed a powerful foreword. The meeting also helped:

- Identify shared advocacy opportunities.
- Build pathways to connect with aligned funders and coalition partners.

3. Documentary Filming

- As part of AWRA's narrative strategy, Domtila Chesang led an intimate filmed conversation with **Jaha Dukureh**, revisiting their 10-year journey since The Guardian's anti-FGM media campaign.
- Additional recordings from the roundtable and events will form part of an upcoming **documentary film** spotlighting survivor-led activism.

Reflections & Key Outcomes

Alignment with Convening Objectives:

- ✓ **Showcasing Global Disparities:** AWRA contributed lived experiences, data, and intersectional feminist analysis on legal and healthcare inequities.
- ✓ **Policy Advocacy & Action:** Positioned the upcoming UNGA 2025 as a key advocacy moment and shared actionable recommendations.
- ✓ **Survivor-Centred Solutions:** Elevated survivor narratives through film, roundtables, and keynote contributions.
- ✓ **Strengthening Partnerships:** Deepened collaborations with The Vavengers, Wallace Global Fund, Equality Now, and legal partners.
- ✓ **Investing in Community Movements:** Amplified calls for structural reform in donor practices and highlighted local leadership.
- ✓ **Sustainable Funding Models:** Advocated for feminist funding intermediaries and flexible funding mechanisms.

Next Steps

- **Coordinate UNGA 2025 Launch** of the legal and healthcare disparity mapping report.
- **Complete and release the documentary**, centring African survivor-activists.
- **Convene follow-up sessions** with donors and grassroots groups to deepen financial and strategic alignment.
- **Advance AWRA's advocacy platform**, integrating findings from CSW week into global policy conversations.