



YOUNG WOMEN SHAPING PHILANTHROPY THROUGH DEBATE.



civsourceafrica.com

A woman with dark hair, wearing a white long-sleeved shirt and a circular earring that says "I AM MY ANCESTORS' wildest DREAMS", is speaking into a microphone. She is holding a blue pen. The background is a blurred stage with a purple and blue backdrop. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

What persuades us to take action in a world that desperately needs citizen involvement to solve some of its most pressing challenges?

Facts and statistics are available to us in abundance and these data points are compelling, but research in many fields has long since concluded that humans are hard-wired for stories, regardless of the facts on the ground.

“

– Bioneers Pulse,
11th May 2023

Strategic conversations have been a core aspect of how we refine the practice of philanthropy in Uganda. It is in these conversations that statistics are reduced to narratives; compelling stories that ignite action and enable us address the challenges premised in the field of philanthropy and civil society.

During one such conversation in February of this year, we gathered to reimagine the relationships between donors and partners, exploring the concept of decolonizing aid within the specific context of women-led and women's rights organizations in Uganda. It was during this conversation that the organizing team, Madonna Vicky Ainembabazi and Olum Lornah Afoyomungu, had a brief chat with Isabella Akiteng, who had served as a panelist earlier in the day. Through her, we discovered a vibrant community of young female university students who eloquently address the most pressing issues of our time through the art of debate. The Elle Parle Women's Open, the third event of its kind, was set to host this conversation in May 2023.

The Elle Parle Women's Open is a debate open meant to attract female debaters who are both in and out of school. The Debate Open started in 2020 and is the brainchild of a group of ardent alumni female debaters from various universities in Uganda. The Elle Parle Women's Open has over the past three years registered an increase in participation in debate and public dialogue by young women in universities and enhanced engagement with the feminist ideology. The past two editions pooled a total of over about 1300 participants both online and in-person in Uganda and Kenya.

The approaches of engaging young women in leadership and participation are premised on the power of debate, research and public speech that equips its debaters with the confidence and capacity development to actively participate in decision making, contribute to high level dialogues and mobilize community efforts to advocate for women's rights. Elle Parle contributes to the myriad of efforts meant to increase the knowledge and evidence base of young women's roles and contribution to politics and decision-making processes in Uganda.

The platform and audience were just the perfect combination necessary to start off the next generation of social justice advocates and able philanthropists. As we reimagine aid, it becomes essential to empower young women who not long from now, will hold positions of power, money, and influence. It is also imperative to start them young, allowing them to critically examine philanthropic practices and create a vision that aligns with their own aspirations for African philanthropy.

We were delighted to attend the final debate rounds where we listened to the young debaters exploring various social justice topics such as reproductive health rights, economic justice, the decolonization of aid among others. The teams delved into the efficacy of decolonization in relation to the prioritization of global philanthropy, examining the historical context of aid and whether its influx post-colonialism hindered development or perpetuated new forms of coloniality.

It proved important to engage young voices on this issue as their awareness of it continues to enable the redefinition of philanthropy and how it is done to propel healing not harm. The debate tournament, an all-female event, featured participation from eight universities in Uganda and Kenya, ultimately crowning Nakigude Maria Speria and Tafumba Rachel as the winners.

