

STORIES WOMEN SOMA SKILLS NARRATIVES KNOWLEDGE CULTURE AFRICAN DIVERSITY YOUTHS ACTION SPACE EARTH CHILDREN EQUITY VOICE



# Strategic Plan 2023 - 2027



## Acknowledgement

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Soma is where it is today, thanks to the efforts and contributions of many individuals, organisations and networks. We would like to thank you all for walking with us through thick and thin for the past 15 years.

We appreciate your generosity, resourcefulness and solidarity. We wouldn't be here today if it wasn't for those of you who gave us purpose; those who made our purpose remain relevant; those who ideated, created, recreated and steered the course with us; and those who trusted us with their resources even at times when we were flagging. You understood when we needed to take bold steps even when our leg muscles were still fragile, helped us steady our faltering steps and focus our gaze on the big picture. Now that we have charted the course and are ready for the next steps, egging on impact, we once again count on your continued support and community.

We would like to especially thank our cocreators in the Transformative Feminist Movement Building coalition and the creative and book chain ecosystem; cocurators of spaces, platforms, events, processes and forum convenors.

Specific to the strategic planning process, we appreciate our Board and members for taking ownership, providing oversight and making remarkable contributions beyond the call of duty.

In a very special way, we would like to thank our current and previous budget support partners and grant makers for their invaluable contribution to the programme leading to and specific support for the development of this strategy, i.e., CAWA, WFT, AWDF, SWISS/Nafasi, OSIEA and UAF-A.

Last but not least, our special thanks to Hope Chigudu, Aida Kiangi and Mary Ndarro for steering the strategic planning process; and Anna Bwana, Penina Mlama and Eunice Urrio who provided editorial inputs at different stages of the SP formulation.



### Performance Targets

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- Quantifiable data and stories of change to demonstrate Soma's contribution in changing narratives that normalise unequal power relations.
- A growing number of intergenerational literary creatives making a marked contribution to documenting footprints of the transformative feminist movement.
- Staff, partners, and literary community have internalised and worked with pan-African feminist storytelling approaches to lead in excavating silenced herstories to inspire and inform transformation.
- Soma becomes a dynamic and effective creative and co-creation space.
- Quality and timely programme implementation assessments done to facilitate learning and inform management and Board decisions and adaptations.

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# Plan Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation

**Monitoring and evaluation will be done at three tiers:**

- **Individual (by position and scope of work) (tier 3)**
- **Programme (tier 2)**
- **Organisational level (tier 1)**

Plan development will be participatory starting from desk and unit level and shared for inputs and feedback at programme management level and finally presented to the Board for approval before it is devolved into different implementation levels. The Board will play an oversight role for the development of long-term planning frameworks and seek AGM endorsement before they become operational. Once the plan is developed, it will be devolved and linked to the performance management system, where performance will be monitored and progress measured quarterly and bi-annually (tier 3 and 2). Annual reports will be reviewed by the Board and presented to the annual general meeting (AGM) and for statutory reporting. The annual reports will be packaged and shared with partners and the general public.

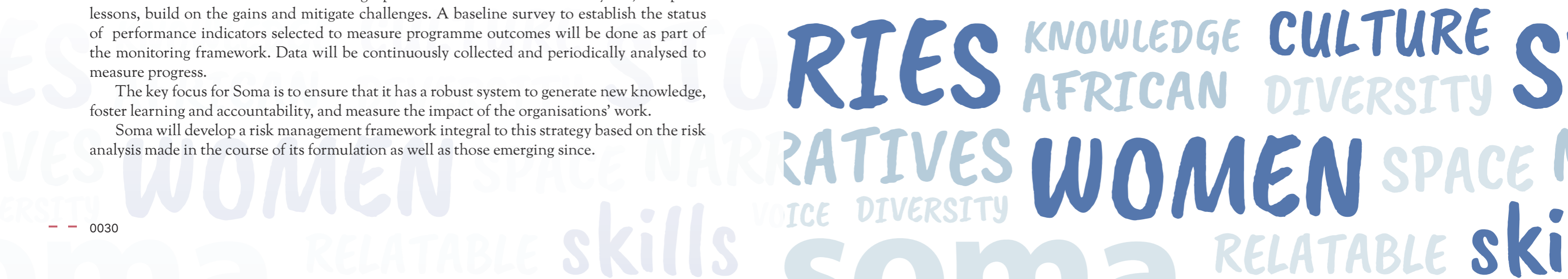
The midterm evaluation of this strategic plan will be conducted after two years, to capture lessons, build on the gains and mitigate challenges. A baseline survey to establish the status of performance indicators selected to measure programme outcomes will be done as part of the monitoring framework. Data will be continuously collected and periodically analysed to measure progress.

The key focus for Soma is to ensure that it has a robust system to generate new knowledge, foster learning and accountability, and measure the impact of the organisations' work.

Soma will develop a risk management framework integral to this strategy based on the risk analysis made in the course of its formulation as well as those emerging since.

## Strategic Plan 2023 - 2027

**To consolidate, sustain and enhance impact of TFMB efforts to disrupt mainstream discourse with transformative, pan-African and eco-feminist herstories and narratives to engender action.**



# Foreword

Soma is at the beginning of a new chapter in its evolution as a feminist organization, with over a decade and a half of experience doing intricate grassroots work, co-creating literature and art and convening countless events to create community, enable dialogue, and offer platforms for the voices of women, children, youth and others in the important public conversations of our gendered lives together.

This strategy is the result of deep and frequent deliberations that have taken into account all of the wisdom and experience accrued over time, the challenges that have been faced and overcome as well as those that continue to demand our attention, and the triumphs and lessons resulting from the work that Soma does. Inclusiveness, discernment and commitment to our Vision and Mission are at the core of every choice that has been made in defining our way forward.

As a feminist organization, our Vision of a “prosperous and equitable Tanzanian society where women and young people re-imagine and author transformation” speaks to the agency that we believe drives the change that we seek to make through our Mission “to nurture innovative storytellers with pan-African feminist consciousness and skills to author transformation.”

The power of storytelling cannot be overstated. We have seen its effect through our work time and time again, through artistic creations and media works, through empowered community animators and enhanced economic activities, through child authors publications and the rich archive of feminist knowledge, wisdom and legal-historical analysis that Soma has built. Through these diverse efforts, what has emerged as Soma’s unique feminist power is the all-important quality of resilience.

As we launch into the coming five-year period, I would like to invite you to join us in the journey of making Tanzania a more equitable society, with wellness and human thriving at the unspoken core of our beliefs. With the collaboration of our members, network of friends and the feminist movement across Africa and the world, we believe that our Vision is achievable. Thank you for taking an interest in Soma as an institution and a community.

Elsie Eyakuze  
Board Chairperson - March 2023



## Strategy 4

***Grow a sustainable and resilient institutional base that efficiently accesses and utilises resources and opportunities for Transformative feminists storytelling with a pan-African ecofeminist edge.***

- Ensure Soma management, members, Board and partners work together to achieve its operational excellence as a dynamic, nurturing space and a learning organisation.
- Strengthen Soma community of co-creators, partners, resource people, and forum convenors to steer convergence among hub spaces, networks and processes.
- Develop innovative and creative approaches to resource mobilisation in collaboration with strategic partners.

### Performance Targets

- Agile, engaged, and motivated team of staff, volunteers and associates able to achieve Soma’s mission.
- Ownership and synergic relationship between Soma programs and other processes of the TFMB movement with a cohesive eco-system of pan-African feminist storytellers, curators, and activists.
- Create a collective resource mobilisation framework of diverse funding sources to sustain cocreation spaces and processes.



## CEO's Statement

Our story begins with two women, a dream to reconnect learning with culture and leisure, a conviction that knowledge is power, a belief in the power of storytelling, and a commitment to making a contribution. Our context: a textbook centred curriculum and a top-down learning environment—neither of which fosters the joy of reading and wonder, and leisure spaces crafted for male patronage where women and children are intruders and young women are fodder for the male gaze.

That is how Soma Book Café materialized. An alternative urban space for leisure, culture and learning. At baseline, someone said, ‘keep it young.’ We did. Nearly all forums have been hosted and populated by young persons. Watoto na Vitabu, bearer of two dreams: one, a possibility for children authored books and two, ‘place a book in the hands of every child’ campaign, produced 3 published child authors, ages 8 to 12. Over 100 wrote publishable stories. So did 57 teenagers from Andika na Soma and Thubutu. The second dream, still lingers.

Like all dreams, ours too, grew wings. For 10+ years we did book fairs and festivals, creative writing research, challenges and training with children, teenagers, aspiring poets, authors and creative translators. We commemorated 50 years after Uhuru examining state of literacy and women’s contribution. Children and teenagers read and debated the place of women and girls as depicted in story books. We disrupted Valentine with book dates. We did theme days, we cocreated and innovated, met challenges and went around them, always pushing boundaries.

Then COVID 19 happened! Soma Book Café, the life line for Soma’s programme had to close. It was time to reflect, innovate, dream new dreams, if need be, find new ways to tie pieces together and weave a bridge to cross over. Some forums moved online. With flexible working arrangements, our governance structures and allies behind us, we confronted our demons, sharpened our resolve and prepared for challenges ahead.

We are proud of the lessons we generated, the community we are building and the platforms we have created for interactions, learnings, disrupting narratives and inspiring action. Fundamental lessons are: a) to tell an authentic story, children and young people need to reconnect with indigenous knowledge they are currently alienated from, thus our intergenerational approach; b) women’s agency and perspectives are systemically and constantly edited out of mainstream

### Strategy 3

#### ***Sustain vibrant public discourse amplifying pan- African feminist and sustainable earth ideas.***

- a. Publish and broadcast pan-African feminist and sustainable earth narratives that value and reconnect young people with indigenous knowledge and stories distilled from feminist narratives.
- b. Moderate public dialogue across gender, generation, rural/urban, different forms of ‘knowing’/ ‘telling’ and other divides, experiences and diversities to influence action for change.

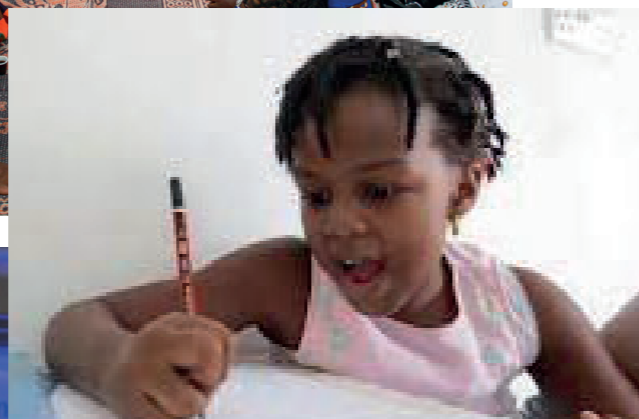
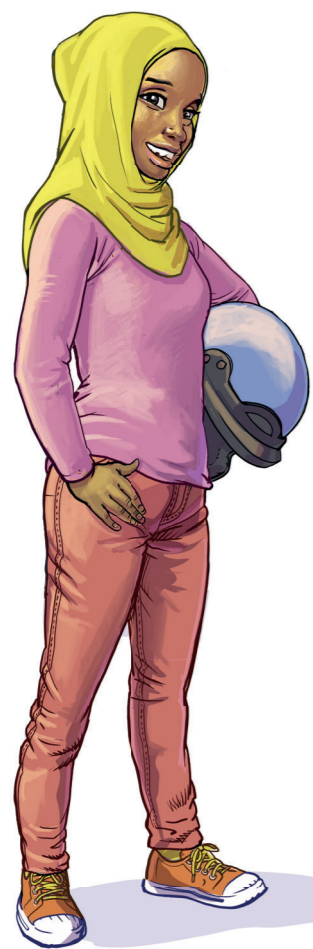
#### Performance Targets

- Soma and at least 25 cocreation partners in women’s rights and feminist organisations/networks managing communication, documentation, knowledge and information repositories, curating and moderating engaging feminist content and public dialogues online and offline.
- At least 5,000,000 members of the public engage with Kestoria Kavazi and allied platforms including Vavagaa, Kalamu Ndogo, Hadithi Zetu; of which at least one third will have developed a positive perspective on gender equality, women’s rights, and agency (with evidence of transformed discourse and actions) aligned to equitable and sustainable development for the Country and Continent.
- At least 50 storytellers will continue to produce content and/curate forums and actions clearly distinguishing as intersectional, pan-African and ecofeminist.

narratives, thus our deliberate choice to focus on herstory; c) it is unrealistic for Africa and Tanzania to achieve prosperity without equality and equity and that our very survival is hinged on the sustained integrity of planet earth; thus, our intersectional pan-Africa and eco-feminist consciousness which embrace decolonial politics; d) information technology bridges the gap between oral, textual, visual, performative and mix media, allowing stories to be accessible and relatable to diverse groups of 21 century populations; thus, multimedia storytelling approaches.

The launch of this strategy, is a celebration of our 15 years of achievements and challenges; and a commitment for another decade of hard work. We count on attracting the right balance of resources and good will, with which to grow stronger and collectively owned structures, processes and an organisational culture speaking to our purpose and ethos. We invite you to join us on this exciting journey.

Demere Kitunga  
December 2022



## Strategy 2

### **Facilitate the growth of a strong cadre of feminist authors to safeguard visibility of women agency and integrity in mainstream Tanzanian and pan-African political, social and cultural memory.**

- a. Develop a feminist storytelling guide for the creation of empowering content that values and reconnects young people with indigenous knowledge and stories of women and African people's agency and integrity.
- b. Provide opportunities for authors, poets and copywriters to experiment with innovative research, content creation and dissemination models and media accessible to large and diverse members of the public.
- c. Organise feminist storytelling research, writing and curatorial workshops and residencies connecting female authors, poets, activists and custodians of silenced indigenous knowledge.
- d. Facilitate engagement of children and youths in regular writing, ideation and innovation challenges with pan-African feminist and sustainable earth themes.

#### Performance Targets

- At least 300 girls and boys (6 to 13 years) and 300 girls and boys (14 to 18 years) will be challenged to raise their voices on gender issues using creative genres. At least 100 of each age group will have received editorial feedback and at least 50 of their works will be published online and offline.
- At least 50 young feminist leaders mentored and enabled to work with creative and digital feminist storytelling approaches in documenting herstories, advocacy and public engagement.
- 15 female authors of diverse identities enabled to use storytelling approaches to research and co-author compelling feminist stories with at least 150 community-based women custodians of indigenous knowledge and expressions.

# Programme Strategies

This section presents the organisation's strategies and targeted impact for programmatic action and organisational excellence for the next 5 years.

## Strategy 1

***Grow a vibrant storytelling hub where women, youth, children and diverse identities engage creatively, collaborate and network to contribute to the Transformative Feminist Movement.***

- a. Maintain a hub of online and offline platforms sustained by a strong community of intergenerational feminist storytellers, curators, mentors, content originators, interlocutors, community animators, innovators and activists.
- b. Curate Kestoria Kavazi, an interactive Multimedia Feminist Storytelling Archive, common repository and gateway for feminist herstories.

### Performance Targets

- An ecosystem of feminist storytelling forums convened online and offline.
- At least 50 intergenerational forums of storytellers, women's rights activists and youth led organisations and those working with and on children's, othered people's rights actively driving Kestoria Kavazi strategic direction and curatorial practice.

## Table of contents

08	<b>Introduction</b> Soma's Herstory Reinvigorating the Women's Movement
12	<b>Understanding the Moment</b> Context Situation Analysis Our Strengths
16	<b>Emerging Opportunities for Soma</b> Strategic Positioning The Power of Storytelling Strategic Direction Theory of Change Strategic Objectives Programme Outcomes Programme Strategies
30	<b>Plan Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation</b>

# Introduction Soma's Herstory

Soma (read and learn in Swahili) was founded in 2007. It became operational in 2008 when it opened Soma Book Café, a launching pad for the promotion of reading for leisure and learning, the first readership space of its kind in Dar es salaam. Soma has since been creating spaces and processes for storytellers to develop skills, interact, learn together and build audiences for progressive authors and multimedia storytellers. It also engages children and youth as readers and storytellers in their own right; and curates spaces for different publics to appreciate and engage with creative thought. Essentially, Soma promotes the creative word as a catalyst for transforming, deconstructing, reclaiming and reimagining cultural identities, her/histories and authoring alternative futures.

## Our Purpose

***“To contribute to Tanzania’s transformation into an informed society that values knowledge, creativity, and independent thinking”***

# Programme Outcomes

The Interactive Outcome Framework (Figure below) provides a summary of outcome areas which will inform the programmatic focus for Soma for the next 5 years. Soma’s community of partners and allies grows and develops around five mutually reinforcing outcome areas: **Space, Skills, Narratives, Voice and Action**. Converging around curated feminist storytelling cocreation Space(s) where they connect, interact, foster synergy and resilient forms of organising. Where they nurture talents, increase knowledge, Skills and consciousness, gain clarity on issues and approaches, analyse, innovate. Where they ideate, excavate silenced herstories, interrogate existing and generate new and powerful Narratives, package, archive and publish seminal contents, and drive public discourse. Where they innovate with creative and digital media to effectively amplify Voices, grow and engaged audiences and influence public discourse. Where they strategize and galvanise power and engender Action for social gender transformation.



The character and how these spaces are experienced exemplify feminist ethos where power is shared and every experience is validated. In the actions initiated and processes facilitated in and through these spaces, women, youths and children with diverse identities position themselves at the helm as knowers, storytellers, leaders and doers: to grow and multiply a cadre and communities of feminist scribes ; to grow and multiply a body of knowledge, knowledge forms and expressions; to inspire and drive public discourse and action; to disrupt neo-liberal patriarchal narratives, structures and practice; to envision and cause transformation; to grow inclusive and resilient organisations, networks, forms of organising and mobilise resources to sustain change.



# Strategic Objectives



The rationale arises from the need to make a unique contribution to the tempo of the Transformative Feminist Movement to effectively impact on narratives, consciousness, and actions leading to social gender transformation, and ultimately equitable and prosperous society, with due consideration to sustainable earth.

***To consolidate, sustain and enhance impact of TFMB efforts to disrupt mainstream discourse with transformative, pan-African and eco-feminist herstories and narratives to engender action.***

We thus intend to continue to expand spaces where women, children (girls and boys), youths and different identities amplify their voices, articulate pan-African feminist narratives and use media innovatively to ‘re-member’, imagine, and author social gender transformation.

Soma remains ambitious but pragmatic considering that human and financial resources are a constant challenge. It will thus focus on building further partnerships and grow its role as a facilitator and curator of cocreating spaces and platforms, while fostering innovations in storytelling to bridge the current gap between written and oral, formal and informal, didactic and creative communication, contemporary and indigenous knowledge forms, physical and cyber spaces with a view to making feminist narrative more popular and contestation acceptable.

Soma fulfils this purpose by using literature to evoke creative imagination, critical reflections, multi-dimensional problem-solving capacities, cultural self-understanding, lifelong learning, and to moderate public discourse. It is, in itself, a learning organisation. It is thus constantly innovating, reading the context and listening to its growing intergenerational community, which in essence aspires for a prosperous African future founded on principles of equality, equity and social justice. Consequently, since 2016 Soma has focused on spaces curation and cocreations to uncover, preserve and amplify pan-African knowledge.



Soma believes in the power of storytelling; that stories impact belief systems and norms that inform relations, behaviour, societal practices, structures, and traditions, including those embedded in patriarchy and intersecting ideologies. To counter intersecting patriarchal narratives that spin myths and stereotypes paraded as inert and unchanging truths in various media and cyberspace, mostly accessed by young women and men, it is imperative to commit energy, resources, and innovation to create and proliferate counteractive knowledge and information that not only amplify women as subjects in transforming social and gender relations, but also compel, engage and foster imagination. Without telling their own story and making their voices heard, advocates for women’s and children’s (girls and boys) rights and pan-African feminist activists will find it hard to leave their footprints and sustain their political momentum.

With this kind of conviction, we believe that telling stories which amplify the central role African women play in shaping the course of our shared her/history contribute to ‘an informed society that values knowledge’ with balance. It is with ‘creativity, and independent thinking’, plus the capacity to marshal our intellectual and cultural resources to mend our society from divisive ‘power’ politics, that we imagine and recreate integrity and equitable prosperity for the country and continent once torn apart. To paraphrase the iconic liberation theologian and educator Paulo Freire, “to be able to wage the struggle for their liberation the oppressed must perceive oppression as a limiting situation which they can transform... this perception is a necessary condition for liberation only if it becomes the motivating force for liberating action”.

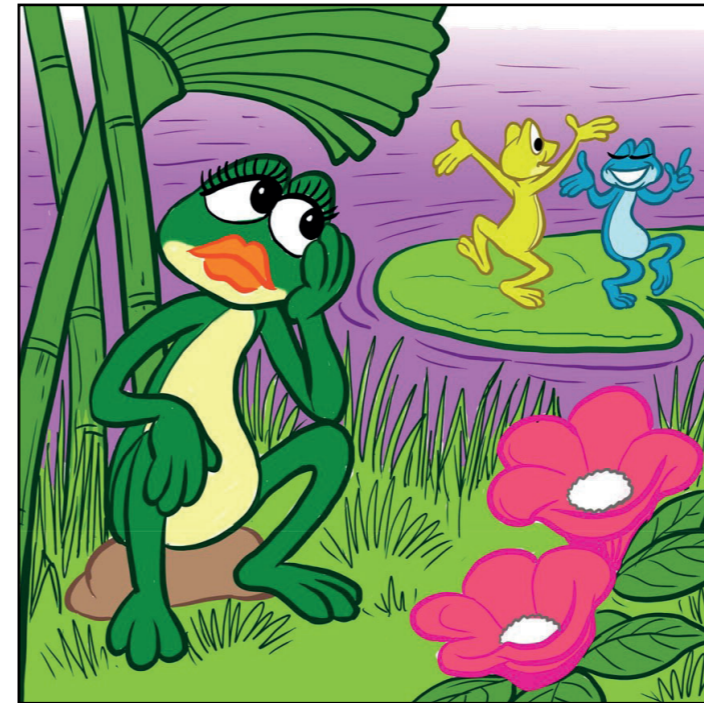


# Reinvigorating the Women's Movement

Soma is a member of the Transformative Feminist Movement Building (TFMB) coalition in Tanzania, a loose coalition of feminist activists and women's rights defenders in Tanzania. Soma specifically contributes to the coalition's herstory platform which works on documenting women's 'historic contribution to our society before and post-independence, as well as claiming public spaces for women's remembrance such as women's museums, monuments, road signages and other forms of memorabilia'. Soma has taken the lead in documenting and archiving feminist stories as well as building the capacity of feminist storytellers. In addition, Soma subscribes to the African Feminist Charter of principles and values jointly developed by feminist activists and thinkers from across the Continent and domesticated by the TFMB. Soma also concerns itself with intersecting the feminist agenda of equality and equity with sustainable earth discourse, taking cognisance of the fact that Africa's quest for sustainable growth is only tenable with a healthy planet.



Soma space the Book Café is changing from readership for leisure, culture, and learning into a feminist storytelling hub grounded in pan-African and Transformative Feminist philosophies and approaches. It currently experiments with a fusion of indigenous knowledge forms and contemporary storytelling media to curate production, dissemination, and exchange of content in public forums in order to foster action for social gender transformation and equitable development. Among other things, Soma co-creates with children to research and publish child authored story books; engages young people in storytelling challenges and training;



## We believe that

- IF** Tanzanian and African women, children and youth, of diverse identities, consciously excavate silenced herstories of their contribution to world heritage of wealth, culture, and knowledge; **and**
- IF** they consciously articulate these contributions to the world heritage of wealth, culture, and knowledge; **and**
- WHEN** these articulations inform narratives, learnings, everyday conversations and national discourse to expose myths and stereotypes that normalize exclusion and subordination of women, people with different ableness and identities; **and**
- WHEN** this process and outcome empowers them to use their knowledge about the past to understand the present, imagine the future and cause transformation;
- THEN** Tanzania (and Africa) will realise its full potential as a prosperous and equitable society.

# Theory of Change



## Assumptions

The assumptions underpinning our Theory of Change are that: Women, their families and communities, especially those affected by intersecting oppression based on ethnicity, class, sexuality, are adversely impacted by abuses of power, inequalities and violence that harm their bodies, deprive them of life sustaining resources, diminish their safety, exclude and suppress their voices.

Women, children, youth, other identities and communities have unacknowledged stories, wisdom, courage and creativity they draw on to survive and navigate many forms of oppression, and which, when tapped, can become resources and reservoirs of power for change, yet they often have limited access to autonomous spaces for sharing their stories and cause them to be heard to engender positive change.

Soma has a wealth of knowledge and experience in curating multimedia feminist storytelling spaces cocreated with diverse groups of women, youths, children and diverse identities and communities.

***The most meaningful and lasting improvements in the lives of women, children, youth, other identities and communities come when they tell their own stories and hence gain the individual and collective power to define and lead change.***

convenes contemporary poets, mix media artists and creative writers with whom we cocreate cutting-edge content creation with contemporary poets, mix media artists and creative writers to co-create and curate learning and social enquiry spaces and processes with grassroots women interlocutors, learned in indigenous forms of knowledge and expressions . Soma also engages with women's spaces and their traditional functions and memories as an archive to be excavated, interrogated, and restored as a latent or 'silenced' knowledge powerhouse . Watoto na Vitabu and Kalamu Ndogo, Andika na Soma, and Thubutu, Uliza Wahenga Dada and Hadithi Zetu are some of the processes with exemplary outcomes that informed this strategy. They can be accessed on our website, [www.somabookcafe.com](http://www.somabookcafe.com).

The 2023 - 2027 strategy builds from these developments. It affirms Soma's mandate as a feminist storytelling hub, curator, and co-creator of the Transformative Feminist Movement Kestoria Kavazi (a multimedia feminist storytelling archive), a common repository and gateway for feminist herstories and a cluster of feminist platforms curating online and off line dialogues engaging diverse publics, popularly known as Vavagaa. The strategy builds on the accumulated lessons and good practices generated in the past fifteen years; some of which will be turned around to cohere with the new directions while others will be gradually phased out and/or outsourced.



# Understanding the Moment

## Context

Tanzania's current national development vision 2025 is grounded on three principal objectives: achieving high-quality livelihood for its people; good governance and the rule of law; and building a strong and resilient economy. The first principal objective includes, gender equality and the empowerment of women in all spheres of society, access to primary health care for all, access to quality reproductive health services, universal access to safe water, and universal primary education.

Tanzania has adopted policies that promote gender equality and create an enabling environment. It is also implementing the UN's SDG 5 on gender equality and empowerment of women and girls. These commitments result from advocacy efforts and struggles by women/young women groups from grassroots, feminist organizations, and other supporting groups, including state and non-state actors. In 1995, women's movements came together with feminist and global political leaders to agree on the Beijing Platform for Action. Women and girls are continuing to challenge laws and policies that do not uphold gender equality, including rights to own property, bodies, voices, and spaces both privately and publicly.

However, in Tanzania, like many other nations across the globe, gender equality is still a dream yet to be fully realised, despite gains here and there. Normalization of women's subordination, including Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and economic exclusion, continue to reinforce the underlying patriarchal notion that the female body and female



### Core Values

In this strategy Soma recasts 12 values listed in its constitution to focus in on six succinct values that its team, including management and Board members, will internalise and commit to. Soma puts African feminist principles at the centre of relations and organisational culture it wants to foster. This resonates with the core values proposed below, which will define and differentiate the Board, management, and staff in their dealings with Soma's partners and its growing community of movers and shakers and among each other for the coming years:

- **Solidarity**
- **Non-discrimination**
- **Respect, self-care and nurture**
- **Transparency and Accountability**
- **Integrity**
- **Diversity**

Invisibility of women (and other underprivileged social groups) and their agency is one way of silencing their equal claim to national building and shaping the course of its her/history, which in turn feeds into the myths created about their inferiority. To undo the damage, an equal amount of effort must be placed in creating a counter-narrative, not only to disrupt but also to inspire transformation. A narrative effective enough to capture the imagination

of diverse members of the public with special focus on young women and men (girls and boys) who are the majority, the most dynamic and the bridge between current reality and future possibilities. Advances in digital technology and innovations in storytelling offer greater opportunities to effectively excavate, archive and amplify voices that have life changing narratives and to encourage public dialogues that catalyse corrective action.

# Strategic Direction

This section presents the 2023-2027 strategic plan for Soma. It restates the vision, mission and recalibrated values of the organisation. It also outlines Soma's theory of change, objectives and impact areas for the programme and organisational excellence.

## Vision

***Soma envisions a prosperous and equitable Tanzanian society where women and young people re-imagine and author transformation.***

## Mission

***To nurture innovative storytellers with pan-African feminist consciousness and skills to author transformation.***

sexuality is a means of exchange and an object of pleasure. All this blurs the root cause of women's subordination. Significant to this is the rise of multiple fundamentalisms including corporate and faith-based ideologies with visible and shadow power over and within governments and other social institutions. Shadow power intersects with, and is embedded in, patriarchal narratives of dominance, and divisions, and creates fear and discord in communities, fuelling regressive norms that blame and shame the most marginalized, including women, girls, people with disabilities, the poor and people with 'other' identities. Shadow power has to some extent also infiltrated progressive movements, including those advancing the cause for gender equality and social justice.

Tanzania has also been facing a democratic crisis following five years of increasing centralisation and authoritarian rule under the fifth administration. Civic space was curtailed through a combination of censorship, regressive laws, policies and regulations, and the use of fear and intimidation. As is often the case in authoritarian situations, populism and conservatism came together to put additional strains on women rights and liberties, particularly rights over their bodies and sexuality. This era of backsliding on fundamental democratic principles culminated in a contested civic election in 2019 and national election in 2020, both on Tanzania Mainland and in Zanzibar which was a sham.

Recent global dynamics have further compounded the existing inequities and tensions, putting additional pressure on the most vulnerable members of our communities. The COVID 19 pandemic and its public health and economic consequences disproportionately affected the poorest and most vulnerable. The



consequences of a slowing global and national economy have been made worse by the cost-of-living crisis brought about by the Ukraine-Russia war and its effects on fuel and food prices. As is often the case, the burden of these crises is felt by women as primary producers and caregivers. Amidst such challenges, capturing the resiliency and solidarity of women and their communities; and participating in other ways as Soma did by innovating with technologies to ease women small vendors access to consumers using mobile technologies and reporting violence during the COVID 19 Pandemic, helps to commit to memory this moment in ways that validates women's agency and inspires transformative actions.



## Situation Analysis

This section contains the environmental and stakeholder analysis used to deduce strategic issues that will be the focus for the new strategy.

The turbulent environment we are currently witnessing has had positive and negative impact on organisations. This includes changes in the law regulating the NGO sector, changes in the law for publishing statistical data, a volatile knowledge and book industry, cumbersome compliance and reporting procedures by regulatory authorities, among others. Soma has not been spared from these and from the devastating effects of the COVID 19 pandemic. Its institutional, human, and financial capacities have been shaken, some of its gains rolled back, and its

space, Soma Book Café closed since early 2020 except for pop up events.

There has been, however, some positive developments such as the improved online communication platforms that have allowed and encouraged different ways of being, new ways of collaborating and different avenues for innovation and mentoring creatives. The mileage Soma has thus far gained from the collective energy and innovation invested in experimental multimedia feminist storytelling, documentation, and archiving interventions since 2016 has resulted in the nascent Multimedia Feminist Storytelling Hub co-created with a cross section of subscribers to the Transformative Feminist Movement Building coalition.

# The Power of Storytelling

*'Stories can change minds... take away dignity and ... restore dignity' –Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie*

Women (and men) experience the world differently depending on their respective contexts and the place they occupy in the social hierarchy. Their human experience is impacted by the intersection between their gender, age, class, and other social constructs that privilege or disadvantage one group over the other(s) to facilitate systemic subordination, discrimination and/or oppression. This among others is at the centre of intersectional feminist gender analysis, which informs this strategy.

Soma recognizes the power of storytelling and its use in mainstream spheres to influence public opinion and the collective psyche. It is aware that to effectively disrupt the dominant norms and stereotypes, the feminist movement must subvert the mainstream with a consistent, and compelling counter-narrative. It must ensure mainstream and 'own' created (alternatives) channels are awash with fresh and accessible packages appealing to large audiences.

Soma also understands that:

- Invisible power is implicated in perpetuating gender inequality, and therefore, to advance broader social justice, there is need to better understand it. This includes how socialization (where deep roots of oppression are instilled) intersects with public narratives to disinform and manipulate beliefs, create discord, unwarranted divisions, foster fear and apathy (among the oppressed).
- Creating and sustaining a movement, the politics of, and power analysis (including transformation of how it is shared) is imperative in order to see a holistic picture of the context, to identify strategic opportunities and risks, and to align strategies for equitable prosperity.
- A thirst for cross-movement and cross-border connections, dialogues, and agenda setting – which bring together intersectional analysis of feminist and other progressive agendas to a broader social transformation effort is paramount.

complemented by renewed interest in collective action within the creative and knowledge value chain. It is expected this will rub off at grant making circles to allow for the interphase between knowledge, culture, innovation and advocacy for women's and children's, rights as the right combination for grant makers. This has begun to show with some feminist and women's funds including Women Fund Tanzania (WFT). Soma has been a player in these advocacy efforts, and draws inspiration and support from them.

Ultimately, within this strategic frame, Soma will leverage its experience and strategic

position as a bridge between those who have stories (feminist activists who have the experience, knowledge and information of women rights struggles but who lack the skills to tell appealing stories) and those who can tell stories (storytellers nurtured by Soma to tell a transformational story but who may not know where to get the stories or how stories contribute to movement building).

Ultimately, Soma aspires to help bridge the gap in documenting women's footprint and to reposition the experiences and narratives of women, youths, children and other identities at the centre of the Tanzanian political, social, historical, and cultural memory within the pan-African and sustainable earth narrative.

Our focus is on the interlinked struggles experienced by these women, youths, children and other identities in a historical context where patriarchy intersects with colonialism, slavery, multifaceted ramifications of neo-colonialism, and other oppressive forms; their agency, solidarity and how they use their relative power (individually and collectively) to transcend barriers, uplift each other and catalyse social transformation.



# Our Strengths

The analysis of strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats (SWOT) conducted to inform this strategy revealed strengths and opportunities, which are internal and external factors that provide Soma with a conducive environment to perform optimally as well as weaknesses and threats which will need to be mitigated.

Notable strengths that Soma already possesses, which will be leveraged to take advantage of the opportunities in its sphere and mitigate risks include:

## Public Image

Soma is a well-known brand and the hub has repeatedly been mentioned as a welcoming and safe space for creative collaboration.

## Committed Board of Directors

The Board is inclusive, diverse, and committed despite the many challenges Soma has faced in the last two years.

## Diverse & Innovative Programmes

Despite the very lean staff complement, Soma has been able to develop and implement various dynamic programmes. Those that were mentioned repeatedly during the interviews were Uliza Wahenga Dada!, Andika na Soma, Watoto na Vitabu, Thubutu, and Vavagaa.

## Emerging Opportunities

## Strategic Positioning

***“To be able to wage the struggle for their liberation the oppressed must perceive oppression as a limiting situation which they can transform... this perception is a necessary condition for liberation only if it becomes the motivating force for liberating action”***

***—Paulo Freire***

Overtime, feminist activists and women rights defenders have produced knowledge and information on women’s contribution to society despite structural gender inequalities and patriarchal myths that abound in individual articulations and public discourse. Most of this knowledge however, is not packaged in appealing genres and media or disseminated in channels accessible enough to large and diverse audiences to counter mainstream narratives. In its efforts to break this barrier, the Transformative Feminist Movement Building coalition introduced its Wanawake Historia Yetu Fahari Yetu (Feminist Herstory) coalition over a decade ago. The latter has a well-articulated agenda but implementation is still sporadic and uncoordinated. Similarly, few creative storytellers, even those writing with feminist consciousness, do not actively interact with collective women rights processes and feminist movement platforms. Those who do, often partake in these processes only when called upon to render a service. Soma has been part of these efforts, building the case for systematic, shared, creative and accessible knowledge production and dissemination approaches.

As a multimedia storytelling space and innovative co-creation hub, Soma is strategically positioned to bridge the gap. It brings to the table multimedia storytelling

approaches that combine oral, written, visual and digital media to capture voices and ways of knowing across a spectrum of women’s experiences and expressions. These approaches have been piloted in feminist storytelling research and writing/artistic renditions leading to public discourse interventions with children, teen agers and women creative writers and mix media artists. Some of these were extended to feminist forums on effective ways to engage the public using their everyday experiences and language. These experiments included the use of various forms of digital media production which have become quite common and can be made to interface with more accessible media, such as community radio, TV and mobile phones, as approaches to populate women rights content in everyday discourse accessible to the wider public. Our Vavagaa platform launched in 2021 as a YouTube channel and later complemented (in 2021/22) by Vavagaa mtaani (physical), ZOOM regional and ClubHouse channels is one example of such innovation.

At the level of public policy, there are signs that the phase of little investment going to nurturing and supporting creativity, independent thinking, and knowledge, all of which are the soil on which everything development grows, is ending. Policy dialogues between government and practitioners in the creative and publishing ecosystem has paid dividend with nascent policy changes and initiatives to stimulate creativity and innovation including creative writing. This is

