We **Lead** with **Power**

A Feminist Transformative
Leadership Guide

Feminist leadership is not just about who leads but how leadership is practiced; rooted in justice, care, inclusivity, and the redistribution of power. It's a daily practice of transforming structures and relationships so that leadership is shared, accountable, and liberating for all.

Credits:

To all the participants who contributed their experiences and perspectives to make this guide possible:

Thank you for your commitment and leadership in building a more inclusive and transformative feminist movement.

Content

Abbreviations

ACSHR	African Conference on Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights and Family Well-being
AGYW	Adolescent Girls and Young Women
AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
AMwA	Akina Mama wa Afrika (solidarity among African women)
APCRSHR	Asia Pacific Conference on Reproductive and Sexual Health and Rights
ART	Assisted Reproductive Technologies
AWAC	Alliance of Women Advocating for Change
AWID	Association for Women's Rights in Development
AWLI	African Women's Leadership Institute
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (UN)
CPD	Commission on Population and Development (UN)
CSW	Commission on the Status of Women (UN)
CNJFL	National Coalition of Young Girls Leaders (Niger)
COA	Community of Action
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DMEL	Design, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
DPO	Disabled People's Organization
FCAM	Fondo Centroamericano de Mujeres (Central American Women's Fund)
FEMNET	African Women's Development and Communications Network
GBV	Gender-based Violence

HIV Human Immunodeficiency Virus

Hivos Humanistisch Instituut voor Ontwikkelingssamenwerking (Humanist Institute for Development Cooperation)

ICFP International Conference on Family Planning

ICPD International Conference on Population and Development

ISSTDR International Society for Sexually Transmitted Diseases Research

IUSTI International Union Against Sexually Transmitted Infections

LBTI+ Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and other gender identities or sexual orientations

Marsa Marsa Sexual Health Center

MEL Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning

MENA Middle East and North Africa

NGO Non-Governmental Organization

RHNK Reproductive Health Network Kenya

SMART Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound

SRH Sexual and Reproductive Health

SRHR Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

STI Sexually Transmitted Infections

UN United Nations

UNFPA United Nations sexual and reproductive health agency

UNHCR United Nations Refugee Agency

Introduction

We Lead was an inspiring, innovative and powerful program implemented between 2021 and 2025 with the aim to improve the Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRH-R) of young women in 9 countries: Lebanon, Jordan, Niger, Nigeria, Uganda, Kenya, Mozambique, Honduras, Guatemala.

The We Lead program was supported by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and implemented by six civil society organizations:

- **Hivos:** an international development organization guided by humanist values, working in partnership with others in the Middle East, Africa, Asia and Latin America on three impact areas: Civic Rights in a Digital Age; Gender Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, and Climate Justice.
- **Restless Development:** a nonprofit global agency that supports the collective power of young leaders to create a better world by training, mentoring, nurturing and connecting thousands of young people to use their youth power and lead change.
- **FCAM:** the Central American Women's Fund (Fondo Centroamericano de Mujeres) is a feminist organization that mobilizes resources to contribute to the strengthening of women's and feminist movements in the region through direct funding, close accompaniment and the facilitation of opportunities that contribute to their sustainability and struggles.
- **FEMNET:** the African Women's Development and Communications Network is a Pan-African Feminist and membership-based network, ensuring that voices of African women are amplified and their needs and aspirations are prioritized in key policy dialogues and outcomes.
- **Positive Vibes:** an African, queer, human rights organization, contributing to realizing human rights, health and social change at global level (Africa, Asia and Central America) through four pathways: vibrant movements; accountable systems and services; just policies and laws; innovation for impact.

- **Marsa Sexual Health Center** advocates for inclusive and equitable access to Sexual and Reproductive Health in Lebanon.

We Lead worked with four specific groups of young women who are disproportionately affected by discrimination and gender-based violence:
- Young women living with HIV.
- Young women with disabilities.
- Young women from the LBTI+ community.
- Young women affected by displacement.

We Lead called upon these women as rightsholders, to emphasize that they are holders of rights. In line with the leading principle "Nothing about us, without us", the program put these young women rightsholders in the driver's seat while supporting them to make sustainable changes for their rights.

Other important principles of the program were local ownership, gender equality, social inclusion, and youth leadership. To bring these principles together, before closing the program in 2025, We Lead developed a final tool for these young women: a Feminist Leadership Guide.

This guide is a catalyst for young women leaders (or aspiring leaders) to explore innovation, growth, grounding and other ways of feminist leadership in their various settings. Exercises in the guide either focus on young feminist leaders or on how organizations supporting young feminist leaders can create genuinely inclusive and safe environments. They are designed to be dynamic and participatory, thus participants are encouraged to engage actively in the group discussions and activities. Exercises will enable young feminist leaders to reflect on their own personal and professional experiences, with a focus on peer learning and exchange.

The exercises are open for modification to one's context and are written in such a way that they can be performed with a facilitator / trainer or without. They are supposed to be implemented in a safe and inclusive space (e.g., physically

accessible venues and toilets, gender-neutral bathrooms, as well as a safe and quiet space for sensory overload or discreet medication) with diverse food options (for dietary wishes and needs related to health and culture). Where necessary, exercises can be accompanied by mentors, sign-language interpreters, translators, voice recordings, braille materials or a buddy system, large print, drawings, childcare support, as well as safety and security support for safeguarding.

The methodology used to develop this guide consisted in: (1) literature review, including existing youth and feminist leadership guides; (2) semi-structured interviews with all six We Lead partner organizations; and (3) co-creation workshops with all four We Lead rightsholder groups of young women in the nine countries.[1] All these tools were applied online.

A total of five co-creation workshops were held: one in English for Nigeria, Kenya and Uganda; one in English with Arabic translation for Lebanon and Jordan; one in Spanish for Honduras and Guatemala; one in Portuguese for Mozambique; and one in French for Niger. Sign language interpretation was available where needed.

The aim of the workshops was to co-create guidelines and priority content for this guide, based on the experiences, needs and visions of young women leaders from the program's various countries of intervention with the goal to foster transformative, inclusive, and decentralized leadership. When referring to workshop participants in this guide, pseudonyms are used to respect their anonymity.

The guide consists of seven chapters: (1) an introductory chapter on feminist transformative leadership concepts and principles; (2) a chapter on intersectionality and inclusive leadership, signaling challenges and opportunities for young women to lead, including intergenerational approaches; (3) a chapter on collaborative decision-making and power-sharing through empowerment;

(4) a chapter on empathy, collective and self-care, creating leadership resilience through continuous reflection and growth; (5) a chapter on gender-based violence and navigating patriarchy in leadership; (6) a chapter on advocacy and feminist policy engagement, including the role of feminist change agents and social media; and (7) a chapter on feminist leadership accountability mechanisms for resource mobilization, management and sustainability.

"For me, feminist leadership means refusing to conform with the state of the world. We are all feminist leaders because it's never easy to name discomfort in our families, workplaces, or schools."

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[1] For systematization of results, various AI tools have been used.

Lebanon   Guatemala   Honduras   Mozambique

Kenya   Uganda   Nigeria   Niger   Jordan

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Feminist Transformative Leadership

Concepts and Principles

Feminist organizations initially tried to create non-hierarchical structures in the 1970s, but by 2000, discovered that informal power hierarchies still emerged based on various social factors. This led to the development of feminist leadership theory, which emphasizes that leaders must embody feminist values within their own organizations to credibly advocate for broader social change. Following the feminist principle that "the personal is political", feminist leadership now focuses on transforming leadership practices themselves, regardless of the leader's gender identity.[2]

A short definition

Feminist leadership is a way of leading that shares power, centers justice and care, and ensures marginalized voices are included and valued in transforming systems of inequality.

1.1 The Concept of Feminist Leadership

The idea that both men and women have of typical leaders is very often biased towards men and masculine traits (such as being authoritative and firm, not showing emotions). Feminist leadership is the opposite of this "typical" hierarchical, undemocratic, non-transparent, patriarchal leadership that promotes injustice and oppression.

Feminist Leadership is leadership that recognizes the imbalances and unfair distribution of power. It understands patriarchy and how it affects the lives of women, girls and gender diverse people.

As a Feminist Leader you are expected to intentionally understand those dynamics, reflect on your power and privileges, and analyze your leadership to make sure it addresses the inequities and oppression of the system. This means that you should be comfortable with being political as feminism is political. Feminist leaders are aware of the fact that they hold a certain power and make decisions on how to use, share and distribute that power, dismantling the hierarchy, in order to encourage collective decision making, at every level of the group.

Feminist leadership is also about:

- Being accountable for your decisions, actions, people you lead, and how you use power;
- Being aware of the power that you hold and how it can affect others;
- Leading with empathy and caring about other people's wellbeing, showing solidarity and creating safe spaces for people, especially for those that face challenges or go through a difficult time;
- Positionality, meaning that as a Feminist Leader you should understand how others see you and how you see others because of your identity and because of their identity. It requires being self-aware in terms of the power and privileges that you hold based on your gender, age, ethnicity, where you were born, your educational level, the social position of your family, etcetera;
- Fostering inclusivity by respecting and appreciating people's differences, diversities, and where they come from. In other words, it is about acknowledging that differences exist so you can open up to the people that you are working with.

Finally, as a feminist leader you should not only care for others but also for yourself, as everyone, including you, is part of a bigger whole, and the chain is only as strong as its weakest link. You are part of the feminist leadership ecosystem and your strength matters. It is a leadership where people are self-aware and leading with emotional intelligence.

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[2] Batliwala 2011; Batliwala and Friedman 2014 in Batliwala 2022.

What is Feminist Leadership?

Feminist leadership is a transformative approach to leadership grounded in feminist values (such as equity, inclusion, social justice, intersectionality, empathy, and care) that recognizes and challenges systemic power imbalances, especially those rooted in patriarchy. It prioritizes sharing and redistributing power, fostering collective decision-making, and creating safe, inclusive spaces where diverse voices, particularly those historically marginalized, are heard and valued. Feminist leadership is accountable, self-reflective, and committed to the well-being and empowerment of all, linking personal actions to broader collective struggles for equality and human rights.

Exercise 1.1. Values and Beliefs about Leadership[3]

Objective: To raise awareness among participants about prevailing beliefs, norms, and values related to female and male leaders and what this means for personal, professional or an organization's (or other group's) growth.

Participants: Staff, members and/or partners of an organization / group.

Method: Small group discussions, plenary exchange.

Materials: List of statements, flipchart paper, masking tape, markers, notebooks / paper, pencils.

Estimated duration: 40 - 50 minutes.

Preparation:

Prepare some statements that stimulate discussion about different leadership styles. The following are some examples, which can be changed, adjusted, or supplemented with other statements:

1. Young women should not lead older men or women.
2. Leaders committed to gender justice are not authoritarian.
3. A good leader is someone who knows how to convince.
4. A leader knows when to speak and when to listen.
5. A leader enhances the capacities of others regardless of their gender, ethnicity, health status, (dis)ability or other diversities.
6. Leaders do not necessarily have to be visible in the group / organization.
7. Women are better leaders than men.
8. Female leaders are better at handling conflict.
9. A leader should be committed to social change.

[3] Oxfam Novib 2010.

10. Women are too emotional to become good leaders.
11. A good leader is one who is in touch with their emotions.
12. It is too difficult to find capable women who can take up leadership positions.
13. A man can never work under a female boss.
14. Servant leadership in an organization helps to empower employees to achieve collective success.

Step 1 (20 minutes):

Form groups of 3-5 people. Assign some statements from the list (or others you prepared) to each group. If there are more than four groups, give some the same statements. The groups have 20 minutes to discuss and reach a consensus, if possible. They write their arguments in their notebooks or on a paper.

Step 2 (15–25 minutes):

In the plenary session, representatives from each group (more than one person can be chosen per group) present the arguments that emerged from the group discussion. Someone else summarizes them on a flipchart. After each presentation, discuss the implications of the arguments for the development of the group's / organization's staff, members and/or partners toward leadership roles and positions. Pay attention to the accessibility of leadership positions for both women and men. Do women in your group / organization have the same space to lead as men, in spite of possible differences in leadership style? Why yes/no? Connect the arguments to beliefs, norms and values on qualities attributed to styles of leadership that are favored. Does the group's culture promote female, transformative or feminist leadership?

Step 3 (5 minutes):

Summarizes what was discussed, paying attention to the accessibility of leadership positions specifically for women. Also connect the arguments to beliefs, norms, and values regarding qualities attributed to leadership styles that people favor and what this means for feminist transformative leadership.

Exercise 1.2. What makes a Good Leader?[4]

→ Can be done parallel with exercise 1.1

Objective:	To raise awareness among participants about prevailing beliefs, norms and values related to what characterizes a good leader and what this means for personal, professional or an organization's (or other group's) growth.
Participants:	Staff, members and/or partners of an organization / group.
Method:	Small group discussions, plenary exchange.
Materials:	Flipchart paper, post–its, masking tape, markers, notebooks, pencils.
Estimated duration:	25–30 minutes.

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[4] Oxfam Novib 2010.

Step 1 (5 minutes):

Each participant writes on 2-4 post-its different characteristic (for example, having a clear vision) they believe are key for a good leader and how this shows (one characteristic per post-it, be specific and provide examples). Put all post-its on a flipchart titled "The Profile of a Good Leader." At the same time, the facilitator groups similar characteristics together.

Step 2 (15-20 minutes):

In a plenary session, discuss each of the (similar) characteristics separately focusing on whether they are truly necessary or not, and whether any additional characteristics need to be added. Ask also: What does such a leader exert leadership over? Do you think of leaders as decision-makers and/or change agents motivating and leading others through a process of change? Are other characteristics expected from a male leader than from a female leader? If there is a difference for men and women, in what aspects do they differ? What implications do these images of leadership have for the opportunities women and men have to become a leader? What are the implications for the group / organization?

Step 3 (5 minutes):

Summarize the discussion and analyze how these are characteristics that both men and women can possess. In other words, there are potential leaders among both women and men.

1.2 Key Principles of Feminist Leadership

The following key principles of feminist leadership were developed during the co-creation workshops with all nine We Lead countries and key informant interviews with all implementing partners. They will be discussed more in detail throughout this guide, but here is a short summary:

1.   Equity & Inclusion

Recognizes power imbalances, especially from patriarchy, and works to dismantle them. Ensures historically marginalized voices are heard and represented. It challenges the status quo and takes a transformative approach that centers people's voices and experiences in order to dismantle discrimination, hierarchies and other challenges they are facing. It includes intersectionality, considering gender, age, sexual orientation, health status, ethnicity, disability, class, religion, education status, residential status, and other forms of identity and oppression, working towards non-discrimination and inclusion of all groups, respecting their diversity and advocating for equality for all.

2.   Social Justice & Human Rights

Connects leadership with activism to challenge systemic inequalities and promote rights for all in practice. It involves not only understanding that human rights are universal, but actively respecting and promoting them to work towards social justice.

"Even within a women program there are different categories and identities of women: those that are displaced, those with a disability, those that are part of the LBTI+ community or those living with HIV."

Project Management Team
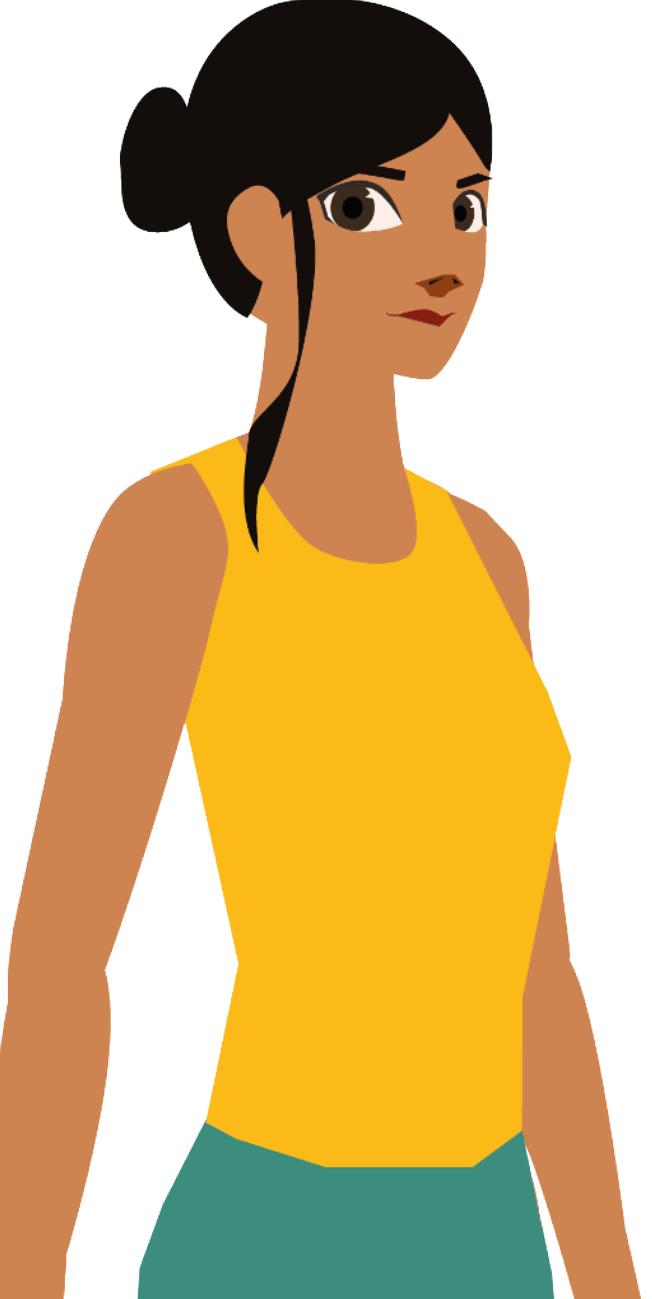
"Feminist leadership sees sisterhood not just as a practice, but as a way of life: an ethical and political bond between women that fuels collaboration, mutual support, and the collective fight against structural inequalities."

3. Collaboration & Collective Action

This is about establishing partnerships and alliances to work collectively towards a shared strategic vision, including through advocacy and policy influencing. This also involves sisterhood as well as intergenerational support through mentorship and other methods of knowledge sharing from older to newer and diverse generations. Other key words are solidarity and the generation of safe spaces to work in.

4. Shared Power & decision making

Encourages collective decision-making, dismantling hierarchies, and using one's power responsibly and accountably. It includes the equitable distribution of power by sharing power and leadership, making it horizontal and mutual.

5. Empowerment & Autonomy

This is about individual as well as collective empowerment, which involves self-determination and autonomy by expanding people's choices, strengthening their voices and their ability to take initiatives and exert influence.

6. Empathy & Care

Centers human well-being, safe spaces, and mutual support ("sisterhood" or "sorority"). It involves leading with empathy and care for others, their wellbeing and wellness. This includes showing respect for diversity by active listening, being flexible and supporting others. Moreover, it is about valuing self-care as an essential element for giving it your best and sustaining collective change.

7. Personal Development & Reflection

This is about leaders practicing self-reflection and self-awareness, so they recognize their privileges, positionality and can dismantle biases. It is about continuous learning, showing courage and leading with emotional intelligence, through clear bi-directional communication that inspires and motivates.

8. **Gender Transformation**

This involves challenging the status quo and working towards a long-term, sustainable change. It is about transformative leadership that challenges patriarchy, toxic masculinities and gender-based violence by promoting equality values and ethics. It involves being innovative, creative and respecting different perspectives.

9. **Governance & Accountability**

This is about responsible use of power by being transparent and accountable in terms of resources.

A Transformative Feminist Leadership Journey in Jordan

A young woman with no prior knowledge of feminism joined Takatoat's feminist space in Amman in early 2023. She quickly became deeply involved, joining their Feminist Reading Club and recruiting college friends to participate. She completed a SRHR program, which helped her develop a healthier relationship with her body and overcome societal shame about discussing women's health topics:

"The best outcome for me is understanding our bodies as girls, because at our age, we never had talked about such topics, whether at school, university, or anywhere else. This is very important to me because, especially with private matters, we feel shy to talk about them due to the society we are in and feel embarrassed discussing these topics. We shouldn't feel embarrassed when talking about our bodies and naming each part correctly. For me, this is the most beneficial thing because on a personal level, it has greatly helped me in my relationship with my body."

Her engagement expanded as she volunteered with Takatoat's media team, participated in their Regional Feminist School, and eventually became a representative at external events. Her transformation from newcomer to passionate feminist advocate demonstrates the organization's ability to cultivate leadership within the feminist movement and create meaningful change in participants' lives.

Exercise 1.3. Feminist Leadership Mandala

Objective: Identify experiences, identities and legacies that play a role in who you are, how you perceive the world and how this plays a role in how you lead and collaborate with others.

Participants: Anybody from your group.

Method: Individual work and peer reflection.

Materials: Paper or template, markers / pens / pencils.

Estimated duration: 30-60 min.

We are all influenced by an amalgamation of our lived experiences, social identities, ancestral and cultural legacies. Acknowledging this and identifying these influences can help us become better aware of how this impacts how we see and engage with the world around us, including how we lead and collaborate in our work and communities.

Steps:

1. Draw the template on a piece of paper.
2. In the innermost circle, write or draw representations of:

   a. 2+ **lived experiences** that have shaped who you are.
   b. 2+ **social identities,** e.g., gender, race, ethnicity, religion, (dis)abilities, health status, migration status, language, socio-economic situation, etc. that you feel impact your experience in life.
   c. 2+ **ancestral legacies,** e.g., intergenerational trauma, intergenerational privilege or wealth.
   d. 2+ cultural legacies, e.g., (tangible or intangible) assets or traits you carry with you as a result of being part of a culture that can influence your success or failure, e.g., ethic of hard work, legacy of being immigrants, history of being part of a persecuted culture or history of persecuting others.

3. In the middle circle, write down or draw representations of how these experiences, identities, and legacies influence how you see the world. For example, if one of your lived experiences is that you have been well received and generally supported as an LBTI+ leader you may see the world as receptive to change. But if your lived experience is that people respond negatively or even violently to learning that you are a LBTI+ leader, you may see the world as a place that is dangerous.

4. In the exterior circle, write or draw representations of how these experiences, identities and legacies AND how you see the world, influence how you lead and collaborate with others. For example, in the case you have had an overall positive experience with community members as a LBTI+ leader, you may be more likely to seek community support or alliances. If you have had negative experiences, you may be more hesitant to seek community alliances.

5. Take a few minutes to review your mandala as a whole.

6. Consider the following reflection questions:

    a. What do you notice?
    b. What parts of your inner circle improve your capacity to perceive, lead, and collaborate by making keen observations, reaching out when needed, and contributing to collegial efforts? How can you embrace this in your work?
    c. What parts of your inner circle reduce your capacity to perceive, lead, and collaborate by narrowing your perspective, relying on harmful use of power, and dominating or dismissing collegial efforts? How might you take steps to manage these negative impacts?

Note: Managing the negative impacts does not mean erasing or dismissing that these are part of who you are. Instead, how can you acknowledge, be mindful, and act to reduce the negative impacts on yourself and others?

8. Optional: Share your mandala with someone you trust to talk through the reflection questions with them.

Source: Creative Action Institute in FRIDA 2023

1.3 Lessons Learned from Feminist Leadership Approaches

We Lead partner organizations identify the following approaches that do not function well in the context that they work in:

1. One-size-fits-all approaches:

Rigid strategies that ignore local contexts fail. Each country has different levels of openness, risks, and safety concerns. This is related to a lack of adaptability and limits progress.

2. Tokenism or superficial participation:

Inviting groups (e.g., rightsholder groups) only to "showcase" them without real involvement does not work. Participants need to be engaged as facilitators, storytellers, active contributors and decision makers.

3. Ignoring safety and security risks:

In contexts like Niger, Nigeria, and Uganda, openly discussing LBTI+ or SRHR issues pose serious threats, including government hostility and risk of imprisonment. Approaches that do not prioritize confidentiality, contextualization of tools to the local context, and careful selection of participants could endanger people.

4. Top-down or rigid programming

Overly prescriptive project designs limit ownership. On the other hand, giving too much autonomy without structured support also is doomed to fail, as some partners will feel abandoned. Balance between guidance and independence is key.

5. Failure to account for trauma and vulnerability

Asking participants to share personal stories without trauma-informed practices creates risks and resistance. Similarly, men and other participants often hold back vulnerability, limiting authentic engagement.

6. Lack of meaningful feedback loops

Collecting feedback but not acting on it, creates mistrust. Listening without responding undermines equity and inclusion.

7. Burnout from emotional labor

Feminist leaders and organizers often carry the extra burden of care and responsibility, leading to exhaustion. Spaces that do not address this strain will be unsustainable.

8. Linear, rigid models of change

Approaches assuming straightforward, step-by-step progress do not reflect the realities of complex, evolving contexts where continuous learning and adaptation are essential.

In other words, what does not work are rigid, one-size-fits-all or tokenistic approaches that overlook context, safety, trauma, and the need for genuine inclusion, feedback, and balance between guidance and autonomy.

What does "leading with a feminist perspective" look like in practice in MENA?

Online: Digital campaigns, mutual support platforms, and feminist lobbying or advocacy groups, women's voices amplification in a safe and effective way; Digital advocacy, politically oriented writing and engagement; An anonymous accountability platform that allows people to bring forward any entangling issues; This is important, as it shies away the image of feminist leadership as inherently perfect.

In-person: Women Circles; Participatory Leadership; Encouraging others to lead and grow through empowerment; Striving to dismantle systems of oppression such as racism and colonialism (in person or online); Dialogue Sessions.
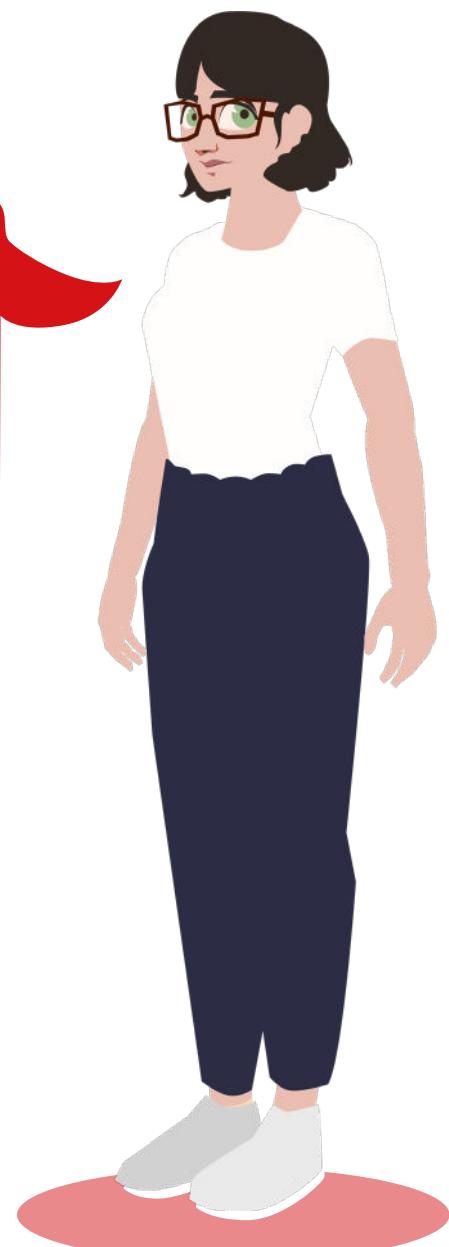
1.4 What is Transformative Change?

Transformative change is a profound and lasting shift that leads to something entirely new and fundamentally different from the way things were before[5].

In the context of Feminist Leadership, it means moving beyond addressing only the visible symptoms of power imbalances, and instead tackling the deeper causes, such as socially constructed norms, attitudes, and power relations that sustain inequality. Transformative change requires shifts in both behavior and attitudes, at individual and collective levels. It involves strengthening individual capacity, fostering organizational and group change, and ensuring that women have meaningful participation in leadership and decision-making[6].

To truly advance Feminist Leadership, traditional power dynamics and structures that reinforce inequality must be transformed. This process calls for recognizing, analyzing, and reflecting on the root causes of inequality, so as to prevent its production and reproduction in social relations. Transformative change also demands ongoing self-reflection to deepen awareness and agency. It is not a one-time event, but a progressive, iterative journey toward more just and equitable systems.

Transformative and Inclusive Practices

Several young women from Central America, including Lela, emphasized the power of creating spaces for marginalized voices, such as indigenous women, to break silences and articulate their experiences. This approach aims to ensure that leadership is both transformative and deeply inclusive.

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[5] Brookfield 2012 in Wong et.al. 2019.
[6] Kantor 2013.

2

Intersectionality and Inclusive

Leadership

Intersectionality is about people connecting; coming together on issues of shared interest that go beyond their own field of work. As a feminist leader you can bring people together on shared issues such as human rights and justice, but also SRH–R or climate. These are important issues for young women with different realities, such as those with a disability, those that are displaced, living with HIV, or that are part of the LBTI+ community. What they share is that they are among the most excluded, facing interconnected issues such as discrimination and safety.

By embracing an inclusive approach, you can also tackle issues that are difficult to talk about, taboo or even punishable by law in your country. Depending on your context, the area where you are working, topics such as sexuality, HIV or SRH–R could be navigated through issues people are more comfortable to talk about like living with a disability or displacement.

This also involves addressing safety and security of participants, making sure that physical and on–line meetings are organized in safe places and communication is protected. Creating safe spaces, not only means that it is physically safe but also accessible for people with a disability or those that speak different languages (using translation and sign language). It also means using a language that is sensitive to the participants' context.

Fostering inclusive and accessible spaces

When organizing any event or meeting, use the following checklist:
- **Physical:** ramps, accessible toilets, a quiet room for sensory overload or discreet medication, designated safe spaces, safe transport options.
- **Communicative:** Sign–language interpreters, translators, voice recordings, braille materials or a buddy system, large print, understandable language, drawings.
- **Social/Cultural:** Clear anti–harassment policy displayed, gender–neutral bathrooms, diverse catering (for dietary wishes and needs related to health and culture), acknowledgment of varying religious/ cultural practices, presence of mentors (when needed), as well as safety and security support for safeguarding.
- **Economic:** Fair compensation for young leaders' time, travel stipends, childcare support, and flexible meeting times (accommodating those with children or who need to take medication at specific intervals).

Don't just tick boxes; genuinely consult with rightsholder groups on their needs!

Another is having therapists in the trainings. Some trainings can be quite emotional, so you need to have professionals nearby that support mental health. This means you need to plan your training sessions well in advance.

"In Uganda, we made provisions for breastfeeding mothers and persons with disabilities by allowing them to bring caretakers who were also facilitated to provide the required services to the We Lead participants during the different program engagements. As a result, there was inclusivity for all the participants regardless of their needs which fostered continuous learning."

Uganda DMEL Focal Point

Exercise 2.1. Establishing Safe Spaces

Objective: To establish the culture for the workshop.

Participants: All members of the group.

Method: Plenary group discussion.

Materials: Flipchart, markers.

Estimated duration: 20-30 minutes.

Steps:

1. In this exercise you will be focusing on your individual leadership journeys. As part of this you may feel like you wish to share elements of your personal stories and lived experience. You will even be invited to share your personal and lived experiences. However, this is optional and you are welcome to share a fictional story, or step out of an activity at any time.

2. It is important that the workshop is a safe space for everyone participating. Acknowledge it is particularly important as many of us have experienced trauma and discrimination.

3. Have a group discussion around "What does it mean to have a safe space?" "What makes you feel included?"

4. Note a few points on a chart and display on the wall during the full workshop

5. Share with participants your safeguarding and wellbeing protocols (e.g. who to speak to, any wellbeing support available)

Source: Restless Development 2024b. See the complete Youth Power Training Toolkit at:
https://youthcollective.restlessdevelopment.org/youth-power-training-toolkit

Good practice: Akina Mama wa Afrika / Solidarity among African women

AMwA is a pan–African feminist leadership development organization founded in 1985 by a group of African women living in the diaspora, who remained keenly aware of their African roots and the need to organize autonomously. They named themselves Akina Mama wa Afrika, which means solidarity among African women. In 1997, they started the African Women's Leadership Institute (AWLI) to strengthen young African women's leadership capacities. Through their unique POT model (Personal Mastery, Organizing Skills and Taking Action), the AWLI has equipped feminist leaders to tackle patriarchy and attain justice for women and girls in Africa.

For more information see: https://akinamamawaafrika.org

2.1 Feminist Mentorship

Transforming leadership and organizations according to feminist principles is challenging and isolating work that few can undertake alone. Leaders need external guides to provide support, guidance, and help them stay on track when they encounter resistance or setbacks. Feminist mentorship serves as this external guidance by helping individuals:

- Understand how gender and social injustices affect their psychology and functioning.
- Challenge systems and institutions that uphold inequities.
- Question belief systems that normalize injustice.
- Mobilize others to work toward equality and gender justice.

Unlike conventional mentoring, feminist mentorship recognizes that activists must address gender-based injustices across multiple spheres; in their personal lives and families, within their organizations, and throughout their broader communities and societies. While traditional mentoring typically focuses on career advancement within existing structures, feminist mentoring goes deeper by enabling individuals to work on themselves, navigate organizational and community change, and develop into stronger feminist leaders. Evidence suggests this approach has demonstrated significant impact in practice.[7]

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[7] Batliwala 2022.

Practical Action: When matching mentors and mentees, go beyond general leadership skills. Consider matching young leaders with mentors who have shared lived experiences, or who have demonstrated exceptional allyship and understanding of specific intersecting identities. For example, a young LBTI+ feminist leader is mentored by an older LBTI+ activist who has successfully navigated political spaces. Mentors should be trained on ethical leadership and preventing power abuse within mentoring relationships. Mentorship sessions should include explicit discussions on navigating stigma, discrimination, and GBV related to HIV status, LBTI+ identity, displacement, or disability in feminist leadership contexts.

Good practice: Implementation of a capacity building, mentoring and monitoring program for girls and women in Niger

The capacity building and mentoring program for girls and women involved selecting a group of rights holders and training them on key topics such as leadership, women's rights, communication, SRH–R, and GBV, while also establishing a mentoring system. This process enabled participants to develop self–confidence and realize their potential, despite restrictive social norms. Thanks to the support of mentors, health workers, resource persons, and education personnel (from the girls' schooling initiative called SCOFI), the trained girls and women became agents of change, leading community awareness–raising actions themselves. This program, supported by local organizations, communities, and the ministries of health and education, fostered sustainable and replicable transformation by helping to break down sociocultural barriers. Although remote monitoring was a challenge, the effectiveness of capacity building and stakeholder engagement enabled real ownership by beneficiaries, ensuring the sustainability of achievements, as documented in a global impact report.

2.2 Feminist Leadership Opportunities for Young Women

While opportunities for feminist leadership exist across multiple formal and informal spaces (community groups, online platforms, women enterprises, educational institutions and international forums) these are often self–created, fragile, and dependent on personal initiative rather than being systematically provided. Overcoming societal, structural, and cultural barriers is essential to make feminist leadership more accessible, visible, and sustainable for young women.

Good practice: Feminism Forum in the MENA region

ANHRE, the Arab Network for Civic Education from Jordan, hosted an online and offline forum around feminism and what this means, especially in relation to adult education and development. The practitioners, experts and local activists that participated in the forum came to the conclusion that adult learning and education are a key part of liberation practices. Adult learning and feminism are similar approaches that can be combined for working towards social justice. The premise is that women must learn how to liberate themselves by means of gaining control over their lives, their decisions, and their resources. There is not one way to do this. It's a cumulative process, which starts with the theoretical underpinnings of the practice and leads to pushing for "real" leadership: one that is sustainable in its quest for justice, equity, transparency, and mutual understanding. This requires horizontal leadership or leadership circles.

This multi–stakeholder practice has a wide reach, among others because of a newsletter addressing the topic, a yearly academy and annual seminars that gather interested individuals and decision–makers together. Moving from theory to practice ultimately enriched the theory itself, so it became a very cyclical and reciprocal process.

Overall opportunities to engage in feminist leadership envisioned by young women from We Lead countries:

- **Feminist collectives, associations, and civil society organizations** offer spaces for young women to gain skills, interact with society, and build leadership experience.
- **Digital platforms and social media** (Instagram, TikTok, etc.) are powerful tools for mobilizing communities, creating campaigns, challenging harmful narratives, and enabling participatory decision-making.
- **Educational spaces, student movements, and artistic platforms** provide entry points for leadership and activism.
- **Mentorship,** especially intergenerational mentorship, empowers young women, fosters collaboration, and passes on knowledge and strategies.

- **Entrepreneurship and economic empowerment initiatives** help young women gain confidence, autonomy, and visibility as leaders.
- **Global and international opportunities** (e.g., advocacy platforms, leadership workshops, conferences) allow young women to expand influence beyond local contexts.
- **Grassroots organizing** and involvement in community-level decision-making processes create opportunities for meaningful leadership.
- **Leadership training programs and favorable policy environments** can strengthen capacity and encourage participation.
- **Inclusive youth friendly corners at health facilities** have proven to increase uptake of health services for the once underserved category of young women.

Positive results of rightsholders engagement with policy makers in Uganda

As a result of the advocacy efforts of rightsholders with disabilities in Kamuli district in Uganda, the "Kamuli District Local Governments' Access to Reproductive Health Services for Persons with Disabilities Ordinance, 2024" came into play. This has resulted into increased access and community support for the rights of young women and girls with disabilities in terms of health service access and uptake.

Inclusive youth friendly corners at health facilities in Uganda

As a key component on the We Lead program, rightsholders together with program officers advocated for inclusive youth friendly corners, which were indeed revamped or set up by some health facilities for the first time.
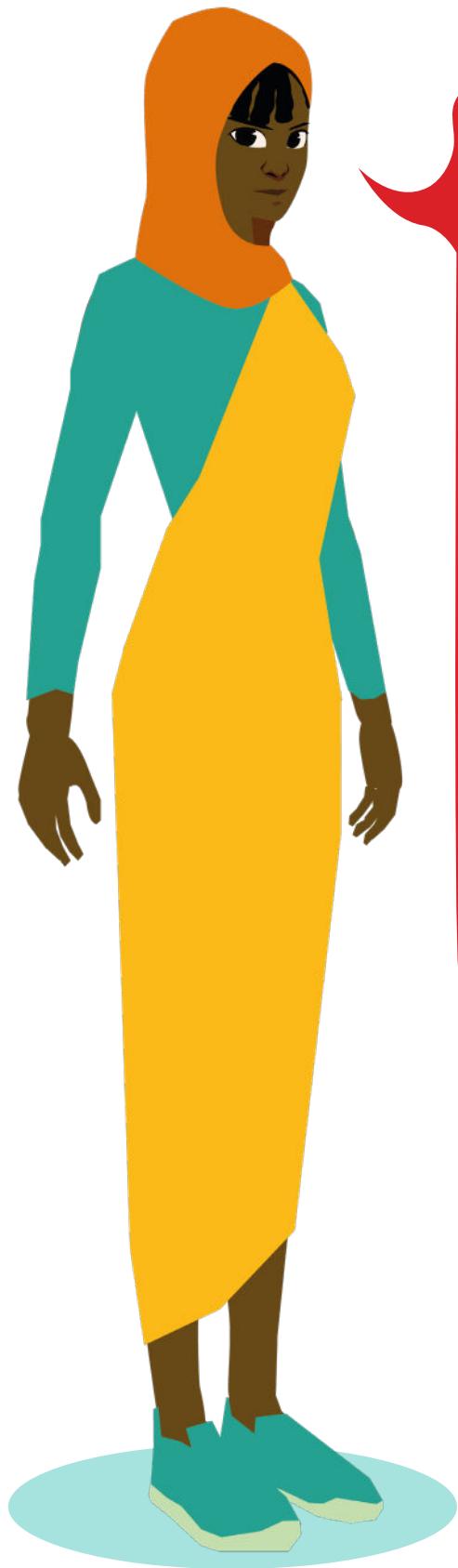
Feminist leadership opportunities in Niger

According to young rights holders from Niger: Opportunities for young women and other youth to assume feminist leadership exist, but they often need to be sought out, claimed, or created. Education, access to leadership positions, female entrepreneurship, and public policies that promote gender equality are important levers. Training programs, awareness campaigns on sexual and reproductive rights, and opportunities to speak in public spaces also enable young people to mobilize, build their capacities, advocate for equality and promote concrete changes in their communities.

Exercise 2.2. Speak Out Safe Space

Objective: To practice speaking in (semi-)public spaces, build confidence, get feedback, and prepare particip nts to speak up about things that matter to them.

Participants: (Future) young feminist leaders.

Method: Group discussions and plenary exchange.

Materials: Flipchart/white board, markers, paper and pens. Optional: microphone, sound recorder / phone to record speech.

Estimated duration: 100-120 minutes.

Leadership Note: Public speaking is not just about talking; it's about being heard. When young women claim space with their voices, they are already leading.

1. Warm-up / Icebreaker (15 min)

- Voice volume game: Each participants practices speaking a simple sentence (e.g., "My name is ___ and this is my voice") in increasing levels of volume, from whisper → normal → loud. Focus on projection, clarity.
- Mirror practice: Pairs mirror each other's posture and gestures while speaking. Notice how body language (non-verbal communication) makes words stronger.

2. Topic Brainstorming (10–15 min)

- In groups of 3-4 people, participants list 3 issues in their community, organization or group they feel strongly about (things that affect young women, e.g., street safety, ending child marriage, more young women in leadership). To get inspiration you can also check out: www.justlikemychilduganda.org/girl-power-project-radio-hour
- Share all issues in a plenary session and select one issue for each group to work on for the rest of this exercise. Try to select different issues for variety purposes.

3. Planning the Public Statement (20 min)

- Each participant writes a short speech (2–3 minutes) about that topic: what the issue is, why it matters, what change they want.
- Think about structure: opening, main message, conclusion. Also pay attention to non-verbal aspects: body language, eye contact.

You can use this simple structure:
- Start strong: "My name is ___ and I believe ___ "
- Explain the issue: what is happening, why it matters.
- Share your vision: what change you want to see.
- End with a call: what you want people to do.

4. Practice in Small Groups (15 min)

- Practice delivering your speech to the rest of your group. The others give feedback: what worked well, what could make it stronger (loudness, clarity, sharing from the heart etc.).

5. Public Practice & Feedback (30 min)

- In a plenary session, each participant presents their speech to the whole group. If possible, record them (video or audio) so they can see/hear themselves later.
- After each speech, allow time for applause/ affirmation, then share 1–2 things that were strong, 1 thing that could make it stronger.
- Discuss how it felt to speak: what was hard/ scary? what helped/ made it easy? what could make it safer/ better next time?

Note: Share tips that made you feel confident (taking a deep breath, eye contact, standing tall, etc.).

6. Next Steps (10 min)

- Brainstorm real public speaking opportunities (e.g., school assembly, community meeting, other local events, a radio program, social media spaces).
- Each participant picks one potential opportunity to try in the next month and sets a small goal: what you will do, where, when.

Source: Girl Power project in Uganda

Key challenges and barriers to engage in feminist leadership identified by young women from We Lead countries are:

- Limited availability of formal leadership opportunities; often these must be actively sought, claimed, or created by young women themselves.
- Fear of societal rejection, safety risks, and backlash, especially for those openly identifying as feminists.

- Adult-centric leadership structures and tokenization of youth participation limit genuine influence.
- Insufficient intergenerational collaboration in some spaces, leading to missed opportunities for shared learning.
- Fragmentation of youth movements and lack of sustained recognition for young leaders' work.
- Structural and cultural barriers that hinder women's participation, including inadequate policy implementation and travel restrictions.
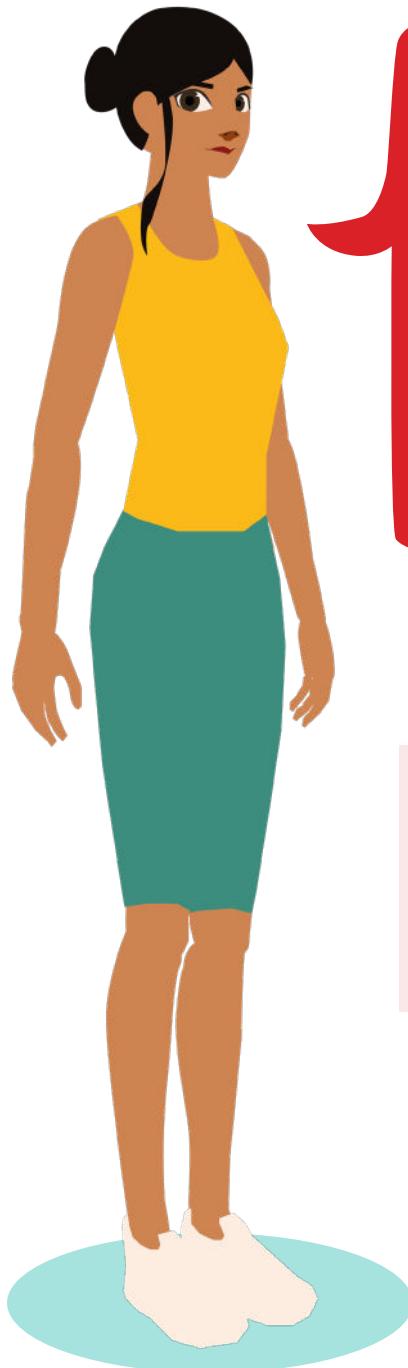
"Initiatives like We Lead have created spaces for youth to be included in decision-making processes. However, adult-centric models often overlook the critical role of young people, risking their instrumentalization. It is essential to recognize their importance and empower them to lead without being tokenized."

"Storytelling can be a powerful tool for intergenerational solidarity."

Andrea Parra from AWID in Restless Development 2021

Young women from Mozambique expressed that they also have to participate more actively in other decision-making spaces and processes. They recently had presidential elections and they preempt that the new government will initiate various political reforms. Their proposal is to act as a collective of feminist women and send a letter to the Minister of Gender, the President of the Republic, their community leader and the director of the health center to let them know their concerns. Young women tend to be seen as a group that is very far removed from political issues, but according to the We Lead participants, "when you are a woman, everything is political". Having a new government is an opportunity to not accept being silenced and to get ideas across. They see a potential in linking to the different leadership programs in Mozambique and to programs that work on bringing girls back to school, trying to understand what they are doing and how they can also adopt these approaches within their interventions as women organizations.

One young woman from Mozambique expressed that in order to not face persecution, their "voice cannot walk alone". She sees a need to engage young men and communicate well with them about their principles and objectives. Although the main goal is to give a voice to the women who have never had one, to the women who have never had equal rights, it is her opinion that "in all our activities, alongside a woman, there must also be a man present so that he, too, is engaged and understands our principles."

2.3 Intersectionality of Feminist Leadership

Our identities are defined by many different elements, such as age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, health status, (dis)abilities, migration status, and more. The concept of intersectionality stems from the idea that our unique experiences are a result of the power and lack of power that are associated with our various social identities.[8]

These social identities are elements of who we are that often shape how we see others and how others see us, how we are valued and treated in our organizations, families and communities. For example, while many people may experience obstacles to accessing healthcare, young women may experience this challenge differently than young men as a result of different needs but also of many types of bias and discrimination. And if this young woman is a transwoman, she may face even more obstacles. And if she is a displaced transwoman in a wheelchair, it may be even more challenging.[9]

Exercise 2.3. Social Identity Flower I: Reflecting on your own identity

Objective: To develop empathy and deeper understanding of ourselves and others through understanding that our intersecting identities are shaped by our social contexts and recognizing how social identities can influence the dynamics of the group.

Participants: Anybody from your group.

Method: Individual self-reflection and plenary exchange.

Materials: Blank sheets of paper, colored pencils.

Estimated duration: 40-60 minutes.

As members of society, our communities, families and organizations, we all have our roles and beliefs, which will affect our social position relative to others. This experience of our social identities shapes how we see the world, as well as what we believe and think, often implicitly. As Feminist Leaders you need to understand your own biases and be conscious about how they influence your relations with others; in your group at work, the family, or other settings. By being aware of your own biases, you can strengthen your role as Feminist Leader in supporting transformative social change for equality.

This exercise will help you to reflect on yourself in order to understand how people see you and how you see yourself according to your different identities, how they are formed and how they intersect. These can be related to gender, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, HIV status, physical ability, displacement status, etc.

All these social identities influence your relations with others, as all social relations are power relations. In this exercise you should ask yourself: What gives me power to make decisions?

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[8] Taylor 2020 in FRIDA 2023
[9] FRIDA 2023.

Step 1 (10–15 min, individual self–reflection)

On a blank sheet of paper, list as many social identities as you can based on your own experiences. You might include:

- Gender
- Age
- Race / Ethnicity
- Religion
- Living with HIV
- Being displaced
- (Dis)abilities
- Sexual orientation

Consider which social identities you would like to explore in depth. On the back side of the paper, draw a flower with as many petals as social identities you would like to explore. Label each petal with one of your selected social identities.

For each petal and the respective social identity, consider the positive and negative messages you have received in different settings: at work, during a training, a meeting, a family lunch, etc. Think about how enabling or disabling each of the social identities in your flower made you vis a vis the people you were within that setting. Reflect on your own power and privileges.

Note: to facilitate understanding read the following example: A young woman might experience that her age and gender puts her at a disadvantaged position when discussing with older and powerful male leaders at a community meeting. On the other hand, these same traits may make her more approachable to other youth and women in the community, helping her to understand their necessities. Moreover, having grown up in a time of social media, she will possibly be more agile in using these as a tool for communicating important messages.

Step 2 (15–20 min, individually and in pairs)

Having recognized and reflected on your position in the chosen setting, now think of ways in which you can adjust your behavior to minimize or partially control the disabling effects of various aspects of your identity and how to make better use of your enabling social identities. After five minutes of individual reflection, find a partner to exchange ideas on this for 10–15 minutes. If you don't want to share things that you feel are too personal, you can give general explanations instead of sharing your own experience.

Step 3 (15–25 min, group exchange)

In plenary share some examples of when you have been unconsciously biased. Talk about the fact that the social identities might not change but them being enabling or disabling depends on the person you are dealing with and how you deal with it yourself. In other words, it is relational and intersectionality affects these social relations of power.

Source: Own elaboration with elements from Creative Action Institute 2021 in FRIDA 2023

Exercise 2.4. Social Identity Flower II: Reflecting on your group's intersecting identities

Objective: To make participants aware of their own and other people's intersecting identities, specifically those of your group. You can focus on the same identities as in the previous exercise.

Participants: Anybody from your group.

Method: Group work and plenary exchange.

Materials: Blank sheets of paper, colored pencils.

Estimated duration: 40–60 minutes.

You can use the social identity flower you made in the previous exercise.

Step 1 (20–25 min group work)

After having done the previous identity exercise focusing on yourself, you will now reflect on the identity of various people in your group. Make groups of 3–5 people; each group selects one or two representatives to make notes and give a summary during the plenary afterwards. As a group, choose a setting in which you have worked together (or could potentially work together). Divide roles and do a role play or discuss verbally:

1. What types of power are expressed (or not) in the interactions/ relations between the different group members.
2. Which social identities influence this most? (compare your social identity flowers)
3. What can you do to influence changes in these power relations towards more equal relations?

Step 2 (20–30 min in plenary)

Each group gives a summary of the discussions they had regarding the questions. Other participants give feedback. Focus on giving examples of the discussions you had in the group regarding the different social identities.

Step 3 (5–10 min in plenary)

Summarize by emphasizing that this exercise illustrates that (a) each individual is shaped by multiple identities; (b) these may have both enabling and disabling effects in a given situation and context; (c) these may be perceived differently by different people (which is also influenced by their identity); (d) the privilege and oppression associated with the various identities depends on the local context (and change over time), due to local values and norms regarding what is good or bad and how people should behave, which may be unique to that context or may transcend it; and e) that focusing on gender alone is insufficient and can misrepresent as much as it clarifies.[10] Take this into account when implementing your role as a Feminist Leader.

Using an intersectional perspective can help you, as a feminist leader, to create the conditions for a more equal and inclusive workplace for different groups of people. This involves challenging ageism, ableism, racism, and other forms of discrimination. Understanding the influence of intersecting identities, you may find that your current workplace reflects the challenges of spaces that once excluded you or your colleagues. Considering these various lived

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[10] Colfer et.al. 2018.

experiences, can shape your understanding of how they can be accounted for and valued as strengths, to reach inclusion. By applying an intersectional lens, you can strengthen your own and your colleagues' abilities to build an organization that is equal, inclusive, and supportive for all members as well as for other stakeholders that you collaborate with.[11]

Exercise 2.5. Social Identity Flower III: Applying it to your organization

Objective: To apply participants' understanding of social identities to the logistics and planning of your organization and for the induction of new colleagues.

Participants: Anybody from your group.

Method: Group work and / or plenary exchange.

Materials: N.a.

Estimated duration: 30-60 minutes.

In groups or during a plenary exchange discuss the following questions:

Diversity of thought and representation:

- How does your team prioritize equitable relationships and foster diverse people and forms of knowledge and experiences?
- Which social identities are represented in your team? E.g., gender, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc.
- How are you ensuring that diverse voices are heard and respected?

Empathy:

- How do you model thoughtfulness and patience, listen to your colleagues and allow them to grow?
- How do you create positive spaces for your team to unlearn negative organizational cultures?

Balance Power:

- How do you consider the power dynamics at play among your team?
- As a feminist leader, how do you cede space and promote the work and achievements of others?

Transparency:

- How do you ensure inclusive decision-making that takes diverse views into account?
- How do you provide clarity to your colleagues around expectations and share information openly with them?
- How do you receive, learn from and respond to feedback?

Source: FRIDA 2023 based on COFEM's 2020 Feminist Leadership Learning Brief: https://prevention-collaborative.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/COFEM_2020_Feminist-Leadership-Learning-Brief.pdf

[11] FRIDA 2023.

Exercise 2.6. Engaging Stakeholders

Objective: To accommodate and integrate different viewpoints effectively and efficiently, engaging diversity, and enabling collective learning.

Participants: Anybody from your group.

Method: Group discussions and plenary exchange.

Materials: Flipchart/white board, markers, paper and pens.

Estimated duration: Depends on level of stakeholder involvement.

Key principles: Participation, taking responsibility, developing tools, understanding the context, channeling anger, dismantling cycles of patriarchal and capitalist oppression, transparency, fairness in addressing issues, the ability to break free from funding constraints, and the belief that mistakes are part of learning (experiment and grow).

Leadership Note: Engaging stakeholders is not about convincing others to agree; it is about co-creating spaces where diverse perspectives lead to stronger feminist strategies and structural change.

Steps:

1. **Understanding the context:** Begin by mapping the current situation, power relations, and histories that shape the issue. Ask: Who is involved? What systems of oppression are at play? Where are the gaps for feminist action?
2. **Engaging influencers:** Identify and invite stakeholders, allies, and community leaders who hold influence. Consider both formal power (based on official positions) and informal power (based on social factors and personal characteristics).
3. **Developing our discourse:** Work as a group to define the language, stories, and arguments that reflect your values. Ensure your message highlights feminist perspectives and collective goals.
4. **Shying away from translated discourse:** Avoid simply repeating external narratives (from donors, media, or institutions). Instead, craft your own authentic voice that resonates with your realities.
5. **Understanding people's relationship with language:** Explore how participants connect with their own languages and dialects. Honor the intimacy and meaning that language carries. This deepens inclusivity and ownership.
6. **Using feminist discourse that is contextually and culturally appropriate:** Speak in ways that feel rooted, relevant, and liberating. Ensure your words truly express the issue and center the lived experiences of all stakeholders.
7. **Dialogue:** Facilitate open exchanges where all voices are valued. Practice deep listening, respectful challenge, and collective problem-solving.
8. **Policy development:** Translate the dialogue into clear proposals, recommendations, or policies. Aim for actionable steps that can influence institutions, communities, or movements.
9. **Creating safe/courageous spaces:** Ensure that the space is free, flexible, and supportive, allowing participants to take risks, make mistakes, and grow together. Balance safety with courage to confront difficult truths.
10. **Express – Listen – Learn:** End with a cycle of sharing, attentive listening, and reflection. Emphasize collective learning, where mistakes are embraced as part of transformation.

Source: based on a good practice example from the MENA co-creation workshop

2.4   Bridging the Generation Gap

Working as a young feminist leader means navigating not only the usual challenges of advocacy, but also dealing with differences between age groups and generational perspectives.

Common misconceptions include beliefs that young people lack expertise or that they are unreliable.[12] These biases often result in professional spaces not being designed for youth or actively excluding youth, despite their valuable insights and ability to make decisions. Intergenerational conversations can help remove obstacles that young people face and help build connections between emerging and established feminist leaders. This approach is also valuable when communicating with various stakeholders. Effective intergenerational dialogue depends on two key practices: engaged listening and purposeful inclusion for both younger and older feminists.

Questions for Self–Reflection

How do people respond to your ideas and initiatives?

What assumptions exist about young people?

How do these beliefs affect your leadership role?

What assumptions exist about older people?

How do these beliefs influence your work as a young feminist leader, and what preconceptions might you hold about older generations?

[12] Restless Development 2021 in FRIDA 2023.

Engaged listening

Engaged listening means giving full attention to the speaker and truly comprehending their message through eye contact or encouraging gestures, and asking clarifying questions before sharing your own thoughts or advice. This approach works well for all stakeholder interactions because it ensures people feel valued and understood, creating a foundation for mutually respectful relationships. Here are ways to practice engaged listening:

• Let the speaker finish their thoughts while you focus on understanding rather than preparing your response or cutting them off.

• Use supportive body language (head nods, eye contact) as a listener and pay attention to non–verbal cues (facial expressions, body posture) as a speaker.

• Repeat back what you heard or restate your position when necessary to confirm mutual understanding.

• Ask for clarification when something is unclear.

Purposeful Inclusion and Connection– Building:

We can greatly learn from those who may have helped pave the way and to strengthen networks by deliberately bringing together different generations. Consider these strategies:

• Allocate resources (funding, time, staff) to bring together youth and experienced feminist leaders who share your organization's interests and goals.

• Use various engagement methods like interactive activities, artistic expression, music, and conversation to create common understanding through sharing experiences.

• Build trust between youth and older feminist leaders by providing opportunities they find meaningful or necessary, within your organization's abilities.

• Use your connections when appropriate to link young and experienced feminist leaders with other change agents or to share current, accurate information.

3 Collaborative Decision-making

and Power-sharing

Leadership is first and foremost about power: about holding power, exercising power and changing the distribution and relations of power in multiple forms and settings.[13] Power itself can be defined quite simply as: (a) who gets what (the distribution of resources); (b) who does what (the distribution of waged and non-waged work); (c) who decided what (decision-making power); and (d) who sets the agenda (who decides what is important, what matters, what can be discussed).[14]

Power is neither inherently good nor bad, but becomes so by the way it is used. It can be used in oppressive ways, namely power over and power under, or in liberating and empowering ways (power to, power with, and power within). Perhaps most importantly, at the heart of feminism is the idea that the more you share power, the more powerful you become, both as an individual and as an organization or movement.

3.1 Different Types of Power

Feminist leadership means functioning with a greater consciousness of other's as well as one's own power and intentionally moving away from how leadership and power have intersected in mainstream organizations, governments and other structures.[15] The feminist approach to power is both radical and revolutionary, because it recognizes three "faces" of power (visible, hidden, invisible) and realizes that power operates in three distinct domains (public, private, intimate).[16]

Let's take a closer look at all these different types of power.

> **Three domains in which power operates can be identified:[17]**

1. **The public:** where it is visible, such as the power of the government, corporations, military, police, judiciary, etc.

2. **The private:** within institutions like the family, clan, ethnic group, marriage, friendships and other relationships.

3. **The intimate:** the power (or powerlessness) that we feel within ourselves, expressed usually in terms of self-confidence, self-esteem, control over our bodies, etc.. Recognizing the intimate realm of power means we are not empty vessels tossed around by the forces of power operating upon us, but that we possess power too, though we often don't recognize this, or use it negatively or reactively, to resist or subvert the forces acting on us. This is related to, what we later will describe more in detail as, the "power within" us, drawing upon feminist notions of the agency that even the most seemingly powerless and marginalized women have.

> **Apart from these three power arenas, three "faces" of power can be identified:[18]**

1. **Visible / direct power:** visible power is the one we are most familiar with. It determines who participates (or not) in decision making in the public realm. It is held by political leaders, directors of companies, community leaders, but also leaders of NGOs, including women's organizations. It is a form of direct power (although this can also operate in the private domain, e.g., so-called "heads" of households), which determines how power, privilege and opportunity are allocated, and who is given authority to control resources, other people or access to knowledge and information.

2. **Hidden / Agenda-setting power:** is about who influences or sets the agenda behind the scenes, i.e., who determines which issues can be addressed and whose voices are heard. This power operates in both the private and public domain. In the public domain we see hidden power operate when violence against women in conflict is not considered as critical as the loss of territory or military losses. Hidden power is also evident in the close but covert ties between political leaders and fundamentalist lobbies, with which the latter are able to influence political decisions and policies without any legitimate (and visible) power. Within families, an example is the influence that some women have on their husbands, who are officially seen as the "heads of households and thus as the formal decision-makers.

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[13] Batliwala 2010.
[14] Rao and Kelleher 2002 in Batliwala 2022.
[15] Batliwala 2010.
[16] Veneklasen and Miller 2007; Batliwala 2019 in Batliwala 2022.

[17] Veneklasen and Miller 2002 in Batliwala 2010.
[18] Veneklasen and Miller 2002; Lukes 2005; Foucault 1979; Gaventa and Cornwall 2001 in Batliwala 2010.

3. **Invisible / indirect power:** is the capacity to shape people's behavior and perception, including their self–esteem without any apparent role in doing so, which makes it difficult to confront. An example is the negative image that is created by the media (including the social media) of feminists, which makes that few people, even those who believe in women's rights and gender equality, are willing to call themselves feminists. Similarly, marketing companies exercise invisible power by shaping meaning and creating new norms about what is good, desirable and positive or what is bad and negative. An example is the use of certain models, establishing how a woman's body should look, thus influencing women's self–confidence.

These different forms of power show that leadership is more than just participating in decision–making processes. The latter does not necessarily give you the power to influence the decisions that are taken. Feminist leadership should strive to make the practice of power visible, inclusive, democratic, responsible and accountable at all levels in both the public and private domains.[19]

When we talk about power in leadership, it's helpful to remember that it comes in two main forms:[20]

1. **Intrinsic power:** This is the power you carry within yourself. It's made up of your personality, charisma, talents, skills, knowledge, and the experiences that shaped you. No one else has exactly the same mix you do. Some of these traits will be strengths; others may hold you back. In feminist leadership, we don't ignore the difficult parts; we face them, work on them, and turn them into opportunities for growth. Doing so not only makes you a stronger leader but also helps you push forward the bigger goals of equality, human rights, and justice.

2. **Extrinsic power:** This is the authority that comes from outside sources, such as:

   a. **Assigned authority:** Power you are given by others, like being elected or appointed to a managing position.

   b. **Positional authority:** Power that comes with the job itself, such as hiring and managing people, handling budgets, representing your group, raising funds, and making strategic decisions.

   c. **Earned authority:** The trust and respect you build over time by using your (assigned and positional) power fairly, sharing it with others, being inclusive, and showing your personal strengths and skills (intrinsic power).

The most inspiring feminist leaders are the ones who don't just rely on the title they've been given (the assigned authority). Instead, they quickly turn that formal authority into genuine, earned respect, so their leadership is rooted in trust and shared purpose.

In their Youth Power Training Toolkit, Restless Development (2024b) shares the following definitions of power:

Power: the capacity or ability to direct or influence the behavior of others or the course of events.

Personal Power: when an individual's power is based on their characteristics, competencies and skills.

See the complete Youth Power Training Toolkit at:
https://youthcollective.restlessdevelopment.org/youth–power–training–toolkit

As indicated by young women from Mozambique: feminist power is a power that is different from other types of power society is used to see. The latter is power that imposes, violates, oppresses and dominates, especially used against women. For these young women, feminist power is power that gives everyone the opportunity to be who they are; it gives freedom. It doesn't dominate, it listens to all voices, it is guided by the inclusion of all. It is a power where there is collaboration,

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[19] Batliwala 2010.
[20] Batliwala 2010.

where there is solidarity. It is the power that represents the capacity that feminists have to change all these unjust structures, which often reproduce violence; their power to change these violent, sexist, patriarchal power structures.

Good Practice from Mozambique: Building and Sustaining Feminist Power

Sustaining feminist power means broadening the definition of leadership, centering marginalized voices, investing in education, and ensuring society values and legitimizes women's knowledge in all its forms. This includes:

Education as a foundation:
Feminist power requires knowledge about feminism, gender, leadership, and human rights; shared not only among young leaders but across society. Girls' education and safeguarding human rights are essential for a country's development.

Spaces for women's leadership:
Women must have opportunities to lead and exercise power. Investing in female leadership and raising awareness in communities ensures women's inclusion in decision–making.

Centering the needs of those represented:
Advocacy must prioritize the lived realities of the rightsholder group (for example, young women living with HIV) placing their needs at the heart of discussions and policies.

Valuing diverse forms of leadership:
Leadership is not limited to women with formal education or institutional roles. Women in communities and rural areas, who influence and drive transformation without formal recognition, must also be acknowledged as leaders.

Legitimizing women's knowledge:
To sustain feminist power, it is vital to recognize, honor, and legitimize the expertise of all women, including ancestral knowledge and lived experience, not just academic or institutional credentials.
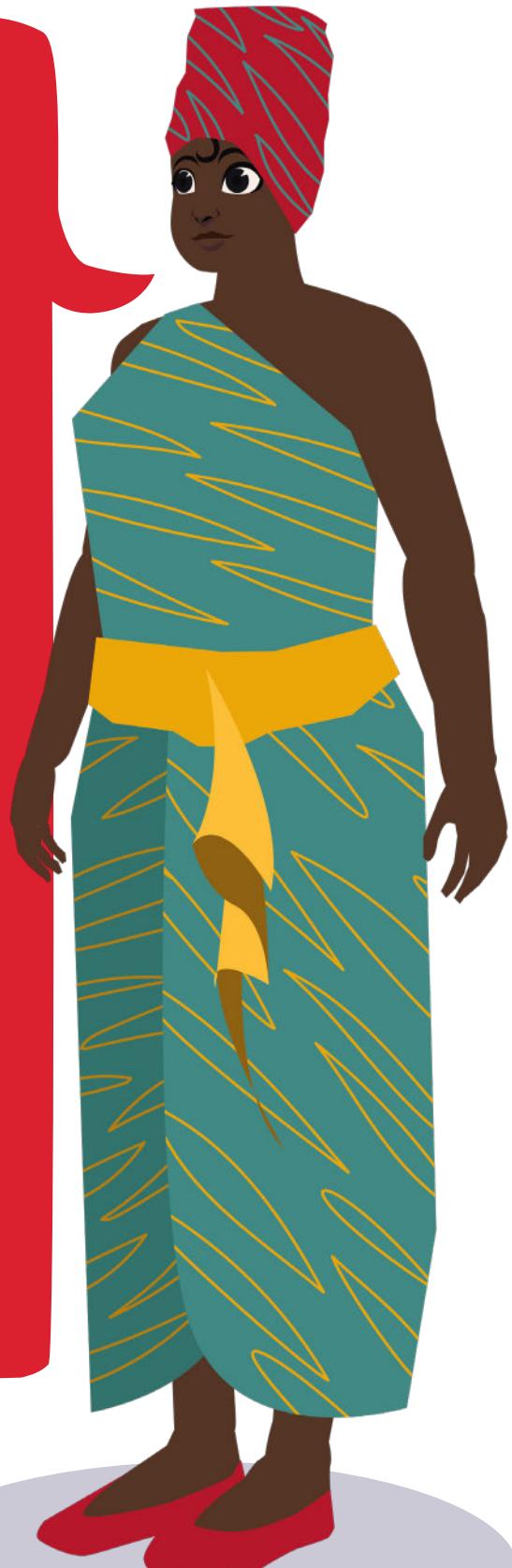
Good practice from Niger: Building and Sustaining Feminist Power

According to Niger participants: Feminist power is collective, transformative, and emancipatory. It is not exercised over others, but with others. It is based on justice, solidarity, respect for diversity, and the questioning of systems of oppression such as patriarchy, colonialism, and capitalism. It aims to deconstruct hierarchies of domination and replace them with more egalitarian and humane relationships.

This power is built by "Giving women the chance to assert themselves" through inclusive and non-judgmental awareness, the empowerment of women through equitable redistribution of roles and responsibilities, as well as the promotion of equal opportunities. It is maintained through concrete actions such as awareness-raising, valuing women's achievements, and creating safe spaces where every woman can express herself freely and make decisions for herself.

At the organizational or movement building level, feminist leadership must also deal with the following four key expressions of power:[21]

- **Power over** is the traditional view of power, often focused on hierarchy, authority and control over others by coercion and domination. It also includes control over the use of resources and decision-making and stems from the idea that power is a finite resource which some have and others don't. E.g., a leader who dictates tasks and expects strict adherence to the instructions.

- **Power to** is about autonomy, self-determination and the capacity to create change and achieve desired outcomes from within or by motivating others. It emphasizes the ability to create new possibilities, make choices, act and achieve goals. E.g., effectively completing a task or project as an individual or a team.

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[21] Pansardi, P. and M. Bindi (2021) the New Concepts of Power? Power-over, Power-to and Power-with. In: Journal of Political Power, 14(1), 2021, pp. 51-71. https://doi.org/10.1080/2158379X.2021.1877001; Stuart, G. (2021) 4 types of power: What are power over, power with, power to and power within? Posted on February 1, 2019), accessed on August 3rd, 2025 at https://sustainingcommunity.wordpress.com/2019/02/01/4-types-of-power; Batliwala 2010; and Inclusion Geeks (2024) The Four Types of Power in the Workplace. Posted on March 21, 2024, accessed on August 3rd, 2025 at: www.inclusiongeeks.com/the-four-types-of-power-in-the-workplace; FRIDA 2023.

- **Power with** is shared power and is about the collective strength that arises from collaboration towards shared interests. It involves collaborative decision–making and working together to achieve a common goal, emphasizing respect, cooperation, mutual support, solidarity and equality. E.g., a group of (feminist) activists working together to advocate for a common cause.

- **Power within** is the most transformative expression of power. It refers to an individual's sense of self–worth, self–knowledge, confidence, and agency while respecting others. It involves recognizing one's own strengths, potential and capacity to make a difference while respecting others. Power within is about empowerment.

Power within allows people to become a better version of themselves. Using our power for good and not to discriminate or discourage other people.

We Lead project coordinator

These different expressions of power are not mutually exclusive. For example, power within allows people to recognize their "power to" and "power with", and believe they can make a difference.

Table: 3.1: Summary of Four Expressions of Power

Power Over	Power With
= built on hierarchy, authority, coercion, domination and control over other people and resources. Stems from the idea that power is a finite resource which some have and others don't. E.g. A leader dictating tasks, expecting strict implementation.	= shared power and is about the collective strength that arises from collaboration towards shared goals. It involves collaborative decision making and working together to achieve a common purpose, emphasizing respect, cooperation, mutual support and solidarity. Power with is about collective empowerment and action. E.g. a group of activists working together to advocate for a common cause.
Power To	**Power Within**
Focuses on autonomy, self–determination and the capacity to create change and achieve desired outcomes from within or by motivating others. It emphasizes the ability to create new possibilities, make choices, act and achieve goals. E.g. effectively completing a task or project as an individual or a team.	= the most transformative power. It refers to an individual's sense of self–worth, confidence, and agency. It involves recognizing one's own strengths, potential and capacity to make a difference. Power within is about individual empowerment.

Source: Own elaboration based on different sources[22]

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[22] Bid

Sometimes a fifth expression is added, which is especially valid for the feminist movement:

• **Power under** is a complex dynamic, often seen when people who have experienced trauma or oppression, gain power and, in turn, act in abusive or authoritarian ways. According to Wineman, survivors carry within them "powerless rage", which, unhealed, leads them to practice power oppressively for fear that otherwise they will again be victimized, thinking there are only two possible roles (victim or oppressor). Survivors of trauma may struggle to shift from being victims to becoming agents of change that use power in non-oppressive, but rather constructive, ways for social justice. Effective feminist leadership begins with recognizing our diverse histories and setting clear agreements for respectful interaction and managing destructive impulses through self-reflection, healing and growth. The African Feminist Charter (AWDF 2007) provides a useful code of conduct[23] and Restless Development (2024b) provides exercises on how to "Power Up", referring to our capacity to take action that has an impact, our citizenship, voice and influence.

According to Restless Development (2024b, diagram Annex 1.2) youth power can be defined in three ways, that are interdependent and equal in measure:

A. **Power Within:** Our individual wellbeing, our confidence, leadership skills.
B. **Power With:** Our synergy with others, our collaborations and community, the power of collective actions.
C. **Power Up:** our capacity to take action that has an impact, our citizenship, voice and influence

See the Youth Power Training Toolkit for useful exercises on this topic:
https://youthcollective.restlessdevelopment.org/youth-power-training-toolkit

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[23] Batliwala 2010 and 2022.

Good Practice: The African Feminist Charter on Feminist Leadership

"As leaders in the feminist movement, we recognize that feminist agency has popularized the notion of women as leaders. As feminist leaders we are committed to making a critical difference in leadership, based on the understanding that the quality of women's leadership is even more important than the numbers of women in leadership. We believe in and commit ourselves to the following:

- Disciplined work ethics guided by integrity and accountability at all times.
- Expanding and strengthening a multi-generational network and pool of feminist leaders across the continent.
- Ensuring that the feminist movement is recognised as a legitimate constituency for women in leadership positions.
- Building and expanding our knowledge and information base on an ongoing basis, as the foundation for shaping our analysis and strategies and for championing a culture of learning, beginning with ourselves within the feminist movement.
- Nurturing, mentoring and providing opportunities for young feminists in a non-matronising manner.
- Crediting African women's labour, intellectual and otherwise in our work.
- Creating time to respond in a competent, credible and reliable manner to other feminists in need of solidarity and support whether political, practical or emotional.
- Being open to giving and receiving peer reviews and constructive feedback from other feminists."

The African feminist charter was first published in 2007 by African Women's Development Fund and reprinted in 2016. It is still a key reference document for many organizations to understand feminist values. Here you can download it in various languages: https://awdf.org/the-african-feminist-charter

Exercise 3.1. What Kind of Power?

Objective: To understand the different domains, faces, forms and expressions of power and learn how to recognize them.

Participants: All members of the group.

Method: Role play based on individual preparation, group discussions and plenary exchange.

Materials: Different domains, faces, forms and expressions of power explained in this guide.

Estimated duration: 85–95 minutes.

Step 1 (5 minutes)

Individual preparation: Read about the three different domains (public, private, intimate); three faces (visible, hidden, invisible); two forms (intrinsic, extrinsic with 3 types of authority); and five expressions of power (over, to, with, within, under) explained in this guide. Think about a setting in which you see one or more of these types of power reflected.

Step 2 (10–15 minutes)

In groups of 4–5 people, analyze each setting with the group. Discuss who has the power and why. Discuss to which domain this power belongs, what face it has, which form and how it is expressed. Discuss the challenges and opportunities of each type of power.

Step 3 (25–30 minutes)

Choose one power setting that you would want to do a role play on. Identify different people that are involved and give make sure to give everybody in the group a role. Prepare a roleplay of 6–8 minutes. You can take 25–30 minutes to prepare.

Step 4 (40–50 minutes)

In the plenary each group presents their roleplay after which the rest of the participants have to guess the power domain, face, form and expression that were shown. Discuss these types of power with the whole group.

Reflecting on Language and Power Dynamics
Some young women from Central America, like Lela, raised critical reflections on language and power, questioning terms like "grassroots" that can reinforce hierarchical thinking. She encouraged a more nuanced understanding of feminist leadership that challenges colonial and patriarchal narratives.

Exercise 3.2. Examining Power Dynamics in Your Organization or Movement

Objective: Identify the types of power dynamics at play, identifying strategies for disrupting negative power dynamics and moving towards "power with".

Participants: Max 12 people of your organization / movement.

Method: Individual reflection, group discussions and plenary exchange.

Materials: Flipchart paper, pencils, copies of the power matrix.

Estimated duration: 60 minutes.

Part of being a feminist leader, organization or movement is living feminist ideals, which means your day to day work authentically mirrors the values you work towards. A great first step towards living feminist values in your work is to understand what types of power dynamics are at play so you can come up with strategies to disrupt them.

This tool can be done individually as a diagnostic tool as you consider engaging others in the process, however, it would be important for many members of your organization or movement to participate to get as broad a view as possible. You may want to implement this activity multiple times with different participants in order to keep the total participant number to a maximum of 12.

Additionally, given the potentially sensitive nature of the topic of power, you may have to take additional steps to ensure confidentiality such as providing anonymous participation through worksheets completed individually and shared anonymously.

Steps

1. Review the definitions of power.

2. Distribute a copy of the Power Matrix and review together, clarifying any questions.

Mechanism of Power	Power Over Example Actors and Supporting Systems	Power With Example Actors and Supporting Systems
Decision making	**Actors** Anyone who makes decisions for many with little representative input **Supporting Systems** Biased laws/policies Decision-making structures that perpetuate privilege	**Actors** Representatives that practice consultation with those they represent and are a member of the group they represent **Supporting Systems** Policies that dismantle inequitable structures Decision-making structures that dvance equity and transparency
Setting the Agenda	**Actors** Groups that can influence decision-makers by offering benefits or have enough resources to be the loudest **Supporting Systems** Practices and laws that allow for providing personal incentives to decision-makers Hierarchical structures support upper management determining strategies.	**Supporting Systems** Non-hierarchical structures support and encourage all voices being heard.
Shaping Norms	**Actors** Individuals or groups who control information and communication **Supporting Systems** Lack of unbiased media sources Common practice of using misinformation to confuse and no disincentives for doing so	**Actors** All members of an organisation or community Campaigns and movements **Supporting Systems** Engaging grassroots stakeholders Power is gained by sharing information

3. Reflect individually on the power matrix regarding which descriptions best describe the organization or movement in your experience.

4. Discuss your reflections with the rest of the group.

Note: Each person may have a different perspective. This is expected! What is important is to discuss how to move towards Power With, if needed.

5. Create a flipchart for each mechanism of power that includes the following information. Place each flipchart in different accessible spaces that will allow for small group work:

Mechanism of power:

Actors:

Supporting Systems:
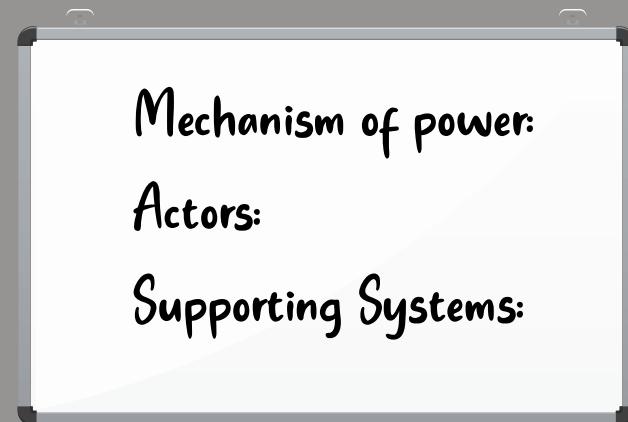
When it comes to this mechanism of power, where are we, as an organization / movement on the spectrum?

← **Power Over** ————— ————— ————— **Power With** →

6. In three small groups (one per mechanism), discuss actors that are involved, supporting systems that make it possible, and where they personally think the organization or movement is on a scale of power over/power with regarding the mechanism of power you were assigned.

7. After 10 minutes, ask for one volunteer from each group to stay with the flipchart for the next two rounds while the other members move on. The volunteer will share their group's thinking with the new group, and the new group will build on what is already documented.

8. After 10 minutes, repeat for the last round. Have the three volunteers share the findings on each of the flipcharts, based on their understanding and ask if other participants have anything to add.

9. In a final plenary session, reflect on the following questions:

• What do you notice?
• What surprised you?
• What areas do you need to work on to move towards "power with"?
• What are some strategies to do that?

Exercise 3.3. Understanding your Own Sources of Power and Areas of Vulnerability

Objective: To raise awareness on sources of power and areas of vulnerability for young feminists.

Participants: Can be done individually or with members and/or partners of your organization / group.

Method: Individual reflection or small group discussions with plenary exchange.

Materials: Flipchart paper, post–its, masking tape, markers, notebooks, pencils.

Estimated duration: 30 minutes.

Steps

1. Draw a circle and divide it into four quadrants labelled Power Over, Power With, Power to and Power within.

2. Reflect and write in each quadrant: Where do I hold power, where do I feel disempowered.

3. Reflect on how your social identities influence your experience of power, e.g. "As a young feminist, how do my ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, HIV status, (dis)abilities, or other social identities shape how I experience power and navigate leadership spaces?".

Note: For more information on social identities, see chapter 2.

4. Reflect on where you want to build your power and how you could go about this.

Source: Own elaboration based on different sources[24]

3.2 Powershifting

Key for Feminist Leadership is powershifting, e.g., dismantling power structures that create and perpetuate gender inequality by moving away from oppressive uses of power (Power over) towards forms that are empowering, enabling, inclusive and collective (power with, to and within). It is not just about women gaining power, but about transforming how power is understood and used, shifting from a model of domination to one of empowerment and equality. Through powershifting, you can dismantle power structures that disadvantage certain groups of young women and other communities. Working collectively is key for powershifting. [25]

Do you want to shift power?
Check Restless Development's powershifting checklist:
https://restlessdevelopment.org/power-shifting-checklist-2

[24] Pansardi, P. and M. Bindi (2021) the New Concepts of Power? Power–over, Power–to and Power–with. In: Journal of Political Power, 14(1), 2021, pp. 51–71. https://doi.org/10.1080/2158379X.2021.1877001; Stuart, G. (2021) 4 types of power: What are power over, power with, power to and power within? Posted on February 1, 2019), accessed on August 3rd, 2025 at https://sustainingcommunity.wordpress.com/2019/02/01/4-types-of-power; Batliwala 2010; and Inclusion Geeks (2024) The Four Types of Power in the Workplace. Posted on March 21, 2024, accessed on August 3rd, 2025 at: www.inclusiongeeks.com/the-four-types-of-power-in-the-workplace.
[25] Restless Development 2024a; Batliwala 2022.

Exercise 3.4. The Challenge of Working Collectively

Objective: To support participants to recognize potential challenges of working collectively to bring about change.

Participants: Anybody from your group.

Method: Small group discussions and plenary exchange.

Materials: Papers with the two quotes.

Estimated duration: 45 minutes.

Whilst often you can have more influence and impact when working collectively with other organizations/ networks, this also comes with challenges.

Step 1 (25 min)

Participants work in small group discussing the below (fictional) quotes and the following questions:
- Have you ever had a similar experience?
- What happened? How was it resolved?
- How do you think situations like these could have been prevented?

Please note these are fictional quotes:

> "Last year I joined the National Youth Alliance for HIV and AIDS. I was excited to join and work with others to reduce HIV transmission in the country. I have experience in communications, so when the National Coordinator asked for a Volunteer to run the social media accounts, I was happy to help. At first it involved a few posts every week. However, over time, it increased and I was being contacted by members all day, even sometimes in the night, to post. It was also hard to read all the abusive, sexist and homophobic messages that people would send to the organization. I asked the National Coordinator for help, but they said there was no-one else who could do it. I asked if I could be paid, but they said there was no funding. So I quit and left the Alliance"
> Jane, HIV activist, Kenya

> "I am the founder of a women-led organization that is working in refugee camps. Our organization brings together refugees and those from host communities to share language skills and build peace. I am also a member of the Regional Association for Women Humanitarians. Last year an US-based Foundation contacted the Regional Association for Women Humanitarians and invited us to a consultation workshop to help inform their next funding round. I attended along with four other organizations from the association. We conducted surveys, prepared research papers and attended the 5-day workshop. After that I heard nothing about funding for our Association. However, a few months later I was told that one of the organizations who attended had received all the funding. They would not be distributing it to other members. I am happy that they received funding as they are doing good work, but I am angry and frustrated at the process. I feel like I wasted my time"
> Hanan, Humanitarian Project Manager, Lebanon

In a plenary session each group shares a few points from their discussions. Other groups can provide feedback. Finalize by sharing some positive examples of working collectively – from your experience, or that of your organization.

Feminist Leadership as a Collective Practice

Young right holders from Central America emphasized the importance of collective power and collaboration. For example, Anna shared an experience of articulating feminist leadership through street actions to advocate for the rights of young trans women. This included organizing public demonstrations and building alliances to challenge systemic oppression.

Decentralized and Autonomous Leadership

Yolotli from Guatemala highlighted the need for decentralized leadership, noting that many feminist movements now operate without centralized structures, relying instead on self-organized networks and grassroots initiatives. This shift reflects a broader transformation within feminist organizing, moving away from hierarchical models.

What does feminist power mean for young women in MENA and how can we build and sustain it?

Offering an alternative to traditional patriarchal authority based on justice and equality among all individuals in society, or comprehensive liberation regardless of gender, class, ethnicity, etc. by shedding light on oppressive and exclusionary practices. Providing women and groups that are marginalized by patriarchal and capitalist systems with the ability to freely express themselves and take control of their life decisions at various levels, to install radical change.

Feminist power is the power that works on dismantling the existing power relation and systematic inequalities especially the ones rooted in gender, race, class and sexuality etc. Unlike the traditional power that is more focused on domination, control, and exclusion, feminist power focuses on solidarity, support, and collaboration.

To ensure sustainability, it's important to build an engaging network instead of falling into disruption. It's crucial to accept that we are different but align in values and hence we work on different issues.

It is a collective, inclusive, liberating force built from within women and marginalized communities, focused on justice, compassion, and resistance. It is not about control, but rather the ability to transform and create safe and just spaces for all.

We can build power by: raising awareness and knowledge about women's rights and feminist principles in general; dismantling patriarchal ideas; ensuring economic and social empowerment, fair opportunities in education, employment, and leadership; creating safe spaces for women to express themselves, organize, and learn from each other; and building support networks among feminists from diverse backgrounds.

Sustainability can be ensured by transferring knowledge between different generations, supporting young leaders and creating learning opportunities while monitoring and tracking systems that hinder gender justice and ensuring fair and sustainable funding.
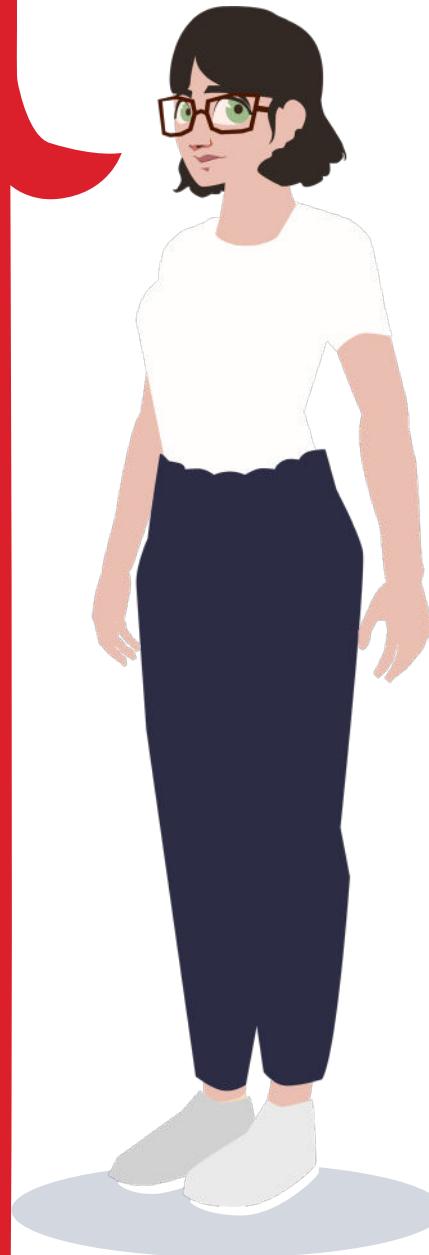
3.3 What is Women's Empowerment?

Women's empowerment means women gaining the ability and confidence to take control of their own lives. It is about making choices, building skills, solving problems, and trusting their own voices. Empowerment cannot be given by someone else; each woman empowers herself, but organizations and communities can create spaces and support systems that make this possible. The idea became more widely recognized at the 1995 World Conference on Women in Beijing, which highlighted the importance of women's participation in decision–making and leadership. In practice, women's empowerment is about: having more choices, being able to speak up and be heard, and seeing real change in women's lives and futures.[26]

Exercise 3.5. Women's Empowerment in Practice

Objective: To understand what Women's Empowerment means and how it can be strengthened.

Participants: Anybody from your group.

Method: Plenary discussion around one or two videos.

Materials: A computer and projector to show the videos.

Estimated duration: 30–60 minutes

To introduce the topic, watch the following video: www.youtube.com/watch?v=lHduhfQyWqI
You can also have a look at the following video: www.youtube.com/watch?v=97OgauWX7q0

For each video (or after watching both) discuss the following questions:

1. What is the video about? Consider elements such as: safety in public space, financial independence, being in charge of your own life.

2. What is the role of the women in the video? What is the role of the men? Consider productive vs reproductive activities in the public or private domain.

3. How are spaces created for women?

4. How do women participate? Consider a broad range of participation that goes from very passive (just being present) to very active (speaking up and taking decisions).

5. In relation to the previous: how powerful are women in different settings?

6. What social norms and values are at play?

7. As a summary: What are drivers of (in)equality? E.g., education, financial means, division of labor, safety, level of participation, (lack of) power.

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[26] UNESCO 2003; Eerdewijk et al. 2017; https://beijing20.unwomen.org/en/about (accessed August 24, 2025).

"Power must be understood as something collective, inclusive, and exercised differently across leaderships."

3.4 Exercising Collaborative Decision-making and Power-sharing

There is not one approach to exercising collaborative decision-making and power-sharing. Based on experiences from We Lead partners, effective collaborative decision-making requires both structural changes (governance, feedback systems) and cultural shifts (accompaniment, solidarity) while navigating real-world constraints.

We Lead partners exercise collaborative decision-making and power-sharing by putting marginalized groups (young women with disabilities, HIV, displaced or from the LBTI+ community) in leadership positions and governance structures rather than just consulting them. They use participatory processes that involve these groups in all phases from planning to implementation and evaluation. It also requires strengthening capacities through training and accompaniment and creating accessible feedback systems like multilingual platforms (including sign language) and country validation processes, so participants can engage effectively.

Success depends on outsiders being humble and admitting they don't know everything; focusing on shared goals rather than on differences; and putting rights holders in the "driver's seat" of decision-making processes, based on an intersectional approach that considers multiple identities.

The main challenges are balancing empowerment of groups with practical support needs, managing time and resource constraints that limit thorough collaborative processes, and supporting groups that sometimes struggle with coordination after gaining independence. This requires both structural governance changes (e.g., how organizations are run) and cultural shifts toward accompaniment and solidarity while navigating real-world constraints of funding cycles and crises.

Table 3.2. presents some models of collaborative decision-making.

Table: 3.2: Models of Collaborative Decision–making

Model	Advantages	Disadvantages
Horizontal/Flat: This model of decision-making encourages everyone to make decisions and is horizontal as compared to a vertical model that has many levels of management and a chain of command. Decisions are made by consensus (see below).	• Encourages creativity, collaboration. • Faster decision–making because there are fewer levels of management • Power, responsibility, andaccountability are distributed.	• Can be more challenging for larger groups because decisions may not be communicated to others
Committees: This model of decision-making utilises groups of people who opt in because of interest and/or skills. Decisions are determined by the committees. (Committees could use a consensual model or majority vote)	• Encourages those who are interested and have particular skills to work together. • Can improve the level of consultation and discussion prior to making a decision because the committee works together. • Can help provide structure without being hierarchical.	• Could create subgroups that reduce communication or knowledge across a group.
Consensual: This model of decision-making focuses on coming to a consensus. This usually means having multiple conversations to shape a decision until everyone is satisfied.	Incorporates everyone's perspective. • The process is very transparent. • Encourages innovation, creativity and collaboration. • New (overarching) interests and solutions could arise during the conversations.	• Dissenters may end up with a lot of power to stall a process. • Decision–making can be slow. • Can be more challenging with a larger group
Majority voting: This model gives each participant a vote. The choice with the most votes is adopted.	• Everyone gets to weigh–in on what they prefer. • Quick	• A close vote can result in a large group being unhappy with a decision. • The group with more power/influence can control decisions.
Majority voting with multiple options: This model enlists all potential options and gives each participant 3 to 5 votes. The choice(s) with the most votes is/are implemented in a prioritized order.	• Everyone gets to weigh–in on what they prefer, but has to look further than only their own option, thus creating more understanding of other participants visions. • A prioritization of options is created, which can be implemented in order of defined importance. • Quick.	• Works mostly if multiple options can be implemented. • The group with more power/influence can control decisions.

Source: Adapted from FRIDA 2023

So, what are some of the common challenges for collaborative decision-making and a more equal distribution of power? Helping to understand these challenges, as well as some misconceptions that underly them can help you reframe and take action to address the challenges.

Table 3.3. Common Challenges for Collaborative Decision-making and Possible Actions

Challenge	Underlying Misconceptions	Reframe	Possible Actions
Lack of clarity on Accountability This might show up as: • Not knowing when to consult others. • Lack of coordination across the organization. • Lack of accountability or taking responsibility. • Lack of mechanisms for accountability.	Distributing power means everyone can make unilateral decisions.	Shift to thinking of distribution of power meaning that: –We all have accountability to each other and the communities we serve. –We have to consult others. –Everyone has a voice and is valued.	Agree on what sorts of actions and decisions require consultation and with whom. Agree on mechanisms for consultation and sharing back information and results.
Lack of knowledge or experience to take on tasks This might show up as: • A heavy burden on unskilled personnel or volunteers in different committees. • Lack of qualified staff/ staff capacity	Distributing power means that everyone is equally equipped to take on tasks.	Shift to recognizing that everyone's voice and perspective is equally important to consider, but everyone comes with different experiences, skillsand knowledge. We are equal, but we are not all the same. Not everyone will be equipped to fulfil every role. Sufficient support and collaboration are often needed.	Identify people's strengths and interests. Strengths do not have to align with interests. When they do not, consider having them collaborate with others who do have the experience, skills and knowledge to effectively do the role or invest in their learning in some other way.
Perceived or actual inefficiencies This might show up as: • Exercising authority in an inefficient way, e.g., taking action without any consultation. • Decision making takes longer because all views must be considered. • Shifting power to the co-executives without creating loophole confusion, animosity and acrimony among members, which, if it happens, may look like division among the organization members.	Collaborative means non-hierarchical, thus there is no structure.	The opposite of hierarchical is not structureless. Instead, it means that there is collective power rather than power concentrated among just a few.	Identify where patterns of consultation or decision-making have gone well. How can you create workflows that support repeating these positive patterns?

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Source: FRIDA 2023

Good practice: Collective Leadership

The Mesoamerican Women Human Rights Defenders Network (IMDEFENSORAS) is a network of activists across El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, and Nicaragua, with Costa Rica acting as the security hub and safety net. Launched in 2010, the network developed a comprehensive and regionally-relevant response to the increasing violence against female activists, who were mainly from poor, indigenous and marginalized communities. They fight narco-mafias and ecologically destructive projects, such as dams. The women created local and regional leadership circles, and fostered democratic and decentralized decision-making, collective care and security (including rescuing and housing sister activists under threat, and supporting their families). They created a uniquely feminist analysis that links the defense of land and natural resources with the defense of livelihoods and bodies. They coined the term "women human rights defenders" but have demonstrated an intersectional feminist approach by marching for the rights of all oppressed, exploited, and excluded people, including LBTI+ women and sex workers, as well as male activists under threat from ruling regimes, traffickers, and international corporate interests.

This story demonstrates the transformative nature of shared power, decision-making, responsibility and accountability. It also emphasizes the importance of building relationships of trust, open and honest communication in case things go wrong, and of avoiding the external forces, such as (social) media, that often push some individuals from the collective into the limelight.[30]

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[30] Batliwala 2022.

3.5 Transforming Organizational Leadership

The Gender at Work analytical framework (see figure 3.1) can be used to get more insights in organizational processes, how organizational change happens, and why sometimes change is not happening or reversed.[27] It is based on two intersecting continuums or axes: from the individual to larger systems, and from informal to formal arrangements. These two axes then create four quadrants that must be tackled for sustainable leadership transformations.

Individual

CONSCIOUSNESS, CAPABILITIES

ACCESS TO AND CONTROL OVER RESOURCES

Informal | **Formal**

NORMS AND DEEP STRUCTURE DYNAMICS

RULES, POLICIES, ACCOUNTABILITY

Systemic
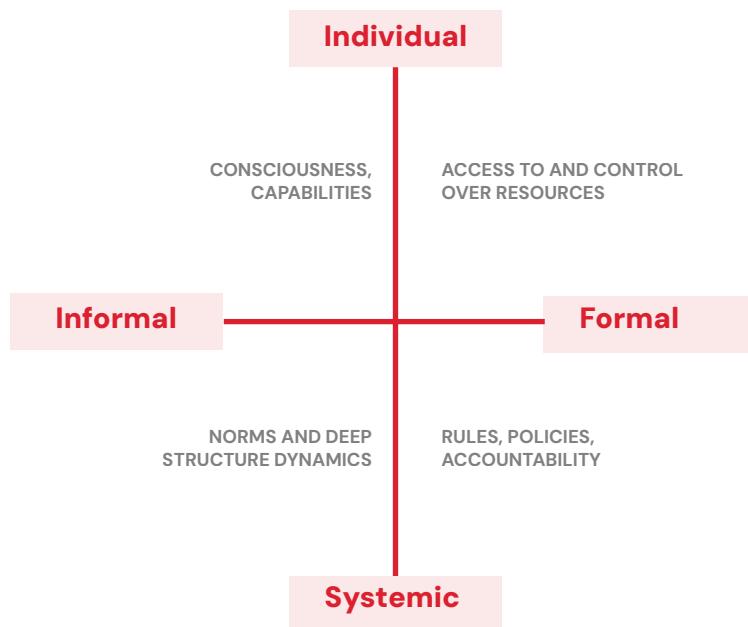
Figure 3.1. Gender at Work Analytical Framework

Gender at Work argues that change needs to take place in all the four quadrants, and change in one quadrant can have important effect on others. Changes do not happen all at once, and take time.

Individual – informal level: consciousness and capabilities.

An individual's knowledge of, willingness and capacity to push for their own and other people's rights affects our ability to lead in an inclusive, feminist way. This includes recognizing our internalized (unconscious) biases, privilege, attitudes, beliefs, trauma and values regarding gender equality and feminist leadership.

Consciousness is the collection of experience, value and knowledge that influence how we come to see gender power relations. Some potential indicators to evaluate this quadrant are:

- Staff knowledge and commitment to gender equality and feminist leadership.
- Commitment of the leadership.

Individual – formal level: Access to and control over resources.

Access to resources (staff, funds, training opportunities, meeting spaces and networks) is necessary but insufficient alone to support transformation, such as control over the resources and changes in attitudes. In some cases, the work environment is very challenging for women or even hostile. In order to achieve transformations, organizations should bring in more women in their workforce and leadership positions, increasing their voice and decision-making power. This should be accompanied by supportive policies and mechanisms that promote wellbeing, recognizing the multiple roles of team members, especially women. Some potential indicators to evaluate this quadrant are:

- Budget and other resources devoted to projects to advance feminist leadership.
- Number of women in leadership positions.

Systemic – formal level: Rules, policies, accountability.

The visible and documented policies, regulations, procedures and strategies that are agreed as a way to mandate organizations to develop structures and leadership systems based on accountable governance, redistributed and shared power (e.g., co-leadership, more authentically representative governance structures, decentralization, democratization of decision-making processes). Policy processes are much more than paper work, and very

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[27] Rao et al., 2015 and https://genderatwork.org/analytical-framework (accessed August 17, 2025).

strongly related to the other three quadrants; often there is a huge gap between policy intends and outcomes. Organizational commitment, accountability, structures, mechanisms, and expertise are needed for policies to be actually implemented. Some potential indicators to evaluate this quadrant are:

- Mission including gender equality, up to the leadership level.
- Policies for anti-harassment, work-family arrangements, fair employment, etc..
- Accountability mechanisms that hold the organization accountable to its intentions.

Systemic – informal level: norms and deep structure dynamics.

The "deep structures" of organizations are the collection of values, history, culture and practices that form the unquestioned, traditional, male dominated way of doing work in an organization. They include informal and often hidden rules that determine who gets what, who does what and who decides. The deep structure and social norms are manifestations of structural hierarchies and inequalities, and are often invisible, taken for granted, mutually reinforcing and constantly being reproduced. Some potential indicators to evaluate this quadrant are:

- Acceptance of women's leadership.
- Organizational ownership of feminist leadership and gender equality.
- Women's issues firmly on the agenda.

The framework allows people to see the whole picture and the emphasis on certain efforts. Often, more efforts are invested in the formal side: providing resources and developing policies and regulations for gender equality, with accomplishments such as women's quotas. Changing the rules and developing gender policies is a key stage in the organizational change process. However, most organizations are unable to accomplish as much as they intend because of the more informal, and

invisible domains. Gender norms are hot-wired into the DNA of organizational systems and kept in place by both visible and invisible power dynamics. More attention, therefore, needs to be paid especially to the deep structures of organizations. According to Gender at Work's experience, when the social norms and deep structure are addressed, changes in the other quadrants are more likely to succeed and be sustainable.[29]

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[29] Rao and Kelleher 2002.

Exercise 3.6. A Pathway to Feminist Leadership

Objective: To take key steps towards a possible pathway to transformative feminist leadership.

Participants: All members of the group.

Method: Individual reflection, group discussions, alliance building, strategic planning and action.

Materials: According to needs.

Estimated duration: Various weeks / months.

Although not intended as a definitive recipe, the following key steps (though not necessarily in the same sequence) must be taken to realize transformative feminist leadership:

1. **Analyzing and working on yourself:** No matter where you are located in the organization, movement, or collective process, becoming a feminist leader begins with analyzing and working on yourself. Are you dealing with unhealed trauma that needs to be tackled, or are you defaulting into power under, putting others down to make yourself feel more powerful?

2. **Mobilize others and build shared leadership of the transformation process.** Avoid the "savior" model. It is useful to articulate a set of principles of feminist leadership to guide both the individual and collective transformation process, as some organizations have done such as the We Lead program parnters. If you are in a formal leadership role, examine how power over resources and decision-making is shared in real terms, and what can change to empower people at different levels of the structure?

3. **Re-examine the structure** of the organization, movement or collective you are part of, to see if it reproduces a traditional top-down hierarchy. Examine potential opportunities to gradually restructure. You can use Frederic Laloux's **Reinventing Organisations** model[31] to identify which category your group falls in, and how you can move out of the impulsive (dominant), traditional (hierarchical), and achievement frameworks, towards a pluralistic (more circular) model adopting evolutionary structures.

4. **Interrogate, analyze and dismantle the deep structure dynamics;** all the hidden forms of power, bias, and control that keep old inequalities going.

5. **Reach out and learn from others.** Look for exchange with peers, as well as the support of feminist mentors and organizational change experts who understand where you want to go, and support you on the journey, holding up a mirror, helping you to explore new pathways and possibilities, and identify your internalized barriers as well as strengths.

6. **Create timelines,** concrete goalposts, and activities, with measurable indicators of change. Otherwise the temptation is to default to old familiar approaches.

7. **Recognize progress and achievements along the way,** both individual and collective, no matter how small or insignificant they may seem, and celebrate them!

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[31] Laloux, F. 2016.

This journey runs against many of the norms and standards you may have always considered "normal". It will occasionally create confusion, even upheavals. The temptation will be to retreat to the known, the familiar, the well-worn systems of the past. It is vital, however, to embrace and work through these challenges. If you do, you will emerge as a transformed feminist leader, with a transformed organization, movement, or collective, with a truly feminist culture.

Source: Batliwala 2022

Good practice: A Greater Voice for Young Women

The World YWCA, one of the oldest women's organizations (founded in 1894) has significantly transformed their own power structures and created space for 60% of their world board seats to be held by young women. Young women made up 30% of the voting delegates at a recent world council. This has given each young member of the organization a far greater say in nominating and electing their representatives and leaders at the local chapter level and national level. It has also ensured that each young member of the organization has more power in determining its overall priorities and governance. [28]

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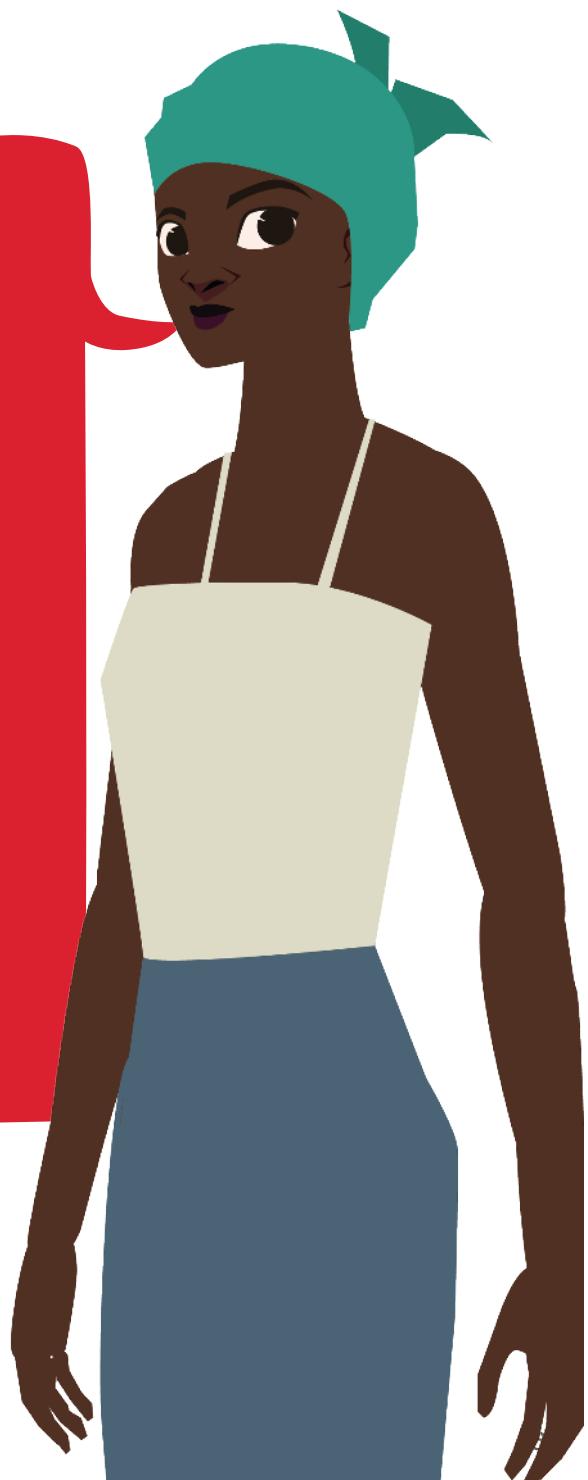
[28] Batliwala 2022.

Care and Leadership Resilience

through Continuous Growth and Reflection

4

"To listen to our bodies and understand our needs and rest long before we are tired and broken is a powerful act of self–love of liberation."

Lucky Kobugabe, 2021

Being on the front lines of feminist leadership to improve the Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) of young women living with HIV, those with disabilities, those affected by displacement and LBTI+ persons, is demanding daily call. In recent years gender and sexual rights are increasingly under threat from a global wave of gender backlash. There has also been a deterioration of legal protections for women's rights in many countries, including attacks on laws around bodily autonomy, SRHR and gender identity.[32] For feminist leaders to survive, self-care and collective care are essential for continuous nourishment, rest, rejuvenation, love, joy and growth.

As a leader, your life is not meant to be all about navigating challenging leadership landscapes and enduring hardships. It is also about thriving through actively cultivating self-care and collective care every day and in all areas of your life. Additionally, continuous growth and reflection ensures that you remain relevant and fit for leadership over the long term. Self-care in feminist leadership is a political act. It pushes back against the pervasive culture of burnout and the expectation that we sacrifice our well-being for the cause. For young women leaders, who often juggle multiple responsibilities, navigate systemic biases, and carry emotional labor, prioritizing self-care is non-negotiable. For young women leaders, who may be navigating patriarchal structures, imposter syndrome, and the weight of societal expectations, prioritizing self-care is not a luxury but a necessity.

Patriarchal structures: Patriarchy is a system of male authority which legitimizes the oppression of women through political, social, economic, legal, cultural, religious and military institutions. Men's access to, and control over resources and rewards within the private and public sphere derives its legitimacy from the patriarchal ideology of male dominance. Patriarchy varies in time and space, meaning that it changes over time, and varies according to class, race, ethnic, religious and global imperial relationships and structures. Furthermore, in the current conjunctures, patriarchy does not simply change according to these factors but is inter-related with and informs relationships of class, race, ethnic, religious, and global imperialism. As feminist, the ideological task is to understand this system and the political task is to end it. The focus is fighting against patriarchy as a system rather than fighting individual men or women. Therefore, feminists define their work as investing individual and institutional energies in the struggle against all forms of patriarchal oppression and exploitation. Patriarchal structures young feminist leaders navigate in advancing SRHR consist of male dominated SRHR leadership and governance structures at community, national, regional and international level. Women are almost 70% of the global health and social workforce but it is estimated they hold only 25% of senior roles. Only 23% of national delegations to the World Health Assembly in 2020 were headed by women and fewer than 5% of the chief executive officers of Fortune 500 health care companies are female (WHO 2021).

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[32] IDS 2024.

Imposter syndrome: is a psychological experience characterized by persistent self-doubt and the inability to believe that one's success is deserved. It is caused by a combination of factors. Social inequalities may also play a part, as minorities tend to face higher rates of imposter syndrome, perhaps due to social stigmas or discrimination.

https://thedecisionlab.com/reference-guide/organizational-behavior/impostor-syndrome

4.1 Understanding Self and Collective Care

As feminists, activists and organizers we are constantly dealing with injustice, on ourselves and our communities. Dismantling violent and oppressive systems that we are fighting requires that we prioritize intentional self and collective care and wellbeing in order to be able to carry out the important work we do. At the core of our being the ability to show up and hold space for one another, share resources and create joy within our community. I most certainly delight in the fact that this practice was not just out of scarcity or necessity like it is in our current times, but rather, it is how our ancestors lived and co-existed in society.[33]

Self-care is any activity that we do intentionally to take care of ourselves spiritually, mentally, physically or emotionally. Self-care may include physical activity, prayer, music, storytelling, resting, or any other practice that engages both the mind and the body. It's about finding what nourishes us and increasing our resilience by engaging in behaviors that help us feel safer and more balanced, limiting what takes our energy away. It's also about decreasing the likelihood that we redirect our experiences of stress or trauma onto others in harmful ways.[34]

Collective care involves taking care of ourselves, while intentionally supporting the care of our colleagues, friends, family, and communities. Collective care recognizes the shared responsibility we all have to ensure wellbeing in our organizations. Collective care improves how we relate to each other, decreases feelings of isolation, and increases collective power and solidarity. Collective care can include practices with an informal group of like-minded peers, within your team, or organization-wide. Collective care practices can include or build on what you're already doing together, or can incorporate new practices. It can influence your overall culture when you engage in collective care activities, regularly, over time. The most important thing is that activities resonate with the group and that leadership actively supports that work.[35]

[33, 34, 35] IWDA 2021a.

Standing up to systems of oppression, such as patriarchy, can be exhausting. In fact, oppressive, patriarchal cultures and systems benefit from the stress and exhaustion of women's rights activists and our movements. In contexts where women's lives and bodies are ignored, devalued and/or abused, the act of celebrating our own wellbeing and that of other women human rights defenders can be a powerful political and organizational strategy. Caring for ourselves and others and being resilient in the face of challenges are ways of positively resisting oppressive forces. Organizational leaders have an especially important role to play in modelling shared purpose and values because of their role in managing the distribution of power and resources.

Exercise 4.1. Understanding Our Self and Collective Realities

Objective: To reflect on the state of your individual and collective care situation.

Participants: Staff, members and/or partners of an organization / group.

Method: Individual reflection, small group discussions, plenary exchange.

Materials: Flipchart paper, post-its, masking tape, markers, notebooks, pencils.

Estimated duration: 25-30 minutes.

This exercise can be done at individual level or as a group.

Steps:

1. Write down a list of activities you do from the time you wake up to when you go to sleep.

2. Check your list and identify self-care activities that are part of your day.

3. Reflect on patterns you have picked up: How do you feel about it? What is working? What is not working? What would be your ideal day?

4. If done collectively: Now that you have taken time to understand where you stand, share your experiences in pairs or taking turns in a group.

5. Set 2-3 actions to improve self and collective care.

6. Think about a possible support network for your wellbeing.

7. As a group, reflect on issues emerging and co-create a care agenda with a plan of action on how you will invest in yourself and collective care to address issues that can emerge. Define roles, responsibilities and accountability mechanisms to ensure you keep in line with your goals.

8. Make a plan to celebrate and reward yourself and the collective when you achieve your milestones.

9. Take time to reflect on your well-being and share lessons and practices with others.

Good Practice in MENA: Creating Safe Spaces for Self and Collective Care Dialogue and Participation

In MENA, safe spaces for dialogue and participation were established in response to women's experiences of oppression and silencing, providing an environment where they could freely express political and social views, share personal reflections, and build collective strength. Guided by feminist facilitation and collectively agreed norms, these spaces evolved to address issues such as women's bodies, unpaid labor, and broader political concerns, with participation remaining voluntary, self-initiated, and rooted in democratic consent. This practice is powerful because it breaks women's isolation, creates supportive networks, and ensures women can express themselves and have a meaningful role in shaping decisions. Its success was enabled by the exchange of ideas, a shared need, accumulated feminist organizing experience, and the availability of safe spaces. Barriers included negative perceptions of women-only spaces and societal discrimination, which were addressed cumulatively and strategically by reinforcing resilience, adapting facilitation methods, and affirming the fundamental role of these spaces in fostering feminist leadership.

Exercise 4.2. Creating Safe Spaces for Self-Care

Objective: To establish the culture for creating safe spaces for self and collective care

Participants: Staff, members and/or partners of your organization / group.

Method: Small group discussions, plenary exchange

Materials: Flipchart paper, post its, masking tape, markers, notebooks, pencils.

Estimated duration: 60-90 minutes.

Steps:

1. Hang on the wall a flipchart with the title: Creating a Safe Space for Self and Collective Care.

2. Ask all participants to reflect individually on how to create safe spaces for self and collective care and write each idea on a post it (5 minutes).

3. Ask them to hang the post its on the flipchart and group them according to topic.

4. Discuss the ideas in a plenary session.

5. End the exercise by developing a plan of action with roles, responsibilities and a timeline for implementing the ideas.

Good practice from Lebanon: Caring for the Collective through Wellbeing and Mental Health Support

This practice emerged from the recognition that the wellbeing and psychological support of the We Lead work community (project participants and volunteers of the CSOs working with the rightsholders) was essential, especially in light of recent political developments in Lebanon and the region. Psychological support was provided through individual sessions with specialists, alongside collective activities such as team workshops, gratitude circles, yoga, art-based methods, and recreational gatherings. A female specialist first conducted an assessment of the work environment, which informed the design of psychological wellbeing workshops and individual counselling sessions. Security and safety priorities were acknowledged, with psychological support affirmed as a key intervention. This practice proved effective as it responded to a fundamental need, helped break stigma around mental health, and demonstrably improved the lives of participants. Its success was enabled by the urgency of the situation and financial support for individual sessions, while barriers such as stereotypes around psychological care were addressed through awareness, confidentiality, and the safeguarding of privacy. The practice continues to evolve, adapting to individual needs and the changing social and political context.
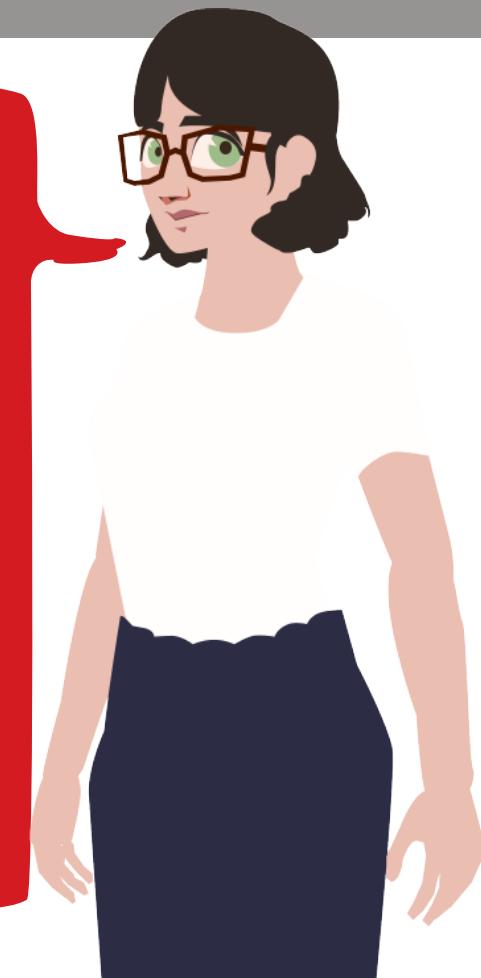
Exercise 4.3. Psychosocial Support for Feminist Leaders and Groups

Objective: To provide psychosocial support for collective care.

Participants: Staff, members and/or partners of your organization / group.

Method: Small group discussions, plenary exchange.

Materials: Flipchart paper, post–its, masking tape, markers, notebooks, pencils.

Estimated duration: Various days.

Steps:

1. Map the psychosocial support needed by your team and feminist leaders you work with.

2. Map service providers and related costs for the psychosocial support services.

3. Tour the service provider facilities (online and / or offline) to be more informed about the services they provide.

4. Develop a psychosocial support service charter with a referral pathway contact to access.

5. Pretest the psychosocial support service charter to ensure it meets the desired intention.

6. Develop a plan of action with shared roles, responsibilities and a timeline to raise awareness of your psychosocial support charter to your team and feminist leaders you work with.

7. Develop a budget for the required psychosocial support services.

8. Map resources and service provide available for psychosocial support.

9. Implement the plan of action for providing the required psychosocial support.

10. Review progress periodically and strengthen your psychosocial support program with feedback and recommendations from your team and feminist leaders, who have accessed the services.

4.2 Feminist Leadership Resilience

The emotional toll on feminist leaders and SRHR advocates is immense and requires systematic response, such as including psychotherapy and support therapies in the employee benefits package.[36] Moreover, it requires strengthening resilience.

Both self and collective care strengthen our ability to be resilient. Resilience can also allow us to have a more positive vision of the future. All of this contributes to our individual and collective wellbeing or state of being comfortable, healthy and happy.[37]

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[36] Disrupt Development 2023.
[37] IWDA 2021a.

Resilience is being able to respond and adapt to changes and shocks, and return to a calm state in the face of difficulty.

Exercise 4.4. Strengthening Resilience: An invitation to a Brave Place

Objective: To develop tips for collective resilience.

Participants: Staff, members and/or partners of your organization / group.

Method: Individual reflection and / or group discussions

Materials: Notebooks, pencils.

Estimated duration: 20-30 minutes.

Some examples of self and collective care activities include below poem you can read on your own or with others for affirmation and nourishing your resilience.

AN INVITATION TO BRAVE SPACE

Together we will create "brave space"
We exist in the real world
We all carry scars and we have all caused wounds.
In this space, we seek to turn down the volume of the outside world,
We amplify voices that fight to be heard elsewhere,
We call each other to more truth and love
We have the right to start somewhere and continue to grow.
We have the responsibility to examine what we think we know.
We will not be perfect.
This space will not be perfect.
It will not always be what we wish it to be
But, it will be our brave space together,
And we will work on it side by side.

By Mikey ScotyBey Jones
www.thepeoplessupper.org

After reading individually or together the above poem, discuss as a group on how you are feeling and set a routine to take action. Identify common designated space to post the poem to ensure access for all as an individual or as a group when in need for motivation.

Good Practice Positive Vibes: Art for Healing and Care

As part of the WeLead project, Positive Vibes facilitated a three-day "Art for Healing" process with Women with Disabilities in Kilifi, Kenya, exploring creativity as a tool for collective care and personal healing. The initiative combined photography, reflection, and healing methodologies, culminating in a publication that brought together artwork and narratives from participants alongside contributions from local and international artists, a chef, other health and NGO professionals as well as college students. Guided by artist Jess Holdengarde, participants engaged with nature as both inspiration and teacher, using locally foraged plants to create silver gelatin prints with Lumen and Phytogram printing methods. This process fostered self-reflection, helping women connect with their bodies, minds, and (natural) environments while challenging how they wish to be seen, valued, and respected in society. Participants co-created a social contract on visibility, documentation, and freedom of expression, ensuring safety and agency in how their identities are represented. Through self-portraiture and collaborative visual storytelling and learning, they explored resilience, nurtured solidarity, and affirmed the value of their stories. This good practice demonstrates how art, nature, and safe spaces can be powerful tools for trauma release, healing, and feminist leadership grounded in creativity and care.
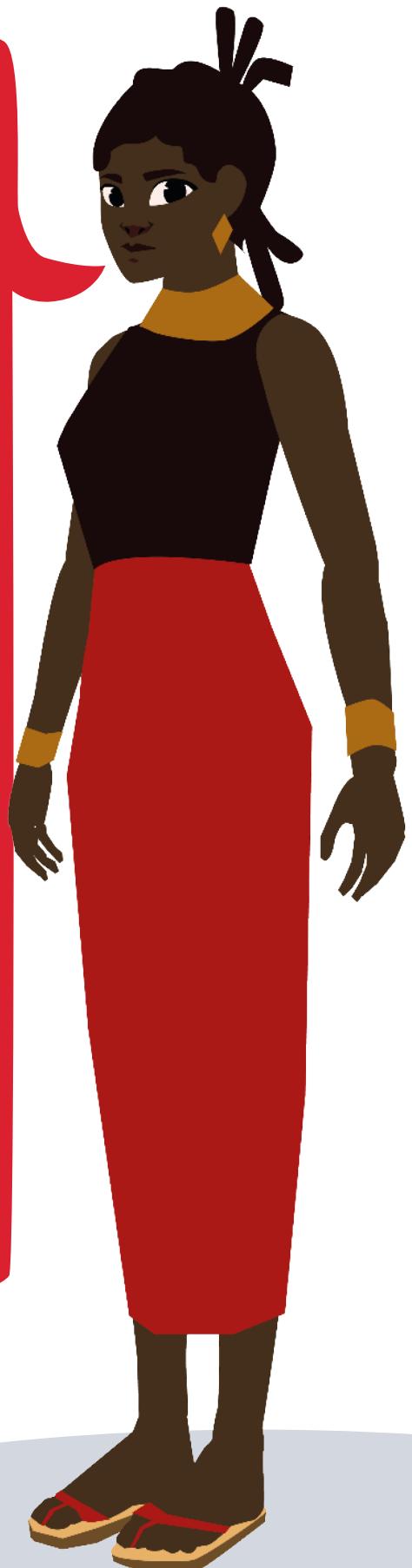
Exercise 4.5. Using Art for Healing and Collective Care

Objective: To explore how feminist leaders can use art for care, healing and wellbeing

Participants: Members and/or partners of your community / organization / group.

Method: Group discussions.

Materials: Art materials

Estimated duration: To be determined by type of art used.

Steps:

1. Form a group interested in working with Art for care, healing and wellbeing.

2. Develop a list of art practices and facilitators in your community or related to your organization / group by browsing the internet and talking with community members.

3. Discuss the different art practices and facilitators with your group and select some that you would like to explore more.

4. Contact and visit the selected practices / facilitator to understand better the different forms of art and opportunities for participation.

5. Try out the different Art forms with your group.

6. Share experiences and continue with the practices your group selects.

Source: Positive Vibes

Good Practice: Enlightening Adolescent Girls through SRHR Training

Asina Tijani is a 16 years old South Sudanese, officially registered by UNHCR in Kakuma Refugee Camp, who participated in the We Lead SRHR program in Kenya: "There's change happening in my life because of the training Resilience Action International is carrying out in my school. By training adolescent girls about sexual reproductive health rights they gain more knowledge about their bodies and in turn reduce the number of girls at risk of pregnancy. I believe more girls like me will have knowledge on how to manage their life so that no one can take advantage of their vulnerability. In the beginning, most of my classmates [...] said they didn't understand the changes their bodies went through in adolescence. This made them unaware of how to feel or how to react about their body changes. Some of the girls I knew were tricked by boys or adult men and ended up pregnant. Since many of us lack information and our parents don't discuss this with us, we end up being asked why we did this after getting pregnant; [telling us] that we have disrespected them. One among many things I treasure most from the training was when the facilitator gave us a package during certification. It had one sanitary pad and a small gift card with motivational words written on it. Once I received that, I felt accomplished."

Written by Mulki Mohamed Ali, We Lead 2022

Good Practice: The Impact of SRHR Training for Self and Collective Care

Sarah is an 18-year-old UNHCR registered refugee living in Kalobeyei village, Kenya: "After attending three weeks SRH training [from the We Lead program], I felt a gradual change in me after learning about sexual abstinence, sexually transmitted disease, proper communication, personal hygiene, cancers of the female reproductive organs, counseling and stress management. The change I am speaking about is the feeling that I can use this knowledge to take care of myself and make changes in my life. I shared this knowledge with friends and peers in my community, and my family. They took it positively and were impressed with what I'd learnt in those three weeks. The myth of HIV/AIDS decreased among my peers and family, and I was able to maintain good personal hygiene during menstruation unlike before. [...] Today, I can comfortably manage stress at home and school. Also, I can support those experiencing stress and guide them to the relevant interventions such as the counseling services the training provides."

Written by Shukri Mohammed, SRH champion and facilitator We Lead 2022

Exercise 4.6. Self and Collective SRHR Care and Wellbeing

Objective: To reflect on and take action to advance SRHR care and wellbeing of feminist leaders.

Participants: Young women, including feminist leaders and members of their groups.

Method: Individual reflection and group discussions.

Materials: Notebooks and pens

Estimated duration: 90 – 120 minutes for steps 1 to 4.

Steps:

1. As an Individual take time to reflect on your menstruation and other personal hygiene care needs and practices.

2. As a group reflect and discuss on collective care practices relating to young women and adolescent girls practiced in your community.

3. Check the internet on practices that have worked elsewhere. Share these practices with your group.

4. Develop an action plan to try them out. Include responsibilities to implement, monitor and document the process.

5. Implement the actions and share experiences afterwards for active learning. Celebrate progress and lessons learnt.

Good practice from FEMNET: Workshop Engagement through "Sip and Paint"

At the start of workshops for women with disabilities, participants are given paper, paint and brushes, which they can use during specific sessions or any other time they want to stay engaged and motivated throughout the workshop. They do mostly abstract painting, while sipping tea or another drink, hence the name "Sip and Paint".

4.3 Feminist Leadership Resilience Approaches

The We Lead program established a resilience fund for the nine countries that partners used for a variety of approaches, such as therapy, training, coalition forming and contextualization of methodologies. Some of the more specific practices from We Lead partners included:

- Scheduling meetings to run from 9 am to 4 pm instead 8 am to 6pm.
- Avoiding meetings on Fridays.
- Encouraging participants to step out from meetings to refresh, do something else, take a call or a break when feeling overwhelmed.
- Using music, dancing, art, fashion shows, traditional games and childhood activities as icebreakers, energy boosters and for relaxation.

Exercise 4.7. Physical Health Selfcare: What Our Bodies Need

Objective: To raise awareness on the importance of physical wellbeing for feminist leaders and rightsholders.

Participants: Feminist leaders, rightsholders, volunteers and other members of the group.

Method: Small group discussions, plenary exchange.

Materials: Flipchart, masking tape, markers, notebooks / paper, pencils.

Estimated duration: 30–60 minutes.

Steps:

1. Draw yourself on a paper and list what your body needs to keep it healthy, happy and free of stress. You might like to think about sleep, eating, exercise, i.e., everything that is important for your body.

2. In groups of 3–5 people, show each other your drawings and rate which one is most complete. Develop a list with everything our bodies need, for example:

   • Every 24 hours have 7 – 9 hours of sleep.
   • Nutritious food at regular times through the day.
   • 6 – 8 glasses of water every day.
   • Physical exercise.
   • Mental exercise.
   • Quiet times of rest during the day.
   • Clothing.
   • Attention to feel and look good, including your hair!

3. Optional: plenary session to share the group discussions. You can start this session by asking each group to share their list and writing them on a flipchart, marking those that repeat. This will generate a priority listing that you can discuss as well.

Source: Modified from Hivos and Positive Vibes 2018

4.3.1 Feminist Leadership Support System

As a feminist leader, your journey requires a strong support system; people who can serve as sound boards for your ideas, contribute to your growth by sharing opportunities and insights, provide both technical and moral support, affirm your leadership, and stand in solidarity with you.

4.3.2 Navigating Emotions as a Feminist Leader

As a feminist leader you also have to nurture your emotional wellbeing. No days are the same in feminist leadership. Some days are kind; some are challenging and, on some days, you are challenged in so many ways that can make you feel emotional and provoked. To stay on course and grounded it is important for you to manage your feelings.

Exercise 4.8. Building a Support Network

Objective: To guide (future) feminist leaders on building a support network, holding on to current supporters and excluding those that have had a negative impact on your life.

Participants: Current and future feminist leaders.

Method: Individual reflection and group discussions.

Materials: Flipchart / white board, masking tape, markers, paper / notebooks, pencils.

Estimated duration: 30-45 minutes.

Me
My Primary Support Group
My Secondary Support Group

Individual preparation:

1. Draw up three circles on a paper or in your notebook with "Me" in the middle.

2. Place the names of people you are closest to, who are (or can be) supportive to your leadership journey, into the central circle. This can be family, partners, friends, mentors or other people who believe in you and have your best interests at heart; those who keep you rooted or provide warmth and nurture you. These are cheerleaders, people who are on our side, who support who you are and what you do.

3. Fill the outside circle with names of people who are not very involved with you, who provide a secondary line of support. This may be professional contacts or people who played a role in your past, they may even have died, such as grandmothers, aunts, school friends. There may be some people in this group who you would like to be closer to.

4. Reflect on whether your inner circle looks full enough for you (how many people we have in this space is very individual) and how you could increase the circle if necessary. For example, you can research and join online or in-person relevant support groups in your community.
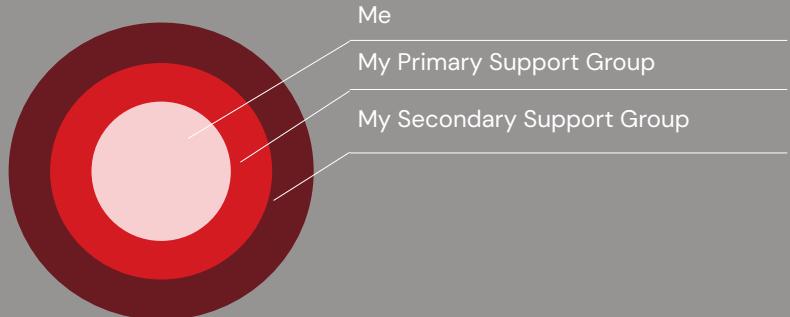
Group dynamic:

5. As a group discuss the following questions:

- How was it to work out those who you want to have in your support group?
- How do we hold on to those who do support us in our vision?
- How could we actively let people know that we want them in our support group? E.g., Inform about their willingness, availability and capacities to support you, officially ask them, invite them to an activity together and tell them how you have appreciated their support, write them a letter

Note: As leaders, it is very important to have a support group around us as these positions can be lonely. Try to develop a routine of reflecting on and building your support system continuously.

Source: Modified from Hivos and Positive Vibes 2018

Exercise 4.9. Our Internal Emotional Jugs

Objective: To support feminist leaders with tools on how to manage their feelings for emotional wellbeing.

Participants: Current and future feminist leaders.

Method: group discussion / plenary exchange.

Materials: flipchart / white board, masking tape, markers, notebooks, pencils.

Estimated duration: 20-30 Minutes.

One way of thinking about our emotions is that they store themselves in an emotional "tank" or jug inside ourselves. This helps us to picture the containing/holding or controlling our emotions.

In a situation where we feel we have been disrespected our emotions can become too much for us. If we aren't careful about pouring them out, they can build up and we can explode.

Steps:

1. Draw a large jug on a flipchart or white board and/or use a real jug with water and a cup or take participants outside to pour the water on the floor.

2. Ask participants to share some specific examples of a bad day or of a time when someone was disrespectful towards them. Remember how it can be just one incident that makes us explode or it can be small things that happen over time and then finally the jug is full, and we dump all our emotions on the floor.

3. Discuss in a group the following questions:

   • What happens when we do this? Chaos, conflict, our mess is on the floor, and it is not so good for us, others or the relationships we have. If we don't know people well, we can lose their respect completely.
   • What can we do to stop the build-up of emotions in our emotional jug? Consider some of the following ideas:
     » We need to regularly pour emotions out.
     » We can talk to someone else (this is like pouring some of the emotions from my jug to your jug to contain).
     » Doing exercise, practicing meditation or engaging in something creative.
     » Sometimes we can talk to the person who might be triggering the emotion(s) to resolve the issue (describing what it does to you instead of focusing on what the other does, i.e., using I statements!).

4. Write constructive ideas next to the jug and make a photo for yourself (or copy it in your notebook) and try them out.

Source: Modified from Hivos and Positive Vibes 2018

Exercise 4.10. Dealing with a Difficult Emotional Situation

Objective: To guide feminist leaders on how to manage their feelings and emotions for their wellbeing.

Participants: Current and future feminist leaders.

Method: Individual reflection, peer practicing, plenary exchange.

Materials: Flipchart / white board, masking tape, markers, notebooks, pencils.

Estimated duration: 30-45 Minutes.

When we deal with a difficult situation where emotions run high, it can help to prepare what you want to say in advance. Writing it down helps us get our head in order and makes it easier to contain our emotions.

Step 1. Individual reflection (10-15 min): Think of a difficult conversation you need to have with someone, in the family, at work or in the community. Develop a script to understand the situation and plan what you need to say to them:

- **The event:** Describe how you see the situation or problem.
- **Your feelings:** Describe how you feel about the situation and express your emotions clearly. E.g., "I feel very frustrated because we have talked about this before."
- **Your needs:** Tell the other person what you need from him/her/them so that they don't have to guess. E.g., "I need you to …"
- **The consequences:** Describe the positive impact your request will have for the other person.

Step 2. In pairs (10-15 min): Discuss each of your situations and practice your scripts with each other, as a preparation for the conversation you need to have. During this practice of sharing your feelings with someone else, take into account the following tip: Always starts with "I", e.g., "I feel…". We call these "I Statements" and they help us to own our feelings, communicate them clearly and avoid us starting a conversation with "You make me feel" or any other blaming statement.

Step 3. In plenary (10-15 min): Discuss the following questions:
- Why is this tool (the script) useful?
- What changes in our behavior when we use it?
- If we use this tool, what kind of response are we likely to get from the other person in terms of feelings and behavior?

The amazing thing is that when we contain our emotions and use this tool, we get a different response from others. If we shout and scream and blame, we often get shouting and screaming and blaming back. When we are calm, and clearly and firmly use this tool, we can influence how the other person behaves. They are likely to be calmer, more receptive to the feedback we are giving them and are therefore more likely to understand our point of view and do things differently next time.

Source: Modified from Hivos and Positive Vibes 2018

When people behave badly or rudely to us, it can help if you remind yourself that everyone has a story; they have a reason for this behavior. It doesn't make it right, but it does make it easier to understand sometimes. If you have someone you work with who is always difficult, make it your business to understand why they do what they do (Hivos and Positive Vibes 2018).

4.4 Conclusion

By intentionally weaving together self-care, collective care, and a commitment to continuous growth and reflection, young women feminist leaders can cultivate a profound and sustainable resilience. This integrated approach not only strengthens individual leaders but also creates more equitable, compassionate, and effective movements for social change. By integrating individual and collective practices into your daily life and leadership approach, you are not just surviving; you are building a powerful and sustainable foundation for your feminist leadership journey. Remember, your well-being is not a distraction from your mission; it is fundamental to its success. Lead with resilience, care, and a commitment to perpetual growth.

Navigating Gender-Based Violence

and Patriarchal Power Dynamics in Leadership

As a young feminist leader, it's critical to acknowledge that you exist and operate within systems often steeped in patriarchy, where power imbalances are the norm. Feminist leadership inherently challenges existing power structures. This challenge can trigger resistance, subtle (and overt) discrimination, and even gender-based violence (GBV). Your intersecting identities mean you experience vulnerabilities, discrimination and violence on multiple fronts, including unique and magnified forms of GBV, oppressive and intricate power dynamics. As you are often breaking new ground and challenging established norms, understanding and navigating these dynamics is not just strategic; it's essential for safety, sustainability, and impactful leadership. In this chapter you will find practical exercises, examples, tips, and actions tailored to these specific intersections for navigating GBV and power dynamics in leadership.

5.1 Understanding Risks that Come with Feminist Leadership

Young feminist leaders, by virtue of your advocacy for equality and justice, inherently challenge the status quo, which makes you targets. Understanding these risks is the first step towards developing robust safety and protection strategies, emphasizing collective care, and building strong solidarity networks.

Risks faced by Young Feminist Leaders

Feminist groups in Lebanon and Jordan face both internal and external challenges. Internally, disagreements over ideology often escalate into personal conflicts that undermine solidarity and discourage newcomers. Externally, groups struggle with patriarchal resistance, social exclusion, security threats, and lack of familial support. Feminists also face societal hostility and stereotypes, where feminism is often misunderstood, distorted, or rejected, particularly threatening women's safety and limiting young feminist leaders' participation in decision-making.

Risks faced by Young Feminist Leaders

In Niger young feminist leaders, especially those from marginalized groups, are exposed to various risks such as stigmatization, discrimination, social rejection, lack of family or community support, as well as forms of violence and intimidation, whether physical or digital. These risks can be emotional, social, economic or security-related, but should not hinder their commitment.

Risks faced by Young Feminist Leaders

In Mozambique, young women suffer various risks when they are in feminist leadership. Some of the risks are the lack of social stability, having their voices silenced, not receiving credit or even having their work devaluated. Patriarchy itself is a risk, and violence is one of the biggest risks. Lately there have been many violent deaths of young and older women in Mozambique. Women are afraid to walk the streets late at night, to take cabs or public transport. Other women shared that they experience harassment at work. In conclusion, women are always at risk, which affects their self-esteem and can cause depression.
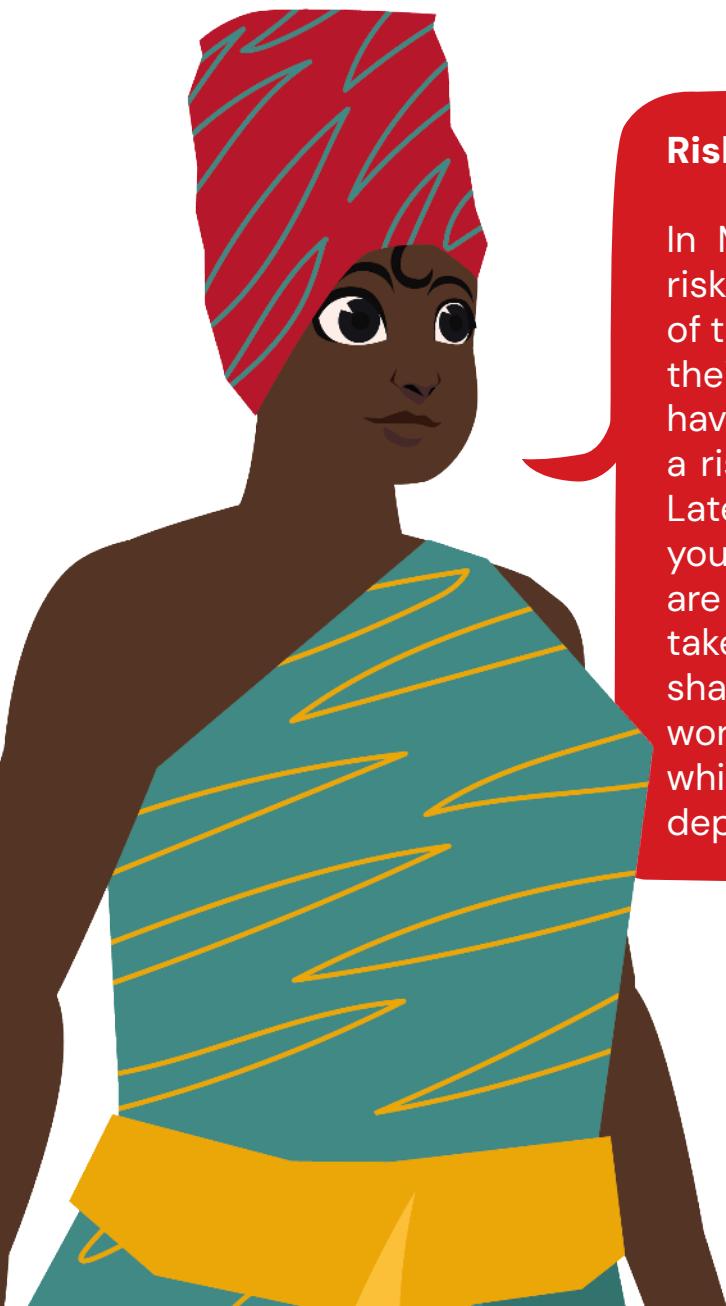
Risks faced by Young Feminist Leaders

Young feminist leaders from Central America identified several challenges, including:

- Surveillance, political repression, persecution and defamation for their activism.
- Physical and emotional vulnerability in contexts of violence.
- Need for funds to ensure security and sustainability.
- Challenges in building collective power in adverse environments.
- Tensions between individual and collective agendas in self-organized movements.

5.2 Strategies on How to Navigate Risks

Identifying risks that you are exposed to as a feminist leader is the beginning of a process of navigating risks that may befall you. With each risk it is important to analyze the likelihood of the risk occurring so that you can prioritize and develop an informed mitigation plan.

Recognizing and framing the challenges helps build more resilient and protected feminist leadership. During the development of this guide, young feminist leaders recommended to establish a support system by building a network of individuals to help you navigate to prevent, respond and get relevant support you need in relation to risks that may come your way as a feminist leader. Other tips include:

- Building alliances with other groups to provide mutual support, despite differences in approaches.

- Fostering dialogue on controversial topics, sharing feminist and political learning.

- Enhancing digital security by reviewing all social media privacy settings, using strong unique passwords for each platform, activating two-factor authentication, using VPNs, secure messaging apps, knowing how to de-escalate, document and report online abuse (e.g., screenshots, timestamps, platform reporting tools).

- Enhancing physical safety, amongst others by taking varying routes on regular routes, setting up alarms at the home and office.

- Using online platforms for expression as well as to expose violations and violence.

- Building alliances with local and international human rights organizations.

- Linking feminist issues to the needs of the local community so that the discourse does not become elitist or hybrid.

- Knowing legal rights and reporting mechanisms, having a lawyer contact, documenting and reporting incidents.

- Facilitating psychological/emotional well-being through peer support, a buddy system, identifying trusted contacts, self-care routines and access to counselling.

- Other strategies are: navigating in-group fights, embracing diversity in feminist leadership, dealing with societal rejection and creating safety funds. These will be described more in detail below.

5.2.1 Navigating In-Group Fights

Sometimes as feminist leaders you can experience "In-group Fighting". It usually starts with people disagreeing over ideological matters and quickly turns into an invalidation of one's identity as a feminist and a dismissal of the efforts towards social progress. This is unfortunately part of some feminist organizations and not only makes things difficult for people within the organizations but also alienates potential newcomers to the feminist scene.

Practical Action: Conduct workshops for all staff and members on "allyship". Present scenarios involving GBV or discrimination against LBTI+ individuals, people with HIV, displaced, or people with disabilities. Discuss how to de-escalate or intervene safely, document, report, and provide support. Emphasize the importance of active listening and believing survivors.

We face "persecution, defamation, systematic violence, but also [we have] networks, alliances, and collective strategies to resist."

Exercise 5.1. Navigating In-Group Fights

Objective: To identify examples of In-Group Fights within feminist groups and develop strategies to navigate them.

Participants: Staff, members and/or partners of a feminist organization / group.

Method: Group discussions, plenary exchange.

Materials: Flipchart / white board, masking tape, markers, star stickers.

Estimated duration: 30-45 Minutes.

Steps

1. In groups, reflect on examples of in-group fighting you may have experienced: what caused it, who was involved and how did it get resolved.

2. List strategies for navigating in these in-group fights. Agree on how you will present your strategies in plenary.

3. Before starting the plenary, identify a note taker who will capture all strategies on a flipchart / white board. Moreover, identify two volunteers to put star stickers (or draw stars) next to each strategy showing the number of times a strategy has been mentioned.

4. During the plenary exchange: take turns to share the strategies that emerged from the group discussions. Make sure all groups are represented.

5. Rank strategies according to the number of stars, which show the frequency of mentions.

6. Ask participants to try out the strategies and share feedback and lessons regularly.

5.2.2 Embracing Diversity in Feminist Leadership

As feminist leaders you are not all the same. You are different in so many ways, for example by ethnicity, religion, HIV status, (dis)abilities, gender identity, sexual orientation, geographical location and positioning in the society at large. Your diversity is your super power.

There is often a fixed, stereotypical notion of what it means to be a feminist, hence resistance from patriarchal segments of society where feminism is often viewed unfavorably. It's important to recognize that talents, interests and experiences with feminism can vary widely, especially in diverse countries and due to your intersecting identities.

5.2.3 Dealing with Societal Rejection

Young feminist leaders often face significant pushback from patriarchal structures that resist their inclusion in decision-making roles. One of the most serious risks women face is societal rejection, which can pose real threats to the safety of feminists. This hostility often stems from a lack of understanding of feminist concepts, widespread societal ignorance, and the distortion of these ideas in ways that make them appear to conflict with accepted social norms.

Exercise 5.2. Embracing Diversity in Feminist Leadership

Objective: To develop ways to identify and embrace diversity within feminist leaders.

Participants: Staff, members and/or partners of a feminist organization / group.

Method: Group discussions, plenary exchange.

Materials: Flipchart papers, masking tape, markers / pencils of different colors, creative stickers and/or magazines (with scissors).

Estimated duration: 60-80 minutes.

Steps

1. Divide participants into pairs. Share flipchart papers, markers / pencils of different colors and creative stickers and/or magazines to each group.

2. In pairs, discuss different ways in which young women leaders in your organization or community are different. Reflect this on the flipchart paper through drawing and using the creative stickers and / or magazines.

3. Prepare an elevator pitch of 1-2 minutes to present your drawing to the group.

4. Hang your drawings on a wall in the room, thus establishing a gallery. One of the pair members stands next to their drawing, ready to explain it to participants who will visit them.

5. Invite the rest of the participants to do a gallery walk learning from the different drawings. After 6 minutes, change the pair member so that everybody can participate in the gallery walk.

6. In a plenary session, discuss emerging ways in which young feminist leaders are different and strategies to ensure that they can connect and work together.

7. End the exercise with participants making an individual commitment to acknowledge, respect and ensure they play their part to lead. With empathy and intentionally being inclusive of other leaders different from them.

Exercise 5.3. Dealing with Societal Rejection

Objective: To facilitate for young feminist leaders to deal with societal rejection

Participants: Staff, members and/or partners of an organization / group.

Method: Individual reflection, group discussion.

Materials: flipchart / white board, markers, notebooks, pencils.

Estimated duration: 20-30 minutes.

Steps

1. As an Individual, reflect on your leadership journey. Have you ever experienced social rejection? If yes, how did it feel and what support did you need? Are you still experiencing the same or you have managed to overcome it? If you have managed to overcome, what strategies did you employ? If you are still experiencing the same, how are you coping, who is supporting you and what advise can you give to a young woman experiencing the same? You can write your answers down in your notebook.

2. In groups: share your experiences and explore how you can best work together to develop an awareness campaign to counter the rejection. See exercise in Chapter 6 on Developing your own Awareness Campaign. You can write the experiences and ideas down on a flipchart / white board.

5.2.4 Creating Safety Funds

Safety funds can be one of the ways to ensure that you have available budget and resources required to navigate feminist leadership challenges. Some examples of safety funds designed specifically to support feminist leaders, activists, and movements when they face sudden risks or urgent challenges are:

*   Urgent Action Fund: This is a feminist fund that provides rapid response grants to women and non-binary human rights defenders facing urgent threats. Their "safety fund" approach allows feminist leaders to access resources quickly (often within 72 hours) for things like: Emergency relocation due to political persecution or violence; Legal assistance and bail; Medical support or trauma counseling; Digital and physical security needs.

*   FRIDA Young Feminist Fund, which also has an emergency response mechanism that works like a safety fund. It helps young feminist leaders deal with unexpected crises, ensuring their work can continue without being derailed by sudden risks.

These funds essentially act as a financial safety net so that feminist leaders are not left without resources when navigating threats, burnout, or leadership challenges.

Exercise 5.4. Our Feminist Safety Net

Objective: To help young feminist leaders collectively explore what a safety fund could look like in their context, practice making decisions about priorities, and identify resources & allies for sustaining it.

Participants: Young feminist leaders and members of their organization / group.

Method: Group discussions, plenary exchange.

Materials: Flipchart paper, masking tape, colorful markers, notebooks, pencils, scenario cards (see step II of the exercise).

Estimated duration: 2-3 hours (if time is short only do step 2 and 3).

Step 1: Opening Reflection (15–20 min):

- In groups of 3-5 people discuss the following questions:
    1. When have you or your community faced an urgent risk or sudden challenge where money/resources could have made a difference?
    2. What did you need most at that moment (e.g., relocation, legal aid, well-being, digital tools)?
- In a plenary session: share your lived experiences and highlight common themes on a flipchart / white board, emphasizing why a safety fund matters.

Step 2: Imaginary Budget Game (40 min)

- In the same groups, imagine you have a budget of USD 5,000. Discuss in your group on how to allocate these limited funds under one of the following scenarios:
    a. Activist facing sudden arrest
    b. Group under online harassment campaign
    c. Feminist leader burned out and needs mental health care
    d. Opportunity to attend urgent advocacy meeting at UN

Note: make sure you have at least one scenario per group. You could pass these on verbally or make cards of each scenario and distribute them.

- During the group discussion make sure to answer the following questions:
    1. What would you prioritize and why?
    2. What trade-offs do you face?

- In a plenary session: share the results of your discussions and write highlights on a flipchart / white board, showing real dilemmas of safety funds (scarcity, urgency, flexibility).

Step 3: Design Your Own Safety Fund (60 min)

- In your groups: design a mini-model of a safety fund for your context. Create a poster on a flipchart paper answering who, what, where, how:
    1. **Purpose:** What is the fund for?
    2. **Who benefits:** Which groups/people should be eligible?
    3. **Decision process:** Who decides and how fast?

4. **Access:** How will people apply (low-barrier methods)?
5. **Resources:** Where could the money come from (local allies, crowdfunding, partnerships, solidarity networks)?
6. **Care & Confidentiality:** How do we keep people safe when asking for funds?

- In a plenary session: each group shares their model. Write down similarities and differences on a white board / flipchart, and highlight innovative ideas.

Step 4 Collective Mapping (20–30 min)

- In a plenary session: map potential local resources and allies on a big paper or whiteboard, for example:
  - Trusted community donors
  - Friendly NGOs
  - Solidarity networks
  - Diaspora connections
  - Skills in the group (e.g., digital security, trauma care)

- Keep it as a living resource map for future real fund-building.

Step 5 Closing Reflection (10–15 min)

- Plenary circle sharing: What is one thing you're taking away about how to create and sustain a feminist safety fund?
- Optional: create a collective pledge (e.g., each group commits to one concrete next step to move toward resourcing their own safety).

Optional Step 6 Role Play

If you have extra time, you can practice through a role-play in which one group is the Fund Committee and others apply with urgent requests.

Feminist leadership in times of war

"We wake up hearing about children dying, Syrians being killed on daily basis, we are exhausted because of the war and genocide that is taking place in Gaza. People inside our institutions know that we are facing threat to our funding. We all come from a political background that is exhausting. […] We need real support, we need to talk about what we are doing, we know we are suffering from all these wars that trickle down on our organizations. We all have expectations. We are looking for creative instruments that can create a revolution."

Good Practices from MENA in Times of War and Peace

Feminist leadership is not a one-time effort, but an ongoing life time process of growth and recognition. Many women continue to be seen as leaders in their communities, even beyond their other roles.

In MENA, a good practice of the We Lead project has been providing welfare and psychosocial support to rightsholders and volunteers. This was especially important in Lebanon, where recent political and security issues made mental health support a real need. In Jordan, while there were fewer political challenges, collective sessions were still organized for staff and community members, including recreational activities, psychosocial support, as well as peace and security workshops. Experts also offered individual support, with financial help available for urgent cases and therapy sessions.

The value of these practices depends on the context. In Lebanon during times of war, priorities shifted to basic needs like food and water, while in calmer times, the focus returned to leadership and empowerment. Good practices also change over time, even within the same community, as needs evolve.

5.3 Understanding and Navigating Gender–Based Violence

Gender-based violence (GBV) is violence that is directed at an individual (against their will) based on their biological sex, gender identity or gender expression. In other words, gender-based violence is a specific type of violence based on expectations related to the gender, sex or gender identity of another person. [38]

GBV can be broadly divided into four types:[39]

1. **Physical violence:** acts using physical force, such as hitting, slapping, pushing and beating.
2. **Emotional/psychological violence:** acts which cause psychological harm to an individual. This is often the most difficult form of violence to identify. It can include humiliating, insulting, threatening, coercion, pressuring, expressing jealousy or possessiveness (e.g., by controlling decisions and activities).
3. **Sexual violence:** sexual acts (from kissing to intercourse) performed with an individual without their consent or making sexual comments (written or verbal) that make someone feel humiliated or uncomfortable. It does not matter if there has been prior consenting sexual behavior. It includes making comments about clothing or a person's body, repeatedly asking a person out, impeding or blocking movement, inappropriate touching, looking up and down a person's body, following a person, showing images or texts of a sexual nature.
4. **Economic violence:** acts which cause economic harm to an individual. It involves withholding (or threatening to withhold) resources or services, such as restricting access to financial resources, education or the labour market, exerting control over household resources. Also, the salary gap between men and women is part of this type of violence.

GBV is rooted in gender inequality, discriminatory norms, the abuse of power, and harmful norms disproportionately affects women and girls. Globally, almost one in three women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence at least once in their life.[40] GBV takes many forms and manifests in various ways, often overlapping and reinforcing each other inflicted in public or in private spheres.[41] GBV occurs in the context of gender-based imbalances in social power,[42] control of resources, and participation in public life. Gender inequality manifests in almost every sphere of life, at individual, community, organizational and other societal levels. Structural inequalities result in the abuses of power that women experience in forms of violence perpetrated by individuals, families, communities, and the State.[43]

One of the ways to navigate GBV is to build a support network (see exercise 4.8 on Building a Support Network), including online or in-person relevant support groups, with whom you can share strategies, solidarity and support. Others are setting boundaries; risk mapping and mitigation planning; developing safeguarding policies and safety & security plans (see below).

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[38] UNFPA 2010.
[39] UNFPA 2016 and 2010; IDH 2017; EIGE no date.
[40] https://data.unwomen.org/global-database-on-violence-against-women

[41] UN Women 2024.
[42] Social power is the capacity of different individuals or groups to determine who gets what, who does what, who decides what, and who sets the agenda (Batliwala 2019).
[43] GBV AoR 2019.

Exercise 5.5. Boundary Setting

Objective: To help young feminist leaders to develop boundaries for different risks in different spaces.

Participants: Young feminist leaders.

Method: Individual reflection and planning.

Materials: Notebook, pencil.

Estimated duration: 30–45 minutes.

A way of navigating GBV is setting personal and professional boundaries. Here are some steps on how you can set boundaries to protect yourself:

Steps:

1. Listing your daily spaces, such as home, work/activism space, public transport, online platforms.

2. Identify and list specific (GBV) risks that exist in each space.

3. Identify who holds formal power (based on official positions) and informal power (based on social factors and personal characteristics) in this space and how that influences your feeling of safety.

4. List boundaries you have or you wish to establish to be safe.

5. List 1–2 small, actionable steps you can take per boundary to feel safer or assert your boundaries. This can include ways to communicate your boundaries in each space.

6. Practice asserting and defending your boundaries.

7. Review and refine your boundaries periodically.

Practical Action: Practice saying "no" to unreasonable demands, even small ones, to build confidence in boundary setting. Rehearse assertive responses to micro-aggressions.

Exercise 5.6. Individual Risk Mapping & Mitigation Planning

Objective: To identify personal GBV and other risks, assess their likelihood and impact, and plan mitigation strategies.

Participants: Feminist leaders.

Method: Individual reflection and brainstorming in pairs.

Materials: Notebook and / or planning stationery.

Estimated duration: 1-2 hours.

Steps:

1. Find a safe, confidential space. Ideally have a trusted peer, mentor or therapist nearby.

2. Reflect (individually or in pairs) on your online visibility status: Which platforms are you on, how secure are your accounts, what personal information is publicly available about you online, and what are the (GBV) risks per platform. Write this down in your notebook.

3. On another page of your notebook: reflect on your home, community, work, public spaces that you frequent, what are the (GBV) risks you could face in each of those spaces (e.g., conservative norms, presence of hostile groups). Make sure to reflect on all areas of your work: what specific issues are you working on that might place you at risk of GBV or backlash? Think specifically about how these risks might manifest to you, taking into account all your intersecting identities (HIV status, disability, LBTI+ identity, displaced status, ethnicity, age, religion, etc.):

    A. Examples for a LBTI+ leader: Risk of "corrective" violence, outing to family/ community, online hate speech.

    B. Examples for a displaced feminist leader: Risk of deportation, sexual exploitation in transit/ camps, economic coercion.

    C. Examples for a leader with HIV: Risk of forced disclosure, shaming, denial of services. Examples for a feminist leader with a disability: Risk of sexual violence, forced medical decisions, care-related coercion or inaccessibility.

4. List individuals or groups that might target you (e.g., online trolls, government officials, family members, community members, strangers) and what they are likely to do to you (e.g., post hateful comments, send threats, spread rumors, physical attacks, sexual harassment, economic pressure, file false charges).

5. For each identified threat, assess:

    A. Likelihood: How likely is this to happen? (High, Medium, Low).

    B. Impact: If it happens, how severe would the consequences be? (High = life-threatening/ severe psychological harm/career-ending; Medium = significant disruption/distress; Low = minor annoyance).

C. Prioritize: Focus on threats with high likelihood and high impact.

6. Develop a Mitigation Plan: For each prioritized threat, brainstorm concrete actions to:

A. Prevent and reduce the likelihood of the risk occurring.

B. Prepare for what to do if the risk occurs (e.g., de-escalation; documenting; having emergency contacts at hand of trusted friends, family, local organizations, lawyers and emergency health service providers).

C. Respond: What actions to take immediately after an incident.

D. Recover: Long-term strategies for healing and resilience.

7. Update this plan regularly (e.g., every 3-6 months or after a significant event).

5.4 Developing GBV Safeguarding Policies and Plans

A Safeguarding Policy is a policy that ensures the individual and collective act to promote and protect the health, well-being, and human rights of people in all their diversity, thus enabling them to live free from harm, exploitation, and abuse. Components of safeguarding policies include objectives, organization values and principles, an overview of safeguarding context, definition of key concepts, safeguarding pillars relevant to your organization internal and external stakeholders, roles and responsibilities, provisions on your organization commitments related to awareness and prevention, reporting and triage response, follow up actions, disciplinary measures and as well as annexes such as templates, relevant forms, reporting flow and operating procedures or guidelines.[44]

To ensure organization policies are fit for purpose to equip you to prevent, respond and navigate GBV situations, there is need for you to take stock, review and refine your policies. This process may include reviewing existing policies, including human resources policies, to analyze if they explicitly mention HIV-related stigma, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, or xenophobia as forms of violence; if reporting mechanisms are safe and accessible, including for someone with a disability or a displaced person (e.g., not requiring physical presence at a distant office), if members with responsibilities of investigating complaints are adequately trained in intersectional approaches and sensitivity around HIV, disabilities, displacement or LBTI+, and if provisions for psychological support are culturally and contextually appropriate for diverse young women.

An organization must develop a safeguarding policy that includes explicit clauses on harassment based on perceived or actual HIV, displacement, disability and LBTI+ status with clear, confidential reporting channels that can be accessed remotely. Through consultation and co-creation with young leaders from these specific communities you can ensure that policies are relevant and survivor-centered. Advocate for and help draft internal organizational policies that specifically name and address GBV based on intersecting identities. Ensure whistle-blower protection is accessible and have mechanisms for anonymous reporting and victim protection and support mechanisms.

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[44] Hivos 2025.

Exercise 5.7. Developing a Safety and Security Plan

Objective: To help identify GBV risks for feminist led organizations, and to develop a safety and security plan.

Participants: Staff, members and/or partners of a feminist led organization / collective.

Method: Small group discussions and / or plenary exchange.

Materials: Optional, but can include: flipchart paper, post-its, masking tape, markers, notebooks, pencils.

Estimated duration: 2-3 hours.

This exercise can be done in a plenary session with your whole group or in smaller groups of 3-5 people after which you can share results in a plenary.

Steps:

1. Reflect and discuss on GBV risks and threats that come with your organization or collective being feminist led and how the threats might manifest.

2. List groups or individuals who may target or perpetrate violence on members of your organization. For each identified group, list types of violence they are likely to perpetrate (e.g., physical, emotional/psychological, sexual and economic), both online and offline.

3. Brainstorm actions your organization can take for safety and security regarding identified threats. Make sure to include a review of your policies, ensuring they are responsive to the needs and priorities of young women in their diversities. If your organization does not have a policy, advocate to have one and develop it together with members of your organization/group.

4. List of groups or individuals who may support you and type of support they could give in which situations.

5. Develop a plan of action with shared roles and responsibilities and periodic routine for progress review.

5.5 Conclusion

Navigating GBV and patriarchal power dynamics is an ongoing journey for young feminist leaders. It requires constant learning, courage, and a deep commitment to the feminist principles of equality, justice, and safety. By prioritizing personal well–being, developing strategic responses, and engaging in robust collective action, young feminists can not only protect themselves but also transform the very structures that perpetuate inequality, paving the way for truly inclusive and equitable leadership for generations to come. Your leadership is vital: protect it, nurture it, and wield it with purpose!

Practical Action: Host regular "safe space" dialogues within the organization/ group where young feminist leaders can discuss power dynamics and GBV experiences without fear of reprisal, facilitated by trained, intersectional allies.

6

Advocacy and Feminist
Policy
Engagement
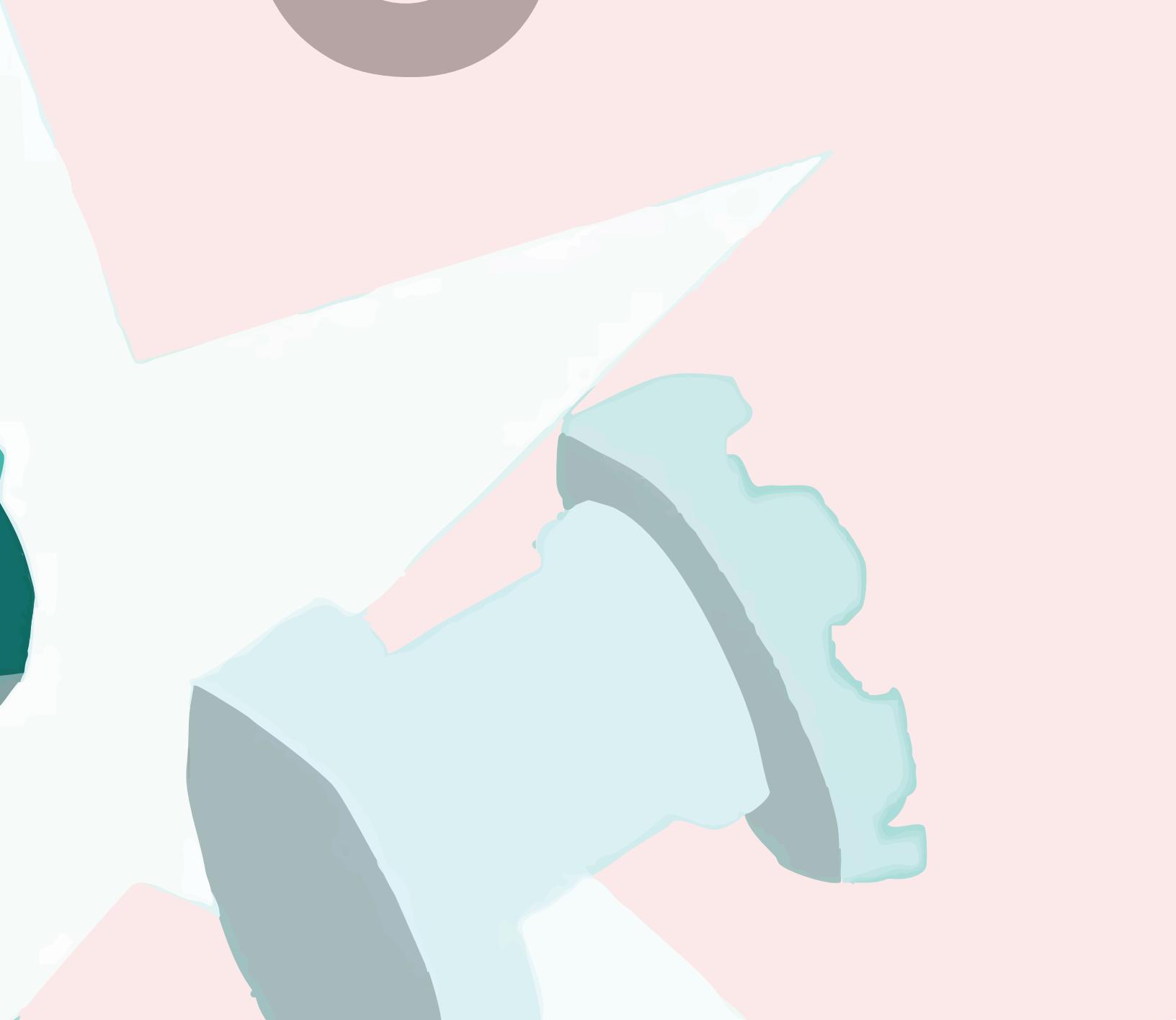
As a feminist leader, you amplify voices and create room for shared voices towards solution while providing a sense of ownership and participation in communities. Advocacy and policy engagement are at the core of your individual activism and collective initiatives at community, national, regional and international level. This chapter provides actionable ways you can take to make advocacy and policy engagement impactful, and promote social justice grounded in feminist principles, including the practices of Feminist Change Agents as Catalysts of Transformative Change and role of social media and influencers in feminist leadership.

Feminist leadership is about embodying feminist values in how we lead and organize, both individually and collectively. For advocacy and policy engagement, this means challenging power structures, promoting inclusion, ensuring accountability, working towards transformative change understanding the context and considering the diverse contexts, challenges, and opportunities that young women face. While the core principles of feminist leadership and policy engagement remain consistent, their application and the specific strategies employed will vary significantly.

When applying feminist principles to the advocacy process this includes: sharing power and collective leadership; transparency and accountability; nurturing and care; and actively working to identify and challenge biases (conscious and unconscious) within the advocacy team, in messaging, and in engagement strategies.

6.1 Feminist Policy Engagement and Advocacy

Feminist policy engagement focuses on formal laws, regulations, and state institutions and broadens the understanding of «policy» to include:

1. **Informal Norms and Practices:** Recognizing that social norms, cultural practices, and community dynamics can be as impactful as formal laws. Advocacy extends to challenging harmful traditions and promoting positive social norms.

2. **Budgetary Policy:** Critically analyzing how resources are allocated (or withheld) and advocating for gender-responsive budgeting that directly funds gender equality initiatives and addresses the needs of marginalized groups.

3. **Private Sector Engagement:** Engaging with the private sector to advocate for ethical supply chains, equal pay, non-discriminatory hiring practices, and corporate social responsibility from a feminist perspective.

4. **Aiming for Transformative Change:** While celebrating incremental wins, it consistently pushes for deeper, systemic shifts that alter the root causes of inequality. This means asking questions repeatedly: why are things the way they are? Who benefits? Who is harmed? And how can policies lead to genuine social justice and liberation, not just superficial equality?

> In Honduras we have had a 12-year struggle for the liberation of emergency contraceptive pills. It took a lot of persistence and resilience to overcome strong institutional and cultural barriers.

The 7 We Lead Principles on rightsholders engagement: Nothing About Us without Us:

The We Lead consortium with rightsholders from nine countries developed seven principles on meaningful engagement of rightsholders living with HIV, identifying as LBTI+, with a disability, and/or those that are affected by displacement. These principles, which you can apply as a feminist leader are:

1. **Open, inclusive, safe and accessible environment for all rightsholders**.

Ensuring that implementation, coordination and governance platforms at the local, national, regional and global levels foster a safe and enabling environment for accessible, inclusive and meaningful rightsholder participation.

2. **Rightsholders at the heart of decision-making.**

Ensuring that rightsholders, in their diversity, are represented in all decision-making platforms. E.g., that their diverse ideas and perspectives (drawing on their knowledge, skills and abilities) are listened to, respected, valued and integrated into all decision-making processes at all levels.

3. **Power is balanced and is for good.**

Partnerships are built on trust, mutually respectful and non-tokenistic between rightsholders and partners, host organisations and Communities of Action. Power is shared and respective contributions by rightsholders are valued.

4. **Rightsholders' capacity and leadership is strengthened.**

Rightsholders' agency is strengthened by supporting their leadership and capacity development, considering their existing skills, experience, knowledge, diversity and intersectional needs to enhance meaningful participation and collaboration at the local, national, regions and global levels.

5. **Rightsholders are represented in all participation and advocacy spaces at all levels.**

Rightsholders' participation is intentional, balanced and guaranteed through specific, reserved and designated seats made available for them at local, regional and global levels. They will not have to compete for representation with Partners, Host Organisations and Communities of Action.

6. **Rightsholders participation is well resourced.**

Engagement is a right, and rightsholders will not have to spend out of pocket for the realisation of this right. Arranging the budget for the engagement of young people will be the obligation of the engaging entity/entities.

7. **The We Lead Consortium is accountable.**

To ensure far reaching engagement, Country Coordination Teams, Regional Coordination Teams, Working Groups, Global Coordination Teams and Steering Committee, Community Of Action Facilitators, partners and Host Organisations will have built in accountability, reporting and feedback mechanisms towards the realisation of these principles.

Source: Restless Development and We Lead (n.d.)

Feminist advocacy involves strategies infused with feminist values to advance young women's sexual and reproductive health and rights and address the impact of policies on young women's lives. It is about connecting with and being grounded in local struggles and building legitimacy from those experiencing injustices. It involves lobbying, campaigning, research, communication, and alliance–building. Constructing an advocacy roadmap includes:

1. **Advocacy Strategy:** How issues are chosen, how partners are engaged, how messages are crafted, how policy targets are approached, how feedback from communities is integrated.

2. **Policy Positions:** Do your policy recommendations genuinely reflect intersectional needs? Are they transformative?

3. **Identify Gaps and Actions:** For each value, identify 1–2 specific, actionable steps the organization can take to better align its practices with that value in its advocacy work. Example: If "Transparency" is a value, an action could be: "Regularly share updates on policy engagement progress (and setbacks) with all team members and community partners."

6.2 Practical Steps and Tools for Advocacy and Policy Engagement

Advocacy and policy engagement starts with identifying the specific problem you want to address and defining your objectives. This can be done by using tools like problem and solutions trees to analyze root causes, setting clear SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time–bound) objectives and prioritizing issues based on potential impact and alignment with your group's expertise.

Another useful tool is Stakeholder Mapping and Analysis, which is about identifying key actors who can influence your issue (policymakers, community leaders, media, other organizations), understanding their interests, power and potential for support or opposition, and developing strategies for engaging with the different stakeholders.

In order to engage in evidence–based advocacy you need to gather data and evidence to support your arguments. You can strengthen the evidence base by conducting research, collecting stories, and utilizing existing information, as well as through analysis and collaboration with research platforms.

Exercise 6.1. Intersectional Stakeholder Mapping and Power Analysis

Objective: To ensure that advocacy efforts are truly inclusive and address the needs of the most marginalized, while also strategically understanding power.

Participants: Staff, members and/or partners of an organization / group.

Method: Group discussions or plenary session.

Materials: Flipchart paper, masking tape, markers, notebooks / paper, pencils.

Estimated duration: 90–120 minutes.

The following steps can be taken in groups of 4–6 people or in a plenary session:

Steps:

1. **Choose a Policy Issue:** Select a specific advocacy issue the organization is working on (e.g., increasing access to SRHR services, advocating for gender-responsive budgeting).

2. **Brainstorm Stakeholders:** List all individuals, groups, and institutions that are affected by, or can influence, this policy issue.

3. **Apply Intersectional Lens:** For each stakeholder group, consider their intersecting identities (e.g., not just "youth", but "young women with disabilities", "young queer people in rural areas", "young women displaced by conflict"). How do these intersections create unique needs or vulnerabilities related to the policy?

4. **Power Grid:** Create a grid to map stakeholders based on:

   • Interest: High/Medium/Low interest in your issue.

   • Influence: High/Medium/Low power to affect the policy (either positively or negatively).

   • Position: For/Against/Neutral.

5. **Develop Engagement Strategies:** Based on the mapping, design tailored engagement strategies for different stakeholder groups, ensuring that the voices of the most marginalized are actively sought out and amplified, not just consulted.

Example: For young women with disabilities, an engagement strategy might involve: partnering with Disabled People's Organizations (DPO), providing communication in accessible formats, holding meetings in physically accessible locations, and supporting them to directly lobby policymakers.

This exercise is designed to be iterative, meaning it should be revisited regularly as contexts change and as the involved individuals and organization grow. The goal is not just to "do" feminist leadership, but to be feminist leaders in all aspects of advocacy and policy engagement.

Exercise 6.2. Feedback Loop

Objective: To establish or strengthen mechanisms for accountability, particularly to the communities and constituencies the organization claims to represent in its advocacy.

Participants: Staff, members and/or partners of an organization / group.

Method: Group discussions, plenary exchange.

Materials: Flipchart paper, masking tape, markers, notebooks / paper, pencils.

Estimated duration: 90-120 minutes.

The following steps can be taken in groups of 4-6 people, in a plenary session, or a combination of both:

Steps:

1. **Define Accountability:** As a team, discuss what "accountability" means in a feminist advocacy context (beyond just financial accountability). It includes accountability for representing diverse voices, transparent decision-making, and impactful change.

2. **Map Existing Feedback Loops:** Identify current ways the organization receives feedback from staff, partners, and communities (e.g., surveys, meetings, complaints mechanisms).

3. **Identify Gaps:** Where are the gaps in your feedback loops, especially from marginalized groups or those who may feel disempowered?

4. **Design New Mechanisms:** Brainstorm and implement new, intentional ways to ensure continuous feedback, particularly on advocacy strategies and policy positions.

Examples: Regular community listening sessions (with accessible formats and languages), anonymous feedback channels, dedicated "accountability check-ins" with partner organizations, co-creation workshops with affected communities for policy recommendations.

5. **Commit to Responsiveness:** Discuss how the organization will genuinely integrate this feedback into its advocacy strategies, even if it means changing direction or admitting mistakes.

6. **Risk Assessment & Collective Care Planning for Advocacy:** Proactively identify risks associated with advocacy (especially for marginalized groups) and to develop strategies for collective care and protection.

7. **Brainstorm Risks:** As a team, list potential risks associated with your advocacy and policy engagement work. Consider:

- Personal Risks: Harassment, threats, burnout, emotional toll.
- Organizational Risks: Reputational damage, funding withdrawal, legal challenges.
- Community Risks: Retaliation against beneficiaries, exacerbating tensions.
- Specific Risks for Marginalized Groups: Increased discrimination, violence, or ostracization for young women with disabilities, LBTI+ youth, etc., when they speak out.

8. **Severity and Likelihood:** For each risk, assess its likelihood and potential severity.

9. **Mitigation Strategies:** Develop concrete steps to mitigate each risk.

Examples: Digital security training, safe space protocols, peer support systems, legal aid access, media training for sensitive messaging, clear communication strategies to manage expectations, "buddy systems" for high-risk engagements, advocating for protective policies.

10. **Collective Care Plan:** Develop a written plan for how the organization will support the well-being of its members and partners involved in advocacy.

Examples: Mandatory rest days, access to counselling, flexible work arrangements, regular check-ins, celebration of small wins, creating a culture that normalizes asking for support.

This exercise is designed to be iterative, meaning it should be revisited regularly as contexts change and as the involved individuals and organization grow. The goal is not just to "do" feminist leadership, but to be feminist leaders in all aspects of advocacy and policy engagement.

Exercise 6.3. Gathering Data

Objective: To gather existing data and define ways to generate new information.

Participants: Staff, members and/or partners of your organization / group.

Method: Group discussions and plenary session.

Materials: Flipchart paper, masking tape, markers, notebooks / paper, pencils.

Estimated duration: 90-120 minutes.

In plenary:

1. Define 3 to 4 topics you want to address with your organization / group. E.g., Access to SRHR services for young girls with a disability, GBV in displaced communities, access to antiretroviral therapy for young women with HIV, criminalization of LBTI+ communities.

2. Form 3 to 4 groups of 3–5 people and assign each group one of the topics.

In groups of 3–5 people:

3. Each group gathers data for the topic they got assigned. Make a summary of the most important information that you gathered.

4. Often data is difficult to find, specifically if it is on a taboo topic for a marginalized community. Regularly, data is not disaggregated by age, gender, LBTI+ identity, disability, HIV status or displacement. Develop a list of information that you think is lacking and ideas on how to gather that data (e.g., research methodologies and approaches). Check out Restless Development's Youth-Led Research Methodology, which is a way to shift power from traditional researchers to those who may have previously been the "subject" of research.

In plenary:

5. Each groups shares key points from their group discussions; other groups give feedback and share information they might have on the topics of each group. Make sure to discuss the following questions:

   A. What challenges have you experienced gathering the data?

   B. What information gaps have you identified?

   C. How do you propose to fill the information gaps?

Now you are ready to develop advocacy strategies and activities, such as:

- **Lobbying and Policy Dialogue:** Engaging directly with policymakers, participating in consultations, and presenting proposals.

- **Campaigning:** Raising awareness, mobilizing public support, and pressuring decision-makers through various tactics (e.g., public events, protests, online campaigns).

- **Media Engagement:** Utilizing traditional and social media to amplify messages and shape public discourse.

- **Community Mobilization:** Engaging grassroots communities and ensuring that advocacy is grounded in lived experiences.

- **Legal Action:** Challenging discriminatory laws and advocating for legal reform.

Practical Advocacy Strategies

1. Direct Lobbying:

Identify 2–3 key policymakers most likely to be receptive or who have direct influence over your issue. Request meetings (in person or virtual). Go prepared with your policy brief and clear asks. Listen more than you speak. Build relationships over time, not just for one meeting. Follow up with a thank-you note and reiteration of your ask.

2. Coalition Building & Joint Statements:

Unite with other organizations for collective impact; a joint statement from multiple groups carries more weight than individual efforts. As tactics you can use formal and informal meetings with potential partners, shared policy positions, joint press conferences, social media campaigns, coordinated actions (e.g., submitting joint comments on a draft law). Be willing to compromise on minor points for the greater good of the coalition.

3. Inside-Outside Strategy:

Combine direct lobbying ("inside" work) with public pressure and mobilization ("outside" work). While you're meeting with policymakers, your social media team might be running a campaign to raise public awareness and put pressure on those same policymakers. Public rallies or petitions can back up your private discussions. Coordinate messaging and timing between your "inside" and "outside" teams.

4. Leveraging Regional and International Platforms:

If national advocacy is stalled, consider elevating your issue to regional bodies (e.g., African Union mechanisms, regional human rights courts) or international bodies (e.g., UN Human Rights Council, CEDAW Committee, CSW). You can submit shadow reports to UN treaty bodies, participate in side events at international conferences, engage with regional parliamentary forums. This requires understanding international human rights frameworks and finding partners with experience in international advocacy.

5. Budget Advocacy:

Analyze government budgets to see where money is allocated (or not allocated) for gender equality and specific services (e.g., SRHR for young women). Propose specific budget lines or reallocations. Advocate for gender-responsive budgeting practices. This requires some basic understanding of public finance and often collaboration with economists or financial experts.

6. Public Education & Awareness Campaigns:

Develop a multi-platform campaign to educate the public and build broad support. These can be social media campaigns, public forums/webinars, community workshops, infographics, short videos, op-eds in newspapers, radio interviews. Use relatable language and focus on the impact on real people.

Exercise 6.4. Developing your own Awareness Campaign

Objective: **Guiding** young women leaders through building an awareness campaign step–by–step.

Participants: Anybody from your group.

Method: Group work.

Materials: Online and off–line tools for campaign making.

Estimated duration: Depends on the length of the campaign.

Step 1: Define your Campaign Purpose. To define the issue and goals of your campaign respond to the following questions:

a. What issue or cause do you want to raise awareness about? E.g., Increase awareness of young women's leadership, encourage participation in leadership programs, mental health awareness, environmental protection.
b. Why is this issue important to you and your community? Explain the impact and significance of this issue…
c. What specific change or action do you want to achieve? Be specific about your desired outcomes…

Tips:

• Choose an issue you're genuinely passionate about

• Make your goal specific and measurable

• Consider what change is realistic within your timeframe

Step 2: Identify your Target Audience. To identify who you want to reach, answer the following questions:

a. Who is your primary audience? E.g., students, young adults, policy makers, working professionals / entrepreneurs, families / parents, general community.
b. Describe your audience in more detail: age (range), gender, health status, special abilities, migration status, interests, values, challenges they face, etc.
c. Where does you audience spend time? E.g., social media, schools / universities, workplaces, community centers, online forums, local events, etc.

Tips:

• Be specific ("everyone" is not a target audience)

• Consider what motivates your audience to take action

• Think about how they prefer to receive information

Step 3: Craft your Key Messages. To craft compelling, memorable messages, answer the following questions:

a. What is your main message? (Keep it simple and memorable). E.g., "Inspire young women to pursue leadership roles", "Break the silence on mental health."

b. List 3 key supporting points.

c. What specific action do you want people to take? E.g., share your story, sign a petition, attend your work.

d. What emotional connection will resonate with your audience? I.e., how will you make your audience care? What emotions will you appeal to?

e. Identify and address common barriers. E.g., barriers that prevent young women from taking on leadership roles, such as lack of confidence, social expectations, limited access to opportunities.

Tips:

• Keep your main message under 10 words if possible

• Use language your audience uses and understands

• Make your call to action specific and achievable

• Use a consistent and positive tone: focus on empowerment, inspiration and positive impact of diverse leadership.

• Test your message with a few people first

Step 4: Choose your Campaign Tactics. To choose the right strategies and content, answer the following questions:

a. Which tactics will you use? This can be one or more of the following: social media campaign, online petition, events (webinars, workshops, panel discussions), partner with organizations, personal storytelling, media outreach, educational materials, grassroot organizing, peer learning.

b. Which 2–3 tactics will you prioritize and why? Explain why these tactics are best for you audience and goals.

c. What types of content will you create? E.g., infographics, videos, blogs, posts, podcasts, etc.

Tips:

• Choose tactics that match with your audience profile and location

• Start with 2–3 tactics and do them well rather than trying everything

• Consider your resources and skills when choosing tactics

• Plan for tactics that can amplify each other

• Engage with local and national media outlets to share your campaign's message and highlight the importance of your goal

Step 5: Resources & Timeline. To plan practical elements, answer the following questions:

a. What budget do you have available (or need to raise)? E.g., $0, $100-$500, $500-$1000, etc. Consider printing costs, venue fees, promotional materials, website hosting, social media advertising, event expenses, etc.

b. What skills or resources do you need to learn or acquire? E.g., graphic design, social media management, audiovisual production, public speaking, writing, event planning, fund–raising.

c. Who will help you? List team members and their roles, including financers / fundraiser, social media manager, event coordinator, and volunteers.

d. How long will your campaign run? E.g., 1-2 weeks, 1 month, 2-3 months, 6 months, ongoing.
e. List 3-5 key milestones or deadlines. E.g., week 1: planning, week 2: content creation; week 3: launch social media; week 4: first event; week 5: partner outreach; week 6: evaluation; etc.

Tips:
- Start small, think big: begin with what you have and grow gradually. Many successful campaigns started with zero budget but a lot of creative resourcefulness.
- Leverage free tools: use Canva for design, Instagram for reach, Google Docs for collaboration, Zoom for meetings.
- Build strategic partnerships: connect with local (women) organizations, NGOs, community groups, businesses, who share your mission. They might share resources, venues or expertise.
- Create a realistic timeline: always add buffer time for unexpected delays. Consider holidays, school schedules, and other potentially competing events when planning your launch.
- Document everything: Keep track of expenses, hours spent, resource contributions. This helps with future planning and shows efficiency to potential supporters.

Step 6: Success Metrics. To define how you will measure impact, answer the following questions:
a. What does success look like for your campaign? Define expected outcomes. E.g., Increase awareness of mental health resources by 40%" or "get 200 students to sign our petition"
b. How will you measure awareness and engagement? Consider social media metrics (likes, shares, comments), survey responses, event attendance, website visits, petition signatures
c. What behavioral changes are you hoping to see? E.g., people seeking mental health support, students joining your group, policy changes, increased participation in events.
d. How will you track progress during the campaign? E.g., daily, weekly, bi-weekly or monthly check-ins on social media analytics, feedback forms, reports, meeting attendance, media coverage, etc.
e. What will you do if you are not meeting your goals? Make a backup plan, which could include adjust messaging, try new tactics, pivot to different platforms, seek additional help, extend timeline, etc.
f. How will you celebrate and share you impact? E.g., Thank contributors, share success stories, create impact reports, plan celebration events, document lessons learned.

Tips:
- Set SMART goals: make your metrics (indicators) Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound. "Raise awareness" is vague; "Get 500 people to follow our Instagram by the end of the month" is SMART.
- Track both numbers and stories: quantitative data (likes, shares, attendance) shows reach, qualitative feedback (testimonials, changed behaviors) shows real impact.
- Use free analytics tools such as Instagram insights, google analytics, Facebook page insights and survey tools like Google Forms.
- Create a simple monitoring sheet to track key metrics weekly. Visual progress helps keep your team motivated and focused.
- Celebrate small wins: acknowledge progress along the way, not just final outcomes. Reaching 100 followers or getting your first media mention deserves recognition!
- Plan your evaluation: schedule time at the end to reflect on what worked, what didn't, and what you would do differently. This learning is valuable for future campaigns.

Practical Action:
For communication it is key to craft clear, compelling, and accessible messages that resonate with target audiences, using storytelling to connect with emotions and highlight the human impact of issues. You can leverage social media for widespread dissemination.

Practical Action:
Apply Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) techniques to track progress towards your objectives, assess the impact of your advocacy efforts and reflect on successes and challenges to inform future strategies.

Practical Action:
Specifically focus on risk assessment and mitigation by identifying potential risks to your advocacy work and to yourself/allies, and develop strategies to avoid or reduce negative impacts.

Specific Considerations for Young Feminist Leaders

1. **Discrimination based on Age Gender and other social identities:**
Acknowledge that young women often face discrimination based on gender, age, disability, sexual preferences, displacement, HIV status and other social identities, which can impact their leadership potential and access to resources.

2. **Mentorship and Skill Development:**
Emphasizing the importance of mentorship from established feminist leaders and providing opportunities for skills development (e.g., public speaking, negotiation, strategic planning).

3. **Leveraging Technology:**
Utilizing social media and digital platforms for networking, information sharing, mobilization, and advocacy.

4. **Intergenerational Dialogue:**
Building bridges and fostering collaboration between young feminists and older generations of activists.

5. **Funding and Resources:**
Addressing the critical gaps in funding and resources for young women's leadership initiatives.

Good Practice: Art–Activism and Rights Holder Leadership in Mozambique

In Mozambique, a strong advocacy practice combines art–activism, such as mural painting and testimonials during the 16 Days of Activism, with the active leadership of rights holders. Murals allow communities, especially women, to express emotions and messages on issues like violence and discrimination in a lasting and visible way, reaching wide audiences without individuals having to expose themselves directly.

At the same time, rights holders are intentionally involved in leadership and decision-making within programs. Through tailored training, capacity-building, and safe spaces adapted to the Mozambican context, many rights holders have grown into leaders who now influence others. This process has increased confidence, visibility, and participation, while also strengthening advocacy impact.

Although challenges remain, such as social resistance, stigma, and insecurity, the creation and replication of safe spaces have helped overcome these barriers. The visible transformation of rights holders into leaders, alongside the lasting power of art–activism, makes this a proven and effective practice for advocacy and policy engagement in Mozambique.

Tips for Policy Advocacy in Practice

1. **Start Local, Think Global:**

Don't underestimate the power of local advocacy. Policy changes at municipal, district, or provincial levels often have immediate impact and can be stepping stones to national change. Identify local councils, traditional leaders, or community decision-makers. Engage them on issues relevant to young women in your immediate area (e.g., safe public spaces, access to local health clinics, water and sanitation). Try community mapping exercises to identify local power structures and key influencers.

2. **Know Your Issue Inside Out, with an Intersectional Lens:**

Be a subject matter expert on your chosen issue. Generic advocacy is less effective. Go beyond surface-level statistics. Research how the issue affects different groups of young women (e.g., how period poverty affects young women with disabilities vs. those in displacement). Collect qualitative data (stories, lived experiences). Use the "Five Why's" analysis tool (asking "why?" five times to get to root causes), create a mini-fact sheet or FAQ document for your issue, including intersectional impacts.

3. **Build Your Tribe and Allies:**

Advocacy is not a solo mission. Collaboration amplifies impact and provides support. Identify other youth groups, women's organizations, disability rights groups, LBTI+ organizations, or even progressive religious/traditional leaders who share your goals. Don't be afraid to reach out and propose joint actions. Try the Alliance Agreement Template; a simple one-pager outlining shared goals, roles, and communication protocols.

4. **Embrace Digital Advocacy (Safely & Strategically):**

Social media and online platforms are powerful mobilization tools for young feminists globally. Use platforms strategically. For awareness, use Instagram/TikTok. For rapid mobilization and sharing factual updates, use X, Signal and WhatsApp. For deeper discussions, consider online forums or webinars. Use tools such as the Social media content calendar, Digital security checklist (e.g., using strong passwords, two-factor authentication, VPNs for sensitive work), Signal or other encrypted messaging apps for sensitive conversations.

5. **Be Relentlessly Persistent, But Flexible:**

Policy change is slow. Don't get discouraged by initial rejections. Follow up respectfully. If one door closes, find another. Be open to adapting your tactics or messaging based on new information or shifting political landscapes. Sometimes a policy "win" looks different than what you initially envisioned (e.g., a pilot program instead of national legislation). Use an advocacy progress tracker; a simple spreadsheet to log meetings, outcomes, next steps, and follow-ups.

6. **Prioritize Self-Care and Collective Care:**

Advocacy can be emotionally draining. You cannot pour from an empty cup. Build self-care into your routine (even 15 mins of quiet time). Encourage peers to check in on each other. Celebrate small wins. Don't glorify burnout. Use tools such as the self-care checklist, buddy system for emotionally challenging advocacy tasks, and group debriefing sessions after intense engagements.

Good Practice from Niger: Co-creation of inclusive advocacy spaces with young women with disabilities in view of promoting their SRHR

The co-creation of inclusive advocacy spaces with young women living with disabilities as part of the We Lead program in Niger was born from the observation of their systematic exclusion from discussions on sexual and reproductive health and rights. In response, a participatory process was implemented, beginning with the identification and mobilization of these young women, the organization of listening workshops to gather their needs, adapted training on SRH-R, human rights and feminist leadership, as well as their integration into formal advocacy spaces and community media. Thanks to this initiative, they were able to make their voices heard, influence local decisions, strengthen their skills and be recognized as agents of change. Supported by CSOs, local authorities, peer educators, the media, NGO SongES and the COA, this inclusive approach overcame obstacles such as stigma, physical inaccessibility and lack of information, thanks to targeted awareness-raising actions, logistical adaptations and communication. Based on the principles of feminist leadership, it is considered a sustainable, replicable good practice that brings social transformation.

Examples of Practical Advocacy Tools

- **Policy Briefs:**
To clearly and concisely present your policy problem, evidence, and recommended solution to policymakers make short and punchy policy briefs of 1–2 pages maximum. Use clear headings, bullet points, and strong visuals (if possible). Start with an executive summary. The content should cover a: **Problem Statement:** What is the issue? Why is it urgent? **Evidence:** Key data, statistics, and 1–2 powerful stories/quotes (anonymized if needed). **Proposed Solution:** Your clear policy recommendation. **Call to Action:** What do you want the policymaker to do? **Contact Info:** Your organization/group's details.

- **Elevator Pitch:**
A concise, persuasive summary of your issue and solution, delivered in the time it takes to ride an elevator (30–60 seconds). Focus on the "hook" (why they should care), the "problem", and the "solution". Practice until it feels natural. Tailor it to who you're speaking with. Here is an example on SRHR for young women with disabilities: "Did you know that many young women with disabilities can't access basic reproductive health information because it's not available in accessible formats for those with a visual or hearing impairment? We're advocating for mandatory accessible SRHR materials in all public health clinics so all young women can make informed choices about their bodies."

- **Digital Storytelling Toolkit:**
To create compelling narratives that resonate emotionally and raise awareness. You can use tools such as (i) **Canva or Adobe Express** for creating visually appealing social media graphics, infographics, and short videos with templates; **(ii) CapCut or InShot**, which are user–friendly mobile video editing apps, for short, impactful video clips (e.g., interviews, explainers); **(iii) Polls or quizzes** on social media to engage audiences and gather quick insights; and **(iv) Personal Testimonies,** which are powerful, humanizing stories – Always ensure safety, anonymity (if requested), and consent.

- **Press Release / Media Advisory Template:**
To inform media about an event, report launch, or policy position. Use strong headlines. Include a clear "who, what, when, where, why" for media advisories. For press releases, include a quote from a key spokesperson (you!). Look up examples from reputable NGOs. Use standard press release format.

- **Meeting Agenda & Briefing Notes:**
To ensure your meetings with policymakers are productive and focused. Send a clear agenda in advance and prepare 1–2-page briefing notes for your team to review before the meeting, summarizing key talking points, asks, and potential responses. Include your organization's details, meeting purpose, key objectives, talking points (three main points), specific asks, and desired next steps.

Exercise 6.4. Developing Your Key Advocacy Asks

Objective: To develop clear advocacy asks.

Participants: Staff, members and/or partners of your organization / group.

Method: Group discussions and plenary session.

Materials: Flipchart paper, masking tape, markers, notebooks / paper, pencils.

Estimated duration: 90 minutes.

In the same groups from the previous exercise:

1. Analyze the information you gathered in the previous exercise and develop a list of key advocacy tasks:

   a. What would be your advocacy asks?
   b. Whom would you ask?
   c. How would you do it?

2. Design a social media graphic that could raise awareness among your target audience (e.g., local or national government, general public, private companies).

3. Develop an elevator pitch (see above) to present your social media graphic.

In plenary:

4. Each group displays their social media graphic on the wall and presents it to the other groups. Each participant can give feedback and help to fine tune the social media graphic.

Source: Restless Development 2024e. See the complete Youth Power Training Toolkit at: https://youthcollective. restlessdevelopment.org/youth-power-training-toolkit

6.3 Advocacy Spaces at Regional and Global Level

There are various networks, conferences and other advocacy spaces at regional and global level that lobby for SRHR, women empowerment and gender equality. We recommend you to check out the following:

- **United Nations Commission on the Status of Women:** The CSW is the principal global intergovernmental body exclusively dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women. SRHR is often a strong focus within its annual priority and review themes. CSW holds an annual event in March at the UN Headquarters in New York. At the regional level, FEMNET organizes the CSW Africa Disrupt every year.

- **RHNK AYSRHR Conference:** This Pan-African Adolescent and Youth SRHR scientific conference happens every year in June in Mombasa-Kenya, organized by the Reproductive Health Network Kenya.

- **AWID International Forum:** Is a global space that gives participants an opportunity to network, build alliances, celebrate, and learn in a stimulating, emotive and safe atmosphere. Is organized every four years.

- **Women Deliver Conference:** Conference organized to align around shared feminist direction, reclaim power, and deliver real-world outcomes by strategizing, connecting, and taking action for a more just, feminist future.

- **International Conference on Family Planning:** Often considered the world's largest scientific conference on family planning and reproductive health. It brings together researchers, policymakers, advocates, health providers, and community members. It is typically held every 2–3 years. The ICFP 2025 theme was "Equity Through Action: Advancing Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights for All"; a major opportunity for global SRHR advocacy.

- **African Conference on Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights and Family Well-being (ACSHR):** A significant regional conference focusing on SRHR issues specific to the African continent. It gathers diverse stakeholders to discuss challenges and solutions.

- **International Workshop on Adolescence, SRHR & HIV:** This workshop focuses specifically on the intersection of adolescent health, sexual and reproductive health, and HIV, often with a strong focus on low to middle-income countries. The 9th International Workshop on Adolescence, SRHR & HIV 2025 took place in Gaborone, Botswana and represented a key event for young feminists working on youth-specific SRHR and HIV prevention

- **STI & HIV World Congress (ISSTDR & IUSTI Joint Meeting):** This major scientific and clinical congress focuses on sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV, including aspects related to sexual health and rights. The STI & HIV 2025 World Congress theme was "Sexual Health for All."

- **Asia Pacific Conference on Reproductive and Sexual Health and Rights (APCRSHR):** A biennial gathering for civil society, youth, academia, and governments in the Asia-Pacific region concerned about SRHR.

- **UN Commission on Population and Development (CPD):** While not exclusively an SRHR conference, CPD is an annual intergovernmental forum at the UN that reviews progress on the Program of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), with SRHR as a central pillar. It's a key policy space. The CPD holds annual sessions, typically in April at the UN Headquarters in New York. Keep an eye on the UN's official calendar for specific dates each year.

- **Conferences on SRHR in Humanitarian Settings:** Increasingly, there are dedicated conferences focusing on the unique SRHR challenges in humanitarian crises, for refugees, and displaced populations. E.g., The 2nd Global Conference on Sexual Health, Reproductive Rights, and Gender Equity in Refugee and Humanitarian Crises (often a yearly event). Keep an eye on organizations like UNFPA, UNHCR, and specific NGOs working in this space.

- **Reproductive Health and Infertility Conference.** This conference unites leading clinicians, researchers, fertility specialists, embryologists, gynecologists, endocrinologists, nurses, psychologists, and allied health professionals from around the world. Attendees explore the latest breakthroughs in assisted reproductive technologies (ART), fertility preservation, reproductive genetics, hormonal therapies, maternal health, and the impact of lifestyle and environment on fertility.

- See this **link** for more Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights events.

There are various reasons on why attending (or engaging remotely with) these conferences, matters for young feminist leaders:

• **Direct Policy Engagement:** Many conferences include high-level events such as ministerial meetings, and opportunities for civil society to present statements, submit recommendations, and engage directly with policymakers.

• **Networking and Alliance Building:** These are prime opportunities to connect with other young feminist leaders, established women's rights organizations, UN agencies, funders, and experts from around the globe.

• **Knowledge Exchange:** They allow you to learn about the latest research, best practices, and innovative programming in SRHR from diverse contexts.

• **Agenda Setting:** They contribute to shaping the global discourse and future priorities in SRHR.

• **Visibility and Voice:** By participating actively you can ensure that the unique perspectives and needs of young women, especially those from marginalized communities, are heard and integrated into global discussions.

• **Resource Mobilization:** You can use the event to identify potential partners and funding opportunities for your advocacy work.

• **Solidarity and Inspiration:** They allow you to gain energy and solidarity from connecting with a global community dedicated to SRHR.

Here are some tips for you, as a young feminist leader, when engaging with SRHR Conferences:

• **Research Thoroughly:** Understand the conference theme, sub-themes, and the participating stakeholders.

• **Prepare Your Message:** Develop concise policy asks and be ready to share your advocacy priorities (including an elevator pitch, see above).

• **Network Strategically:** Identify key individuals or organizations you want to connect with in advance.

• **Leverage Digital Platforms:** Follow the conference hashtags, engage in online discussions, and share key takeaways even if you can't attend in person.

• **Submit Abstracts/Proposals:** Many conferences welcome submissions from young researchers and advocates to present their work.

• **Seek Sponsorships/Scholarships:** Many major conferences offer support for young people and those from low-income countries to attend or support in follow up initiatives.

• **Follow Up:** Post-conference, nurture the connections made and continue to advocate for the issues discussed.

Remember: every advocacy journey is unique. Be adaptive, stay resilient, and always center the voices and experiences of the young women you are advocating for. Your passion and unique perspective as a young feminist leader are your greatest assets!

Good Practice from Uganda: Young Women Championing SRHR

Change came by chance one day when Doreen noticed the Alliance of Women Advocating for Change (AWAC) mapping out Adolescent Girls and Young Women (AGYW) in her community Osukuru in Tororo district to be trained as SRHR Champions under the We Lead project. Through the project, Doreen has gained a wide range of life experiences, knowledge and techniques of handling sensitive issues like rape, child marriage, discrimination and gender–based violence: "As SRHR Champion, I have become even more empowered and enlightened on my sexual and reproductive health rights, I have become very assertive. With all hope lost, I sought solace in AWAC. The trainings […] and psychosocial support I received during the monthly engagements at AWAC, changed me instantly, completely and permanently." Doreen is now a determined SRHR advocate in her community, helping other AGYW to access equitable and quality adolescent SRHR services and products such as condoms and other family planning methods.

Source: We Lead impact stories 2022

6.4 The Role of Feminist Change Agents

Feminist change agents and their practices are key in promoting social change and challenging the status quo. There are many feminist role models. One of the roles of the older ones is to coach, mentor, support younger generations; intergenerational dialogue is important for sharing knowledge and experiences, as well as to develop new strategies together. Some change agents (often young feminist leaders like you!) are social media influencers, using the platform responsibly by identifying with people, sharing important content to discuss taboo topics and shift negative attitudes.

Feminist change agents, operating within a framework of feminist leadership, play a crucial and transformative role in advancing Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights for young women who face multiple, intersecting forms of marginalization. These groups include young women with disabilities, LBTI+ groups, young women living with HIV, and young women from displaced communities. Here's a breakdown of their roles:

1. **Centering Lived Experiences and Intersectional Analysis:**

- **Elevating Voices:** Feminist change agents prioritize the voices and experiences of marginalized young women. They ensure that advocacy efforts are not merely "for" them but genuinely led "by" them. This means creating safe and accessible spaces for them to share their realities, needs, and solutions.

- **Intersectionality in Practice:** Deeply understand and apply intersectional analysis, recognizing that a young woman's SRHR challenges are compounded by the simultaneous experience of being young, a woman, a LBTI+ person, having a disability, living with HIV, or being displaced. They challenge single-issue approaches and advocate for holistic solutions.

- **Deconstructing Power:** Critically examine and deconstruct power imbalances within communities, healthcare systems, and policy-making bodies that perpetuate discrimination and exclusion. This includes challenging ableism, homophobia, HIV-related stigma, and xenophobia.

2. **Inclusive Policy Development:**

Feminist change agents advocate for the development and implementation of SRHR policies that are explicitly inclusive and responsive to the unique needs of diverse groups. This includes pushing for:

- **Accessible Information:** SRHR information in accessible formats for young women with disabilities. E.g., Braille, sign language, easy-to-read language, digital formats, use of drawings, photography and other visuals.

- **Non-discriminatory Services:** Healthcare providers trained in disability competency, LBTI+ sensitivity, and non-stigmatizing care for young women living with HIV.

- **Culturally Sensitive and Trauma-Informed Care:** Services that acknowledge the specific traumas and cultural backgrounds of young women from displaced communities.

- **Legal Protections:** Advocating for the decriminalization of same-sex relationships (where applicable), anti-discrimination laws for people with disabilities, and protection for displaced persons.

Good Practice: Male engagement as a strategy to challenge norms

In Uganda, We Lead partner FEMNET engaged male gatekeepers and journalists to foster positive SRHR reporting. Moreover, at community level, they engaged religious and cultural leaders, who are traditionally men, to push for the SRHR agenda for young women in their diversity.

3. **Challenging Discriminatory Norms and Practices:**

Feminist Change Agents actively work to dismantle harmful social norms, stereotypes, and discriminatory practices that deny young women their SRHR. This might involve:

- **Combating Asexualization and Infantilization:** Challenging the perception of young women with disabilities as asexual or incapable of making their own decisions.

- **Addressing Stigma:** Working to reduce stigma associated with HIV and LBTI+, creating a supportive environment for open discussions and access to services.

- **Advocating for Bodily Autonomy:** Resisting forced sterilization, forced abortions, or forced contraception, which disproportionately affect women with disabilities and those living with HIV.

- **Combating Gender-Based Violence (GBV):** Addressing the heightened risk of GBV, including sexual violence, faced by all these marginalized groups, particularly in displaced settings.

- **Budget Advocacy:** Advocating for adequate funding and resources to ensure that SRHR services are available, accessible, acceptable, and of high quality for specific populations. This includes earmarking funds for disability-friendly facilities, specialized training, and outreach programs.

4. **Capacity Building and Empowerment:**

- **Peer-to-Peer Support Networks:** Facilitating and strengthening peer support networks where young women can share experiences, build solidarity, and learn from each other.

- **Leadership Development:** Providing training and mentorship opportunities to empower young women to become SRHR advocates and leaders themselves. This includes skills in policy analysis, communication, negotiation, and community organizing.

- **Knowledge and Skill Transfer:** Equipping young women with the knowledge and skills

Good Practice: Advocacy Actions by Women Rightsholders in the Garin Kaka Refugee Camp (Maradi, Niger)

In the Garin Kaka refugee camp, located in Maradi, Niger, rights holders, primarily refugee women, led a remarkable advocacy effort to improve access to maternal health care. Supported and trained by the CNJFL (National Coalition of Young Girls Leaders) team, particularly in leadership, advocacy, communication, and the fight against gender-based violence, these women gained the confidence to express a crucial need: that of a midwife in the camp's health center. Their request was motivated by a cultural reluctance to be consulted by men, particularly for childbirth. With the support of the local Garin Kaka town hall, which validated their approach, the advocacy effort was forwarded to the Maradi town hall, which is responsible for recruitment. Two months later, in 2021, a midwife was assigned to the health center, where she continues to work to this day. This initiative, which mobilized rights holders, the CNJFL, and local authorities, illustrates how empowering women can lead to concrete, sustainable, and replicable results. It was made possible thanks to the commitment of the women involved, the openness of the authorities, and a strong prior collaboration between the CNJFL and the Maradi city hall, which helped overcome barriers to accessing decision-making bodies. This good practice demonstrates that, when well-informed and supported, women can play a central role in defending their rights and improving their living conditions.

to navigate healthcare systems, understand their rights, and make informed decisions about their bodies and sexualities.

- **Digital Advocacy:** Supporting young women in leveraging digital platforms and social media for advocacy, awareness-raising, and connecting with broader movements.

5. Partnership and Collaboration:

- **Building Coalitions:** Forging strong alliances with disability rights organizations, LBTI+ rights groups, HIV/AIDS networks, humanitarian organizations, and other feminist movements.
- **Engaging Allies:** Educating and mobilizing allies, including healthcare providers, community leaders, and policymakers, to champion the SRHR of marginalized groups.
- **Intergenerational Dialogue:** Fostering dialogue and collaboration between young feminist leaders and established feminist activists and organizations to ensure continuity and share lessons learned.

6. Challenging Systemic Barriers:

- **Addressing Legal and Regulatory Gaps:** Identifying and challenging laws and policies that create barriers to SRHR access, such as age of consent laws that hinder access to services for young people, or punitive laws against same-sex relationships.
- **Improving Healthcare Provider Competency:** Advocating for mandatory training for healthcare providers on the specific SRHR needs and rights of young women with disabilities, those living with HIV, being displaced or from the LBTI+ community. This includes addressing biases and discrimination in service delivery.
- **Strengthening Data Collection:** Pushing for disaggregated data collection to better understand the specific SRHR needs and challenges of specific groups, which often go uncounted or are invisible in general statistics.

7. Amplifying Transnational Solidarity and Shared Learning:

- While national contexts differ, many challenges faced by young women (e.g., GBV, climate vulnerability, lack of SRHR access) are shared across borders.
- Policy engagement allows young feminists to connect their local struggles to global movements. By engaging in policy at different levels, you can share strategies, learn from successes and failures in other countries, and build powerful transnational solidarity networks. This shared learning strengthens advocacy worldwide and allows for collective action on global issues.

8. Building the Next Generation of Global Leaders for Justice:

- The world needs diverse, ethical, and effective leaders to tackle complex global challenges.
- Policy engagement serves as a critical training ground for young women, equipping them with the skills, networks, and political acumen to become future leaders not just in their countries, but on the global stage. It fosters their ability to analyze complex issues, build consensus, negotiate, and drive transformative change, ensuring a more just and feminist future for all.
- In essence, for young women globally, policy engagement is not an option but a necessity for liberation and equality. It is the mechanism through which they translate their lived experiences into systemic change, challenging patriarchal power wherever it exists, and collectively building a world where the rights and autonomy of all young women are recognized and realized.
- In essence, feminist change agents in feminist leadership act as catalysts for systemic change. They challenge the status quo, champion inclusion, empower the marginalized, and advocate for a world where all young women, regardless of their intersecting identities, can fully realize their SRHR.

6.5 The Role of Feminist Social Media Influencers

Many young feminists are on social media. The rise of social media has given birth to a new kind of public figure: the influencer. These individuals, who have cultivated large, engaged online followers, play an increasingly significant role in shaping public opinion and, consequently, have a growing (and complex) role in young women's feminist leadership, advocacy, and policy engagement. From a feminist leadership lens, leveraging influencers for policy engagement is not simply about reaching a wider audience; it's about doing so strategically, ethically, and in a way that aligns with feminist values of authenticity, inclusion, and systemic change. The role of feminist social media influencers include:

1. **Amplifying Messages and Expanding Reach:** Social media influencers (bloggers, YouTubers, TikTokers, Instagrammers, podcasters) can rapidly disseminate feminist messages and calls to action to millions of followers who might not engage with traditional advocacy channels or even mainstream news. They can reach younger, diverse, and niche audiences effectively. This broadens the base of support for feminist causes, moving beyond existing activist circles. It's crucial for awareness-raising, especially on issues that are often stigmatized or ignored by mainstream media. It can help normalize feminist concepts and counter anti-gender narratives by presenting them in accessible, relatable ways.

2. **Humanizing Issues and Sharing Lived Experiences:** Influencers often share personal stories, unfiltered opinions, and "behind-the-scenes" content, fostering a sense of authenticity and relatability with their audience. This can humanize abstract policy issues, connecting them to real-life impacts. This aligns with the "personal is political" principle of feminism. When an influencer speaks about the challenges of accessing SRHR services, the impact of period poverty, or experiences of digital violence, it resonates deeply with their audience, making policy asks more tangible and urgent. This is particularly powerful for issues where stigma prevents open discussion.

3. **Mobilizing Grassroots Support and Action:** Beyond just awareness, influencers can issue direct calls to action, urging followers to sign petitions, contact their representatives, participate in online campaigns, attend protests, or donate to feminist causes. Their endorsement can convert passive followers into active participants. This taps into "power with" by leveraging their community-building capacity. It can activate younger generations who are already digitally engaged, translating online solidarity into tangible political pressure on policymakers.

Opportunities for Young Queer Women – The Lebanon Case

Being a queer woman, especially if it shows or you express it, is very difficult in Lebanon, due to conservative, religious and homophobic entities/voices. It is hard to be openly queer and not receive backlash. However, there are civil society spaces, such as queer organizations or organizations that get funding to work on queer issues, which work on creating spaces for queer women and for them to take up leadership positions. There was a time in the local queer movement where this was challenged and brought to light. Today, queer organizations are not led only by gay cismen, but by a variety of gender identities.

4. **Challenging Norms and Stereotypes:** Many influencers build their platforms by challenging conventional beauty standards, gender roles, or social norms. They can promote body positivity, diverse gender expressions, healthy relationships, and critical thinking about societal expectations. This is crucial for "cultural policy engagement". While not direct legislation, shifts in social norms are foundational to achieving gender equality. Influencers contribute to a more inclusive public discourse, making it easier for policymakers to pass progressive legislation without facing as much social backlash.

5. **Reaching Policymakers Indirectly and Directly:** Policymakers themselves often monitor social media trends and influential voices. A popular influencer speaking on an issue can put it on a politician's radar. Some influencers also engage directly with policymakers on platforms like X or during virtual events. This offers a complementary channel to traditional lobbying. While traditional advocacy builds relationships in private, influencer campaigns create public pressure and demonstrate popular support, which policymakers cannot easily ignore.

Feminist Social Media Influencers – A Good Practice from FEMNET

FEMNET works with ambassadors throughout eastern, northern, and southern Africa. Each region has different needs and focuses, though some issues cut across all. Ambassadors act as influencers: they spread key messages, drive campaigns, use hashtags, and support calls to action. They are profiled, trained on key principles and often feature in TV interviews. While some also use this role for their own political visibility, it remains mutually beneficial, as the message reaches wider audiences and policy makers; the narrative continues to circulate.

Interview with FEMNET, April 2025

Ethical and Strategic Considerations for Influencers

Influencers are a powerful asset for young women's feminist leadership in advocacy and policy engagement. They can break through traditional barriers, humanize issues, mobilize large audiences, and drive public discourse. However, their engagement must be strategic, ethical, and rooted in core feminist principles to ensure that their influence genuinely contributes to dismantling patriarchal power and achieving transformative change, rather than merely creating fleeting trends or reinforcing superficial activism. Here are some tips on how to approach working with influencers (or as influencers yourself) with critical consideration:

1. **Authenticity and Alignment of Values:**

- Consideration: Is the influencer genuinely committed to feminist values and the specific cause, or is it a one-off "brand partnership"? Does their past content align with feminist principles (e.g., intersectionality, anti-capitalism, anti-racism)? "Feminism washing" is a real risk.

- Feminist Leadership: Prioritize genuine passion and consistent values over sheer follower count. Develop clear agreements on messaging, compensation (if any), and ethical guidelines. Avoid partnerships that feel transactional or compromise the feminist message.

2. **Intersectionality and Representation:**

- Consideration: Does the influencer's platform represent diverse voices and experiences, or does it perpetuate a narrow, privileged view of womanhood? Are they amplifying marginalized voices or speaking for them?

- Feminist Leadership: Seek out influencers who are themselves from marginalized communities or who consistently uplift intersectional perspectives. Ensure that the campaign amplifies lived experiences directly, rather than just having a mainstream influencer speak on behalf of others.

3. **"Slacktivism" vs. Sustainable Engagement:**

- Consideration: Will the influencer's call to action lead to meaningful, sustained engagement, or just a fleeting trend?

- Feminist Leadership: Collaborate with influencers to design campaigns that encourage deeper action; signing petitions, contacting local representatives, sharing stories, as well as attending community meetings. Link online actions to offline organizing efforts.

4. **Digital Safety and Well-being:**

- Consideration: Influencers, especially those advocating for feminist causes, are often targets of intense online harassment and digital violence. Are they prepared for this? What support can be offered?

- Feminist Leadership: Prioritize the influencer's safety and well-being. Discuss potential risks, provide digital security advice, and offer emotional support. Collaborate on a crisis communication plan in case of backlash.

5. **Commercialization and Funding:**

- Consideration: How will the influencer be compensated, if at all? Is it ethical for feminist advocacy to pay influencers, and if so, how does that align with grassroots principles?

- Feminist Leadership: Be transparent about any financial arrangements. Explore models where influencers contribute pro bono or where compensation is explicitly tied to demonstrable impact for the cause. Seek to build long-term, values-driven relationships rather than purely transactional ones.

6. Narrative Control and Misinformation:

- Consideration: Once a message is out, the influencer has control over their platform. How can the feminist organization ensure accuracy and prevent misinterpretation, especially with complex policy issues? What if the influencer later shifts their views?

- Feminist Leadership: Provide clear, concise, and evidence-based briefing materials. Engage in ongoing dialogue. Focus on influencers who have a track record of responsible communication and commitment to the truth.

6.6 Conclusion

In essence, Advocacy and Feminist Policy Engagement, seen through a feminist leadership lens, is a dynamic, ethical, and strategically conscious approach to social change. It's about embodying feminist values in every step of the advocacy journey, ensuring that the process of change is as just and equitable as the outcome it seeks to achieve

Intergenerational Dialogue on Feminist Advocacy

For more information on Feminist Advocacy check out this video from We Lead partner Restless Development (2021) in which young feminist activist Nino Ugrekhelidze and feminist activist and scholar Andrea Parra from the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) discuss the changing architecture and context of advocacy and feminist movements, including:

- The 4th World Conference on Women held in 1995 in Beijing where sexual and reproductive rights were presented as human rights for the first time.

- The clear call to political action after the Beijing conference.

- Feminist advocacy being about creating concrete actions for change.

- Traditional policy advocacy, such as law suits, shadow reports, civil society monitoring.

- Young feminist using new more alternative advocacy tools.

- Young feminists centering care in activism unlike earlier movements.

- Young feminists facing backlash from rise in far right and anti-rights groups.

- The need to build new strategies to defend feminists in digital spaces.

- Traditional advocacy spaces not being designed for young people.

- The UN representing a possible vehicle to advocate for change locally.

- Formal institutions being able to learn a lot from movement organizing led by young people.

- Trusting yourself and looking for your community: "You are not alone!"

- Believing in the collective power of youth.

"Young people cannot be excluded from conversations that impact their lives. Nothing for us without us!"

7

Feminist Accountability Mechanisms

for Sustainable Resource Mobilization and Management

As a feminist leader, your ability to mobilize, manage, and account for resources is a core tenet of feminist leadership itself. A feminist accountability mechanism in resource mobilization and management is a combination of policy and practice ensuring compliance to your organization's policies and administrative practices for donors and investors, young women in their diversity, as well as the communities you lead. Sometimes this will be in compliance with donors and investors requirements, as well as existing laws and policy regulations in your country and communities you lead and work with. Some of the components of these feminist accountability mechanisms include consultation and consensus-building with young women on resources and support they need, inclusion of diverse young women in all processes, and mobilization of diverse resources in ways that uphold feminist values and foster independence. By mastering these mechanisms, you will not only ensure the longevity and impact of your leadership but also embody the very principles of feminist leadership.

This chapter explores how you can build robust and values-driven accountability mechanisms. Navigating the complexities of funding, partnerships, and impact demands a holistic approach to accountability. It goes beyond mere financial compliance to encompass accountability to the communities you serve, to your feminist principles, and to the transformative change you seek. As anti-rights movements gain ground and civic space shrinks, transparent and ethical resource practices are not just good governance; they are a vital counterforce, building trust and legitimacy within your movements.

This chapter will equip you with practical insights and tools to:

- Strategically mobilize diverse resources in ways that uphold feminist values and foster independence.

- Implement transparent and ethical financial management practices that prioritize sustainability and impact.

- Cultivate comprehensive accountability mechanisms that strengthen relationships with communities, partners, and funders, fostering a culture of trust and shared ownership.

By mastering these mechanisms, you will not only ensure the longevity and impact of your leadership but also embody the very principles of fairness, equity, and transparency that are at the heart of feminist leadership.

See also Restless Development's youth-led accountability toolkit:
https://restlessdevelopment.org/2020/06/youth-leadership/

7.1 Key Concepts

Resource mobilization is the ability of a group to gain resources and to mobilize people towards accomplishing the group's goals. Growing in terms of budget is a major part of resource mobilization, but acquiring new people and connections is important too: in-kind contributions (gifts or services), knowledge, connections, information, experience and friendships can go a long way to advancing your goal! Relationships matter, and taking time to build genuine relationships that are founded in trust is never a waste of time. Resources, primarily money, is a form of power. Part of the reason we mobilize resources is not just to sustain our work but also to shift the balance of power by shifting resources from those who hold a lot of power to those who hold a little. In that sense, resource mobilization is in itself a form of activism, not just an "add on" or "necessary addition" to young feminist organizing.

Accountability refers to an organization's ability to be guided by good management and financial principles. An accountable organization is one that responsibly reaches out to its community, properly manages its resources, and is able to report back to donors regarding how the funds were used. These organizations are also likely to gain public support, as donors often expect to be regularly informed on how their money has been spent. Additionally, some donors might even request visits to project sites to make sure that their funds are being used in the best and most responsible way possible.

Transparency is about open and participatory communication with internal and external stakeholders regarding an organization's financial and management health. It includes information about the organization's activities, and even financial transactions to stakeholders such as members, board, donors and supporters. Organizations should keep in mind that this is highly important for prospective donors and partners, as transparency assures them of an organization's trustworthiness and honesty to its constituents.

Legitimacy: Different countries have different requirements for recognizing the legal existence of organizations. But regardless of how diverse these requirements are across the world, each country still exercises some level of control over its non-profit organizations. Only those that have been established according to their country's internal laws are considered to be "legitimate". Of course organizations can choose to be registered or not, for various reasons such as registration costs, too much bureaucracy, safety issues, or simply not being recognized for the cause you fight for. Unfortunately, registered organizations are more likely to gain donor support because this means they achieved some level of compliance with their government "standards"

Source: FRIDA 2017).

7.2 Sustainable Resource Mobilization

Apart from accountability, transparency and legitimacy, what is crucial for a sustainable donor–grantee partnership is a genuine commitment to your cause, honest grantee–donor collaboration, and effectiveness in delivering results and introducing change to your donor. It is important to show donors what their financial support can do in very clear terms. Often people cannot imagine the impact. These will collectively grant you with a lasting and healthy donor relationship that is based on mutual trust and understanding.[45]

The same accounts for the relationship with governments. Through the development and implementation of accountability principles, including transparency, you can gain trust for your feminist movement not only from donors but also from government. This will contribute to your movement's legitimacy, which will increase your chances for donor support[46], thus a virtuous circle is created.

Other ways to achieve sustainability in resource mobilization are: diversifying funding sources; local resource mobilization; and ethical donor screening.

Exercise 7.1. Who Gets What?

Objective: To understand the resource mobilization experiences of young women leaders.

Participants: Staff, members and/or partners of your organization / group.

Method: Plenary exchange.

Materials: Notebooks, pencils, character and resource cards.

Estimated duration: 40-60 minutes (110-130 minutes with additional steps)

Preparation:

1. Create 5 characters (printed cards with drawings or name tags) consisting of: a young woman living with HIV, a young woman with a disability, a young displaced woman, a young woman from the LBTI+ community, and a privileged young woman (without stigma).

2. Prepare a Resource Station: 10 cards (or elements) that represent resources, such as food, cash, a training, a scholarship, SRHR service voucher, a transport pass, medicine, a start-up grant, a loan, volunteers / staff, valuable information, access to an expert network, etc.

Steps:

1. Identify five volunteers to assign a character to and two others to be leaders of the Resource Station.

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[45] FRIDA 2017.
[46] Based on semi-structured interview with Restless Development in May, 2025.

2. One by one, each character approaches the resource station and requests the resource(s) they need, explaining why they need them. The other participants observe and take notes of their observations.

3. The leaders of the resource station give or deny resources based on biases common in your community / country. E.g., "Only students with a residency card get this" or "Sorry, no transport pass for people with a disability as you will not be able to enter the bus anyways".

4. After all characters have engaged with the resource station, you can either repeat the game with other volunteers or start with the plenary session.

5. During the plenary exchange, first invite volunteers to reflect on their experiences in engaging with the resource station leaders. Then ask the observers for feedback. Reflect together on the following questions:

   b. Who got more resources and why?

   c. Who got less resources and why?

   d. What feminist accountability practices were demonstrated or breached by both the resource mobilizers and the leaders of the Resource Station.

   e. What does fair resource distribution look like? I.e., how would you redesign the system.

If you want you can bring this exercise a step further (60–90 minutes):

6. Brainstorm on what you could do to ensure feminist leadership accountability in resource mobilization for your cause.

7. Co-create a plan of action with roles and responsibilities and set timelines for progress reporting and review.

7.2.1 Diversify Funding Sources

Feminist organizing takes time and sustained effort to achieve deep systemic change. Therefore, it is tempting to prioritize flexible long-term core funding, i.e., funding that is not tied to specific projects or short timeframes, but supports your organization's vision, core operations, and staff salaries.

However, this type of funding is scarce, especially for young feminist activism. Therefore, as young feminist leader you will have to seek solutions creatively in alternative income sources. By reducing your dependence on one large, potentially patriarchal, donor (who can always

change their priority topics), you can better align with your own mission. In other words, when you are able to diversify the sources of income to your organization, you will increase your autonomy and resilience.

It might seem appealing to apply for big grants, but they are often restricted funds (e.g., money that can only be used for specific purposes). Therefore, it is important to combine this with unrestricted funding (financial support that your organization is free to use as you see fit). Table 7.1 shows different types of funding and the variety of sources they can come from.

Table 7.1 Types of Funding and their Sources

Type of Funding	Characteristics	Sources
Grants	Usually restricted but can also be unrestricted. Mostly project-based and time bound, short-to-medium term funding.	Governments, bi- or multilateral donors, (inter)national NGOs.
Earned income	Unrestricted, short-to-long term funding, for-profit operation, needing different management skills.	Sale of products, fee for services, interest on savings, income from events, membership fees.
Gifts	Unrestricted, short-to-long term funding.	Individual philanthropists, social responsibility money from companies, giving circles, family foundations, crowdfunding, community fundraising, in-kind support.

*Restricted funds can only be used for specific purposes; unrestricted funds can be used freely.
Source: Adapted from FRIDA 2017.

Crowdfunding is the practice of funding a project or venture by raising small amounts of money from a large number of people, typically via the internet. For more information on why and how to set up your own Crowdfunding Campaign see FRIDA's 2017. Toolkit from page 31:

https://youngfeministfund.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/FRIDA-RM-Toolkit-2017.pdf

Prospect research is the process of identifying, researching and profiling potential donors; individual, institutional, family and corporate funders (FRIDA 2017).

Exercise 7.2. Mapping and Broadening your Resource Network

Objective: To create a clear understanding of who is in your network, what resources these relationships bring to your organization, what relations (and resources) are missing and how to develop those.

Participants: Staff / members of your organization / group. Optional: partners and other supporters of your organization / group.

Method: Small group discussions and/or plenary exchange.

Materials: White board, flipchart paper, masking tape, markers / pencils of different colors, notebooks, pens.

Estimated duration: Around 2 hours.

If your group is more than 10 people, you might want to do some of the below steps in smaller groups of 4–5 people. Just make sure to align the results during a plenary session afterwards.

Step 1: Mapping your network (50–70 minutes)

1. Take a flipchart paper and write te name of your organization / group in the center or make a small drawing that represents it, e.g., your logo or another type of icon.

2. Write the initials of people, organizations and other stakeholders that are in your network around it. The better you know them, the closer they should be to you.

3. Draw lines in different colors to show the relationship with each of them:
   a. Color 1 if you are currently receiving financial resources.
   b. Color 2 for possibility to receive / give financial resources.
   c. Color 3 for connections to other resources (you can indicate the type of resource with a symbol next to it).

4. Make the line thicker if you feel you can count on the person / organization and be fully open and transparent, e.g., the thickness of the lines shows the level of trust.

5. Add arrows to represent the degree to which you give or you receive in this relationship. Make the line two-way if reciprocity is equal.

6. In a plenary session, discuss your network map, responding to the following questions (you can make notes on a flipchart/whiteboard):
   a. What do you see when you look at the map as a whole? Any surprises?
   b. What do you notice about the characteristics of the support relationships you have more trust with? And what about those where trust is less?
   c. How did you build each relationship? What comes naturally and what is more challenging in this process for you?
   d. What resources do you need that you are not getting? Why is that?
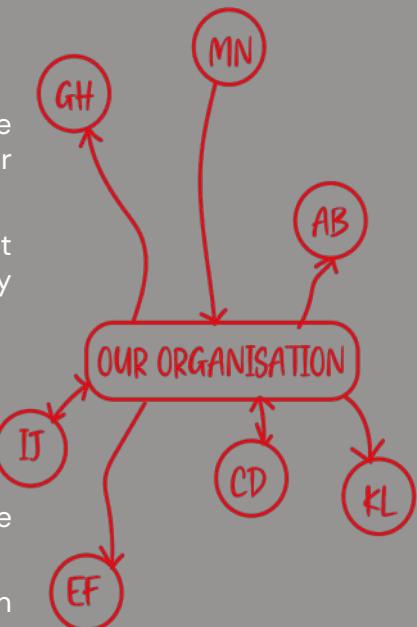
7. Thinking about your organization's vision and goals, and based on the previous discussion, revisit your map and visualize the changes that would best reflect your "desired network" 12 months from now:

    a. What new relationships do you have?

    b. What new kind of support is present?

    c. Which existing relationships have changed and how?

8. Develop an action plan that will help you to get the desired network. Indicate who will contact whom, when and how. Discuss potential challenges and how to deal with them. Don't only think about what support they can give you, but also what you can give!

Source: FRIDA 2017.

Exercise 7.3. Profiling Prospective Donors

Objective: To identify prospective donors who both align with your mission and have the capacity to fund part of your organization's initiatives or operations.

Participants: Staff / members of your organization / group. Optional: partners and other supporters of your organization / group.

Method: Small group discussions and/or plenary exchange.

Materials: White board, flipchart paper, masking tape, markers, notebooks, pens.

Estimated duration: 3-4 hours.

If your group is more than 10 people, you might want to do some of the below steps in smaller groups of 4-5 people. Just make sure to align the results during a plenary session afterwards.

Steps:

1. Make a broad list of potential funders of your organization. You can use the following research methods:

    a. Revise the selected list of funders, the funding portals / donor databases and prospect research resources mentioned on page 47, 22 and 28 respectively of FRIDA's 2017 Toolkit: https://youngfeministfund.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/FRIDA-RM-Toolkit-2017.pdf.

    b. Review who funds your peers / sister organizations by checking their website or contacting them directly.

    c. Conduct a web search and grants database search using keywords that represent your field of work (see also the databases in FRIDA 2017, mentioned in the pre-last point).

    d. Make sure that you look for funding opportunities for all of your projects and the organization in general with this first broad prospect research.

Checklist for potential donors:

    a.   Do they fund my organization's kind of work, in the region where I work?

    b.   What kind of funding do they provide? E.g., for programs, research, organizational strengthening, trainings, seed funding, etc.

    c.   How much do they typically fund?

Note: Make the list broad. If you begin with a focus that's too narrow, you could overlook valuable opportunities. Also, even if a donor isn't the right fit now, getting familiar with its name and priorities can benefit you later as your organization evolves. Along the way, you'll also build a stronger understanding of the funding landscape.

2.   Refine your search by making a priority list based on:

    a.   Mission alignment: The best NGO-funder relationships are those that share a common mission and vision for the world. You can find these on their website.

    b.   Geographical location: Funding is often restricted to a certain continent, region, country or even city.

    c.   Eligibility requirements: Some funders require organizations to have a special charitable tax status from a particular country or to be legally registered in your country (although this is not always the case as human rights funders understand the security and privacy risks involved). Be sure your organization is eligible for funds based on its current legal status. Also make sure you can develop or acquire all necessary documents they ask for when submitting a proposal (e.g., a project budget, financial statements, registration certificate, CVs); without these your proposal will not be taken into consideration.

    d.   Funding needs: Donors have often pre-established the type of funding they will provide. Sometimes they will pay for overhead costs (core funding or operational costs such as rent, utilities, administration). It is more common for donors to fund specific projects. Check their website and annual reports on the type of funding they provide. Also check if they have an open request or call for proposals (RFP / CFP) and analyze if it is what your organization need. You will have more chance when applying for a RFP than with an open application.

    e.   Average grant size: A donor will likely not provide a large portion of your organization's budget, as that makes you too dependent and poses too much risk. Also, they need to make sure that their money is being strategically distributed to advance the causes they are seeking to support. When reviewing requests or calls for proposals (RFP / CFP), make sure that the grant amounts are reasonable and both make sense with your project and operating budget. Do not apply for grants that are more than half of your budget. You can check out a funder's annual report to understand how much they typically grant (this may differ from what is stated on their website).

    f.   Previous grantees: One way to decide if a donor is a good fit is to look at their list of past grantees. You can find these in their annual reports or on their website. Check if they fund similar organizations / projects / budgets and try to find out if they take on new organizations (regularly). It the answer to both is yes, proceed.

    g.   Deadline type: Grants are separated into three different types of deadlines: Hard Deadlines in which a due date is given, Rolling Deadlines in which there is no defined deadline, and Invitation Only (or Pre-selected Only), which means you can only apply if a funder invites you to submit a grant request. You can cultivate funding from any of these deadline types but you must know the deadline type so you apply in the right way. Also, always confirm a deadline with the donor itself as deadlines change regularly.

3. Make an action plan indicating who is going to contact whom, when and how. Amongst others:

   a. Apply to RFPs: Go to the funder's website and check if there is an open RFP. If so, is it by invitation only or are all solicitors welcome to apply? What is the deadline? If it is a rolling deadline, try to find out when applications are actually reviewed, often they have pre-established moments for this. Prioritize those that have the nearest deadline.

   b. Keep yourself informed: Sign up to get notifications and newsletters sent directly to your email from potential donors or other organizations that announce grant opportunities and network events that apply to your case (see FRIDA 2017, page 22). Follow them also on social media.

   c. Establish a relationship: Invite potential funders to your events, send them your newsletter, engage them on social media (carefully), or invite them even for a cup of coffee. In the beginning, ask for advice, not for money (yet).

Source: FRIDA 2017.

Exercise 7.4. Developing Ethical Donor Guidelines

Objective: To enable feminist leaders to develop clear guidelines for vetting potential funders in line with feminist values and principles.

Participants: Staff, members and/or partners of your organization / group.

Method: Small group discussions and/or plenary exchange.

Materials: Flipchart paper, post-its, masking tape, markers, notebooks, pencils.

Estimated duration: 2-3 hours.

If your group is more than 10 people, you might want to do some of the below steps in smaller groups of 4-5 people. Just make sure to align the results during a plenary session afterwards.

Steps:

1. Establish a list of feminist values and principles that are important for your organization.

2. Make a list of all people / entities that provide funding to your organization or projects.

3. For each funder, identify and reflect on how their values and principles align with yours. Don't look only at their mission statement online but also at the type of organizations / projects they finance (you can often find this in their annual plan).

4. Based on the reflection make a list of ethical donor criteria. Include your values / principles, but also indicate what other values would still be acceptable and where you draw the line.

5. Revise your list of prospective donors using these Ethical Donor Guidelines. Collectively rate them on a scale of 10; 0 being minimum and 10 being maximum fit against your feminist values.

6. Discuss a way forward based on the outcome of your reflections.

Source: FRIDA 2017.

7.2.2 Local Resource Mobilization

As said, there are enormous challenges associated with resource mobilization globally. However, the context of each region is different, thus creating varying obstacles but also opportunities. Local resource mobilization is a set of strategies and tools to raise money and other resources from local sources. It starts in your home, in your building, in your street, town or city. These can be direct grants, membership fees, in-kind donations, volunteer support, and many more. Apart from reducing your reliance on external donors, local resource mobilization can often help organizations make progress on various other objectives, such as (FRIDA 2017):

- Increasing awareness about the cause among individuals who are outside of activist or donor circles.

- Building collective ownership and solidarity, e.g., lasting and trusting local support that leads to community action to advance the cause of the organization.

- Boosting the visibility of the organization and its activities.

- Moving supporters, donors and volunteers from one-time supporters to long-term investors in social justice and collective power.

- Transforming access of grassroots groups to funding and support, and increasing the sustainability of local and regional social justice movements.

- Finally, these shifts also help to show how grassroots organizations are conducting local resource mobilization as one tool to challenge and transform internalized beliefs, attitudes, cultural norms, and access to resources.

7.2.3 Ethical Donor Screening

Most donors will not fund your project or organization if your mission and type of work do not align with their mission, vision, priority topics and key strategies. However, there are also funders that are interested in boosting their image or who want to fulfil a corporate social responsibility. To ensure that the source of your funds doesn't undermine your mission, you can develop clear guidelines for vetting potential funders in line with feminist values and principles. This involves research on their values, human rights records, and whether their other investments contradict feminist principles, such as companies involved in arms trade, fossil fuels, or exploitative labor practices. It's about targeting "clean money" and maintaining integrity.

7.3 Ensuring Accountability in Resource Mobilization

Accountability in resource mobilization means being transparent about what you have, using resources wisely, and building collective power. By mapping allies, collaborating, and strengthening your skills, you create sustainable strategies that truly serve your communities.

As young feminist leaders, it is important to remember that resources are not just about money. They also include knowledge, skills, data, expertise, and even people who can support your work in different ways.

Here are some key steps you can take to ensure accountability in resource mobilization:

1. **Map your resources and allies:** Look at the donors, partners, and organizations around you. Revise who you already work with and whom else you could contact. What role could hey play to strengthen your leadership and work? How could you engage them to collaborate? Don't limit yourself to big institutions like the UN or international NGOs like Hivos; local organizations, neighbors, or community groups may have valuable resources.

2. **Think beyond money:** Resources can be: research, reports, networks, expertise, or volunteers. For example, during a 16 Days of Activism campaign, different groups combined their resources. By working together, their impact was bigger than if they had acted alone.

3. **Understand power and influence:** Do a power mapping: Who makes decisions? Who are the influencers at local, national, or organizational levels? Everyone has influence somewhere. Use it strategically to push for feminist priorities. It is not only about financial but also political accountability. See also chapter 3 on this topic.

4. **Strengthen your skills:** Trainings like gender-responsive budgeting can help you see that budgets exist not only at the government level but also in communities and organizations. Build confidence in writing proposals. Even small grant applications can show your accountability and increase trust from donors.

5. **Work for sustainability:** Resource mobilization is not a one-time event. It's about building long-term strategies, rooted in your community and with the people you serve. Always involve rightsholders and allies in planning. This ensures transparency and shared accountability.

6. **Expand your network:** Don't only engage your usual partners. Reaching out to allies outside your core group strengthens your network and increases impact.

7.4 Feminist Accountability Mechanisms for Resource Management

Feminist accountability in resource management includes ensuring that how resources are obtained, allocated, managed internally and programmatically are in line with feminist values and principles, including:

- Ensuring budget allocations are done through inclusive and consultative processes.

- Promoting a shared understanding and collective ownership of available resources.

- Making financial information accessible and understandable to all stakeholders.

- Centering young women's voices to have a genuine voice in how funds are distributed, ensuring that decisions reflect collective priorities and address specific needs of young women from marginalized groups.

- Simplifying budgeting and expenditure reporting.

In this section you will find various examples of feminist leadership accountability mechanisms, such as establishing accountability ethics, inclusive budgeting, prioritizing young women with intersecting vulnerabilities and resources mobilization for emergency situations.

7.4.1 Accountability Ethics

Establishing your own accountability ethics allows you to ensure that your organization will be considered a model of good practice in the civil society community. This means, amongst others, to ensure that the financial and material resources mobilized in the name of your constituents are put to their service and not diverted to serve personal interests; that systems and structures are guided by appropriate codes of conduct to prevent corruption and fraud, as well as to manage disputes and complaints fairly. An example of accountability ethics that feminist organizations can develop and adhere by is provided by The Charter of Feminist Principles for African Feminists published by AWDF in 2007 and reprinted in 2016.

Good Practice: Accountability Ethics from the Charter of Feminist Principles for African Feminists

Some of the institutional ethics that feminist organizations committed to by subscribing the charter are:

- Advocating for openness, transparency, equality and accountability in feminist-led institutions and organizations.

- Affirming that being a feminist institution is not incompatible with being professional, efficient, disciplined and accountable.

- Insisting on and supporting African women's labor rights, including egalitarian governance, fair and equal remuneration and maternity policies.

- Using power and authority responsibly and managing institutional hierarchies with respect for all concerned. We believe that feminist spaces are created to empower and uplift women. At no time should we allow our institutional spaces to degenerate into sites of oppression and undermining of other women.

- Exercising responsible leadership and management of organizations whether in a paid or unpaid capacity and striving to uphold critical feminist values and principles at all times.

- Exercising accountable leadership in feminist organizations taking into consideration the needs of others for self-fulfillment and professional development. This includes creating spaces for power-sharing across-generations.

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Source: AWDF 2007 (reprinted in 2016), https://awdf.org/the-african-feminist-charter
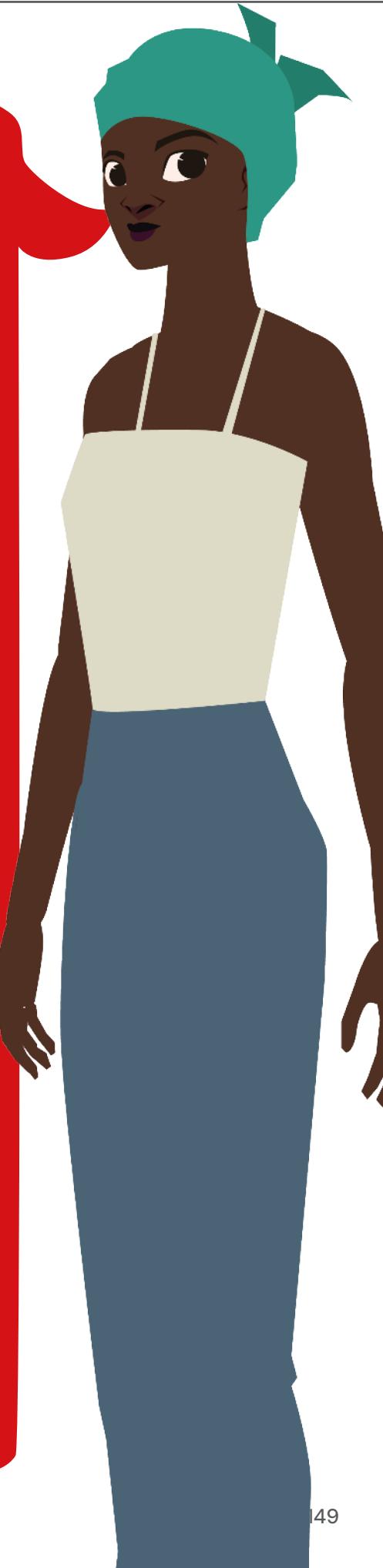
Exercise 7.5. Development of Accountability Ethics for your Organization

Objective: To help participants develop institutional ethics to implement feminist accountability mechanisms in resource mobilization and management.

Participants: Members and/or staff of your organization / group.

Method: Small group discussions, plenary exchange.

Materials: Whiteboard/flipchart, markers, notebooks, pencils, cards with ethics.

Estimated duration: 2 hours.

Preparation:

Make a set of cards with the six institutional ethics from the African Feminist Charter (AWDF 2007) indicated in the good practice box. Six cards; one ethic per card.

Steps:

1. Divide participants into groups of 3-5 people. Share one ethic card per group (or more if you have less than six groups).

2. Each group is to identify a group leader, timekeeper, rapporteur and member to present a summary of their discussions in 3-5 minutes during the plenary session (some roles could be combined in one person).

3. Take 30 minutes to read the ethic, reflect, share your experiences and brainstorm about how that ethic could be applied in your organization. Prepare 3 to 5 possible formulations of that ethic (or more if your discussion leads to more than one related ethic) to propose during the plenary.

4. In a plenary session, each group has 3-5 minutes to present a summary of their group discussions and the ethical statements that came out of it. The other groups can ask questions and provide feedback to jointly refine the formulation of the ethic(s). Note each ethic down on a whiteboard/flipchart.

5. Finalize by reviewing all the ethics and brainstorm on potential additional ethics.

6. Optional: co-create a roadmap for consultations with your organization's partners and other relevant stakeholders to refine and validate the ethics. This moment can also be used for defining an official launch of the ethics in which all relevant parties officially adopt it (e.g., by signing it).

7.4.2 Inclusive Budgeting

Inclusive budgeting is done by involving staff, volunteers, and even community representatives in discussions and decision making about resource acquisition, allocation, expenditure, monitoring and evaluation. This promotes collective ownership, increases transparency, and ensures resources are allocated based on lived realities and needs, not just top-down directives.

Exercise 7.6. Inclusive Budgeting

Objective: To generate ideas for inclusive budgeting for your organization / group.

Participants: Staff, members and/or partners of your organization / group.

Method: Plenary exchange.

Materials: Flipchart / white board.

Estimated duration: 20–30 minutes.

Reflect on what an inclusive budgeting process will look like for young women you are working with (e.g., young women with HIV, with disabilities, displaced or from the LBTI+ community). Write on a flipchart / white board what you are going to:

    a. Start doing to ensure inclusive budget development.

    b. Stop doing to ensure inclusive budget development.

   c. Continue doing to ensure inclusive budget development.

7.4.3 Prioritizing Young Women with Intersecting Vulnerabilities

Part of inclusive budgeting is to allocate resources for inclusive participation. This involves prioritizing resources for young women with intersectional identities and vulnerabilities, even if it means directing a disproportionate number of resources to one or two people to ensure equal inclusion into group processes. For example:

- Contracting a sign language interpreter for people with a hearing impairment or translators to ensure people from different language regions understand each other.

- Developing materials in braille for those with a visual impairment or drawings and audiovisuals for easier understanding.

- Adapting methodologies and processes to ensure participation, even if it means bringing the work to the people or moving it online.

- Stimulating community-led initiatives to ensure adaptability to the community's needs.

7.4.4 Resource Mobilization for Emergency Situations

Resource mobilization in times of an emergencies is not only about raising funds; it is about adapting strategies and budgets; working collectively with local rightsholders and other stakeholders; being transparent and accountable; and ensuring that resources follow lived realities rather than top-down directives. This is shown by the following good practice example.
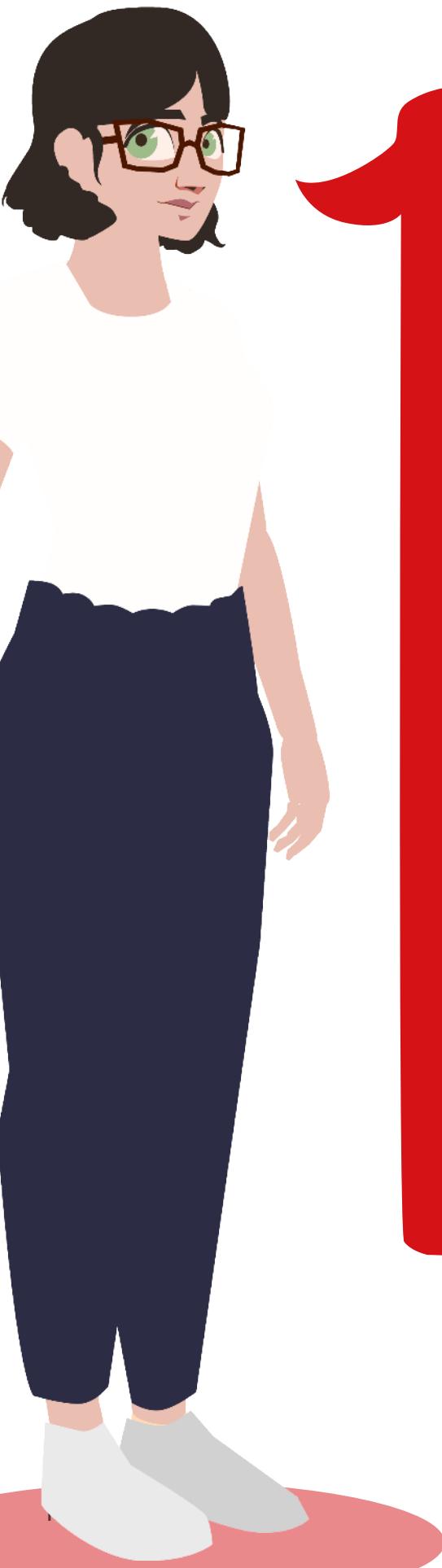
Good Practice: Flexible & Collective Resource Mobilization during Emergencies

When the war in Lebanon escalated, displacement rose sharply. Marsa reached out to local partners, only to find that many had already begun responding. Community–led collectives, guided by solidarity rather than funding, immediately visited temporary housing for internally displaced people to assess needs. These needs varied: some communities urgently required sheets, others water, while many women and girls needed sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) support. Together with partners, Marsa mapped what was already being met and identified the remaining gaps. Marsa asked and got donor approval to reallocate part of the We Lead grant toward emergency needs, which allowed them to provide 2,000 personal hygiene kits for women and girls, including menstrual products and supplies for the cold winter months. This approach succeeded because resources were reallocated transparently, efforts were coordinated with partners to avoid duplication, and limited funds were maximized for collective impact. In 2021/2022, when backlash and attacks displaced members of the queer community, Marsa again mobilized resources to provide urgent support. These experiences showed that, especially in emergencies, resource mobilization requires: (i) Flexibility from donors to adjust budgets quickly, (ii) Decentralizing power to allow local actors to lead (iii) Transparency and collective ownership to ensure accountability.

Exercise 7.7. Resource Mobilization during an Emergency

Objective: To prepare for resource mobilization and accountability in emergence situations.

Participants: Staff, members and/or partners of an organization / group.

Method: Plenary exchange.

Materials: Flipchart / white board, masking tape, markers, notebooks, pencils.

Estimated duration: 50-70 minutes.

Steps:

1. In groups of 4–5 people (or in a plenary session if your group is smaller than 10 people), identify a volunteer to read the Marsa good practice.

2. Reflect on the story and your own experiences on resource mobilization and accountability during emergency situations in your community or country. What went well? What would you do differently next time?

3. Write down (in your notebook or on a flipchart / white board) the steps you would take in case of similar future emergencies.

4. In a plenary session: develop one action plan for future emergencies based on the input from all groups.

7.5 Conclusion: Embracing Radical Accountability for an Inclusive Feminist Future

As young feminist leaders, our journey toward gender justice is defined not just by the policies we advocate for, but by how we build and sustain our movements. For young women who often navigate complex, intersecting forms of marginalization (such as those living with HIV, with disabilities, affected by displacement or young LBTI+ women), the integrity of our accountability mechanisms in resource mobilization and management is key. Feminist accountability is far more than a bureaucratic exercise; it is a radical practice of power redistribution, transparency, and care. It is the living embodiment of our values, ensuring that every resource mobilized, every decision made, and every outcome reported, actively dismantles rather than perpetuates inequality.

Resource mobilization for these vital activities must be rooted in ethical partnerships and community-driven needs, actively challenging traditional power dynamics and advocating for the flexible, inclusive funding that truly empowers grassroots action. Resource management demands participatory budgeting and adaptive planning, prioritizing the holistic care, well-being, and unique accessibility needs of participants and facilitators from these specific groups, rather than imposing rigid, top-down structures.

Young feminist leaders stand at a unique intersection of innovation, lived experience, and an unwavering commitment to justice. By diligently applying these feminist accountability mechanisms, you are not just managing funds; you are cultivating trust, building resilient movements, and setting new standards for accountability. You are ensuring that resources flow where they are most needed, reaching those who have historically been sidelined, and empowering them to lead their own liberation.

Conclusion:

So, what does it mean to lead as a Feminist?
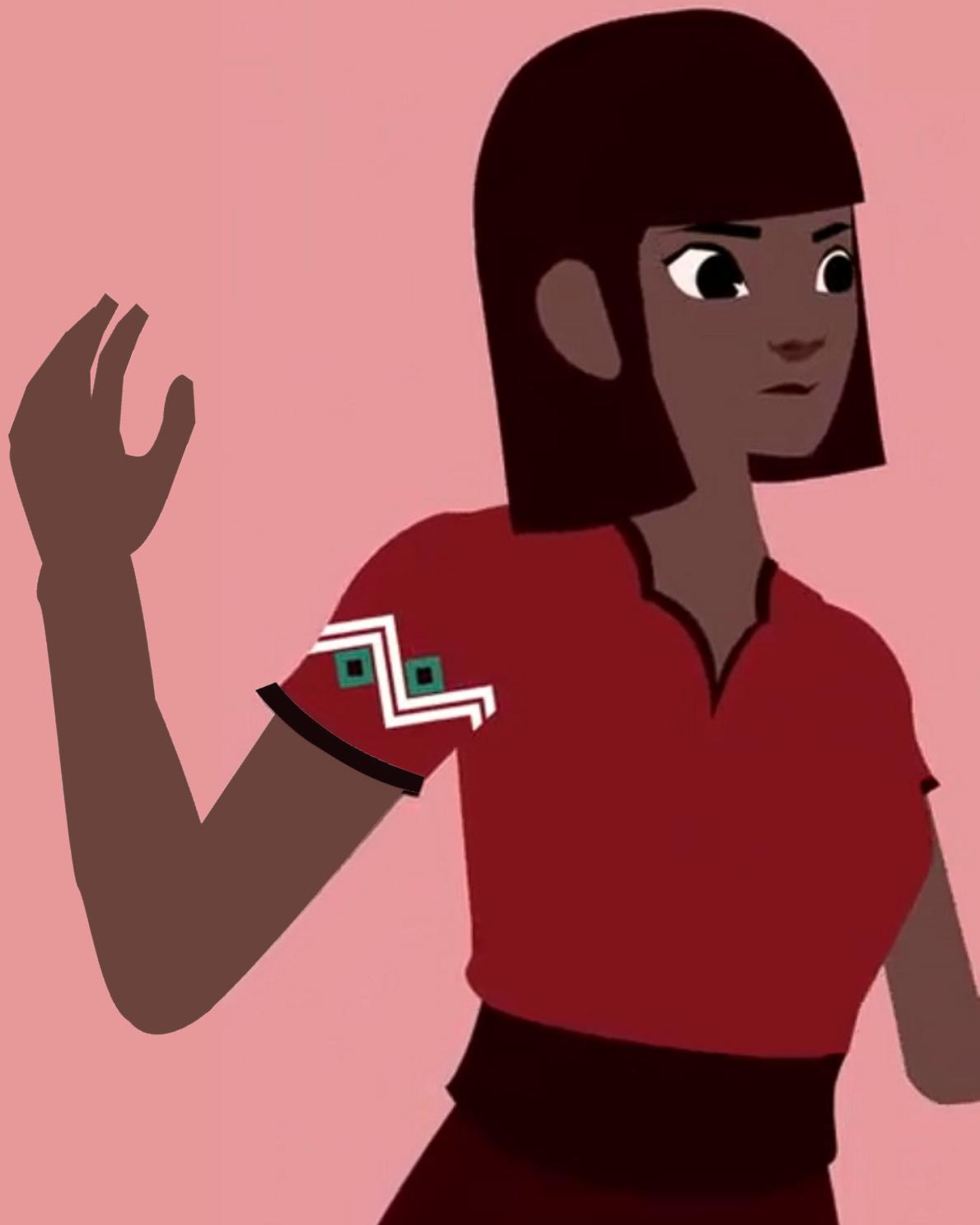
As a feminist leader you should be aware of the power and privileges that you hold and make responsible decisions on how to use and share that power; dismantling the hierarchy, so that you encourage collective decision making.

By allowing diverse voices to claim a seat at the table you will help to break down patriarchy.

As a Feminist Leader you should be self-aware in terms of the privileges and biases that you hold and foster inclusivity by respecting and appreciating people's differences.

Feminist leadership is also about being transparent and accountable for your decisions and actions. Leadership is trust in action.

It is about leading with empathy and caring about other people's wellbeing, especially for those that face challenges.

Moreover, as a feminist leader you should not only care for others but also for yourself, as everyone, including you, is part of a bigger whole.

To conclude:

Feminist Leadership is bold. It is intentional. It is transformational. Let's lead in ways that build power with others, not over them.

We celebrate the feminist leader in you!

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