



Feminist Pocketbook

TIP SHEET #10:

Feminist movement building: Taking a long-term view

The Coalition of Feminist for Social Change (COFEM), created in 2017 to reassert a feminist perspective in violence against women and girls (VAWG) work, is a collective of activists, academics, and practitioners working globally to end VAWG.

This Tip Sheet is part of COFEM's Feminist Pocketbook. For access to the full Pocketbook go to: www.cofemsocialchange.org.

Tip Sheet 10 discusses the importance of local and national feminist and women's movements to catalyse political and transformational change to end gender-based violence (GBV) and promote gender equality. It offers tips for supporting local women's movements to be at the forefront of efforts to address and end GBV.

Key points

- Historically, feminist movements catalysed global efforts to address and prevent gender-based violence (GBV) and promote gender equality. Today, however, mainstream development and humanitarian organisations often lead this work.
- Spaces for feminist movements are shrinking, particularly in a development climate of funding scarcity and the push for prioritising projects with measurable, quantifiable impact, even with short-term funding.
- When pursued from a feminist foundation, efforts to end GBV and create gender equality are inherently political; they need to remain political to promote transformative change.
- For feminist and women's movements to lead efforts to address and end GBV, we need to ensure that local and national women's movements are funded and at the forefront of research, programming and decision-making.

What is the issue?

Over the past three decades, local, national and international women's movements have brought GBV into the public domain as a development, public health, international peace and security, and women's rights issue. This collective, feminist action to improve women's status highlighted and defined the very concept of 'violence against women.' Women's movements articulated that violence against women and girls (VAWG) links directly to women's subordination and elevated

this issue to national and global health and human rights policy agendas. Women's movements also mobilised collective action to shift attitudes and behaviours around GBV, challenge gender inequality at institutional levels, and advocate for creating environments that foster the achievement of women's rights.

More recently, we are experiencing shrinking space for women's movements and rights. Mainstream development and humanitarian organisations

Intersectionality and feminist movement building

Progressive social movements, including feminist movements, are not immune to discrimination and inequality. Internal power hierarchies can exist wherein privileged groups or members dominate the space and exclude the voices of diverse and marginalised women. When only privileged and powerful groups of women, such as those from the Global North and/or with other privileges, have unequal influence over agenda setting and action, the movement cannot represent or respond adequately to the needs of all women. This can result in serious harm, for example, when white feminists and activists perpetuate colonialist and saviour mindsets that further oppress and subordinate women of colour.

Tip Sheet 1 explains that intersectionality means identifying and challenging diverse and intersecting power structures. Feminist movements must explicitly confront internal hierarchies and inequalities to be genuinely inclusive and representative of diverse women. This means those with privilege must step back and engage in critical self-reflection across the movement, from individual activists to leadership and representation at the movement level. Feminist movements must amplify the voices of women who are historically marginalised and support women leaders from diverse backgrounds who actively drive changes in their own lives and communities.

increasingly lead global efforts to address GBV. These mainstream organisations are well funded in comparison to local and national women's organisations, but they often lack a political analysis of gender inequality and GBV. Further, women's organisations are increasingly missing from critical agenda-setting spaces. Large-scale global meetings on women's issues, for example, often do not prioritise, or adequately resource, participation for civil society organisations. In addition, resource and funding scarcity can result in donor and organisations' failure to take the long-term view of ending patriarchy in order to end GBV. Instead, most actors invest and commit to programmes that aim to show tangible and quantifiable results in the short term, as well as 'value for money.'

Why does this matter?

Preventing and ending GBV is inherently political work that requires transforming deeply embedded patriarchal structures. A major consequence of the shrinking space for women's movements is the dilution of the political and transformational dimensions of this work. In response to donors' and policy-makers' demands, much GBV programming has become overly premised on technocratic, data-driven, short-term and quantifiably measurable programming.¹

The shift away from long-term investment in local, national and international women's movements occurs despite research showing that women's movements drive progressive policy and social change around women's rights. Political scientists Htun and Weldon's 2012 global study² demonst-

ed that the presence of a strong and autonomous feminist movement was the single most important factor in catalysing action to recognise and address GBV in a country.

Further, turning points in history — such as the #MeToo movement — do not happen in a vacuum.³ Rather, they are the result of decades of activism and consistent, hard work by women's activists and movements across the world. Women's movements can secure a national response to GBV grounded in legal protections, accessible services and inclusivity of vulnerable groups. These examples are precisely why we need local and national women's movements at the forefront of research, programming and decision-making.

How to create and sustain feminist movements to improve gender equality and address GBV

Strong feminist movements consist of inter-related elements that, together, create greater gender equality and reduce GBV. Developing and enhancing these key elements can transform the structural drivers and dimensions of gender inequality and GBV:

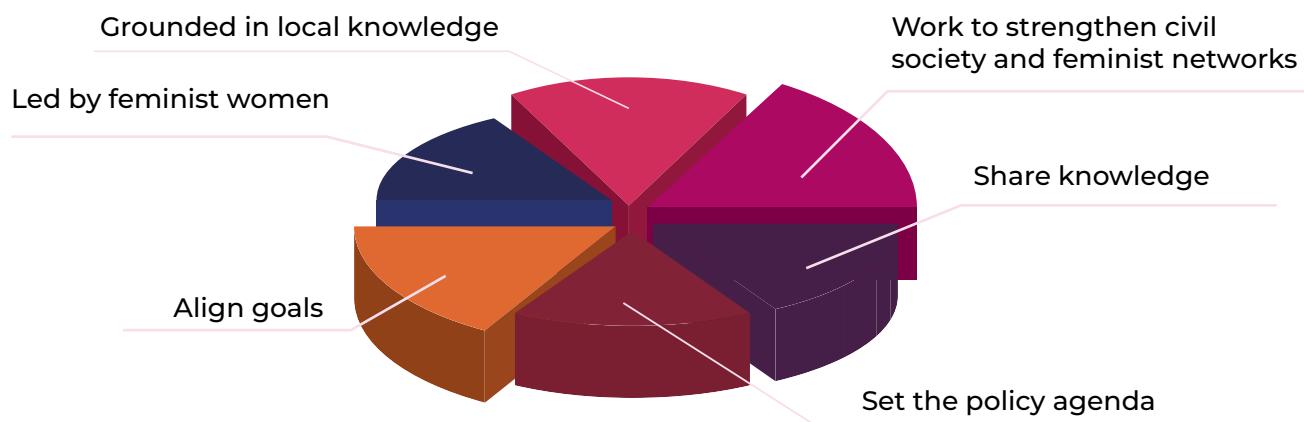
- **Grounded in local knowledge:** Feminist movements have the capacity to use and promote local expertise, knowledge and solutions. Local women and organisations are expert 'knowers' who understand intimately what women's lives are like, what violence looks like in their communities, how people talk about violence, and

¹ See Tip Sheet 5, Feminist approaches to building knowledge and evidence on GBV.

² Htun, M. and Weldon, S. L. (2012), The Civic Origins of Progressive Policy Change: Combating Violence against Women in Global Perspective, 1975–2005, *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 106, No. 3 August.

³ See Tip Sheet 3, Connecting gender-based violence, sexual harassment and everyday sexism.

Figure 1. Elements of strong feminist movements



how unequal power between women and men is manifested and sustained. This local 'knowing' supports programming, service provision and advocacy that is appropriate, relevant and safe.

- **Led by feminist women:** Feminist movements are made up of individual women leaders with the vision, insight and courage to identify the complexities, challenges and possibilities to address priority women's issues in their communities. When diverse groups of women mobilise together, they are better able to lead change and garner widespread support. Inclusive feminist movements are comprised of diverse female leadership, which brings together different types of resources, creativity and the power to enable real and innovative solutions.
- **Work to strengthen civil society and feminist networks:** Strong feminist movements drive social and financial investment towards long-term and sustainable civil society infrastructure. The creation of new organisations, and the strengthening of existing organisations, enables grassroots and local civil society actors to continually develop and implement GBV initiatives as social change occurs and contexts change. Feminist movements necessarily involve network- and alliance-building among women's organisations and other groups for coordinated

and collective action. Collaborative networks allow for holistic action, building on expertise and specialisations across individuals and organisations. Formal and informal networks strengthen and unify the GBV community across diverse geographies and sectors.

- **Share knowledge:** Knowledge-sharing is an essential part of strong feminist movements. Actors and organisations at all levels need to be able to disseminate, receive and learn from the knowledge generated across anti-violence movements. Both local and institutionalised forms of knowledge need to be widely accessible for the variety of women's rights actors to inform their strategies and work collectively towards progressive change.
- **Align goals:** Strong feminist movements include many different actors and organisations who unite through a common goal and collective strategy. More actors lead to greater support toward a common aim, thus increasing the likelihood that a movement will achieve its goals. Further, articulating a shared vision and action plan maximises scarce resources.
- **Set the policy agenda:** Strong feminist movements mobilise masses of public support for advocacy, activism and making concrete political

Case study: Mama Cash

Founded in 1983 in the Netherlands, Mama Cash mobilises resources from individuals and institutions to fund and support women's, girls', trans- and intersex's groups through grant-making and partnership building. Mama Cash's work is driven by the understanding that feminist movements need to be autonomous and well-funded in order to defend and advance women's and human rights

globally. Grantees are supported to identify their own priorities around GBV and are resourced to use innovative, non-traditional mechanisms and strategies to achieve their aims. Mama Cash's unique philosophy towards catalysing and growing feminist movements across the globe contributes to the dismantling of structures that create and maintain GBV.

demands. Social movements have the power to shape public agendas and mobilise political will to demand institutional reforms. Feminist movements can and have influenced policy through a

variety of mechanisms including lobbying, generating lawsuits, educating citizens, organising protests, and establishing large forums or meetings for strategising and collective action.

Practical tips



Practitioners, researchers, donors and policy-makers

- Support and centre local women's rights organisations already working for gender justice and human rights in all GBV efforts.
- Build inclusive alliances, develop shared analyses and establish common cause across and within movements.
- Prioritise the inclusion and empowerment of women from diverse and marginalised backgrounds when engaging with feminist movements and women's rights organisations.

Practitioners

- Build capacity, promote leadership development, centre the voices of marginalised women across feminist platforms, and advocate for inclusive decision-making and participatory coordination structures.
- Support and centre local women's rights organisations already working for gender justice and human rights. Share knowledge with them and provide material, financial and other resources

to nurture their capacity to design and implement their own activities and agendas.

- Strengthen partnerships and networks and cultivate a spirit of collective action rather than competition towards creating the multi-faceted and holistic changes needed to address GBV in the long-term.

Donors and policy-makers

- Ensure a policy and funding balance between short-term technical interventions and longer-term transformative social change approaches that are founded in grassroots activism.
- Invest in strengthening the capacity of local and grassroots women's organisations and leaders.
- Advocate for the bi-directional transfer of knowledge, skills and other expertise between international organisations and local and national civil society organisations.
- Promote and facilitate networks and partnership-building among diverse organisations and actors and across disparate sectors and geographies.



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