



# BUILDING FEMINIST PRACTICE

A POCKETBOOK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS



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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This Pocketbook was informed by several sources: years of activism by feminist movements in Africa, the contributions of facilitating feminist institutes, interviews with human rights defenders in Africa, and a desk review of articles, charters and guidelines. Throughout the Pocketbook, quotes from those interviewed illustrate the content.

We believe that a combination of these sources offers a set of ideas that will enhance the human rights work that human rights defenders are already doing. We acknowledge the collective feminist thinking that has shaped our own thinking and ideas in this Pocketbook. Through its feminist lens, this Pocketbook aims to impact readers' own lives, the organisations they work in, and their programming.

This publication was written as part of the Consortium to Promote Human Rights, Civic Freedoms and Media Development (CHARM) Africa project and its ongoing work to protect and expand the space for civil society organisations and human rights defenders in the region, which includes a special emphasis on frontline actors working on issues related to gender, labour, LGBTI+, and environmental and indigenous rights, as these groups are most likely to bear the brunt of closing civic space. CHARM is funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, SIDA.

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# FOREWORD

We are happy to present Civil Rights Defenders' first-ever Feminist Pocketbook to you.

The idea of creating this Pocketbook is a result of years of collaboration with partner organisations in Africa and around the world. We incorporated a wide range of perspectives to develop a product that can be used in different contexts and by different individuals, groups and organisations.

Our aim is to give you hands-on tools and a resource that will help you reflect upon and adopt feminist principles and practices in your human rights work. We hope that the Pocketbook will complement other existing resources on human rights and feminist perspectives.

Creating this Pocketbook would not have been possible without the fantastic work of everyone involved. We are particularly grateful to the writers, who were incredibly dedicated to this project, and to the interviewed participants, who provided invaluable insights and knowledge about their experiences in organisations related to gender and feminism.

We also thank the editors, designers and everyone else who contributed to the making of this Pocketbook.

Additionally, we wish to thank each and every one of our partner organisations in Africa and elsewhere. Your work and tireless efforts to call for justice and advocate for change is remarkable: every day, we learn from you.

We hope that this Pocketbook will serve as a valuable resource and a source of inspiration to you. By deepening our knowledge and understanding of feminist theory and practice, we strengthen our overall work and its impact.

Self-reflection is crucial: we need to continually challenge oppressive structures within our societies, within our organisations and within ourselves. With this Pocketbook, we wish to invite you to do the same.

Let us continue to inspire, challenge and learn from each other.

– Civil Rights Defenders

# ABOUT THIS POCKETBOOK

The Building Feminist Practice Pocketbook is intended as a practical and accessible resource that guides and supports human rights defenders in Africa in building a feminist practice. In Part 3, we share some related resources that are available to the public. This Pocketbook identifies and focuses on some core feminist ideas, simplifying them for an effective implementation and deeper understanding of feminist values, principles and tools. This guide also offers a pathway for you to establish a feminist practice at the personal, organisational and programmatic level.

The Pocketbook centres a core feminist idea that the personal is political; this is the belief that we cannot bring about social change without being deeply conscious of how it affects our private lives. Neither can social change be achieved without being conscious of power relations in both the private and the public sphere. Feminism does not advocate for deep interrogation solely for the sake of knowing and consciousness: instead, it encourages us to transform ourselves and others as we transform society. This principle is already familiar to human rights defenders, who apply it to their work to advance human rights in society. Human rights defenders, in essence, not only believe in human rights but also reflect them by applying them in their own daily lives at home, at work and in the community.



Feminism goes beyond rights to centre on power. Power is key in understanding feminisms, which aim to transform the way power is arranged in society by turning oppressive power into power that liberates. Understanding power dynamics creates the opportunity to improve our work by seeing and recognising power; surfacing and naming power; confronting and challenging power; and building power. At the most basic level, feminist practice encourages us to imagine a world in which the needs of the most marginalised are prioritised. A world in which everyone is conscious of and builds the kind of power that brings freedom, love and care to all. With this dream in mind, feminist practice enables us to confront and resist oppressive forms of power, using intersectionality as a tool to determine whether these forms of power are based on class, race, gender, ethnicity, ability, geography or any other factor.

We hope that those who are open to strengthening their feminist practice will find this a useful tool.

**Enjoy the journey of building your own feminist practice!**

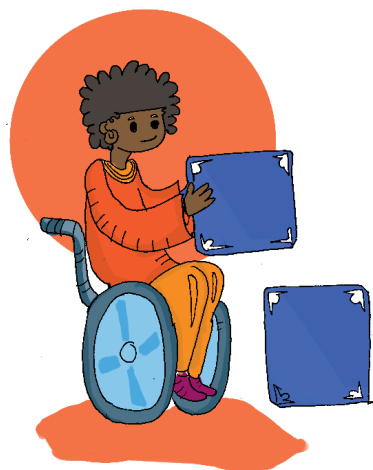


Feminism is for everyone – construction of masculinity is as destructive to men as it is to women – feminism demands a transformation of the mind, heart and body that is essential for the dignity and freedom of everyone.

**Shereen Essof**

# HOW TO USE THIS POCKETBOOK

THIS POCKETBOOK IS ORGANISED IN FIVE MAIN PARTS:



# 1

**SOME BASIC BUILDING  
BLOCKS OF FEMINISM**

Page 20

# 2

**FEMINISM AS A  
PERSONAL PRACTICE**

Page 36



# 3

## FEMINIST PRACTICE IN AN ORGANISATION

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# 4

## FEMINIST PRACTICE IN PROGRAMMING

Page 68

# 5

## GOING DEEPER IN OUR FEMINIST PRACTICE

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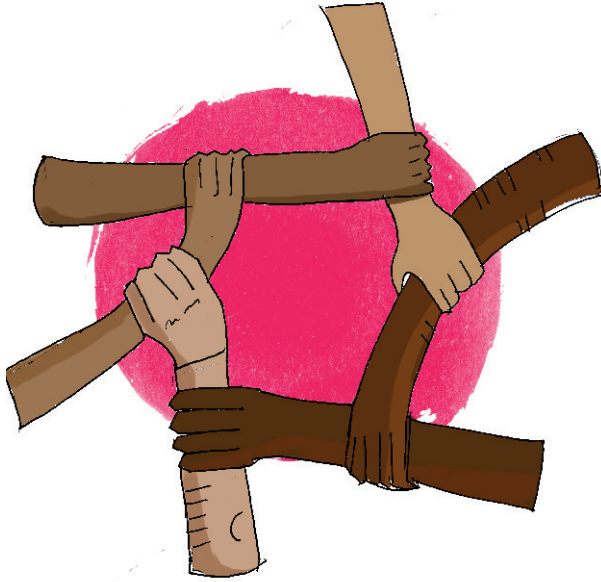




## ON SEQUENCING

We suggest that you start by simply paging through this Pocketbook, intuitively delving into whichever part feels natural to you. This may be a section that resonates with you, feels meaningful or sparks your curiosity. It may also be a section that feels relevant and that you think will answer or help you grapple with certain questions you have about feminism. Our own recommendation is that you begin with *Part 1: Some Basic Building Blocks* and *Part 2: Feminism as a Personal Practice*.

These parts lay the groundwork by introducing certain basic feminist ideas and practices, which you may later consider applying to an organisation you are a part of or any human rights programming work you do in your community and society.



## ON THE FRAMEWORK

Each of the five parts contain key elements that include: *Imagine; Quotes; Tips; Practical Guidance; Case Study/ Examples; Personal Reflection; Checklist*. These elements are a way of presenting feminist ideas without digging too deep into specific ideas or practices. We offer them as starters, tasters and bird's eye views of feminist practice. Each of these elements in Parts 1-5 offers a different opportunity to learn and deepen your understanding of feminist practice.

The *Imagine sections, Quotes and Tips* are intended to evoke emotions, inspire and elicit questions or trains of thought on personal transformation and social change. The *Practical Guidance* parts show how feminist ideas can be translated into a range of possible actions you may want to adopt in your practice as human rights defenders.

The *Case Study/Example* sections offer a sense of how others have put feminist ideas into practice, while the *Checklist* acts as a reference point for you to organise yourself as you build your feminist practice.

## ON INTENTION AND METHOD

- The framework and flow of the Pocketbook is geared towards planting the seeds of feminist ideas in human rights work, and towards understanding the opportunities these ideas create.
- It also encourages human rights defenders to schedule time for regular reflection, reading, conversation and debate in order to build a context-specific feminist practice.



## ON REFERENCING

We approached referencing with some trepidation and discomfort. Feminist ideas in general, and certainly in this Pocketbook, have been articulated and have evolved to speak about issues in different geographic locations across the world. They exist in many institutional formations, such as community activism and academia.

These articulations have sometimes been documented and sometimes left undocumented. Often, orally articulated ideas gain traction and spread so widely it becomes difficult to identify 'the source'.



In other instances, sources are much clearer. As such, we acknowledge and express gratitude for the contributions of feminists everywhere, past and present. We do not claim these ideas as our own. However, we take full responsibility for the ways in which we have woven ideas into this Pocketbook's particular flow, form and framework. Naturally, we share the specific resources we chose to refer to as we wove together ideas that build a feminist practice for human rights defenders in Africa.

As you work with this Pocketbook, we urge you to honour those who have built and given life to feminism and feminist ideas and practices. Above all, we encourage you to make this publication your own and make it work for you. We hope you will enjoy and be inspired by this Pocketbook!

## ON LANGUAGE

Gender oppression originates from a system of power called patriarchy, which is at the centre of feminist work. Patriarchy is a form of social organisation that upholds male dominance and excludes, oppresses and marginalises individuals based on gender and gender norms and behaviours.

Patriarchy organises power and privilege in ways that benefit men who perform certain norms and behaviours that support this form of social organisation. Historically, feminism targeted this system almost exclusively.





Over time, however, feminism evolved and broadened its lens to include all systems of oppression, which are analysed and addressed in an intersectional way.<sup>1</sup> Intersectionality is a concept that allows us to see how oppressions are linked. Addressing oppression in an intersectional way means including race, class, gender, disability, ethnicity, sexuality and other forms of oppression rather than dealing with independent power dynamics.

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1. D.W. Carbado, D.W., K.W. Crenshaw., V.M. Mays, and B. Tomlinson, INTERSECTIONALITY: Mapping the Movements of a Theory<sup>1</sup>. Du Bois review: social science research on race, vol 10 no.2, 2013., p.303-312

An intersectional analysis shows us how these power dynamics combine, intersect and overlap in marginalised groups. Carefully considering all factors that may oppress a person strengthens movements and human rights work.

We deliberately use feminist language in this Pocketbook. In addition to embracing women's human rights, feminism reveals, names and addresses power relations in society. Feminism politicises women's rights work in order to confront power, using the tools and analyses that feminism affords human rights defenders – one of which is intersectionality.

For this reason, feminism excavates and confronts oppressive power and builds emancipatory power. Feminism thus helps human rights work address all forms of power and privilege that oppress and marginalise people, with the goal of achieving structural change and equality for all.

”

At the center of the feminist analysis is unpacking POWER, in systems and structures that are exploitative and oppression – A feminist lens provides the tools and asks the critical questions. “While other ideologies stopped at the door... feminist ideology went beyond and dug up the foundation to reveal what holds these houses and structures of inequality.

**Memory Kachambwa**

Feminism is for everyone and everyone should be a feminist,<sup>2</sup> because feminism's objectives stand to benefit everyone. Patriarchy has terrible consequences for men too: the roles and behaviours that patriarchy expects and demands from men prevent men from living in freedom and with dignity. All systems of oppression affect people of all genders and races, although their effect varies depending on access to power and privilege.

We believe it is important to place women and LGBTI+ persons in the spotlight and pay particular attention to the system of patriarchy – in fact, this Pocketbook was written precisely to respond to this need and priority.

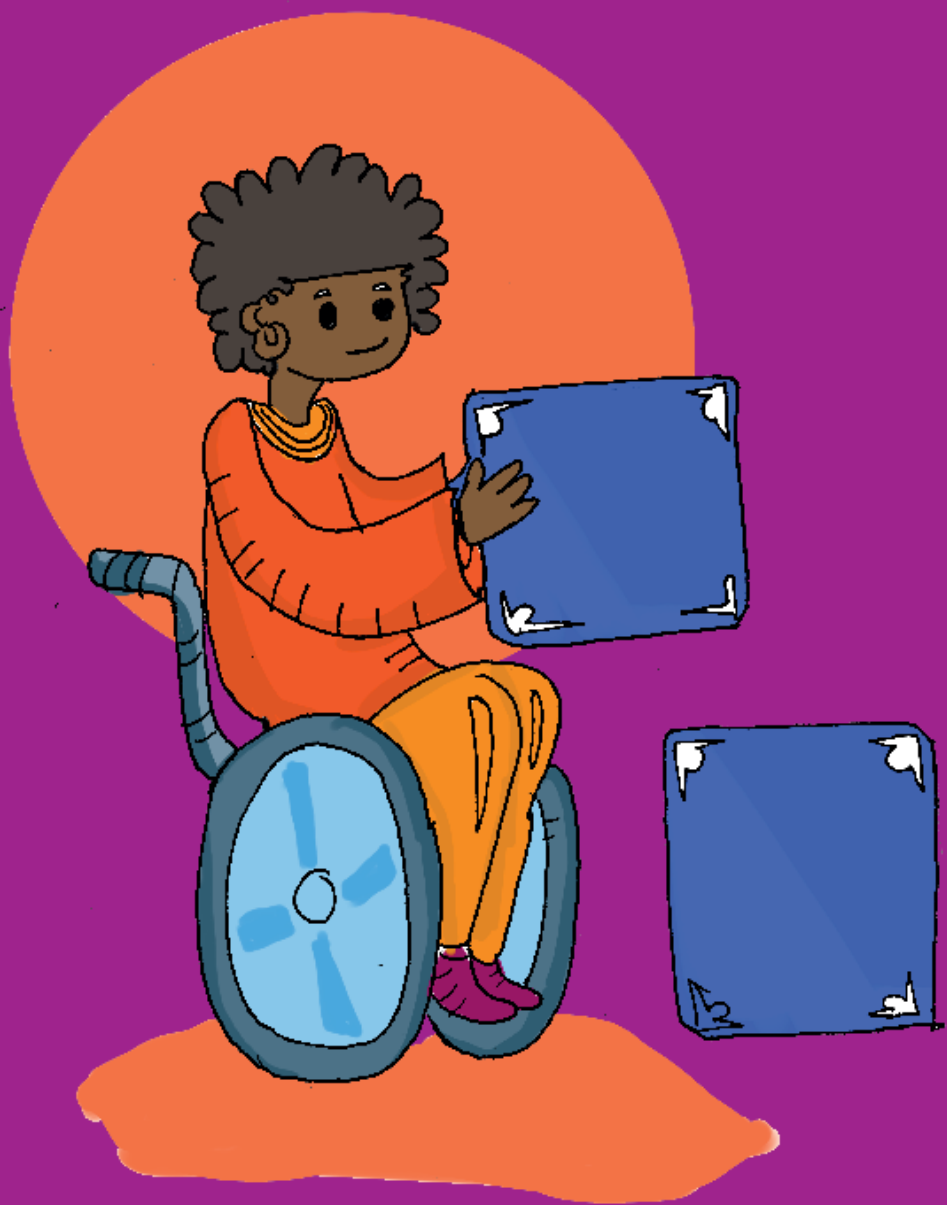
We use the abbreviation 'LGBTI+' to refer to lesbian, bisexual, trans-diverse, gay, intersex, asexual and gender non-conforming people. We see the phrases 'integrating a gender perspective', 'conducting a feminist analysis' and 'using a feminist lens' as interchangeable, but as distinctively different from 'being [a] feminist'.

To us, the latter is a conscious and deliberate choice to identify with feminist politics, practice and movements across the globe.

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2. C. Adichie, *We should all be Feminists*, HarperCollins, United Kingdom, 2014

PART 1  
**SOME BASIC  
BUILDING  
BLOCKS OF  
FEMINISM**



# FEMINIST IDEAS FOR A FEMINIST PRACTICE

Many feminist ideas are used in the fields of gender and human rights, development, social justice and organisational development.

In this Pocketbook, we decided to focus on three main feminist ideas that we consider the basic building blocks of any feminist practice: The Personal is Political, Feminist Consciousness and Power. But first, let us look at feminism itself.

## MAIN IDEA: FEMINISM/S

### WHAT IT MEANS

Feminists often have their own particular understanding of feminism. On the African continent, for example, feminist activists, advocates and scholars refer to feminism in the plural form (feminisms), rather than giving it a fixed definition in the singular form (feminism).

African feminists use the term 'African feminisms' to acknowledge the fact that there are multiple gender identities, sexual identities and ethnic identities on the continent, and variations of feminisms that address those realities. For this building block, we sought out similarities across different strands of feminism and combined their common themes to help us understand what feminism is.



**Feminism enables us to:**

- ▣ Be conscious of power in society and the ways in which it operates.
- ▣ Increasingly address oppressive forms of power, including patriarchy, racism and economic exploitation.
- ▣ Replace oppressive forms of power with personal and collective power for social justice and the common good.

**Feminism is therefore:**

- ▣ An ideology – a set of standards, beliefs and values about how to live our lives.
- ▣ An identity – a shared commitment to a particular sense of who and how we are in the world.
- ▣ A practice – the application of these ideas and values to our personal, professional and social lives.
- ▣ A movement – local and global collectives and groups operating separately and/or together to advance these values, ideas and practices.

## WHY IT MATTERS

There are so many reasons why feminism matters. In the context of this Pocketbook, we believe feminism matters because it offers a unique set of ideas and values that will help human rights defenders develop a practice that grapples with power at a personal, organisational and programmatic level.

It offers a way to ensure that we, as human rights defenders, become ever more conscious and capable of confronting oppressive power and building collective power that emancipates.

”

It's [Feminism is] many things: a set of principles, a lens for understanding power, a vision, a strategic approach, a process, a way of working, distinct movements and histories, and specific political demands and agendas.

**Shereen Essof**



# IDEA 1:

## THE PERSONAL IS POLITICAL

### WHAT IT MEANS

The Personal is Political is a foundational feminist concept. 'The personal' is generally understood as referring to our internal, private life. It is the sum total of our being and doing when we are alone or with our inner circle (a few trusted individuals, our family, acquaintances and friends). It is the part of our lives that is outside the public eye, or what we refer to when we say "this is my business" or "none of your business".

'The political', on the other hand, is the external, public aspect of our lives. It includes our community, social, professional and work lives. It has to do with how we live our lives outside of closed off, private spaces.

One of the early distortions of patriarchy and its connected systems of oppression was that the private and the public were framed as two separate spheres, with our approach in one sphere having no bearing on the other. Feminist work challenges this distortion by showing how our private and public lives are connected.

An example of this is that I cannot act corruptly while advocating for integrity, transparency and accountability. What I do in private is personal and protected by my right to privacy. But feminism reminds us that the values we uphold in public should be in line with what we say and do in private, because these worlds are connected.

Of course, feminist practice is an evolving practice and recognises that no one is perfect. But feminist practice encourages self-reflection and action, so that we may increasingly practise what we believe (our politics) internally as well as externally. If we apply self-reflection and action to our behaviours and relationships, we can chip away at oppressive power in both our private and public lives. The same unequal power relations that exist 'out there' in public also exist 'in here' in the private.

Further, what happens in the public domain impacts on each of us personally. The systems, institutions and ideas in society shape our daily lived realities and may offer less or more power to our individual lives. As feminists, our commitment to confronting oppressive power and mobilising people power is central – wherever we are. Hence, the personal is political.

## WHY IT MATTERS

This matters because feminism is both a set of ideas about the world and a daily practice that is often referred to as 'feministing'. Feministing is lived and not just done sometimes or in some contexts.

We should therefore apply a feminist lens, perspective or approach to understand and improve all aspects of our lives, whether visible or invisible to others.

Human rights defenders often already have a major impact on the lives of future generations; feminist practice can help create an even greater impact. Power is present in all spheres of life, so using a perspective that seeks to transform gender and other power relations will change the lives of many.

”

In my view, Feminism is a direct opposite of how we see the world and perceive certain things in the world, and it's important that it is used so that we improve the ways in which life happens and how the world is set up, and how people see themselves and each other. So, feminism as an ideology is important in mainstream NGOs, because it provides an alternative to the ways in which people do work currently.

Feminism is not a limited ideology. It does not say to you, you have to be only queer, you have to be only black, you have to be only this and this and that, but it's a cross cutting ideology, and therefore makes it easy for infusing or adaptation into your kind of work.

**Botho Maruatona**

## IDEA 2:

# FEMINIST CONSCIOUSNESS

### WHAT IT MEANS

Feminist consciousness is an ever-evolving sense of conviction and commitment to feminist values and ideas as a way of making sense of the social, political and economic realities in both our private and public lives. Over time, the relevance and application of feminist ideas in our lived experiences becomes a way of being.

Feminist consciousness is a critical action that helps us find real solutions to resolve inequality in society. One example is always applying a gender power analysis to our individual behaviour and our programming and interventions. Feminist consciousness involves advocating for the advancement of human rights and the complete eradication of gender injustice from our own social position. Whether this critical action comes from a male ally, a Black woman or an LGBTI+ person, each social position has its role in addressing structural inequalities and gender injustice in all its forms.

Feminist consciousness emerged from early feminist organising that used feminist consciousness-raising as a practice and a methodology to bring the most marginalised in society together to reflect on their daily realities and determine a collective course of action.

Feminist consciousness-raising is also an organising strategy and a tactic to increase interpersonal awareness, understand shared oppression and gain insight into the role systems and institutions play in this oppression. It supports the fact that women and LGBTI+ persons are agents of their own change, both individually and collectively.

The practice of feminist consciousness-raising deeply respects and acknowledges the collective power of organising around feminist ideas and principles, which is called feminist solidarity. Feminist solidarity and feminist consciousness-raising are connected: feminist solidarity is collective power and mutual support across the boundaries of race, class, gender, disability, sexual identity and social differences. It is a commitment to nurturing connections with people and groups involved in similar struggles.

In that sense, effective feminist consciousness-raising leads to sustainable feminist solidarity.

## WHY IT MATTERS

Feminist consciousness matters for many reasons. In the context of this Pocketbook, we emphasise the fact that it illuminates each person's daily lived realities and the way different forms of power help or hinder them.

Many who participate in feminist consciousness-raising feel like a light is suddenly turned on, a light that allows them to see more clearly what they already knew or that exposes hidden oppressive power.

Feminist consciousness exposes deep truths and offers hope for individual and collective power that liberates.



Feminism is very important because it works towards undoing and deconstructing patriarchy that has over decades dehumanised us as women and girls, affecting all parts of our lives today.

**Grace Yeanay**

# IDEA 3: POWER

## WHAT IT MEANS

Power and gender are never independent. Power differences often underlie gender differences and gender roles and behaviours. Power is a central concept in many disciplines such as psychology, sociology and philosophy, which means power has several meanings and applications.

Many theorists from different disciplines have studied how power is organised, challenged and obtained. Feminists are concerned with power at the structural, organisational, interpersonal and individual level and, most importantly, with how these levels interact.

Because power exists between people and is applied with a particular intention and/or serves particular interests, it is political rather than neutral. Where there are competing interests in society, power determines access and opportunity. How power is organised determines whose interests are progressed and whose are marginalised. If we fail to expose and see these interests, we will fail to transform society. From a feminist perspective, we divide power into two categories: oppressive power and emancipatory power.<sup>3</sup>

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3. Gender AIDS Forum, Women in Leadership: Feminism 101, Durban, 2006.

## OPPRESSIVE POWER

This category of power has been referred to by many philosophers, theorists and activists as ‘power over’.<sup>4</sup> It is the kind of power that is characterised by domination or hegemony, exerted by one individual or group over another. This ‘power over’ subordinates or oppresses, as it only serves the interests of whoever has power over another group or individual.

In practice, it is the act and process of imposing one’s decisions, will and/or ideas to serve one’s own interests. In the system of patriarchy, this oppressive form of power is socialised into men’s behaviour from birth, through tradition, religion, education and other institutions that serve the interests of men.

Men are affected by patriarchy as they are expected to have and exert this form of power over women and LGBTI+ persons. They are rewarded for expressing, exercising and displaying such power – or shunned when they fail to do so.

This kind of power prevents and constrains, stifles and suffocates, polices and controls. It stops us from enjoying our rights to freedom, dignity and equality.

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4. A. Allen, ‘Feminist Perspectives on Power’, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Stanford, CA, E. N. Zalta (ed.), Autumn 2016, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2016/entries/feminist-power/>.



## EMANCIPATORY POWER

This category of power enables agency. It is exercised or practised by individual women or LGBTI+ persons as a ‘power within’ to change the outside world. It may be located within an individual or it can be exercised by a group or collective.

Emancipatory power that is practiced or exercised collectively can be understood as ‘power with’. This power is not neutral either, as it intends to achieve socially just changes or results. It is power to transform. Feminists refer to these emancipatory forms and expressions of power as empowerment.

Empowerment or building power for feminists can be thought of as the capacity to transform oneself and others.<sup>5</sup>



Feminism is an important lens as it will “awaken” us all on what we have been missing – bring the missing link to the workspace for a more holistic solution to societal problems. Then we will start moving towards social transformation.

**Christine Guchu**

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5. A. Allen, ‘Feminist Perspectives on Power’, 2016.

## WHY IT MATTERS

If human rights defenders are equipped with the tools to analyse power, then structural oppression can be dismantled. Feminism gives us a set of beneficial tools to understand oppressive and emancipatory power, and how to attain deep change in society. This change can occur at any level. If we are to go beyond the symptoms of the real problem to find the root causes of our struggles, power, therefore, must be brought into the equation for the analysis and for critical action.

Using the problem tree methodology, we are concerned with the root causes of the struggles that we ourselves, our communities, and society face. In the case of feminists, we have a particular concern about the daily lived realities and the struggles of women, LGBTI+ and other minorities. Feminists seek to work together to build their/our power, to see oppression, and to challenge it.

Feminism is concerned with power as it is the basis of deepening the consciousness of women and the LGBTI+ community and it also supports the development of a sense of collective and personal power for building solidarity and mobilising collective action.<sup>6</sup>

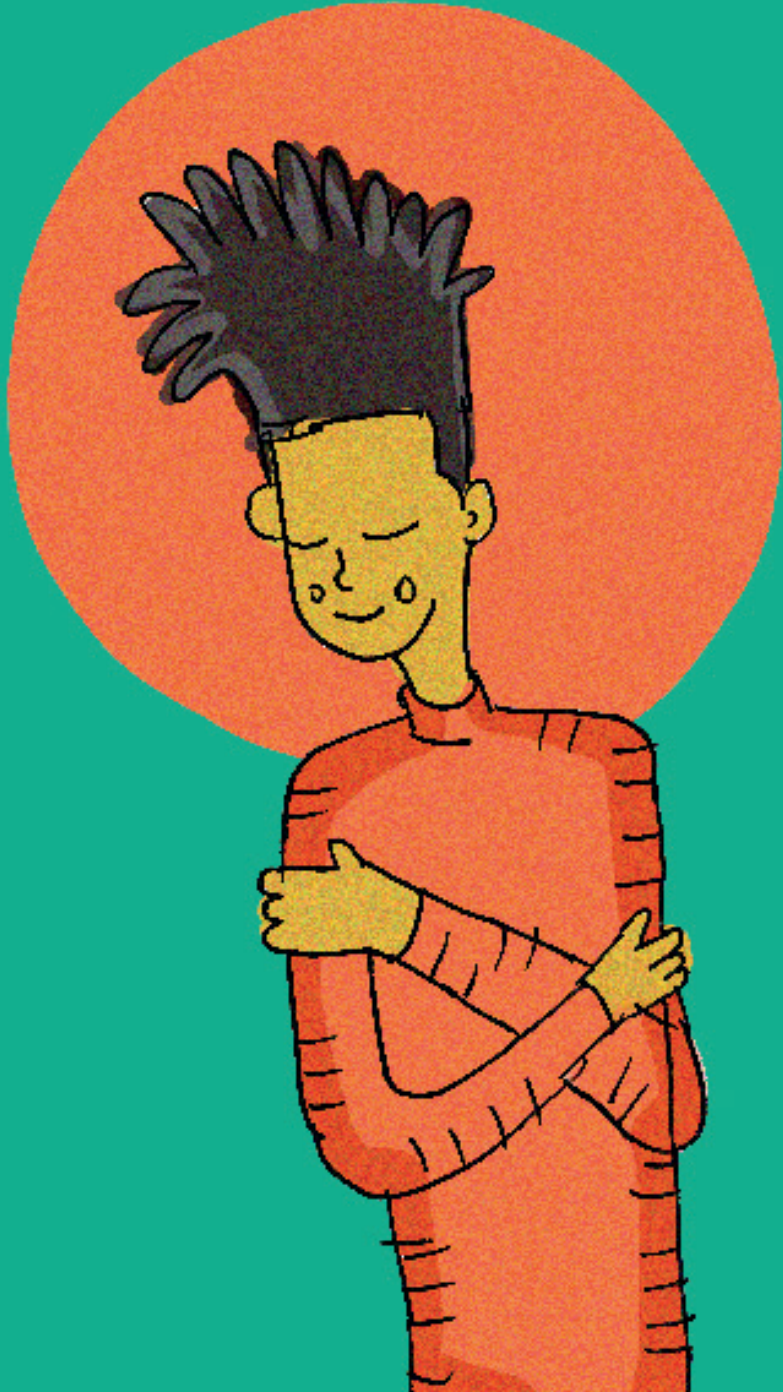
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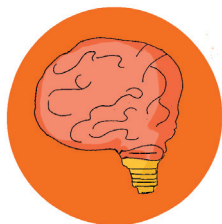
6. I.M. Young in A. Allen, 'Feminist Perspectives on Power', 2016

HERE ARE SOME QUESTIONS TO CHOOSE FROM TO FOCUS YOUR REFLECTION. YOU CAN OF COURSE ALSO CREATE YOUR OWN QUESTIONS TO REFLECT ON

1. What was your understanding of feminism before you started reading this Pocketbook?
2. How similar to or different from the description in this Pocketbook was your understanding?
3. Based on your own understanding of feminist ideas and the descriptions in this Pocketbook, do you have any questions?
4. What is your opinion on the three feminist ideas we focused on in Part 1 (The Personal is Political, Feminist Consciousness and Power)?
5. Did any part of the description of these concepts resonate with you?
6. Is there a question or idea you would like to develop or consider more deeply, either by yourself or with others? How could you do that?
7. Can you think of a way to take action (whether big or small) in your life, your work or your activism using the ideas from this section?

PART 2  
**FEMINISM AS  
A PERSONAL  
PRACTICE**





## IMAGINE


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Imagine... A world in which every individual is valued. Imagine, breathe and think of your power within. Are you cared for? Does society have your needs and best interest at heart? Imagine a place where we can all reach our full potential. Where we know how to care and love, and actively give care and love to others.

Imagine revolution as a practice that grounds us as individuals. Where the revolution blossoms in us as we first offer ourselves love and self-care, and then share that love and care within ourselves with others. Imagine initiating action as part of a collective. Imagine building community as a daily practice. Imagine, breathe and think of your power within.

Imagine a collective, a community on the African continent, a conscious world. It starts with each of us, with our own consciousness. We are all capable of exercising power or having power exercised over us. Imagine what power would look like next to freedom if we deepened our consciousness of our own power. Imagine facing the choice to use power destructively or constructively.

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Then imagine each of us choosing to create collective power, to use power constructively. Imagine the possibility: a world with nothing but freedom.

Feminism in our personal practice reminds us that this possibility is real. This kind of community is possible. And it starts with us.

We tend to be taught to limit our imagination and censor our thoughts, dreams and visions. Feminism teaches us that our imagination is freedom, that all of this is possible.

We will keep building, developing and co-creating the possible. Starting with each individual – the personal. Conscious individuals and groups make conscious communities. And conscious communities shape the Africa and world we want.

### **Another World Is Possible!**

*World Social Forum*



# PRACTICAL GUIDANCE

The personal is political. We understand that what happens in private is political. There are power relations in every sphere of life, including in the private. As such, there is the potential for and a likelihood of inequality existing in this so-called private domain. In many respects, this space is even more vulnerable to oppression because it is outside of the public eye.

Oppression can exist unchallenged in private because of behaviour that protects the person, privileges and reputation of those who hold greater power. Domination is protected by silence, traditions and social behaviours that privilege those who hold more power, which means that abuses of power in private are connected to broader social, economic and political issues in the public.

The abuse of power in the public domain has to be taken personally by us all; they are our business and our concern. For human rights defenders, harm means that power has been misused and abused – that a human right has been violated. When someone with power inflicts harm on someone else with less power, we are talking about oppression.

Harm is oppression and a form of power that operates in both the external, public domain and the so-called internal, private domain. The nature of harm varies from emotional and mental to physical and sexual.

The private is public and the public is private.



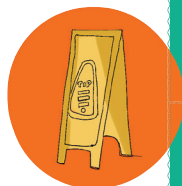
This understanding of power also takes into consideration each individual's right to privacy and confidentiality. All matters of power are feminist issues and essential for social justice.

Social justice is many things. It can be based on your ideological stance, your geographic location, your passion for certain issues, or your experience based on identity. All of these factors will influence your understanding and the meaning of social justice.



Social justice for feminists has power at heart. And the work starts with us. It is critical work that involves building one's feminist practice through three key factors:

- Feminist Consciousness
- Solidarity and Community
- Personal and Collective Action



## TIP

**LESSON:** Taking on a feminist perspective is an important change process that requires preparation and readiness work. Embarking on this journey has a powerful and positive impact on our communities and the world. It may also have negative consequences, whether anticipated or not.

Review the practical guidance in Part 3 to remind yourself of readiness work. Focus on the discomfort of examining your own power and the power relations in your personal, professional and social lives. Have a conversation with your community about dealing with backlash and about the practices you have in place to ensure collective care and human rights protections.

Our practical guidance focusses on three main areas:

# 1 FEMINIST CONSCIOUSNESS [POWER WITHIN]

We already discussed the meaning and relevance of feminist consciousness in Part 1, which outlined some key feminist building blocks. When we begin to take on a feminist perspective, we have to explore and establish our own practice.

It is important that this personal practice aligns with our own value system and spiritual work, including rituals and practices. Sometimes, we can simply weave feminist values into our existing value framework and practices.

”

Most mainstream NGOs get it when you talk about human rights, they get it when you talk about social justice - but when you talk about gender which affects social norms and their privileges it becomes a gray area.

**Memory Kachambwa**



Here are five possible practical actions we can take to build our personal feminist practice:

## PERSONAL REFLECTION

Look within: spend time alone and in small groups to reflect and process your own values and daily practices that affirm these values. Reflect on what inclusive feminist values and ideas would look like in practice.

## RECOGNISE THE COMMON CONDITION

If you identify as a woman or an LGBTI+ person, talk about your common experiences, challenges and condition. A common condition is an experience you share because you share a social position or identity, such as race, ethnicity, gender or sexuality.

These shared experiences determine how we navigate the world and have emotional, mental and physical implications on our daily lives. A common condition recognises identities, but also enables us to explore and consider actual issues, such as access to running water, shelter or any other issue, need, problem, deprivation or gap.

If you identify as a man, observe, listen and try to understand the common condition of women and LGBTI+ persons. Try to understand the power and privilege men hold in society in relation to their common condition. Explore ways of connecting across difference, of building solidarity and contributing toward a community that is based on love and care to resolve an issue linked to a common condition.

## SEEING POWER

Map your own power [see example below] and consider how to shift power relations as an ongoing practice. Confront and address your own expression of oppressive power/power over. Build your own emancipatory power (power within/with) through practice, action and reflection. Have and keep having conversations with others about power and how it operates.

## GROUNDING IN FEMINIST VALUES

Connect, communicate and explore feminist ideas and values to deepen your consciousness of power. Integrate and weave these feminist ideas and values into the values of your own consciousness or your spiritual/other practice.

## GRAPPLE WITH CONTRADICTIONS AND CHALLENGES

Complete congruence between our personal practice and feminist values and ideas is the goal, but it will probably not be possible from the start - or without the support of others.

Feminists are committed to progressively moving towards such congruence. As your feminist practice grows, you will have to be ready to grapple with complexity, contradictions and internal conflict and to accept feedback and guidance.

# 2

## SOLIDARITY AND COMMUNITY

[POWER WITH]

A central element of feminist transformation is solidarity: building friendship, developing a community, facilitating support networks and offering collective care.

Find your feminist collectives and communities and practice demonstrating this solidarity over time, while remaining connected to pressing current issues that need that power with others.

# PERSONAL AND COLLECTIVE ACTION

## [POWER TO]

Feminist consciousness coupled with solidarity/ community/friendship set the scene for collective action. This collective action is based on a sense of belonging, resonance with the politics, and the intention to navigate hard and complex circumstances to achieve gender justice.





## EXAMPLE

### CIRCLES OF POWER

They sat in a large circle talking about their advocacy and campaigning work, mostly to challenge state power and its impact on the human rights of the communities they worked with.

Their work was inspiring, courageous and bold and the tactics and strategies they used were powerful and effective in many ways. Newer human rights defenders listened and learned and asked many questions.

At the end of that initial segment of the Learning Exchange Agenda, the Aquarius Feminist Co-operative shared their methodology for building personal power as human rights defenders engaged in high-level advocacy. The facilitator from the Co-operative asked the participants what kinds of power they had practiced in their own work and organising.

There was some confusion and disorientation in the group. How did they get to be asked such a question when they were activists and advocates and organisers fighting for social justice? A slow and awkward discussion followed. The facilitator then shared an exercise for each participant to work on alone, outside, during the tea break.



## HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS' POWER MAPPING EXERCISE

1. Using paper and colour markers, create three columns to represent three areas in your life:
  - a] Household / Family;
  - b] Workplace / The Organisation;
  - c] Intimate Relationship / A Close Friendship.
  
2. In each of the three areas on your page, make notes on whether there are people in that area who have power over you. Who are they? What is the basis of their power? What does their oppression look like? What are the outcomes and consequences of their oppression?  
 Answer the same questions in each column, then consider whether you yourself exercise power over anyone else in that area of your life.  
 Return to each column, consider and make notes on emancipatory power (power within, power with and power to). Who in that area is actively building or living emancipatory power? To what extent are you engaged in building these types and expressions of power in these areas of your life? What are the consequences and outcomes of applying this kind of power?
  
3. Using scissors, create three circles and then graphically represent the emancipatory and oppressive power, the people involved and the consequences in each of the circles.

Make the circle in which you yourself exercise the most oppressive power (relative to the other two areas) much bigger. Now, look at the three circles and consider how they intersect and how the power in one circle feeds into the power in the others.

4. The participants did not have to share their circles. Instead, they were asked what they had learnt about how power operates and what this meant for their advocacy with decision-makers.

They were encouraged to spend an hour that evening considering what, if anything, they needed to do to transform power relations in their own lives. The socialising that night was abuzz with discussions about the meaning of the exercise.



With a feminist lens, the organisation becomes conscious about using power positively and holds staff accountable when behaviours inconsistent with feminism are exhibited. A feminist ideology also influences the organisation positively as it ensures that everything done by the organisation is in line with the ideology.

**Gertrude Bibi Annoh-Quarshie**



# POWER MAPPING EXERCISE



# 1

Using paper and colour markers, create three columns representing one of three areas of your life:

- a) Household / Family;
- b) Workplace / The Organisation;
- c) Intimate Relationship / A Close Friendship

Go back into each column and consider and make notes on emancipatory power: power within and power with as well as power to.

Who in that area are actively building or living emancipatory power?

To what extent are you engaged in building these types and expressions of power in each of the three areas of life?

What are the consequences and outcomes of applying this kind of power?

# 2



Using scissors, create three circles and then represent graphically the emancipatory and oppressive power, the people involved and the consequences in each of the circles.

3

For the circle where you personally exercise the most oppressive power [relative to the other two areas], cut a much bigger circle.

Now, look at the three circles.

Consider how they intersect and how the power in each feed into the power in the other.

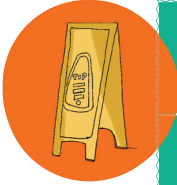
4

5

The group is not asked to share their circles. They are asked what they had learned about how power operates and what this meant for their advocacy with decision makers.



They were encouraged to spend an hour overnight to consider what if anything they needed to do to transform power relations in their own lives.



## TIP

**LESSON:** Consciousness of one's own power and the commitment to continuously grapple and navigate such power is central to the feminist idea that the personal is political. It ensures that we transform ourselves and others through our organising and work.

If you have not done the exercise before, consider trying Circles of Power. What, if anything does this have to do with being a human rights defender?



Feminism is about ending patriarchal norms and behaviours. It's connected to who has power, how power is used and who benefits from power.

**Catherine Rogers**

# MASTERING POWER



## FEMINIST CONCIOUSNESS [POWER WITHIN]

It is important that this personal practice is aligned with our own value system and spiritual work including rituals and practices.

## SOLIDARITY AND COMMUNITY [POWER WITH]

Building friendship, developing community, facilitating support networks, collective care.



## PERSONAL AND COLLECTIVE ACTION [POWER TO]

Feminist consciousness together with solidary, community and friendship set the scene for collective action.



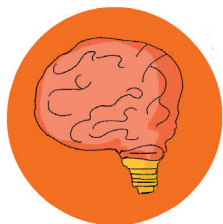
## YOU MAY FIND THIS CHECKLIST USEFUL FOR YOUR OWN REFLECTION AND PRACTICE

UNDERSTANDING POWER	YES	NO
Do you understand the relevance of emancipatory power?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do you understand the relevance of oppressive power?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do these resonate for you personally?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
KNOW YOUR OWN POWER	YES	NO
Do you have a map of your own power over, power within and power with?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Have you considered the ways in which you could better grapple with your own power over?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Have you considered the ways on which you could better build your own and others' power?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
LEARNING AND REFLECTION	YES	NO
Do you create and set aside time for personal reflection on your feminist and broader spiritual or other practice related to your way of being in the world?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do you make time for and invest in learning about various feminist methods, ideas and practices, and the lived realities of women and LGBTI+ persons?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
SOLIDARITY AND COMMUNITY	YES	NO
Are you connected to feminist networks, communities and collectives to create friendship and relationships based on diversity and a shared condition?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do you work towards building spaces and opportunities for feminist community-building and solidarity?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
COLLECTIVE ACTION	YES	NO
Do you proactively and responsively work with other feminists and allies to embark on smaller or bigger joint actions based on friendship, community and solidarity?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Are you actively engaged in a process to identify needs and trends in collective organising? Are you an active contributor to feminist agenda-setting in your own political, geographic, identity- and issue-based movements?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

PART 3  
**THE  
ORGANISATION  
AS A FEMINIST  
VEHICLE**







## IMAGINE

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Imagine... An organisation that is accountable, transparent and meaningful. Whose priorities are in the best interest of the people and society as a whole. Imagine this possibility in every area of work, process and space. Imagine, breathe and see physical and online spaces that use feminism as a vehicle.

Imagine an organisation with clear roles, clear responsibilities and equal opportunities for everyone. An organisation that makes a concerted, proactive, well-resourced effort to mentor, coach and learn from each other. That offers each of us the opportunity to evolve both personally and politically. Imagine a strong wellbeing ethic being valued just as much as a strong work ethic as we strive to make a positive impact.

Imagine an organisation that allows you to evolve, where errors are embraced just as strongly as excellence and progress are encouraged. Where mistakes are seen as something to reflect on, make sense of and learn from.

Imagine an organisation with an open culture, where everyone is empowered to speak, voice their ideas and address their concerns and frustrations.

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An organisation that protects confidence and values consensus. Or, when consensus is hard to reach, an organisation in which everyone actively takes responsibility for listening, hearing and acting.

Imagine, breathe and see the possibility of an organisation with opportunities for women and LGBTI+ persons to exercise their right to an opinion, to speak, to make decisions and lead. An organisation committed to engaging with uncomfortable issues that call for conversation. An organisation that ensures in-depth conversations about meaningful participation, voice and the visibility of women and LGBTI+ persons take place across the organisation. From volunteers to managers and board members: this organisation has the collective will to keep learning and understanding power.

Imagine an organisation that exposes hidden power and grapples with both emancipatory and oppressive power.

An organisation that regularly schedules meetings, intimate group discussions and interviews to engage with this power, to navigate it with grace and openness. Imagine.

**Another Organisation Is Possible!**

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# PRACTICAL GUIDANCE

## READINESS AS THE KEY TO BUILDING A FEMINIST PRACTICE IN THE ORGANISATION

Your commitment to building a feminist practice means you will develop an inclusive plan to show how you will integrate a feminist perspective in the organisation.

We encourage you to decide on small steps to start with. Start small, focus, and stick to the process over a sustained period: What to do; Why; With whom; Where and When.

Apart from developing this planning framework, your most important work in this phase is preparing the mindset of those who will lead and participate in this change process. This includes:

### 1. CREATING CLARITY

Readiness for a feminist practice involves building consensus in your governing body and among staff on why you are doing this. An important part of this clarity is exploring the costs and benefits for women and LGBTI+ persons in your organisation.

### 2. PREPARING FOR DISCOMFORT

Readiness involves a conversation on the discomfort of surfacing power, both oppressive and emancipatory, within the organisation, and ensuring there are always diverse voices in leadership, including women and LGBTI+ persons.

### 3. LEARNING

Preparation should involve a process of mapping what knowledge, skills and experience exist in your organisation in relation to feminism, women's rights, sexuality, gender, and gender identity and expression.

### 4. ANTICIPATING RESISTENCE AND BACKLASH

When you plan serious changes, particularly when using feminist ideas and gender as a lens to address inequalities in the organisation, there will be some level of backlash from internal and/or external sources. This backlash may pose a physical or psychological risk to some staff and those in leadership positions.



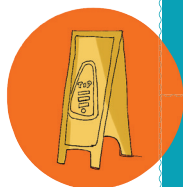
Without questioning power and how power operates, it's difficult to include gender/women's rights on the agenda. Therefore, intersectional analysis is a useful tool for organisations to help identify how different axes of power intersect and to define areas of focus. For so-called mainstream organizations, gender matters because for the vast majority of roles and responsibilities, both men and women have the full capability to make unique contributions to society.

It matters both as a tool for analysis: inviting is to reconsider who we are leaving out and why, AND as end in and of itself; all persons should be included regardless of gender because all human beings bear similar capabilities.

**Noah Mirembe**

## 5. ORGANISING YOURSELVES

The governing structure of the organisation (including its management and the staff as a whole) has to consider how it will meet the challenge of integrating a feminist perspective in the organisation. Organising yourselves also means investing in organisational culture shifts and resourcing feminist interventions.



### TIP

**LESSON:** A gender and diversity policy or a feminist policy will not fix an organisation's problems of power. Policy is important, but it simply codifies what we are already committed to. Feminist action supported by an accountability and transparency policy is what will fix the organisation's problems related to power and authority.

Invest time and effort in bringing your best leaders on board as you work to foster commitment to feminist ideas. Building consensus on the value of a feminist perspective with the support of policy will reflect this commitment and readiness.



## EXAMPLE

### OPPRESSIVE POWER: POWER OVER

The year before, the organisation had been through a policy review process, during which its policies were updated to ensure they aligned with what was considered best practice. A consultant was hired to conduct a benchmarking exercise and to consult with the staff and the Board of Directors. Based on these processes, the policy update was finalised.

The resulting policies were a good reflection of a progressive organisation's plans for its operating standards in terms of people leadership (human resources), funding and finances, gender and diversity, sexual harassment, wellbeing, and safety and security, among other aspects.

An external evaluation had been done and a new strategy had been developed. There was excitement and hope: everyone anticipated a new phase of advocacy in the organisation and felt a renewed sense of connection to feminist activism and the movements they had organised in.

A year later, more than 50 per cent of the staff were experiencing burnout. Several employees were frequently off sick and conflict simmered in and across teams.

At the same time, staff turnover was down: jobs were hard to find in the economic climate. Donor confidence was high as delivery was high, because reports were on time and thorough. Partners believed the organisation was thriving and that it was a good example of an ever-developing institution striving for excellence.

In the year that followed, despite the economic downturn, turnover among women staff began to escalate and eventually soared. What was the problem?

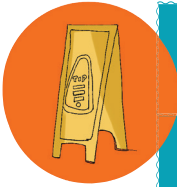
Because the organisation had done so much to set standards, update pay scales and review interest in its work. The team received plenty of external affirmation and donors displayed growing interest in their work. Why were women leaving? And why were those staying so angry?



Feminisms are meant to democratize democracy, from the inside out. Integrating a feminist perspective means changing how we see power, how we organize and lead change, and our vision/agenda for the future. These are some of the reasons why feminism is important as a lens/ideology for mainstream NGOs.

**Shereen Essof**





## TIP

**LESSON:** You are less likely to find oppressive power in the formal spaces of an organisation or institution, such as its policies and the minutes of meetings. Instead, it is generally found in “the ways that things are here” and “how we do things here” – that is, in the organisational culture. Oppressive power in formal spaces tends to be more exposed, so changing it is usually easier. When this process is public, the organisation is more likely to be ready for technical interventions such as systems, policies and mechanisms.

Conversation is a powerful tool to explore power, diversity and shared leadership in an organisation, especially but not only with women and LGBTI+ persons, but also other marginalised groups and men from their position of power.

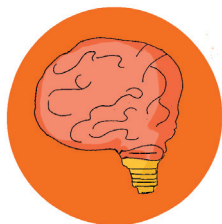
**YOUR TEAM MAY FIND THIS TOOL USEFUL IN TRACKING THE PROCESS OF INTEGRATING A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE**

LEADERSHIP COMMITMENT AND SUPPORT	YES	NO
Are the governing body and senior management on board and ready to lead and support this process?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Are they open to learning and leading as they do so?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Are they aware of and grappling with their own fear and resistance to this change process?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
EMOTIONAL READINESS	YES	NO
Have you begun the work of preparing the team for grappling with patriarchy and other systems of oppression?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Is this work being sustained?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
PEOPLE	YES	NO
Are there any individuals on the Board or among the staff who can champion this work, based on their passion and experience in feminist analysis and change management?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Among these individuals, are there diverse voices ready and willing to co-lead and co-create?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
CAPABILITIES	YES	NO
Have you mapped the emotional, social, political and technical capabilities needed for this process?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Are you developing capabilities in conflict management?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Are the most critical capabilities ready and available, or is there a plan to make them available?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

STRUCTURES	YES	NO
Are there structures in place to make decisions, lead and actively engage in the process of integrating a feminist perspective?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Are these structures functional, with a clear purpose, role and plan and clear tracking mechanisms?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
MECHANISMS AND SYSTEMS	YES	NO
Do you have mechanisms in place across the organisation to ensure participation, accountability and transparency as you integrate a feminist perspective?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
TECHNICAL RESOURCES	YES	NO
Do you have a list of technical resources, assets and administrative tools and resources needed to ensure the process will be facilitated efficiently?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
COORDINATION AND COMMUNICATION	YES	NO
Is there a coordination and communication plan in place, with an individual or team ready to lead and manage this?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
POLICIES	YES	NO
Is there a policy review plan in place to integrate a feminist perspective in all existing policies and draft new polices as needed?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
MONEY	YES	NO
Have you costed the process of integrating a feminist perspective?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Is there an approved budget?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do you have a fundraising plan and proposal for this work?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

PART 4  
**PROGRAMMING  
WITH A  
FEMINIST  
LENS**





# IMAGINE

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Imagine... A time when social justice and human rights work put love and care at the front and centre in its approach.

Imagine attitudes and cultures that seek to advance humanity. Imagine a time when programming with a feminist lens has become possible.

Imagine programming and organising that prioritise the needs and rights of women, LGBTI+ persons and other marginalised groups.

Imagine these groups moving from the margins to the centre. Imagine an approach to social justice work that recognises, affirms and systematically invests in their voices, visibility and leadership. All because of a deep commitment to equity.

Imagine organising through advocacy, healing and wellness, learning and development, research and documentation, and service delivery that grapple with power and confront it.

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Imagine programming that boldly faces patriarchal power to end its domination. Programming that enforces this through legislation, policies and institutions, both at the personal and community level.

Imagine working with communities, policymakers and decision-makers in both state and non-state institutions in ways that build the power within and the power to transform society.

And imagine making your working culture more emancipatory by weaving feminist ideas into it.

By creating opportunities for women and other oppressed groups, feminist programming will build agency and meaning and will ensure human rights are respected.

**Another Movement Culture Is Possible!**

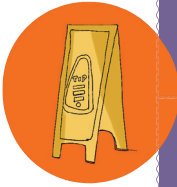
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## PRACTICAL GUIDANCE

None of us are starting from scratch. As human rights defenders, we are already passionate about and actively working on social justice issues. We understand the principles of equity and prioritise those who have been forced to exist on the margins of society. A central intention of feminist organising has been to focus on those on the margins, including women, LGBTI+ persons and anyone who has been discriminated against, stigmatised or excluded.







## TIP

**LESSON:** In many ways, integrating a feminist perspective is similar to learning a new skill or exploring a new area of work. We all know how to observe, read, consult, analyse, plan, communicate, implement, track and evaluate. Now, we should use those capabilities to achieve gender equality and integrate a feminist perspective into our organisational development.

Use your own processes and procedures as a 'good enough' framework that offers opportunities to explore, learn and weave action into your programmes. You don't have to start a new project or programme: the aim is to build on and develop what already exists! This can be as simple as including an indicator on how positions in your organisation change, or understanding the gendered experiences of employees and volunteers. Understanding gender requires just a little guidance in the right direction. In practice, this could mean hosting a women-only or men-only circle, to create a space to share their daily lived realities and ways in which power operates in their lives. Find a point of entry that works for you!

How you begin to integrate a feminist perspective will depend on where your organisation is in its planning cycle: you may be about to develop a new strategic plan or you may have just done so, or perhaps you are halfway through your strategic cycle. Depending on where your organisation is, you can seize the moment to start, accelerate or strengthen the feminist lens in human rights programming.

## THE PROCESS

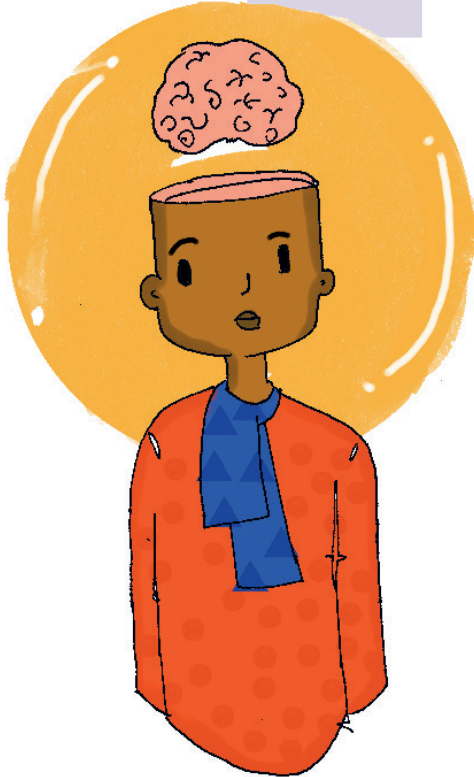
# 1

### LEADERSHIP, VOICE AND AGENCY

The most critical step in feminist programming is to ensure that the opinions and ideas of women, LGBTI+ persons and other marginalised groups are taken seriously. They hold invaluable knowledge about their realities; they are capable of analysing situations, generating solutions and leading programming that will achieve holistic gender equality.



## 2

**FEMINIST CONSCIOUSNESS**

Your approach to all interventions and programming should be inclusive and participatory. Interventions that use feminist consciousness to guide their programming should centre on power, aiming to turn oppressive power into emancipatory power.

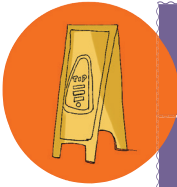
In essence, programming with a feminist consciousness addresses all forms of structural inequality. Projects and programmes should incorporate processes that enable us to reflect on our similarities and differences, so we can build a sense of unity through solidarity, friendship and community.

They should enable us to locate our own power and the power of the collective, and together explore ways to allow emancipatory power to emerge.



### LEARNING AND REFLECTION

Like any change process, there should be moments that grant women, LGBTI+ persons and other marginalised groups the space to slow down and reflect. This reflection and the lessons that emerge from it should inform and shape your process of integrating a feminist perspective into your programming. These spaces are ideal for sharing new feminist ideas, concepts and tools for analysing and addressing power.



## TIP

LESSON: Once women, LGBTI+ persons and other marginalised groups are able to engage in spaces that are focused on feminist consciousness-building, they begin to lead their own processes. Sometimes, the process will take on a life of its own. This is sustainability in action. In many cases, these groups will continue their process with or without you! Once they have awakened to the ways in which power operates, they will be driven to explore in greater depth what this means for them.

Generate questions on power, social condition and the position of marginalised groups. Enable and encourage these groups to lead this process. You do not need to have all the expertise and experience in gender and feminism: you can learn this or ask an external actor to help apply a feminist lens to programming. The questions you generate will become opportunities to explore and find empowering answers.

# 4

## CHANGES, OUTCOMES, RESULTS

When integrating a feminist perspective, a helpful point of entry is to agree on a set of changes that women, LGBTI+ persons and other marginalised groups want to see in their own lives, action or activism.



One of the simplest yet most comprehensive frameworks is ‘Women’s Condition and Women’s Position’ by Caroline Moser, which includes women’s practical needs (condition) and their strategic interests.<sup>7</sup>



## EXAMPLE

### ADDRESSING WOMEN’S CONDITION AND POSITION

The girls were in their final year of high school. Three days a week, they remained on campus until 5pm to take extra classes. When winter arrived that year, they walked home in the twilight or even darkness, passing by a forest. This forest supplied the village with wood for heating. Some of the young men in the area had been employed by a logging company and were housed in huts on the edge of the forest.

The girls felt anxious whenever they had to stay late for extra lessons. They were sometimes unable to concentrate at school and terrified when it was time to leave for home.

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7. C. Moser, *Gender Planning and Development Theory, Practice and Training*, Routledge, 1993

Eventually, a teacher discovered that the young men intimidated, sexually harassed and threatened to rape the girls as they passed by a certain part of the forest. The girls believed that the reason none of them had actually been raped was because they always walked together and outnumbered the men. But they were still afraid that the men would outnumber them one day.

If, for some reason, one or two of the girls would not be able to walk with the group, they would be at risk of being subjected to worse. After a long process of meetings and action by the parents and school staff, streetlights were placed along the stretch of road near where the men worked and hung out.

The students' parents even managed to get the logging company to pay for the lighting. By the end of the next year, the men had started to hang out in other parts of the forest, so they could continue to entertain themselves when the new class of final-year students had to walk home in the twilight. The lights had not been maintained and often did not work – meaning the girls walked in darkness despite the efforts of their parents and their school.

One Saturday, the girls met with a young teacher who lived in the village but worked at a school close to town. She asked the girls many questions, and they spent all morning exploring the problem and brainstorming an effective solution.



The girls eventually concluded that lighting was not really the solution. The problem, they saw, was the fact that the young men had a strong sense that, as men, they were entitled to the girls' attention. They believed the girls were there for their enjoyment and entertainment.

Somehow, the men thought that the girls enjoyed the attention and wanted to be intimate with the men because the men were employed and had an income.

Now, the girls were able to approach the school and their parents to plan a solution that would address the oppressive power the men exerted over the girls and that would bring an end to this treatment.



Certain terminologies make people fearful - feminism, women's rights, multiple gender identities, etc. people need to understand that having a Feminist approach benefits all of us...yes, even men!

**Catherine Rodgers**

# CHANGE IN CONDITION

A feminist analysis, perspective or lens is concerned with the daily lived realities and practical needs of women and LGBTI+ persons. What are their celebrations? Their struggles? What are the emotional, mental and spiritual implications of these lived realities?

The answers to these important questions inform feminist organising, including research, policy advocacy and campaigning, service provision, and learning and development (capacity building).

Much of the work done by human rights defenders with women, LGBTI+ persons and other oppressed groups addresses these practical needs and their condition.

But it is problematic that few women and LGBTI+ persons are included in the planning of interventions, that they are excluded from leadership roles and that they often cannot participate in interventions offered by state or non-state actors.

Women, LGBTI+ persons and marginalised groups cannot achieve structural change and dismantle patriarchy without solidarity. Solidarity across genders is essential for changing power relations and the condition of these groups.



Feminism takes it deeper when you start understanding its ideology then you start to look at everything and you do and how you do it and where you are with different eyes. It forces and changes the way plans are made.

The way roles are distributed, it pushes people to have to do things through what they do and what they give voice to. Who gets paid and how and all of those things that we can easily reproduce in our own institutions.

The very things we are fighting against because they are inside us, so I think feminism brings that to question. It pushes people to challenge own actions.

**Coumba Toure**

# CHANGE IN POSITION

When adopting a feminist approach in work with women and LGBTI+ persons, the provision of goods and services should be respected, promoted and connected to feminist consciousness - raising or - deepening work. Feminist consciousness - raising or - deepening is about seeing the problem for what it really is.

This work is critical in and of itself, no matter what human rights defenders have promised in funding proposals to donors. It is also important because it provides the basis, the facts and the evidence for advocacy, research and capacity building.

To translate these ideas and concepts into practice, project plans, monitoring and evaluation, and other internal processes, programming would benefit from a feminist lens and should consider the feminist work that changes positions.

A change in position occurs when you take active steps to:

- Improve the condition of women, LGBTI+ persons and other marginalised groups (necessary but insufficient)
- Empower and transform realities while also building their agency, so that they are equipped and supported to lead the change process in both the public and private domain (critical for deep change)




## THE PROGRAMME AND STAFF TEAM MAY FIND THIS TOOL USEFUL TO TRACK YOUR EVOLVING FEMINIST PRACTICE

PARTICIPATION	YES	NO
Have you organised with women, LGBTI+ persons and marginalised groups to engage and participate in your programme structures?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Have you created space over time for their leadership and participation in decisions on the programme?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
COMMITMENT AND RESOURCING	YES	NO
Is the entire organisation clear about and committed to prioritising and investing time, effort, funding and other resources to enable and support the leadership, voices and gender sensitisation of women, LGBTI+ persons and other marginalised groups?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
MAPPING AND LISTENING	YES	NO
Has the organisation understood the need to listen and committed to listening to women, LGBTI+ persons and other marginalised groups to hear about their practical needs/condition/daily lived realities?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Has the organisation acted to listen and map these realities, and has it considered how power relations in society create and sustain these struggles?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING	YES	NO
Has the Programme team begun to work with women, LGBTI+ persons and other marginalised groups so that they are able to draw the link between their lived realities/condition and unequal power relations in society?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Are women, LGBTI+ persons and other marginalised groups in these processes increasingly able to see and understand oppressive power?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How are men contributing to turning oppressive power into emancipatory power?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

SOLIDARITY	YES	NO
<p>Are women, LGBTI+ persons and other marginalised groups increasingly able to see the commonalities and links between their struggles?</p>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<p>Do women, LGBTI+ persons and other marginalised groups increasingly create a sense of community and friendship between each other, acting as each other's support?</p>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
COLLECTIVE ACTION	YES	NO
<p>Do people of all genders increasingly organise together to achieve gender equality and confront the oppressive power of state and non-state actors?</p>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<p>Is your organisation increasingly able to take up the priorities of women, LGBTI+ persons and other marginalised groups with key decision-makers?</p>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<p>Is your organisation increasingly able to help women, LGBTI+ persons and other marginalised groups speak and act on their own behalf in advocacy and campaigning work?</p>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
TRACKING, MONITORING, EVALUATING	YES	NO
<p>Does your organisation have clearly articulated outcomes/results and markers or indicators to assess the success of this work?</p>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<p>Does the Programme team collect and process information on its progress, problems and plans in relation to condition and position?</p>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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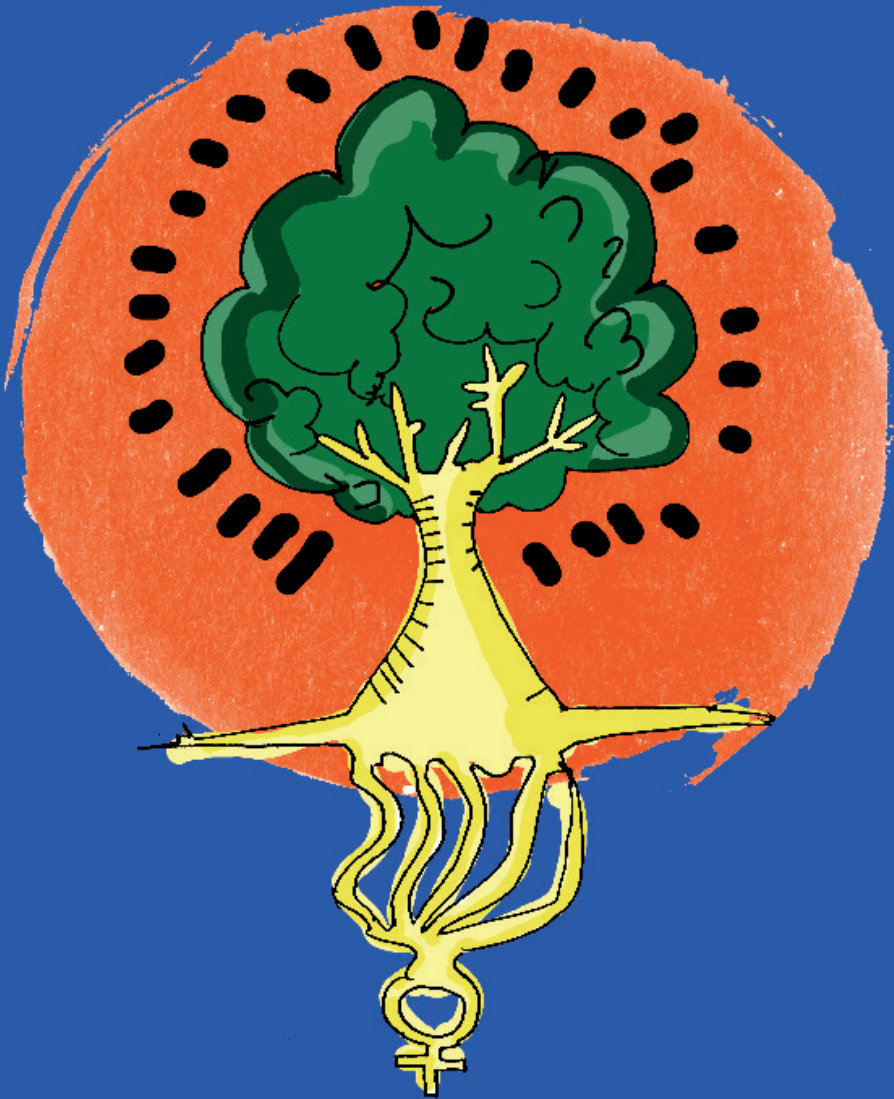


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PART 5  
**GOING  
DEEPER**



Congratulations!

You have come to the end of the Building Feminist Practice Pocketbook. We hope you feel inspired and curious about feminist practice.

We also hope you found something that resonated with you and that you will pursue! Interested in reading and learning more? Then please continue with this section: PART 5: GOING DEEPER.

Before we dive in, we would like to recommend two texts that we know many have found useful as a reference point for building their feminist practice in diverse locations and contexts.

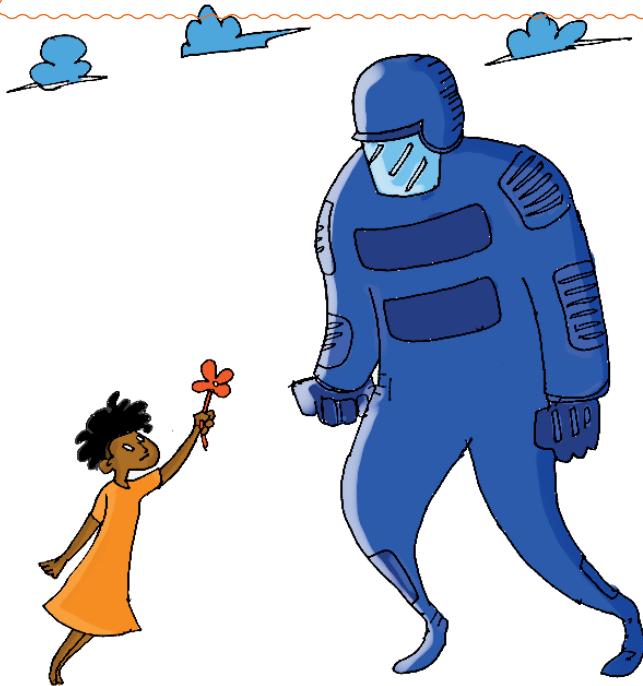
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Resistance to feminism and gender transformation takes a very pernicious form. Strategies include the right words, but actions do not follow. There is no learning from what doesn't work, unfair treatment if women or inequities go unnoticed or are not addressed and women are blamed for bad outcomes.

After a while what is in the strategies is wholly ignored and feminist ideals are considered burdensome and unwelcome (even foreign). It breaks my heart when people use the argument: it is the women who do not want their own progress. And I hear it most in CSOs.

**Carmeliza Rosario**



# DEALING WITH RESISTANCE

The movement to create gender equality and dismantle the patriarchal status quo is destabilising and disruptive at a fundamental level. Resistance can take place by building feminist practice and by navigating, building and confronting power on a personal level, in the private sphere. There will almost certainly be resistance within your organisation or group – even from those who are committed to change – because change causes discomfort. Since discomfort is part of building your practice, it is important to prepare for resistance and backlash.

Backlash includes the harassment, violations or aggression feminist activists experience when they confront unequal power relations. Often, it is those who are invested in maintaining the status quo for their own benefit and their own privileges who are responsible for blocking progress.

In Part 3, we urged you to emotionally prepare for discomfort and backlash and to develop strategies to foresee and respond to it. This Pocketbook cannot mention all the strategies that exist to deal with the impact this may have on mental and physical wellbeing. But to get you started, here are some notes from the conversations we had with human rights as we developed this publication.



# PARTNERS IDEAS

## WHY WE RESIST INTEGRATING A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

1. Fear of losing perceived or real power.
2. The comfort that comes with doing things 'the normal way'. In some cases, mainstreaming gender is perceived as coming at the cost of established, normal practices. Conversations on best practices demonstrate that 'the normal' is not actually normal.
3. The argument that we work with both women and men and do not discriminate. What is the problem? Why would we need gender transformation and feminism?
4. Some believe in equal rights but see the word 'feminism' as an ideology and a movement that does not align with their personal beliefs and values.
5. Fear that men will eventually lose out (the assumed loss of power, influence, authority, control and economic opportunities).
6. Fear that feminism will overturn time-honoured traditions, religious beliefs and established gender roles, which feels scary and wrong.
7. Fear that feminism will cause negative shifts in relationships, marriages, society, culture, power, authority dynamics and economic and job opportunities, if and when women are on an equal footing with men.

8. Real or perceived misandry (and a ‘cancel culture’) when people do not understand feminist leadership or the value of intersectional analysis. This leads to the assumption that feminists hate men, which in turn fuels resistance and defensiveness.
9. Resistance to making women’s rights and gender justice an organisational priority often takes the form of a dismissal of the significance of gender equality. Some say, for example, that “gender isn’t a problem” because there are plenty of women organisations already and enough women working for NGOs. Others say that their organisation “focuses on democracy and inclusion”, so specific action on women’s rights and gender justice isn’t necessary.
10. Fear of tackling invisible layers of hitherto invisible inequality. The depth and breadth of discrimination against women and girls that societies have normalised and called ‘custom’ or ‘tradition’ are also normalised in organisations. This is not up for discussions in most organisations.
11. Fear that changes in the domestic sphere go against cultural, religious or traditional values or are being imposed by external oppressors or majority cultures. This is a particularly powerful challenge in identity-based organisations and movements where belonging and identification with a collective is central to membership of the movement and its sense of solidarity.



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- Urgent Action Fund Africa, <https://www.uaf-africa.org/>
- Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition, <https://www.defendingwomen-defendingrights.org/>

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Please consider completing this feedback form. Your insights, learnings and ideas will be a significant contribution to feminist knowledge and the work of Civil Rights Defenders. You can help us produce better resources to strengthen and complement the work of human rights defenders.

**Name of the Human Rights defender providing feedback** [OPTIONAL]

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**Contact details** [OPTIONAL]

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**How I have used this Pocketbook:**

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**What I found useful and less useful:**

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**My / Our key recommendation for Civil Rights Defenders  
in terms of this Pocketbook:**

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Thank you for your time and effort in completing this feedback form. Feel free to add additional pages if needed. Please copy and paste your completed feedback form in the body of an e-mail or add it as an attachment and send it to [africa@civilrightsdefenders.org](mailto:africa@civilrightsdefenders.org).

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## ABOUT CIVIL RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Civil Rights Defenders is an international human rights organisation founded in Sweden in 1982. The organisation defends civil and political rights and partners with and supports human rights defenders on four continents. Civil Rights Defenders engages in advocacy activities and legal processes and provides information on the human rights situation globally.

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