



Feminist Organizing Toolkit

for Diaspora Organizations



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The aim of the toolkit

This toolkit is part of a series that intends to offer practical guidance to diaspora actors in different areas: (1) Diaspora Fundraising, (2) Community Outreach, (3) Networking and Alliances Building, (4) Advocacy and (5) Diaspora Feminist Organizing.

Women-led diaspora initiatives can play a crucial role in the sustainable development of their countries of origin, as well as in promoting the participation of diaspora communities in the societies of residence. Yet, women in diaspora often face unique challenges related to their status as both migrants and as women. Strengthening diaspora feminist organizing capacity is crucial in recognizing the diverse and gendered experiences of women in the diaspora, by providing resources to challenge patriarchal norms, and harnessing their potential as leaders and changemakers in both their countries of origin and societies of residence.

This toolkit provides hands-on tools and a resource that will help to reflect upon and adopt feminist principles and practices in diaspora organizing. The toolkit aims to provide insights about the specific challenges and experiences of diaspora women and gender-diverse people and offers tools, resources and guidance for feminist organizing.

Who is this toolkit for?

By centering the voices, knowledge, and wisdom of diaspora women we aim to ensure that the toolkit is informed by their distinct experience, expertise, needs and challenges. While the primary focus of this toolkit is on gender justice and the experiences of diaspora women, the approaches and insights presented here are valuable to a broader range of actors. Many of the challenges faced by diaspora women—such as exclusion from decision-making, discrimination, and structural inequalities—are also experienced by other marginalized groups, including LGBTQI+ individuals, people with disabilities, and ethnic and racial minorities. Hence, we believe that all diaspora organizations can benefit from integrating feminist principles, as they offer frameworks for inclusive leadership, equitable decision-making, and transformative justice that strengthen community resilience and advocacy efforts.

Further, this toolkit is designed for organizations at different stages of development and with varying capacities. Newly established diaspora organizations can use it as a foundational guide to build inclusive and participatory structures from the outset. More established organizations can benefit from ongoing reflection and adaptation, using the resources and exercises to deepen their commitment to shared power, accountability, and collective care.



Finding your way through the toolkit

Section 1 begins with a brief introduction by conceptualizing feminist organizing in the diaspora context. As such it provides an overview of the role of diaspora women as leaders and changemakers and offers key definitions and concept of what we mean by feminist organizing.

Section 2 outlines feminist leadership principles and offers tools to put these principles into practice, focusing on building a mission and vision, core feminist organizational values, and shared power and collective decision-making.

Section 3 provides tools and practices for diaspora feminist organizing, focusing on transforming gender norms, storytelling for community building and advocacy, and self and collective care practices.

Section 4 explores feminist resourcing strategies, emphasizing autonomous resourcing as a way to ensure financial sustainability, and gives an overview of different feminist funds.

Section 5 offers conclusions and recommendations to diaspora actors and organisations in their feminist organizing.

Through case studies, practical exercises, and recommendations for additional resources, the toolkit aims to equip diaspora organizations with the knowledge, strategies, and tools needed to strengthen their transformative and feminist leadership.

Each section includes an exercise to help put the toolkit's content and themes into action. Exercises are designed to be useful for and implemented by diaspora organizations, which often operate with lower capacity and volunteer efforts. Exercises can be done by members of the organization, without an external facilitator, though we recommend appointing a group member to moderate/facilitate a structured discussion. Additional tools in and further resources are also included, in case you want to dig deeper into the topic.



Exercises

In these boxes you find relevant step-by-step guidances that help you in your feminist organizing.



Relevant concepts & approaches

These boxes explore definitions of different concepts or important theories and approaches relevant to feminist organizing.



Case examples

These boxes illustrate the topics by exploring real cases and best practices.



Additional tools & resources

These boxes offer additional tools and resources on the topic, such as toolkits or training resources.



Section 1 - Conceptualizing Feminist Organizing in the Diaspora Context

This section explores the role of diaspora women as leaders and changemakers, highlighting their contributions to development, advocacy, and feminist organizing while addressing the intersecting power structures, gender norms, and systemic barriers they face across transnational contexts. It offers key definitions and concept of what we mean by feminist organizing.

Women in the diaspora play a crucial role in the sustainable development of their countries of origin, as well as in promoting participation of diaspora communities in the societies of residence. Yet their **diverse contributions as leaders and changemakers remain often overlooked**, as gendered narratives continue to marginalize their experiences within both diaspora spaces and within societies of origin and residence.

Diaspora women-led organizations not only promote sustainable development and humanitarian aid but also challenge patriarchal norms, advocate for gender justice, and create spaces of belonging for migrant and refugee women¹. Others engage in advocacy efforts to raise awareness on women rights, or lobby for a commitment to ensure gender-sensitive as well as gender-transformative approaches to sustainable development². As such, women's diasporic political struggles often intersect with feminist struggles for more gender-based rights and equalities³, making feminist organizing an essential tool for all diaspora actors committed to systemic change. Despite the transformative potential, **women-led diaspora initiatives encounter numerous obstacles that stem from both external and internal power structures**. These challenges are shaped by intersecting factors, including power dynamics within diaspora communities, structural inequalities in host societies, and the transnational complexities of engaging in activism across multiple contexts⁴.

These intersecting dynamics **often restrict women's access to decision-making spaces, funding, and institutional recognition**⁵. Additionally, transnational activism can be met with skepticism or repression, particularly when diaspora women challenge traditional gender roles or speak out against systemic injustice⁶.

Feminist organizing within the diaspora context seeks to challenge these dynamics by **centering gender justice, equity, and collective liberation in all aspects of community and political work**. In diaspora contexts, feminist organizing is shaped by the lived realities of migration, displacement, and

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- 1 Al-Ali, N. (2007). Iraqi Women in Diasporic Spaces: Political Mobilization, Gender & Citizenship. *Revue Des Mondes Musulmans et de La Méditerranée*, 117–118, 137–154; McIlwaine, C., & Bermúdez, A. (2011). The gendering of political and civic participation among Colombian migrants in London. *Environment and Planning A*, 43(7), 1499–1513; Godin, M. (2018). Breaking the silences, breaking the frames: A gendered diasporic analysis of sexual violence in the DRC. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 44(8), 1390–1407.
 - 2 Hewitt, L. (2011). Framing across differences, building solidarities: Lessons from women's rights activism in transnational spaces. *Interface: A Journal for and about Social Movements*, 3(2), 65–99.
 - 3 Al-Ali, N. (2010). Diasporas and gender. In K. Knott & S. MacLoughlin (Eds.), *Diasporas: Concepts, intersections, identities* (pp. 118–122). Zed Books.
 - 4 Busbridge, R., & Winarnita, M. (2015). Dialogue and Other 'Men's Business': Gender, Conflict and Multicultural Politics in the Diaspora. *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 36(2), 202–220.
 - 5 Anthias, F. (2012). Transnational Mobilities, Migration Research and Intersectionality: Towards a translocational frame. *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, 2(2), 102.
 - 6 Aljizawi, Noura, Siena Anstis, Marcus Michaelsen, Veronica Arroyo, Shaila Baran, Maria Bikbulatova, Gözde Bökü, Camila Franco, Arzu Geybullu, Muetter Iliqad, Nicola Lawford, Émilie La Flèche, Gabby Lim, Levi Meletti, Maryam Mirza, Zoe Panday, Claire Posno, Zoë Reichert, Berhan Taye, and Angela Yang. "No Escape: The Weaponization of Gender for the Purposes of Digital Transnational Repression," *Citizen Lab Report No. 180*, University of Toronto, December 2024. Available at: <https://citizenlab.ca/2024/12/the-weaponization-of-gender-for-the-purposes-of-digital-transnational-repression/>



transnationalism, requiring an approach that recognises the intersection of multiple struggles—gender, race, class, colonial histories, and hence the diversity of diasporic feminist identities. As such, the strategies and insights explored in this section are not only relevant for women-led organizations but can strengthen the work of all diaspora actors who seek to build more just, inclusive, and transformative spaces.

What is feminism?

Feminism does not have a single definition—it has evolved in different ways depending on historical, cultural, and political contexts. Some people may be sceptical of feminism because of its historical association with Western or elite perspectives, but feminist movements have continually transformed to reflect different local experiences, traditions, and needs. In this toolkit we understand feminism as seeking to create a world where all people can live with dignity, freedom, and equality, free from oppression and discrimination. It is not just about equality between men and women—it aims at transforming all forms of power that marginalize people based on their gender, race, class, sexuality, disability, nationality, or any other identity¹.

What is feminist organizing?

Feminist organizing emphasizes feminism as a practice rather than merely an ideology, shifting the focus from abstract principles to the everyday actions, relationships, and structures that shape lived experiences. This approach recognises feminism as a process of doing, rather than just believing, emphasizing the material ways in which power is negotiated, resisted, and transformed.

Feminist organizing prioritizes collective care and mutual aid as political strategies, and challenges power imbalances, by critically reflecting on how decisions are made, resources are distributed, and voices are centred. As a way of being, organizing, and relating, it is a rooted force for change in the everyday lives of those who practice it.

Concept



Key concepts

Decolonial Feminism – Colonial histories have shaped gender relations, migration policies, and global power structures. Decolonial feminism seeks to dismantle Eurocentric, patriarchal frameworks that exclude or marginalize women from the Global South, advocating for alternative forms of knowledge, leadership, and organizing that emerge from local and indigenous experiences.

Intersectionality – A term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), intersectionality is the acknowledgement that everyone has their own unique experiences of discrimination and oppression, and that we must consider everything and anything that can marginalize people – such as gender, race, class, sexual orientation, physical ability. It helps us to take into account people's unique experiences of discrimination and oppression for better assessment and

1 Batliwala, Srilatha (2011). Changing Their World: Concepts and Practices of Women's Movements". https://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/changing_their_world_2ed_full_eng.pdf



Resource

Additional resources on feminism

Check out the South Feminist Knowledge Hub, an online learning and convening space for southern feminist activism, offering information and materials about South Feminism theory, histories, research, analysis, concepts, practices, and policies from a decolonial Global South feminist perspective.

<https://knowledgehub.southfeministfutures.org/kb/>

Resources on intersectionality

Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (2021). A Guide to Building Feminist Intersectional Solidarity. Ottawa: ON Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women. <https://www.criaw-icref.ca/publications/a-guide-to-building-feminist-intersectional-solidarity/shape-people's-experiences>

UN Women (2021). Intersectionality Resource Guide and Toolkit. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/01/intersectionality-resource-guide-and-toolkit>

Womankind Worldwide: Intersectionality 101: What is it and why is it important? <https://www.womankind.org.uk/intersectionality-101-what-is-it-and-why-is-it-important/>



Section 2 - Feminist Leadership Principles

“Feminist Leadership at its most basic is a commitment to creating alternatives to traditional, hierarchical leadership and organizational cultures. This can take many different forms, from critical self-reflection on the individual level to developing new decision-making structures on the collective level. Most importantly, Feminist Leadership doesn’t have a fixed definition or step-by-step guide. It is an ongoing process of learning and unlearning, both individually and together with others.”¹

Feminist leadership (or transformative leadership) is the foundation of feminist organizing, shaping both the vision and the everyday practices of an organization. It challenges traditional notions of leadership by shifting the focus from hierarchy and authority to collective power, shared responsibility, and transformative change. Rather than exerting dominance or control, **feminist leadership is concerned with how power is used** to foster leadership that is participatory, accountable, and rooted in social justice. It is not a fixed model but an ongoing process of reflection, learning, and unlearning, shaped by the needs of those it serves.

Feminist organizing, as the practice of feminist leadership, puts these principles into action by creating structures, strategies, and spaces that prioritize equity, inclusion, and collective decision-making.

In feminist leadership, power is redistributed rather than concentrated, ensuring that decision-making processes are inclusive and representative. It moves away from competition and individualism, **emphasizing collaboration, mutual care, and relational approaches to leadership**.

Feminist leadership is both personal and political. It recognizes that leadership is not just about achieving a position of influence but about the ways in which leadership is enacted—how decisions are made, whose voices are heard, and whose experiences shape priorities.

This section explores the foundations of feminist leadership in diaspora organizing, focusing on how power is understood, shared, and transformed within movements and organizations. It begins by examining how personal experiences and political struggles are interconnected, and how this can inform the development of the vision and mission of the organization. It then delves into the core values and practices that define feminist organizing and leadership, **offers guidance how these principles can be embedded in everyday structures and actions**. Finally, it addresses the importance of shared power and collective decision-making, emphasizing non-hierarchical leadership models that foster participation, accountability, and transformative change.

1 Coalition of Feminists for Social Change. (2021). COFEM Learning Brief Series: Feminist Leadership. https://cofemsocialchange.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/COFEM_Learning-Brief-Series_Digital.pdf



Resource

Check out the resources of Fair Share's feminist leadership

On this page you can find recordings, the hosts' presentation slides and an overview of key insights for each session of the Feminist Leadership: Eight Weeks of Exploration.

<https://fairsharewl.org/explorefeministleadership-resources/>



Example

Check out the resources of Fair Share's feminist leadership

NESWA's aim is to promote the role of migrant women* by emphasizing civic responsibility through networking and creating circles of trust in order to shift the current socio-political context. The initiative NESWA-Acts was launched to create a civil and political network that develops a new political system from a feminist and gender-neutral perspective. Through a series of workshops, the initiative covers topics such as human rights, negotiation and lobbying mechanisms, governance, bodily autonomy and body language, as well as art activism.

<https://www.neswa-ev.com/en/neswa-act1/>



2.1. Building a Vision and Mission

A clear and compelling vision is essential, as it provides a guiding framework for the organization's mission, strategies, and impact. Operating at the intersection of gender, migration, race, and transnational belonging, many women-led diaspora organizations navigate complex identities and systemic barriers.

A strong vision can affirm the organizational purpose, strengthens collective power, and fosters solidarity across borders. It allows organizations to challenge dominant narratives, advocate for policies that center gender justice and migrant rights and build sustainable partnerships that align with their values. As such, through a well-defined vision, it becomes easier to find allies for your cause.

Given the structural challenges many women-led diaspora organizations face—ranging from political exclusion to limited funding—a well-defined vision can ensure resilience and long-term sustainability. It also plays a crucial role in ensuring intergenerational continuity, passing knowledge and leadership to future generations. Most importantly, a vision can empower women-led diaspora organizations to **reclaim their narratives, counter stereotypes, and position themselves as agents of change** rather

Concept



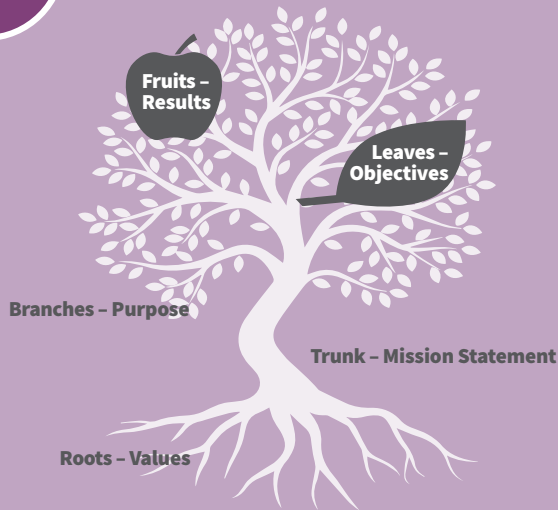
Vision is an aspirational statement that describes the long-term change an organization seeks to create in the world. It is a future-oriented guiding principle that reflects the organization's ultimate purpose and the transformation it aims to contribute to. A vision is broad, inspirational, and rooted in values, offering a sense of direction and motivation for all activities.

Example: We envision a world where migrant and displaced women are fully recognized as political agents and cultural producers and have access to rights, justice, and dignity.

Mission defines the organization's core purpose and approach to achieving its vision. It is

Developing a vision and mission as a diaspora women-led organization is deeply connected to the feminist principle of the personal is political. This concept, rooted in intersectional feminist thought, recognizes that personal experiences—especially those shaped by gender, migration, race, and systemic exclusion—are not isolated but rather embedded in broader political structures. By developing a mission, organizations transform these personal and collective experiences into a social and political force. Hence, a mission is not just an abstract statement, it reflects the cause, aspirations, and agency of those involved in the organization.

By rooting your organizational vision and mission in the personal realities of diaspora women, you can ensure that your work remains relevant, intersectional, and grounded in lived experiences.

**Exercise**

Note on facilitation: Before you start make sure you appoint someone from your team to facilitate and moderate the exercise.

<https://blog.resourcezone.com.au/?p=437>

Creating your vision tree

Objective: This exercise uses the metaphor of a tree to guide organizations in developing their vision and mission. Each part of the tree represents a key component: values, mission, purpose, objectives, and results. By the end of the exercise, you will have a clear and cohesive framework that reflects your collective goals and aspirations.

Materials needed: Large poster paper or a whiteboard, markers, sticky notes, or digital collaboration tools (e.g., Miro, MURAL).

Who should take part: Leadership, active members & volunteers to ensure collective ownership.

Time required: 1.5 – 2 hours

Step 1: Defining the Roots

The roots of the tree symbolize the foundational principles that ground the organization. These values represent what your organization stands for and the ethical guidelines that shape its work. Without strong roots, the tree cannot grow or sustain itself. Discuss with your team the following question:

- What values are most important to our work? What principles guide our decisions and interactions?

Team members then write their answers (e.g., solidarity, dignity, justice) on sticky notes and place them on the roots of the tree

Step 2: The Trunk - Craft the Mission

The trunk represents the core mission of your organization and serves as the connecting force between its values (roots) and its goals (branches and fruits). A strong trunk gives the tree its structure and ensures alignment between the organization's actions and aspirations. Discuss with your team the following questions:

- Who do we serve?
- What are their needs?
- What does our organization do to meet these needs?

As a group, synthesize the answers into a concise mission statement that describes the organization's



purpose and approach. A good mission statement is **clear, concise, and impactful**, articulating the essence of what an organization does and why it exists. It should:

- **Reflect Purpose:** Clearly articulate the organization's core purpose and what it seeks to achieve.
- **Identify people they serve:** Specify the community or audience it serves (e.g., diaspora women, migrants, policy makers).
- **Emphasize Approach:** Highlight how the organization works toward its goals (e.g., advocacy, fostering networks, promote empowerment).
- **Align with Values:** Reflect the foundational principles and ethics that guide the organization.
- **Be Memorable:** Keep it brief and easy to remember, ideally no more than a few sentences.

Step 3: Branches - Exploring the Purpose

The branches symbolize the broader purpose of the organization and its role in creating change. They connect the mission to the larger societal or systemic impact the organization seeks to achieve. Reflect on the following questions with your team:

- What is the broader purpose of our work?
- What role do we play in addressing specific challenges and contributing to social change?

Brainstorm with your team and write down three to five main streams where the mission is outworked.

Step 4: Leaves - Identifying Objectives

The leaves represent actionable goals and objectives that allow the organization to grow and thrive. These objectives provide the roadmap for how the organization will achieve its mission and purpose. Reflect with your team on the following questions:

- What are our short-term and long-term objectives?
- What specific actions will help us achieve our purpose?

Brainstorm with your team the different objectives (e.g., securing funding, launching new programs, building partnerships) for the purpose branches. Ensure that these are specific, measurable goals that translate the mission into action.

Step 5: Fruits - Visualizing Results

The fruits symbolize the long-term outcomes and impact of the organization's work. They represent the ultimate success help to develop a shared vision of the long-term change the organization aims to contribute to. Reflect on the following questions like:

- If we succeed in our mission, what will the world look like?
- What changes do we want to see?

Together with your team, write your envisioned results (e.g., empowered communities, policy changes, cultural shifts) on the fruits of the tree. Then develop a vision statement that articulates a compelling picture of the future you want to achieve.



Step 6: Closing Reflection

Once the tree is complete, reflect with your team on the connections between each part: How do the values (roots) support the mission (trunk)? How does the purpose (branches) grow toward the goals (leaves) and results (fruits)? This reflection helps to ensure that the vision and mission are cohesive and grounded in the organization's collective aspirations.



Resource

Additional tools for facilitating visioning

The Visioning Toolkit series by atctools.org can help you create a joint mission, shared vision and common values and give practical guidance on how these become integrated into organizational work and culture.

https://atctools.org/toolkit_tool/visioning-toolkit/

The Organizer's Canvas by Benedict Hugosson, Leading Change Network, is a visual tool that helps organizers think creatively around building leadership based on five key organizing practices: story, relationships, structure, strategizing and action.

<https://commonslibrary.org/the-organisers-canvas/>

2.2. Translating Organizational Values into Practices

Diaspora women-led organizations often engage in value-driven politics and strategies aimed at fostering human rights, equality, peace, empowerment and inclusiveness. Defining the value of the organization helps to articulate what you stand for to the outside world and ensures that your actions remain aligned with the core purpose, even during times of change or challenge. As such, a well-articulated set of values can act as a framework for making ethical and strategic decisions.

Feminist values and principles have been expressed through various frameworks and interpretations, emphasizing distinct aspects of feminism based on cultural, historical, or social contexts. Below you can find some that are commonly used:

- **Equality** - Advocates for the equal rights, opportunities, and treatment of all individuals, regardless of gender, race, class, or other identity markers.
- **Justice** - Focuses on fairness and the redistribution of power and resources to address historical and systemic injustices faced by marginalized groups.
- **Inclusivity** - Embraces diversity and ensures that all voices, particularly those from underrepresented or marginalized communities, are heard and valued.
- **Dismantling Power Hierarchies** - Challenges oppressive systems and structures that perpetuate inequality, aiming to create more equitable and participatory forms of governance and interaction.



- **Intersectionality** - Recognizes the interconnected nature of social identities (e.g., gender, race, class, ability) and how they create unique experiences of oppression or privilege.
- **Validation of Diverse Experiences** - Acknowledges and uplifts the lived experiences of individuals, particularly those often overlooked or silenced.

In defining your values, reflect on what principles should guide our organization's work and what you want to stand for in our community and to the outside world. Importantly, your values not only guide your actions and strategies, but also the practices, ways of work and organizational principles. For instance, values such as inclusiveness and equality should be reflected internally in decision-making processes, team composition, and how we engage with stakeholders, ensuring that the organization practices what it preaches.

Exercise



Translating your values into practice

Objective: This exercise developed by Nil Delahaye, an organization capacity development trainer, can help you to reflect on your values and principles in an interpersonal and organizational context, and how to put them into practice, fostering a culture of mutual respect, care, and accountability.

Materials needed: Large poster paper or a whiteboard, markers, sticky notes, or digital collaboration tools (e.g., Miro, MURAL).

Who should take part: Leadership, active members & volunteers to ensure collective ownership.

Time required: 1.5 – 2 hours

Note on facilitation: Before you start make sure you appoint someone from your team to facilitate and moderate the exercise.

Step 1: Collective Brainstorming

As a group, list your organization's key values (e.g., equality, solidarity, justice, care). Identify concrete ways to apply each value in everyday interactions and decisions, by jointly reflecting the practices that come into mind when communicating, handling conflicts, supporting and cheering for and with each other. Encourage your team to reflect on personal experiences, organizational practices, or aspirations.

For each value, divide discussions into four key organizational practices:

- **Communication:** How do we communicate this value in our meetings, emails, and external messaging?
- **Conflict transformation:** How do we handle disagreements while staying true to this value?
- **Support & Care:** How do we ensure our team and members feel supported and valued?
- **Recognition & Celebration:** How do we amplify each other's contributions and successes?



What concrete feminist practices comes to your mind when:

Communicating with each other

Conflicting with each other

Supporting each other

Cheering with and for each other

Step 2: Creating a Shared Framework

Once you have discussed your values and practices, write these down in a shared document or visual representation. Discuss the following questions:

- How can we integrate these practices into team interactions, decision-making, and program design?
- What structures or policies do we need to reinforce these practices (e.g. ground rules for meetings, accountability mechanisms)?

The following example illustrates how the value of intersectionality can be integrated into organizational practices, by ensuring that all voices, identities, and lived realities are recognized and valued.

Dimension	Practices	Actions
Communication	Ensuring all voices are heard and valued.	• Use inclusive and accessible language in internal and external communication. • Rotate meeting facilitators to ensure diverse voices lead discussions.
Conflict Resolution	Acknowledging differences in lived experiences and power dynamics when addressing conflicts.	• Establish a simple, collective conflict resolution agreement (e.g., mutual respect, active listening) • Encourage community accountability rather than punitive approaches to conflict resolution. • Seek free, external mediation support from allied organizations if needed.
Support & Care	Providing emotional and structural support, while addressing systemic barriers.	• Provide mental health and well-being resources tailored to diverse identities. • Offer flexible participation options for members facing systemic barriers (e.g., childcare, accessibility needs).
Recognition & Celebration	Amplifying contributions equitably and creating collective moments of joy and success.	• Encourage visibility of diverse voices by rotating speaking opportunities in public engagements. • Recognize the emotional labor of activism by allowing space for joy, reflection, and cultural expression in organizational activities.



Resource



Additional tools for putting values into practice

Check out Module 2 of the toolkit below for more exercises to clearly articulate the ideals of the organization, in terms of what you wish to practice internally and see realized in the communities you work with or the world at large.

Batliwala, S. & Michel Friedman (2021). Achieving Transformative Feminist Leadership A Toolkit for Organisations and Movements. <https://www.sexualrightsinitiative.org/resources/achieving-transformative-feminist-leadership-toolkit-organisations-and-movements>

2.3. Shared Power and Leadership and Democratic Structures

Feminist leadership is more than increasing the number of women in leadership positions, it's **about fostering environments where diverse voices are heard, valued, and included in decision-making**. For diaspora women-led organizations, which often rely on voluntary work and operate with limited resources, this approach can be both a necessity and a challenge. Many organizations face pressures to navigate systemic barriers while upholding feminist values of inclusivity, accountability, and shared power.

Feminist leadership aims at actively transform traditional power structures that prioritize centralized authority and rigid hierarchies. A frequent misconception, however, is that we need flat, non-hierarchical structure or no structures at all, as formalizing decision-making systems would be inherently patriarchal or bureaucratic. While the intention behind this is to democratize power, it can often result in what Jo Freeman termed “**the tyranny of structurelessness**”. **Without clear structures, informal hierarchies often emerge, privileging those with more confidence, access, or unspoken influence**. As a result, decisions may become driven by individuals who face little accountability, leading to inefficiency and potential conflicts. Without transparent systems, marginalized members may be unintentionally silenced or sidelined. Hence, the alternative is not the absence of structure but the creation of participatory leadership models that distribute power and encourage collective decision-making.

All organizations have a structure (formally or informally) that defines the relationship between roles, functions, responsibilities, tasks and decision-making authorities. **This structure shapes who has the power to make decisions, drive the agenda, and determine what is important or not**. In many countries, the organizational structure of a registered association is regulated by the law on associations. For example, in Germany the statutes of an association must provide for an annual general meeting and the board of directors. Hence, direct or visible power is laid out in the organization's statute and bylaws that define who has the authority to make decisions (e.g., the board, executive team, or members) and establishes voting rights, eligibility for leadership roles, and rules for decision-making processes.

However, **power does not always operate in visible and tangible ways**. So even if formal structures are put in place, hidden power dynamics can shape how the organization is functioning in real life. For



instance, especially for volunteer-led organizations, leadership roles may be (unintentionally) concentrated among a few individuals, who have more time and resources to volunteer. In other cases, decision-making may become overly centralized due to a lack of formal structures, with power resting in the hands of founders or a small circle of active members.

In organizations, people with different talents, predispositions, and backgrounds come together to work on a shared goal. Our different capabilities are not only shaped by our upbringings and lived experiences, but they also influence how we act in a group. **Invisible power operates subtly through internalized beliefs, values and norms** that shape how people perceive their roles, abilities and possibilities. Especially diaspora women who often experience systematic inequality may feel powerless to challenge the status quo or lack confidence to lead.

Three Faces of Power		
Direct / Visible	Hidden	Invisible
The visible hierarchy of formal decision-making structures, roles, and processes within an organization Example: Formal leadership - board, directors, or steering committee. Written rules and guidelines - constitution, bylaws, statutes, protocols	Operates behind the scenes to shape what issues are addressed, who participates in decision-making, and what is considered “important”. Example: Key decisions may be discussed informally among a small group before being presented to the broader organization.	Operates through internalized beliefs, values and norms that shape how people perceive their roles and possibilities. Example: People who experience inequality may feel powerless to challenge the status quo or lack confidence to lead.

Things to Consider in Transforming Structures

Participatory or democratic leadership does not mean that there should not exist any hierarchies. Imagine you are an organization with hundreds of members. Involving everybody in each decision of the organization will take energy and risk that things will not get done at all. Also, not everyone is eager to participate in lengthy meetings, but some members might actually prefer to work on certain tasks and projects. Hence, it's more about making hierarchies visible and transparent but also allowing openness to change and spaces for leadership development.

- **Promote accountability and transparency** by developing decision-making processes that are clearly documented and shared with all members, and encouraging regular feedback mechanisms to evaluate leadership practices and address power imbalances.
- **Make leadership development a conscious and integral part** of the organization, by providing mentorship and training to empower members to take on leadership roles.
- **Establish collective leadership structures** such as co-leadership models, shared decision-making councils, or distributed teams responsible for specific functions and build in multiple layers



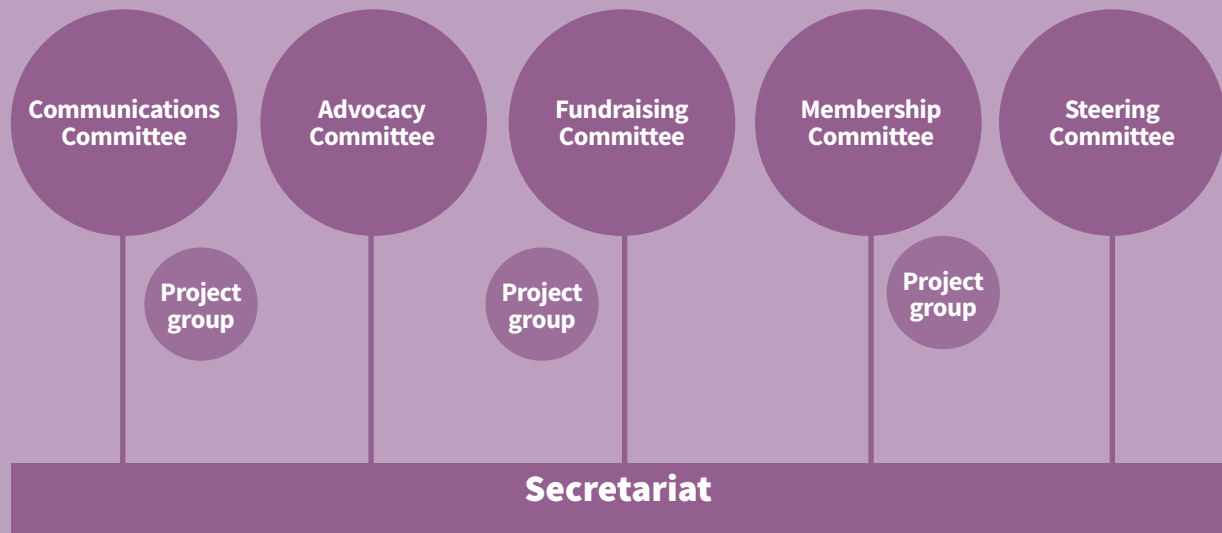
and levels of leadership to reduce reliance on a single individual.

- **Periodically rotate leadership roles** to prevent power from becoming entrenched and to encourage new perspectives.

Example



Get inspired by the Feminist Humanitarian Network (FHN)



The Feminist Humanitarian Network (FHN) is a global collective of feminist leaders dedicated to transforming the humanitarian system through feminist principles. The network operates through four Strategic Committees, each responsible for implementing different aspects of its strategy:

- **Advocacy Committee:** Focuses on promoting feminist perspectives within humanitarian advocacy.
- **Fundraising Committee:** Dedicated to securing resources to support the network's initiatives.
- **Membership Committee:** Manages member engagement and expansion efforts.
- **Communications Committee:** Handles internal and external communications to amplify the network's message.
- **Steering Committee:** has overall oversight of the Network and is appointed by their membership.
- **Secretariat:** supports the implementation of the FHN's strategic workplans; coordinating day-to-day activities on fundraising, events, communications and advocacy.

This committee-based structure ensures that major decisions are made collectively, fostering diverse participation and preventing the entrenchment of power. By distributing responsibilities across these committees, FHN aligns its organizational framework with feminist values of transparency, inclusivity, and shared leadership.

<https://www.feministhumanitariannetwork.org/our-structure>

**Exercise**

Mapping and transforming power in your organization

Objective: In order to move towards a participatory leadership model, you first need to analyze how power operates in your organization at the visible, hidden and invisible levels. The following exercise from the *Achieving Transformative Feminist Leadership Toolkit* developed by Srilatha Batliwala and Michel Friedman helps you to map the sites and dynamics of power in your organization.

Materials needed: Large poster paper or a whiteboard, markers, sticky notes, or digital collaboration tools (e.g., Miro, MURAL).

Who should take part: Leadership, active members & volunteers to ensure collective ownership.

Time required: 2.5 – 3 hours

Note on facilitation: Dealing with internal power dynamics can be challenging and may provoke some discomfort, hence, we recommend setting community agreements (e.g., confidentiality, active listening, respect) before starting. If there are already open conflicts in your organization, consider getting an external facilitator.

Step 1: Mapping Power

Reflecting on the following questions with your team can help to understand how power operates in your organization:

Who Does What? Examine how tasks and roles are assigned across the organization. Are there visible patterns in this division of labor? For example:

- Are leadership roles primarily held by older or more senior members of the organization?
- Do individuals with longer tenure in the organization hold the most authority, even if others have the capacity or interest to contribute?

Who gets what? Analyze the distribution of resources within the organization. Consider both tangible resources (e.g., funds, access to staff, or materials) and intangible resources (e.g., influence, networks, visibility, or access to critical information). Key questions include:

- Who has the most control over these resources, and who has the least?
- Are there imbalances in how resources are shared, and do these reflect broader power dynamics (e.g., based on age, gender, or seniority)?
- Map out decision-making authority over these resources to see if control is concentrated in specific individuals or groups.

Who decides what? Identify who holds decision-making power at various levels of the organization. Reflect on:

- Is decision-making authority linked to members' responsibilities and capacities or shaped by other factors (e.g., personal relationships, informal hierarchies)?



- If hidden power dynamics exist—are there individuals making key decisions without formal authority? For example, do certain influential members informally sway decisions, even if they are not in leadership roles?
- Evaluate whether the decision-making processes are transparent and inclusive or if they unintentionally exclude certain voices.

Step 2: Assessing and Aligning Power Structures

After having analyzed your organization's visible and hidden power in your organization, the next step is to diagnose the balance and distribution of power and identifying areas for improvement. Discuss with your team the following questions:

- **Is there a balance between authority and responsibility?** If the organization values democratic and participatory decision-making, does the current distribution of authority and responsibility reflect this, e.g. are leaders accountable for how they exercise their power?
- **Do those affected by decisions have a say in shaping them?** For instance, if you are an organization focusing on women empowerment, is there space for your members and the women you work with to engage in decision-making processes?
- **Are power structures appropriate for the mission and purpose?** For example, if the mission is to build a community-based organization, is sufficient power delegated to community-level structures? Are community members involved in decisions about strategy and resource allocation?
- **Is power overly concentrated?** If so, consider how power can be distributed more equitably across the organization to avoid burnout and encourage shared ownership.

Step 3: Planning and Implementing Changes

Based on this analysis, identify specific changes needed to bring the visible power structures into alignment with your organization's values and goals. For each change, consider the following:

- **What needs to change?** Clearly define the adjustment required (e.g., decentralizing decision-making, rotating leadership roles, or creating participatory forums for community input).
- **How can the change be achieved?** Identify practical steps to implement the change, such as revising the organizational bylaws, introducing new decision-making processes, or providing training for leadership development.
- **Who will lead and enable the change?** Assign specific responsibilities to individuals or teams. For example, task a leadership committee with facilitating the transition or involve external facilitators to guide inclusive discussions.

Resource



Additional tools for power analysis

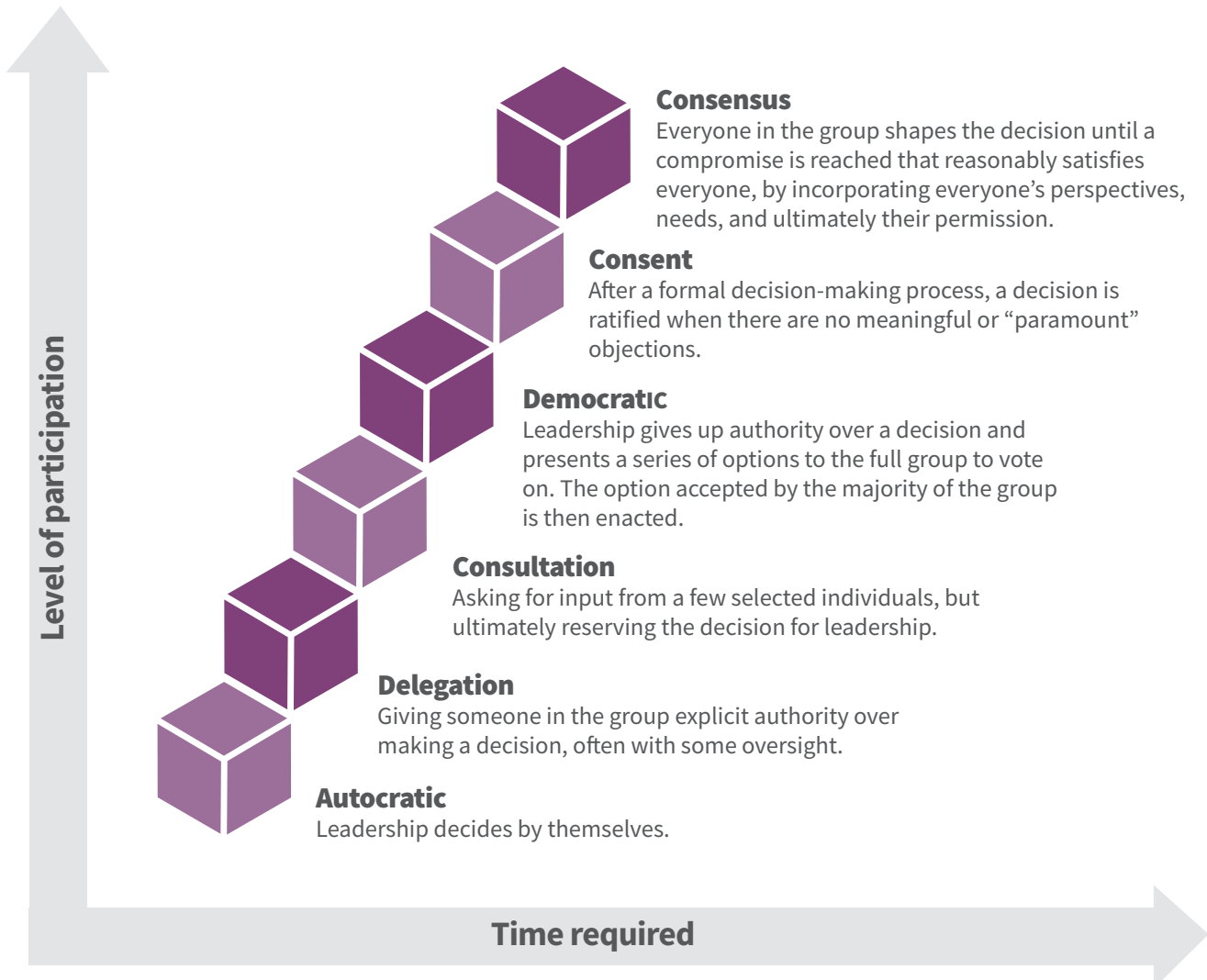
For more exercises that help you to analyze power for change, check out the following toolkit by Hunjan, R. & Pettit, J. (2011). Power: A practical guide for facilitating social change. Carnegie United Kingdom Trust. https://d1ssu070pg2v9i.cloudfront.net/pex/pex_carnegie2021/2011/11/09211812/Power-A-Practical-Guide-for-Facilitating-Social-Change_0.pdf

Check out the Our Voices, Our Choices Podcast series on feminist leadership to get inspired who different feminist organisations translate their feminist leadership into practice. <https://open.spotify.com/episode/7jaa9g4KllsfmqPUBQopvV>



Collective Decision-making Processes and Tools

As mentioned before, feminist leadership aims at creating spaces where different voices are being heard, valued and included in decision-making processes. Unlike hierarchical leadership models that concentrate power in the hands of a few, feminist leadership seeks to distribute decision-making power in ways that are participatory, transparent, and accountable. The image below illustrates a spectrum of decision-making models based on the **level of participation required** and the **time needed** to reach a decision.



The degree of participation in **decision-making directly influences ownership, commitment, and accountability** within a group or organization. The more we offer space for participation, the more we can foster a sense of ownership and commitment by the people involved and affected in the decision. This is especially the case, when we move beyond consultation – asking for opinions - towards methods of **consent or consensus** that incorporate everyone’s perspectives, needs and agreement.

While consensus and consent are valuable for fostering deep alignment and collective ownership, they can also be time-intensive and less practical for routine or time-sensitive decisions. In cases where a decision does not require full agreement or where achieving consensus may slow down progress, a democratic or even autocratic decision-making model can provide a more efficient alternative.

Hence, there is **no one-size-fits-all approach to making decisions**, but rather multiple ways to structure decision-making processes, each with its strengths and limitations. The key is developing a nuanced



practice of decision-making that balances efficiency with inclusivity, selecting the right approach for each situation.

Below you find some suggestions from [the decider App](#) for different decision-making models depending on the type of decision being made:

Model	Pros	Cons	When to use
Autocratic	Fast Unambiguous next steps Conveys strength	May miss crucial information or perspectives Overuse lowers group engagement and morale	When there's time pressure, you have all the information to make a decision, and your group is crystal-clear on what the execution would look like
Delegation	Frees up your time and energy Owning decisions motivates your team members	May require more hand-holding than anticipated Those who decide definitely won't do EXACTLY what you would do	When time is critical, when a single member of the group has the best information, and when the group is crystal-clear on what the execution would look like
Consultative	Yields additional perspectives beyond your own Helps you gauge how the decision will play out politically Gives you access to technical knowledge Opportunity to influence key stakeholders	People may feel excluded and unimportant Creates the perception of politicking	When you need to gather expertise from a limited group or when you need the support of key members of the group
Democratic	Transparent process Perceived as fair People easily grasp where the process begins and ends (unlike consensus and consent)	Vulnerable to groupthink or political campaigning Majority feels little need to compromise with minority Lack of ownership on implementing decisions - "I didn't vote for that!"	When choices are clear cut, when your team is well informed, and when your culture embraces majority rule
Consent	Fast and consultative Encourages iterative, "good enough" solutions Doesn't require agreement Promotes objective debate	Can rush teams toward a suboptimal solution Can ignore team cohesion in the decision making process Can be harmful if used on wide-impact, long-lasting decisions	When speed is needed, when the proposal is clearly defined, and when the impact of the decision is limited and reversible
Consensus	Satisfies all constituents Fosters strong, united groups Equalizes the distribution of power in a group Constituents leave fully prepared to implement the decision	Can take forever Nearly impossible for groups with low trust or competing interests Difficulty increases as group grows larger Subject to compromises that may not serve the group well	When a decision will impact lots of people and those people have both valuable insight and the capacity for candid negotiation



It is equally important to be **transparent about the choice of decision-making models**, ensuring that all members understand why a particular approach is being used and how their input is valued. Lack of clarity can lead to frustration, mistrust, or disengagement, especially if people expect a participatory process but encounter a more top-down decision. Establishing clear communication around decision-making methods fosters trust, strengthens collective accountability, and helps align expectations within the group.



Exercise

Developing a decision-making framework

Objective: This exercise helps you to develop a structured, participatory, and transparent decision-making framework, by analyzing key factors that influence decision-making.

Materials needed: Flip charts or whiteboard, markers, printed decision-making model spectrum (or digital access), decision-making framework template.

Who should take part: Leadership, active members & volunteers to ensure collective ownership.

Time required: 1.5 hours

Note on facilitation: Before you start make sure you appoint someone from your team to facilitate and moderate the exercise.

Step 1: Mapping Decision-making

First, the goal is to map which decision-making models are usually used in your organization. You may want to introduce the table above summarizing different decision-making models. Discuss within the group:

How are decisions typically made in your organization or group?

Write down responses on a flip chart under three categories:

- What types of decisions are frequently made in your organization?
- Who is usually involved in decision-making? (One person? A small group? The whole team?)
- How much participation is involved? (Top-down? Consultative? Fully collective?)
- What are the common challenges? (e.g., unclear processes, lack of inclusivity, time constraints, donor influence)
- How do you feel about it? (Empowered? Frustrated? Neutral?)

Step 2: Categorize Decision Types

Once you have mapped the different decision types, try to categorize them by writing them on a flip chart. Below you can find example categories:

- Strategic decisions (e.g., long-term vision, partnerships)
- Operational decisions (e.g., budgeting, project planning)



- Urgent decisions (e.g., responding to crises, immediate risks)
- Team-related decisions (e.g., hiring, conflict resolution)

Then discuss in the group how do these decisions differ in terms of:

- Time urgency?
- Need for inclusivity?
- Impact on the organization?

Step 3: Develop the Framework

Now, take 2–3 types of decisions and determine the best decision-making model for each, by filling out the framework. Discuss why that model works best and how you will ensure transparency?

Decision type	Who is involved?	Best decision model	Why?	How to ensure transparency?
Strategic Planning	Leadership, advisory board, community members	Consensus	Requires long-term commitment	Open forums, participatory planning
Grant applications	Core team, finance lead	Consultative	Technical expertise needed, but team should have input	Clear review process, budget transparency

Once you have filled out the framework reflection the next steps:

- What steps can we take to integrate this framework into our organization?
- What challenges might arise, and how can we address them?

**Resource**

Additional tools and guides for decision-making

The **Decider App** was built to support groups in decision making and to help them become more conscious of their decision making. It asks you a few simple questions to explore better ways to make group decisions.

<https://thedecider.app/>

The 6 **strategic lenses** tool offer a structured approach to intentionally decide why certain issues should be prioritized over another. When the team shares this understanding, it creates a common language for discussing options, shaping strategies, and enhancing the overall impact of our actions. Incorporating these lenses into discussions can help you to make decision making more efficient, while also offering spaces for engagement and buy-in.

<https://www.trg-inc.com/learning-hub/sixlenses>

The **Level of Commitment** tool offers a structured way to assess not just agreement, but actual commitment to action. By integrating this tool into democratic decision-making, you can move beyond simple majority votes and ensure that the decisions taken are not only agreed upon but actively supported and carried forward by the team. It helps you to reveal hidden hesitations and allows space to discuss concerns before moving forward. This also helps you to prevent disengagement, where members reluctantly agree but do not actively contribute. efficient, while also offering spaces for engagement and buy-in.

<https://atctools.org/wp-content/uploads/toolkit-files/levels-of-commitment.pdf>

The **Practical Guide for Consensus-Based Decision Making** by James Madden provides an overview of how to engage in and facilitate consensus-building within groups. Through a mix of practical advice, philosophical reflections, and specific facilitation techniques, the guide serves as a resource for groups committed to making thoughtful, inclusive decisions

Maddon, James (2017) A Practical Guide for Consensus-Based Decision Making

<https://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/hubfs/Resources/Tools/Practical%20Guide%20for%20Consensus-Based%20Decision%20Making.pdf>

Worksheet - Building Consensus around Difficult Decisions

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/13UYaTstPvFMq1kYKRqe2ZEX8WrgwKwltuf9djtEC2A/edit?tab=t.0>



Section 3 - Feminist Organizing Tools and Practices

This section provides practical tools and strategies for feminist organizing within diaspora contexts. It explores approaches to transforming gender norms, including engaging with faith-based communities, working with men and boys as allies, and challenging gendered expectations from childhood. It also highlights the power of storytelling as a feminist practice, both as a means of reclaiming narratives and as a tool for advocacy, community-building, and healing. Additionally, it emphasizes the importance of self and collective care, recognizing that sustaining activism requires practices of rest, joy, and shared well-being.

3.1. Transforming Gender Norms

Gender norms shape the lived experiences of diaspora communities, influencing roles, expectations, and power dynamics across geographies. While these norms can serve as anchors of identity and belonging, they can also reinforce inequalities that limit women's and gender-diverse people's agency, participation, and rights.

Concept



Gender norms¹ are social norms defining acceptable and appropriate actions for women and men in a given social context. These norms shape women's and men's (often unequal) access to resources and freedoms, thus affecting their voice, power and sense of self.

While diaspora women-led organizations can play a crucial role in transforming gender norms and practices, they may face multiple challenges related to their diasporic position. Organizations may face resistance from traditional authorities and community members who perceive change as a threat to cultural identity. Being sometimes viewed as outsiders or accused of imposing Western values may pose challenge to the perceived legitimacy of diaspora women-led organizations. Hence, creating acceptable alternatives is a slow process, often met with skepticism. In countries of residence, discrimination, racism, and xenophobia, may limit access to resources, policy influence, and visibility. For instance, stereotypes that portray diaspora women as either victims in need of saving or as inherently regressive might undermine their efforts to transform gender norms in residence countries.

Centering Women's Economic Empowerment

Economic empowerment is a cornerstone of gender justice. For diaspora women, gaining access to economic opportunities enhances individual and collective agency, while shifting deeply entrenched gender norms in both countries of residence and origin. Supporting women's entrepreneurship, access to fair employment, cooperative models, and financial literacy can redistribute power in private and public spheres. Diaspora women-led initiatives can create economic spaces—such as skills training programs, community-run businesses, or solidarity economies—that are rooted in cultural understanding and mutual aid.

1 Heise, L. & Cislighi, B. (2019). Transforming gender norms to achieve gender equity: What is the role of social norms theory? *Sociology of Health & Illness* Vol. xx No. xx 2019 ISSN 0141-9889, pp. 1–16
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323075180_Transforming_gender_norms_to_achieve_gender_equity_What_is_the_role_of_social_norms_theory.



Example

Get inspired by Zan e.V.

zan زن

creating a safe and empowering space for Afghan women to build confidence, autonomy, and community.

<https://zanev.de/>

Zan e.V. works with Afghan women in Germany, many of whom have fled the degrading and violent conditions in their home country. Afghan Women arriving in Germany often face the dual burden of trauma and limited formal education, which poses challenges to building a self-determined life in exile. Zan e.V.'s Education Programme offers courses in German language, IT, textile skills, and basic political education,



Example

Get inspired by African Women Empowerment (AWE)'s Pride of a Woman Project



AWE aims at empowering other African women to be self-reliant, proud and confident. The Pride of a Women project's objective is to give new perspectives to mothers, young girls, school dropouts, those forced to do prostitution or forced into unwanted marriages, early motherhood and abused women in African communities. AWE's Empowerment strategy is to enable women identify their hidden skills and potentials and empower them to extract these resources, help them build on these qualities and put them to maximum use.

https://awe-ev.org/?page_id=49



Example

Get inspired by Giving Africa a New Face (GAaNF)



GAaNF aims to promote a paradigm shift in development cooperation between Africa and Germany, combat the causes of flight in a practical way, and shape the integration culture in Germany in a sustainable way. Their The Young Talents Mentorship Program, in collaboration with Allianz GRACE, aims to support migrants in Germany in building confidence, sharpening professional skills, and navigating the job market with ease. The program offers personalized career mentorship, professional development opportunities, and networking opportunities.

<https://www.gaanf.org/>



Working with Boys and Men as Allies

Gender is not just about individual identities or behaviors, it is a structural system that organizes power, access, and opportunities in society. It shapes institutions, laws, economies, and social norms in ways that privilege men and masculinity while marginalizing women, gender-diverse people, and non-dominant forms of masculinity. Engaging men and boys in gender justice is essential because patriarchy is not just a “women’s issue”—it is a system that benefits men as a group, whether or not individual men actively perpetuate harm.

Engaging men and boys in gender justice requires intentional, community-centered approaches that create spaces for critical reflection and action. Diaspora women-led initiatives can develop grassroots, culturally rooted strategies that challenge gender inequality within families, religious spaces, and broader community structures. For example, a meaningful way to engage men and boys is through community-based dialogues that create safe spaces for reflection on their roles in gender equality and the impact of patriarchal norms on everyone. Mentorship programs can challenge harmful ideas of masculinity by encouraging men to lead with care and accountability, rather than control.

Resource



Additional resources on working with men and boys

Vienna Institute for International Dialogue and Cooperation (VIDC) has developed this **manual with practical exercises in the context of gender sensitization in the work with refugees**. The Manual is based on their experiences with a Gender-Tandem-Workshop-Program for Afghan men and boys and with Afghan women in Austria.

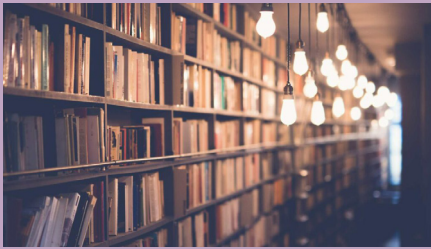
https://www.vidc.org/fileadmin/michael/dard_kush_ii/manual_genderafghan_e_final.pdf

MenEngage Alliance is a space for members to come together in solidarity with those most targeted by gender injustices and patriarchal systems to collectively dismantle structural barriers to women’s rights and gender equality. On their resources page one can find different toolkits that offer guidance and practical tools when working with men and boys.

<https://menengage.org/resources/>

Working with Children and Youth

The way children are raised and the stories they are exposed to significantly impact their understanding of gender roles. Diaspora women led organizations can use literature and children’s books to challenge gender norms by creating and promoting stories that offer alternative role models and foster critical thinking about identity, agency, and relationships from an early age.

**Example****Get inspired by the Fasiathek of Arca e.V.**

Arca's mission is to empower Black people, with a particular focus on women and FLINTA* individuals. The Fasiathek, is a learning center and library for educating schoolchildren and adults about history from an African-centered perspective — encompassing Black-African, Afro-German, and Afro-diasporic narratives. The Fasiathek creates a space for the Black community in Hamburg to tell African stories, celebrates African cultures and raises awareness of the diversity of the African diaspora.

<https://arca-ev.de/projekt/fasiathek-schwarze-praesenzbibliothek/>

**Example****Get inspired by Re-cuentos, cuentos para un mundo mejor**

The Re-cuentos, cuentos para un mundo mejor project was developed to challenge traditional gender roles in storytelling, recognizing the role of children's narratives in shaping gender norms and expectations. The project, led by Diana Jimenez Thomas Rodriguez and Karla González Pech, sought to counter-act the reinforcement of hegemonic masculinity and female passivity by creating ten gender-inclusive short stories that promote alternative role models and sisterhood while discouraging narratives that normalize gender-based violence.

Implemented in Merida, Mexico, in 2017, the project engaged around 150 children through interactive storytelling sessions in community centers, bookstores, and malls, incorporating creative activities to encourage self-reflection.

<https://www.whtrust.org/blog/feminism-and-storytelling>

Working with faith-based approaches

Spirituality, religion, and faith-based beliefs play a significant role in shaping values, norms, and social structures within communities. These influences can both reinforce and challenge gender inequalities. While it is crucial to critically examine how religious and spiritual traditions have contributed to gender norms, it is equally important to engage with faith communities to foster interpretations that uphold justice, equality, and dignity. Women have long played a critical role in building and maintaining diasporic religious communities and networks, and they have also been catalysts for change and transformation within religious groups and the wider community. By working with faith-based organisations, diaspora women-led initiatives can amplify spiritual and religious teachings that support gender parity, care, and shared responsibility.

Many communities are shaped by traditional values of care, respect, and shared responsibility and by reconnecting with these histories, diaspora initiatives can foster gender justice in ways that are more deeply rooted in community values.



Exercise



Connecting feminism to religion, tradition, and spirituality

Objective: This is a facilitated reflection exercise that can encourage you to reflect on your understanding of feminism and explore how it connects to your religious, spiritual, cultural, and traditional values.

Materials needed: Flip charts or whiteboard, markers.

Who should take part: Leadership, active members & volunteers to ensure incorporation of diverse voices and experiences. It can also be done with members of the community you serve.

Time required: 1 hour

Note on facilitation: Before you start make sure you appoint someone from your team to facilitate and moderate the exercise.

Step 1: Personal Reflection

Ask your team to take 10-15 minutes to individually reflect on and write down responses to the following questions:

- What is your understanding of feminism?
- What influences have shaped this understanding? (Family, education, religious beliefs, personal experiences, activism, etc.)
- How do you relate your feminist understanding to religion, spirituality, culture, and tradition?
- What traditional, religious, or spiritual values do you see as aligned with gender justice? Can you think of examples from your own community or history?
- What challenges do you perceive in bridging feminism with faith, tradition, and spirituality? How can they be addressed?

Encourage participants to be honest and open in their reflections—there are no right or wrong answers.

Step 2: Collective Brainstorming & Historical Reflection

Ask your team to write or draw key values from their religious or cultural backgrounds that align with feminist principles (e.g., justice, dignity, care, solidarity, respect, nonviolence). Next, ask them to add examples from history or community traditions that reflect gender justice (e.g., women leaders in religious history, matrilineal traditions, spiritual practices honoring gender balance, women-led movements). Finally, as a group, discuss:

- What does this reveal about the connections between feminism, faith, and culture?
- Where do we see common ground between feminism and faith, tradition, or spirituality?



Step 3: Putting Discussion into Action

After identifying shared values and common ground, move from discussion to action by developing concrete next steps.

- How can we use these connections to foster gender justice in diaspora communities or in our country of origin?
- What can be concrete next steps and actions?

3.2. Empowerment Through Storytelling

Stories can be a powerful tool for women-led diaspora actors in their efforts to better communicate about their overall objectives or specific projects/campaigns and engage more people. Many civil society organisations are using storytelling to promote their work, enhance their outreach or to mobilize funds.

Storytelling as feminist praxis can be seen as a **transformative act of reclaiming narratives, amplifying marginalized voices, and building collective power**. For women-led diaspora organizations, storytelling can serve as a bridge between personal experiences and systemic struggles, making the invisible visible and the silenced heard. Rooted in the feminist principle of the personal as political, **storytelling allows women in the diaspora to articulate their lived realities while situating them within broader frameworks of resilience, and social change**.

Women in the diaspora often find their identities misrepresented or erased within dominant discourses shaped by patriarchal and racialized frameworks. Through storytelling, women-led diaspora organization can reclaim the right to define their experiences, countering stereotypes of victimhood, or passivity. Instead, stories can showcase **resilience, agency, and complexity, challenging the power structures that seek to silence them**. By telling their stories on their own terms, diaspora women can disrupt hegemonic narratives and assert their presence as active agents of change.



Example

Get inspired by Diaspora Woman/Mujer Diaspora



identities within the diaspora. The initiative focuses on dialogue and collective reflection, with a specific orientation: working on women's historical memory from their own perspectives.

<https://www.mujerdiaspora.com/>

The initiative began in London in late 2014, during a period when the Colombian diaspora was reflecting on its role in relation to the peace negotiations between the Colombian government and FARC. A group of Colombian women in the diaspora identified the need for a process rooted in women's perspectives to position themselves as agents of peace and social transformation. They developed an innovative and inclusive approach to bridge the polarizations of the war and engage the diverse social, economic, political, and ethnic

Feminist storytelling practices emphasize reciprocity and care, ensuring that the act of sharing does not exploit or re-traumatize. This ethic of care is especially important in the context of diaspora organizing, which is often shared by loss, displacement and dispossession.



Example



Get inspired by Mendy for Peace Culture and Diversity Management



The organization aims to instill a culture of peace and diversity management and is interested in the Horn of Africa in general and Sudan in particular. Its projects focus on education and critical knowledge for young people of all genders. As one initiative, they organized creative writing workshops for migrant women, resulting in the publication of five books in Arabic and engaging over 250 women in exploring migration, identity, and political positioning through storytelling. Beyond writing, this initiative has created a space for networking, empowerment, and publishing opportunities.

<https://voiceofmendy.org/>

Example



Get inspired by Afghanistan Women's Studies Academy (AWSA)



AWSA, an independent research foundation specialized in the production and development of content in the field of gender studies in Afghanistan. Among other the organization collects and records first-hand narratives, focusing on oral history to create and strengthen theoretical knowledge by considering the local forms of women's struggles, demands and lived experiences for the elimination of all forms of gender and sexual discrimination

<https://www.instagram.com/awsaacademy1/>

Storytelling can serve various functions in diaspora feminist spaces, such as archiving histories, by documenting stories for advocacy, art, or community records. Stories can be also used to shape messaging, build a campaign or as a mobilization strategy. By fostering spaces of solidarity and healing they can also deepen connections across different identities within the diaspora and support collective processing of grief, trauma, and hope.

3.3. Storytelling for Community Building and Collective Healing

Storytelling can be a powerful tool to strengthen community bonds, since it creates spaces to share experiences, recognize common struggles, and imagine collective futures. Storytelling can be also used for intergenerational dialogue within diaspora communities, and through this preserves histories and knowledge that might otherwise be lost to displacement. By weaving together personal and collective narratives, diaspora women actors can sustain cultural memory while creating new possibilities for connection and collaboration.

The act of telling one's story is inherently empowering. It validates the storyteller's experiences, **transforming pain, grief, or anger into tools for resistance and healing.** For diaspora women, whose lives are often shaped by trauma—be it war, forced migration, or systemic racism—storytelling can be a pathway to reclaiming agency and finding strength in vulnerability.

**Exercise**

Story circles

Objective: Story circles are a participatory method deeply rooted in feminist and community-based traditions. They create intentional spaces for people to share their experiences, listen deeply, and build connections. As such, story circles serve as a powerful tool to foster solidarity, amplify marginalized voices, and facilitate collective healing.

Materials needed: Flip charts or whiteboard, markers.

Who should take part: Active members and volunteers, selected members of the community you serve.

Time required: 4 hours

Note on facilitation: Before you start make sure you appoint someone from your team to facilitate and moderate the exercise.

Step 1: Identify the Purpose and Intentionality

Before organizing a story circle, clarify its purpose. Is it to share experiences of displacement and belonging? To document the histories of activism? To foster healing after collective trauma? Defining the goal ensures that the structure and facilitation align with participants' needs.

In the context of diaspora feminist organizing, story circles might focus on:

- Sharing migration journeys: Exploring themes of loss, resilience, and belonging.
- Building intergenerational dialogue: Bridging gaps between older and younger generations.
- Strategizing for activism: Connecting personal experiences to collective action.

Step 2: Preparing the Space

Creating a safe, welcoming environment is critical. This involves both physical and emotional preparation:.

Physical Space:

- Arrange chairs in a literal circle to emphasize equality and inclusivity.
- Choose a comfortable, quiet location where participants feel secure.
- Provide refreshments, cushions, or other comfort items.

Emotional Space:

- Establish community agreements (e.g., confidentiality, non-judgment, active listening).
- Acknowledge power dynamics (e.g., language, class, age) and work to mitigate them.
- Consider the specific needs of the group (e.g., interpreters, childcare).

Step 3: Define Facilitation Principles

The role of the facilitator is crucial in guiding the process while respecting participants' autonomy. Feminist facilitation emphasizes shared power and care:



- Set the tone: Begin with a grounding exercise, such as deep breathing or a short poem, to create focus and presence.
- Model vulnerability: Share a personal story (briefly) to establish trust and openness.
- Be flexible: While structure is important, allow space for organic dialogue and connection.
- Trauma Sensitivity: Be prepared to respond if stories trigger intense emotions; have resources or support available.

Step 4: Doing a Structured Story Circle

A typical story circle unfolds in several phases:



Step 5: Closing the Circle

End with a ritual or activity that brings closure and solidarity:

- A collective affirmation (e.g., “We are strong together”).
- A shared action plan for the next steps in organizing our advocacy.
- A moment of silence, song, or gratitude.



3.4. Storytelling for Advocacy

In addition to its healing and community-building functions, storytelling is a powerful tool for advocacy and mobilization. Diaspora women-led organizations can use storytelling to connect with broader audiences, communicate their objectives, and build solidarity across movements. Stories can evoke empathy and understanding, making abstract issues tangible and inspiring action. By sharing narratives of resilience and hope alongside the challenges they face, organizations can attract allies, secure funding, and strengthen the visibility of their work. Platforms like social media have amplified these efforts, enabling diaspora women to reach global audiences and foster transnational solidarity.



Exercise

Developing a public narrative for your advocacy work

Objective: The public narrative framework was developed by Marshall Ganz and is a powerful tool for diaspora feminist organizing because it helps build relational, collective, and actionable power. The framework consists of three interrelated components - the Story of Self, Us, and Now. Together, these components connect personal experiences to shared purpose and urgency to inspire and mobilize action.

Materials needed: Flip charts or whiteboard, markers, paper and pens.

Who should take part: You can do this exercise with active members or with members of the community you serve.

Time required: 4 hours

Note on facilitation: Before you start make sure you appoint someone from your team to facilitate and moderate the exercise.

The story of self explains what motivates you personally to take action. It highlights the values, experiences, and turning points that have shaped your commitment to the cause.

The story of now identifies the urgent challenge that requires immediate action. It calls on the shared values from the story of us to motivate collective action.



The story of us connects individual values to the shared experiences, histories, and aspirations of a community. It builds a collective consciousness and demonstrates that “we” have a shared purpose and responsibility.



Step 1: Story of Self - Why you are called to act

A good story is drawn from the series of choice points that have structured the “plot” of our life – the challenges you faced, choices you made, and outcomes you experienced. In developing your Story of Self, think about defining moments in your life that shaped your values and try to identify experiences that connect you emotionally to the cause. Reflect on the following questions:

- **Challenge:** What obstacles have you faced in life? What made you struggle or grow?
- **Choice:** What decision did you make in response to those challenges? What values informed that decision?
- **Outcome:** What happened as a result? How did it transform or reinforce your values?

Step 2: Story of Us - Why we are called to act together

This component encourages us to see ourselves as part of a community with shared values and challenges in order to foster solidarity and align our personal experiences with the larger cause. We all belong to multiple “us” — families, faiths, cultures, communities, organizations, and nations—that connect us with others. Your task is to consider which “us” you can inspire to take action with you in pursuit of a shared purpose. After you defined the “us”, map out the shared experiences, values, and challenges of your community and link them to your personal story to create the “story of us”. In doing so, reflect on the following questions:

- **Shared Challenge:** What common struggles does the community face?
- **Shared Values:** What values or aspirations unite us?
- **Shared Hope:** What vision of the future inspires us to act?

Step 3: Story of Now - Why we must act now

A “story of now” conveys urgency—driven by a threat or opportunity—that challenges shared values and inspires other to give attention or take immediate action. In this component we must create a sense of urgency, showing what’s at stake, while also presenting a clear path forward. Think about opportunities to inspire collective action, such as specific campaigns, crises, or goals. End with a clear call to action that inspires your audience to take a specific step that connects to the narrative. For the development of the Story of Now, reflect on the following questions;

- **Urgent Challenge:** What specific issue demands immediate attention?
- **Threat:** What’s at risk if we don’t act?
- **Call to Action:** What can we do together right now? (Be specific)

Things to Consider While Narrating Your Public Story

- **Be Authentic:** Stories speak the language of emotion, and through this connect our hearts, minds, and hands. Your vulnerability and honesty are your greatest strengths, so don’t be afraid to show them.
- **Practice Emotional Resonance:** Make your story vivid and concrete. Use specific details to evoke emotion and avoid abstract language. Instead of saying, “I faced discrimination,” describe the moment it happened and how it felt. Describe sights, sounds, and emotions to make your story more compelling.
- **Tailor the Narrative:** Adapt your public narrative to the audience, focusing on values and experiences that resonate with them. For example, a narrative for feminist allies might emphasize solidarity, while one for diaspora communities might center shared histories.



- **Be specific and concise:** Your story of self, us, and now should typically take 2 to 3 minutes to share. This allows enough time to convey emotional depth and key details while keeping it concise and engaging.
- **Practice and Revise:** Share your narrative with others and refine it based on their feedback. Check out [Do's and Don'ts of Public Narrative](#) | [How to Coach Public Narrative](#) | [Lesson 1](#) of Resistance School to practice effective coaching and constructive feedback.



Example

Get inspired by the PowerSouth

The logo for PowerSouth, with "Power" in black and "South" in green.

Check out PowerSouth's website and see how the organization uses storytelling to amplify the voices of Indian women. Listen to the inspiring stories of the women monitors of Udaipur Urja clean cookstoves and hear from them how the project has changed their lives.

<https://www.power-south.de/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/PowerSouth-meets-Women-from-Udaipur-Urja.mp4>



Example

Get inspired by Empowerment for Her



Through their "Hear Me" program, the organization Empowerment for Her aims to amplify the stories of victims of women's rights violations, ensuring that their experiences are shared and their struggles are acknowledged. Through a series of interviews and storytelling sessions, their team works closely with each participant to capture the essence of their journey. These stories are published on their website,

featured in their newsletter, and shared through various media channels, ensuring that the voices of these courageous individuals are heard far and wide.

<https://empowermentforher.org/hear-me/>



Example

Get inspired by the Diaspora Storytelling Series



What is the importance of Diaspora stories? The Diaspora Storytelling Series brings together personal narratives from people who have migrated or have ancestral ties to different countries, allowing us to connect across borders and cultures. By sharing stories of migration, displacement, and adaptation, the series fosters a deeper understanding of the diverse experiences that shape our world. Enjoy and leave your thoughts in the comment section below.

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLspguNSQc3Huv2P9UUp0riljo1-GTbZRb>



Resource



Additional resources for using storytelling in advocacy and community outreach

For more detailed guidance on how to use storytelling in messaging and advocacy, check out the **Community Outreach Toolkit for Diaspora Organisations**.

https://drc.ngo/media/lhjj1pii/drc_diaspora_community_outreach_toolkit_2021.pdf

Sowt offers an **Audio for Advocacy: Podcasts and Storytelling Online Course on Advocacy Assembly**, a free online training platform for human rights activists, campaigners, and journalists. The course in English language is designed for organisations and individuals who are interested in audio storytelling and human rights advocacy. It serves as an introduction to podcasting and how human rights advocates can utilize audio storytelling in their work. This course examines what podcasts are, how they can be useful to your work, and what are inspiring examples of shows out there.

<https://advocacyassembly.org/en/courses/37>

350 Storytelling Toolkit helps you to identify impactful digital stories to drive change. It guides storytellers through crafting personal and community narratives using text, photos, and videos, with sections on planning, editing, and effective sharing, and what are inspiring examples of shows out there.

https://350.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/350-storytelling-toolkit_EN.pdf

3.5. Self and Collective Care

“Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation and that is an act of political warfare.” - Audre Lorde

Social and political transformations in the country of origin often inspire diaspora actors to engage in advocacy and contribute to social change. These acts of involvement can foster a collective sense of we-ness—an empowering and rewarding feeling of solidarity. However, women in the diaspora frequently face a **“portfolio of obligations,”** balancing the demands of their personal and family lives with their commitment to supporting broader community struggles. In addition, women often carry face distinct gendered expectations within their diaspora communities, as well as in their countries of origin and residence.

In protracted conflicts, constant exposure to death, displacement and destruction - even from afar - brings both a sense of obligation and responsibility to act but also the emotional toll of despair, frustration, and potential burnout. In the context of residence, the diasporic experience is often not only marked by exile, displacement, instability and insecurity but also by experiences of exclusion, discrimination, and racism. Women in the diaspora face challenges as both migrants and women, creating position of a **double (or multiple) disadvantage** that pose barriers to recognition, visibility, and access to resources. Hence, the diasporic experience is marked by grief, anger and despair, as much as stories of hope, desires, dreams and happiness.

Because we are often driven by the seriousness of our cause, we sometimes forget about the things that bring happiness to our engagement. Changing the world doesn't have to be just another form of work, and more importantly, **joy and pleasure can co-exist alongside anger, pain, and grief**. We should not neglect the power of positive emotions that not only bring us together but also helps us to stay committed to our cause. **Claiming and celebrating success, even when small**, is a crucial aspect of building stronger, healthier, and more impactful communities. We can create space for pleasure in all



aspects of our work, especially by practices of collective joy, which means experiencing joy within our community:

- Creating moments of release like the celebration of victories, no matter how small!
- Making and having food together
- Dancing when decisions are made
- Practicing music, singing and dancing on events or activities.

A feminist practice recognizes emotions as political forces and integrates rest, emotional well-being through self and collective care as essential components into the work and activism.

Self-care is not just an individual act; it is a form of collective care deeply rooted in shared resilience and solidarity. By understanding our struggles as a collective, we can draw strength from our communities and recognize that resting is not a weakness but a necessary step in ensuring the sustainability of our organization and actions. Collective care—**where the well-being of others becomes a shared responsibility**—enables us to build resilience and nurture the collective strength required to confront systemic injustices. This starts by seeing self- and collective care not as a separate task, but as an aspect that guides how we do our work.



Exercise

Developing a self- and collective care plan for your organization

Objective: This exercise can help you reflect on self and collective care at an individual and organizational level. It encourages personal reflection, team dialogue, and the co-creation of sustainable care practices within your organization.

Materials needed: Individual worksheets (digital or printed), sticky notes, markers, large poster paper or a whiteboard, visual elements (quotes, poems, images representing care).

Who should take part: Leadership, active members & volunteers to ensure a collective perspective, or with members of the community you serve.

Time required: 1-1.5 hours

Note on facilitation: Before you start make sure you appoint someone from your team to facilitate and moderate the exercise.

Step 1: Reflection on Care and Well-being

Complete the first two rows individually. Then, with your team, bring this plan as well as an image, quote or poem that represents self or collective care to you. Together, complete the third row, dreaming of shared practices, experiences and rituals that you can try together.



	What nourishes you and brings you joy?	How are you currently creating space and time for this?	How could you create more space and time for this?
Personal life			
Professional life			
Organisational life			

Source: Adjusted from Mosaics & Mirrors [Toolbasket](#)

Step 2: Collective Brainstorming

Together as a team, complete the third row, dreaming of shared practices, experiences and rituals that you can try out together. When discussing your worksheets you can reflect on the following questions:

- What challenges do you face balancing your personal, professional and organizational obligations?
- What strategies have you used to manage these challenges?
- What strategies, actions and policies can your organization implement to promote care and well-being of your members?

Step 3: Developing a Collective Care Plan

As a team, draft a collective care commitment or small agreement that integrates self and collective care into your organizational culture. Display the images, quotes, or poems everyone brought, creating a visual board of what care means to your organization.

Resource



Additional resources and tools for self- and collective care

The podcast episode **Trauma, Healing & Collective Power** by generative somatics (gs) discusses trauma, oppression, healing and organizing for structural change by exploring the connections between personal, collective and structural transformation, and between healing and building collective power.

<https://soundcloud.com/generativesomatics/trauma-healing-collective-power>

The **worksheets** created by **TARSHI** can help you become more aware of your stress, thoughts, emotions and beliefs. The worksheets are on a range of topics, from finding happiness in the small things, to understanding stressors, from mindful breathing with body movement, to reflecting upon your core values.

<https://www.tarshi.net/selfcare/resources-self-care/>

Explore the recipes for **well-being library** where you find a collection of recipes to craft personalized individual and collective wholebeing learning journeys.

<https://www.recipesforwellbeing.org/about/>

Join **Move to End Violence's** 21 Days to a More Impactful You **21-day self-care challenge**.

<https://www.movetoendviolence.org/resources/21-day-self-care-challenge-packet>



Section 4 - Feminist Resourcing

Despite the global commitments to gender equality, less than 1% of funding for gender equality reaches grassroots women's organisations, despite them being often at the forefront of addressing critical issues such as gender-based violence, education, and economic empowerment. Support for women of color is even more minimal, with under 0.05% of the \$67 billion allocated annually going to women's organisations led by and for women of color¹.

This highlights that there are **systemic inequities in philanthropy, where historically marginalized groups face significant barriers to access the resources needed to create meaningful change**. In addition, donors often require extensive documentation, legal registrations, or prior funding history, which are criteria that are often difficult to meet by smaller more grassroots diaspora-led organizations. In addition, the prevalence of short-term, project-based funding restricts the organizations' ability to build institutional capacity and sustainability.

This section explores **feminist resourcing strategies** that go beyond conventional funding models. It introduces the concept of autonomous resourcing, which emphasizes collective, self-determined approaches to sustaining feminist movements, including resource-sharing, solidarity economies, and alternative funding streams. Additionally, it offers an overview of different feminist funds, which prioritize grassroots, community-led movements and operate on principles of trust, flexibility, and long-term investment in feminist organizing.

Autonomous Resourcing

The feminist practice of autonomous resourcing refers to a self-determined, collective approach to generating and managing resources, rooted in feminist values of equity, care, and justice. This practice seeks to **build financial and material sustainability for feminist movements and organizations**, enabling them to operate more independently from external systems. While advocating for more equal access to funding opportunities is crucial, reflecting on different tools and methods of autonomous resourcing can be a key strategy to ensure organizational sustainability and financial resilience. Importantly, autonomous resourcing **defines resources more broadly**, by including next to financial resources, human resources, connections and solidarity.



Example

Get inspired by Collective Diaspora



Collective Diaspora is a membership-based organization of Black cooperatives and Black-led cooperative support organizations from across the African diaspora. The organization is weaving together a transnational Black cooperative support system to challenge the economic isolation faced by Black communities and the extraction of Black wealth that has been taking place in different forms since the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Collective Diaspora's mission is to build regenerative economies grounded in racial and gender equity through the development and growth of Black cooperatives around the world.

<https://diaspora.coop/>

1 African Diaspora Network (2021). Investing in Women- Summary & Highlights, <https://africandiasporanetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Investing-in-Women-Summary-Highlights-compressed.pdf>



Fundraising

Self-generated Funds

Generate income from service fees (e.g., training, consultation), facility rentals, business ventures like cafes, or sales products such as crafts.

Crowdfunding

Use platforms like GoFundMe or Patreon to rally supporters for specific initiatives

Membership Models

Develop membership models where members and supporters contribute regularly to your organization with membership fees.

Mutual Aid & Cooperative Models

Solidarity Funds

Establish community-based savings pools or mutual aid funds to support members in times of need or for collective projects.

Cooperatives

Form cooperatives where resources, profits, and decision-making are shared equitably among members.

Skills-sharing Networks

Exchange skills and labor within your networks, reducing reliance on external service providers and fostering resource sharing.

Resource Pooling & Asset Building

Shared-ownership Models

Purchase or lease community spaces, such as cultural centers or offices, through collective investments or pooled savings.

Resource Banks

Create centralized repositories of shared resources like technology, event equipment, or office supplies.

Exercise



Mapping our collective resources

Objective: This exercise can help you to broaden your understanding of resources beyond financial means and explore collective, feminist strategies for sustaining your work.

Materials needed: Flip charts or whiteboard, markers.

Who should take part: Leadership, active members & volunteers to ensure a collective perspective.

Time required: 1-1.5 hours

Note on facilitation: Before you start make sure you appoint someone from your team to facilitate and moderate the exercise.



Step 1: Individual Brainstorming

Ask your team to take a moment to reflect on the different types of resources you currently have access to within your organization and networks. Encourage them to think beyond financial resources to include:

- **Financial Resources** (e.g., grants, membership fees, crowdfunding, income generated from activities or sales)
- **Material resources** (office space, equipment, supplies)
- **Human resources** (skills, knowledge, time)
- **Social resources** (networks, alliances, community support)
- **Emotional resources** (care, solidarity, mental well-being)

Step 2: Resource Mapping

Now, discuss and list the different resources that sustain your work and assess where you might be over-reliant on external funding and identify any overlooked resources.

- What resources (financial, material, human, social, emotional) currently sustain our work?
- In which areas do we rely too much on external funding or institutions?
- What are the risks or challenges of this dependency?

Step 3: Exploring New Strategies for Autonomous Resourcing

Based on your discussion, brainstorm new or expanded autonomous resourcing strategies. Think creatively about how to mobilize resources through cooperation, solidarity, and self-sufficiency. What alternative or community-driven ways could we explore to strengthen our resourcing?

- What autonomous resourcing strategies have we already experimented with? What worked well? What didn't?
- What are other practices to strengthen autonomous resourcing in our organizing?
- What concrete next steps can we take to implement new autonomous resourcing practices?

Use a flipchart or digital whiteboard to create an Autonomous Resourcing Map, categorizing strategies under different resource types.



Resource

Additional resources on autonomous resourcing

Tenzin Dolker (2019). What we can learn from feminists who fund themselves.

<https://www.openglobalrights.org/what-we-can-learn-from-feminists-who-fund-themselves/>

AWID (2021). Autonomous Resourcing: How Can Activists Resource Our Own Activism?

<https://www.awid.org/resources/autonomous-resourcing-how-can-activists-resource-our-own-activism>

Feminist funds

Feminist funds are distinct from traditional funding mechanisms in their philosophy, approach, and priorities. They often ensure flexibility in funding, by providing core, unrestricted, and long-term funding to support sustainability and autonomy of organizations. Feminist funding is often characterized by a **trust-based practices that emphasize relationships of trust with grantees, minimizing bureaucratic**



hurdles. These funding schemes often aim at local empowerment, by prioritizing grassroots, community-led organisations and movements, especially those marginalized within mainstream funding landscapes. Feminist funds often provide not only financial resources but also mentorship, training, and networks.

Below you can find a list of selected feminist funds:

Name	Description	Geographic Focus	Link
Alliance Gender Equality	Provides funding and capacity-building for small, frontline organizations working on gender equality across Europe that support people living in the most vulnerable situations.	Europe	https://alliance-genderequality.org/our-grants/
African Women's Development Fund	AWDF's grant making ensures resources reach the hundreds of African women's organizations that are working in diverse ways to improve the lives of women and African society at large.	Africa (all countries), MENA (Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Yemen)	https://awdf.org/what-we-do/resourcing/
Amplify Change	Supports civil society organizations in Africa, South Asia, and the Middle East to improve sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).	Africa, South Asia, Middle East	https://amplifychange.org/
Black Feminist Fund	Unique funding focused explicitly on supporting Black feminist movements.	Americas, the Middle East, Europe and Africa	https://blackfeministfund.org/
Dalan Fund	Distributes resources to intersectional movements, registered organizations, unregistered collectives, and networks led by historically and currently excluded communities, prioritizing organizing primarily led by, working for, and with women, transgender and gender non-conforming people.	Central and Eastern Europe, Caucasus, Central and North Asia	https://dalan.fund/what-we-do
Doria Feminist Fund	The Doria Feminist Fund seeks to create a feminist ecosystem where the new generation of feminist movement in the MENA region has access to more and better funding and resources	MENA	https://www.doriafeministfund.org/
Einhorn Feminist Funding	Aims to support activists, NGOs and other initiatives in their fight against patriarchal structures.	Germany	https://einhorn.my/femfund/
Equality Fund	Resources women's rights organizations and feminist movements worldwide by partnering with organizations, coalitions, and networks focused on building power with women, girls, and gender expansive people, especially in the Global South.	Global	https://equalityfund.ca/what-we-do/grantmaking
Filia Frauenstiftung	Promotes projects by and for women, girls and LGBTQI+. Funding is focussed on Central and Eastern Europe, also in Germany. Funding is focussed on projects and initiatives that campaign for freedom from violence, demand social participation and strengthen democratic structures.	Central and Eastern Europe, Germany	https://www.filia-frauenstiftung.de/filia-foerdert/
Fondo de Mujeres del Sur (FMS)	Supports organisations that promote the rights of women in all their diversity in southern Latin America. FMS supports grassroots initiatives, organizations and networks of women in all their diversity, who work to achieve transformative results towards gender, ethnic-racial and social justice.	South America	https://www.mujeresdelsur.org/en/about-us/



Fondo de Acción Urgente	Regional feminist fund for Latin America and the Spanish speaking Caribbean, which contributes to the sustainability and strengthening of activists and their movements, with quick and agile support in situations of risk and opportunity.	Central & South America, Caribbean	https://www.mujeresdelsur.org/en/about-us/
FRIDA Young Feminist Fund	Believes in the collective power of young feminists to lead and transform their own communities. That's why they are the only fund run by young feminists to support and establish other emerging feminist organizations, collectives and movements in the Global South.	West, East, South, Central Africa; South, Southeast, East Asia and the Pacific; Southwest Asia and North Africa, Latin America; the Caribbean and Central, Eastern Europe and Central and North Asia.	https://youngfeministfund.org/
Global Fund for Women	Offers flexible feminist funding and support to fuel collective action and create meaningful change.	Global	https://www.fondoaccionurgente.org.co/
Mama Cash	Mobilizes money to support feminist activism through fundraising and influencing the donor community to bring better and more money to feminist movements.	Global	https://www.mamacash.org/funds/
Mediterranean Women's Fund	For Mediterranean women's organisations to have the concrete means to act, unite and make themselves heard, the Mediterranean Women's Fund pulls together the necessary resources and tailors its support to the specific needs of each group. By amplifying their voices and their movement, it allows these associations to become a force of change for the emancipation of women.	Mediterranean region	https://youngfeministfund.org/
Prospera - INWF	Grown from a peer-learning network to a more structured, membership-driven service organization. Prospera currently gathers 47 women's and feminist funds, who collectively provide grants in over 172 countries. Prospera INWF members redistribute resources primarily to countries located in the Global South and East and uplift the voices, leadership, and power of diverse women's and feminist activists, organisations, and movements.	Global	https://prospera-inwf.org/womens-funds/
Urgent Action Fund	Provides fast, flexible support to women, transgender and non-binary activists so that they can respond to unexpected risks and opportunities, protect and care for themselves and one another, and nurture and sustain thriving frontline feminist movements for a just and equitable world.	Canada, Central Asia, Europe, the Middle East, the Balkans, the Caucasus, and the United States.	https://urgentactionfund.org/
Urgent Action Fund Africa	Pan-African and Feminist Fund that supports African Women's Human Rights Defenders (AWHRDs), their organizations, collectives and movements to take actions that sustain their work and themselves before, during and after urgent situations.	Africa	https://www.uaf-africa.org/
Women's Fund Asia	Supports women, girls, trans, and intersex rights organisations and activists in their work to advance human rights in the Asian region.	Asia	https://womensfun+A18:D20dasia.org/index.php?r=whatWeDo/grantMaking
We are Purposeful	World's first Africa-rooted global fund for girl activists and their allies, resourcing girls' resistance across the globe.	Global	https://wearepurposeful.org/projects/with-and-for-girls-fund/



Section 5 - Conclusion and Recommendations

With this toolkit, we aimed to provide hands-on tools and a resource that can help diaspora women-led organizations (and others) to reflect upon and adopt feminist principles and practices in diaspora organizing. A key lesson from this toolkit is that **feminist organizing within diaspora communities is both intersectional and deeply contextual**. Women in the diaspora navigate multiple identities, histories of displacement, and sociopolitical landscapes, requiring strategies that are adaptable, culturally grounded, and rooted in collective solidarity. Although, we highlight the distinct experiences of women in the diaspora, we believe that all diaspora organizations can benefit from integrating feminist principles, as they offer frameworks for inclusive leadership, equitable decision-making, and transformative justice that strengthen community resilience and advocacy efforts.

While it is difficult to provide broader recommendations given this diversity, selected key learnings and recommendations are summarized below.

Recommendations

Collective power is essential for transformative change. Diaspora feminist organizing thrives when collective power is prioritized. Women-led diaspora organizations operate within transnational systems that often exclude them from mainstream decision-making. However, by fostering solidarity, coalitions, and intersectional alliances, diaspora women-led organizations can amplify their voices, access resources, and drive systemic change. The toolkit highlights that movements rooted in participatory leadership and shared decision-making are more resilient and impactful.

- **Strengthen diaspora feminist networks by creating regional and global coalitions that foster knowledge-sharing and collective advocacy.**
- **Encourage non-hierarchical leadership models that value shared decision-making and participatory governance.**
- **Build alliances with feminist movements in both residence and origin countries, ensuring that diaspora voices are recognized in broader gender justice struggles.**

Care is a political act and a necessary foundation for sustainability. The emotional and physical labor of feminist organizing often leads to burnout, especially in diaspora activism, where women navigate personal struggles of displacement alongside community responsibilities. Feminist organizing cannot be sustainable without self and collective care. Care is not just a personal practice but a political commitment to well-being, resilience, and community-building. The toolkit highlights that care should not be an afterthought but integrated into organizing structures as a fundamental value.



- **Develop organizational cultures that prioritize well-being by embedding self-care and collective care practices into feminist organizing.**
- **Create safe spaces for healing, joy, and emotional support, recognizing that activism must be nurtured by shared resilience.**
- **Advocate for feminist funding models that include resources for mental health support, rest, and sustainable activism.**

Feminist organizing is an ongoing practice, not just a theory. Hence, feminist organizing is not just about adopting feminist principles—it is about practicing them in everyday interactions, leadership, and structures. The toolkit emphasizes that feminist organizing requires continuous process of learning, unlearning, and reflection to critically examine power dynamics, privilege, and internalized biases within their own spaces. Fostering a culture where feedback, critical dialogue, and self-awareness are embraced are necessary tools for transformation.

- **Establish regular reflection spaces within organizations for members to assess power dynamics, decision-making processes, and inclusivity.**
- **Encourage learning and unlearning sessions that address internalized patriarchy, privilege, and intersectionality, ensuring that organizations remain accountable to feminist principles.**
- **Promote peer-to-peer mentorship and knowledge-sharing, allowing both experienced and emerging leaders to exchange insights and refine their feminist practice.**



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Appendix A: Feminist Organizing and Leadership Toolkits

Below you can find additional toolkits and resources that offer practical guidance on feminist leadership, organizational development, monitoring and evaluation, and influencing strategies, among others.

African Women Development Fund (2015). The Feminist Organisational Development Tool. <https://awdf.org/the-feminist-organisational-development-tool/>

Batliwala, Srilatha (2011). Changing Their World: Concepts and Practices of Women's Movements. https://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/changing_their_world_2ed_full_eng.pdf

Batliwala, S. & Michel Friedman (2021). Achieving Transformative Feminist Leadership A Toolkit for Organisations and Movements. <https://www.sexualrightsinitiative.org/resources/achieving-transformative-feminist-leadership-toolkit-organisations-and-movements>

Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (2021). A Guide to Building Feminist Intersectional Solidarity. Ottawa: ON Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women. <https://www.criaw-icref.ca/publications/a-guide-to-building-feminist-intersectional-solidarity/>

Civil Rights Defenders (2021). Building Feminist Practice – a Pocketbook for Human Rights Defenders. <https://crd.org/2021/06/11/launch-of-feminist-pocketbook-for-human-rights-defenders/>

Cornelius, R., Crabtree-Condor, I. & Chiponda, M. (2024). Feminist Influencing Basket of Resources. Oxfam. https://www.oxfamnovib.nl/Redactie/Downloads/English/4-FeministBasketOfResources_final%20copy-compressed.pdf

Dunkley, L., Conway, M. & Messmer, M. (2021). Gender, think-tanks and international affairs: a toolkit. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2021/02/gender-think-tanks-and-international-affairs-toolkit>

Equality Fund (2021). Feminist Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning: What Does it Look Like in Practice? <https://equalityfund.ca/learn/feminist-mel/>

Fare Share (2020). Feminist Leaders for Feminist Goals - a toolkit. <https://fairsharewl.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/20-10-21-FS-Toolkit.pdf>

IWDA (2021). The Feminist Organisational Capacity Strengthening (FOCS) Toolkits. <https://iwda.org.au/resource/feminist-organisational-capacity-strengthening/>

Safier, C., Wakefield, S., Harvey, R. & Rewald, R. (2019). Oxfam's Guide to Feminist Influencing. Oxfam. <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/oxfams-guide-to-feminist-influencing-620723/>

The Creative Action Institute/FRIDA (2023). Young Feminist Leadership Toolkit For LGBTQI+ organisers in West, East, Southern and Central Africa. <https://youngfeministfund.org/the-young-feminist-leadership-toolkit-for-lgbtqi-organizers-in-west-east-southern-and-central-africa-wescathe-young-feminist-leadership-toolkit-for-lgbtqi-organizers-in-wesca/>



UN Women (2021) Intersectionality Resource Guide and Toolkit. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/01/intersectionality-resource-guide-and-toolkit>

Ward, Jeanne & Jule Voss (2024) Guidance Note on Applying Feminist Approaches to Humanitarian Action - GBV AoR Helpdesk 2024. <https://gbvaor.net/node/1979>



Appendix B: Useful Resources

Beautiful Trouble Toolbox

Beautiful Trouble provides an online Toolbox for grassroots and social change actors. In different sections you will find the different theories behind their tools, as well as strategic frameworks and hands-on exercises to help you assess our situation and plan our campaign. It also highlights specific forms of creative action, such as a flash mob or blockade. The website and tools are available in Arabic.

Website: <https://www.beautifultrouble.org/>

Commons Social Change Library

The Commons Social Change Library is an online collection of educational resources on campaign strategy, community organizing, digital campaigning, communications and media, working effectively in groups, fundraising, diversity and inclusion and much more.

Website: <https://commonslibrary.org/>

NGO Connect

NGO Connect, is a website site of SCS Global dedicated to connecting and strengthening civil society organisations (CSOs), networks and support organisations worldwide. The Resources and tools database contains technical and program-related materials to support organisational development and institutional strengthening.

Website: <https://www.ngoconnect.net/resources-tools>

Power Shift Network Resource Bank

Power Shift Network Resource Bank is a crowd-sourced compendium of all the movement's best tools and trainings capturing methods for community building, storytelling, coalition building, fundraising and much more.

Website: <https://www.powershift.org/resources>

Racial Equity Tools

Supports individuals and groups working to achieve racial equity. It offers tools, research, tips, curricula, and ideas for people who want to increase their understanding and to help those working for racial justice at different levels – in systems, organisations, communities, and the culture at large.

Website: <https://www.racialequitytools.org/>

Trainings 350

Offers practical tools for organisers, facilitators and trainers, including tools to build long-term capacity and power, activities for leading interactive workshops, seminars, and retreats, as well as methods for leading group meetings. The website and tools are available in Arabic.

Website: <https://trainings.350.org/>

Eirene Peacebuilding Database

In this database, you can find more than 3,300 indicators that are compiled together from publicly available peacebuilding resources. You can search for indicators based on country, field and program activities. If your organization is engaged in peacebuilding or if your advocacy issue is linked to a conflict, this is a useful resource to help you figure out potential indicators to measure your impact. It is completely fine to use pre-used indicators in your programming if it fits well in your theory of change.

Website: <https://www.allianceforpeacebuilding.org/eirene-peacebuilding-database>



The Vocabulary of Emotions

To distinguish thoughts and feelings, it may be helpful to check out the different ways emotions manifest themselves, so that we better judge what is our emotion and what is our thought. The vocabulary of emotions developed by Tom Drummond (2021) may be a helpful tool.

Website: <https://tomdrummond.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Emotion-Feelings.pdf>

OECD DAC Criteria

The OECD DAC Network on Development Evaluation (EvalNet) has defined six evaluation criteria: relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability. These criteria can be used to make evaluative judgements about an advocacy campaign.

Website: <https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/daccriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm>



About DRC Diaspora Programme

Danish Refugee Council (DRC) is a leading, international humanitarian displacement organization, supporting refugees and internally displaced persons during displacement, in exile, when settling and integrating in a new place or upon return. We provide protection and life-saving humanitarian assistance. We support displaced persons in becoming self-reliant and included into hosting societies - and we work with communities, civil society and responsible authorities to promote protection of rights and peaceful coexistence.

Since 2010, DRC's Diaspora Programme has engaged and supported diaspora as civil society actors who have the agency, space and capacity to enable fulfillment of rights of people affected by conflict and displacement. The aim is to support the constructive role of diaspora as transnational civil society actors that seek to contribute to relevant protection and solutions outcomes for people affected by conflict and displacement – in the diaspora's former home countries, for those on the move, and for those settling in third countries.

About VIDC

The VIDC is the oldest civil society development policy organization in Austria. The institute was founded as a think and do tank for global development policy issues by Bruno Kreisky together with prominent politicians from the so-called “Third World” - including Tom Mboya from Kenya and Ahmed Ben Salah from Tunisia - after the “Conference on Economic Cooperation and Partnership” which was held in Salzburg and Vienna in July 1962.

The central political concerns of the VIDC are, on the one hand, the fostering of a critical public sphere with regards to social, political, cultural and economic developments, as well as democracy movements, and, on the other, the establishment of international dialogue based on equality and respect. The core focus area of VIDC, now entitled VIDC Global Dialogue, was expanded in the 1990s to include two new initiatives, *kulturen in bewegung* and *fairplay*. These introduce further important facets of “dialogue at eye level”: www.vidc.org.

About RE Narrate

RE Narrate gGmbH is a young, value-driven, social impact company that conducts research, offers consulting services and implements projects and training in the area of migration, diaspora, civil society and sustainable development. RE Narrate works at the intersection of research, policy and practice to unlock the power of knowledge for social change. The focus lies on research that is community-driven, participatory, and action-oriented, by combining research with education and community involvement.

Dr. Nora Jasmin Ragab is the author of this toolkit and co-founder of RE Narrate. She is an independent migration scholar, with a research interest in exploring the intersections of diaspora mobilization, conflicts, and socio-political dynamics of displacement. Nora is passionate about the development of methods and concepts to promote spaces of self-organization and civic organizing. Together with Eleni Diker, she developed the series of diaspora toolkits on fundraising, community outreach, networking & alliances building, and advocacy.

About GIZ

The Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH is a service provider in international cooperation for sustainable development and international education, committed to fostering a liveable future worldwide. GIZ operates in diverse sectors such as economic development, employment promotion, energy, environment, peace, and security. Its expertise is sought after by various clients, including the German Government—primarily the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)—European Union institutions, the United Nations, the private sector, and other national governments. Collaborating with businesses, civil society, and research institutions, GIZ promotes effective integration between development policies and other areas of activity.

This work has been commissioned through the Global Programme “Shaping development-oriented migration” (MEG), which is implemented by GIZ. The MEG assists partner countries in leveraging the benefits of regular migration and engaging diaspora for sustainable development.



Notes



DRC DANISH REFUGEE COUNCIL

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diaspora@drc.ngo / www.drc.ngo/diaspora