

**OXFAM AMERICA**  
RESEARCH BACKGROUNDER

# **Transformative and Feminist Leadership for Women's Rights**

Shawna Wakefield



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# OXFAM AMERICA'S RESEARCH BACKGROUNDS

Series editor: Kimberly Pfeifer

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## Author information and acknowledgments

Shawna Wakefield is a women's rights and gender justice consultant, supporting personal, collective and social transformation through research, program and organizational strategy, development and group facilitation, and teaching mind/body practices. She was Oxfam's Senior Gender Justice Lead from 2008-2015.

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# ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AWID	Association for Women's Rights in Development
AWDF	African Women's Development Fund
CEDOVIP	Center for Domestic Violence Prevention
FLMBaRI	Feminist Leadership, Movement Building and Rights Institute
FLOW	Funding Leadership and Opportunities for Women
GBV	Gender-based violence
IDS	Institute of Development Studies (IDS)
JASS	Just Associates for Women
LGBTI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex
MEV	Move to End Violence
PEKKA	Programme Pemberdayaan Perempuan Kepala Keluarga
TLWR	Transformative Leadership for Women's Rights
VAW	Violence Against Women

# FOREWORD

Gender is the most significant predictor of poverty and powerlessness. Gender inequality remains a pervasive and fundamental obstacle to human development and the guarantee of universal human rights. To remedy this, the Beijing Platform for Action recommends specific steps that can be taken to fulfill “the goal of gender balance in governmental bodies and committees, as well as in public administrative entities, and in the judiciary,” including “setting targets and implementing measures to substantially increase the number of women ... if necessary through positive action, in all governmental and public administration positions.”<sup>1</sup> And yet, we cannot deny the empirical reality that women globally continue to be excluded or underrepresented in all areas of political and economic decision making.<sup>2</sup>

Oxfam’s Strategic Plan, “Power of People against Poverty,” commits Oxfam to work on gender justice. It positions Oxfam as an international NGO that “puts women’s rights at the heart of all we do.” Oxfam’s theory of change acknowledges that systematic discrimination against women and girls is both a cause and a consequence of the inequality that drives poverty. It postulates that when women and girls are able to make their own choices and exercise their collective voice, and when institutions address their self-defined needs and interests, we will advance gender justice. We ground our theory of change in the recognition that capacity building of civil-society organizations must devote specific attention to women’s leadership, attitudes, and beliefs concerning gender roles and economic empowerment in order to change the gender-inequality reality. For such efforts to be transformational, they must promote change within individuals and collective behavior, as well as across all social structures—political, economic, and cultural. Without the collective action of women and men working for gender justice and women’s rights, we will not achieve any of our development or humanitarian goals. Efforts to achieve gender justice require a transformation in leadership that then translates into transformative leadership for women’s rights.

Oxfam understands women’s leadership as central to its work to promote gender justice. As a result, Oxfam invests in an approach called Transformative Leadership for Women’s Rights (TLWR). TLWR challenges and transforms power relations and structures (in all their different manifestations) into an enabling environment for individual leadership potential. It embodies the principles and values of human rights, gender equality, participation,

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<sup>1</sup> Beijing Platform for Action, Paragraph 190.

<sup>2</sup> For example, worldwide women make up only 23 percent of national legislators. See <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm>

consultation, and respect for the dignity of all people.<sup>3</sup> TLWR is about the quality of the leadership. It directs others to bring about fundamental change and facilitates collective efforts to transform inequitable institutions: in the home, in the community, within wider institutions, and in our own organizations.

We commissioned Shawna Wakefield to produce this research backgrounder in support of our effort to promote the TLWR approach. The objective of this scoping is to provide an account of the practices of and programs in the organizations that support transformative leadership for the realization of women's rights. The research includes analysis of trends and recurring challenges on setting a transformative agenda for realizing women's rights. In doing this research, Oxfam made the following assumptions: that most women leaders and organizations supporting their leadership do not use explicit language about transformation and feminism; that women leaders can be patriarchal and hierarchical; and that men can be women's rights champions and transformative leaders. We also assumed that exercising transformative leadership for women's rights does not require the exclusion of issues that are not directly relevant to women's interests and needs.

Author Shawna Wakefield<sup>4</sup> provides a scan of trends in thinking on and progress toward realizing women's rights and the role of transformative leadership. Her analysis increases our understanding of the kinds of leadership that advance women's rights and in what circumstances; and where we need to turn our attention to fill the gaps in our understanding of the outcomes of transformative leadership and the challenges in scaling it.

Through this research, Oxfam intends to establish itself as a learning partner and ally in the field of gender justice by highlighting an underinvested area that is crucial to advancing women's rights, namely, leadership for women's rights. Looking ahead, we think ambitions to achieve significant gender equality outcomes will require an active platform of pioneering leaders and organizations, exemplifying transformative leadership for realizing women's rights across the globe and advancing the TLWR agenda. We hope this Backgrounder provides a modest but critical building block.

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<sup>3</sup> "Transformative Leadership for Women's Rights: Understanding How Leadership Can Create Sustainable Change That Promotes Women's Rights and Gender Equality," an Oxfam Guide, 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Shawna Wakefield – International gender Justice consultant and lead Oxfam confederation as Senior Gender Justice Lead for Oxfam International from 2010 - 2014

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## HIERARCHY DISRUPTED: TRANSFORMATIONAL AND FEMINIST LEADERSHIP FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS

### *Introduction*

The complex threats to women's rights today, particularly in societies dealing with conflict, poverty, and inequality, require leadership that positions not just individuals but rather a critical mass of them to lead the way in shifting oppressive power dynamics that keep such harmful systems in place. The history books are filled with testimonies to visionary, inspiring, and heroic leaders. Even among those considered most transformative, the people who stood behind and beside them are often forgotten, not understood for their part in creating and sustaining change. The importance of the relationships, and the solidarity and energy they provided to the more visible leaders, is underestimated.

Oxfam's research demonstrates a strong relationship among practices of modeling of feminist purpose and principles; inspiring shared visions through reflecting, learning, and unlearning; empowering and enabling others to act; challenging oppressive norms and power; and encouraging the integration of heart, mind, and body among advocates for transformation. The research focuses on the strategies and practices of women's-movement-building and -supporting organizations—because movements themselves are proven to be a deciding factor in creating many of the systemic changes that positively affect women's lives.

### *Oxfam's positioning on TLWR*

For decades, Oxfam has supported women's leadership and participation, from the grassroots to policymaking fora. Oxfam has a commitment to transforming unequal and oppressive uses and systems of power, and sees strengthening the organizational capacity of women's organizations and women's leadership as pivotal transformative leadership for women's rights is considered an important strategy across Oxfam's work for active citizens and more effective states.

### *The problem and methods of analysis*

Despite the enormous contributions so many women have made by the time they reach political office, the barriers to their effective leadership, and to leadership without perpetuating patriarchal and hierarchical norms, are still high. The



available examples of transformative leadership, which focus on women's rights and social justice, and strengthen collective power, have not been sufficiently explored. The relationships among formal and informal leadership and women's activism at local levels and formal politics are not well understood. In this report, Oxfam reviews widely acknowledged conceptualizations of transformational, feminist, and social-justice leadership, and zeroes in on the strategies and practices of trailblazers in transformative, feminist leadership and women's rights, presenting a progression of strategies and practices integral to transformational leadership for women's rights.

### *Findings*

- Theoretical trends

Leadership theory was shaped within a gendered system. Countless narratives of exceptional, heroic men, whose work and family lives do not meet, dominate the history books. Over time, notions of what makes a good leader have shifted, and there are now more paradigms and practices of leadership in operation at the same time than perhaps ever before. The conceptualization of transformational leadership theory was an important one in this regard, where leadership is not an individual exercise but rather is an ongoing, collaborative process, whereby leaders come to understand the motives of followers and prioritize satisfying their higher needs and engaging the full person for mutual benefit.<sup>1</sup> Feminist thought on leadership resonated with many of the features of transformational leadership; this overlap reflects the principles and experiences of women's-rights activism and women's rise in politics. Transformational and feminist leadership incorporates the emphasis on the nature of power, and the personal and psychological aspects of leadership.

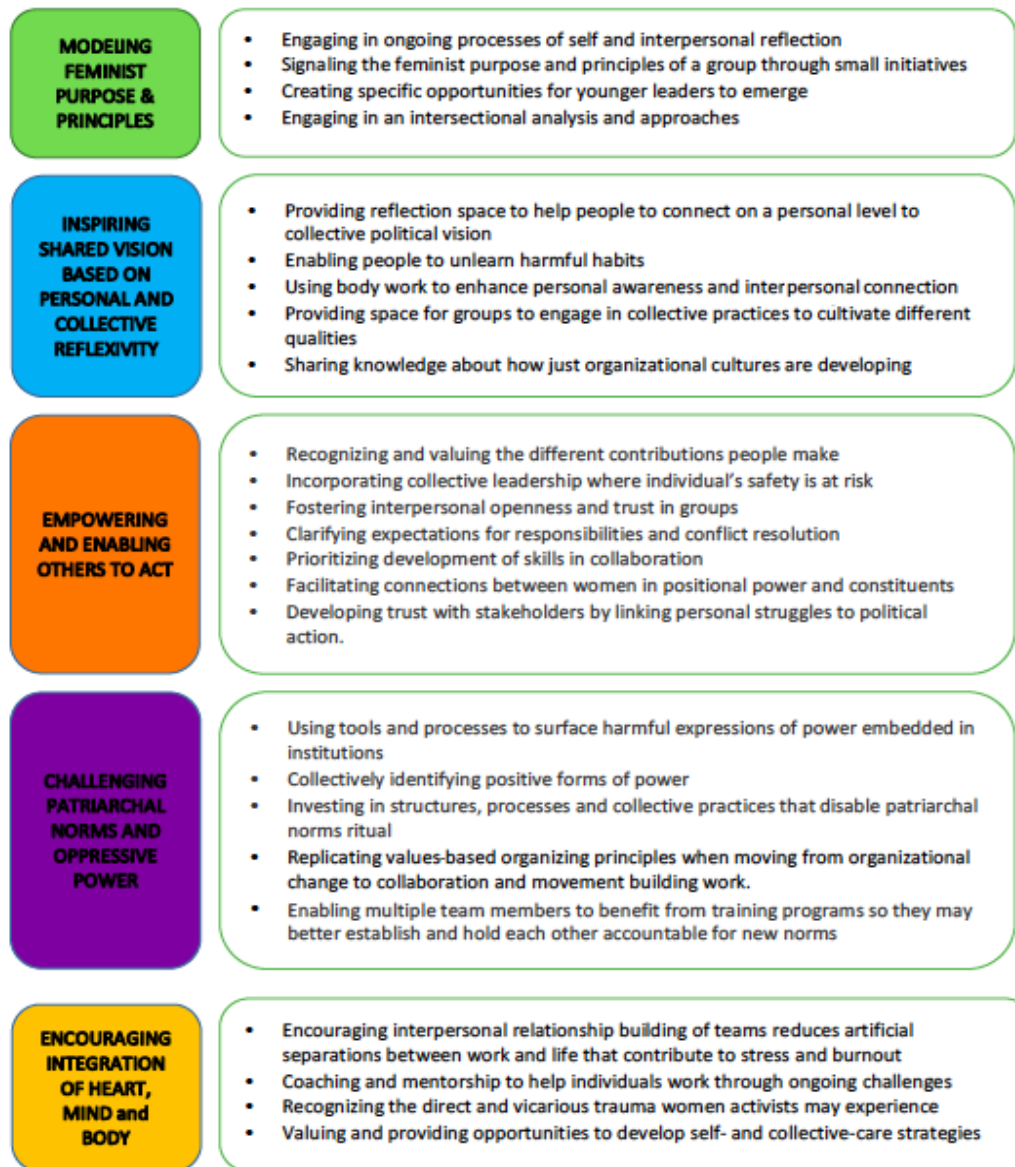
- In practice

At international, national, and local levels, women's leadership has been correlated with significant achievements, including quantifiable increases in access to services such as water, education, and childcare.<sup>2</sup> But women's leadership efforts still frequently come up against major barriers, at systemic and individual, formal and informal levels. The 1990s brought significant new attention to women's political participation, complementing the interest in women's economic empowerment. However, this commitment on the part of governments and donors was focused on a narrow set of international targets, including one that equated the numbers of women in legislative bodies with their political empowerment. Women gained more seats but often not more power. Systemic factors include electoral and political systems rigged by patriarchal norms and practices against women's meaningful participation, institutions with norms that discriminate against women, particularly minorities, and a lack of accountability between grassroots women and women in formal politics. At the

individual level, women often lack confidence to engage in politics, internalize sexism, lack the support of their families, and do not strongly challenge discriminatory norms.

The profiles in this research illustrate how movement-building and -supporting organizations use a variety of practices that put feminist principles and values into action, and practice new models of working with power and leadership.<sup>3</sup> These may be useful in helping shape leadership development capacity strengthening among women and men, in formal or informal leadership.

### Strategies for building transformative and feminist leadership



Source: Shawna Wakefield (2017)

These strategies and related practices build on each other and are interconnected. Modeling feminist purpose and principles is a basis for all other practices of transformative leadership for women's rights. Inspiring shared vision based on personal and collective reflexive learning provides space to ask questions about the kinds of organizations and worlds the group wants to create and creates a more even playing field on which to take collective action. Groups can empower and enable others to act when they engage in reflexive learning together, and can even strengthen collaborations within and across organizations. Challenging patriarchal norms and oppressive power is an expression of feminist principles, requiring analysis, reflection, and the ability to confront respectfully. Efforts to integrate heart, mind, and body helps to ensure group leaders and members see each other as whole people, and that the well-being of leaders, their colleagues, and collaborators are foundational to the sustainability of any leadership practices and results.

*Challenges to these strategies and practices include:*

- Donor interest in short term, measurable projects, rather than transformative processes;
- consistency (individual and organizational) in modeling feminist purpose and principles;
- chronic stress, overwork, and unresolved trauma among women's-rights activists that stumps creativity and innovation;
- age and other hierarchies that prevent power distribution and decision making collaboratively with younger and more diverse women;
- lack of resources, tools, and reflexive spaces that can help leaders and organizations identify harmful habits and allow transformative practices to emerge;
- lack of prioritization of skills in conflict resolution, respectful confrontation, and use of positive power; and
- lack of models of how to transform the deep structures of oppression in organizations and movements.

*Conclusions*

The images of strong accountable leaders have deeply gendered roots and are embedded in many societies' understandings of the kinds of leadership needed to bring about lasting change. But women's organizations and movements are creating alternative models, ones that foreground feminist principles, creatively dismantling and creating alternatives to oppressive structures and norms, to

manifest collective visions for change. Development organizations and donors have an important role to play in valuing and making these strategies and practices visible, so that such practices can be shared and better contribute to the achievement of a more just future.

### *Recommendations*

Development organizations should:

- Respect and commit to supporting feminist values, principles, and politics that underpin women's
- rights in programming and collaborations with women's-rights organizations;
- provide longer-term, core funding and technical support that facilitates stronger skills in
- transformational leadership for women's rights among women's and mixed organizations;
- research and share knowledge about the nature and impacts of transformative and feminist leadership, particularly emphasizing collective power; and
- provide continuing and peer education opportunities after leadership trainings and programs are complete to help participants navigate challenges.

Donors should:

- Provide longer-term investment and adaptive core support systems for movement-building organizations, based on their real needs and interests;
- trust grantees to know what they need and have capacity to absorb;
- engage with movement-building and -support organizations to design leadership development programs so they are based on their existing strengths, needs, and interests;
- provide access to coaches, mentors, and spaces for reflection for activist communities;
- emphasize development of leaders that have legitimacy within their communities, not just ones that are able to communicate with donors and audiences;

- develop integrated security analysis of the risks to women in leadership, coordinated with other donors.

Movement-supporting organizations should:

- Share knowledge of experiences and strategies for challenging oppressive and hierarchical structures and developing new organizational norms;
- experiment with and value small efforts to model feminist principles in organizing and organizations;
- create opportunities for the development of strong human relationships within and across organizations;
- prioritize skills development and opportunities around collaboration, within organizations and across them
- value and stress the importance of integration of heart, mind, and body as part of the movement-building work within organizations and in communication with donors; and
- accompany the evolution of participants in leadership-development programs when they return to their organizations and movements, and facilitate creation and use of tools that address the specific organizational contexts.

# INTRODUCTION

Leaders who inspire masses of people to mobilize for social justice are widely portrayed as visionary, inspiring, and heroic individuals. They use their heads and their hearts, they are strategic and tactical, and they grow their power with others to mobilize for things unimaginable to everyday people. Martin Luther King. M.K. Gandhi. Harriet Tubman. Aung San Suu Kyi. Nelson Mandela, Gautama Buddha. The people who stood behind and beside them—called “followers” in the leadership literature—are often forgotten, not recognized for their part in creating collective power and the role that their relationships, solidarity, and energy provide to more visible leaders.

Individual symbols of social justice leadership and power are becoming fewer and farther between. Violence against women, religious and economic fundamentalism, and everyday exclusion and violence based on ethnicity, race, class, sexual identity, and age are a reality for too many women, particularly those of sexual or other minority status. Trends in institutional changes, such as marketization, regionalization, and decentralization, and constitutional reforms have shaped at least part of the context within which these realities have taken place, particularly in the past 30 years.<sup>5</sup> These are complex problems with intricate causes and manifestations. The solutions to those problems have yet to be found on a wide scale. Developing and sustaining the kinds of leadership required to generate the inspiration, energy, ideas, and strategies needed to shift power imbalances at the root of gender inequality is a major challenge of our time.

We often lament a vacuum of ethical leadership, but it also may be true that we seek leadership in the wrong places.<sup>6</sup> Where are individuals and groups creating energy, inspiring just action, and sharing power for social justice? We will not know the answers if we only look in the formal realm of elected politics, or for individual heroes.

Instead, looking to social movements and movement-supporting organizations is a logical place to start. We know that women’s movements, defined as an organized set of constituents pursuing a common political agenda of change through collective action,<sup>7</sup> have historically been vital to the achievement of

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<sup>5</sup> Mona Lena Krook and Fiona MacKay, introduction to *Gender, Politics and Institutions*, 2011.

<sup>6</sup> Ethical leadership is the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers. *Leadership: Current Theories, Research, and Future Directions*.

<sup>7</sup> Srilatha Batliwala, *Changing Their World: Concepts and Practices of Women’s Movements*. Association of Women’s Rights in Development, 2012.

women's rights. One major study of social movements and violence against women (VAW) policies in 70 countries over four decades found that feminist mobilization in civil society, rather than other actors' inclusion of women in government, is the deciding factor in policy development. The same study shows that autonomous women's movements have also been responsible for institutionalizing feminist ideas in international norms by catalyzing government action, including action by women legislators.<sup>8</sup> Women's movements have also brought issues formerly seen as private (such as VAW) into the public domain, and have changed attitudes, beliefs, and social norms as a result.

As Srilatha Batliwala and others argue, women's movements are known to provide women with real leadership and decision-making power. At the same time, some women's movements have lost the momentum, coherence, and impact they had up until the 1990s, and others are building collective power in new ways. In her scan for the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID), Batliwala finds that we are in "an era of building our own organizations rather than movements, of implementing projects rather than processes of more fundamental change in gender and social power relations."<sup>9</sup> In a climate in which funding for movement building is considered by movement-support organizations, such as AWID, to be insufficient and under threat, organizations still provide valued forms of support. This reality suggests that the leadership and organizational realities of those organizations matter.

The examples in this study focus on the **practices of feminist and transformative leadership, in the context of organizations that are about strengthening some aspect of women's rights**. In addition to the effectiveness of women's organizations in influencing policy, Oxfam experience<sup>10</sup> and research also shows that women's leadership in informal domains is particularly important for the development of political skills and networks, particularly in countries where there are restrictions on women's mobility and participation in public life.<sup>11</sup> Further, a key lesson emerging from the major study on the role of women's movements in legislation on VAW was also that general-purpose, mixed-gender organizations usually do not do enough to advance women's rights. They acknowledge that political parties, government agencies, and human rights organizations can be critical allies, but that autonomous women's organizations—particularly feminist ones—need to be a fundamental component

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<sup>8</sup> Mala Htun and S. Laurel Shelton, *The Civic Origins of Progressive Policy Change: Combating Violence Against Women in Global Perspective (1975–2005)*. American Political Science Review 106, no. 3 (2012): 548-569.

<sup>9</sup> Batliwala, *Changing*.

<sup>10</sup> Duncan Green, *The Raising Her Voice Global Program*. Oxfam Active Citizenship Case Study, 2015.

<sup>11</sup> Andrea Cornwall and Anne-Marie Goetz, *Democratizing Democracy: Feminist Perspectives*. Democratization 12, no. 5 (2005): 783-800.

for advancing women's rights.<sup>12</sup> Finally, as one set of scholars on women and leadership notes, where there is gender inequality, the goals of social change require effective feminist leadership across all sectors and societal institutions.<sup>13</sup>

Leaders can influence others and shape institutions and social norms, and as such they can enable the realization of women's rights and gender equality as they lead.<sup>14</sup> Recent research shows that effective leadership can also combine navigation of "the web of formal and informal institutions and networks that constitute the world of political decision-making,"<sup>15</sup> for instance. And yet, as prominent African-American feminist scholar Bell Hooks has pointed out, it is important to note that there are many examples where women (like many men) have been more concerned with their own authority and power than developing relationships with—and being accountable to—diverse groups of people who come from different political perspectives.<sup>16</sup> Internalized sexism— "deeply embedded and internalized patriarchies,"<sup>17</sup>—is at times reproduced by women themselves.

Considering this, here we are concerned with the kinds of leadership most likely to create more socially just systems in which women's rights and gender justice are realized—first by practicing them as individuals and within organizations and movements for change, rather than focusing on formal politics. We suggest here that the focus on women leaders needs to be more inclusive of leadership in informal domains, and the interaction between informal and formal domains, so that leadership for enabling women's rights can be more effective in both. We highlight strategies and examples to support building feminist leadership with the purpose of realizing women's rights, because the kinds of transformative practices that happen at individual and collective levels, across a range of systems, structures, and practice, seem to be subject to experimentation the most in organizations where feminist values are embedded. Where deep commitment to women's rights is required, "movement-building organizations" and "movement-support organizations" are fruitful terrain for action and to study.

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<sup>12</sup> Mala Htun and S. Laurel Weldon, *Why Autonomous Social Movements Hold the Key to Reducing Violence against Women*, Scholar Strategy Network, 2013. Available at <http://www.scholarsstrategynetwork.org/brief/why-autonomous-social-movements-hold-key-reducing-violence-against-women>

<sup>13</sup> Jean Lau Chin et. al., *Women and Leadership: Transforming Visions and Diverse Voices* (New York: Wiley, 2007).

<sup>14</sup> Chin, *Women and Leadership*.

<sup>15</sup> Pilar Domingo et. al., *Women's Voice and Leadership in Decision-Making: Assessing the Evidence*. Overseas Development Institute (ODI), 2015.

<sup>16</sup> Bell Hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Routledge, 2014).

<sup>17</sup> Batliwala, *Changing*.



This consideration of leadership moves beyond the study of individual heroic charismatic leaders who are so often publicly profiled. There is also the crucial importance of social relationships and the need to understand how individuals energize and inspire each other. This study is informed by thinking on leadership as a collective relational capacity to bring forth new realities<sup>18</sup> and to shift and focus collective attention around transformative leadership<sup>19</sup>. In sum, here we are considering transformative and feminist leadership for women's rights as a relational process of people working together to transform systemic oppression, against women and other marginalized genders, for the realization of women's rights and social justice for all. This report's fundamental proposition is that a strong relationship between practices of personal and collective transformation; use of power for positive change; and creative collaborations that influence social norms, deep cultures, structures, and processes are necessary for transformative leadership to advance women's rights.

The report analyzes transformative and feminist leadership practices that align with Srilatha Batliwala's leadership diamond, which uses a feminist lens to unpack the key practices of transformational leadership proposed by Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner<sup>20</sup>. These practices, which we explain more fully later in the document, include:

- Modeling feminist purpose and principles;
- inspiring a shared vision based on personal and collective reflexive learning (and unlearning);
- challenging patriarchal norms and oppressive power;
- empowering and enabling others to act; and
- encouraging integration of heart, mind, and body.

Underlying this premise is a fundamental question: Can transformative leadership be developed in individuals and groups, or do some people have an innate ability to lead in a transformational way? Drawing on reviews of the literature on feminist and transformational leadership and interviews with 22 women supporting or leading organizations that develop transformative and feminist leadership for women's rights, we examine some examples of the kinds of strategies and practices that are testing the assumption that it is possible to develop the muscles for feminist and transformational leadership.

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<sup>18</sup> Peter Sengue, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*. New York: Doubleday/Currency, 1990

<sup>19</sup> Otto Sharmer, *Theory U: Learning from the Future as It Emerges* (Oakland, Calif: Berrett-Koehler, 2009).

<sup>20</sup> Srilatha Batliwala, *Clearing the Conceptual Cloud*. CREA, 2008.

This report will do five things:

- 1) Provide a **scan of trends in transformational and feminist leadership**, thinking, and practice;
- 2) offer an **analytic framework** for understanding varied practices of transformational and feminist leadership undertaken at the individual, group, and organizational levels to advance women's rights;
- 3) provide **examples of transformational and feminist leadership in action** in movement-building organizations;
- 4) provide a summary of **strategic implications, challenges, and promising practices** from the literature and interviews with 22 activists supporting transformational and feminist leadership to advance women's rights;
- 5) propose a plan for **moving forward: possibilities for a research agenda; and**
- 6) **conclude** with a summary of the report's findings.

# SCAN OF TRENDS IN TRANSFORMATIVE AND FEMINIST LEADERSHIP

Some of this study's key concepts include those addressing transformational leadership, women's political leadership, feminism, power and feminist leadership, social movements, organizations, the relationship between movements and organizations, and the "deep structure" of organizations. Here we trace the development of some of these concepts. Much of the historical and even current conceptual framing of leadership has been done by Northern researchers in their own contexts, which undoubtedly limits its universal application. However, cross-cultural research in 62 different cultures around the world did find that at least some aspects of transformational leadership theory are widely endorsed.<sup>21</sup> Generally, the research has also taken place in work environments that perpetuate false separations of work and family life, or production and reproduction, a point raised in the literature on feminist leadership, and more recently addressed in thinking on transformational leadership.<sup>22</sup>

## TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP CONCEPTS

Many of the historical studies and narratives on leadership focus on leaders' characteristics, personality traits, and behaviors.<sup>23</sup> These studies are heavily influenced by the 19<sup>th</sup>-century "great man" theory, which posits that history is determined by the leadership of exceptional, heroic men. The psychological theory that leadership must be understood through the study of personality traits followed in the early 1900s. Trait theories hypothesized that individuals are born with a set of personality traits and characteristics that make them good leaders. When this theory was dispelled, leading researchers to look at the behavior of leaders and how they can be developed; this approach was followed by the so-

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<sup>21</sup> Deanne N. Den Hartog et al., *Culture Specific and Cross-Culturally Generalizable Implicit Leadership Theories: Are Attributes of Charismatic/Transformational Leadership Universally Endorsed?* *Leadership Quarterly* 10, no. 2 (1999): 219-256.

<sup>22</sup> Joyce Fletcher, *The Paradox of Post Heroic Leadership: An Essay on Gender, Power and Transformational Change*. *Leadership Quarterly* 15, no. 5 (2004).

<sup>23</sup> Scott D. Derue et al., *Trait and Behavioral Theories of Leadership: An Integration and Meta-Analytic Test of their Relative Validity*. *Personnel Psychology* 64, no. 1 (1999): 7-52.

called contingency theory of the 1960s–1980s, which essentially says that leadership effectiveness depends not only on a leader’s personality but also on the situation, including the relationship to group members, task structure, and definition, and the leader’s position of power.<sup>24</sup>

In the late 1970s, leadership theory moved to interrogate the interaction between leader behaviors, the leader’s relationship with group members (or “followers”), and the context in which their leadership takes place.<sup>25</sup> This perspective was introduced by James Burns as transactional (leadership largely based on the exchange of rewards contingent on performance) and transformational leadership. This research, carried out on political leaders, led Burns to define transformational leadership as:

- **Idealized influence** and charisma, which inspires followers’ loyalty and devotion, putting others’ needs above their own personal needs, being consistent, and modeling high standards of ethical and moral conduct;
- **inspirational motivation**, and enthusiastic acceptance of a challenging goal and a mission for the future achieved by appealing to the faith and emotions of the follower, rather than logical discourse;
- **intellectual stimulation**, activating others’ abilities to solve problems, to think and imagine and to believe in values and consider values; and
- through **individualized consideration**, attends to followers’ needs and interests, and mentors them to decide what suits them to reach higher levels of attainment.

Burns and those he influenced saw leadership as an ongoing, collaborative process, whereby leaders come to understand the motives of followers, to satisfy their higher needs, and to engage the full person such that there is mutual benefit.<sup>26</sup>

He suggested looking at how leadership emerges within political and historical contexts rather than examining the characteristics of individual leaders alone. Mentoring plays a significant role in the transformational leadership model.<sup>27</sup>

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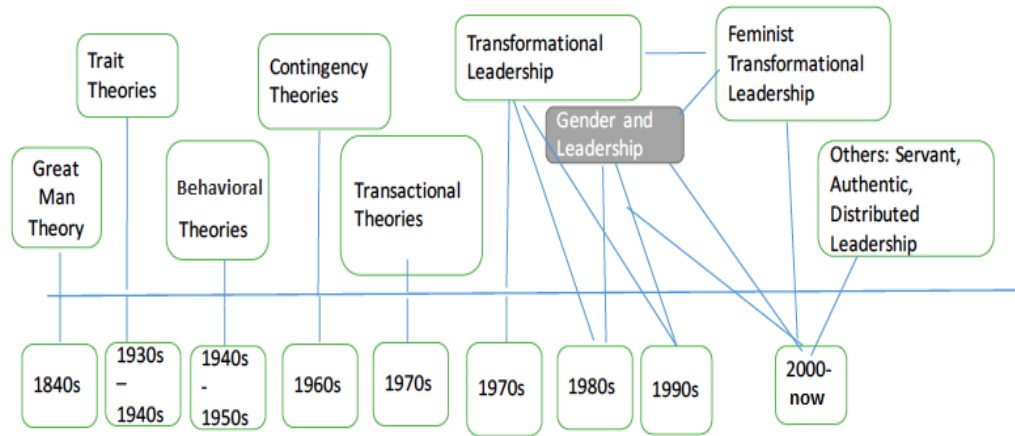
<sup>24</sup> F.E. Fiedler, *A Theory of Leadership Effectiveness* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1967).

<sup>25</sup> Timothy A. Judge et al., *Personality and Leadership: A Qualitative and Quantitative Review*. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 87, no. 4 (2002), 765-780.

<sup>26</sup> James Burns, 1978; Bernard Bass, 1994.

<sup>27</sup> James Burns, 1978; Bernard Bass, 1994.

**Figure 1. Key developments in transformational and feminist leadership theory**



Source: Shawna Wakefield (2017)

Although a significant research has been done on leadership, particularly in corporations and in politics, less has been done in the context of social justice organizations that interact with both formal and informal political systems and processes. Even less has been done on feminist organizations or those with the explicit purpose of advancing the rights of women and girls.

Around the time transformational leadership was being conceptualized, hypotheses about women in leadership positions, and of feminism in leadership, were being developed.<sup>28</sup> Judging from “personal experience in organizations and on informal surveys and interviews of managers,” observers suggested that, compared with men, women were “less hierarchical, more cooperative and collaborative, and more oriented to enhancing others’ self-worth.”<sup>29</sup> Since then, more scientific queries into these claims and the reasons underlying their findings have yielded inconclusive results. However, one major meta-analysis of research on male and female leaders found that women have a slight advantage over men in terms of being transformational leaders.<sup>30</sup> The reasons suggested include the coherence between women’s stereotypical roles—nurturance, for instance—when compared with men’s, and the features of transformational leadership that

<sup>28</sup> Ronit Klark, *The Transformational Leader: Who Is S(he)? A Feminist Perspective*. Journal of Organizational Management 17, no. 2 (2004): 160-176.

<sup>29</sup> Alice H. Eagly, *Women as Leaders*. Harvard Business School Research Symposium Gender & Work: Challenging Conventional Wisdom, 2013.

<sup>30</sup> Alice H. Eagly et al., *Transformational, Transactional, and Laissez-Faire Leadership Styles: A Meta-Analysis Comparing Women and Men*. Psychological Bulletin 129, no. 4 (2013): 569-591.

emphasize more nurturing qualities, such as interpersonal bonding—as compared with men, who take a more transactional, punitive approach to leadership responsibilities.

Another body of work goes beyond the typical focus of leadership analysis to look at the values and attitudes of women in leadership, finding that women are more likely to place an emphasis on the welfare of the people they are in frequent contact with and to endorse social values that promote others' welfare.<sup>31</sup> However, as noted by Bernard Bass, men dominate most of the organizations being studied; and studies are needed that adjust for abilities predictive of a successful leader.<sup>32</sup> Eagly points out that although women are not a homogenous group, these values and attitudes may explain why women are more likely than men to advocate for policy changes to promote interests of women, children, and families, and for healthcare and education—findings that are consistent across political parties and countries.<sup>33</sup>

Over the past 20 years or so, transformational leadership has been positively correlated with group effectiveness,<sup>34</sup> organizational innovation and empowerment,<sup>35</sup> the achievement of organizational outcomes,<sup>36</sup> followers' development and performance,<sup>37</sup> workers' well-being,<sup>38</sup> and followers'

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<sup>31</sup> S.H. Schwartz & T. Rubel, *Sex differences in value priorities: Cross-cultural and multimethod studies*. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. (89) 1010-1028, 2005.

<sup>32</sup> Bernard Bass, *Two Decades of Research and Development in Transformational Leadership*. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology* 8 no. 1 (1999), 9-32.

<sup>33</sup> Alice H Eagly, *Women as Leaders: Leadership style versus leaders' values and attitudes*, *Gender at Work: Challenging Conventional Wisdom*, Harvard Business School

<sup>34</sup> Kevin B. Lowe et al. *Effectiveness Correlates of Transformational and Transactional Leadership: A Meta-Analytic Review of the MLG Literature*. *Leadership Quarterly* 7, no. 3 (1996), 385-425.

<sup>35</sup> Dong I. Jung et al., *The Role of Transformational Leadership in Enhancing Organizational Innovation: Hypotheses and Some Findings*. *Leadership Quarterly* 14, nos. 4-5 (2013).

<sup>36</sup> Victor Jesus García-Morales, Maria Magalena Jimenez-Barrionuevo, Leopoldo Gutierrez-Gutierrez, *Transformational leadership influence on organizational performance through organizational learning and innovation*, *Journal of Business Research*, 1030-1050, 2012. J.M. Howell and B.J. Avolio, *Transformational leadership, transactional leadership, locus of control, and support for innovation: Key predictors of consolidated business-unit performance*, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 78, 891-902, 1993; H. Liao A. Chuang, *A Multilevel investigation of factors influencing employee service performance and customer outcomes*, *Academy of Management Journal*, 47, 41-58, 2004.

<sup>37</sup> Taly Dvir et al., *Impact of Transformational Leadership on Follower Development and Performance: A Field Experiment*. *Academy of Management Journal* 45, no. 4 (2002): 735-744.

<sup>38</sup> Kara A. Arnold et al, *Transformational Leadership and Psychological Well-Being: The Mediating Role of Meaningful Work*. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology* 12, no. 3 (2007)

commitment to organizational change.<sup>39</sup> The most effective leaders are those found to be both transactional and transformational, depending on the situation, according to researchers.<sup>40</sup> In the late 1990s, Avolio and Bass theorized that leaders who focus on developing follower potential will “create group norms that encourage colleagues to focus on helping each other continuously learn and develop. The broader the leader’s span of influence, the more likely such norms will become part of the larger organizational culture.”<sup>41</sup>

### **Women’s political leadership**

There is new but still limited research on the complex dynamics between women’s activism and leadership in informal domains, and their interactions with both male and female political leaders in formal domains. There is less on the relationship between transformative and feminist leadership for women’s rights and political leadership. This is an important area for future exploration.<sup>42</sup>

Internationally, the 1990s brought a rise in attention among donors and governments to women’s participation in formal politics, which built on earlier attention to women’s economic empowerment, primarily via a proliferation of micro-credit. This interest coincided with the rapid onset of economic globalization and shifts in power and politics. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), intended to chart a path to an end of poverty, included a narrow gender goal. However, this goal was measured by even more narrowly conceived targets, including one that equated the numbers of women in legislative bodies with their political empowerment.

Research points to the importance of having a critical mass of women in leadership positions, usually accepted as at least 30%, in order to shift norms of decision making.<sup>43</sup> However, this is not at all certain; it depends on a variety of factors, including the degree of transparency and democracy within those systems. Although in most regions the proportion of seats held by women doubled between 2000 and 2014, women still only held around one in five seats in lower and upper houses. In Africa, women’s representation has grown from

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<sup>39</sup> David M. Herald et al., *Effects of Transformational and Change Leadership on Employee Commitment to a Change: A Multilevel Study*. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 93, no. 2 (2008): 346-357.

<sup>40</sup> J.J. Hater and B.M. Bass, *Supervisors’ Evaluations and Subordinates’ Perceptions of Transformational and Transactional Leadership*. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 73 (1998): 695-702; J.M. Howell and B.J. Avolio, *Transformational Leadership, Transactional Leadership, Locus of Control, and Support for Innovation*. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 78, no. 6 (1993): 891-902.

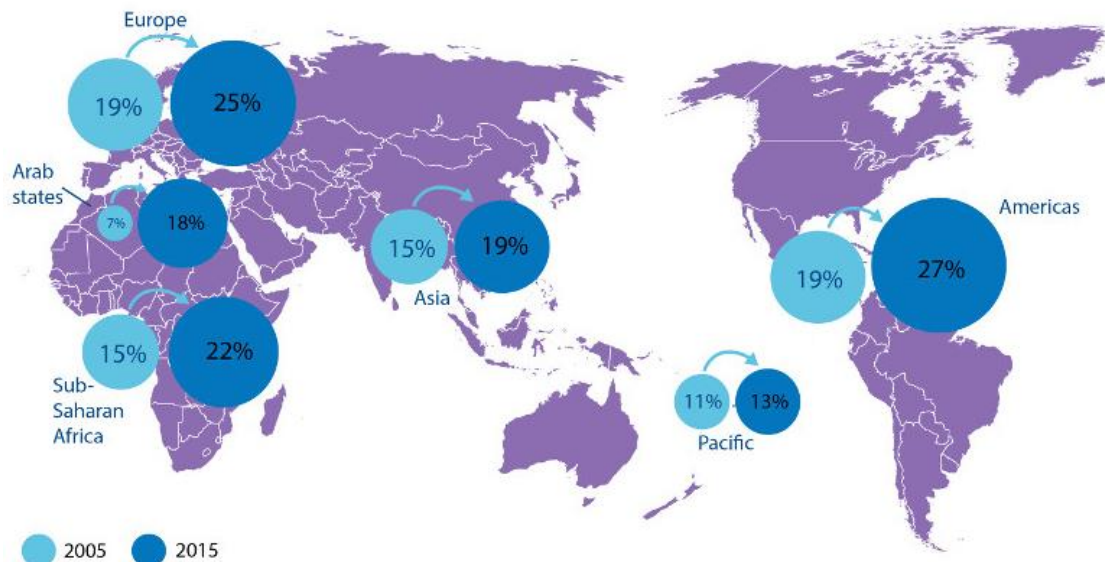
<sup>41</sup> Bruce J. Avolio and Bernard M. Bass, *Individual Consideration Viewed at Multiple Levels of Analysis: A Multi-Level Framework for Examining the Diffusion of Transformational Leadership*. *Leadership Quarterly* 6, no. 2 (1995) 199-218.

<sup>42</sup> Pilar Domingo et al.

<sup>43</sup> UN Women, *Progress of the World’s Women*, 2010.

1% of African legislators, in the 1960s, up to as much as 64% in Rwanda, in 2014—the first country to surpass 50%.<sup>44</sup> Research points to the importance of a critical mass of women in leadership positions—usually accepted as 30% or more.

**Figure 2. Proportion of women in parliaments (2005-2015)**



Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union, <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world-arc.htm>

However, there were significant flaws in an approach that attends primarily to securing women's participation within status quo political systems. Women's ability to effectively champion other women's political, economic, and social empowerment is related to many factors.

Further, the motivations and allegiances of women in politics, the level of development of the political system women are entering, and the support of their families also matter. Political institutions have well-established norms, and as Tripp points out, although some women are challenging these and standing for women's rights, these norms are powerful, and more often than not, women are moving in the other direction to fit the norm.<sup>45</sup> Gender bias against women in positional leadership, such as political representation, directly affects their ability

<sup>44</sup> Aili Mari Tripp, *Women and Politics in Africa Today*. Democracy in Africa, 2013. Available from <http://democracyinafrica.org/women-politics-africa-today/>

<sup>45</sup> Tripp, *Women and Politics in Africa Today*.



to perform.<sup>46</sup> With the possible exception of systems where decisions are made by consensus, the legitimacy and authority of women representatives as leaders is often undermined because of norms that undervalue their participation.<sup>47</sup>

#### Intersection of formal institutions and informal rules

A recent ODI study on women's leadership and participation finds that, "A general consensus exists that for quotas to bring about substantive change, other conditions need to be in place, including an electoral system conducive to women's candidacy, incentives for parties to include women (including sanctions for non-compliance), women's movements within and outside parties lobbying for change, and the political will among influential politicians for reducing inequality."

Because of these same gender norms, women are also more likely to have a low perception of self, and of their abilities to lead, than men. Any negative perceptions of women's representation may be strengthened if they are not able to produce results, which leads to a vicious cycle that can reinforce perceptions of women as poor leaders. With the possible exception of systems where decisions are made by consensus, the legitimacy and authority of women representatives as leaders is also often undermined by norms that undervalue their participation.<sup>48</sup> Minority women have been more likely to fare worse, though they are often ignored both in the formation of quota policies and in research.<sup>49</sup>

At the same time, notable achievements have resulted from women's political leadership, especially at local levels. For instance, linkages have been established between women's participation with rises in access to services such as water, education, and childcare.<sup>50</sup> A good example is the Oxfam Raising Her Voice program, through which women work at the grassroots level, have effectively engaged in the political sphere with positive outcomes for women's rights. This work points that it is important to understand the processes by which

<sup>46</sup> White House Project, *Benchmarking Women's Leadership*, 2013.

<sup>47</sup> Christopher F. Karpowitz et al., *Why Women's Numbers Elevate Women's Influence, and When They Do Not: Rules, Norms, and Authority in Political Discussion*. *Politics Groups and Identities* 3, no. 1 (2015).

<sup>48</sup> Karpowitz, *Why Women's Numbers Elevate Women's Influence*.

<sup>49</sup> Melanie Hughes, *Intersectionality, Quotas, and Minority Women's Political Representation Worldwide*, *American Political Science Review* 105, no. 3 (2011).

<sup>50</sup> UN Women, *Progress of the World's Women*, 2010.

political negotiations take place, including the role of formal and informal networks.<sup>51</sup>

The quantitative approach taken to the MDGs, the gender goal in particular, may have had the adverse effect of limiting the scope of what is understood to constitute women's leadership and therefore what is measured. Studies point to a lack of attention to the enabling environments for leadership, the need to look into the household to build a theory of change and to build a more interconnected view of women's leadership in relation to other aspects of their lives that impinge on their ability to lead an analysis of which women are able to develop leadership capacities. These studies also note insufficient data on the relationship among individual leadership capabilities, collective action and social change for women, a consideration of the role of men and boys, studies over time, and the relationships and roles of funders and partners.<sup>52</sup>

The limited initiatives tracking and gaining insights into the **pathways** for women's leadership also look primarily at women's participation in formal politics. Alternatives to the studies focusing on the quantifiable aspects of women's leadership (*i.e.*, the number of women in legislative bodies) are more qualitative aspects, including questions such as: what kinds of leadership are being utilized? What are women's sources of influence and power in formal leadership positions? How are women who are seen as legitimate and effective leaders navigating the terrain of male-dominated politics?

Some have moved beyond the approach of focusing on individual women leaders to include the connections between individual and collective, informal and formal pathways to leadership in the global South. As part of the Pathways to Women's Empowerment Project, Mariz Tadros looked at pathways to leadership, asking questions such as how do women become politically engaged? What political, social, and economic dynamics obstruct or facilitate their pathways to political power? What kinds of relationships enable or undermine women's ability to assume leadership? The key takeaways from Tadroz' research were:

- There is no technical formula to ensure perfect quotas;
- quotas are not a proxy for democratization or commitment to gender equality;

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<sup>51</sup> Georgina Waylen, *Understanding Institutional Change: A Gender Perspective* (2014) Working Papers in Gender and Institutional Change. University of Manchester: UIC; Working Paper No. 1.

<sup>52</sup> Office of Development Effectiveness, *Women's Leadership: Evidence Review*, Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs, 2014; Tam O'Neil et al., *Support to Women's and Girl's Leadership: A Rapid Review of the Evidence*, 2014.

- there is a need to look at the kind of critical mass of women required for gender equality;
- women's collective action on issues of gender equality is crucial; and
- building women's political empowerment should include constituency building.
- Women's political trajectory is a process; it does not begin or end with elections; and
- There is a need to shift to provide women with opportunities for political apprenticeship.

The quantitative approach to supporting women's leadership is necessary in that it provides important grounding on the outcomes related to women's participation in political life. However, qualitative measures are also needed to provide a full picture of the strengths and shortcomings of any approach to strengthening women's leadership.

### **Feminist leadership concepts**

It may not be a coincidence that feminist interpretations of transformational leadership concepts began to gain popularity as women were gaining political office. There is coherence between feminist leadership principles and practices and transformational leadership, despite the fact that the theory was essentially gender blind, since it was developed based on studies of men. In a 2007 book reflecting on the durability of Burns' claims on transformational leadership, Laurien Alexandre asserts: "leadership is embedded within a deeply engrained gender system—in our distribution of power and resources, in our self- and collective perceptions of effective leadership, in our identities as leaders and as followers, and in our expectations of who can lead, of where leadership takes place and for what purposes." She finds this work resonates with feminism in several ways: the understanding of leadership as a process of mobilizing by people with shared motives and values; understanding that leadership is about relationship; valuing connection over disconnection and cooperation over competition; building mutual goals; desire for leaders and followers to grow in connection through empathy and mutual empowerment; and a recognition of the need to avoid reliance on a single archetypal leader. She feels more emphasis is

needed on the nature of power, and more attention should be paid to personal and psychological aspects of leadership.<sup>53</sup>

However, a critique of the gender-blind *application* of transformative leadership claimed that up until the early 2000s at least, models of transformative, distributed leadership were treated as though they are gender neutral, and that this may do a disservice to the transformative potential of such styles of leadership. Fletcher proposed three characteristics of “post heroic” leadership concepts—the less individualistic, more relational, collaborative concepts of leadership: leadership as practice (where visible heroes are supported by a network of personal leadership practices distributed throughout the organization); leadership as a social process (an emergent process with two-way influence between leader and follower); and leadership as learning (which depends on creating a learning environment where outcomes can be achieved for the larger community).<sup>54</sup> Fletcher argued that without acknowledging the nature of gender and power dynamics underlying these theories and offering practical strategies to address them, their transformational potential may be undermined.

She problematized, for instance, countering the common perception in the business world that male leaders are more effective and productive than women with the notion that women may be more effective post-heroic leaders because of “feminine-linked images and wisdom of how to grow people in the domestic sphere.” She noted how the thinking on post-heroic leadership echoes the false dichotomy created between work and family and the value placed on labor. She surfaced a discussion of power, arguing that models which emphasize “power with” may also be associated with “powerlessness,” which is different from the intention of being more flexible and drawing on an adaptive exercise of power and leadership.

In this context, frameworks such as those that look at complexity in contexts and organizations, and the kinds of leadership needed, would do well to include specific interrogations of gender and power within their analysis. In any given context, there are many actors and factors blocking women’s rights. They interact in non-linear and often unpredictable ways, and solutions often emerge in surprising ways. Looking at best practices may provide insights, but it is inherently backward looking, whereas what is needed may be more of a gendered understanding of how to “lead from the future as it emerges.”<sup>55</sup> This is even more true in chaotic environments, such as times of conflict and natural

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<sup>53</sup> Laurien Alexandre, *Leadership: Gender Excluded Yet Embraced*, “Reflections on Leadership,” ed. Richard A Couto (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015).

<sup>54</sup> Joyce Fletcher, *Paradox of Post-Heroic Leadership: An Essay on Gender, Power and Transformational Change*. *Leadership Quarterly* 15, no. 5 (2014).

<sup>55</sup> Otto Sharmer, *Theory U: Leading from the Future as It Emerges* (Berrett-Koehler, 2009).

disaster, where there may be opportunities for transformation, but as history has shown, this is far from automatic.

In 2008, Srilatha Batliwala prepared for CREA a conceptual framework for understanding feminist and transformational leadership.<sup>56</sup> The paper addresses many of the concerns raised by Fletcher about the perils of ignoring gender and power in post-heroic leadership considerations. In this framework, Batliwala defines transformative feminist leadership as:

Women with a feminist perspective and vision of social justice, individually and collectively transforming themselves to use their power, resources and skills in non-oppressive, inclusive structures and processes to mobilize others—especially other women—around a shared agenda of social, cultural, economic and political transformation for equality and the realization of human rights for all.<sup>57</sup>

Batliwala based the concept on four key aspects of a “feminist leadership diamond”: power, principles and values, politics and purpose, and practices.<sup>58</sup> Leadership is all mediated by “the self”—the histories; social, economic, and other identities; psychologies; personality traits; self-esteem; socialization; all aspects of identity; talents; and abilities. We need to develop more understanding about where the inspiration to lead in transformative ways comes from in order to support and nurture it and ensure it is a new way of operating collectively rather than an anomaly.

Much of the inspiration to provide leadership in struggles for women’s rights comes from the commitment to feminist values and principles themselves. There is no universally accepted definition or set of values and principles. But some commonly accepted ones provided by Batliwala and others include the notion that:

- The personal is political—feminism posits that transformation of issues once considered “private,” such as domestic violence or division of labor in the home, are considered sites for collective and political action. This also encompasses the notion that we must be the change we want to see in the world—individual and social transformation cannot be separated;
- women and other marginalized genders should be empowered—power must be shared and gender power relations must be transformed at all levels and throughout all change processes;

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<sup>56</sup> CREA is an India-based organization founded in 2000 with deep experience providing feminist leadership trainings in South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East.

<sup>57</sup> Batliwala, Srilatha. *Feminist Leadership for Social Transformation: Clearing the Conceptual Cloud*. CREA. 2011.

<sup>58</sup> Srilatha Batliwala, *Clearing the Conceptual Cloud*, CREA, 2008.

- oppressions operating together must end—beyond gender equality, all social relations of power that oppress or marginalize on the basis of social identifiers (e.g., age, sexual orientation, caste, dis/ability) must be transformed; and
- value of democratic structures and decision-making processes.<sup>59</sup>

Conceptualizations of gender power are critical components of feminist thought. As a practical issue, understanding gender and power dimensions is part of how women's organizations and movements strategize for change.

Another concept that helps illuminate how power plays out in organizations is the concept of “deep structure” coined by Aruna Rao and David Kelleher; it describes how hidden and unspoken organizational and cultural norms and patterned behaviors reflect individual behavior. All individuals hold different historical and social forms of power, and these realities often remain below the surface of organizational politics and practice, and, when they are not made explicit, can become sources of hidden power contributing to deep structures of oppression and exclusion. These are influenced heavily not only by gender norms and power relations but also by other social identifiers in wider society, such as class, caste, ethnicity, and sexual identity.

Even less frequently discussed is the reality that many women in leadership are reproducing forms of leadership where hierarchical forms of power predominate. Most of the groups profiled in this study are addressing deep structure in creative ways—making sure the underlying power dynamics are explicit, to discuss and challenge them.

In 2002, after years of experience with policy change, and seeing the lack of full transformation emerging from them, John Gaventa of the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) and Lisa VeneKlasen and Valerie Miller of Just Associates for Women (JASS) formulated the “power matrix” to look at expressions of power at the organizational or movement-building level.<sup>60</sup> The matrix introduces the positive forms of power often cited as **power with**—the ability to co-create, to collaborate and mobilize collective power toward common aims. When based on common values and principles, power with is critical for organizing. When we access the **power within**, we are tapping into our inner

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<sup>59</sup> Srilatha Batliwala, *Changing Their World: Concepts and Practices of Women's Movements*, AWID, 2011.

<sup>60</sup> Lisa VeneKlasen and Valerie Miller, *A New Weave of Power and Politics: An Action Guide for Advocacy and Citizen Participation*, eds. Debbie Budlender and Cindy Clark (Oklahoma City Ok.: World Neighbors, 2002).

resources, strengthening our sense of “self,” and the effectiveness of power with. The **power to** is the potential of every person to visualize and realize societal change that reflects their visions. **Power over** is generally associated with negative expressions such as repression, force, and discrimination. Batliwala cites in her feminist transformational leadership concept paper an additional concept, **power under**, described as the often-hidden sabotage employed unconsciously by people who have experienced inter-personal trauma, and the constructive power for building movements to confront and overcome injustice.<sup>61</sup> These forms of power may be visible (in formal decision making, for instance), hidden (how political agendas get set), and invisible (how meaning gets established) ways.

### **Support for feminist transformational leadership**

From the movement for environmental and climate justice to labor movements to women's-rights movements worldwide, alternatives to heroic and hierarchical leadership—within organizational and institutional structures and cultures—collective action and social movements are subject to experimentation. If the project of feminist and transformative leadership is about securing women's rights, using more modes of “positive power” to inspire a critical mass to act, then ideas, perspective, energy, inspiration, and practical approaches are needed across aspects of private and public life—culture and society, politics, economics, religion, and spirituality.

This requires a wider and deeper bench of leadership within institutions and movements. It requires leadership to include the capacity to determine what the context requires and what kinds of decisions need to be made, and to exercise leadership capacities and practices to achieve progress or fundamental shifts. It requires representation in positional leadership, as well as greater empowerment and leadership among the full range of stakeholders.

It is worth citing a few large-scale programs here that have operated on the principles of transformative and feminist leadership.

Between 2008 and 2013, the Oxfam Raising Her Voice project supported a \$7 million (£5.8 million) DFID-funded portfolio, that worked in 17 countries, with five local partners, 141 community activist groups, and more than 1,000 coalition members to ensure grassroots women's voices are heard in decision making by combining strategies for change in the personal, social, political, and economic spheres. The program was not designed with the concepts of transformative leadership in mind; instead, it often used existing projects, such as rural development programs, as a starting point. However, it was found that over five years of the projects, as women and their coalitions and networks confidence

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<sup>61</sup> Stephen Wineman, *Power Under: Trauma and Non-Violent Social Change*, 2003.

increased, the groups placed gender and power at the center of their project approaches and stakeholder analyses.<sup>62</sup> Some of the achievements of the program were the following: women—particularly from marginalized groups—increased self-confidence and agency; spoke out about women’s rights abuses; developed individual and organizational leadership capacities; improved social acceptance of women as leaders; and made an impact on promoting public institutions’ gender awareness.<sup>63</sup>

Established in 2000, CREA has held an annual Feminist Leadership, Movement Building and Rights Institute (FLMBaRI)<sup>64</sup>. CREA operates on the understanding that traditional leadership development programs focus on “utilitarian” skills to the detriment of movement building, and that activism uninformed by analysis has far less impact on creating sustainable change than when it is rooted in a feminist analysis and approach to leadership. CREA was an early adopter of the language of feminist transformative leadership in the international context.

By the 2010s, more organizations supporting women’s leadership were conceptualizing their work in terms of transformational and feminist leadership. In 2012, the Global Fund for Women received a grant of \$5.9 million from the Dutch FLOW Fund to support women’s rights organizations in Asia Pacific between 2012 and 2015. It awarded grants to 139 women’s rights organizations in 26 countries to strengthen their efforts to eradicate violence against women and build peace; ensure the equality of rights to economic and environmental security; and engage in the political and public life of their communities and countries. To understand more about the partners and the projects, the organization undertook a learning project to answer the questions: What does transformative women’s leadership look like in the communities in which our grantees work? Why is this type of leadership important? What does it take for women’s groups to develop this type of leadership? And how can the Global Fund for Women and other funders support it?

It found that grantees were funding transformational leadership at two levels—personal transformation and the development of social change agents, with personal transformation seen as an important first step. The change agents were creating change in individual and systemic as well as formal and informal domains. It found that it takes an average of three years to develop leadership in this integrated manner, which is consistent with other initiatives profiled in this study. It found that the intention to promote social change agents made it more likely that young women leaders in the organization would be promoted.

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<sup>62</sup> Duncan Green, *The Raising Her Voice Global Program*, 2015.

<sup>63</sup> Hannah Bearden and Eva Otero, *Women’s Right to Be Heard: An Evaluation of Oxfam GB’s ‘Raising Her Voice’*. Portfolio,” 2013.

<sup>64</sup> In East Africa (English), Middle East and North Africa (MENA) (bilingual—in English and Arabic), South Asia (English) and India (Hindi).



Finally, it found that unrestricted funding was important, though the picture of the organizations showed many of them did not have this luxury.<sup>65</sup>

The African Women's Development Fund, founded in 2001 by three African feminist activists, is one of few funders that explicitly funds transformative leadership development among its grantees and provides ongoing coaching and mentorship to the heads of those organizations. In 2008, it supported regional and sub-regional women's organizations Convention to discuss the state of women's political leadership, stressing accountability at the center and opportunities for young women to lead.<sup>66</sup>

Leadership to achieve women's rights is often complex, and sometimes, chaotic. In the profiles and examples that follow, we look at transformative leadership in action, primarily over the past decade. The women human-rights defenders of Mesoamerica risk their lives daily in their struggles for the rights of indigenous and rural women. The women of Aceh, in Indonesia, involved in a savings and leadership development program have challenged extremely conservative social and cultural norms in times of conflict to exercise new forms of legitimate leadership. In the Movement Building Boot Camp for Queer East Africa Activists, feminist thinking supports Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) activists who were under attack to kindle their activist consciousness while accessing their hearts, minds, and bodies for collective action.

The transformative and feminist leadership practices cited in this study address some of the many commonly understood challenges to women's rights—lack of voice, agency and mobility, safety and security, sexual health and reproductive rights, economic inclusion and empowerment. In their compilation on women leaders, a group of feminist psychologists concluded that the goals of feminist women are the application of the principles of collaboration, egalitarianism, and inclusiveness to leadership and the positions in which they find themselves. It argues for the promotion of gender-equitable environments and against masculinized contexts or women needing to “act like men” to get ahead.<sup>67</sup>

These initiatives share a commitment to supporting women's movements and movement-building organizations, which have been prime places to put feminist values into practice. Despite the inconsistencies and challenges, movements are still places of meaningful women's leadership roles with real decision-making power—in contrast to other movements or even formal politics where women's

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<sup>65</sup> Global Fund for Women, *What does it take to build transformative women's leadership for social change?*

<sup>66</sup> Report of Workshop, *African Women in Political Participation and Transformational Leadership*, 2008.

<sup>67</sup> Jean Lau Chin et al., conclusion to *Transforming Leadership with Diverse Feminist Voices*, Wiley: 2008.

participation is so often treated instrumentally. They are also places to practice new models of working with power and leadership.<sup>68</sup>

The feminist movement-building organization Just Associates for Women (JASS) has proven in its work with thousands of women worldwide that transformation of unequal power dynamics is a fundamental requirement for the achievement of gender justice, women's rights, and social justice. Feminist movements work to challenge multiple oppressions and work to catalyze these transformations, as Jessica Horn points out in her work on gender and social movements.<sup>69</sup> Feminist organizations aim to structure themselves, their processes, and their relationships to challenge gender and power inequality.

However, the extent to which organizations address different forms and expressions of power within their institutions is often a question. The programs and women who are part of them profiled here show the tip of the challenges and solutions, especially when women re-enter mixed organizations or movements, or enter formal politics.

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<sup>68</sup> Batliwala, *Changing*.

<sup>69</sup> Jessica Horn, *Gender and Social Movements*, for BRIDGE, 2013.

# TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN ACTION

"The magic of practice is that incremental progress grows exponentially, as one practices, giant leaps can occur through seemingly repetitive small steps."

-Love without power, Movement Strategy Center.

## A FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYZING TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Practice is the repetition of certain acts done consciously and for explicit benefit. The focus here is on leadership practice, rather than leaders themselves, because of an interest in learning about how to create environments that enable and promote alternatives to patriarchal, hierarchical oppressive structures and relations, and move toward more liberating, gender-just, and ethical expressions of power.

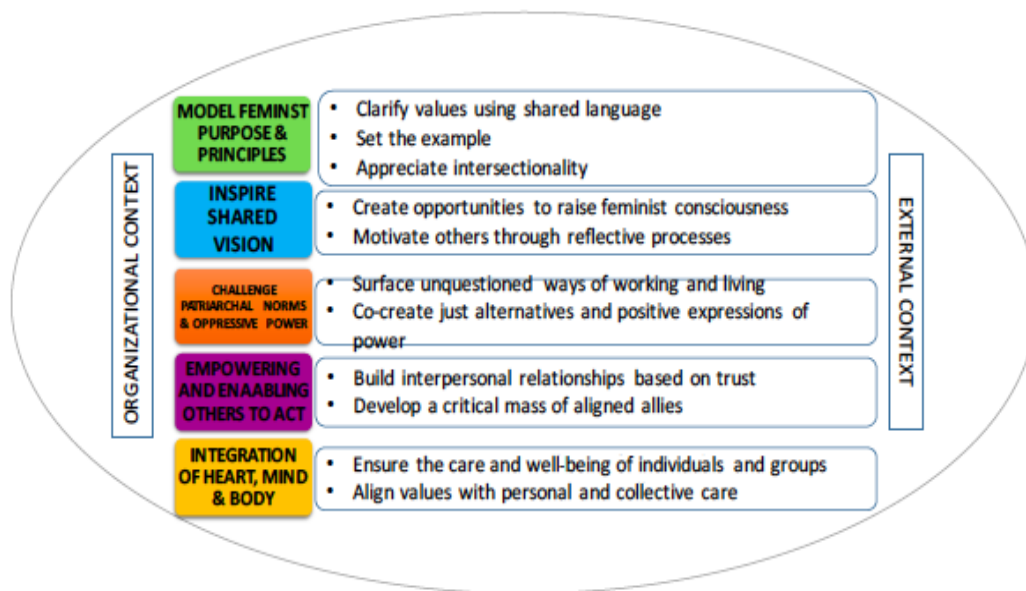
The goal of realizing women's rights and gender justice requires power transformations in several domains. As the Gender at Work Framework outlines, in society shifts are needed in the domains of attitudes and beliefs, social and cultural norms, resources, and laws and policies. At organizational levels, this concerns attitudes and beliefs, the deep culture and structures within organizations, and resources and rules. Practice is needed at individual and collective or organizational levels, supported by systems and structures that encourage strong relationships, the positive use of power, collaboration, inclusion and an intersectional, intergenerational approach. And yet generally practice has been underemphasized in leadership development approaches. Generally, they train, and women are meant to do.

For the purposes of this research, we are especially concerned with practices at two major levels: within the self or at the personal level, and within organizations and networks. As Aruna Rao and David Kelleher found in their extensive work with community-based organizations around the world, organizations are deeply gendered systems. As has been widely theorized elsewhere, organizations are

not machines; they are more like living systems. People hold the values and norms reflecting their histories and social contexts in their relations to others. Creating new cultural and social norms requires not only collective commitment but also practice that dismantles old norms and establishes new ones—at both personal, interpersonal, and organizational levels.

The kinds of practices needed include those that help people learn from the past, stay open to alternative interpretations of past and present, visualize a transformed future, and create structures and systems that enable the emergence of a new reality. Others highlight the importance of the enabling environment for good to emerge; the role of dissent and debate;<sup>70</sup> and social-justice leadership.<sup>71</sup> These somewhat subtle practices intersect, overlap with, and add to those posed in Batliwala’s *Clearing the Conceptual Cloud*.

**Figure 3. Analytical framework for transformative and feminist leadership**



Source: Shawna Wakefield (2017)

Building on the practices identified by key organizations and scholars<sup>72</sup> on transformative, feminist, and social justice leadership, and the results of interviews for this research, we found the following categories of practices. They

<sup>70</sup> David Snowden and Mary E. Boone, *A Leader’s Framework for Decision Making*. Harvard Business Review 85, no. 11 (2007).

<sup>71</sup> Roadmap Consulting, *Five Core Practices of Social Justice Leadership*, 2012.

<sup>72</sup> E.g., Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership, *Clearing the Conceptual Cloud*, Achieving Feminist Transformative Leadership.

are all carried out in the context of firm commitment to feminist values and principles throughout individual and collective leadership practice:

- **Modeling feminist purpose and principles:** acting on the basis of an explicit set of feminist values and principles with clear and shared language, which serves as an ethical compass for the practice of leadership and forms the basis for values-based organizational cultures. This includes appreciation of the intersection of age, race, class, religion, sexual identity, and other social categories, and of the interconnectedness of social-justice challenges and solutions;
- **inspiring shared vision based on personal and collective reflexive learning (and unlearning):** Processes to facilitate development of self-awareness among individuals and groups, help them deal with their own trauma, and reflect as individuals and collectives as part of feminist consciousness raising and use of power. This is captured in the transformational leadership literature as “individualized consideration,” whereby leaders inspire others to rethink the way they do things, and to challenge conventional practice. A feminist perspective adds the importance of recognizing the contexts within which individuals are socialized and the prejudices they may perpetuate as a result. Being able to address discrimination, oppression, and marginalization requires addressing this;
- **empowering and enabling others to act:** building interpersonal relationships and trust among group members, based on a belief in shared vision and values. Ensuring systems and structures for collective leadership are in place to foster interaction between individuals and teams that encourage the energizing relationships that make up an enabling environment within which transformative leadership can thrive. Includes developing relationships across a “critical mass of aligned allies” to include work for women’s rights across organizations, sectors, and movements;
- **challenging patriarchal norms and oppressive power:** surfacing gendered deep structures—unquestioned ways of working and living, influenced by values, history, norms, and practices<sup>73</sup>—respectfully confronting them, and co-creating more just alternatives. It requires examining and contesting oppressive expressions of power that feminists may inadvertently reproduce, especially where patriarchy has been internalized; and

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<sup>73</sup> Aruna Rao and David Kelleher, *Unravelling Institutionalized Gender Inequality*. Gender at Work occasional paper, no. 8 (2002).

- **Encouraging integration of heart, mind, body:** supporting the care and well-being of individuals and groups that strengthens their ability to stay connected to core feminist values and principles, to be resilient in the face of stress, and to contribute fully to transformation. This is a personal and political project.

## THE PRACTICES OF TRANSFORMATIVE AND FEMINIST LEADERSHIP

The profiles included below highlight the practices we consider to be important for transformational leadership that benefits women's rights. We chose the examples on the basis of initial consultations with several advocates in the fields of women's rights, transformative leadership, and social change who identified key actors with expertise in the areas of work our hypothesis identified.

As has been pointed out in the literature on transformative feminist leadership, the question of what leadership is *for* is important for understanding the transformative potential of leadership within movement-building and -supporting organizations. We included the founding goals of the organizations and initiatives we profiled, as well as the purpose and theory of change underpinning them, to give context to the environments in which leadership practices are playing out. Each of the initiatives focuses leadership development on a specific set of women or women's rights advocates, and we make these explicit.

The profiles illustrate how movement-building and -supporting organizations use a variety of practices that put feminist principles and values into action. They show that all of these practices build on each other and as such are interconnected. Modeling feminist purpose and principles is a basis for all other practices of transformative leadership for women's rights. Inspiring shared vision based on personal and collective reflexive learning provides space to ask questions about the kinds of organizations and worlds the group wants to create—and creates a more even playing field for group members to take collective action. Empowering and enabling others to act can emerge when groups engage in reflexive learning together, and can even strengthen collaborations within and across organizations. Challenging patriarchal norms and oppressive power is an expression of feminist principles that requires analysis, reflection, and the ability to confront respectfully. Encouraging integration of heart, mind, and body helps to ensure that group leaders and members see one another as whole people, and that the well-being of leaders, their colleagues, and collaborators are foundational to the sustainability of any leadership practices and results. All of these practices should be underwritten by

practices of interpersonal relationship and trust, as well as an appreciation of the intersecting identities and interests of potentially aligned groups.

Each profile therefore includes:

- Context;
- theory of change and strategies
- practices to support transformative leadership, and
- emerging lessons and outcomes.

## **Move to End Violence: Creating radical connections<sup>74</sup>**

### **1. Context**

In 2009, the Novo Foundation, in the US, decided it wanted a strategic focus on women, in particular, on ending violence against women (VAW). Looking at the field of work on VAW, it found considerable emphasis on service provision, managing the problem as it exists, rather than addressing the root causes and eliminating it. It wanted to do a US-based movement-building exercise, with a “global perspective,” to change this, connecting to the wealth of work happening on violence against women. It began with 150 stakeholder interviews, to take a step back and work with others not from a place of crisis but as a way to give time and perspective to the project in order to build a vision for transformative change. The Move to End Violence (MEV), a 10-year movement-building initiative, currently in its sixth year, was the result.

Since the initiative’s inception, there have been three cohorts of approximately 100 Movement Makers each, who develop a common language and set of foundational skills together. This common language becomes a foundation for building a “critical mass of aligned allies,” so that groups can innovate without starting fresh each time. The first cohort was chosen on the basis of whether individuals were aligned with the purpose that emerged from the stakeholder interviews. It is an evolving and reflexive process. With each cohort, they are built on the principles and practices built during cohorts before so as not to reinvent the wheel. The cohorts tend to be primarily women of color from marginalized communities, who take an intersectional approach to analysis and organizing.

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<sup>74</sup> Based on interview with Jackie Payne, director, MEV (November 23, 2015); Norma Wong, faculty advisor (online), Jesenia Santana, program officer, NoVo Initiative to End Violence Against Girls and Women (January 28, 2016), and MEV website.

Speaking about this process, MEV director Jackie Payne states that “people who have a hunger for a transformational approach are seeing what is wrong in the world, and have both an official commitment and a personal commitment that is driving them forward and getting them to ask questions. They have reached the limits of how they have done things before and know they can’t take them far enough.”

Move to End Violence has been intentional about choosing leaders with an expressed interest and experience in building collective power and an environment that enables others to lead, as opposed to those who are visionary but are not working collectively or collaboratively. Visionaries may play a role, but they are not the focus of Movement Makers leadership program. They are also intentionally “not trying to disrupt all the organizations and make visionary leaders,” said Payne. The program has developed individuals that bring back to their organizations and allies what they have learned.

The Move to End Violence has been well supported financially by Novo Foundation, which has enabled it to provide a constellation of technical support to MEV Movement Makers to strengthen and support their leadership. Some of the tools this long-term support has enabled include:

- Coaching: The Movement Strategy Center brings knowledge and experience of a “transformative approach to movement building” and has helped to design the program and provide coaching and advice. Every individual gets a coach, for integration; every organization is visited twice, to assess organizational strengths, to facilitate workshops that support changes in organizational habits;
- exercises for integration: Norma Wong, instructor with the Institute of Zen Studies, brings to the initiative a secular Zen practice of power and leadership, focused on what is needed for individual, organizational, and social change. Every encounter gives cohort members tools to bring back to their organizations;
- financial support: support to the Movement Makers organizations to cover their participation in the program and core costs for organizational development and collaborative campaigns with other Movement Maker alums; and
- training: All Movement Makers attend the Rockwood Leadership Institute, one of the premier schools in the US for developing leadership skills among social-change activists.



## **2. Theory of change and core strategies**

The logo for the Move to End Violence illustrates its theory of change. The flock of geese is headed towards the sun. The head goose in the flock has the important role of breaking the wind so the other geese get an easier ride. But then they switch. It is a metaphor for collective leadership.



The importance of collective leadership emerged during the stakeholder interviews: Almost everyone talked about being burned out. They found this to be especially common among activists and service providers working on violence against women, since many women are survivors themselves, dealing with secondary trauma in their work. Too many were exercising forms of leadership and organizing that put activists' health at risk and saw this as a threat to the movement. Activists knew they were not operating at their best or making as much of an impact as they could have.

As a result of these realizations, developing a deep practice of relationship building and cultivating individuals' abilities to see others' full humanity became an important focus for developing leaders' capacity to catalyze fundamental change. The main strategies of the program are to:

- Foster transformational leadership development;
- explore and practice liberation from oppression;
- build strong, healthy, and sustainable organizations;
- understand movement theory and practice; and
- develop and flex social-change skills.

## **3. Practices to support transformative leadership**

### **Modeling feminist purpose and principles**

The work operationalizes a number of feminist principles, including, notably, understanding the multiple, compounding oppressions that create barriers to justice, including sexism, racism, and classism. This approach has encouraged greater appreciation for complexity in the lives of Movement Makers and their communities, and an ability to address issues of marginalized communities. In Minnesota, for instance, the largely Latina Movement Makers decided a job fair in a mall was the best way to reach Latino men. The approach also enabled

movement leaders, activists, and community organizers that are part of the MEV to articulate the collective outrage and solidarity at racially motivated police brutality against black trans and cis gender women and men as part of an “inclusive racial and gender justice agenda.”

### **Inspiring shared vision based on personal and collective reflexive learning (and unlearning)**

MEV encourages “finding ways to be with ourselves and each other, rooted in love, compassion and grace.” For instance, in the most recent cohort of Movement Makers, instead of introducing themselves with traditional markers of roles (which can establish positionality and separation), they shared “love notes” about themselves that included information about their history, culture, and heritage, as well as their experiences and talents.

The “love notes” are just one of many tools used by Move to End Violence to strengthen the practices of raising consciousness and confidence about one’s self, strengthening trust and inter-personal relationships, and beginning to shift the deep cultures toward appreciation of the intersecting identities of Movement Makers and thus a stronger basis for stronger collaboration.

### **Empowering and enabling others to act**

A specific practice MEV uses with members is called **60/40 Stance**: Forward Stance + Transformation, which is a “mind-body approach to movement building,” that integrates the principles of stance, energy, awareness, and rhythm that underlie Tai Chi, a Zen martial art. By engaging Movement Makers in such a physical practice, the theory is that the activists will learn to move together, be aware of each other, and to move in sync in their strategic and organizational work. They can then translate this into a more forward and less defensive stance in their world, on personal, organizational, and movement levels as they face complex, dynamic challenges.

### **Challenging patriarchal norms and oppressive power**

The overall strategic approach of MEV appears to be to take a positive position, offering inspiration to end violence against women. It is unclear the extent to which patriarchy and oppression are dealt with explicitly *within* the movement.

## Influence of what happens to women on discourse of power

“We’re in for a battle where Black women’s lives, their activism and what happens to Black women’s bodies, will undoubtedly influence the course and discourse around power and community liberation.”

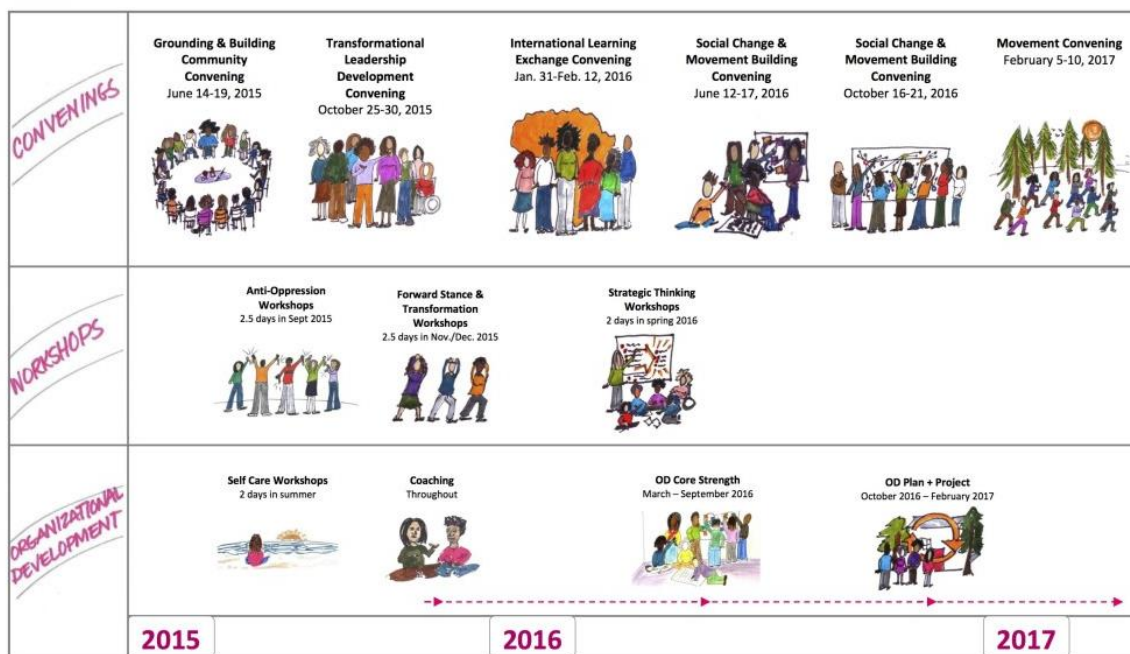
-Farah Tanis, Executive Director, Black Women's Blueprint/MEV Movement Maker

## Encouraging integration of heart, mind, and body

Self-care and collective care are a very important part of the model of MEV. These practices ask questions of Movement Makers, such as what individuals can do to take care of themselves, and what habits do not support this. The premise is to have a transformative movement that is “powerful, resilient, creative, and impactful,” which requires caring for individuals in the movements. In practice, this requires Movement Makers to integrate self-care strategies before burn-out takes place—instead of waiting for vacations that are all too often few and far between.

Securing the well-being of Movement Makers underpins many aspects of the work, including strategic thinking—which they see as openness to multiple possibilities, anticipating impact and consequences, and making timely choices as core elements of strategic thinking.

**Figure 4. Move to End Violence Cohort Road Map**



Source: Move to End Violence

## Emerging lessons and outcomes

Below are presented some of the key lessons from MEV's work:

- **Moving with leaders who are ready:** For the work MEV is doing, they have found it important to choose leaders with interest and willingness to developing their skills in collaborative leadership; Thus, the first MEV cohort experimented with a combination of who they saw as visionary leaders, more inclined to independent work along with leaders who may also have been visionary but who placed more emphasis on collective, collaborative leadership.

**meeting folks where they are:** Given the MEV mission to create a critical mass to end violence against women, the organization has acknowledged the importance of recognizing that different roles are needed while also sticking to its core values. The MEV needed to engage with people where they are, not trying to “convert” leaders, but rather find other ways to engage people with more traditional kinds of leadership skills. It also means that it works differently with a core team of people, for instance, than with a wider set of Movement Makers on “applied engagements” to collaborate with other movements; and

- **keep developing and moving with pace of change:** The nature of violence is dynamic, and the MEV needs to be able to have awareness about and take advantage of opportunities to respond and build momentum. This means at times it needs to move more quickly, and at others more deeply than expected. It learned the importance of continually developing its support system for the Movement Makers to move at the pace the group wants to move, with regular contact via coaching, mentoring and intermittent training.

### **Women make their own decisions**

“The aim is not to become a village head or to engage in the political system; there is more emphasis on the women being leaders, meaning they have capacity to make decisions for themselves and their families, to be independent and be themselves. That’s our core.”

-Nani Zulminary, PEKKA Coordinator

## **Women-Headed Families Empowerment Programme (PEKKA), Indonesia: Surfacing women’s individual and collective power<sup>75</sup>**

### **1. Context**

As of 2014, out of 65 million households in Indonesia, approximately 9 million—or nearly 14 percent—were headed by women. The number of women heads of household grows, but they are not socially or legally recognized. They are severely discriminated against, are marginalized in their communities, and experience high levels of poverty.

In 2000, Nani Zulminanri was asked by the National Commission to Stop Violence Against Women, or Komnas Perempuan, to document the lives of widows in Aceh affected by the conflict; this was intended to raise their visibility and in the process, gain greater recognition of the rights of women-headed households. A divorced single mother herself, Zulminanri accepted this assignment. Although it was a difficult one, she was motivated by her empathy for the women, and she identified with the discrimination they faced because of their marital status.

In the beginning, Zulminanri and other PEKKA facilitators concentrated on painstakingly organizing women heads of household by going door to door in the villages, village by village, province by province—beginning in a few villages in four provinces. Seeing significant need and interest in saving collectively, she began to organize women into savings groups, together called the Women-Headed Families Empowerment Programme, or Programme Pemberdayaan Perempuan Kepala Keluarga (PEKKA).

After three to four years, an increasing number of women heads of family wanted to join the groups. PEKKA now works in 20 of the country’s 33 provinces, with approximately 1600 groups and more than 30,000 members.

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<sup>75</sup> Based on interview with Nani Zulminary (September 2015), “*PEKKA: Integrated Approaches to Movement-Building and Social Accountability.*”

There are now PEKKA forums at the village, district, and national levels to encourage the network to work collectively. They meet all together every year, and every three or four months the leaders meet together.

PEKKA holds democratic elections for women to take on positions of leadership in the associations. Although the structure of the associations in each context is distinct, generally they include three chairpersons and three other people with different formal leadership roles. There are similarities in the structures of the associations, though the division of labor is specific to the context. For instance, where customary law is very strong, one person is responsible for dealing with indigenous customary law. They take leadership in the bigger systems in their village.

Women in the PEKKA associations exercise their leadership in multiple ways. They organize multi-stakeholder forums, which challenge the government to recognize the problems women heads of family face on a day-to-day basis, and they also bring the government officials to villages to meet directly with women who are equipped to discuss their challenges directly.

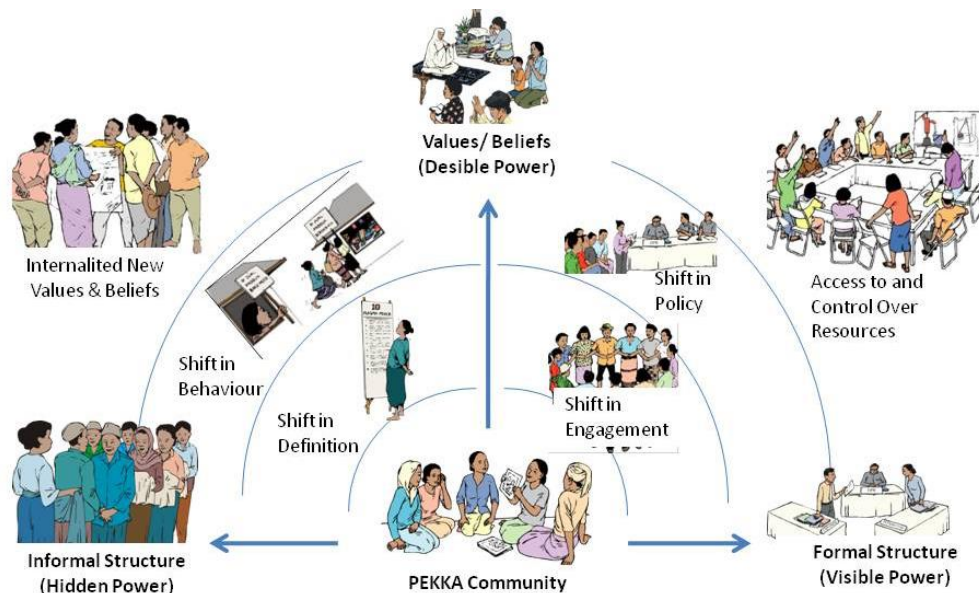
As the supporting organization, PEKKA provides the women heads of family with documents and organizes direct actions with the government, and even engaged with the supreme court.

## ***2. Theory of change and core strategies***

PEKKA's purpose is to build a grassroots movement of women-led economic cooperatives that empower women individually and collectively to transform their lives and their communities. This requires transformation of the deep-seated social and cultural norms and systems that perpetuate discrimination against women heads of household—and their poverty. To challenge these norms and systems, PEKKA uses feminist popular education and community organizing to build cooperative forms of savings and microfinance. PEKKA starts by organizing small groups of 20 to 100 members in order to:

- Build their capacity, through training that develops feminist conceptual understanding and consciousness, including training in collective power;
- provide practical skills in management, village planning, participatory rural appraisal, savings and borrowing, and participatory budget processes;
- develop leadership skills to foster democratic and accountable systems (for instance, choosing their own leaders); and
- use skills and communication outside dominant systems of power and decision making.

**Figure 5. PEKKA model**



Source: JASS

The PEKKA staff do not select women to participate in the groups but rather respond to their interest in being part of a collective, to learn, to designate their groups, and to register in the Indonesian system as a way to gain recognition as a formal institution. Often, the women often have no formal education and are poor and illiterate. And yet they are frequently able to develop and grow into leadership roles and responsibilities.

### ***3. Practices to support transformative leadership***

#### **Modeling feminist purpose and principles**

The awareness of rights, feminist consciousness, and self-confidence that PEKKA women build, at personal, collective, and community levels, has led many women to question the formal leadership styles at village levels and beyond. The increased confidence has spawned interest in running for public office among many association members and has put the core values and principles of collective power to the test as they have run for office. In some provinces, this led to several PEKKA members running against each other, after deciding (collectively) that they did not want to step back from running for the office. In this case, they all ran and none of them won. In other provinces, the women negotiated to see who had a greater likelihood of winning and the capacity to represent the interests of women heads of household. They chose one person to represent and run. Unable to compete in a system where money was needed to win, they did not get elected.

### **Developing and supporting new kinds of leadership**

“Participatory democracy and leadership does, inevitably, create clashes and internal conflict—people always resist doing things differently. Some want to take control, which is why we have a leadership change every three years. That’s our role as organizers in PEKKA, supporting this growing grassroots movement of women—to develop and support new kinds of leadership and to build women’s capacity to manage conflict, basic business and planning skills, and then, gradually, how to use their collective power to influence local and even national politics.”

-Nani Zulminary, PEKKA: Integrated approaches to movement-building and social accountability– September 2015

These experiences have been learning opportunities. The women learned about different ways to lead; how to put values of collective leadership into practice outside the confines of PEKKA groups; the weaknesses in the political parties; the wider system; and ways to analyze the political context. In addition to the limiting social and cultural norms and low sense of personal capacity that prevent many women from participating in politics, the high levels of corruption in the system make it even more challenging for women to participate. This reality requires that PEKKA place even more emphasis on feminist purpose and principles, including accountability and transparency.

PEKKA also provides space for the full range of members’ identities, beyond their role as heads of household, to be appreciated and addressed. Many are migrant workers, and they have issues relating to access to and quality of healthcare and social protections. PEKKA facilitates analysis across issues and enables members to develop joint advocacy and stronger voices.

### **Inspiring shared vision based on personal and collective reflexive learning (and unlearning)**

What distinguishes PEKKA from other Indonesian leadership development programs is the focus on the personal. PEKKA is facilitated as a safe space where women can tell their stories, talk about issues they face, and get support from other PEKKA members.

PEKKA members use the narrative methodologies such as *River of Life* and *Reality Storytelling* processes. As the group builds trust, members begin to talk informally about their personal lives, telling their stories, even about some of their most painful chapters. They tell their stories because the women have a lot in common: Many are domestic violence survivors or had “irresponsible” husbands or experienced sexual violence. Telling these stories becomes part of their



release and is a step to strengthening their confidence and leadership. Storytelling is a practice that takes place twice a month in these settings.

There is generally no formal counseling available to the women. Instead there is space provided for them to listen to one another and be heard; to share successes and failures; and learn together.

### **Empowering and enabling others to act**

As women gain more exposure to and consciousness of feminist values, the political and economic system, and collective leadership, they see the leadership weaknesses in their own villages. They see their own potential to do things differently. This happens through exercises and practices that build trust and reciprocity among the women and strengthen the basis for collective organizing and leadership. This process has required support and careful, responsive facilitation on the part of the PEKKA organizers, who must have “concrete skills and a considerable amount of heart and soul.”<sup>76</sup> Sometimes women encourage one another to try to become village heads themselves, and some have succeeded in securing these formal leadership positions.

At the same time, the organizing process is slow, based on gradual processes of building trust, solidarity, and a sense of community and reciprocity—invaluable resources for women on the margins of their communities. It can be a challenge, but PEKKA facilitators try to ensure that all members’ roles are considered central and that collective leadership is fostered as much as possible. PEKKA organizers first needed to gain permission from village heads. Many refused, because the idea of working with women-headed families seemed so strange to them. In cases where consent was granted, the next challenge was to gain respect from the women themselves and create safe places for dialogue and sharing.

One village head of PEKKA brought electricity and healthcare centers to the village. The PEKKA leaders are changing the way the village heads are running the leadership by engaging in more participatory and transparent processes. They say “maybe we should have PEKKA village leaders too” said Zulminary.

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<sup>76</sup> Nani Zulminarni and Valerie Miller, *From Women’s Individual and Collective Power to Political Change: PEKKA: Integrated Approaches to Movement-Building and Social Accountability*, a Just Associates Case Study. For JASS, 2015.

### Leaders changing the system

“Petronella Peniloli, is the village chief of Nisa Nulan, Adonara Island, Indonesia. The first female chief of her village, she has brought electricity, a road, healthcare center and water supply to her community in just 4 years after waiting 65 years for these developments since Indonesia’s independence.

Petronella has been a leader in PEKKA since 2005 and used her leadership training to run for office. PEKKA and its vast grassroots network accompanied her successful campaign.

Rather than leading in the traditional, top-down style, Petronella applies the principles and methodologies of community organizing—learned through PEKKA - in running her village. Today, she engages everyone in participatory planning and budgeting, which helps her community come to agreements about priorities and how to use their resources.

As Petronella explains: “I make decisions as a leader not only using my logic and thinking, but I use my heart and my empathy. As a mother and a widow who has raised sons alone, I give more attention to the poorest people because I know what it’s like to be poor... At the beginning, even just after I was elected, I still didn’t have the courage to speak out. Slowly I overcame all of my doubts and uncertainty from my teaching and my culture. Now I’m used to it, even though I’m still the only woman who’s a village head. People listen to me. I feel free to speak my heart and my mind.”

-Excerpt from “Pekka’s Innovative Model Lauded by International Experts”  
(1/19/2011)

### Challenging patriarchal norms and oppressive power

Using the JASS framework, especially the power framework, PEKKA enables women to look at the power structures and systems on and beneath the surface of the political and economic system. On the one hand, they are challenging social norms and perceptions of the existence and value of women heads of family. On the other hand, they are influencing *institutional* perspectives through engaging with government.

By creating separate spaces for women heads of family to be in dialogue with government officials, they have provided an alternative to a system that excludes women heads of family. They have invited officials to participate in PEKKA fora, using these as an opportunity to influence the officials to take up PEKKA advocacy objectives.

### **Women's hesitation to take up new roles**

"If they have the opportunity to be parliament members – they feel guilty, what will people say, what about the children, these things hold them women back."

-Nani Zulminary

The PEKKA associations have learned navigate existing practices and social norms successfully, while working to secure women's rights—and their safety and security.

### **Encouraging integration of heart, mind and body**

The program emphasizes facilitation that recognizes PEKKA members' whole being, providing opportunities for women to share their personal stories and needs, as well as to evolve with them as their basic needs are met. Probably due to the conservative context, physical practices, for instance, do not appear to be part of the model emerging lessons and outcomes

At first women, can only dream, but they see their potential and gain legitimacy and respect through the knowledge they gain through PEKKA. The recognition of women as heads of household in many villages is a major outcome of PEKKA's work, and it hopes for women to be recognized in official statistics, valued as equals, and able to facilitate their meaningful involvement in socio-political processes.

In addition, in many cases, women have gained more knowledge, information, and networks than the men. At the village level, for the women who experienced these gains, there is a big leap for women who typically have very low status in their villages. It is evidenced that PEKKA leaders are changing the way the village heads are running the leadership by engaging in more participatory and transparent processes.

Other outcomes have included adoption of national policies in the past five years that support women heads of family, recognizing the rights of women heads of family; lobbying to gain access to and manage local government funds, together with non-PEKKA stakeholders; and strengthening relationships with at least 10 local government officials.

Patience, a realistic long-term vision of change, and feminist popular education and movement-building strategies have been key to PEKKA's successes. **Key lessons related to leadership include:**

- **Transforming invisible power and cultural norms is complex:** In many cases, unlearning old norms and values is as important as learning ones that may be new and unfamiliar, particularly in very repressive and restrictive contexts. Unlearning the deeply held cultural belief system that women cannot be leaders and must be dependent on someone is the biggest challenge to the development of women's leadership. Sometimes women feel empowered, and ready to face the challenges, and other times they lose that confidence;
- **maintaining collective leadership is challenging in the formal system:** The feminist and collective consciousness that women gain while working together can be challenged when the move into larger systems dominated by patriarchal norms. Further, when women enter public roles, they often continue to maintain their household responsibilities;
- **a long-term approach is needed:** Changing the way women perceive themselves requires more than training in traditional leadership skills or dealing with the system. It requires accompaniment—sustaining and continuing conversations that support women in seeing themselves anew and gaining power to operate in new contexts. They have found it takes an average of three years for women to become more comfortable with taking leadership responsibilities;
- **the real issue is social norms:** Politically, there are many good laws to protect women, but real change is needed on the cultural, social, and religious levels. The approach is no longer only political; there should be a strong cultural approach seeking to transform the culture.

## **Raising Voices: Creating an organizational culture that cultivates collective leadership and activism<sup>77</sup>**

### **1. Context**

Raising Voices, in Uganda, began in 1999 as a small project of the Center for Domestic Violence Prevention (CEDOVIP) designed to mobilize communities to prevent violence against women and children. CEDOVIP became an independent organization in 2003, however it remains closely tied to Raising Voices: Attempts to strengthen its organizational cultures are a collective effort of staff and managers from both organizations. Raising Voices was co-founded and directed by Lori Michau and Dipak Naker, who from the start based their work on

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<sup>77</sup> Based on an interview with Lori Michau (November 12, 2015), co-director, Raising Voices; "Creating an Organizational Culture for Social Justice Activism"; and Raising Voices website.

strong values—to move beyond service delivery, to emphasize activism rather than training, and to see individuals as change agents rather than program recipients. The organization is now 35 staff members strong and growing, which is both a challenge and an opportunity to experiment and take risks to continue the values-driven culture it has co-created with committed staff. Raising Voices founded and has coordinated the GBV Prevention Network since 2003.

Raising Voices works with partners across the range of its projects and programs. During the early days of Raising Voices, organizational structures were organic and instinctual but as the organization has grown, and staff increasingly have input and take on leadership, new structures and systems have emerged. It does not endorse the idea of recruiting partners. It offers trainings to which partners come based on their own needs. It does not solicit for joint bids. Very often, donors fund partners to do community mobilization work (as part of the SASA! Program<sup>78</sup>) directly, and Raising Voices separately provides technical assistance, with partners identifying their respective needs.

## ***2. Theory of change and strategies***

The mission of Raising Voices is to prevent violence against women and children. Their goal is to reduce the social acceptance of violence against women and children, which is understood to be, at its root, about the abuse of power at an individual level, perpetuated through social norms, systems, and structures. VAW is seen as “deeply embedded in an overarching belief system about power: who has it; how it is used; and how relationships and communities are shaped by those beliefs.”

Addressing VAW requires fundamental shifts in power dynamics at individual, relationship, community, and societal levels. Appreciating the complexity of the problem, Raising Voices has focused on generating ideas, strategies, practical responses, and evidence.

The theory of change includes a simultaneous flow of:

- Practice that contends with the practicalities of making ideas actionable at individual, community, and institutional levels and in the media;
- emphasis on learning that focuses on identifying what works, what doesn't, and why; and

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<sup>78</sup> A collaborative endeavor by Raising Voices, CEDOVIP, the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, and Makerere University.

- influencing broader thinking and investments in the prevention of violence against women and children through informing policy, developing strategic alliances, and creating connections among leaders for change.

**Figure 6. Theory of change**



Source: Raising Voices

Raising Voices is not a project-based organization; rather, it sees itself as focused on the broader social climate and looking to infuse and contribute to social movement rather than being delivery oriented, as is common in the Ugandan context.

### ***3. Practices to support transformative leadership***

#### **Modeling feminist purpose and principles**

From the start, the co-directors, Lori Michau and Dipak Naker, laid down a set of organizational values rooted in feminism—equality, respect, integrity, non-discrimination, activism, unity, teamwork, accountability, creativity, and quality. The commitment to being a values-driven organization in both decision making and practice is integrated into the organizational practices. The process-driven culture includes different practices, described below, that support this.

<b>Need to be politically aligned</b>
<p>“You lose people with good skill sets, but if you feel you are not politically aligned, then it won’t be good work.”</p> <p>-Lori Michau, co-director, Raising Voices</p>

The co-directors also bring an intersectional understanding of the oppressions that strengthen power imbalances—including issues such as sexual identity—and will take on collective responsibility for leadership. In interviews, they show an interest in ensuring incoming staff share Raising Voices’ values and spirit. They are clear this is not so much a job as a mission. They have found this to be challenging in a context where the predominant experience of potential and incoming staff is one of more hierarchical- and power-driven organizations.

Once staff members are hired, they go through a strong orientation process where values and relationships are prioritized. The word “family” emerges often to describe the organizational culture. Inevitably, some people simply do not fit into this culture and accept the whole “spectrum of rights” and end up leaving the organization.

**Inspiring vision based on personal and collective reflexive learning (and unlearning)**

Joining Raising Voices includes many processes, including the consciousness raising of staff about concepts of feminism, violence, and women’s rights. The process starts at the personal level, within the organization, and moves outward to society. Most of the staff come from different models of civil society, both in terms of purpose and practice. People are encouraged and supported to go through their own journey and a political analysis of their own lives, acknowledging how they came to their involvement in VAW work, moments that have led them to understand injustice, and what it means to become politicized through a deeper connection to self.

They are nurtured to put their individual analyses into a larger frame of oppression and injustice, so that they may better connect to their purpose in preventing violence against women. The structures and processes Raising Voices use are all in service of fostering individual and relational development and a healthy organizational culture. The Get Moving! Methodology provides a set of practices to support this process among both staff and members of the wider GBV Prevention Network.

## **Empowering and enabling others to act**

The importance of having more meaningful relationships among staff members has always been fundamental to the organization. These relationships are facilitated by some of the Raising Voices processes we will discuss.

Beyond the organization itself, Raising Voices staff member Jean Kemitare, who started the GBV Prevention Network, brought together a range of organizations working to prevent GBV that had not worked together before. She stepped into her leadership capacities, holding the core values of the organization and culture, and engaging critically with the complexity of the task of preventing VAW as well as working in collaboration with others, and founding the GBV Prevention Network, in 2003. The network is a group of activists and practitioners with a common set of beliefs and motivations to prevent violence against women in the Horn and in East and southern Africa. Since its inception, the network has grown from 30 to more than 500 members in 21 countries across the region.

### **Evolving relationships for building leadership**

“It is evolving. I have always been interested in people. I am a relationship builder. I did not even see myself as a leader for a really long time. I am just a person that helps people to feel good about themselves. We all have ego issues, but I am behind the scenes. We all want recognitions (of course), but I do not thrive on that.”  
-Lori Michau, co-director, Raising Voices

The partners devote the time needed to build trusting relationships, based on clear memoranda of understanding. It is important to connect with individuals about their lives, beyond the work, which is in turn how the partners focus on community mobilization. The environment in Uganda for NGOs is quite competitive, so this way of interacting can be a challenge, but it can also be transformative.

## **Challenging patriarchal norms and oppressive power**

Core feminist values are translated into an updated organizational structure. Raising Voices now has a management team, which includes the two co-directors, a deputy director, and the coordinators for each of the thematic areas: influencing, practice and learning, and the Gender-based violence (GBV) Prevention Network. The organization aims to make collective decisions about organization-wide issues and to decentralize decisions that can be made at a programmatic level. However, not all decisions are made democratically; the



leaders have found that as the organization grows, large group processes are not always practical.

Each of the coordinators has a team of managers and program officers. The managers are responsible for the programming and making strategic decisions for their departments, with autonomy and flexibility, and the support of their respective coordinators and a co-director.

There is no formal process for conflict resolution. Instead, leadership relies on solid communication, even in the face of tension. Staff members are encouraged to speak directly to one another, and when they need other support and mediation, there are many accepted “problem solvers” to help.

Although in the beginning, these processes had been held by the co-directors, as the organization grows, leadership relating to group process is now distributed more equitably.

The large GBV Prevention Network is moving into a new phase as well, with the addition of country chapters. This has raised many issues that are presenting new leadership challenges—namely, how to promote values-based, solidarity-based country chapters.

### **Encouraging integration of heart, mind and body**

There is a risk of burnout in a system in which everyone is a leader. The space provided for personal reflection, reflexive learning, and analysis strengthens the culture and creates an enabling environment in which all staff can take leadership. In addition, Raising Voices makes space for fun, seeing it as an important aspect of self-care and a way to strengthen unity among staff.

### ***4. Emerging lessons and outcomes***

This way of working may be linked to the results the organization has achieved in other areas, in partnership with like-minded organizations and individuals. An evaluation of the outcomes of the community-based prevention initiative SASA! showed that the outcomes related to lowering partner physical violence, reducing levels of acceptance of partner violence, and receiving support to women who were exposed to violence were attributed to contributions by Raising Voices in SASA! communities.

**Lessons from the organizational change initiatives** include:

- **Sharing leadership means accepting mistakes and respecting different choices.** There will be a wide range of interpretations about how to get things done. Co-directors, particularly founding ones, need to

be able to take a step back, hold space, and respect the choices staff make to enable staff to lead;

- **conflict can be a growth moment.** When people run counter to organizational values, it can be very challenging, especially when they have invested considerable time and energy. Leaders need to hold onto core values, remain positive, and acknowledge the problem, be intentional about how they use power to solve problems, and learn from the experience rather than get demoralized;
- **work on organizational culture needs to be visible.** It has been crucial to Raising Voices to articulate clearly that there will be a focus on organizational culture, and that this is a collective process that everyone will be a part of co-creating and practicing;
- **small steps make a really big difference.** Although this process is important, no one needs to go on a 10-day retreat to strengthen trust, relationships, and collaboration for women's rights. Instead, it is possible to make smaller efforts to connect on a human level—mentoring instead of supervising, inviting all staff take part facilitating meetings, eating lunch together, and opening spaces that create room for honesty and diminish fear; and
- **be human:** Positional leaders need to allow themselves, including their weaknesses, to be exposed, so that they can be with people more fully and foster trust and their own relationships.

An additional insight is that Raising Voices has been fortunate to have long-term relationships with donors who support its strategy, providing core support grants rather than project grants, which provide 80% of the funding. It has been crucial to the success of Raising Voices to identify donors that share its perspective and believe in what it is doing and the way it is doing it.

## **Alquimia Feminist School with indigenous women: The magic of collective power**

### **1. Context**

In 2010, Just Associates for Women (JASS) began the Alquimia Feminist School, building on years of personal and political relationships and creative collaborations between indigenous women and their organizations in Mesoamerica. JASS allies in different countries in Mesoamerica were consulted, and women were recommended based on agreed a profile to choose participants. JASS and the Alquimia Feminist School chose women who had

taken leadership in specific struggles and who were natural leaders with legitimacy in their communities, and they gave priority to those in the “second line” of leadership who were as widely recognized and whom they felt could benefit. The organizations they came from had to agree for the women to participate, to provide time for it, and to be being willing to socialize internally the new knowledge the women would bring after the training. Some of the leaders were from NGOs, but most were from social movements.

The purpose of the school was to make the voices and movements of indigenous and rural women visible, using information, communication, and technology tools.<sup>79</sup> The women soon identified a need for space to collectively develop deeper political analysis, risk assessment, and strategic tools to support their advocacy.

In 2013, the three-year Strategic Leadership for Indigenous and Rural Women was set up to respond to these ideas, bringing together 30 women leaders from seven countries in Mesoamerica to learn from and support each other, develop skills and strategic capacity, and strengthen their collective work for human rights. The program is unique in the region for its integration of feminist popular education and movement-building curricula, with safe spaces for women who work on challenges around territory, land, and natural resources.

Alquimia was designed to build collective power and strategic leadership for indigenous and rural women to be able to defend their rights. They must confront racism and patriarchal cultural patterns as well as restrictions that marginalize them and limit the realization of their rights. These specific barriers exist amid general discriminations against indigenous people, including:

- 1) lack of access to land, lack of respect for their territories, and forced displacement as a result of land grabs, racism, and discrimination
- 2) lack of bilingual education, particularly for girls
- 3) poor health conditions. Militarization and extreme violence, particularly against women, have aggravated the precarious conditions.

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<sup>79</sup> Laura Carlsen and JASS partners, with contributions from Rosanna “Osang” Langara, Lisa VeneKlasen, Patricia Ardon, and Natalia Escruceria, *Making Change Happen 5*, for JASS 2014.

### Being a leader

“I always thought to be a leader was to be the big figure and only talk about issues and rights and all, but without including natural resources. And now I see that it isn’t like that—to be a leader is much more than that; it includes everything and is for everyone.”

-Ada Inés Osorio, Honduran Miskito

Adding insecurity related to resource extraction and environmental degradation, indigenous women face a complex web of challenges related to their identities, socio-economic and political contexts, and cultural norms. Women activists are at particular risk for opposing more powerful people, making their participation and influence within the family, at the community level, and even within indigenous peoples’ movements dangerous and challenging. Alquimia works with activists, popular educators, organizers, human-rights defenders, academics, feminist-movement and NGO leaders, and other women in leadership positions at the community, national, regional, and international levels, using the following strategies:

- Leadership training for organization and action
- generating new knowledge and learning to strengthen organizations and social movements

The group meets twice a year and per country throughout the year, so members can stay connected to each other and to regional strategies. They have ongoing virtual follow-up, which helps them feel safer and less isolated.

## **2. Theory of change and strategies**

The Alquimia school aims to “re-tool and re-energize activists with more confidence, effective skills, new allies and strategies for a fast-changing and risky context.”<sup>80</sup> The school works on strengthening indigenous women’s leadership, exchanging strategies for resistance, and promoting safety and well-being deemed vital for their activism, movements, and survival.

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<sup>80</sup> JASS, *Alquimia School: an innovative approach to indigenous women’s leadership & collective power* (2015), available from <http://www.justassociates.org/en/article/alquimia-innovative-approach-indigenous-womens-leadership-collective-power>

### **3. Practices to support transformative leadership**

#### **Modeling feminist purpose and principles**

Patricia Ardon reflected on the importance of using key strategic issues as their underlying principles of the leadership school. The school simultaneously helps activists to analyze and develop strategies to address power; patriarchy, using a lens of intersectionality; feminist popular education; strategic thinking and action; and sharing information on contexts in the region. These entry points were identified on the basis of knowledge of the region gained through years of work with indigenous and rural women, yet the first workshops provided space for women to identify the pressing issues within those spheres relevant to the women themselves. They prioritized issues that would be strategic for them thematically, and in terms of the practical tools they needed.

#### **Building on different aspects of power**

“Building on a framework that incorporates these different aspects of power – from the visible, hidden and invisible forms that marginalize women to the life-affirming forms that empower women, we connect analysis to strategy, clarifying the crucial importance of multiple approaches from policy advocacy and organizing to leadership training and consciousness raising.” Alquimia: JASS Mesoamerica, Feminist Leadership Development and Knowledge Generation.  
-Lori Michau, co-director Raising Voices

The school models feminist purpose and principles by using a critique and analysis of patriarchy, combined with an affirmation of the innate power women have at individual and collective levels. These principles, generated by the women in the school, include social justice, love, generosity, self-awareness, sisterhood, happiness, wonder, patience, hope, critical thinking, diversity, and a rejection of dichotomies that justify inequality and subordination.

#### **Inspiring shared vision based on personal and collective reflexive learning (and unlearning)**

The Leadership School stresses the women leaders’ direct experiences, from the intimate, private sphere to the public sphere, all of which are integrated into their context analyses.

### How patriarchy operates in our lives

“That is in the center of how patriarchy has operated to keep us subordinated. We are not separated in our private and public lives. That has been very powerful. It has been powerful in terms of increasing self-esteem of participants and all of us in general.”

-Patricia Ardon

Linking this analysis of how patriarchy operates to relationships among activists, across movements, has been important to generating a more systemic analysis.

### Appreciating intersectionality of issues and complexity

Patricia Ardon from JASS MesoAmerica, reflected on the dilemma of whether to work with women who are specialized in one area, such as violence against women or reproductive rights:

*The specialization on issues like violence against women or reproductive rights has limited our possibility to have a more in-depth analysis of systemic causes and effects on women in general. Our analysis is that violence is closely linked with land rights, so we are not pieces of people but integrated people with daily lives, with women who live every day of their lives at risk. Even killed or raped and persecuted. It is important to be able to have these more integrated analyses. If you don't maybe you are helping to repair one part of the system, but not looking at the whole.*

### Empowering and enabling others to act

Through sharing personal stories, sharing experiences and strategies for activism, analyzing common and different situations together, and developing practice tools and strategies, the leaders gain trust in one another. Space is created to nurture the possibility for alliance building, and networks are being built to engage in specific collective initiatives. Collaborations have included development of a guide for facilitators to understand how and why power operates in conflict at different levels, and corresponding sessions to work with the guide. Sessions on alliances have been included in the curriculum; topics have included helping leaders identify key issues they want to use as the basis for alliances and exploring the dilemmas that working in alliance presents to their work.

### Challenging patriarchal norms and oppressive power

Although it is important for the women to frame their work in terms of the collective rights of indigenous peoples, they confront a dilemma of struggling with

oppression within their own communities. It is challenging for them to speak out against violations they suffer, as they are accused of betraying their culture. They need support and strategies for continuing to analyze their own personal reactions and the possibilities for collaboration. The ability of the women to analyze power and deal collectively and positively with conflict has been useful in the group context of the school and in their networking and collaborations.

### **Encouraging integration of heart, mind, and body**

The Leadership School uses self-care tools and practices, including by inviting in women who have experience with and knowledge of how to support the emotional challenges women face, using their own cultural practices and complementing with others.

#### **4. *Emerging lessons and outcomes***

- **More analysis of the context within which women operate:** It would be useful to understand the organizational and movement contexts the leaders operate within so we might identify more effective strategies and encourage alliances with those who share their vision;
- **more ongoing support:** As part of a more sustainable approach, JASS Mesoamerica would like to see more capacity to work regularly with women leaders. This would enable accompaniment of the evolution of participants when they return to their organizations and movements, and facilitate creation and use of tools that address specific organizational contexts;
- **time:** Time is needed so that women may build and share a collective story of experience of the 30 women in the training;
- **integration of security issues:** To contribute to leadership development in contexts of insecurity and violence, the particular risks of women defending human rights and integrated security analysis and approach must be taken into account. Donor agencies should coordinate with other supporting actors on this front;
- **fewer administrative pressures on leaders:** Donors require many administrative activities not related to exercising leadership on the issues they have prioritized. Donors should consider this as they design their systems for funding, their M&E requirements, and the provision of technical support to activist women's rights leaders and their organizations; and

- **less attention paid to “famous” leaders:** International organizations tend to link with leaders who are better able to communicate with the audiences they want to reach. This privileges the leadership of individuals who are not always the most trusted in their own communities. These leaders often lack legitimacy even among women and then have problems in their communities, which leads them to share less information and limits their collective power.



# STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS, CHALLENGES AND PROMISING PRACTICES FROM LITERATURE AND INTERVIEWS

Figure 7. Strategies for building transformative and feminist leadership



Source: Shawna Wakefield (2017)

## MODELING FEMINIST PURPOSE AND PRINCIPLES

“Transformative leaders don't separate themselves from who they are and the change they want to create in the world”

-Shereen Essof of JASS in South Africa

The women exercising and practicing transformative leadership whom we interviewed for this study agreed that the personal and political approach to leadership is germane to staying rooted in feminist principles and purpose. As with many women's-rights and social-justice organizing efforts, it can be easier to agree on principles and values than to strategize and implement through running organizations, programs, campaigns, and service-delivery efforts. These efforts often operate within a terrain of complexity and chaos.

Modeling different ways to put feminist values into practice is seen as challenging and vital for trust and impact by those working to exercise them. In other words, it is not sufficient to advocate and push for change in social, economic, and political realities that advance women's rights only in the communities where project or program goals are meant to be achieved. These values and principles must be applied in the ways in which the work takes place—at individual/personal, collective, and organizational levels, including in collaborations beyond organizations.

By all accounts, this is not easy, and it is an ongoing process. It looks different depending on context, and it is clear that different strategies and tactics are needed at different times as the group members, organizations, and context change. For instance, in the PEKKA program, women's needs for recognition and income were initially the priority. However, as the women themselves develop confidence and leadership skills and secure basic needs, they have defined more ambitious goals oriented toward transforming the system as a whole. This requires consistent return to the principles and values of feminism, as the women transform themselves and meet the challenges of supporting each other in mainstream political environments.

Leadership development programs and technical assistance must grapple with the question: **What kinds of leadership are needed and whose leadership needs development?** Among the movement-building organizations consulted in this study, there was agreement that although charisma is important and has an important place in achieving transformative goals, the commitment to core values and principles is even more important. For instance, the profiles and literature review suggest a difference between leadership to meet a strategic objective focusing on enabling others to catalyze change (Raising Voices, Alquimia), on the one hand, and community-based initiatives that begin by meeting the basic needs of a broad tent of marginalized people from the start (PEKKA), on the

other. Others are intentional about developing a third way, in which different leadership approaches and styles complement one another (e.g., Move to End Violence), even where the entry point to the work is fostering collaborative skills and leadership.

Some of the leadership-development programs we profiled attempt to develop leadership opportunities for younger women in particular. For instance, the African Women's Development Fund is a long-term leadership development program designed to identify, develop, and promote emerging young African women leaders. CREA Leadership Institute invites applications and tends to focus on younger women, although it does aim for intergenerational cohorts. Alquima, of JASS Mesoamerica, identifies a second tier of leaders through its learning and education initiative. The FAHAMU Movement Building Boot Camp also used this strategy, as the key constituents for its leadership development and organizing work. Similarly, a Gender at Work project, supported Sikhula Sonke, develops a second layer of women-led leadership among farm workers, including a focus on deepening democratic practices and processes within the organization to ensure it was member driven.<sup>81</sup> This can be a transformative strategy, particularly in places where hierarchical leadership is the norm.

The people we interviewed stressed the importance of keeping an open and positive mind; an attitude that when things are tough, it is more meaningful to show the way rather than try to convince others to come their way. Often there is a double standard for women and men in leadership, as we see in the PEKKA example, where because of discriminatory social norms, women are not immediately seen as legitimate leaders. They have a heavy role of shifting perceptions at all levels—internally and within families, organizations, and larger society, while at the same time doing the work. They must work hard to earn this respect—through generating knowledge, building trust, and delivering tangible results.

As result, intersectionality is often viewed primarily as an analytic or theoretical category, but here it is used as an organizing principle that suggests alternatives to oppressive and marginalizing deep structures.

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<sup>81</sup> Gender at Work, *Transforming Power: A Knotted Rope* (2012), available at <http://genderatwork.org/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/TRANSFORMING-POWER-A-KNOTTED-ROPE-SINGLE-PAGES02.pdf>

### **Journey for women's interests**

"When you work for women's interests, it's two steps forward -and at least one step back. And those steps back are often evidence of your effectiveness; they represent the threat you have posed to the power structure, and its attempt to push you back."  
-Sheela Patel, SPARC, Oxfam Raising Her Voice program

These deep structures are based on the prejudice and discrimination that people carry with them into organizations and movements, from their own histories, social categories, and past and present experience. An organization may be committed to ending violence against women yet conceptually see power transformation as the key to ending it. However, institutions are led by people and mediated by the relationships among them in an organic system. In these systems, aside from positional power and authority, an individual's source of power may come from one of many different social identifiers—as members of one or another gender, ethnic or racial group, religion, or on the basis of age. Several people we interviewed noted the unconscious exercise of power over that can happen in feminist organizations. Others referred to "patriarchal reproduction." These below-the-surface realities often go unchallenged and therefore unaddressed, even though they conflict with core feminist principles and values.

FAHAMU's Movement Builder Boot Camp, led by Jessica Horn and Hakima Abbas, provided activist leaders with conceptual and practical leadership skills rooted in feminism to advance sexual rights in East Africa. They included modules about developing conceptual understanding rooted in feminist values and knowledge (theories of power and change, conceptualization of the body, gender and sexuality, culture, religion and fundamentalisms) to develop practice (activism and movement building, debates in LGBTI activism) and the self (sustaining ourselves in activism). As a facilitator, Horn describes the process as one of the most "personally and collectively transformative" processes she has worked with.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Jessica Horn, *The Movement Building Boot Camp for Queer East African Activists: An Experiment in Revolutionary Love*, Queer African Reader. Eds. Sokari Ekine and Hakima Abbas (Nairobi: Pambazuka Press, 2013).

### **Collaborative leadership**

“Collaborative leadership, beyond training programs is needed. This includes ongoing, in depth work in networks, over time in, movements. That becomes the scaffolding for collective leadership.”

-Idelisse Malave, Social Transformation Project

Challenges to feminist values included:

- Being consistent in modeling feminist purpose and principles across organizations, over time;
- staff turnover, which in some contexts requires continually going back to basics;
- patriarchal reproduction by feminist leaders, perhaps expressing their experience of power under;
- working with the concept and practice of intersectionality, so that all kinds of discrimination and marginalization are addressed, not just those based on gender;
- stiff age hierarchies that prevent younger feminists from taking leadership roles and responsibilities;
- the leadership vacuum created when older leaders leave organizations without transitional leadership in place; and
- the tension between respecting social and cultural norms and creating environments open to questions, dissent, and alternatives.

The promising practices included:

- Engaging in ongoing processes of self and interpersonal reflection about how to strategize and act in accordance with feminist principles;
- signaling the feminist purpose and principles of a group or organization through small initiatives that are empowering and positive reminders amid complexity;

- creating specific opportunities for second-tier leadership development and for younger women to diversify and distribute responsibilities, inject new thinking into organizational and movement-building efforts, and ensure smoother leadership transition; and
- engaging in an intersectional analysis and approach for all aspects of leadership development initiatives, challenging usual lines of division in terms of theme or identity.

## INSPIRING SHARED VISION BASED ON PERSONAL AND COLLECTIVE REFLEXIVE LEARNING (AND UNLEARNING)

Raising awareness of women's rights—and increasing feminist consciousness—is a cornerstone of efforts to shift attitudes and beliefs about gender roles and relations and women's contributions and values in society. This approach is also important in organizations and institutions working on social change.

The approach of the individuals and organizations profiled in this study speaks to the importance of engaging both the personal and political; individual's sense of self; their understanding of their positions in relation to others with perceived power; and their notion of what they can achieve. Activists speak to the need for leaders to be in process of personal transformation in order to be effective in inspiring and leading transformational change.

Some of the most influential work on organizations and leadership suggests that the *interior* environment or “self” of leaders is critical to their approach to leadership. According to Srilatha Batliwala, *recognizing the powerful role of the self is critical in the feminist leadership context because women's psychic structures have been constructed not only through the usual institutions, socialization processes and experiences (like family, school, peers, etc.), but through the particular nature of the patriarchal structures in which they have lived and the oppressions they have consequently negotiated.*

In other words, reflexivity at the levels of self, interpersonal, organizational, cross-organizational, movement, and society-wide are important parts of the process of creating a shared vision.

### The African Women's Development Fund (AWDF)

*The African Women's Development Fund was founded by three activists who had worked separately on social justice issues and wanted to accelerate change, unleashing the power of women by getting more resources to women's organizations. AWDF is the first pan African women's rights grant-making organization, which has provided grants to 800 organizations in 42 countries, affecting the lives of millions of women across the continent.*

The organization has pioneered work to support leadership among African women CEOs. They meet at least once a year, to train, and receive coaching and mentorship. Initially they did not speak of many of the personal challenges they experienced, yet with coaching by Hope Chigudu, they began to think and talk about personal issues such as self-care and what kinds of leaders they wanted to be. She has her coaches develop personal strategic plans that includes: physical, emotional, relational, spiritual, and psychological domains.

Initially, there was pushback as the women did not feel they had the time or money to delve deeply into these domains. AWDF initially did not know their grantees needed this kind of support, rather, they focused on the programmatic outputs. However, the demands that started to emerge from the women, as well as the leadership vacuum as many of the founders of feminist organizations leave, is a transition challenge.

**AWDF began to accept the importance of the issues of transformative leadership, at both personal and organizational levels, and is now considered to be one of the major funders committed to a deep exploration, together with grantees, of what transformative leadership looks like in practice and what support is required.**

The activists we interviewed used specific tools to cultivate personal reflexivity: meditation, prayer, mindfulness, breath work, tai chi, reading and journaling, yoga, and dance. In addition, AWDF has offered extensive coaching for women heads of organizations with the purpose of facilitating feminist leadership. The idea behind these strategies is to cultivate the willingness to break rules, to encourage collective learning, and development, to accept 'the weirdest ideas.'

The Movement Strategy Center, which works with a range of social justice actors, aims to build several core and overlapping practices, including those that strengthen: personal evolution (knowing yourself, habits, asking "Who do I need to be to move toward the future I imagine?"); radical connection (deep trusting relationships that get built to make unimaginable things possible); vision and purpose (holding lots of different views of people); strategic navigation (step into

the space and make big leaps—and continually ask what could be a big leap). They stress the importance of using different practices and tools to cultivate different qualities needed in a specific context and time.

At the collective level, movement-building organizations like JASS find that providing a safe space for women to share and reflect is part of the longer-term process of building trust and creating strategy, as we discuss below. Such spaces are critical to building a feminist sense of self- and collective awareness, knowledge with a political consciousness and perspective, and a sense of different world views and new ways of looking at the issues. This is important, given that the nature of women’s rights work is non-linear in terms of attitudes, beliefs, and norms change. It is often dynamic, including setbacks and backlash.

#### **Little things lead to large challenges**

"People think there is one thing they can do that will make everything ok. But that sets people up to fail. It's little things that you do as a practice that leads to these larger changes."

-Rusia Mohiuddin, Universal Partnership

Processes of reflection provide the necessary space and time to consider what has happened, and how to meet challenges from a place that is more than simply reactive. Challenges faced by the activists we have profiled included consideration of how to continue to provide space to develop as the pace of change and developments quicken. They note that follow-up and practice has too often been undervalued. This is a concern, given that it takes time to unlearn bad leadership practice, which requires the continued dedication of space for reflexivity and practice. Further, as Jessica Horn put it, “Unlearning is important. But where does it happen? We can’t say go do transformative leadership without processes. Coaching, training to help people practice using different forms of power are needed because models are scarce.”<sup>83</sup> Based on her experience facilitating transformative processes in organizations across Africa, Michel Friedman adds that what is necessary are not models but rather experimentation, seeing what works, changing, naming, and trying new things in a continual process of learning and action.

At Movement Strategy Center, for instance, coming together on a regular basis to practice and reflect together, and work on strategy simultaneously has created a “subtle but big shift in how we hold the work,” said Jodie Tonita.<sup>84</sup>

<sup>83</sup> Jessica Horn, e-mail message to author, (2015)

<sup>84</sup> Interview with Jodie Tonita, Social Transformation Project (October 30, 2015).



Some of the challenges mentioned included:

- Often there are not enough resources and tools to provide ongoing reflexive spaces for individuals and groups that may sustain changes, including coaching and mentoring.
- providing processes and space for people and groups to examine their harmful habits and practices is often not considered part of leadership development methods and processes.

Some of the promising practices included:

- Providing context-relevant opportunities for individuals and groups to self-reflect is important to the process of inspiring others and creating a shared vision.
- enabling people to unlearn harmful habits is just as important as creating new ones.
- using body work can help enhance personal and collective self-awareness and inter-personal connection to a shared vision.
- providing space for groups to engage in collective practices can lead to the cultivation of different qualities needed to reach shared vision.
- recognizing and sharing knowledge about how organizational cultures that promote feminist principles and advance women's rights are developing. This also may help reduce the gap between service-providing organizations and advocacy.

## EMPOWERING AND EMPOWER OTHERS TO ACT

Providing the space for reflexivity, as described above, lays the groundwork for the building of interpersonal relationships and trust that empowers and enables others to act. At organizational levels, practicing different tools together to cultivate trust and stronger relationships has made a difference. These include practices that help to build energy and power within participants, such as Forward Stance. Providing the opportunity for individuals to practice different roles can also build trust and strengthen relationships, by helping to situate

different leadership practices as works in progress rather than a set of finite skills capacities that are really about positional power.

As illustrated beautifully in Gender at Work's *Transforming Power: A Twisted Rope*<sup>85</sup>, a collection of stories of gender equality and organizational change, feminist leadership is challenging issues of power, how to examine and reframe it in a more collective and distributed manner. But it requires the time needed to build relationships, trust, and the desire to work together. When individuals do not trust each other, communication is impeded, information is not shared, and competition creeps in. This is understandably not conducive to an environment in which creative solutions and innovations emerge, both within organizations and across movements.

Where conflict does arise, a few interviewees pointed to the importance of having some kind of mechanism for resolving conflict respectfully. At Raising Voices, they have learned that challenges emerge in the absence of trust, or when trust is present but has been violated. Power and how it is managed is important here as well. Interviewees have found that without trust, the exercise of power over becomes more automatic. In the experience of the leaders we interviewed, power over is exercised very sparingly. And when it is exercised, it is on the basis of clear rules and agreements laid out in advance. However, some shared how difficult it can be when people act counter to common values. In fact, more space is often needed to encourage positive dissent; spaces for respectful confrontations and contestations, even when agreement may never come.

An antidote to environments in which trust is lacking and that are disempowering are the practices used to encourage shifts in awareness, consciousness, changes in attitudes and beliefs. These are also the practices that can strengthen the ability to be open and trusting in relationship with others and enable others to act. Rockwood Institute makes work on the self a priority and uses this as a basis for building trusting relationships among its cohorts as an ongoing process. This allows for ample opportunities for self and collective reflexive learning. The Social Transformation Project, which grew out of Rockwood, continues this trajectory by strengthening leaders' collaborative capacity beyond personal connection. They look for leaders who are "low ego, high-impact strivers," because they can seek strategies outside of their organization and work at a movement level with the ability to work across movements.<sup>86</sup>

When JASS in Malawi initially spoke with women with HIV/AIDS about their priorities, they identified tangible urgent basic needs, such as money and better

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<sup>85</sup> Gender at Work, Labor Research Service, Justice and Women, Sikhula Sonke, Remmoho Women's Forum, Vukani Tsohang Africa, Kganya Women's Consortium, *Transforming Power: A Knotted Rope*, 2012.

<sup>86</sup> Interview with Jodie Tonita, Social Transformation Project (October 30, 2015).

food. However, different priority concerns came out later, in more informal spaces, where they began to share and come up with strategies that went beyond survival to their very quality of life. They began to know each others' stories and strengths. The subsequent campaign for better treatment for HIV, antiretrovirals that did not harm their sexuality and bodies, was born.

Mobilizing in 2012, they agreed to gather 25 women into what is now a campaign of 6,000 women. The organization has framed the campaign in a way that says every single woman matters in a system that is trying to deny their humanity at every stage. Every woman has a role to play, whether she is speaking to the media, meeting with traditional authorities or ministers, or videotaping on her cellphone. All women are "activated" at different times, depending on the needs of the campaign and their capacity to respond. This makes for many "centers," rather than one or a few with positional power and authority. It is "radical democracy, in a context where women have been programmed to think about leadership in very narrow ways."<sup>87</sup>

In settings where women's lives are at risk, the strategy of sharing leadership is related to the safety and security of women human-rights activists: They go against the grain, and a cross-section of activists and allies working together for systemic change is needed, particularly when individual leaders' lives are under threat.<sup>88</sup>

As a movement builder and a widow herself, Nani Zuminary has been successful mobilizing other widows, in part because they know her story, respect her tenacity, and share an experience that involves stigma and marginalization in the Indonesian context. Her story and that of Raising Voices illustrate the importance of movement builders and others supporting leadership development (women's-rights movement-building NGOs) developing trust with stakeholders by being human and linking personal struggles to political action—together.

Numerous examples of organizations' staff show how being able to relate to one another in informal and trusting ways enhances their ability to bring the best of their skills and knowledge to the table, rather than relying on those in positional power.

Several of the interviewees for this research noted that in addition to interpersonal and organizational relationships, collaborative relationships beyond the organization are important but not made a priority in feminist and women's organizations. Ellen Sprenger, who specializes in top-tier leadership development among women, regretted the lack of attention to collaboration. She

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<sup>87</sup> Interview with Shereen Essof (November 24, 2015), JASS Southern Africa Coordinator.

<sup>88</sup> Interview with Ellen Sprenger (November 11, 2015)

noted a disconnect between organizations collaborating when donor funds are available but not properly developing good relationships in advance of those opportunities, and the focus on and clarity about the roles and responsibilities needed to sustain good work. This problem is likely not unique to women's organizations. However, given the purpose and values guiding women's-rights work, including the emphasis on collective power, collaboration needs to be placed front and center in both strategies and practices.

Some of the challenges included:

- Trying to do transformational feminist leadership development with people who are not interested or ready to take the journey;
- when people act counter to agreed values, they violate trust and accountability; some find it difficult to use power over in ways that promote more positive forms of power;
- creating environments where people can disagree and respectfully confront others;
- pursuing trusting and accountable relationships across organizations and prioritizing skills development in collaboration; and
- lack of prioritization of collaboration among women's organizations, though some are experimenting with this.

#### **Norm of critical debate**

"We need to deal with the passivity and raise up a critical voice within the organization -how do we in our group get to a point where argument is the order of the day, where we are contesting, debating and arguing? How do we as a group start developing that skill when it's not been the norm in families, the community or the schools? The norm of having critical debate or critical engagement is a new norm we are trying to create in JAW because in the current norm we sit out huge silences. The challenge is how to move past this to a point where you develop a norm where people can be allowed and feel comfortable to debate or argue."  
-Amber Howard of Justice and Women (JAW) & Gender at Work Action Learning process

The promising practices included:

- Many of the practices used to encourage shifts in awareness, consciousness, and changes in attitudes and beliefs, are ones that can

strengthen people's ability to be open and trusting of others' leadership;

- being clear about expectations of the ways individuals and the collective relate to one another within and between organizations;
- recognizing the individual skills, abilities, and knowledge within a group so all contributions can be valued and used, which distributes leadership more effectively.
- prioritizing skills development in collaboration and pursuing trusting and accountable relationships across organizations.
- maintaining support for women when they enter formal politics, so they stay connected to allies in civil society in order to improve outcomes of their political work.
- in cases of formal collaboration across organizations, developing relationships without external pressures (such as donor calls for proposals) and clarifying roles and responsibilities related to collaborations.

## CHALLENGING PATRIARCHAL NORMS AND OPPRESSIVE POWER

"This has been a distinct feature of many feminist movements worldwide - the attempts to break away from patriarchal models of power and create more shared models of leadership, authority and decision-making. While these have not always been successful – the insidious and hidden power structures that have emerged, for instance, in overly "flat" feminist organizations like autonomous women's groups, for instance- they are worthy examples of the search for new ways of governing ourselves, making decisions and sharing both power and responsibility."

-Srilatha Batliwala, "Changing Their World: Concepts and Practices of Women's Movements." Association of Women's Rights in Development (AWID). 2012.

Despite limited financial support and frequent backlash in the face of women's-rights gains, feminist and women's organizations and movements have a long history of challenging dominant patriarchal hierarchical forms of leadership.

The leadership of such women has not been widely documented for many reasons, from lack of total acceptance of the narrative of leadership that goes against norms to reluctance on the part of those exercising these alternative practices of leadership to take credit for their efforts and results. Other reasons cited include rejection of perceptions of hierarchy among feminist collectives and organizations<sup>89</sup> and—on the part of some recent academic literature and management doctrine—the belief that leadership practices characterized here as transformational are in fact simply feminine expressions of their women’s characteristics rather than leadership.

The research also suggested that an enabling environment for transformational leadership that advances women’s rights is crucial; leaders are less likely to succeed if they are operating in organizations with oppressive structures, processes, and policies. This is multi-directional: Transformative leadership benefits and contributes to enabling environments for others to lead, toward the ultimate goal of realizing women’s rights and social justice. This dynamic requires that leadership be a practice of presenting what may be alternatives to status quo structures and systems of power and hierarchy, as in the case of managers’ making decisions that staff do not have a say over. The use of “positive power” in these situations is fundamental to transformative leadership.

But it is often not common practice to interrogate the sources of power within organizations, and between individuals from different social categories—based on, for instance, gender or sexual identity, age, race, class, ethnicity, and religion.

In reality, the forms and expressions of power often operate simultaneously, and a group that is committed to fostering power with may at times give way to exerting power over. Within organizations, developmental psychologists point to the fact that our early models of leadership were founded on meeting basic needs of small groups.

The use of **power over** was the dominant form of leadership until recently, in human development terms. Never before have there been so many paradigms of leadership and organizations at the same time, as Laloux points out in *Reinventing Organizations*. These reflect different ways of using power.

Reflecting on the challenges of implementing feminist values and principles in practice, one activist (interviewed but not profiled) noted that she has been in spaces where it is clear to that we sometimes adopt male models of leadership. We tweak or massage the edges, but we are still investing in a model of leadership that understands power in different ways.

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<sup>89</sup> Srilatha Batliwala, *Feminist Leadership for Social Transformation: Clearing the Conceptual Cloud*. CREA. 2011.

Another said, “[N]o one wants to talk about patriarchal leadership reproduction.” And yet this is part of what needs to be put on the table for discussions or processes that reveal and ultimately provide alternatives to power dynamics are upheld by deep structures that are detrimental to the achievement of women’s rights in organizations and wider society.

They can be powerful exclusionary forces that facilitate subversion of public, democratic processes when supported by individuals whose experience and consciousness do not actively support feminist or collective goals. These also dictate who will be conceived and visualized and supported as a leader.

The Oxfam AMAL Program (“Amal” means “hope” in Arabic)—hosted by Oxfam in partnership with 13 local organizations in Tunisia, Morocco, Yemen, and in the Occupied Palestinian Territories—is strengthening the individual and collective leadership skills and practices of women so they may reclaim political and civic participation and rights. Working at the personal level as part of collective leadership development has been challenging in practice. In Occupied Palestinian Territories, for instance, where there is a complex context of feminist principles and practice, we have seen the emergence of dilemmas of creating time and space for personal growth and reflection.<sup>90</sup> Conscious of this, Oxfam staff and partners have experimented with new methods, such as “respectful confrontation,” which is about encouraging open-hearted and peaceful engagement as a way to avoid and resolve conflict.<sup>91</sup>

For activists, it is important to recognize the personal experiences they may come with—of direct and indirect violence, and the power associated with it. Space and appropriate tools are needed if we are to re-conceptualize and reimagine power.

The *African Feminist Charter*, developed by African feminists, and the subsequent “Feminist Organizational Development Tool,” which supports their practice, are examples of this kind of resource. The charter has become a useful tool for helping to surface deep structures within the women’s movement and beyond that reflect core principles—to enable conversation, build shared understanding of core values and principles, and align expectations within organizations and as a basis of alliance building.

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<sup>90</sup> Ines Smyth, *Transformative Leadership for Women’s Rights: Lessons and Experience*, 2015.

<sup>91</sup> Joe Weston, *Mastering Respectful Confrontation: A Guide to Personal Freedom and Empowered, Collaborative Engagement* (Heartwalker Press, 2011).

## Figure 8. Negative expressions of deep culture and transformative feminist alternatives

Deep culture is often framed in a negative light. Below are some common negative expressions of deep culture highlighted in *Clearing the Conceptual Cloud* together with corresponding practices of transformative leadership for women's rights:

Negative expressions of deep culture	Transformative feminist alternatives
Informal groups, cliques, and other informal formations that exercise power and influence over formal structure and decision making	Trust-building practices to get to know others  Emergent problem solving
Invisible/informal decision-making processes that influence/lead to formal organizational decisions; or the formal values of the organizations not being lived out in its daily working.	Clear decision making; distributive leadership
How different work and roles are valued and measured	Encouraging flexibility in roles among staff; all staff facilitate meetings on a rotating basis; raise own issues
Practices that build or damage people's credibility, reputation, etc. (gossip, back-biting, rumors, smear campaigns, etc.)	Put in place conflict-resolution protocols, ensure that core values guide conflict resolution; support informal mediation.

Source: Excerpt from Srilatha Batliwala and Michel Friedman for CREA, *"Achieving Transformative Feminist Leadership"*

Further, as noted in this paper and in the literature, despite the feminist leaders' commitment to building institutions that reflect their values and purpose, the pressure on them to continue the work, meet urgent demands, and ensure institutional survival mean that finding the time and resources for reflection and co-creation of alternatives is often like the shifting sands of an illusion.

For reasons like these, organizational development specialists and scholars of organizational culture have noted that change in deep structure often comes at a point of organizational or personal crisis on the part of leaders. There is a breaking point for many leaders if they operate in ways that are distinctly different from their core values. This has been expressed beautifully and painfully, for instance in the Urgent Action Fund's *What's the Point of a Revolution If We Can't Dance?* In it, women activists share their experience with fear, trauma, overwork, and loss and stress the importance of their personal concerns' relevance to their public work, as well as the need to make well-being and sustainability a priority



for women's-rights movements.<sup>92</sup>

Several noted the catalyst that personal and organizational crises allow leaders to take on deep cultural and organizational shifts. These crises help to stress the importance of providing space to look at individual and collective consciousness about power and how things are really run and can facilitate commitment to dismantle the current norms.

The role of leadership in changing the deep structure of institutions is not to micromanage or engineer the construction of a new culture but rather to engage in practices that enable the emergence of new deep structures. According to Laloux, who has studied at a wide range of research on human and organizational development, leaders can pull others toward their perspective by putting in place structures, practices, and an organizational culture that helps stakeholders to integrate transformative practices that take complexity more wholly into account.<sup>93</sup> Practicing transformative leadership may point toward simpler forms of managing, when feminist values, trust, and relationships are in place and people have time and space to reflect and to heal—in a way that is not separate from but is integral to the transformative aims they seek in the work for women's rights.

Raising Voices, which has invested a great deal in creating a healthy organization rooted in feminist values and practices, highlights the importance of structure and process. At the same time, Lori Michau notes that it is small steps that make a difference. She writes: "You don't have to go on a 10-day retreat. You can have lunch together. You can do more mentoring rather than supervising. There are big shifts you can make that don't cost a lot of money. You have space for process, but you have open space rather than fear based organizations. There is room for more honesty."<sup>94</sup>

Several activists stressed the importance of values being reflected in the structure of the organization and networks, so it is harder to stray. "Surface" structure has been the focus of many organizational development initiatives that have failed. The most promising practices appear to be those that provide enough of a common basis of expectations and how to get things done to enable a free flow of ideas, relationships, and innovation toward the benefit of women's rights. For instance, developing a second tier of leadership in organizations and movements, as we have mentioned, and creating opportunities for meaningful leadership practices regardless of position, have been important ways to ensure

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<sup>92</sup> Jane Barry and Jelena Dordevic, *What's the Point of a Revolution If We Can't Dance?* for Urgent Action Fund, 2007.

<sup>93</sup> Frederic Laloux, *Reinventing Organizations*, 41, 2014.

<sup>94</sup> Based on an interview with Lori Michau (November 12, 2015), co-director, Raising Voices; "Creating an Organizational Culture for Social Justice Activism"; and Raising Voices website.

better leadership transitions and more distributed, diverse, and collaborative leadership within institutions.

When such structures, systems, and cultures are in place, use of power over can come from a place of commitment to co-creating an enabling environment for everyone to thrive, rather than a place of fear, where power is abused. Power over could be used as part of a system in which there is fundamental trust in relationships so that instead of weakening collective power, it can strengthen it. This kind of deep structure runs counter to dominant traditional and patriarchal practices of leadership, where power is interpreted as a zero-sum game. It can be very challenging, even painful, for activists to look at their actual practice, develop a fresh perspective on it, and discover that they have reproduced power inequalities, such as patriarchal hierarchical and oppressive leadership norms.

Of course, the wider significance—the relationship between the deep culture of organizations and the results of their work—is unknown. Despite the enormous challenges to creating deep structure change in organizations and beyond, the profiles included here suggest a reframing of the deep-seated norms in positive ways. They celebrated the transformational possibilities of collectives that draw energy from shared feminist values; exercising positive power—or even ethical use of power over—is being experimented with in inspiring ways.

Some of the challenges included:

- Working on deep structure is the most challenging and important domain to consider and strategize around in the context of organizational change and development, as well as broader social change efforts. Deep structure is deeply ingrained in individual and group psyches and ways of operating. It often keeps power dynamics in place that people are accustomed to;
- there are few explicit models of how to change deep structure; doing so requires many more intentional methodologies to surface and enable groups to strategize around;
- many women's experience of and associations with power are through abuse. Related unresolved trauma can negatively affect people's abilities to openly analyze, discuss, and imagine alternatives to oppressive deep structures; and
- it can be painful for feminists to confront their own patriarchal reproduction, since it runs so counter to values and purpose.

The promising practices included:

- Using tools such as the “power matrix” tool to enable groups to unpack and strategize around surface and deep structures and power dynamics;
- developing a set of agreed-upon values and principles that reflect the feminist purpose and values of the organization, which is in the language of the relevant group members, and using this to stress positive alternatives to oppressive deep structures;
- experimenting with practices articulated in *Achieving Transformative Feminist Leadership* and *Building Organizations with Soul*<sup>95</sup> toolkit, which include powerful exercises for groups to map their organization’s deep culture, analyze hidden and invisible power, and deal constructively with deep culture and hidden and invisible power;
- replicating values-based organizing principles when moving from organizational change to collaboration and movement-building work;
- enabling individuals and groups to ask generative questions and to design and facilitate their own group processes, similar to the Gender Action Learning process of Gender at Work and Faster than 20, which works on improving the muscles for enquiry and collaboration; and
- bringing more than one person from an organization to leadership development programs, so they may work on skills together and collaborate.

## ENCOURAGING INTEGRATION OF HEART, MIND, AND BODY

All the leadership practices we profiled contained some aspect of strengthening individual and collective well-being. Although it is challenging to secure time and resources for well-being, everyone acknowledged this is critical if women’s-rights movement-building work is to achieve anything transformational. In many ways, this overlaps with the practices related to personal and collective consciousness, interpersonal trust and relationship building among other areas unpacked here.

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<sup>95</sup> Hope Chigudu and Ruth Chigudu, *Building Organizations with Soul*, 2015.

The Association of Women's Rights in Development, which has championed issues of self-care, well-being, and sustainability, particularly among women human-rights defenders, presents donors' ethical responsibility to support the well-being of the people they support so that they may do the very brave work of transforming violent and unequal societies. The association stresses that this goes straight to the heart of the movement's effectiveness and longevity.<sup>96</sup>

**Experiences draw people to social justice work**

"A lot of people come to the work of social justice because of direct, secondary, and intergenerational experience of trauma. They need to find joy and hope and organize on a basis of hope and love and vision, and be fierce about protecting this from harm."

-Kristen Zimmerman, Movement Strategy Center

Several warned of the critical challenges this poses to women's-rights work. In contrast to other industries, which deal largely with complicated technical problems, women's-rights work requires a deep bench of leadership and sustainability, and well-being for those doing the work.

Some of the challenges included:

- Lack of support for unresolved issues of trauma, overwork, and stress
- lack of resources and technical support allocated for organizations to provide more integrated and longer-term approaches to activists' well-being and self-care.

Promising practices included:

- Raising Voices' encouragement of relationship building among staff, decreasing the artificial separations between work and life that often contribute to stress and burnout;
- AWDF's mentorship program for heads of African women's-rights organizations, to offer them counsel to deal with ongoing personal and professional challenges in real time; and

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<sup>96</sup> "Politicizing Self-Care and Well-Being in Our Activism as Women Human Rights Defenders," accessed November 4, 2016, <http://www.awid.org/news-and-analysis/politicizing-self-care-and-wellbeing-our-activism-women-human-rights-defenders#sthash.c7kDTg1c.dpuf>.

- Move to End Violence’s emphasis on recognizing the trauma of activists and front-line service providers, and valuing and providing opportunities to develop self- and collective-care strategies for collective impact.

## DONORS AND TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP

It is important to capture the complexity of transforming deep structures and supporting transformative leadership for women’s rights, as well as the work of those leaders at the forefront of pressing for change in those deep structures. As mentioned by 11. Joanne Sandler, Senior Associate, Gender at Work: “it is a symbiotic and mutually reinforcing process that requires courage, vision and tenacity.”<sup>97</sup>

In the current climate, there is no way to unpack the issues related to building transformative leadership practices to advance women’s rights without a discussion of the role of donors and development organizations and how they can strengthen this work. It is well known that transformation takes time, and that it is usually unclear how much time complex social change will take. This requires donors to be invested in the long-term mission of feminist and social-change organizations, rather than interested only in short-term outputs.

Need for financial support
<p>“How can you be transformational if you ain’t got no cash?” -Jessica Horn</p>

In 2008, the largest single fund to advance women’s rights, the MDG3 fund, was created; it had important impacts, as the AWID “Women Moving Mountains” report documents. It found that the \$81 million (€77 million) fund not only strengthened the 45 organizations it funded, but also—because of its emphasis on women’s funds and movement-building organizations—more than 100,000 women’s organizations. This notably included their leadership and related skills.

Nevertheless, an evaluation of the fund found that the success of women’s political participation initiatives in strengthening their skills was mediated by the

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<sup>97</sup> Joanne Sandler, e-mail message to author, February (2016)

challenge of operating within male-dominated structures where their leadership was challenged.

This MDG3 Fund was followed by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs Funding Leadership and Opportunities for Women (FLOW) fund, an \$84 million (€80 million) fund set up to support initiatives of NGOs and other women's organizations in the areas of security, economic empowerment, and political participation. As stated in the report, "the evaluation reports show that short-term support for building local female leadership is insufficient to effectively change the nature and practice of such leadership and/or to effectively strengthen women's position and their meaningful involvement in local governance bodies once elected."<sup>98</sup>

Nevertheless, in 2016, the FLOW funded fewer organizations with larger pots of money than it did in the past (from an average of \$2.1 million [€2.4 million] to an average of \$10 million [€9.5 million] per grantee)—and only two of the nine recipients were women's organizations. One hundred and sixteen women's-rights organizations signed onto a letter critiquing the funding process, which benefited largely Northern-based organizations, citing the backbreaking implications of this decision for smaller and medium-size organizations that had benefited from funding in the previous rounds.<sup>99</sup>

A few donors were consulted in this study. Ilana Landsberg-Lewis of the Stephen Lewis Foundation, which has funded transformative community-driven work, such as AIR, encouraged donors to ask partners what kind of funding and technical support is needed to advance transformative leadership instead of designing pots of funding based on predetermined ideas of what skills and capacities are necessary. This requires being a learning partner and funder working closely with organizations on the ground that are trying to effect change.

Few donors have specific pots of funding for transformative leadership, or as Joanne Sandler, former deputy director for UN Women, and others have noted, for core funding that would enable flexible support for leadership building. Those that do, including the African Women's Development Fund, are very intentional about their funding. The Novo Foundation has also provided significant long-term funding for the Move to End Violence, including funds for not only the development of the Movement Makers but also aid in the collaboration of alumna of the program, such as money for joint campaigns. Some others, such as the Global Fund for Women and the Stephen Lewis Foundation, do not have specific pots of funds for transformative leadership but see it as embedded in the principles and values of the foundation and grant making. They provide core

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<sup>98</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, *Evaluation of the MDG3 Fund "Investing in Equality" (2008-2011)*, 2015.

<sup>99</sup> WIDE, *Open letter to HE Minister L. Ploumen Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, 2016.

funding to organizations and ensure that they can identify their own capacity development needs and priorities for support. Some of this connects specifically to leadership and organizational strengthening. They also provide spaces for reflection, sharing of experiences, and learning that are vital to the nurturing of new solutions to the entrenched problems of gender injustice and inequality.

There at least two sides to the issue of donors' funding and transformative leadership for women's rights. From the perspective of many women's-rights organizations, what is the nature of the need for support to develop transformative leadership? Where is the interest among NGOs and movement-building organizations? Is there a recognition of the need for leaders to develop in line with feminist values and the purpose of achieving women's rights?

As we have suggested, it is important for donors not to approach these issues with a pre-packaged agenda but rather to support the kinds of capacity development required by activists in institutions. For this to happen, activists also need to express the need for this kind of support. The importance of core funding in the service of transformative agendas has been established, as have the kinds of transformative outcomes that such funding makes possible.

For instance, with more funding, Alquimia would accompany the evolution of participants in their organizations, facilitate specific tools for those organizations according to their needs, support them in sharing and gaining space in their organizations, particularly in those with both men and women. As an example, indigenous women speak in terms of collective rights and indigenous people, and confront the dilemma of oppression within their own communities.

Everyone agreed that donors already have and could provide more support for transformative leadership practices to take root. The kinds of longer-term processes that emerge as an important transformative leadership practice includes various forms of mentorship and coaching. These kinds of processes require a longer-term investment, which project-based funding cannot touch.

Some trends in donor requirements are the move to demand consortia in funding, to require results, logical frameworks and linear logic models of project outputs and social change. This makes the transformative agenda a challenge. Transformation takes time, but it is often not clear how much time is required. The conditions for big shifts to take place if transformative practices were supported continuously so that coaching and mentoring could be incorporated and increase sustainability of leadership outcomes. Another critique about the nature of funding is that it is not sufficiently supporting emergence and breakthroughs. Outcomes decided before a program starts is a practice that is at odds with fostering the kinds of emergent innovation in social transformations needed for women's rights to be realized.

And yet there are some excellent practices of supporting the organizational sustainability of women's-rights organizations, which is fundamental to any organization's ability to think beyond survival. The African Women's Development Fund works closely with leaders to secure the strength and ingenuity of its leadership and organizations; the Stephen Lewis Foundation values trusting relationships with partners and provides core and technical support on the basis of actual partner needs rather than fund priorities; the Global Fund for Women does the same.

A recent report by the International Network of Women Funders found that women's funds provide crucial support for emerging, innovative, and self-led groups that address marginalized and underfunded issues and populations; raise consciousness of women's-rights violations; and influence local philanthropy. They are close to the social movements they support and, as a result, their grant making can be more relevant to local needs and opportunities.<sup>100</sup>

Unfortunately, if not done with care and respect, the transformative leadership practices of individuals can also be undermined by donors' funding. To strengthen their support for transformative leadership that advances women's rights, donors could:

- Coordinate with each other;
- provide longer-term commitments;
- trust grantees to know what they need and that they have capacity to absorb;
- provide access to coaches and mentors dedicated to working in activist communities;
- find creative ways to support M&E so that it is framed to answer context-relevant questions that will improve the work rather than simply supply donor requirements;
- look to develop leaders that have legitimacy within their communities, not just ones that are able to communicate with donors and audiences; and
- make different leaders more visible in their own communications, in their own words.

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<sup>100</sup> Christen Dobson and Lucia Carrasco Scherer, "*Collective Change: The Value of Mobilizing Women's Rights in the Global South and East*," for International Network of Women's Funds, 2016.



There are a range of donor strategies that are being used and that could be used to strengthen transformative leadership practices that benefit women's rights. Greater collaboration between the organizations they fund, a wider set of front line actors, and a long-term perspective seem most important in the service of widespread transformative practices at personal, inter-personal, organizational, movement, and cross-movement levels and society wide.

As expressed by Hope Chigudu, "transformative leadership is authentic, assertive, courageous, but I find that the authenticity can be eroded by donor funding. Transformative leadership enables a vigorous and creative engagement in order to disrupt, influence, create and challenge. It builds credibility for itself while building relationships with fellow organizations. It accepts that when its life is over its ok to carry out a post-mortem and go in dignity and peace."<sup>101</sup>

As stated by Theo Sowa, Executive Director, African Women's Development Fund, "If we have to wait for every African woman who has ideas to get a Nobel Peace Prize before they can have a place at the table we will be waiting a very very long time."

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<sup>101</sup> Hope Chigudu, communication via email, November 8, 2016.

# MOVING FORWARD: FOUNDATIONS OF A RESEARCH AGENDA

There are many questions that came out in this research about what it takes to promote transformational and feminist leadership for the advancement of women's rights. Despite the proliferation of research on transformational leadership, there is a limited amount of research on leadership that is feminist in its perspective and overtly seeks to promote women's rights and social justice aims. Given that in the past 10 year, there has been an increase of organizations and programs experimenting with different approaches, it will be important moving forward for there to be more enquiry and long-term thinking built into programs—particularly ones driven by researchers from the global South—underpinned by a serious research agenda. The individuals, groups, and research cited also have many areas they would like to know more about to improve their work on transformative and feminist leadership for women's rights. Some of the issues we would suggest be on the research agenda include:

- How can women's-rights organizations, and other civil society organizations be better supported to practice transformative and feminist leadership for women's rights?
- in what ways does personal transformation influence feminist social transformation where women's rights are realized?
- can enabling environments for transformational and feminist leadership to succeed be created in mixed organizations? Is this possible within formal political institutions?
- what difference does it make to women's rights and social justice outcomes when feminist and transformational leadership is exercised within organizations?
- what combination of capacities and strategies are needed to advance transformative and feminist leadership that contributes to tangible outcomes for women rights? How does transformative and feminist leadership for women's rights practiced in civil society organizations and movements influence outcomes of formal decision-making? What kinds of leadership are needed to build strategic alliances with key decision makers to this end?

- are women (and men) who exercise feminist and transformational leadership within informal civil society organizations more effective leaders if they enter formal political institutions? Under what conditions do they maintain connection to their initial constituency?
- what is the relationship among individual empowerment, collective action, and transformational and feminist leadership?
- what is the role of NGOs in supporting leadership development? and
- where are there indigenous and organic ways of supporting transformational and feminist leadership? What can we learn from them?

# CONCLUSION

In a context in which many women's organizations are striving to survive—in the face of competitive funding, backlash, and threats to safety and security—and in this context, leadership can be a difficult topic to contemplate. This problem is not unique to women's organizations, however, and the lessons in this study point more generally to the fact that in complex and chaotic contexts, it is easy for leaders and managers to be stretched thin and lose sight of what a world of gender equality, social justice, and fully realized women's rights could look like.

At the same time, there are hidden and uncelebrated examples of transformative and feminist leadership that are changing the rules of the game. They are leading the way, experimenting and inspiring with new forms of leadership and organizational culture that must be taken into account as part of the new landscape of intersectional work for women's rights.

The findings of this report suggest that it will be important moving forward for development organizations to:

- Stay clear and committed to the feminist values and principles that underpin the work for women's rights, and ensure that organizations are not depoliticized as they enter into partnerships;
- ensure access to core funding, as it will strengthen the ability of individual leaders and their organizations to take on more transformational work;
- recognize and celebrate examples of transformative and feminist leadership in action, as a strategy for changing the incentives for leadership to match the social justice objectives organizations want to achieve; and
- consider how transformative and feminist leadership can strengthen the outcomes of work across sectors, *e.g.*, governance, economic empowerment, and humanitarian response.

Leadership practiced according to shared feminist values, rooted in the core goal of women's rights situate in a broader context that values social justice for all, is generating brilliant examples of strong organizational culture, inspired co-creators, valued partnerships, and more mutually empowering and trusted relationships with communities. This perspective is a huge resource that should form the basis of support to these organizations. The practices discussed in this report are important aspects of how women's rights are realized when transformative leadership that mobilizes individual and diverse collective power

to challenge exclusionary informal and formal political structures is exercised, and when enabling environments are created for their leadership to succeed. The report also points that leaders who build broad coalitions and collective leadership to influence discriminatory power structures achieve more transformational change for women's rights and that individuals, groups and organizations are transforming themselves to reflect the changes they want to see in the world.

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## **Interviewees**

1. Alexa Bradley, JASS
2. Aruna Rao, Gender at Work
3. Ellen Sprenger, Spring Associates
4. Hope Chigudu, Independent Consultant
5. Idelisse Malave, Social Justice Project
6. Ilana Landsberg-Lewis, Stephen Lewis Foundation
7. Jackie Payne, Move to End Violence
8. Jane Sloane, Global Fund for Women
9. Jesenia Santana, NoVo Initiative to End Violence Against Girls and Women
10. Jessica Horn, African Women's Development Fund
11. Joanne Sandler, Senior Associate, Gender at Work
12. Jodie Tonita, Social Transformation Project

13. Joe Weston, Respectful Confrontation
14. Kristen Zimmerman, Movement Strategy Center
15. Lori Michau, Raising Voices
16. Nani Zulminary, PEKKA
17. Norma Wong, Faculty Advisor (online)
18. Patricia Ardon, JASS MesoAmerica
19. Rupsa Mallik, CREA
20. Rusi Mohiuddin, Universal Partnership
21. Shereen Essof, JASS Southern Africa
22. Srilatha Batliwala, JASS

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