Womankind Worldwide



BEIJING+30 REPORT

WOMANKIND WORLDWIDE

Keeping the Agenda Alive

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ACRONYMS

ACs:	Action Coalitions
BPfA:	Beijing Platform for Action
CEDAW:	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination of Violence Against Women
CSO:	Civil Society Organization
CPD:	Commission on Population and Development
CSW:	Commission on the Status of Women
EVAWG:	End Violence Against Women and Girls
FGM:	Female Genital Mutilation
GBV:	Gender-Based Violence
GEF:	Generation Equality Forum
GNC:	Gender Non-Conforming
ILO:	International Labour Organisation
IPV:	Intimate Partner Violence
LGBTQI+ :	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex +
NHRIs:	National Human Rights Institutions
NGO:	Non-Governmental Organization
INGO:	International Non-Governmental Organization
ODA:	Official Development Assistance
SDGs:	Sustainable Development Goals
SRHR:	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
TFGBV:	Technology Facilitated Gender-Based Violence
UN:	United Nations
VAW:	Violence Against Women
WHRDs:	Women's Human Rights Defenders
WEHRDs:	Women's Environmental Human Rights Defenders
WROs:	Women's Rights organisations

FOREWORD

As we look forward to marking the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA), we are at a crossroads of reflection on the progress made, renewing our commitment, and the urgent action required to address persistent gender inequalities and emerging challenges.

This report comes at a critical juncture for women's rights and gender equality globally, especially with the sobering setbacks in the journey toward realising the vision set forth in Beijing in 1995, 30 years ago.

Beijing+30 offers a platform for governments, civil society, and feminist movements to pause, assess and celebrate achievements, share best practices, and renew our zeal to continue to work towards realising gender equality. This analysis examines the complex landscape of achievements, persistent challenges, and emerging threats to gender equality.

Through the lens of our partners and allies in the Global South and in the United Kingdom, we explore how the promises of Beijing have manifested in real-world changes, while also confronting and acknowledging the substantial work that remains to be done.

Womankind explores the realities shaping progress and challenges to meeting the goals set out in the BPfA, in Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Kenya, Nepal, Uganda, the United Kingdom, and Zimbabwe. We delve into three critical areas: Violence Against Women, Women's Economic Empowerment, and Women in Leadership and Decision-Making.

These interconnected themes that continue to shape the future of women's lives across different contexts and countries and having a direct correlation to impact the realisation of gender equality.



While the changing contexts and continued growing backlash against women's rights, the rise in far-right agendas and movements, the emboldened patriarchal structures and norms, the impact of climate change, the effects of global crises such as COVID-19 pandemic, the heightened economic constraints on women and girls, what emerges is a nuanced picture of resilience and resistance.

We take stock and celebrate victories in legislation across contexts, rise in women's leadership representation, and rights awareness, but do not fail to acknowledge that the work that is still ahead of us. The resilience and resistance with and in recognition of feminist movements', women's rights organisations who are at the forefront and continue to be vital role in driving change globally.

Our collective action in persistent advocacy, resilience and resistance despite shrinking civic spaces, having less than 1% of funding allocated directly to women's rights organisations and movements in the Global South is keeping the vision of Beijing alive and advancing gender equality agendas at local, national, and international levels.

As we look toward the future, we hope this report not only as a reflection on the past three decades, a recognition of the immense contributions made by feminist movements and Women's Rights Organizations (WROs) but also as a call to action for you. A call for the urgent need for a sustained commitment, collective care for each other, increased resources, celebration of each other and continued transformative approaches to realise the promise of Beijing for all women and girls, in all their diversities.

Diana Njuguna and Disha Sughand

Co-CEO Womankind Worldwide



INTRODUCTION

The UN Beijing+30 commemorates the 30th anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995[1], the landmark event that set a global agenda for achieving gender equality and empowering women. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA[2]), adopted by 189 countries, established a transformative framework with clear commitments to women's rights across twelve critical areas of concern[3] , including education, health, violence against women, women and the economy, and political participation.

As we approach the Beijing+30 milestone in 2025, we are presented with a crucial moment for reflection on the progress made, renewed commitment, and the urgent action required to address persistent gender inequalities and emerging challenges. Beijing+30 offers a platform for governments, civil society, and feminist movements to assess achievements, share best practices, and identify gaps in realising gender equality. It also emphasises the need for accelerated progress, the indivisibility of human rights, intersectional approaches, and sustained investment in women's rights to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030.

This report reflects on the progress and challenges in advancing gender equality as we approach Beijing+30, specifically related to Violence Against Women (VAW), Women and Economic Rights, and Women in Power and Decision Making. It explores the realities shaping progress and challenges to meeting the goals set out in the BPfA, in Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Kenya, Nepal, Uganda, the United Kingdom, and Zimbabwe.

Going beyond the numbers, this report examines intersectionalities underpinning these areas, bringing to the fore the lived experiences and reflections from Womankind Worldwide's partners and the realities behind the data, illustrating both advancements and persistent barriers that shape the lived experiences of women and girls.

The Beijing+30 review takes place within a larger global context marked by a rapidly changing social, economic, and political landscape, including an increase in support for right-wing ideologies, the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, pushback on rights, and the erosion of civic space and feminist organising.

The report connects Beijing+30 with the SDGs and other frameworks, including the Generation Equality Forum (GEF) Action Plan, to situate the progress of BPfA and feminist advocacy within a global blueprint for change in this continually changing context.

This report was commissioned by Womankind Worldwide with the objective of collating and amplifying the contribution and relevance of the BPfA in the successes of feminist organising in the Global South as well as highlighting persisting challenges for the path ahead for BPfA, on Violence Against Women, Women's Economic Rights, and Women in Power and Decision Making. Based on a literature review, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions with Womankind staff, partners, and allies in the focus countries.



[1] Fourth World Conference on Women (1995), UN Women
[2] Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) (1995), UN Women
[3] 1) Women and poverty, 2) Education and training of women, 3) Women and health, 4) Violence against women, 5) Women and armed conflict, 6) Women and the economy, 7) Women in power and decision making, 8) Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women, 9) Human rights of women, 10) Women and the media, 11) Women and the environment, and 12) The girl child.

The report highlights the vital work of feminist movements and organisations such as Womankind Worldwide, whose work in partnership with others has catalysed progress in gender equality. It adopts a partner-led perspective, amplifying the experiences, successes, and challenges faced by feminist organisations and movements from the Global South.

The stories and perspectives collected in building this report reflect joint efforts and mutual accountability and centre the voices of women and girls from diverse experiences and backgrounds, including LGBTQI+ individuals, women with disabilities, and rural women.

Whilst we seek to join others in celebrating the progress made in the last three decades on the BPfA, we are cognisant and concerned that significant challenges still exist. From the systemic barriers to women's economic inclusion to the persistent underrepresentation of women in leadership, this report highlights the need for transformative, intersectional, and intergenerational approaches.

We also remain concerned about the growing funded and coordinated anti-gender mobilisation around the world, including the significant cutbacks on multilateral funding for gender justice at a time when the feminist movement requires sustained funding for their work.

The road from Beijing+25[4] to Beijing+30 provides valuable lessons and opportunities to inform future strategies. The report aims to capture part of the conversation from Global South feminist movements, leaders, and activists on some of the strategies and actions that have been implemented to overcome the challenges and the much-needed lessons learned from these, as we plan as a feminist movement and supporters, for our trajectory beyond Beijing+30.



Photo: Jane Anyango, Deputy Executive Director- Institutional Strengthening, FIDA-Kenya

[4] Womankind Worldwide, AWID, CIVICUS, Gender and Development Network (GADN), Urgent Action Fund Africa, (2020), 'Feminist Movements and the Beijing Vision: Organising, resisting, advocating'

BEIJING AT 30 PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES

Over nearly three decades, the BPfA has galvanized progress, influenced policy, and inspired generations of activists. Since its inception in 1995, the BPfA has led to shared agendas for feminist organising across issue-based and geographical boundaries.

It has led to the rights of women and children being embedded in national and international policymaking, and resources allocated and targeted programmes and knowledge developed for gender justice and equality at international, national, and local levels. Today, despite many achievements, ongoing barriers and new global challenges are hampering the full implementation of the BPfA, necessitating the urgent need for innovative approaches to fulfil its vision.

The interlinkages between the 12 critical areas of concern[5] of the BPfA have led to feminist activists globally calling for a more holistic approach, as intersectional challenges, especially those faced by more vulnerable groups such as LGBTQI+ individuals, Indigenous women, sex workers, women with disabilities, migrant women, and women from ethnic and racial minorities, etc. are often underrepresented in policy implementation.

Funding models also do not consider challenges, and often organizing, research or programming do not reach structurally excluded women and girls. In this section, we discuss the progress and persisting challenges faced by women and girls in some of the critical areas of concern of the BPfA.

[5](1) women and poverty; (2) education and training of women; (3) women and health; (4) violence against women; (5) women and armed conflict; (6) women and the economy; (7) women in power and decision-making; (8) institutional mechanisms; (9) human rights of women; (10) women and media; (11) women and the environment; (12) the girl child.



Photo: Extreme right- Sehin Teferra, Director of Setaweet with colleagues in the office

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Thirty years after the adoption of the BPfA, domestic and intimate partner violence (IPV) continue to be some of the most pervasive forms of Gender-Based Violence (GBV)[6] , cutting across cultural, economic, and geographic boundaries and impacted by various social and economic issues.

For example, economic violence, manifested through unequal pay, control over money, or denial of resources—reinforces women's dependence on men, their experience of violence, reduces their autonomy and increases the risk of IPV by limiting women's ability to leave abusive situations because of financial dependency. Entrenched societal expectations, economic pressure, and a lack of access to education put at risk rural and impoverished communities and perpetuate inequality.

Inequities for girls and women compound as survivors experience layers of disadvantages due to factors such as age, gender, ethnicity, and geography.

For example, in Nepal, working women in lower-paying or informal jobs are at greater risk of being abused, linking sexual harassment with economic rights violations[7] . Those women are at higher risk due to the combination of economic status and gender, and the fear of retaliation or losing their livelihood often silences them.

The adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security in 2000[8] marked a milestone, emphasising women's roles in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Yet, women in conflict zones, such as Afghanistan and Ethiopia, continue to experience violence and displacement, exacerbated by militarisation and impunity, and the experiences of women under military colonial occupation are not directly outlined within the resolution.



Photo: Sehin Teferra, Director, Setaweet, Ethiopia

[6]Gender Data Portal (2022), 'Violence against women and girls – what the data tell us', World Bank Group.
[7]Coyle, D., Shreshta, R., Thapa, C.J., (2014). 'Women's insecurities and the workplace in Nepal: A study from Banke and Bara districts'.
[8]Office of Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, 'Landmark resolution on Women, Peace and Security'. (See- resolution (S/RES/1325))

Conflict and the impacts on gender equality remain an urgent crisis across regions, as well as its links to climate change, white supremacy, imperialism, and authoritarianism. Climate change continues to be a major factor in conflict as resources become more scarce and increased displacement of people happens in many regions[9] . In Afghanistan and most other conflict areas, structural and societal oppression alienates women from advocacy spaces, and militarisation centralises control, deepens the marginalisation of women, and leads to gender apartheid and persecution[10] .

The return to power in 2021 of the Taliban has drastically restricted women's rights in Afghanistan and increased the risk of violence against those defying the restrictive norms. This has led to a reversal of decades of progress in women's education and public participation, highlighting the intersection of militarisation, conflict, education, GBV, and systemic oppression[11] . Ethiopia's Tigray conflict demonstrates how sexual violence has been weaponised, further marginalising women in conflict zones.[12]

Institutional violence

Institutional violence, such as abuse in detention centres or discriminatory practices in healthcare and social and legal systems, and by police or other law enforcement agencies such as border and immigration agencies, continues to be perpetrated against women. Women from the most vulnerable groups, such as sex workers, trans and gender non-conforming folks, Indigenous women, and refugee and migrant women, are at a further disadvantage, experiencing the highest levels of discrimination in these systems. In the UK, feminist movements have been uncovering and highlighting 1,500 cases of police violence and harassment against women in just 6 months[13] , as well as police-perpetrated domestic violence[14] .

Femicide

Femicide, the most extreme form of violence against women, highlights the deadly consequences of systemic gender inequality and has nearly doubled globally since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.[15] Global femicide rates are alarmingly high with approximately 51,100 women and girls killed by their intimate partners or other family members in 2023[16] In Zimbabwe, femicide is often linked to IPV, where survivors are killed after attempting to leave abusive relationships, in Kenya, at least 500 women have been killed since 2016[17] , and in the UK, 52% of women killed in 2020 were killed by a current or former partner[18] . The intersections of domestic violence, economic violence, patriarchy, misogyny, and cultural attitudes contribute to the prevalence of femicide globally. Femicide continues to be linked to climate change, where exposure to extreme events and GBV, a result of increases in economic instability, food insecurity, disrupted infrastructure, and increased exposure to men in temporary and displacement shelters, has proven to exacerbate gender inequality and GBV[19] .



[9]centre for Women's Global Leadership, (2012). 'Sexual Violence During & After Conflict', Rutgers.
[10]Womankind Worldwide (2024), 'Countering Gender Apartheid & Gender Persecution in Afghanistan: Call for Global Action for Accountability and Codification'
[11]Rahmani, M. (2024).'The Taliban's 'Vice and Virtue' Order', NEWS - WomanKind Worldwide.
[12]Fisseha,G., Gebrehiwot, T.G., Gebremichael,M.G., et al. (2023), 'War-related sexual and gender-based violence in Tigray, Northern Ethiopia: a community-based study', BMJ Global Health 2023;8:e010270.
[13]Hall, R., (2023)., 'More than 1,500 UK police officers accused of violence against women in six months', The Guardian.
[14]centre for Women's Justice, 'POLICE PERPETRATED DOMESTIC ABUSE: Has anything really changed since the 2020 super-complaint?', Funded by Human Rights Fund
[15]Womankind Worldwide (2023), 'AN OVERVIEW OF FEMICIDE: WHAT IT IS, WHY IT HAPPENS, AND HOW TO END IT'.
[16]UNODC (2024), 'Femicides in 2023'
[17]UN Women (2024), 'Femicide cases in Kenya fuel urgent calls for action to end violence against women'.
[18]Femicide Census 2020

The intersections of domestic violence, economic violence, patriarchy, misogyny, and cultural attitudes contribute to the prevalence of femicide globally. Femicide continues to be linked to climate change, where exposure to extreme events and GBV, a result of increases in economic instability, food insecurity, disrupted infrastructure, and increased exposure to men in temporary and displacement shelters, has proven to exacerbate gender inequality and GBV[19]

.There has been significant progress in legal protection from GBV since the adoption of the BPfA, with more countries enacting laws against domestic violence and workplace harassment.

Despite progressive legislation in many regions, there remains a huge implementation gap between policy creation and its effective execution. Most frameworks lack enforceability mechanisms, adequate funding, and accountability structures.

For example, Kenya has robust legal frameworks in place, including the Domestic Violence Act, the Protection Against Violence Act that addresses domestic violence, the Prohibition of FGM (Female Genital Mutilation) Act, and the Sexual Offences Act[20] , however, the rising incidence of Gender Based Violence in recent years is well-documented[21].

The Domestic Violence Act (2009) and the National Penal Code (2017) in Nepal have increased legal protections, including criminalising marital rape, and feminists celebrated the extension of the statute of limitations for rape reporting. However, significant cultural and systemic barriers still hinder access to justice and resources for women.

This is especially true for marginalised groups such as women with disabilities, in a context where violence against women with disabilities is rife, and disability exacerbates the risk of violence and abuse[22].

The Domestic Violence Act (2010) and the Female Genital Mutilation Act (2010) of Uganda have also contributed to reducing harmful practices, and in Zimbabwe, efforts to address femicide and child marriage are promising, but feminists have highlighted that systemic support is needed to effectively operationalise these laws[23] .

The United Kingdom's Domestic Abuse Act (2021) has strengthened protections for survivors, recognising coercive control as a form of abuse, but high-profile cases of violence have highlighted systemic failings[24] .



Photo: Edinah Masiyiwa, Executive Director, Women's Action Group, Zimbabwe

[19]Malivel, G., Huyer, S., Seager, J., (2024). 'Climate Change and Gender Based Violence: Overview of Current Research.' Working Paper No.16, Accelerating Impacts of CGIAR Climate Research for Africa (AICCRA).
[20]Republic of Kenya (2024). 'BEIJING+30 Kenya Country Report'.
[21]Bwale , V. 'The Rising Trend of Gender Based Violence in Kenya: A call for Urgent Action'. Urgent Action Fund - Africa
[22]Bhadra, L. (2019). ' Invisible Realities: Understanding the Lived Experiences of Women with Disabilities in Rural Nepal'. Womankind Worldwide
[23] Plan International (2016). 'In-depth review of legal and regulatory frameworks on child marriage in Zimbabawe'.
[24]End Violence Against Women - UK (2024). ' Met Police are still failing victims'.

In Afghanistan, the Directorate on Elimination of Violence Against Women and Girls was followed by actions by civil society to ensure its implementation. Grassroots organisations worked to document cases of violence against women, which became instrumental in driving legal reform.

Gender departments and offices for Ending Violence Against Women (EVAWG) were established in several provinces[25], which helped increase reporting and advocacy for reform and led to a change in the legal code to protect the rights of women, which was eventually implemented via presidential decree before the political situation changed more recently.

Much of the credit for these legislative and policy changes goes to feminist movements, activists, and WROs working collectively toward the mainstreaming of gender equality into development agendas. Despite the progress, huge gaps remain, for example, 54% of countries do not have laws that base the legal definition of rape on the lack of freely given consent[26].

Progress on GBV has been largely due to feminist movements' ability to work at the grassroots to address the root causes of GBV, including patriarchal social norms, influencing gatekeepers, building women's leadership, etc.

However, the State mechanisms do not prioritise prevention. While there are laws, many of the laws are not supported by rules or guidelines on how to implement the law - this often makes them ineffective or even damaging. It also makes it difficult to allocate the resources that are required for the effective implementation of the law.

As shared by partners, in many of the countries feminist movements have been at the forefront of pushing for improvements in legislation, ensuring accountability of the governments at national, regional and international laws. They have been key to keeping the BPfA agenda alive for 30 years.

There has also been a notable attitude shift in favour of gender equality and against GBV globally and at community levels. As social and support systems for survivors have increased in certain countries, so too has reporting of violations, signalling a general shift towards supporting justice and protection measures for survivors. Moreover, there is greater awareness of the importance of consent and healthy relationships, fostering a cultural shift towards mutual respect and equality in personal and social interactions. However, while there has been progress, there is still a gap in the sustained action and accountability required to ensure the gains made are not only safeguarded but continue to be strengthened.

"THE LAW IS A SEPARATE THING AND THEN THERE IS LIFE- A SEPARATE THING"

- ANNE AGAR POLYCOM GIRLS, KENYA.



[25]International Development Law Organisation, 'Afghanistan's Violence Against Women Units'.
[26]Gender Snapshot (2024), UN Women

A focus on punitive measures that take away attention and resources from the services for survivors, for example, insufficient shelters, resources, and options to leave abusive relationships, has been of growing concern to feminist movements in recent years. GBV laws often do not provide for women and girls in all their diversity, with the focus remaining on cis-gendered able-bodied, heterosexual women and girls despite overwhelming evidence that sex workers, women with disabilities, Dalit women, LGBTQI+ women are disproportionately subjected to abuse.

CASE STUDY

Womankind Partner, Deaf Women Included (DWI) from Zimbabwe, is in the process of developing a safe shelter for women and girls with disabilities who have experienced violence. Often, shelters are not equipped to provide for women and girls with disabilities for example, they might not have sign language interpreters or accessible structures, etc.

Further, it is also possible that women and girls with disabilities who lack resources or access to services might not be trained in sign language. The law needs to be supported with guidelines and diversity-sensitive budgeting to ensure that laws and policies are accessible to women and girls in all their diversity.

Often, the law does not have specific provisions to identify such abuse, the services do not provide for their different needs, and mainstream women's movements have not been able to successfully address the needs of women and girls in all their diversity.

Laws are also being used to persecute women and girls. For example, the Anti- Homosexuality Act 2023 in Uganda or the laws introduced by the Taliban in Afghanistan. Although in Kenya, there has been a raft of steps made against FGM, the practice remains in rural and traditional communities, is rising in urban communities[27] , and laws have been used disproportionately to punish survivors of FGM and not perpetrators[28] .

While legislative change alone is not sufficient for transformative justice, feminist movements continue to view legislative change as a necessary element in the progress of women's rights and advocate for laws against child marriage, disability rights, guidelines for implementation of women's representation in government, reversing, stopping or stalling homophobic and transphobic laws, reversing regressive laws and policies on girls' education, and so on.

However, in recent years, in response to the lack of implementation in GBV laws, as well as the failure of laws to realise justice in many instances of GBV, feminist movements have been examining the status quo of a heavy focus on punitive measures to address GBV, as well as exploring alternative approaches to prevention and redress[29] . Fault lines across movements have been a challenge to creating the intersectional cross-movement work required to address GBV, and siloed approaches to prevention, as well as a hyper-focus on criminalisation as a response to GBV, also hinder real progress in addressing these barriers[30].



[27] 'Every chemist has a backroom': the rise of secret FGM in Kenya- The Gaurdian December 2022
[28] centre for Human Rights - American Bar Association (2024), 'Monitoring Prosecutions under the Prohibition of FGM Act in Kenya', Trial Watch Report, Clooney Foundation for Justice, 2024
[29] Amnesty International, CREA, IWRAW Asia Pacific, RESURJ, & The Global Health Justice Partnership of the Yale Law School and Yale School of Public Health. (2024). Imagining possibilities: Moving beyond criminalization as our dominant response to gender-based violence
[30] Mahajan,A., Fried, S., and Cordeiro, I., (2023), 'Flaws in Laws-Challenging Criminalization of Young People's Bodily Autonomy (South Asia)' CREA. https://creaworld.org/resource/flaws-in-laws/

NAVIGATING WOMEN'S RIGHTS ONLINE

Despite the use of social media as a key strategy for feminist advocacy and movement building, the digital divide presents a new barrier to equality, as many women, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, lack access to technology and the internet. This disparity limits opportunities for education, economic participation, and advocacy, especially as digital spaces become essential for mobilisation and activism. Addressing digital inequalities and protecting women in online spaces are necessary steps for advancing BPfA goals in an increasingly digital world.

Technology Facilitated GBV (TFGBV) shows how the technological revolution has resulted in new forms of violence online, particularly against women and girls around the world, including through hacking, impersonation, gendered revenge pornography, catfishing, surveillance, cyberbullying, doxxing, tracking, etc[31] .

A 2018 study by Amnesty International found that that 23% of women surveyed in 22 countries had experienced online abuse or harassment, with marginalised groups facing significantly higher rates of violence . The TGFBV policy brief by Womankind Worldwide further emphasises that marginalised groups, such as women from racial or ethnic minorities, queer individuals, and people with disabilities, are particularly vulnerable to TFGBV. In many instances, the violence they face online is rooted in the same societal norms that drive violence against women more broadly, including patriarchal structures, misogyny, and discriminatory beliefs.

The intersection of race, gender, sexuality, and disability can intensify the risks of both TFGBV and femicide, with women from these groups often targeted more frequently and more violently, both online and offline. This form of violence often amplifies existing offline inequalities, creating an unsafe environment for women to express themselves or participate in public discourse.



[31]Kadurira, M (2024), 'Disrupting the Continuum of Violence: Combatting Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence', Womankind Worldwide
[32]ibid.



The Women's March in London in 2020

WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND LEADERSHIP (WPL)



Photo: Horia Mosadiq, Afghan Women's Rights Activist

Platforms and opportunities for women to lead and engage in development agendas at local, regional, and global levels have expanded since the adoption of the BPfA, fostering a more inclusive focus on issues affecting women across various spheres.

The goal of achieving equal representation and real political participation remains unmet, and persistent challenges, including GBV, economic inequality, and systemic discrimination, continue to underscore the need for sustained efforts in addressing intersectional inequalities.

Some countries, such as Rwanda and Nepal, have achieved significant representation of women in political leadership through gender quotas.

In Nepal, the constitutional provision for a minimum of 33% representation of women in local and federal government bodies has led to a landmark achievement of nearly 41% female representation in local elections, of which 6525 are Dalit women[33].

However, patriarchal norms and systemic discrimination continue to limit women's participation in decision-making processes globally.

For example; public and political leadership is regarded as a masculine attribute and in decision making spheres, men's notions and input are often valued above women who are expected to listen and concur with decisions made or ideas fronted.[34] Even when it comes to the political spheres, women are marginalized twice.

Firstly because they are women and secondly for daring to be being politicians which is not a role ascribed to them by society. Affluent women who are poised for leadership positions are often harshly judged by consideration of attributes such as beauty, respectability of private life, economic status and/or academic background.

[33]Clulo, M., (2017),' Marginalised women in Nepal are taking their place in local government',NEWS. Womankind Worldwide.
[34]Muray, N. R. (2014). Participation of women in peace building in Somalia: A case study of Mogadishu. International Peace Training Center.

Ethiopia's gender-parity cabinet, where women represented 50% of the cabinet[35], and with appointments such as Sahle-Work Zewde as the first female president, represents significant strides, and the UK has had three women prime ministers in recent decades.

Similarly, Uganda's gender quotas in parliament have enabled women to participate in governance. In Kenya, the 2010 Constitution introduced mechanisms to address historical gender disparities, which mandates that no more than two thirds of an elected body can be of the same gender; however, progress is slow[36] .

However, these advancements are not always an advancement for all women, as women leaders are not always in support of women's rights and are often anti-rights, anti-gender, and opposed to much of the work of feminist movements. Feminist analysis on this in recent years is bringing to the fore how arbitrary the focus on the numbers of women in leadership and decision-making positions is and calling for more meaningful measurement of women in leadership and decision-making.

The positionality of certain women in leadership positions does not always mean a win for all women. For example, in Nepal, despite constitutional provisions and advocacy for representation, Dalit women remain critically underrepresented in high-level decision-making roles.

Apart from a single Dalit woman in the National Dalit Commission, no Dalit women are represented in key National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) such as the National Women Commission or National Planning Commission. In Zimbabwe, the quota system that ensures that political parties put forward female members of parliament[37] , does not recognize or support the engagement of women with disabilities for example.

The feminist movement, more broadly, has moved beyond the traditional understanding of feminist leadership and political participation[38], beyond the numbers of women engaged in politics, for example, towards different understandings of political power and the way it manifests in women's and GNC folks' lives.

For example, Womankind's work on strengthening women's leadership and participation focused on transforming existing systems of discrimination through building WROs and movements to mobilise women and girls to influence decision-making and shape laws and practices.

Women's Rights and Feminist movements have played a key role in mentoring and developing women's leadership at local, regional, and national levels. For example, in Kenya, FIDA Kenya is a women's rights and feminist movement supporting and building the capacity of women parliamentarians, and in Zimbabwe[39] , the Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe (WCOZ) has been working with women to build their leadership skills.

SIHA Network[40] , a Womankind partner and sub- regional organization working in Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Kenya, Somaliland, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan has seen through their work that women's participation and leadership in local governance has led to transformative changes in inter-communal peace, meaningful negotiations, and addressing tensions over resources.

Many government bodies and departments have adopted critical policy tools such as gender-responsive budgeting or policy review with a gender lens, thanks to the leadership of feminist movements. They have been responsible for the establishment of gender departments within government and critical changes in law and policy to advance women's rights, for example, the SIHA Network was instrumental in South Sudan signing the Maputo Protocol[41] .



[35]Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed in 2018 announced a cabinet with women leading 50% of the portfolios. While the representation has decreased since then, women continue to hold important portfolios such as Minister of Defence. See
[36]CREAW (2019), 'Tracing the Journey towards implementation of the Two Thirds Gender Principle'.
[37]Women make up more than one-third of Zimbabwe's new Parliament
[38]Strengthening Women's Leadership and Participation, Womankind
[39] Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe - For further reading see here
[40]Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa - For further reading see here
[41] The Maputo Protocol is an international human rights instrument that protects the rights of women in Africa. See here



"POST-COLONIAL STATES HAVE COMPLETELY FAILED TO INCLUDE WOMEN IN THEIR DIVERSITY IN THE GOVERNANCE SYSTEM AND STRUCTURES. THAT WOULD BE REALLY IMPORTANT."

– HALA ALKARIB, SIHA NETWORK

Photo: Marta Gemeda from Siqqee, Ethiopia

Despite these gains, women parliamentarians and women in leadership positions, more broadly, are often overly scrutinised, given limited support, and any of their failings are attributed to their gender. While women are represented within government and in democratic governance structures, the system continues to be patriarchal, and feminist leaders from the majority world[42] , in particular, continue to face restrictions to participate in decision-making more meaningfully.

Sex workers, for example, are faced with various barriers that impede their political participation and safety, despite advocating for legal reforms and challenging societal prejudices being essential for sex workers to assert their political agency and demand equal representation[43].

National gender machinery and policies have strengthened in many contexts, but insufficient funding and politics hinder their effectiveness. Intersectional approaches are often lacking, resulting in inadequate inclusion of diverse groups of women[44]. Follow-up to global and multilateral accountability mechanisms such as for example, the Commission on the Status of Women, are lacking at the national level and often sit within inappropriate, inadequately equipped government departments.

Strengthening multilateral cooperation and holding states accountable are essential to preserving the BPfA's framework for action. Many feminists argue that gender mainstreaming can dilute feminist agendas and weaken comprehensive social justice initiatives by becoming bureaucratic and failing to advance transformative change.

[42]Majority World Initiative,Yale Law School
[43]Womankind, WIPSU, WCoZ (2024). 'Building Collective Power and Navigating a Women's Agenda: Feminist lessons on Adaptation, Resistance and Leadership from Women in Zimbabwe'.
[44]Gouws, A., & Madsen, D. H. (2021). Beijing +25. Agenda, 35(2), 3–17.

WOMEN'S ECONOMIC RIGHTS

There has been some progress on women's economic rights in recent years, including an increase in labour rights for women and the representation of women in the labour force. Increased efforts to reduce poverty among women have included targeted microfinance initiatives for women and conditional cash transfer programs, many of which are highlighted in national Beijing+30 reports.

However, cash transfer programs and microfinance initiatives usually stem from neoliberal economic frameworks that emphasize individual responsibility over structural transformation, and in some cases, have been shown to increase domestic violence where men's subscription to beliefs around traditional cultural norms around gender make them reluctant to accept women's control of money in the household[45].

Many feminists argue that the burden of addressing and alleviating poverty is shifted to women through these programs and fails to challenge the various systemic and structural issues that contribute to increasing poverty, such as wage inequality, weak social protection systems, and GBV.

For example, women in rural areas might get microloans but have no access to land, resources, inheritance, infrastructure, markets, or the legal framework necessary for long-term economic empowerment. Women account for less than 40% of owners or rights-bearers for agricultural land in 32 out of 49 countries with data[46].

Microfinance often results in women taking on loans without adequate support systems or financial education, leading to cycles of debt. Rates and repayment pressures that come with microfinance can also exacerbate financial insecurity, with women sometimes resorting to selling assets or reducing consumption to repay loans.



Photo: Anne Agar, Managing Director, Polycom Girls, Kenya

[45] Sinha, D., & Kumar, P. (2022). Trick or Treat: Does a Microfinance Loan Induce or Reduce the Chances of Spousal Violence against Women? Answers from India. Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 37(7-8), NP4030-NP4056.
[46] Gender Snapshot (2024), UN Women

Whilst cash transfer programs and microfinance initiatives can provide important short-term relief, feminist critiques emphasize the need for holistic, intersectional approaches that address and dismantle structural inequalities and systemic barriers.

An example is Kenya's Women Enterprise Fund[47] which provides loans for women to become entrepreneurs. However, loans are given under very strict liability norms, which have led to women losing their collaterals. Over time, CSOs have advocated training on financial management, developing proposals, a more lenient grace period, better loan terms, and support with registering businesses.

Economic disparities in the context of an extractive and exploitative neoliberal system remain a formidable and enduring obstacle, with women still disproportionately affected by poverty, unemployment, and precarious work. In recent decades, the feminist movement has shared reflections, analysis, and critique of how the neoliberal economic order has been a major challenge to realizing the BPfA[48] .

In contexts where austerity is or has been a dominant fiscal policy, women's economic empowerment is often impacted because of the increased unpaid care work taken up by them when public services are cut[49] . Women are more likely than men to be employed in public sector work and so face increased loss of livelihood in austerity contexts[50], and are more likely to be impacted by cuts to health and education services.

Most unregulated informal and precarious forms of employment disproportionately represent women, where mechanisms that recognise the needs and protect migrants, domestic workers, LGBTQI+, and women with disabilities, etc., from violence and discrimination are often missing. Globally, women earn on average considerably lower wages, enjoy fewer, or no social benefits at all, and take on most caregiving responsibilities.

The World Bank and International Monetary Fund loan conditionalities encourage states to rely on the privatisation of services, to raise funds to service their debts leading to profit-driven services that do not meet the needs of women and other marginalised groups as publicly owned public services would. Additionally, regressive taxation disproportionately impacts women as they are more likely to spend their incomes buying basic goods on behalf of their families[51] .

To make up for income and corporate tax revenue shortfalls caused by corporate tax abuse[52], governments tend to resort to regressive taxation, such as consumption taxes that disproportionately impact women[53]. In recent years, feminists have been calling for the reform of the global tax system as an essential element of addressing and redressing historical injustices, including those related to gender disparities. Feminists also continue to call for debt relief and cancellation to address the current flawed development finance landscape.

[47]"The Women Enterprise Fund will continue to provide Kenyan women with access to alternative financial services. It is expected that the loans women will access as a result of the establishment of the fund will have a positive impact on family welfare." (Kenya Vision 2030)
[48]Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (2020), '25-Year Review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action - APWLD Regional CSO Submission'.
[49]ActionAid International (2022), The Care Contradiction: The IMF, Gender and Austerity
[50]Gender and Development Network (2018). 'The impact of Austerity on Women'(Submission to the Independent Expert on foreign debt and human rights on the links and the impact of economic reforms and austerity measures on women's human rights)
[51]Global Alliance for Tax Justice, Gender & Development Network, Akina Mama Wa Afrika, Womankind Worldwide, NAWI (2021), 'Framing Feminist Taxation - With Examples from Uganda'.
[52]Mansour, M.B.,(2024), 'World losing half a trillion to tax abuse, largely due to 8 countries blocking UN tax reform, annual report finds'., Tax Justice Network
[53]Wahono, A.,Tobin K., (2024), 'Towards Economic and Climate Justice - A Feminist Analysis of Critical Trends', Feminist Action Nexus for Economic and Climate Justice.



Stock photo: An Afghan woman in Afghanistan



INTERSECTING AREAS- PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES

Photo: 3rd person from right- Shyleen Momanyi, Executive Director, Young Women's Leadership Institute with colleagues

ACCESS TO EDUCATION

There have been significant strides toward greater enrolment of girls in primary and secondary education as well as improving literacy rates among women around the globe[54] . However, challenges ranging from poverty to harmful practices alongside conflict remain wide-ranging in restricting progress in various regions including South Asia and Africa.

In Afghanistan, for example, the Taliban's 'Vice and Virtue Order' has rolled back two decades of progress, including in education, where education of girls after 12 has been forbidden[55].

Despite great progress made with education, for example, in some countries such as Nepal, the achievement of gender parity at primary school[56] is belied by persistent cultural and economic barriers to advancement.

For example, although the government of Nepal has officially banned the chhaupadi taboo[57], an illegal ancient tradition that entails banishing young girls, to mud huts or sheds for the duration of their period, to avoid bringing 'bad luck' to the family. Young rural women and girls are still being held back because of chhaupadi or other similar socio-economic obstacles in their access to a continuum of education.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS

CASE STUDY

Polycom Girls, in partnership with Womankind Worldwide, launched the Siri Ya Mwezi comic book under the #MyPeriodt! Campaign. The initiative was designed to promote inclusive dialogue on menstrual health and advocate for its integration into school curricula.

The comic serves as an educational tool for adolescents, communities, health providers, and policymakers, focusing on menstrual health and the importance of menstrual equity.

This creative approach addresses the barriers that prevent girls from fully participating in education and social activities during their menstrual cycle, aiming to create a more supportive and inclusive environment.

Through this project, Polycom Girls and Womankind Worldwide are working towards ensuring that menstrual health is recognized as a critical part of adolescent well-being and education.

Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) programmes, such as free menstrual hygiene products and improved maternal healthcare, show what can be achieved through integrated approaches to reach broader goals in gender equality. Maternal mortality rates have declined globally, although progress has stalled and reversed in some countries[58], and access to reproductive health services has expanded in many countries.

However, there has been significant regression and rollback of SRHR[59] in many countries, including access to safe abortion and comprehensive SRHR services, as well as sexuality education, access to contraceptives, and other services, especially those services for adolescents and young people and marginalised communities such as sex workers, trans and GNC persons, and migrant communities.

Disparities remain in rural and underserved areas, where access to essential healthcare services is limited, particularly for marginalised groups such as LGBTQI+ individuals and women with disabilities. For example, the Termination of Pregnancy Act (1977) in Zimbabwe is from colonial times and is extremely restrictive, allows for abortion only under certain circumstances, and requires conditions such as access to a government doctor.

[54] GEM Report (2020), UNESCO https:/gem-report-2020.unesco.org/gender-report/progress-towards-gender-parity-in-education-is-undeniable/
[55] Rahmani, M. (2024) 'The Taliban's 'Vice and Virtue' Order', NEWS - WomanKind Worldwide.
[56] UNESCO (2019), 'Defending girls' right to education in Nepal' (Updated in 2023)
[57] Chhaupadi is an ancient tradition practised in some rural parts of Nepal. It involves banishing people, often young girls, to mud huts or sheds for the duration of their period,
[58] Suzuki, E., Kouame, C., Mills, S. (2023), 'Progress in reducing maternal mortality has stagnated and we are not on track to achieve the SDG target: new UN report', World Bank - Blogs.
[59] Gender & Development Network (2023), 'Resisting the rollback on women's and girls' rights- Considerations and entry points for action for the UK government', Briefings.

This makes access to abortion extremely limited. As shared by Womankind partner, Deaf Women Included, women with disabilities are doubly affected as they are not aware of their right to access abortion or about the process because they do not have education or access to information, yet they are most vulnerable to abuse and early and forced pregnancies.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change has introduced new challenges, with women bearing the brunt of environmental disasters and resource scarcity. As climate-related displacement grows, women and girls are more vulnerable to human trafficking, sexual violence, and loss of livelihoods [60].

Climate change also poses health risks to women, particularly in low-income regions where access to health care, clean water, sanitation, and healthy food is a challenge. When their social and economic rights are violated, women also become less able to adapt to climate change and broader ecological destruction[61].

Feminist groups and environmental activists are increasingly calling for more and more gender-responsive climate policies that address these interconnected concerns, emphasising inclusive policies that consider the unique challenges faced by women in climate-affected regions.

Women's leadership in environmental sustainability has grown, particularly in grassroots climate movements, however, women remain underrepresented in decision-making roles in environmental policy, and their unique vulnerabilities to climate change are often overlooked.

The risks of violence and other violations towards Women Environmental Human Rights Defenders (WEHRDs) have increased, faced with specific forms of GBV and discrimination, as well as growing backlash against their role and work to protect and defend land, water, natural resources, and territories, against extraction, climate change, and harms[62].

IMPACT OF COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic and its impacts further exacerbated gender inequalities in recent years and exposed weaknesses in chronically underfunded public health and social systems, which are now less able to meet the needs of women and girls.

The pandemic led to increased GBV, with lockdowns trapping many women in unsafe environments, for example, in Kenya, cases of GBV against women and girls increased by 55% following the COVID pandemic[63]. Economically, women were disproportionately affected by job losses, as they were more likely to work in sectors hardest hit by the crisis, such as service industries and informal labour, as well as being among those most at risk due to their overrepresentation in the health and care sectors.

The pandemic also increased the criminalisation of health, which has had a disproportionate impact on women and stretched health systems shifted resources away from essential services, including maternal health care.

The pandemic saw the propensity of governments around the world towards the use of punitive measures and restrictions related to social contact, exposure, transmission, and movement–including travel and curfew, in addressing the pandemic, with disproportionate use of measures often used against the most marginalised communities[64].

[60] EngenderHealth and Women's Earth Alliance (2024), 'Women on the Frontlines: Climate Change, Gender-Based Violence, and Reproductive Rights'. Engender Health.
[61] Wahono, A.,Tobin K., (2024), 'Towards Economic and Climate Justice – A Feminist Analysis of Critical Trends'. Feminist Action Nexus for Economic and Climate Justice.
[62] UN Women (2024), Brief: Women environmental human rights defenders.
[63] AWESOME Consortium (2024), 'Safe at Work, Safe in Society - A guide for advocacy efforts in order to ratify convention 190 in Kenya, Uganda and Ethiopia'.
[64] Resurj (2021), 'THE CRIMINALIZATION OF A PANDEMIC A CROSS-REGIONAL FEMINIST ANALYSIS'.

GENDER BACKLASH

One of the most significant challenges faced by feminist movements and WROs working on GBV in recent years is the rise of authoritarianism, anti-rights, fundamentalism, and conservatism[65], and a deprioritizing of women's rights, which has fueled a backlash against women's rights, LGBTQI+ rights, and civil society organizing. This has increased the repression of feminist movements through violence, shutting down of civic space, detention, and state surveillance.

> "THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY SHOULD ACCEPT AND RECOGNISE HOW ALL THESE GRASSROOTS LEVEL FEMINIST MOVEMENTS WHO HAVE BEEN ADVANCING GENDER EQUALITY IN AFGHANISTAN HAS BEEN ERASED EASILY AND HOW EASILY THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY HAS FORGOTTEN EVERYTHING."
>
> – MARYAM RAHMANI, WOMANKIND STAFF

The impact of the gender backlash can be seen through overt forms, such as the shrinking of civic space and loss of gender-based rights, such as the Anti-Homosexuality Act 2023 in Uganda or the global gag rule by the US Government[66].

It can also use discursive strategies and delegitimise wins such as the 'Prostitution and Violence Against Women' report by the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women and Girls that identifies 'prostitution' as a cause and consequence of violence against women and delegitimising sex work[67] .

CASE STUDY

Programmes like NAPE's Nyinabwenge—meaning Mother of Knowledge—community radio project have helped change societal attitudes.

The program enabled women to confidently take part in community matters by providing a platform for discussion of issues such as women's rights, GBV, economic empowerment, and health. The impact of this platform goes beyond the women; it also extends to the men and the community at large, forcing them to question discriminatory practices and stand up for gender equality.



Photo: Vera Machera, Programme Officer, Women Challenged to Challenge, Kenya

[65]The Observatory on the Universality of Rights (2021), 'Rights at Risk- Time for Action', Trends Report
[66] "The global gag rule prohibits foreign nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) who receive U.S. global health assistance from providing legal abortion services or referrals, while also barring advocacy for abortion law reform—even if it's done with the NGO's own, non-U.S. funds." (for further reading see)
[67]Fried, S. T., Miller, A. M., Mallik, R., Radačić, I., & Restrepo-Saldarriaga, E. (2024). The (mis)use of evidence in contested rights: commentary on the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls' report on "prostitution and violence." Sexual and Reproductive Health Matters, 32(1).



Photo: Young women at the She Leads Forum in Nairobi that works to provide mentorship and coaching for upcoming leaders

CALLS TO ACTION

Violence Against Women and Girls, Women's Economic Rights, Women in Leadership and Decision-Making



GOVERNMENTS AND POLICY MAKERS

1.Strengthen policy frameworks and ensure full implementation of existing gender equality laws and policies, with adequate funding and institutional capacity.

2.Commit increased and sufficient budgets to gender equality efforts, especially in underserved areas and for marginalised communities.

3.Urgently implement comprehensive actions to eliminate GBV by strengthening legal frameworks, ensuring full implementation of existing laws, and committing substantial, sustained funding for GBV prevention and survivor support services.

4.Champion publicly funded public services that meet women's needs, progressive taxation and the reform of the global taxation system, and the implementation of legislation mandating workplace protections, such as International Labor Convention 190 (ILO190).

5.Implement progressive taxation systems that fund women-centered public services, such as affordable childcare, healthcare, and housing, ensuring that economic policies are designed to address the unique needs and barriers faced by women in the workforce.

6. Implement policies that enforce gender quotas and take concrete steps to increase the representation of women in leadership roles at all levels of decision-making, both in the public and private sectors, while ensuring a safe, and harassment-free environment.

7.Strengthen national gender machineries with a focus on intersectionality to address the diverse needs of all women, including LGBTQI+, women with disabilities, and Indigenous women.

WOMEN'S RIGHTS ORGANISATIONS (WROS) AND CIVIL SOCIETY

1. Advocate for comprehensive and survivor-centred approaches to tackle GBV, going beyond punitive measures to include restorative justice and support systems.

2. Safeguard feminist activists and leaders, as well as WHRDs and WEHRDs, from violence and harassment through robust protective measures.

3. Invest in research, conduct mixed-method, real-time research to demonstrate the positive impacts of women's leadership and document their contributions at family, community, and national levels.

4. Disaggregate and analyse a Gendered-Data Collection to monitor progress, identify gaps, and inform policy and program development.

5. Support and expand leadership development programs for women, including mentorship, networking, and skill-building opportunities, to ensure they can ascend to leadership positions in both the public and private sectors.

INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND DONORS

1. Provide funding for research and programmes into alternative response and redress of GBV, including community-led initiatives and survivor-centered programs.

2. Increase investment in advancing women's economic rights programmes, supporting women's entrepreneurship, access to finance, and equal employment opportunities.

3. Support initiatives that promote women's leadership, including funding leadership development programmes, mentorship, and networking opportunities to help women advance in decision-making roles.

INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITIES

1. Offer direct support to feminist activists, ensuring their safety and well-being.

2. Individuals, communities, and local leaders can adopt intersectionality as a framework for understanding and addressing the unique challenges of the most marginalised groups in their societies.

3. Foster an environment where women's economic rights are recognised by supporting women entrepreneurs, advocating for workplace equality, and ensuring equal access to education and training opportunities that can lead to financial independence.

4. Actively mentor and provide guidance to young women and girls, encouraging them to take on leadership roles in both formal and informal settings, and helping to break down barriers that prevent women from reaching leadership positions.

5. Participate in the fight against GBV by promoting zero-tolerance attitudes, supporting survivors, and demanding accountability for perpetrators.



Photo: Zertihun Tefera, Executive Director, Siqqee, Ethiopia

FEMINIST FUNDING



In recent years, global commitments to multilateralism have waned[68], weakening international support for the BPfA's goals. This decline, compounded by nationalism and corporate and private sector influence in UN processes[69], has limited the accountability mechanisms necessary to enforce gender equality commitments.

As countries prioritise national interests, fuelled by the shift to the right-wing, authoritarianism, and pushback on feminist advocacy and organising that we see globally, as well as pulling back engagement and funding for multilateral mechanisms and agreements and reduction of development assistance or increase in conditionalities that serve the interests of the Global North, the BPfA's progress remains threatened at all levels.

Currently, less than 1% of global development aid is allocated directly to women's rights organisations[70], with even less reaching grassroots feminist movements in the Global South.

This lack of funding stalls initiatives that impact economic empowerment, education, and addressing GBV.

Without sustained funding, the capacity of women's organisations to advocate for and implement BPfA goals is substantially compromised. Despite feminists' calls for funders to see the COVID-19 pandemic as a critical moment for increasing support for feminist organisations, and the development of instruments such as the Generation Equality Forum (GEF), Action Coalitions (ACs)[71] and similar tools that have been developed to advance gender equality on a global scale, much remains to be done to fill the gaps.

In recent years, feminist funders and funding models have had to adapt to and navigate various shifting political, social, and economic landscapes whilst addressing the needs of their grantees, who face dwindling funds and increasing backlash.

> "THEY (DONORS) ALSO DO NOT THINK HOW THE WORLD WOULD BE DARK AND MISERABLE WITHOUT WOMEN'S ACTIVISM FOR EQUALITY."
>
> – WOMANKIND PARTNER, GREAT HORN OF AFRICA.

The complex landscape of funding has been impacted in recent years by a notable reduction in private philanthropy as well as Official Development Assistance (ODA). ODA funding that was already chronically underfunding gender equality, especially considering that gender equality is a 'principal objective' of ODA, remains at only 4% of all bilateral ODA[72] and faces ongoing cuts and questioning.

For example, in 2022, the UK reduced its aid budget to 0.5% of GNI for the first time since 2013, a real-term reduction of 50%[73]. In 2025, and as this report is published, UK has announced rise in military spending by 2.5% of GDP by 2027, with further cuts in the aid budget from 0.5% to 0.3% of GDP[74].

[68]United Nations (2024), There Are 'Alarming Signs Multilateralism Has Run Out of Steam', First Committee Hears as General Debate Enters Second Week', Meetings Coverage, General Assembly - Seventy Ninth Session, GA/DIS/3740
[69]Marmo, E. (2022). We Get the UN We Fund, Not the UN We Need. Global Policy Forum, Rosa Luxembourg Stiftung, New York
[70]Dolker, T. (2021), 'Where is the Money for Feminist Organizing? - Data Snapshots and A Call to Action', AWID.
[71]For Action Coalitions see -
[72]Lever, E., Miller, K., Staszewska,K. (2020). Moving More Money to Drivers of Change: How Bilateral and Multilateral Funders Can Resource Feminist Movements. AWID and Mama Cash with support from the Count Me In! Consortium
[73] Douch, M., Edwards, H., Landman, T., Mallick, S., (2022). Aid effectiveness: Human rights as a conditionality measure. World Development, Volume 158,105978, ISSN 0305-750X.
[74]Crerar P and Stacey K, Starmer Announces Big Cut to UK Aid Budget to Boost Defence Spending, The Guardian, Published on 25th February 2025.

In addition, the new US administration is already making significant and devastating cuts to its aid budget and programs. In recent years, only 8% of all private philanthropy for development targeted gender, while Black feminist movements only receive somewhere between 0.1% and 0.35% of annual grant dollars from US foundations[75] .

In November 2024, the Dutch government announced plans to cut funding for civil society globally through development funding by 1 billion Euros in the next 5 years, which feminist movements fear will have a devasting impact on gender equality programmes[76].

This is further compounded by existing funding restrictions from Global North governments and the veiled conditionalities of partnerships and funding that underpin ODA. Whilst not explicitly implemented or part of aid agreements, as they were in the 90s, restrictions, and conditionalities are still active through, for example, assistance/ aid-related human rights and foreign policy conditionalities, and by the long history of colonialism and patriarchy that is seen in foreign policy and aid policy more generally. Histories that continue to impact women through imperialism, neoliberalism, and the 'corporatisation of aid[77]' Similarly, restrictions in the form of compulsory registration, review of foreign funds, etc, have impacted grantees and recipients in more recent years.

We have seen an increased commitment to and implementation of what has been coined 'feminist foreign policy'[78] by Global North governments.

However, these policies continue to be implemented within an extractive and neoliberal framework, where the resources that continue to be taken and gained by Global North governments in the form of illicit financial flows, mining[79], extraction, and land, for example, significantly outweigh the assistance received by recipient countries.

Whilst there has been a narrow increase in funding for VAWG in recent years, much of this funding is focused on prevention rather than the full cycle of violence and lacks the understanding or mechanisms to address GBV. It often does not support certain approaches, initiatives, or organisations that address the response and redress of violence in a way that centres the needs of survivors and communities[80] or is rooted in restorative justice as opposed to criminalisation and punitive response.

Inaccessible funding application procedures and opportunities for gender equality have created a culture of competition for limited resources. Competition within feminist movements very often compromises collective efforts, and donor fatigue leads to declining contribution, support, and donations, further exacerbating competition for resources.

In the case of funding that is specifically allocated to certain groups, funders are often more comfortable funding larger organisations than supporting smaller groups this leads to the siphoning of funds away from the intended target groups, and mainstream feminist WROs often use those with intersectional identities to gain access to reserved pots of funding.

The vast difference between funding for feminist and LGBTQI+ organisations, compared to the funding being invested in anti-rights and anti-gender movements, is staggering.

When it comes to anti-LGBTQI+ funding, figures indicate that for 2021-2022, just three anti-LGBTQI+ organisations reported $1 billion income compared to 8,000 global LGBTQI+ grantees receiving $905 million between them[81]. To counter the scale of anti-rights funding that is being invested globally, especially in countries such as Uganda and Kenya, it is estimated that a minimum of $6 billion[82] in additional resources for feminist funds is required by 2026.

Many donors continue to fail to consider intersectionality, for example, with many women's rights donors and funders viewing disability-focused initiatives as being a separate 'stream' for funding, undermining feminist principles of inclusivity and disability justice.

This is part of a broader issue within the feminist movement where Women with Disabilities report feeling excluded, through both omission in funding and program planning, but also through deliberate exclusion and siloing, lack of budget and funding, or being considered not part of the women's and feminist movement[83] .

[75]Tant, E., Michalko,J., (2024), 'Why donors must finance feminist movements', Boosting gender equality with finance and fiscal policy- Blog Series, ODI- Global.
[76]First development budget cuts announced: overhaul of grants for NGOs- Government of the Netherlands
[77]Price,M., Sayegh, G., Viana,M., Uribe,O., (2017). 'Cut the Strings: Bodily Autonomy Needs Sustainable Funding', Disrupted Journal- Feminist Foreign Policy
[78] centre for Feminist Foreign Policy, (2022). 'Policy Brief A Feminist Foreign Policy Response to COVID-19'.
[79] NAPE, NAWAD, Womankind Worldwide, UK AID (2021), 'Reimagining the Future Beyond Extractives: A paper with and for the Ecofeminist movement in Uganda to outline potential for transformative change'.
[80] Mahajan,A., Fried, S., and Cordeiro, I., (2023), 'Flaws in Laws-Challenging Criminalization of Young People's Bodily Autonomy (South Asia)' CREA.
[81]Global Resources Report (2024)
[82]Global Philanthropy Project (2020), 'MEET THE MOMENT: A Call for Progressive Philanthropic Response to the Anti-Gender Movement'
[83]AWESOME Consortium (2023), 'DISABILITY AND INCLUSION IN THE CONTEXT OF FEMINISM AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS MOVEMENTS.'

As a colleague from Deaf Women Included pointed out, often mainstream WROs use their access to donors to pitch for funds reserved for disability justice. To ensure they are considered they will work with an activist or create a tokenistic partnership with disability justice organisation as well. However, when it comes to implementation the activist, or the disability justice organisation gets a very small proportion of the funding.

CASE STUDY

It is critical to navigate the power differentials in forming partnerships and working across Global North and the South. For example, in Afghanistan, before the Taliban took over in 2021, around 2018, INGOs and UN agencies started implementing projects on their own with a dire impact on trust building and sustainable programming. For example, local organisations while implementing women's economic empowerment programs and working with limited resources would often require local women's groups to make a percentage contribution to the capital they are acquiring for the program (for example: a sewing machine bought with a 20% contribution from the women themselves). This also aided sustainability because it helped women understand that contributions had to be made to maintain the capital good; they also trained members from the community to implement the project to ensure sustainability.

The INGOs would come into these spaces, would not conduct an assessment or propose collaboration with local organisations. Instead, they would hand out attractively designed kits and free capital goods. This would almost create a competition with the program the local organisation is conducting and since their program is more lucrative, the beneficiaries would all go to them. The INGO would then conduct a project for about 8 months and leave with almost no phasing out or sustainability plan. The community would be ill-equipped to maintain the capital goods acquired or sustain the project. They would then expect local organisations to give out similar resources or lose trust in such projects because of their previous experience. According to the Womankind staff from Afghanistan, these interventions harmed more than helped the work on women's rights.

Complicated application processes set by governments, with burdensome requirements, lengthy and complex applications, reporting schedules, and tight deadlines, disadvantage many of the communities and groups that need the most support and face the most significant barriers. Changing priorities and target groups, by government donors and often based on changing political landscapes nationally, hinder sustainable action and progress.

Some barriers in the forms of compulsory registration, tiresome compliance requirements, and monitoring in-flow of money, lead to fewer opportunities for funding, restricted funding, and a delay in receipt of funds etc. For example, the Private Voluntary Organisations Amendment Bill 2024 proposed in Zimbabwe which requires compulsory registration, claims to monitor foreign funding regarding potential risks to terrorism, financing, and political lobbying.

In recent years, feminist funders have begun to reshape the funding eco-system[84] and made strides in filling the gap left by the reduction in ODA, reductions in private philanthropy, and funding for gender equality more broadly, as well as the impact of anti-rights, anti-gender, and right-wing gains on funding.

They have centred on healing, care, and well-being and have been questioning and addressing the challenges of traditional funding models and deconstructing, rebuilding, and reshaping the practices and approaches to funding[85].

These funders are often implementing funding models that are rooted in the principles of accessibility, inclusivity, responsiveness, and flexibility, and they centre and acknowledge movements, intersectionality, and the diverse needs of feminist organisations and grassroots initiatives, enabling a focus on more localised, context-specific solutions.

New exciting funding models, coalitions and approaches are emerging. These include Phenomenal Funds, the Black Feminist Fund and Womankind's flexible funding mechanisms including Her Voice Fund[86] , The Movement Strengthening Fund and, Strategic Partner Support Grants, The APC's Exploring Feminist #Tech Joy and coalitions of grantees and funders such as Prospera INWF.

[84] Arutyunova, A., Doherty,A., Hessini, L. (2024). 'Resourcing Feminist Movements: Provocations for the Future'. Proximate.
[85] Van Deven, M., 'Moving money, building movements: An expansive horizon of possibilities'. Alliance Magazine.
[86] Womankind Worldwide - 'Her Voice Fund' see
[87] Bofu-Tawamba, N., Bright, R., Clohesy, S., et.al., 'Trust-based Philanthropy'. The Uprising of Women in Philanthropy.

Feminist funders have begun adopting practices of trust-based philanthropy[87] as well as flexible application and reporting processes for many women's rights organisations, feminist organisations, activists, and informal groups, in particular those in the Global South, struggling to access traditional funds and without the resources to meet the robust eligibility requirements and application processes[88] .

CASE STUDY

Womankind's Movement Strengthening fund provides flexible funds to women's rights and feminist organisations for their work to strengthen intersectional feminist movements in their own contexts and transnationally. The fund supports feminist movements to achieve national, regional and global policy and legal change and social norm change. Womankind believes that initiatives that solely focus on achieving the end goals of feminist movements often miss an opportunity to strengthen the processes of movement-building. The MSF has been designed to strengthen relational dynamics of feminist movements so that the resulting collective actions can be more impactful.

Feminist movements need the autonomy to set their agendas and address issues holistically because concern-based project models often miss the interrelation of challenges that communities face.

[88]Womankind Worldwide (2024), 'A feminist convening on flexible funds in Kenya.'

Thematic approaches, while well-intentioned, often don't resonate at the grassroots level, and feminists in recent decades have increased their calls for flexible funding that allows for locally relevant and context-specific interventions. Movements need to invest in the nurturing of young feminist leadership, which is critical for collective organizing and long-term progress.

Significant gaps remain in meeting the needs of feminist movements and organisations, which limit the possibilities for accountability, collaboration, and transformational engagement.

Feminist funders face having to ensure greater accountability, intersectionality, decolonizing approaches, ensuring inclusivity, and maintaining political integrity and feminist principles whilst scaling the work and being intentional and reflexive in the process.

Strengthening the movement has also expanded to include a focus on practices around care, suggesting growing recognition of the emotional and physical toll of feminist organising. By integrating care into the very fabric of philanthropic efforts and movement-building strategies, feminist movements are building resiliency and sustainability, ensuring that both individuals and organisations can thrive.

CALLS TO ACTION - FUNDING

1. Prioritise direct funding to grassroots feminist organisations in the Global South.
2. Prioritise long-term, core, and flexible funding for feminist movements.
3. Provide a sustainable and flexible funding to grassroots feminist organizations and groups including support for disability justice initiatives led by disabled women and informal groups and movements, through a feminist and trust-based approach, ensuring broad support for responsive, intersectional feminist movements.
4. Feminist movements play a more central role in decisions around funding to address their identified needs through participatory grant making processes.
5. Move away from one-size-fits-all funding models and support locally driven, context-specific gender equality initiatives.

CASE STUDY

The FCDO funded project they implemented by Womankind Worldwide with three partners in Nepal between October 2019 - September 2022. The project received GBP. 1 million for developing women's partnership and leadership. From the onset the project faced multiple challenges, especially the COVID - 19 pandemic; there was very limited space for in-person work and due to COVID-19 partners were also facing health crises and in some cases death.

The three partners had not worked with each other before and were placed in a remote province of Nepal. However, the strong trust-based partnership that Womankind practices allowed them to be partner-led and practice flexibility with accountability. They managed to move their work onto WhatsApp groups and zoom rooms and keep an open line of communication.

They identified the objectives they could tweak and achieve, and ones they could not. Womankind then advocated with the donor for the flexibility the partners needed in terms of objectives of the work and compliance. Even though they were granted limited flexibility, they managed to finish the project, achieve all their objectives, and score well on their success indicators.

FEMINIST MOVEMENTS



Feminist movements have evolved to address the interlinked nature of social justice issues. While siloed thematic approaches preferred by donors and governments often fail to resonate locally, grassroots-led initiatives and consortiums have created safe spaces for intergenerational and inclusive collaboration, learning, and accountability that consider the full realities and experiences of women's lives.

Feminist movements often push for strong grassroots connections in sustaining movements although power dynamics between WROs can mean this can get overlooked in favour of organising that is led by more influential women's rights leaders with more resources. As a result, grassroots movements in the Global South, have exemplified resilience and adaptability, particularly in addressing threats and backlash in increasingly restrictive environments.

Feminist movements and activists face significant pushback in their work from shrinking civic spaces, militarised environments, regressive laws and donor disinterest, with their efforts undervalued by international and mainstream organizations.

This struggle on multiple fronts can result in burnout, rendering collective care and solidarity essential for maintaining progress. The marginalisation of LGBTQI+ individuals, women with disabilities, sex workers, and rural women is replicated often in feminist movements, where these movements fail to integrate intersectionality, and many with multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, are not in positions of power or leadership.

THE FEMINIST MOVEMENT IS STRONG AND DOES WORK COLLECTIVELY ACROSS ISSUES HOWEVER, "WHEN IT COMES TO THE RESULTS SOME WILL BENEFIT MORE THAN THE OTHERS"

– AGNESS CHINDIMBA, DEAF WOMEN INCLUDED

Many women's rights organisations, especially ones that work in restrictive environments, often face significant risks. As a Womankind partner pointed out, people working at the grassroots are easily accessible, their information is easily available, and which makes them very vulnerable to backlash from government and other actors.

Multiple partners expressed how within strong feminist partnerships where power dynamics are more equitably balanced the partners with more power, step up to absorb risks. This could be in the form of flexibility in compliance to reporting from a partner whose identity is criminalised in their sphere of work, or a mainstream feminist organisation sharing resources to a partner with criminalised identities.

In recent decades, transnational feminist movements have been reclaiming space in multilateral advocacy mechanisms and processes, which has also led to a shift in the demographic of participation at key global spaces on women's human rights, such as the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), the Commission on Population and Development (CPD), CEDAW, and other related spaces such as Conference of Parties (COP), High-Level Political Forum, etc, as feminist from the Global South take the lead on feminist organising and advocacy.

The continued shrinking of civic spaces around the world linked to the rise of authoritarian and conservative governments poses one of the major challenges to the effectiveness of feminist advocacy. Feminist leaders and WROs increasingly face resistance in their engagement and leadership, as evidenced by declining participation at forums such as the CSW due to multiple factors such as visa barriers, lack of funding, increased threats from governments and anti-rights movements, safety and security challenges.

WCOZ in Zimbabwe have expanded their movement (which is multi-thematic) to various new districts in the country. This has led to not only a wider, more intersectional movement but also greater relevance of women's realities that has been fed directly into advocacy by the WCOZ. In this way, anchor organisations like the WCOZ are critical to grassroots movement building and sustainability.

Intergenerational and inter-movement conflicts within the feminist movement, alongside replication of patriarchal structures, underscore the need for reflexivity, power and privilege analysis and accountability within feminist organising, and the need for building spaces for healing, mental health support, and care within these movements is increasingly recognised as vital for their sustainability.

It demands incorporating care work in general organising strategies so that feminist activists can navigate the emotional and psychological tolls of their work.

It also points toward the need for intentional intergenerational mentorship, critical self-reflection, feminist storytelling and documentation of struggles in the interest of facilitating knowledge transfer.

Feminist movements are reimagining and supporting new strategies and accountability approaches, challenging traditional and patriarchal forms of power and leadership. These strategies include transformative feminist leadership, new models of rotational and co-leadership, linking leadership to collective and self-care, redefining leadership and partnership, and prioritizing the collective strength and values of feminist movements over individual or organizational power.

The strategies are focused on an understanding of power and positionality, of mutual accountability and care, fostering intersectional and transformative leadership that disrupts and transforms the status quo and that integrates principles of collective and self-care.

CASE STUDY

The Participation and Opportunities for Women's Economic Rights (POWER) Project, which was co-led by Womankind's Ugandan partners, NAPE and NAWAD, and Womankind, exemplifies how ecofeminist principles can be applied to advocacy. The project opposed land grabs, supported alternative livelihoods for those affected, and demonstrated a non-extractive approach to feminist movement building.

Research stemming from this work not only provided actionable recommendations for feminists joining the movement90 but also proposed concrete steps for governments to sustain and support these efforts. This dual strategy of grassroots advocacy and policy influence highlights the effectiveness of integrating ecofeminist values into broader feminist agendas.



Photo: Dibabe Bacha, Executive Director, Ethiopian Women with Disabilities National Association

CALLS TO ACTION- FEMINIST MOVEMENTS

1. Foster inclusive and intersectional frameworks that challenge patriarchy by addressing the interconnected realities of gender, race, class, disability, and sexual orientation etc.

2. Prioritise grassroot organising and ensure that local voices shape agendas and strategies.

3. Build reflexive practices to increase awareness of and confront power imbalances and patriarchal structures within movements, ensuring accountability and inclusivity;

4. Build reflexive practices to confront power imbalances and patriarchal structures within movements, ensuring accountability and inclusivity.

5. Develop strategies to operate effectively in shrinking civic spaces, such as leveraging digital tools and creating safe spaces for advocacy and collaboration.

6. Nurture inclusive and intersectional frameworks that bring to the fore the interlocking experiences of gender, race, class, disability, and sexual orientation amongst other areas in specific contexts. Stress grassroots organising and ensure that local perspectives drive agendas and strategies.

7. Develop strategies that allow for effective action in restricted civic spaces, such as leveraging digital spaces and creating safe spaces for activism and collaboration.

8. Prioritise healing and mental health spaces to create care-driven and sustainable efforts.

9. Building the capacities of feminist leaders, especially young and marginalised leaders, with sustained training and programmatic support; supporting grassroots women's organisations in decision-making and policy implementation.

10. Strengthen partnerships and ensure constant dialogue among governments, CSOs, NGOs, and feminist movements.

11. Leverage international organisations and allies to seek government accountability with respect to gender equality mandates in line with the BPFA. Continued public awareness and mobilisation that challenge destructive practices, norms, and values.

CASE STUDY

Feminists for a Binding Treaty

This international coalition, with members from the Global South and North, has been working to negotiate a treaty to stop corporate harm for more than ten years. While no binding treaty has yet emerged, the coalition has secured major milestones, including the incorporation of critical human rights language and provisions for due diligence, victim remedies, and corporate accountability. However, the gains made are precarious since recent debates have brought hard-won language into jeopardy.

The lack of hybrid options for meetings and last-minute changes to meeting dates—including the yearly session being moved with less than a month's notice from October to December—have acted as a barrier to community and civil society representatives attending the session, which further consolidates corporate influence. This evidences the continuing need for monitoring and activism of the process from civil society.

A GLOBAL SOUTH FEMINIST UNDERSTANDING OF BEIJING

The global narrative on Beijing and the BPfA is considered by some to fail to address the power disparities between women from the Global North and the Global South, tending to prioritise northern perspectives and experiences. Some feminist activists believe that it tends to overlook the unique challenges, needs, and contributions of women from the Global South and that there is a lack of recognition of Global South feminist activism and contributions.

The concept of a "global sisterhood," as presented in the BPfA, is seen as a framing that fails to address the diverse experiences of women and girls in the Global South and their lived realities, hiding disparities in power, positionality, and privilege.

The long list of issues addressed by the BPfA has been criticised as a "laundry list" that may lack focus and fail to engage with the deeper, intersectional struggles faced by marginalised groups, particularly those in the Global South. Feminist movements continue to advocate for agendas that go beyond the binaries of the Beijing framework. These initiatives bring into light a broader and holistic view of gender equality to reclaim and popularise a more progressive and intersectional feminist agenda.

"THE GLOBAL SOUTH [AFRICA] IS NOT A MERE RECIPIENT OF POLICIES FORMULATED ELSEWHERE, BUT CAN CLAIM OWNERSHIP OF WPS [BPFA] AS WELL" (BASU)

Feminist movements now increasingly call for greater recognition and integration of local and grassroots knowledge, norms, and practices. It is in these localised methodologies, often marginalised in international policy discussions that so many insights and solutions lie. Inadequate recognition of such contributions may undermine efforts to develop holistic and inclusive frameworks for gender equality.

Some organisations take an active approach in using the BPfA to make it their tool for advocacy, and some groups are deeply guided by its principles, whilst others use it more loosely, often tailoring their strategies to local needs.

This selective engagement reflects both the utility and limitations of the BPfA as a universal framework. Partners described the BPfA as providing validity to women's rights concerns and an opportunity for groups across spaces to come together and determine common agendas, learn from each other, and have a sense of a larger camaraderie.

There is an ongoing debate about whether there needs to be a reopening of negotiations on BPfA language or new global conferences on women; some consider the need for substantive reviews and revitalization of the frameworks to be an important step forward, while others feel that progress can be made through regional mechanisms and commitments, and that review processes are sufficient to deal with the emerging gender issues without reopening the BPfA that could result in backsliding, especially considering the current global political context.



Photo: Gojam Aberra, at the Synergy Action for Ethiopia offices

[89] Gouws, A., & Madsen, D. H. (2021). Beijing +25. Agenda, 35(2), 3–17.

CONCLUSION

While Beijing catalysed transformative change, progress has been slow and uneven. The advances in education, health, and legal protection are laudable but are largely undercut by structural inequalities, conflict, and regressive policies. Going forward, there will be a need for a renewed commitment to intersectional approaches, inclusive leadership, and sustainable resources underpinning the promise of gender equality envisioned in Beijing.

Indigenous and grassroots norms, practices, and knowledge should underpin global frameworks like the BPfA. These perspectives often challenge Western-centric approaches and offer alternative solutions rooted in local contexts. Elevating these voices can enrich global feminist movements and ensure that strategies are contextually relevant and transformative. The extent to which the BPfA will continue to guide the work of feminist movements will be highly dependent on how it is used to incorporate the voices of and recognize the challenges faced.

To realize the BPfA's vision, sustained commitment, innovative approaches, and multilateral cooperation must be prioritised to address emerging barriers, promote intersectional policies, and adopt gender-responsive solutions through promoting inclusivity in policymaking and reaffirming global commitments.

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