FEMINIST DEVELOPMENT POLICY:
A PATHWAY TOWARDS FEMINIST GLOBAL COLLABORATION

#2 Knowledge as Power

KNOWLEDGE AS POWER

In this briefing, we will be looking at the topic of knowledge as power. There are four aspects of knowledge as power that we believe need to be addressed to achieve more feminist global collaboration:

- the different **knowledge** we value,
- the knowledge we exclude by **prioritising some forms over others**,
- the phenomenon of **knowledge extraction** and
- reflecting on the **knowledge held by who** is actually doing development, and to what end.

The hierarchical flow of developmental knowledge from the Global North to the Global South highlights the problem of whose knowledge is recognised, but also what kind of knowledge. There is power in deciding which type of data is collected, how it is analysed and what it is used for – and power in deciding which knowledge to ignore. In this way, knowledge becomes a vehicle for perpetuating inequalities in the development sector. Thus, a key part of FEMINIST GLOBAL COLLABORATION is creating new organisational structures and cultures that respect and value the knowledge and perspectives of the myriad communities and people based in the Global South.

KNOW LEDGE AS POWER

"Knowledge in the sector tends to be siloed into how well are women doing on X outcomes. And because there is so much reliance on your matrices and your quantitative metrics, it doesn't allow for describing the nuances of who people are."

Désirée Acholla

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY POWER?

The strength of feminist analysis is that it seeks to understand how power plays out. Feminist analysis deems power not as something inherently negative or positive, but as something that needs to be shared evenly amongst people and societies. To actively deconstruct the current power imbalance within international development, we need to name it and seek to understand it through an ongoing process of unlearning and re-learning.

The recommendations are based on conversations with Désirée Acholla, a social impact consultant at Inararibonye Advisors; Ayisha Siddiqa an environmental activist and co-founder of Polluters Out; and Elvira Pablo, a Policy and Member Engagement Officer for Latin America and the Caribbean at Girls not Brides.

"I think we have to unlearn everything from the survival of the fittest to Adam Smith's idea of capital gain and how we progress. They're all coming from men who think that the way that you survive is hoarding resources and fighting each other because there's a limited amount. That scarcity mindset has done us damage."

Ayisha Siddiqa

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RECOMMENDATIONS

We encourage you to embrace and reflect on any discomfort that may arise when you discuss and research topics such as sexism, racism, colonialism, and white privilege, and to work through that discomfort to ultimately understand the impact of certain actions, even when your intentions are benevolent. We encourage you to support the creation of organisational cultures that value a just production and sharing of knowledge within the sector. We offer some reflective questions with this brief to spark a process of reflection and ultimately change. We hope that you and your organisations will dare to take steps to make feminist global collaboration a reality for us all.

Individual level
Put yourself on the journey and ask yourself how much of what you have come to understand about human experience stems from a white supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal frame of thinking. Here are some reflective questions for this journey of unlearning and relearning:

- Désirée Acholla: "What stake do you have in the development work you are involved in?"
- What kind of language do you use in your work? In what ways does your language manifest power asymmetries? Do you use language such as "beneficiaries", "hardship allowance" or "in the field"? Which language could you use instead?
- Is your language technical, based on standardised knowledge, with many acronyms? Or are you trying to speak a language that resonates with the people you are working with?
- Look around you: Who is part of your team? And who are your partners when it comes to setting up projects or targets? Are the people whom the project aims to serve part of this process? Are they informing your project, or do they have a central voice in it? If not, how could you change that and bring them in? Are you treating knowledge as a one-way street or as an exchange which can be mutual? Try bringing these questions up in discussions with other practitioners and your team.

Organisational level

- Decision-making and problem-solving processes should be de-centralised. Create collaborative work, make decision-making processes transparent and look for small (feminist) organisations directly in the communities. Actors living in the areas you are working in, need to be included in conceptualising, planning and implementing projects, as well as debriefing.
- Appreciate and learn from the myriad of Indigenous and non-Eurocentric forms of knowledge. Without extracting or appropriating this knowledge, it must be taken into account, e.g. when addressing the climate crisis.
- Reflect on the purposes of your planning, monitoring, evaluation and learning systems. Do these processes also involve your accountability towards organisations based in the Global South?
- Reflect on your project management cycle: Who is currently steering the projects and data collection and analysis in your organisation? With which criteria do you decide who will steer this work?
- Reflect upon your knowledge production so far: Do you only rely on technical, "objective" measurements like quantitative metrics of social and economic problems? Or are you also looking for an alternative, more qualitative way to value human experiences from various contexts? When using data, who has a voice in the data you are collecting and analysing?
- Dealing with the legacy of colonial history must be the basis for moving towards a FEMINIST GLOBAL COLLABORATION This includes acknowledging and apologising for the atrocities of colonialism and discussing financial reparations and debt relief (more on this in the podcast episodes 3 & 4).
- Reflect on your organisation's decision-making processes: How could you change your policies in order to corporate these new reflections and give people from the Global South a voice in decisions that affect them?

"What we need is the local knowledge, because when we want to address the issue, we necessarily need to know the context. But the knowledge, the power [...], or the voices of the communities are not necessarily valued at the same level as the people that come from outside.

Elvira Pablo

Cultural level:
Valuing certain knowledge forms over others also informs the culture of organisations and institutions. The following suggestions are based on the works of Tema Okun, Kenneth Jones, and Partners for Collaborative Change found at Changeelemental.org, in which they argue that "in our society, the dominant culture that shapes our institutions, our media, the way we see ourselves and each other is that of the white middle class." To move away from this, we need to address these unjust cultures and embrace those based on feminist principles. Some of these include:

- Ever heard of the term 'white mediocrity'? More often than not, Black, Indigenous and people of colour are given extra work and/or less pay while white staff are given a pass, or receive quicker promotions. Try changing this culture by addressing the problem within your professional community.
- What is the kind of culture that is promoted in your organisation and with external actors? Is it based on efficiency, extraction, competition and productivity? Or is it a culture of care, reciprocity and honesty?
- Are you actively deconstructing binaries like 'developed' or 'under-developed', as described by the guest on our first podcast?
- How can you work with and support others who are invested in shifting values and norms to more just knowledge production?

For more inspiration, please check out these practical attempts:
- Learn from our guest Desiree's work online at DecolonizeDevelopment.org or ImpactSupport.social
- Learn from Aid Re-imaged
- Learn from the Anti-racist and decolonial Framework by Start network.

If you have any questions or would like to get in touch with us. You can reach out to Lisa Tatu Hey, Project Manager at FAIR SHARE of Women Leaders e.V. at lisa@ fairsharewl.org or to Jana Prosinger, Office Director Global Unit for Feminism and Gender Democracy at Heinrich Boell Foundation at prosinger@boell.de.

The ideas and practices introduced here are based on the podcast episode of "A pathway towards FEMINIST GLOBAL COLLABORATION: Knowledge as Power" featured in the podcast series "Our Voices, Our choices" from the Heinrich Boell Foundation in collaboration with FAIR SHARE of Women Leaders and the members of a new emerging feminist network on feminist development policy based in Berlin.

LITERATURE & LINKS

1. Analyse Power. https://www.powercube.net/analyse-power/
2. Ann Hendrix-Jenkins. It's time to put an end to supremacy language in international development
3. Aram Ziai. Development Discourse and Global History, From colonialism to the sustainable development goals
4. Claudia Horn and Isadora Cardoso. COP26 Was a Flop, but the Climate Justice Movement Is Still Growing
5. Grada Kilomba. Plantation Memories, Epsiodes of Everday Racism
6. Keya Khandaker and Lata Narayanaswamy. The unbearable whiteness of international development
7. Miriam Lang, Lyda Fernando, Nick Buxton. Beyond Development: Alternative Visions from Latin America
8. Professor Sylvia Tamale. Re-Routing Knowledge Production in Africa: In Search of Our Roots. Start from 6:30min
9. Tim Kornprobst et al. Postcolonialism & Post-Development: Practical Perspectives for Development Cooperation
10. White Dominance and Inclusion: Spectrums of Organizational Characteristics. This work is adapted largely from the works of Tema Okun, Kenneth Jones, and Partners for Collaborative Change found at Changeelemental.org

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