RECOMMENDATION PAPER FOR DEVELOPMENT
PRACTITIONERS AND POLICY AND DECISION
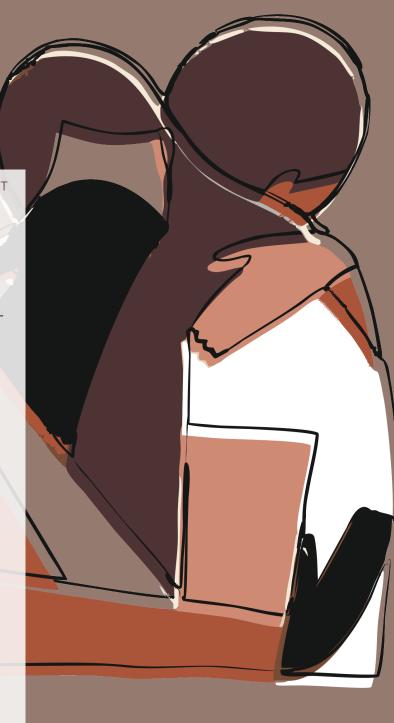MAKERS:

FEMINIST
DEVELOPMENT POLICY:
A PATHWAY TOWARDS
FEMINIST GLOBAL
COLLABORATION

#5
Beyond
Representation

This recommendation paper aims to encourage development practitioners and organisations to shift international development policy towards intersectional Feminist Global Collaboration.

It accompanies our podcast episode "Beyond Representation" which aims to critically explore the topic of representation, both its benefits and shortcomings. Representation and the question of who is in the room and who is missing when decisions are being made is vital to the process of shaping Feminist Global Collaboration and the policies within it. However, it must go way beyond simply placing historically marginalised people into unjust patriarchal and capitalist oppressive structures. Instead, we need decision-making structures that are anti-oppressive and participatory.

The current funding system within the international development Policies, norms or international summits are never neutral; they have been influenced and shaped by people. Yet, for the last centuries the decisions around norms, policies or international summits have not belonged to the diversity of the people of the world. If the planning of budgets, prepping of emergency situations or the envisioning of the future does not reflect the multitude of perspectives and lived realities of working class, Indigenous, or differently abled people – and all the intersections that exist beyond the norm of the white, hetero, able bodied, academic, wealthy man – we fear that any attempt at Feminist Global Collaboration will ultimately be futile.

TAKE THE COP AS AN EXAMPLE:

Dr Sherilyn MacGregor of the University of Manchester argues that the lack of diversity at UN climate summits is both a cause and effect of the fact that climate change has been represented both as a scientific problem and as a threat to security – two

"So, when we talk about representation at the spaces, we also need to look at how our society is right now. It's not just about getting people out of their homes and just telling them, you do that, you do this. It's more about bringing a change. And that is a continuous process."

Pema Wangmo Lama

disciplines which have been traditionally dominated by men, resulting in solutions to the climate crisis stemming largely from a very narrow and male-centric set of "knowers''. A UN report from 2022 showed that at the COP in Glasgow in 2021, women, for example, made up only 37 % of national delegations, and accounted for maximum 29% of total speaking time in various spaces. In her book "Diversifying Power" Jennie Stephens states that "countries with more women in leadership positions adopt more stringent climate policies than countries where women do not play a prominent leadership role".

TAKE PEACE-BUILDING AS AN EXAMPLE:

There are studies which find that peace-building efforts are more successful if women participate. The report "Reimagining Peacemaking: Women's Roles in Peace Processes" shows: "Peace processes increasingly go beyond outlining cease-fires and dividing territory to incorporate elements that lay the foundations for peace and shape the structures of society." In the most peace processes groups who "did not take up arms" were not included, which comes with a lack of many other priorities for a peaceful society. "Between 1992 and 2011, just 2 percent of chief mediators and 9 percent of negotiators in peace processes were women."
Both these cases show that representation is missing when decisions are being made on the burning issues of our time: peace and climate breakdown. Intersectional representation broadens decision-making-processes by

incorporating a wider range of needs and possibilities for change. It allows positions considered as secondary or minored to become majoritarian, enriching the mainstream through experiences and perspectives which tend to be overseen.
There are established strategies to strengthen true representation of diverse groups in decision-making processes:

TOP DOWN
• Introducing representative democracy in which elected officials represent a group of people
• Introducing proportional representation; the most known, binary example is to have 50/50 representation of men and women
• Making representation accessible for people with limited resources offering them financial support for instance

BOTTOM UP
• Making people aware of their rights and of the fact that they enrich the respective society with their experiences and positions; making people aware of the added value for the whole society if they bring in their full potential
• Create a system that allows people to speak out their needs and concerns, to organise within their own groups, to decide for their rights and their future and to propose their own agenda

As Pema Wangmo Lama said: "it is very important that we go from top down as well as bottom up". Elected or nominated representatives of various groups have to make their voice heard if they want to achieve systemic change and overcome intersecting systems of oppression. In order to do so they need to be supported by the groups they are representing. Nevertheless, there are a lot of challenges of each representation form we have to be aware of.

GOING FURTHER THAN JUST OPTICS

As Samie Blasingame, host of the Feminist Global Collaboration podcast series, says: "Representation is not optics, it's much deeper than that. It is an opportunity to bring changes for the whole of society." So, it cannot merely end with bringing a more diverse range of people into current organisational or leadership structures. One cannot ignore the fact that many organisations are shaped by unjust structures, cultures and norms, which do not make historically marginalised people feel welcomed nor safe e.g having to deal with racial micro-aggressions.

If cultures and norms are not actively worked on and changed, representation can be seen as an act of "tokenism". We see "tokenism" most commonly when organisations or governmental structures with weak socio-cultural or racial diversity purposefully hire a new CEO or representative from historically marginalised groups "without committing to more meaningful shifts in power, policies, or communities served".

This briefing paper is based on conversations with:
• Pema Wangmo Lama, a Mugum Indigenous youth activist, feminist, and climate activist from Kathmandu
• Jovan Ulićević who leads the Association Spektra in Montenegro
• Roula Seghaier who is Strategic Program Coordinator at the International Domestic Workers Federation and is a community organiser for migrant workers.

"People mistake or perhaps purposefully and intentionally conflate inclusion with representation. So, it is not sufficient to check the checkbox [for] particular identities and make sure that they are included on a certain executive board [...]. One needs to make sure that that inclusion translates into representation and that the person who holds a certain position of power or authority, [...] [holds] a certain level of accountability that is transferred into all of these bodies."

Roula Seghaier

RECOMMENDATIONS

First of all, 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.

INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

When thinking about representation try making room for critical self-reflection of current power structures and your individual role in them. Here, we want to provide you with some guiding questions for this process.

- Representation is closely connected to privileges people have. As a starting point, it is important to check our privileges. Our socio-economic identities such as race, religion, age, sexuality influence our privileges or experiences of oppression. This article lists 25 questions (in German) that check your privileges. Going through the questions may help to understand the various standpoints and situatedness in society.
- Being aware of your privileges is an essential step for changing, but it is not the change itself. As a previous podcast episode called "Knowledge as power" emphasised, most people writing the agendas and making decisions are not representative of the plurality of societies throughout the world. Dominant eurocentric, universalising, western and white agendas have dominated the agenda setting for the people of the world, as if they could speak for everyone. Reflecting on your own experiences: What are the major institutions that shape your perceptions? Whose worldviews are they replicating? In what ways are they critically looking at themselves? What authors do you usually read and which views do they share? What kind of news make it into the headlines of your favourite newspaper or news platform?
- Roula brought up that inclusion and representation are not the same. Inclusion is only the first step to representation. Representation is demanding that experiences, knowledges and ideas that different people hold are truly embedded into decisions. Which of your individual experiences of inclusion and exclusion can help you understand the situation of excluded and under-represented persons? How can you contribute to inclusion and representation of others in your respective context? What are potential individual contributions that enable representation at its full meaning? Are there moments of power in your life in which you could share that power with other people? Are there ways in which you can organise yourself to share your access to power? If so, when and how will you go about it?

ORGANISATIONAL LEVEL

- Recruiting at a workplace is a structural expression of representation. Norms around hiring are explicitly or implicitly shaped around particular kinds of people, while others do not feel addressed at all. Transparency and clarity help applicants as well as organisations who hire. As a positive example of how organisations can improve, look at the blog post of systemic justice talking about their hiring procedure. What kind of hiring procedure exists in your organisation? What improvement is still possible to achieve a higher representation of diverse groups within your employees?

- Onboarding for new staff members: Whether people engage within organisations depends on how comfortable they feel in that space. To ground people into a new context, it helps to provide proper on-boarding processes for people explaining how the organisation works internally as well as how decisions are made, how people can bring up topics they want to discuss etc. What kind of empowerment system (see the quote of Jovan) have you created or can you create to support individual and collective responsibility?
- Feedback mechanisms: Feedback structures make it possible for people to raise their criticism and concerns as well as their positive feedback. What kind of feedback mechanisms have you implemented in your organisation that allow feedback both towards superiors and staff members? Try enabling respectful and power sensitive feedback systems for your organisation.
- Decision-making in your projects: As Roula puts it: "*The first ask or the priority ask from developmental agencies would be to truly represent the voices and interests of the people concerned and to make sure that the project does not become an end in itself. But it is a mean to fulfil the demands of these people.*" Do the people intended to benefit from your projects have the voice and power to state what they need or consider useful? Think about ways how your organisation can revisit and reshape its project management. What kind of resources (finances, space, mobility, time etc.) can you provide to people concerned in order to ensure their inclusion and representation in the decision-making? What roles and responsibilities do they have within the project?
- Empowering collective decision making or other participatory methodologies: Dispersing decision-making makes the process accessible and more transparent. The process itself might take longer but the implementation is based on a collective decision.
- Nominating or electing representatives of your organisation for any political level: If you nominate or elect people from your organisation for interest representation, how do you support representatives of diverse, especially marginalised groups to participate in elections? What kind of structures may support the elected to make their voices heard and to provide a systemic change that will provide equality, justice and solidarity?

"If you're a leader or leaders, you should empower systems that are empowering collective and individual responsibility. Like if you want people to speak up or speak out, you need to create that kind of system that allows that."

Jovan Džoli Ulićević

CULTURAL LEVEL

Lack of representation of all social groups shows the fragmentation of our society and prevents solidarity between different groups. The inequalities amongst us are being systematically reproduced because our patriarchal culture is embodied and reproduced daily. We all are part of it. The ideas we have, the things we do and do not do, the way we write papers like this; it all stems from our experience living in a patriarchal society that is shaped by power imbalance.

As the quote of Pema shows, to live up to the ideas of representation we need to address our society and cultures holistically. Here is some inspiration for how the cultural level could enable more representation.

- Let's reflect on how patriarchy is influencing our culture. How does patriarchy show itself in the culture you're a part of? Do you have any guiding principles or collective mission that lead you in your attempts to overcome patriarchal norms and introduce norms of justice and solidarity? Have you explored feminist leadership, to name one example of a justice driven idea of leadership?
- "Othering" refers to the alienation of people or a group of people as intrinsically different from the majority who is considered the "norm". Believing that values of equality, respect or freedom are intrinsically western, white or European is a way of othering. If you witness these forms of othering, make people aware and speak up about it.
- How can you create a culture of commonality in your organisation?
- How can you create anti-racist cultures for instance in the community you live in or the team you work?
- How can you contribute to a culture that values representative, anti-oppressive and participatory decisions?

We encourage you to take a deep breath, absorb these questions and be the feminist change you want to see in this world. You are not alone: We are in for it, too.

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