Feminist Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning:

The Praxis of Women's Rights and Women-Led Organizations in Conflict, Crisis, and Humanitarian Settings

In collaboration with:

care

Women's Peace & Humanitarian Fund
A United Nations & Civil Society Partnership

gnwp Global Network of Women Peacebuilders

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About CARE, WPHF, and GNWP

CARE International is a 78-year-old global confederation working to fight poverty and social injustice in the world, with a specific focus on the empowerment of women and girls. It works side-by-side with communities to understand the root causes of poverty and find innovative, locally led solutions. CARE seeks to demonstrate the results and methodologies used in its projects to ensure transparency and accountability and advance the quality of its work.

The United Nations Women's Peace & Humanitarian Fund (WPHF) mobilizes critical support for local and grassroots civil society organizations working on women, peace and security, and humanitarian action. WPHF is a flexible and rapid financing mechanism supporting quality interventions designed to enhance the capacity of women to prevent conflict, respond to crises and emergencies, and seize key peacebuilding opportunities. Since its launch in 2016, WPHF has funded over 1,300 local women's rights and led organizations working to support women to be a force for crisis response and lasting peace in 44 countries. In addition, WPHF has supported the participation and the protection of over 500 women human rights defenders and women peacebuilders in 23 countries.

The Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (GNWP) is a coalition of over 100 women and youth-led organizations from more than 50 countries across Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Latin America, Eastern, and Western Europe, the Middle East, and the Arab world. GNWP amplifies women's, young, and girls' voices for more sustainable and inclusive peace through advocacy and action for the full and effective implementation of the UN Security Council Resolutions (UNSCR) on Women, Peace and Security (WPS), Youth, Peace and Security (YPS), Sustaining Peace, Gender-responsive Humanitarian Action, and 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

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CARE and the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF) wish to acknowledge the women's rights and women-led organizations in Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Haiti, Nepal, Nigeria, and Ukraine, who took the time to speak with us so openly about their experiences and approaches to feminist monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning (MEAL). Their insights have been instrumental, and their dedication to the work they do in making their communities more gender equitable, safer, and more peaceful is inspiring.

Special acknowledgements also go to the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (GNWP), an international development organization (INGO) who works directly with women's rights and women-led organizations, and who generously offered their time and expertise in the review of this research and provided key insights into this topic.[1]

It is hoped that this study will be useful in demonstrating the importance of feminist MEAL as an approach to supporting women's rights and women-led organizations in their quest of building more equitable societies and lasting transformational change.

WROs and WLOs that participated in the research:

Center for Childcare and Human Development

Center for Advocacy, Transparency and Accountability Initiative

Centre for Women's Awareness and Development

Fundación Surcos de Vida

Helping to Leave

Ukrainian Women's Lawyer Association JurFem

Marijàn Organisation Féministe

Platforme Centre du Nord Est

Sauti Ya Mama Mukongomani

[1] Given the extensive experience of the organization, GNWP participated both as an interviewee organization and in the review of this research.

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Acronyms

C3HD	Center for Childcare and Human Development
CATAI	Center for Advocacy, Transparency and Accountability Initiative
CWAD	Centre for Women's Awareness and Development
CRVS	Conflict Related Sexual Violence
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GNWP	Global Network of Women Peacebuilders
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MEAL	Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning
OCAT	Organizational Capacity Assessment Tool
PGNE	Platforme Centre du Nord Est
PSHEA	Protection from Sexual Harassment, Exploitation, and Abuse
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
SMM	Sauti Ya Mama Mukongomani
SRHR	Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNOCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
WHO	World Health Organization
WHRD	Women Human Rights Defender
WLO	Women-Led Organization
WPHF	Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund
WPS	Women, Peace and Security
WRO	Women's Rights Organization
YPS	Youth, Peace and Security

Introduction

In 2024, CARE and the United Nations Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF) carried out a joint qualitative research project on feminist monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning (MEAL) in six countries - Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Haiti, Nepal, Nigeria, and Ukraine - and involving ten women's rights organizations (WROs) and women-led organizations (WLOs). The objective of this research is to i) understand and document how these organizations see and use feminist MEAL approaches; ii) enhance understanding of feminist MEAL's most important aspects; and iii) share with actors at all levels how to conduct and support its approaches more effectively.

For the purposes of this paper, the authors recognize the various definitions and terminologies used by grassroots, feminist, and women's rights and women-led organizations as well as global experts in this area, and have summarized the term feminist MEAL as the multi-faceted, context-driven, and inclusive processes used in monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning with the key objective of using data for advocacy and transformative and long-lasting changes while ensuring Do No Harm approaches are applied.

Feminist MEAL is an approach that is not new. However, its widespread use by WROs, WLOs, and others has varied – sometimes even being seen as "less than" traditional and more quantitative monitoring and evaluation practices. This research finds, however, that there is a need to debunk that feminist MEAL is not as robust or systematic as traditional MEAL practices because of its flexible and adaptive nature.

The main themes emerging from this research include:

- WROs and WLOs have varying and evolving understanding, terminologies, and capacities regarding feminist MEAL and its application
- WROs and WLOs see the localization of MEAL as critically feminist, as they are the ones who know their context best and are present to lead MEAL processes from within it
- Co-design, participation, inclusion, and consultation are fundamental pillars of feminist MEAL and the only way to guarantee accountability to all stakeholders, especially women and excluded communities
- Feminist MEAL places primacy on the use of data and evidence to amplify the voices of women, to advocate and contribute to transformational changes
- Adaptation and flexibility are key feminist principles in conflict, crisis, and humanitarian settings
- Working in consortiums, networks, and collaborations is a key approach in feminist MEAL, increasing visibility, capacity, and impact of results
- Recognizing intersectional and multiple identities is critical in feminist approaches applied by WROs and WLOs
- Using multiple Do No Harm approaches, including anonymity and confidentiality, consent and withdrawal of consent, and data security and protection approaches is central to feminist approaches applied by WROs and WLOs
- The use of feminist indicators and participatory and qualitative methodologies is key in feminist MEAL practices, and there is a need to debunk that feminist MEAL is not a robust or systematic approach because of its flexible and adaptive nature

Methodology

The study used a combination of qualitative methods including document review of gray literature and key informant interviews with ten WROs and WLOs from six countries (Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Haiti, Nepal, Nigeria and Ukraine) that mainly focus on protection work, drawing

on maximum variation for the selection of organizations across regions. Interviews took place between May 29 and July 15, 2024.

While the organizations who participated in the research work primarily on the protection of women and girls, including the prevention of and response to gender-based violence (GBV), the paper recognizes the larger issues that WROs and WLOs work on in crisis and conflict settings.

All information collected during the research was transcribed (if given consent) and, if needed, translated from Spanish or French into English. Transcriptions were analyzed using deductive coding based on the thematic areas of enquiry. Coding and categorization were done using Excel and then summarized into narratives following the thematic framework.

Ethical Considerations

In conducting the research, confidentiality and anonymity of the respondents were respected. Quotes presented in the following pages of the research are only those where consent of the organization has been provided, and individual names are not used.

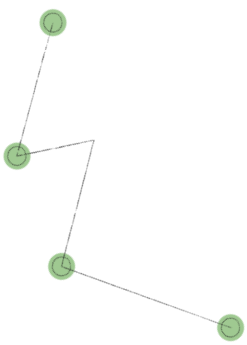
Participation in interviews posed minimal risks to participants, and no future risks are expected. Participation was also voluntary, and respondents could skip questions they chose not to answer or opt out of participation at any time without consequence. Questions were equally framed in a generalized way to increase the comfort level of participants surrounding sensitive issues.

In addition, and aligned with feminist approaches, the draft research report was shared with each of the organizations who participated in the study to provide them the opportunity to review, have time for deeper reflection, adjust or retract any of their quotes, and make any additional contributions to ensure their voices were appropriately reflected.

Limitations

As with any research, there are some considerations and limitations that should be noted in reading the findings:

- The field of feminist approach is broad, and the research does not explore the multiple dimensions of feminist approach but is limited only to MEAL.
- While the sampling strategy aimed to take a maximum variation across countries and sectors of work of WROs, interviews were often subject to availability, internet connection, and comfort of WROs and WLOs in sharing their experiences. The authors equally recognize that the power inherent in researcher versus participant is unequal.
- Likewise, considering that a purposive sampling method was used to explore perspectives of CARE and WPHF partners in select countries, the insights from them cannot be generalized to the wider population of WROs and WLOs.
- All quotes have been taken verbatim from interviewee voices in the language of their choice. Transcripts translated into English for analysis have potential for error, but the researchers' best efforts to represent the voices of WROs and WLOs from the original languages of Spanish or French been made.



Background

Feminist MEAL is just one of many feminist approaches used by women's rights and women-led organizations to advance women's rights and the rights of those that are excluded across a wide range of issues, including violence against women, access to productive and reproductive rights, and political representation, among many others. Beyond this, and as further described by the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID), "feminist goes beyond working toward equality and rights for women. [It] means dismantling patriarchal beliefs, systems and institutions that oppress women, girls, trans, intersex and non-binary people globally."[2] WROs and WLOs are crucial actors in building global feminist movements.[3] These are organizations that fight for deep-rooted change, work on issues that are often marginalized and contested, and promote the rights of women, girls, LGBTQI+ individuals, and other excluded communities.

In conflict, crisis, and humanitarian programming, feminist approaches entail recognizing that these settings have different impacts on men, women, girls, boys, and persons of all genders; understanding that other forms of diversity also interact with sex and gender to further exacerbate these impacts; and integrating gender into every level of an emergency response based on this recognition.[4] To do this integration effectively implies not only ensuring that programming is designed to respond to diverse populations, but that it involves their active and meaningful participation and decision-making in humanitarian response, especially via women's rights and women-led organizations that represent them.[5] Importantly, this lens should not only be applied in certain gender-specific areas of humanitarian action – for example, gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and response, gender mainstreaming programming, and the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda – but across all approaches to humanitarian action.[6]

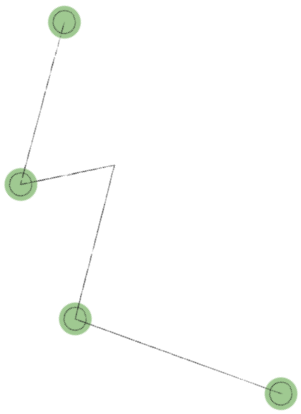
Within this broader consideration of feminist approaches, feminist evaluation is an approach that has strong roots in advocacy. As highlighted by Sette (2012), "it is a very reflexive process that gives voice to people that would not have the opportunity otherwise."[7] Podems (2018) posits eight key principles to feminist MEAL, including: evaluation is a political activity, knowledge is contextual, knowledge is a powerful resource, and action and advocacy are appropriate responses.[8] Others, like OXFAM, highlight the non-linearity of feminist MEAL, and the importance of appreciating complexity. They outline key foundations to feminist MEAL including the importance of understanding it as an approach, shifting power to participants in evaluation, and being rooted in Do No Harm principles, among others.[9] Batliwala and Pittman (2010) emphasize feminist MEAL's focus on learning, analyzing one's role in the change process, empowering constituencies, practicing accountability and building credibility, and advancing advocacy for social justice.[10] As highlighted in WPHF's capacity strengthening work with WROs and WLOs, practices including

[2] Kellea Miller and Rochelle Jones (2019). Towards a Feminist Ecosystem. AWID. https://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/AWID_Funding_Ecosystem_2019_FINAL_Eng.pdf
[3] Ibid.
[4] CARE. Emergency Toolkit. https://www.careemergencytoolkit.org/gender/gender-in-emergencies/
[5] Ward, Jeanne and Jules Voss (2024). Guidance Note on Applying Feminist Approaches to Humanitarian Action. https://sddirect.org.uk/sites/default/files/2024-08/Guidance%20Note_Applying%20Feminist%20Approaches%20to%20Humanitarian%20Action.pdfeminist Approaches to Humanitarian Action.pdf (sddirect.org.uk) p. 9
[6] Ibid p. 1
[7] Sette, Christine (2012). Feminist evaluation approach is not just about women. https://www.betterevaluation.org/blog/feminist-evaluation-approach-not-just-about-women
[8] Ibid.
[9] OXFAM Canada (2020). Feminist Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL). Guidance Note. https://www.oxfam.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Oxfam-Canada-Feminist-MEAL-Guidance-Note-English.pdf
[10] Batliwala, Srilatha and Alexandra Pittman (2010) Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID). Capturing Change in Women's Realities A Critical Overview of Current Monitoring & Evaluation Frameworks and Approaches https://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/capturing_change_in_womens_realities.pdf

participatory approaches that involve rights holders in all aspects of MEAL, the protection and security of participants via Do No Harm approaches, the localization of priorities regarding data collection, the use of accessible language and mixed methods, and adaptation in humanitarian and conflict settings, among many others are important.[11] This differs from gender-sensitive monitoring and evaluation, which draws on many of the same approaches and tools used in feminist MEAL, however, stops short of the transformational and advocacy lens often applied in feminist MEAL.

At the same time, because of its name, practitioners point out that feminist MEAL "may offend (or perhaps alienate) and, as a result, some people may not try to understand, or wrongly assume what it is… and is difficult to implement due to the lack of concrete guidance."[12] In addition, the use of the word "feminist" can increase the risk to organizations in certain contexts. For this reason, it is important to expand and clarify understandings of feminist MEAL approaches, as this research aims to do.

While the theoretical framing of how feminist MEAL is conceptualized and understood at the global level is important to have in mind, the findings from this research explore how grassroots WROs and WLOs who are conducting MEAL on the ground conceptualize and apply feminist MEAL approaches in practice in conflict, crisis, and humanitarian settings. Their insights and recommendations are grounded in lived experience, and therefore provide a valuable contribution to all actors' understanding of how feminist MEAL can and should be most effectively conducted, supported, and resourced.



[11] Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund (2021). Tip Sheet: Gender Sensitive and Feminist Monitoring and Evaluation and Ethical Considerations. https://wphfund.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Tip-Sheet-Gender-Sensitive-ME-and-Ethical-Considations_ENG_25082021-1.pdf

[12] Podems, Donna (2018). Making Feminist Evaluation Practical. eVALUation Matters, Fourth Quarter. https://idev.afdb.org/sites/default/files/Evaluations/2020-03/Making%20Feminist%20Evaluation%20practical.pdf

Findings

The following section highlights the many and varied themes that emerged from the research.

WROs and WLOs have varying and evolving understanding, terminologies, and capacities regarding feminist MEAL and its application

"For me it's a new thing as well. I didn't actually realize what feminist MEAL was, because we don't always call it that. That's why I think it would be important to change what we call it and use Feminist MEAL more explicitly." (Centre for Women's Awareness and Development (CWAD), Nepal)

Frameworks and terminology

Feminist MEAL in this research is defined as the multi-faceted, context-driven, and inclusive processes used in monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning with the key objective of using data for advocacy and transformative and long-lasting changes while ensuring Do No Harm approaches are applied.

Interviewees were asked what feminist MEAL means to them and their organizations. Of course, there is no one common definition and WROs and WLOs have both varying and evolving understanding, terminology, and capacities regarding feminist MEAL and its application. Global literature equally accepts that an ideal feminist MEAL framework has yet to be created and that no one set of tools, approaches, or change processes can meet the needs of all organizations.[13]

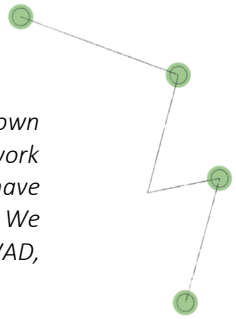
Irrespective of the definition or terminologies they use, and whether WROs and WLOs identify as feminist organizations or not, feminist MEAL is still firmly grounded in practice by WROs and WLOs. It goes beyond the application of only technical aspects of monitoring, evaluation and reporting, and is integrated into their programming as well. They do not necessarily emphasize or use "feminist" in their descriptions or specific language. For example:

> *"For us, the participatory M&E system we use is feminist. It means engaging women and girls, and all categories in the design, in the tools and taking into consideration all protection issues and safety as well in co-design of analysis and in owning the findings. It also means issues of safety of our data and in protection." (Center for Childcare and Human Development (C3HD), Nigeria)*

> *"It's basically that when you're developing the framework you need to have a feminist lens to it, including participation, inclusiveness, responsiveness, and promotion of transformative social change, and addressing diversity and intersectionality within the community. We need to take those things into consideration and have a feminist lens while developing frameworks. We can always work on having the MEAL framework done, but if it isn't sensitive enough or doesn't have a feminist lens, then it won't be feminist. It's mostly about the lens you're looking from while designing the framework that gives you the essence of a feminist MEAL framework…I think we have a feminist lens and sensibility when working in this sector but having a feminist approach in name is very important. Just saying MEAL framework is a broader way of looking at it, but if we called it a feminist MEAL framework, that would be more focused, concrete, and descriptive." (CWAD, Nepal)*

> *"We have not encountered such an emphasis on having a feminist MEAL framework, but as we are working in the sector of women and children, we have a feminist lens in that work. We haven't called it a feminist framework before, but we do have a feminist lens. We have not*

[13] Batliwala, Srilatha and Alexandra Pittman (2010) Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID). Capturing Change in Women's Realities A Critical Overview of Current Monitoring & Evaluation Frameworks and Approaches https://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/capturing_change_in_womens_realities.pdf



had the opportunity when working with other funding agencies, or even from our own perspective we might not have had the namesake of working on a feminist MEAL framework but given our experiences working for a long time on women's rights for 26 years, we do have that sensibility and the feminist lens. So we do have that essence, but we don't call it that. We need to work on having a feminist framework by itself as well and that we call it that." (CWAD, Nepal)

"For us, first, to use the feminist approaches. To be transparent in what we do, to be cognizant of the communities we serve. To ensure that the data is used in the right way. For evaluations we do this as well, but less so." (Marijàn Organisation Féministe, Haiti)

For the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (GNWP), a network that supports grassroots WROs and WLOs in crisis and conflict settings, the term and understanding of "feminist MEAL" is important particularly for donors.

"Feminist M&E is for advocacy and making change. It all boils down to, 'what are the results'… if donors were more feminist, what would happen? What would be the results? They would maybe fund more local women's organizations." (GNWP, Ukraine)

"They (donors) think that feminist means women. NO! It is inclusive; it is participatory; and democratic. There is a fear of donors using the word 'feminist' (like in foreign policy), but at the end of the day taking the principles can be worth it." (GNWP, Ukraine)

Although terminologies differ, all WROs and WLOs see feminist MEAL as something that is inclusive, participatory, and used beyond the project to advocate for the needs of the communities they serve. They may not use the specific language of "feminist", and in many contexts this can increase the risk to organizations.

Feminist approaches beyond MEAL

Feminist MEAL approaches go beyond the collection of data, use of data for advocacy, and all things technical, and in many cases WROs and WLOs do not distinguish between feminist MEAL and feminist approaches throughout their organizational culture, in their human resources, and in programming - nor should they. A feminist lens is a feminist lens and distinguishing between feminist programming and feminist MEAL is counter to the priorities and mandates of these organizations.

One area where this is evident among WROs and WLOs is in their human resources, both in terms of recruitment, how they are onboarded, in staff capacity strengthening, and in safeguarding protocols and policies, such as Protection from Sexual Harassment, Exploitation, and Abuse (PSHEA), put in place in the organizations. Some organizations have equally put in place escalation methods for those that breach safety protocols in the organization.

"[There needs to be] a strong recruitment process – do not rush – as you will see that survivors' confidentiality are being breached. Or from staff [that] cannot handle these cases. It's important to survivors. If this is the case, then GBV work is not for you as you are bounded by principles. The staff has to be trained." (C3HD, Nigeria)

"In practice, from recruitment from GBV case managers, we do background checks. After we ensure the fidelity of our personnel, we train them on case management, privacy, data protection – they sign agreements on all of these do no harm principles." (C3HD, Nigeria)

Another area where feminist principles have been integrated is in feedback mechanisms established by organizations, either in written form or through telephone hotlines. These feedback mechanisms are used not only to hear about the satisfaction of services often provided by WROs and WLOs, but also to escalate issues that beneficiaries have experienced and hold organizations accountable.

Capacity in feminist MEAL

There are varying capacities and experience levels of WROs and WLOs applying feminist MEAL. This ranges from some organizations stating that feminist MEAL means having women on staff or indicators that include women and girls to those who have a more inclusive understanding around principles of transparency, intersectionality, and the use of data and monitoring and evaluation processes to ensure that change can be captured and used for advocacy and transformation.

Many WROs and WLOs admit that there is a capacity gap in this field, including general gender responsive and feminist approaches in programming and institutionalizing processes, but say they have slowly increased their capacity in both areas.

> *"We have a protocol on gender equality, among many others. We have evolved over the years. We did not always have this. But now we are getting stronger and building our capacity in this area, so it is more participatory." (Platforme Centre du Nord Est (PGNE), Haiti)*

> *"When we received the grant, we were oblivious (we were young) and then we started learning about gender sensitive approaches and how we design our projects and how to transport people [in the war]." (Helping to Leave, Ukraine)*

> *"For example, for our SGBV program, we put in a system where people receive services including satisfaction and opinions on the services to ensure they meet their needs. For the moment, our challenge is to institutionalize this." (Marijàn Organisation Féministe, Haiti)*

WROs and WLOs also have evolving capacity that has increased with new adaptations and contexts. As noted in Ukraine, because of the war, they have learned that anonymization of names is crucial and can increase risk, for example.

International feminist organizations such as the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders are seen to have an important role in further strengthening the capacity of WROs and WLOs in this space. As an organization that partners with grassroots organizations, they are in the unique position to dedicate time to capacity strengthening in both programmatic and MEAL approaches.

> *"We do an assessment on the capacity of partners (not just for reporting requirements). It starts off with a call with our partners. We have already co-designed the proposal [with them] and explore what are the realities in collecting data in these settings. GNWP supports them to do this and how they can do it, but also how they can frame it on the international stage." (GNWP, Ukraine)*

However, not all WROs and WLOs have opportunities to partner with more established feminist organizations to strengthen their capacity. Some WROs and WLOs, particularly younger or emerging ones, highlight that the capacity challenges and limitations around feminist MEAL include financial limitations to adopt best practices in this area.

> *"For the use of data, it is a real challenge as we don't have a lot of resources. For example, we did two studies in knowledge management to use the data to orient and do advocacy for better service delivery." (Marijàn Organisation Féministe, Haiti)*

> *"What needs to be known is that there is a capacity gap – there is a need to make resources available for capacity building. It cannot be a standalone process. A holistic process is needed. More needs to be done in the capacity area to see how organizations can apply feminist approaches – we need more on mainstreaming about gender in organizations." (Center for Advocacy, Transparency and Accountability Initiative (CATAI), Nigeria)*

GNWP, for example, advises local organizations and those without larger partners to communicate the challenges with donors and with each other, and to be honest if they do not know how to apply monitoring and evaluation approaches. Therein lies the strength of feminist and women's rights organizations in their ability to network and work in solidarity.

"Some of our partners didn't know what [women peace and security] was or have an INGO [partner] before. We are fortunate to have partners that share the pursuit of supporting women peacebuilders. Maybe they have never worked in WPS, but they have the foundations. Our goal is to help them build the capacity. My biggest piece of advice is to communicate about the challenges and issues. For example, what is M&E….it is okay to ask. We help to build capacity, but it is not about making ourselves look good – that is anti-feminist, but [it is about] the communication and reaching out, tapping into your feminist networks." (GNWP, Ukraine)

"Donors should have checklists so they can see the capacity/benchmark before funding. They should focus on a capacity improvement plan so they can meet the standards so they can implement safely, with the principles, NOT just that they have experience in the sector, these factors like participation, protection, data security are not being implemented in practice. Just because you have experience in the sector and policy, doesn't mean it is implemented." (C3HD, Nigeria)

Capacity strengthening in this area is key and must come with financial resources from all levels - from those who support capacity strengthening initiatives with WROs and WLOs as well as from WROs and WLOs themselves - so that they are equipped to implement this approach fully. This research shows the importance of investing in WROs' and WLOs' varying capacities as a way of investing in Do No Harm and inclusive approaches, improving the quality of impact documentation and learning, and sustaining the work of these organizations on the frontlines.

WROs and WLOs see the localization of MEAL as critically feminist, as they are the ones who know their context best and are present to lead MEAL processes from within it

"The work becomes easier when you know the local context. That will also ensure acceptance from the community. Likewise, we engage communities starting from the design, reporting, and data collection. We engage them because that also builds trust." (CATAI, Nigeria)

A key aspect of feminist MEAL, according to WROs and WLOs, is that it is locally led, locally adapted, and grounded in the local context. The comparative advantage that WROs and WLOs have is that they often live in and are part of the communities they support and have a deep understanding of what is needed to gain a complete picture of a situation.

An interviewee from the DRC, for example, referenced the fact that when she collects data from displaced people, she can be in the camps with them to fully understand the situation. Similarly, in Colombia, a WRO explains, "the fact of living with [the women leaders in the community], sharing many things with them" gives their organization the ability to observe many needs and opportunities for growth that would not otherwise be possible to identify. It is also an advantage that her organization is well known in the territory, which opens many doors for them in terms of data collection and gaining key insights into the community. This locally led MEAL allows for greater community buy-in and a more robust process of validation with communities, even "constant validation," according to this Colombian interviewee. Furthermore, speaking to the importance of participatory MEAL as discussed elsewhere in this report, this locally led nature of MEAL is what allows both data collectors and participants to mutually benefit from MEAL as they are included in all phases of MEAL.

In this vein, locally led MEAL is essential because WROs and WLOs are the ones who know intimately and fully their own context. A Nigerian interviewee asserted that building trust with communities via participatory MEAL is only possible when the data collector knows the local context. Similarly, in Nepal a WLO has tailored interview questions for community members and local government, demonstrating the level of detail in MEAL that is only possible with knowledge of all the

stakeholders in this local context.

Additionally, in line with the need for flexibility and the ability to adapt as discussed later in this report, a Ukrainian interviewee commented on the fact that only local organizations can know exactly when adaptations are necessary, such as when there are electricity outages or shelling events. Moreover, their local knowledge allows them to use language that is appropriate. Critically, this knowledge and awareness mitigates against perpetuating trauma for participants in any given moment.

> *"We may overlook certain things - like this is the data we can get, but the local reality, due to the war, can be different. There are many cases when partners ask [or] say that certain identifiers are not included in reporting, such as LGBTQI+ information because it can be problematic and would have consequences." (GNWP, Ukraine)*

Interviewees also pointed out that they are most capable of adapting global projects to their local contexts. An interviewee from Nepal shared how his organization took a set of indicators that was developed for a multi-country project and adapted it to the Nepal context, creating more specific sub-indicators that would most appropriately measure the global indicators. And, in the DRC, a WRO similarly explained that her organization takes government tools – particularly those related to gender-based violence (GBV)[14] – and adapts them to be most useful and effective at local levels.

When it comes to localization efforts, WROs and WLOs highlight that donors and other international actors need to be more committed to the importance of understanding local context and promoting locally led MEAL. A Ukrainian interviewee shared that her organization has faced resistance from donors when they have provided rich data and nuanced information on local context, where the donor has asked them to cut out the context from their analysis. Conversely, donors have also asked organizations to report on information that is inappropriate to collect, or that can cause harm in their context, thus demonstrating a lack of insight into the complexities of the context.

> *"There are different donors who are more flexible. [We ask] if that is something that is necessary, but we have also had others that stick to their own data wants and their own priorities. We have to sometimes fit into these realities, although we will still push." (GNWP, Ukraine)*

Similarly, there is shared frustration on donor calls for proposals "that have no grounding in realities," forcing WROs and WLOs to fit into what the donors want, as expressed by a Haitian organization.

> *"I would say to donors when they launch a call for proposals, are these based on the evidence from the field? When we see a launch, it is not really based on our context, I ask where did they get this information? We have experience and we know what it is happening. Their priorities are not always based in reality and in the sector. It MUST be more localized and more regional." (PGNE, Haiti)*

Interviewees emphasized the importance of equal partnership to address these errors. Only by partnering fully and equally with a local organization and trusting them completely to conduct data collection as is most appropriate can a MEAL process be feminist. And crucially, as articulated by another interviewee from Haiti, these partnerships must be funded.

[14] Gender-based violence (GBV) is an umbrella term for any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person's will and that is based on socially ascribed (i.e. gender) differences between males and females. It includes acts that inflict physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion, and other deprivations of liberty. These acts can occur in public or in private. See the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action: https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/working-group/iasc-guidelines-integrating-gender-based-violence-interventions-humanitarian-action-2015

> *"In the context of crisis, the financing for M&E is important as it is not central for donors. We need this to showcase our work – we need to get data. And to get the data we need to do this in a safe way. Donors also have to have confidence in us, because we know the communities, we know the needs. For me, they have so many rules and expectations. They need to have trust." (Marijàn Organisation Féministe, Haiti)*

Co-design, participation, inclusion, and consultation are fundamental pillars of feminist MEAL and the only way to guarantee accountability to all stakeholders, especially women and excluded communities

"Designing projects and the collection of data is done together. It's co-design, not just telling them how to do it and providing the information that donors are requesting." (GNWP, Ukraine)

Another critical aspect of WROs' and WLOs' conceptualization of feminist MEAL is the importance of participatory approaches and accountability to all stakeholders. Interviewees defined accountability as taking responsibility as data collectors and communicating with the community and other relevant stakeholders who are affected by a project. They see it as including these stakeholders in every aspect of MEAL, in addition to other project processes as well.

> *"Accountability is when an individual is working in the family level, community level, and institutional level, each individual person has to be accountable to their organization, their family, their community, and their society. It means that each person has to take responsibility. And as a data collector, accountability is ensuring confidentiality and building the confidence of the stakeholders." (CWAD, Nepal)*

Key to upholding accountability, as explained by an interviewee from Nigeria, is participatory MEAL, which entails consulting with community stakeholders throughout the project cycle – from design through to implementation through to monitoring and evaluation. First, project leaders must engage stakeholders in the co-design of a project and its MEAL framework. A Congolese interviewee emphasized the importance of this co-design process as a way to build the community's confidence in a project. A different Nigerian interviewee likewise emphasized that engaging with the community from the start of the project is key to building trust. This interviewee also shared that they consult with women in the community when they develop tools as well, so that they "know what is applicable in the context."

> *"[Women in the community] are engaged in everything we do. They even mobilize other community members. They are involved at all phases." (C3HD, Nigeria)*

Equally important to co-designing interventions with the community is to engage all partners involved in an initiative equally in this phase as well. This reflection was shared by a Ukrainian organization that works internationally with many partners, and the interviewee emphasized the fact that having them 100% involved from the design phase is critical to ensuring that everyone is on the same page.

After the design phase, it remains imperative to keep all stakeholders involved and informed throughout the implementation of monitoring and evaluation activities. An interviewee from the DRC said that "those who must participate in data collection are those concerned," reiterating the importance of participatory MEAL at this phase. Her organization organizes focus groups, called context analysis meetings, with the women in the community so that they can discuss community problems together, as well as the use of community score cards to facilitate discussions. Similarly, in Nigeria, the use of a project advisory group that includes both beneficiaries and government stakeholders, and which supports in monitoring and feedback, is an example of participatory accountability mechanisms. A Nepalese interviewee similarly shared how they involve both

community members and local government authorities in their data collection processes.

Furthermore, Ukrainian and Colombian interviewees explained that co-evaluation with and by those involved in a project, though more time consuming, is critical throughout its life cycle. An example from Colombia demonstrates how a WLO holds itself accountable to the women leaders with whom they work by including them in their own self-evaluation processes throughout the project, rather than waiting until the end, and democratizing MEAL tools so that they can be used equally by participants as by the data collectors. She shared an example of an organizational capacity assessment tool that they update together with the WLOs that serves as a good example of how to do participatory MEAL that leads to mutually beneficial outcomes from both data collector and participant.

> *"We have realized that, when we update the organizational capacity assessment tool, they have been very rewarding spaces for Surcos de Vida because we have taken advantage not only of updating the categories, but also of discussing the progress they have been making. It has been a bi-directional growth where they take advantage of the experience of Surcos de Vida, and we take advantage of the new ideas, of what they have been presenting, and what their new knowledge is, and we move forward together." (Fundación Surcos de Vida, Colombia)*

Finally, after the implementation phase, it is important to involve the community in dissemination efforts as well. A Nigerian interviewee shared that for any briefs they produce, they collaborate with community members and leaders to be part of their dissemination via conferences, webinars, and presentations. This is critical as it ensures that the community maintains ownership over their knowledge, and that the findings that are generated are heard and acted upon. Thus, participatory MEAL in the eyes of WROs and WLOs is crucial throughout every phase of a project as an exercise in upholding accountability to all stakeholders and therefore keeping MEAL truly feminist.

Mutual trust, reciprocity, and transparency

The theme of mutual trust, reciprocity, and transparency is also intricately linked to feminist MEAL and Do No Harm principles that WROs and WLOs promote. In several cases, these organizations highlight that data that is collected does not belong to them but is entrusted to them.

> *"When we talk to institutions, we have to be very cautious about the information we have, but we know to what extent we can include the information we have about them, always with the care that we have that information, but it is not ours, it belongs to the organizations. Also depending on the space, the context, and what information is needed." (Fundación Surcos de Vida, Colombia)*

Further, there is intentionality in building trust through consultative and inclusive processes as highlighted in Nigeria, where a WRO states, "the work becomes easier when you know the local context. That will give you a head start to get acceptance from the community. Likewise, we engage community starting from the design, reporting, data collection. We engage them because it builds trust." More notably, in Colombia, this mutual reciprocity goes to reducing power hierarchies and imbalances.

> *"The concepts, or the objectives that we set, have to be in line with what we think; but how it touches the community is the methodology. It is the dialogue. We try to make it non-hierarchical. We inspire them, but they also inspire us. It is a circular work, because we have looked in the spaces of humanitarian crisis that that circle was broken and there is no reciprocity, and when there is no reciprocity, then I become a little paranoid, and I become a little competitive because there is no other option. We always take care that our projects, when we arrive at the territory, will always be an exercise of reciprocity, in that scenario we move." (Fundación Surcos de Vida, Colombia)*

Feminist MEAL places primacy on the use of data and evidence to amplify the voices of women, to advocate and contribute to transformational changes

"Once we have the data, it provides evidence for the advocacy we do. We conduct advocacy that strengthens actions. We bring information to decision-makers, we see which actors can make a change. Advocacy to push for change." (Sauti Ya Mama Mukongomani (SMM), the DRC)

Another salient finding is the importance of the use of data for transformational change, for advocacy, and to amplify the voices of women and marginalized groups. Across all countries, interviewees spoke to using the information collected in their advocacy efforts at local, national, and international levels, whether to advocate for policy or law changes, or improve the situation of the populations they work with.

WROs and WLOs determine their advocacy actions based on what the data and evidence tell them. An interviewee from Nepal sees this as particularly important to the "A" and "L" of MEAL; their organization aims to engender transformative social changes as an exercise in accountability and learning. A Colombian interviewee also explained that the data her organization collects serves two purposes: 1) it informs how to advance the project, and 2) it allows them to keep their contextual analysis updated with perspectives and information from the women in the territory to be able to use that data in their advocacy efforts in the region. Further, in the DRC, an organization expressed that using data for change is necessary for creating sustainability across interventions and projects. She wants to see the results from a given project used for change before the relevant actor moves on to something else. Knowing how to do this is a key ingredient to feminist MEAL.

> *"I think it is better that we are really evaluating the changes that are observed at the community level and working on the achievements of the changes and reinforcing those achievements there so that soon we can perhaps move on to something else, but after having really emptied a little the basket of what we worked on before." (SMM, the DRC)*

> *"So based on the data, we have to ensure that women, girls, and people with diverse sexual orientation have their rights, policies, and access to justice. And we have to ensure equal gender and power relations within the family, community, and organizational levels." (CWAD, Nepal)*

WROs and WLOs use data for various types of advocacy and with a wide range of actors. At the international level, an interviewee working in Ukraine explained how her organization uses the data they gather from their partners to advocate with Member States and multilateral agencies at the United Nations and carry out multi-country campaigns to ensure meaningful representation of women peacebuilders. In another example, a Haitian interviewee uses data in advocacy with international donors to ensure their understandings are based in research and information from the ground.

> *"We have three avenues i) advocacy in terms of how we amplify the data that we gather with our partners to Member States at the United Nations to multilateral and power holders and how do we bring it to them to challenge their perceptions about what women peacebuilders are doing; ii) broader campaigns of [the organization] across many countries for the full cycle of WPS and YPS and how sustaining peace resolutions in the UN and the Summit of the Future, and how we ensure there is meaningful engagement and voice; and iii) using this data in proposals - these are the needs are in reality." (GNWP, Ukraine)*

Across several countries, WROs and WLOs use data for advocacy with their governments as well, both at national and local levels. A WRO in Haiti highlighted that their organization also brings data and evidence to conversations with parliament, advocating for better policies and service delivery, while another Haitian organization uses prevalence data on GBV, access to medical assistance, and conflict resolution in their advocacy with departmental representatives of the Ministry of Justice and

Ministry of Women to influence state policies.

Similarly, in Nigeria, interviewees use data to influence policy formulation, as well as to advocate for youth inclusion in government activities, and one organization explained how her organization uses their research to document and advocate for the inclusion of women in transitional justice systems and for speedy justice. And, in the DRC, an interviewee shared that her organization brings data on displaced people to her government authorities to highlight the situation of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in order to seek peace.

This role in advocacy is not without its challenges, particularly in crisis settings as described by a WLO in Ukraine.

> *"We are constantly advocating…[but] our advocacy work is tricky. When the war started, no one was ready for what legal problems would appear with certain populations. It can be very difficult for people to come back to Ukrainian controlled territories. Their documents are not valid, or they were forced to change them under occupation authorities. When they came to the border, no one understood them in terms of legal status. We do a lot of education on this. Another thing, because resources are being focused on war efforts, we need to advocate for the economic, medical, etc. wellbeing of our beneficiaries. They need to then find a place to live, and we help them with that…. we take them to safety and help them to live their life in dignity. This is the first tenet we must focus on in war." (Helping to Leave, Ukraine)*

In line with other themes of the research highlighting collective work and uplifting others, interviewees from Colombia and Nepal also commented on how they specifically highlight the capabilities of other women leaders in their networks to government authorities, based in the evidence they have of WROs' and WLOs' track records and work. In Colombia, they monitor the work being done in local government and make connections between government authorities and local women leaders based on the evidence they have of local leaders' areas of expertise. They utilize these advocacy processes to increase the visibility of these grassroots organizations and raise their data to the necessary targets.

> *"We have gone above all to the departmental administration to make them aware of the abilities of these organizations, and knocking on doors, not as Surcos de Vida, but as Mujeres Liderando el Cambio[15] [the project representing a network of 15 WLOs] because the information they give us gives us power. We have that possibility to go and speak for them and explain what is happening. Because sometimes there are organizations that are so great in their actions, but fear does not allow them to see themselves as great, so they do not feel capable of reaching some spaces." (Fundación Surcos de Vida, Colombia)*

In Nepal, an interviewee uses the data from a capacity-strengthening project with other WLOs to advocate for their leadership opportunities with municipal governments.

> *"So that advocacy was done based on the data we had collected, and the training was the medium to empower them, and it enabled them to advocate at local level and access resources at local level as well. Also, the WLOs have earned representation at the district disaster management committee at local level as a result of the advocacy." (CWAD, Nepal)*

Several interviewees specifically noted this practice of using feminist MEAL approaches in the collection of data for advocacy as important for the effective prevention of and response to GBV. A Haitian interviewee said her organization collects data on violence "in order to find solutions;" they take concrete actions based on data, including referring cases of survivors, conducting campaigns, and sharing policy recommendation for the prevention and response of GBV. A Nigerian organization also uses GBV data to secure convictions, while simultaneously advocating with the

[15] https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/womens-voice-and-leadership-humanitarian-settings

government on related issues. And in Ukraine, an interviewee explained how her organization has consulted with survivors of violence during the war and used the information to develop and advocate for a draft law on conflict-related sexual violence, in coordination with experts and state representatives, which has now successfully gone through its first vote in parliament.

The lack of reliable data in this area is an issue and it is important for organizations working in the prevention and response of GBV to have data for advocacy. Overall, civil society organizations have a role in this area, and "*can be ideal as civil society organizations are at the centre of advocating for change and well-placed to use statistics to make their case*." (Henrica, J, 2023)

Across these examples of the fundamentally feminist practice of using MEAL for transformational change and advocacy, interviewees highlighted the need for more resources to be able to do this type of work. They push for more funding from donors and the international community to enable WLOs and WROs to communicate the data and information they have and utilize it to being real change to their communities.

> *"For the projects that are financed in Haiti by donors and with women, the funds are very small, the envelopes are 'weak'. We need to increase the financing for organizations, and to align with feminist approaches in programming. What happened to the larger funds? We cannot do a lot with the smaller funds." (PGNE, Haiti)*

In the same vein, to be able to effectively use data for change, WROs and WLOs must be able to determine for themselves which data they should collect, based on what would be most useful for strengthening their advocacy and impact. This includes the ability for WROs and WLOs to revise projects as needed and adapt to their contextual realities, rather than simply following a donor-led approach to data collection and information requests.

Adaptation and flexibility are key feminist principles in conflict, crisis, and humanitarian settings

"Flexibility is key, especially in conflict situations. It can shift every day. For example, a woman was hit by shelling and our partners were delayed in reporting – this [situation] influences timelines, but we have to be flexible because sometimes donors don't understand. The problem is not only with data, but also how much time it takes." (GNWP, Ukraine)

For feminist MEAL processes and approaches to be realized, flexibility is imperative. Batliwala and Pittman (2010) point out that women's organizations are often "frustrated by the lack of a genuine and ongoing negotiation space with some donors for discussing what is happening with their assessment systems – there is a sense that once a framework has been negotiated, it becomes a very rigid tool with little space for modification even if the users discover that it is not working well or that new dimensions need to be added."[16] INGOs also have a tendency to replicate these practices, setting agendas without locally-led, context-driven input. WROs and WLOs emphasize that for MEAL to be feminist, it must allow for adaptation of approaches throughout project implementation, as well as beyond the project cycle.

Projects must be flexible at every level so that data collected can inform adaptive management and lead to changes in how activities are implemented based on learnings. For example, a WLO from Nepal explained how the data they collected with women-led organizations participating in a

[16] Batliwala, Srilatha and Alexandra Pittman (2010) Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID). Capturing Change in Women's Realities A Critical Overview of Current Monitoring & Evaluation Frameworks and Approaches https://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/capturing_change_in_womens_realities.pdf

capacity-strengthening project led the project organizers to adapt the way they were doing organizational strengthening and development. Interviewees from Haiti mentioned the importance of being able to adapt their strategies for service provision based on relevant data.

And, in Ukraine, an interviewee shared an example of how her organization changed methodologies of data collection after noticing a difference in results when they called women for data collection versus when they spoke with men. As a result, they received much more detailed answers about what the needs were, such as household items that were missing, than they had received prior. Further, organizations in this context highlight the need for work to be based on iterative processes, and therefore flexibility is imperative for being able to adapt strategies and processes as necessary throughout the life cycle of a project and MEAL plan.

Overwhelmingly, many WROs and WLOs call on international actors to remember that allowing for flexibility in MEAL processes is a feminist practice. Particularly when working with women leaders, who are busy and balancing multiple demands on their time, it is critical for data collection to be a flexible process that considers their time burdens. Organizations ask donors for flexibility for the changing or adaptation of their activities when the context requires it, and to be understanding when deadlines cannot be met. Being feminist is, therefore, recognizing the burdens placed on WROs and WLOs and sharing those burdens with them.

Adaptation in conflict, crisis, and humanitarian settings

As noted already, adaptation and flexibility are key feminist MEAL tenets. As eloquently presented by FRIDA, - a feminist fund - in their strategic monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) framework, it is about "moving" and ensuring the MEL is agile, flexible and adaptable.[17]

This is particularly relevant for WROs and WLOs working in conflict and crisis scenarios and humanitarian spaces. Some of the WROs and WLOs who participated in the study dedicate their work to supporting women and marginalized groups who are forcibly displaced, often with little resources and in contexts that are always evolving. Particularly when working in conflict, crisis, and humanitarian settings, WROs and WLOs express that they need to be able to adapt their MEAL approaches according to the changing context. For this reason, projects and interventions involving local organizations in these contexts must be flexible. Even with the best MEAL plans in place, the fluid nature of conflict, crisis, and humanitarian settings can render these plans unusable. As posited by Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP), monitoring and evaluation cannot be done in the same way as it is outside of humanitarian crisis.[18]

For example, in Nigeria, a WRO explained that the crisis in the northeast is unpredictable, and their plans must be adapted daily. As much as they try to plan according to different scenarios, adjustments must always be made. Similarly, in Ukraine, an interviewee shared that recently one of their local partners was hit by shelling and they were delayed in reporting as a result. In these scenarios, MEAL processes must be flexible and, as this organization articulated, donors must be understanding.

Adaptation of monitoring and evaluation in crisis, conflict and humanitarian settings not only includes the iterative approaches as described above, but also the use of alternative technological options such as remote methods of data gathering and adaptations in terms of frequency and amount of data collected to ensure the protection of staff and beneficiaries, and at times taking a "good enough" approach to ensure the protection of staff and beneficiaries.[19] During the COVID-19

[17] Collectively Imagining What Feminist MEL Looks Like: Introducing FRIDA's Strategic MEL Framework (2022) https://youngfeministfund.org/collectively-imagining-what-feminist-mel-looks-like-introducing-fridas-strategic-mel-framework/

[18] ALNAP (2016). Evaluation of Humanitarian Action. https://library.alnap.org/evaluation-of-humanitarian-action-eha-guide

[19] Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF), "Gender Sensitive and Feminist M&E, and Ethical Considerations for Data Collection and Use", webinar (May 2021)

pandemic, for instance, many local and international organizations, and donors applied these principals, among others.

Interviewees shared some of the specific methods they employ of adapting processes due to crisis contexts, as well. In Ukraine, for example, organizations explained that they must adopt much more intensive security precautions than prior to the Russian invasion, which affects all of their procedures. Likewise, in Haiti, an interviewee highlighted how data collection has been made much more complicated by the crisis, and her organization has had to try out different methodologies to adapt to the new reality.

> *"We have had to adapt to our situation in Haiti. We are constantly in crisis. We have to work harder. We cannot always travel to collect data. We try to use telephone, but this is [also] difficult. More recently, we tried to use telephone methodology through WhatsApp and using what is called "Bouche à Oreille" [word of mouth]. You can ask the person to call us through someone else. We have these types of strategies." (Marijàn Organisation Féministe, Haiti)*

The application of feminist MEAL in these contexts differs slightly, albeit still rooted in advocacy and transformation, but organizations that work specifically in the humanitarian sphere emphasize that the priority for them is the protection, life-saving, and urgent activities in which they are involved. In Ukraine, for example, women's rights organizations have shifted their focus from their usual activities to responding to the war, placing additional stress on their institutional capacities.

At the same time, WROs and WLOs do not see too much of a difference in humanitarian settings in terms of the feminist principles being applied. The bedrock for many is trust, participation, and inclusion. On the latter, intersectionality and the acknowledgement that inequalities are multi-layered and overlapping are still important to ensure all marginalized groups are included in humanitarian programming and assistance.

> *"We track if people are safe, that they can reunite with their families, they can access medical care covered on the road, and to fulfill other needs. We try to evaluate the needs of different groups in their circumstances of war, and we try to focus on groups that may need more support and those that may not be covered by government or other INGOs." (Helping to Leave, Ukraine)*

Organizations highlight the use of technology to adapt to the context and restrictions on mobility, as well as maintaining do no harm principles such as consent and data security.

> *"We still try to make sure we can provide support…. we can connect through a Chatbot or can request to be connected to women [through] a call center. "When they reach out through the Bot, they have to consent in advance if they want to share their details. We can still provide support without all the details (e.g. they may only want advice – especially since they may not know what they can do during the shifts in the war front) and share protection measures with them (without data recording), but if they do give us the information, then we obtain their information with consent. We have a database with our beneficiaries. Sometimes we worry about the safety of the data, because some of our beneficiaries live in border zones and they could be occupied at any time. We have sensitive data, and it could be dangerous for our beneficiaries if their data ends up in wrong hands. Only selected groups of volunteers/staff have access to this data as a consequence. We change passwords often and we have data security measures." (Helping to Leave, Ukraine)*

Despite the prioritization of rapid and life-saving programming by feminist organizations in conflict, crisis, and humanitarian settings, feminist organizations are committed in the use of their data and programming as a way to advocate for the needs of communities in humanitarian settings, although this is often difficult. One current example includes the support to displaced communities in Ukraine whereby organizations like Helping to Leave aim to advocate and educate on the legal status of people coming to Ukrainian government-controlled territories from temporary occupation.

Donors and international organizations need to ensure that WROs and WLOs can remain flexible and apply adaptation approaches during crisis, conflict, and humanitarian settings, with a primacy on ensuring that the protection of the organizations and beneficiaries comes before the quest of obtaining data.

Working in consortiums, networks, and collaborations is a key approach in feminist MEAL, increasing visibility, capacity, and impact of results

"Organizations must understand that the issue of moving forward together is something new; not to move forward alone. The issue of advancement as a hierarchical structure is something we come from, but it is not the dynamic of feminist movements. There are many feminist approaches, and we connect a lot with the approaches from joint advancement, in a network, or in a circle." (Fundación Surcos de Vida, Colombia)

As mentioned briefly in other sections of this report, WROs and WLOs consider collective work in solidarity as well as the uplifting of women and other organizations to be a key component of feminist MEAL.

In one regard, this includes collaborating with others in the data collection process itself. WROs and WLOs utilize networks of peer organizations, consortiums, survivor networks, alliances with government bodies, and partnerships with INGOs to collect data effectively and triangulate information across multiple sources. A Haitian interviewee explained, for example, how her organization is actually made up of many small organizations in one network, and it is critical for them to receive data from each of those voices in order to guarantee quality and representation. A Ukrainian interviewee equally explained that her organization's collaboration with government bodies and INGOs assists in the collection of information about cases of violence. This also ensures that all actors involved in an issue have the same information.

Moreover, the importance of collaboration and working in consortiums comes through in WROs' and WLOs' approaches to advocacy within feminist MEAL. A Haitian interviewee shared her organization's strategy for working with other organizations, both peer organizations and INGOs, to do public campaigning based on data collected on pregnant women in crisis settings, stating that they "worked with other organizations in the same sector to increase [their] results." Similarly, a Colombian organization approaches all of their advocacy with government authorities from the perspective of the women who they work with regularly in their territory, thus elevating data from many sources to advocacy targets at the same time in a collective, feminist approach.

> *"We have learned to speak collectively. We are in constant validation with [other women leaders]. When we speak on the project, we don't speak alone, but we generally speak with validation from the women we encounter in other settings. So, I think that working from a feminist approach is that." (Fundación Surcos de Vida, Colombia)*

As such, WROs and WLOs emphasize the importance more broadly of empowering allies and uplifting their work. This includes increasing visibility and capabilities of other WROs and WLOs in an effort toward amplifying the overall impact of their work within a shared sector and building solidarity. When coming from a feminist approach to MEAL, organizations aim to make visible all relevant work and information, not only their own.

> *"Organizations have to understand that the issue of moving forward together is something new; not to move forward alone. The issue of advancement as a hierarchical structure is something we come from, but it is not the dynamic of feminist movements. There are many feminist approaches, and we connect a lot with the approaches from joint advancement, in a network, or in a circle." (Fundación Surcos de Vida, Colombia)*

Interviewees specifically encouraged other WROs and WLOs to proactively live out the feminist principle of collaboration and solidarity. While this is often done naturally, it is also sometimes jeopardized as a result of the need to compete for funds in these sectors. For example, organizations like the one in Colombia have reframed their perspectives to see peer organizations as allies, so that when one of them advances, they all advance together. They work on a project that aims to strengthen 15 other grassroots organizations in their region, in order to strengthen their allies. A Haitian interviewee shared this sentiment as well.

> *"You must also keep in mind the centrality of communities. Don't work in silos. You must have solidarity with other feminist organizations. Working in movements, because it helps in doing advocacy and even in accessing other funding opportunities and in finding new allies. For us this is really important." (Marijàn Organisation Féministe, Haiti)*

Collaboration and partnership, however, are not limited to between organizations themselves, but with donors as well. While interviewees highlight this as a core recommendation for improvement, global funds such as the Equality Fund[20] note that *"there are examples of how donors can engage with partner organizations collaboratively to design their monitoring, evaluation and learning. These collaborative and mutually beneficial relationships can only be achieved through partnerships that acknowledge and engage with the ever-present and inherent power dynamics that exist in donor-grantee relationships."*[21]

Recognizing intersectional and multiple identities is critical in feminist approaches applied by WROs and WLOs

"For us, the first thing is that women are the heart of all decisions. It has to be representation of all women in their intersectionalities, for example like transgender women. They have to be included." (Marijàn Organisation Féministe, Haiti)

Originally coined by Kimberlé Cranshaw in 2015, intersectionality is "a way of thinking about identity and its relationship to power."[22] WROs and WLOs insist that for MEAL to be feminist, it must take into account intersectional identities including sex, age, ability, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, and indigenous ties, among others, and it must consider power dynamics. As articulated by Batliwala (2019), power lies at the heart of how societies are organized, and social power is "the capacity of different individuals or groups to determine who gets what, who does what, who decides what, and who sets the agenda."[23] For MEAL to be feminist, it must be cognizant of the power dynamics inherent among the societies from which the data is being collected, and the varying capacities that different groups of people have to be listened to and heard.

An interviewee from Nepal explained that her organization always begins with a power analysis when developing MEAL, which they conduct at both the strategic, organizational level as well as the project level. They then develop their MEAL frameworks ensuring that they incorporate this power analysis and include indicators that allow for an intersectionality analysis.

In Haiti, furthermore, an interviewee highlighted that to account for intersectionality, they collect disaggregated data around service delivery. When they think about women, they include women in all their diversity, including trans women, and they ensure that these women are included in

[20] A Fund that provides flexible and unrestricted funding to feminist movements and connects feminist leaders with philanthropists committed to the collective power of women, girls, and gender expansive people worldwide. See: https://equalityfund.ca
[21] Wyatt, Alyna, et al. (2021), Feminist Approaches to Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning: Overview of Current Practices. Equality Fund & Genesis Analytics, June 2021. https://equalityfund.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Feminist-MEL-Research-Overview-Paper-FINAL-1.pdf
[22] Crenshaw, Kimberlé, "Why Intersectionality Can't Wait," Washington Post, September 24, 2015
[23] Batliwala, Srilatha (2019). All About Power: Understanding Social Power and Power Structures. https://commonslibrary.org/all-about-power/#Download_Resource

interventions as well. A different Haitian interviewee also shared that they maintain a database to help ensure that they reach different people, rather than the same ones each time. It is a feminist practice to make sure an intervention is reaching diverse populations.

That said, interviewees also grappled with the contextual challenges that often create obstacles to collecting disaggregated data. A Ukrainian interviewee pointed out that it is difficult to collect data on LGBTQI+ populations, and it must be done with caution and flexibility.

> *"For survivors or for LGBTQI+, where this is a security risk multiplier, it is also harder to collect this data. The same for how many people participate in the project. Must be done in the least invasive way as a principle. The reality is that numbers cannot always be precise. It comes down to flexibility. We know we have to report the data, if it is impossible, we ask if it is fine – can we provide other data that would be similar." (GNWP, Ukraine)*

Despite the challenges, it is viewed as critical to a feminist approach to ensure that intersectionality and power dynamics are accounted for in MEAL processes, as this ensures that the project or intervention itself is reaching diverse and representative populations.

Using multiple Do No Harm approaches, including anonymity and confidentiality, consent and withdrawal of consent, and data security and protection approaches is central to feminist approaches applied by WROs and WLOs

"For us, confidentiality and anonymity are paramount – like the Hippocratic oath. We do not want any backlash for us as an organization or for a survivor of violence. They have to have trust and faith in us as an organization. As well we must do this for transparency. We cannot let other people have access to this information." (Marijàn Organisation Féministe, Haiti)

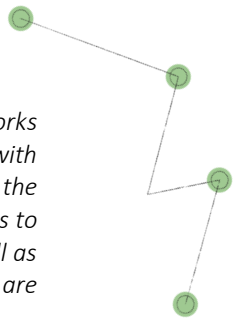
Anonymity and confidentiality

Widespread across all countries and interviewees, confidentiality and anonymity are prevalent ways in which organizations maintain Do No Harm approaches, whether it is working with survivors of GBV or CRSV, with refugees in humanitarian contexts, or in economic recovery and empowerment programming.

Many of the organizations who participated in the research provide referral services for survivors of violence. These organizations are adamant that confidentiality and anonymity need to be fully integrated into this process as they pose additional risks for survivors. WROs and WLOs that provide referral services to survivors only provide names and contact information after explicit consent is given by the survivor, for example. While sometimes this means survivors who do not wish their contact information to be shared go without support, their anonymity and consent comes first, all to ensure the protection of survivors and prevent further victimization, emotional distress or backlash and threats from their communities.

> *"When it comes to survivor data, we will not ask for it, [not] for survivors or for LGBTQI+, where this is a security risk multiplier. It is also harder to collect this data. The same for how many people participate in the project. All of this must be done it in the least invasive way as possible." (GNWP, Ukraine)*

> *"Confidentiality is our main concern. Because we started during the war, every piece of data can be used if someone wants to misuse it! Since the beginning we implemented a lot of protocols. When volunteers join they sign a non-disclosure agreement – it is dedicated to the safety of our beneficiaries." (Helping to Leave, Ukraine)*



> *"On a recent project, we usually work with a dedicated staff in the project area who works together with the community and will keep track of how many cases either they have met with or who have been registered with police. They are also working in accordance to help the victims/survivors and bridge them with referral mechanisms and assisting them with access to justice. We always need to have confidentiality at the utmost level, of their identity, as well as to have consent, [including] when they participate in case studies, in which names are anonymized of course." (CWAD, Nepal)*

> *"If there is a woman and [we] do not have services she needs, we must refer. But we have to ensure that the information we share, that we get the authorization/consent from this woman to refer her case." (Marijàn Organisation Féministe, Haiti)*

Organizations also highlight that when reporting on their sectors, they limit the information and provide only what is absolutely necessary. As noted by a WRO in Nigeria, "nothing should be shared which would compromise confidentiality".

Anonymity, however, goes beyond the protection of individual names and identities, but equally for photographs, donor briefs, impact stories, and other communication shared publicly. Further, it is integrated into all data collection processes and tools that are used within organizations, and with those who have access to sensitive information. In many cases this means limiting who within organizations has access to such information, and for those that do, ensuring that they commit to the safeguarding principles within the organization.

> *"First, there has to be specific people who have access (not all of them), must have consent / agreement to not share the information and sign a policy to this. Also, it is important to have security policies in the organization and everyone must know about it." (Ukrainian Women's Lawyer Association JurFem, Ukraine)*

Despite well-articulated global ethical standards around anonymity and confidentiality in the MEAL sector, some organizations share that they have been explicitly asked for sensitive information by donors. Feminist practitioners argue that the collection of prevalence data[24] can equally cause harm, emotional distress, and re-victimization, and is fundamentally against ethical practices in MEAL, if not done properly.[25] The use of secondary data can be one way to reduce this harm, particularly if secondary data is available.[26,27] United Nations Women (UNW), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), World Health Organization (WHO), and KnowVAWdata, for example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, disseminated a decision-tree providing guidance on when it can be appropriate to collect data on the prevalence of violence against women. In all cases, the conclusion is if there are other sources available then it is not recommended to proceed and the protection of women over data is more important.[28]

Interviewees of this research agreed with these principles. In Nepal, CWAD specifically stated that they do not collect survivor data when secondary sources are available.

> *"We use the national level data analysis and then local government, local community, federal government, and provincial government to collect GBV data, and also use the GBV shelters. CWAD is doing the community mediation trainings to reduce GBV within the community as well as at local government level. Mostly we use secondary data from police, women's rights commissions, data from WOREC, other resource centers." (CWAD, Nepal)*

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[24] The prevalence of violence against women refers to the proportion of women who have experienced violence as part of the population of women "at risk". Prevalence rates are thus based on counting people rather than events or incidents

[25] Henrica A.F.M. Jansen (2023): A guide to better understanding and using violence against women prevalence data: Illustrated with a case study on partner violence in the Pacific region. New York: kNOwVAWdata, UNFPA, Technical Division

[26] CARE International. Gender Based Violence Research Ethics. https://www.care.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/GBV-Resource_Research-ethics_web.pdf

[27] https://wphfund.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Tip-Sheet-Gender-Sensitive-ME-and-Ethical-Considations_ENG_25082021-1.pdf

[28] https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2020/Decision-tree-Data-collection-on-violence-against-women-and-COVID-19-en.pdf

Organizations such as the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders do not ask for survivor data and see their role as advocates and have long standing experience to stand up to donors and say, "we do not do that…do you really need this information?" GNWP explains how they understand the importance of disaggregated data including age, sexual orientation, ethnicity and other identity factors. However, such data can also put their civil society partners at risk. The safety and security of partners is paramount. Otherwise, they will not be able to do the vital peacebuilding and humanitarian work they do.

Conversely, organizations are also clear that sometimes anonymity is not useful for promoting visibility, advocating for women's rights, and ensuring women's voices are heard. At times, this is seen in the unequal relationships between INGOs and grassroots organizations where their visibility gets lost against larger organizations.

This fine balance requires some analysis by the organization (with consent) of when it is beneficial to share identifying information.

> *"With the principles of confidentiality, we are clear about them according to the information we collect. There are organizations in which we see that it is necessary to maintain anonymity, but there is other information where they want to be visible. So, in those spaces, it is either with their authorization or their request to make visible the information they are providing us. Also, when we talk to institutions, we have to be very cautious about the information we have, but we know to what extent we can include the information we have about them, always with the care that we have that information, but it is not ours, it belongs to the organizations. Also depending on the space, the context, and what information is needed." (Fundación Surcos de Vida, Colombia)*

And,

> *"Contrary, the importance of identifying the sources at the time of presenting the information. We have participated with many organizations, and then we realize that they are presenting our work with our name and they do not even recognize us…it is a rule of our organization that every contribution has to be made visible from the organizations. This is our strength. Because we are not alone in the territory, because we have built things with those organizations. It is not just Surcos de Vida, but it is those powerful women of the territory and we recognize that work. As long as we do not generate more risk, and that is always agreed with the allies in the projects, the voice of women in the territories is recognized and identified. There is no identification of their own names, but of their organizations." (Fundación Surcos de Vida, Colombia)*

Consent and withdrawal of consent

As eloquently stated by one Ukrainian WRO, "*If data is of survivors, we do not include their identifiers. We usually use a pseudonym. They can also retract their consent."* This is consistent across all WROs and WLOs who highlight that consent is not a one-way process. A WRO in Nigeria goes on to state that this is necessary to reduce harm and risk to those participating in data collection processes: *"We clearly state how the data will be used and do not showcase any personal information in order to reduce harm and risk."*

This consent is not only seen in face-to-face interactions with women, survivors, and rights holders supported by organizations. A Ukrainian organization, for example, has integrated consent protocols into their ChatBots that are used to communicate with displaced women. Consent, importantly, is not seen as static but can be withdrawn at any time without consequence.

> *"We always ask for [consent] and we understand that it can be withdrawn at any time. [One time], a photo of a partner was shared with their prior consent. However, we wanted to double-check if they were comfortable with this photo after some of their comments during our activities. We messaged the partner again later, even after they provided consent initially, and they requested we remove the photo that was posted earlier. We, of course, responded immediately. Consent is fluid and so consent can change!" (GNWP, Ukraine)*

Protection and data security

The majority of organizations, particularly those working with survivors of GBV, are clear that the protection of data is crucial. Some use identifiers in their databases, rather than names, while others ensure their data is password protected and encrypted, although the latter was less widely mentioned in interviews. At the same time, the research highlights also that this is not as widespread as it should be.

> *"First, before you start working, you have to put your systems in order. You cannot work in GBV in conflict affected communities, without these systems. Some don't even have a place to safely keep case management forms in their office. It is amazing how many do this. Only few people in our organization have access and all hard drives are password protected." (C3HD, Nigeria)*

In WPHF, INGO partners of the Window on Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs)[29] have turned to more encrypted communication methods such as Signal and Proton Mail as more secure communication channels, and annual reports are anonymized in certain countries for the protection and security of civil society organizations and individuals.

The concerns about protection and security are not static, however. Organizations in both Nigeria and Ukraine go as far as to say the software that exists can be problematic, such as open-source platforms and use of Google Forms, for example, as they are not secure. Further, the growing use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) poses some threats. Feminist organizations need to be cautious in its use and application, as currently in its evolving form it is anti-feminist and not enough is known or tested for it not to cause harm.

Donors equally need to be flexible and promote anonymity for the protection of activists, women human rights defenders and WROs and WLOs who are at risk of persecution and threats. WPHF, for example, anonymizes entire annual reports and external communications from countries like Myanmar and Afghanistan, including WRO and WLO names and their geographical presence in efforts to ensure this protection. A Nigerian interviewee, likewise, has updated its data security tools.

> *"I [want] to mention, the use of devices. Some organizations using google forms. Those are not restricted! It is not safe. It's a breach of confidentiality. It is important that they use more sophisticated tools. For example, we use Kobo Collect with the support of UNOCHA. It may be complicated, but we can learn, [and] it is free. Even when you don't have internet, you can connect later. Organizations should [also] restrict those collecting and when you respond, you should not be able to edit again. We don't want enumerators to rush and edit, compromises the data integrity." (C3HD, Nigeria)*

Provision of referrals for GBV

As discussed above, WROs and WLOs highlight the importance of only collecting GBV data when absolutely necessary because secondary sources are not available. In addition to this, interviewees also emphasize the importance of not collecting data on GBV unless the organization is able to provide referral services to the survivors from whom they collect information. This is particularly important when collecting GBV data, as opposed to other types of data, because collecting GBV data without offering referral services could risk re-traumatizing or re-victimizing the survivor and then leaving them without support.

> *"For example, we usually work with a dedicated staff in the project area who works together with the community and will keep track of how many cases either they have met with or who have been registered with police. They are also working in accordance to help the victims/ survivors and bridge them with referral mechanisms and assisting them with access to justice." (CWAD, Nepal)*

[29] https://wphfund.org/whrds/

As a WLO from Colombia also articulated, they see it as irresponsible for an organization to collect data from survivors unless this mechanism for referrals is in place, and for this reason they do not actively collect GBV data within their organization.

The use of feminist indicators and participatory and qualitative methodologies is key in feminist MEAL practices, and there is a need to debunk that feminist MEAL is not a robust or systematic approach because of its flexible and adaptive nature

Traditional MEAL practices have often been critiqued for perpetuating unequal power dynamics between donors, INGOs, and other international organizations and their recipients,[30] and that the traditional results framework, logical framework analysis and their cause-and-effect relationship and linear nature do not facilitate the dynamic and complex nature of social change.[31] This report is not positing that there are no benefits to having standard frameworks but exploring what feminist frameworks could look like and how they can facilitate the flexible and evolving nature of change. This is particularly important in crisis and conflict settings. As described by FRIDA, a feminist fund:

> *"Traditional approaches to MEL require 'proving' one's contribution to change…as a funder, we have a duty to refrain from taking activists away from their core activities and, remain sensitive to what is asked of them, and considering how they can co-own these MEL processes and narratives."* [32]

This challenge is not unique to the donor-recipient relationship, but also in the INGO-partner relationship, where power dynamics often result in top-down processes as well. As articulated by a woman leader in the Humanitarian Practice Network magazine, there is a "repetition of power structures operating throughout the humanitarian system between local and international actors."[33] These power structures and imbalances can impact the ability to realize feminist MEAL, particularly when donors, INGOs, and other international organizations do not provide the flexibility necessary within MEAL frameworks to apply feminist approaches.

At the same time, INGOs with a feminist lens do aim to instill some flexibility. WLOs that have partnered with CARE, for example, have been given the opportunity to design their own MEAL frameworks based on the context and need at the local level within the Women's Voice and Leadership in Humanitarian Settings project,[34] integrating feminist indicators and qualitative methods. They also have full flexibility to adjust and adapt their frameworks throughout the course of the project.

> *"Most are more focused on the MEAL perspective of the overall project because that has a scientific element with quantitative data; if they emphasized a feminist MEAL framework as well, that would give the other recipients of their grants to have that perspective as well. So that way it would be easier for us to advocate for this." (CWAD, Nepal)*

This flexibility is also given by some donors to ensure increased access to funding opportunities. For example, WPHF does not require WROs and WLOs to establish targets or results frameworks at proposal phases.

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[30] Pedretti, Leandra (2024). Bringing a Feminist Curiosity to Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL): Tracing Feminist, Postcolonial, and Development Theories in Feminist MEL. https://lup.lub.lu.se/luur/download?func=downloadFile&recordOId=9156757&fileOId=9156761

[31] Batliwala, Srilatha and Alexandra Pittman (2010) Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID). Capturing Change in Women's Realities A Critical Overview of Current Monitoring & Evaluation Frameworks and Approaches https://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/capturing_change_in_womens_realities.pdf

[32] FRIDA (2022). Strategic MEL Framework. https://youngfeministfund.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/English.pdf

[33] Frangieh, Jeanne (2024). Humanitarian Practice Network. The Unmet Need for WLO Access to Direct Humanitarian Funding. https://odihpn.org/publication/the-unmet-need-for-wlo-access-to-direct-humanitarian-funding/

[34] https://reliefweb.int/report/world/womens-voice-and-leadership-humanitarian-settings-july-2024-enfanp

Moreover, most monitoring and evaluation tools are limited in what is captured. There has been little in the way of capturing changes in women's movement building or the impacts derived from collective feminist interventions, and most efforts are individual project or grant focused[35]. WPHF, in its partnership with the Spotlight Initiative,[36] piloted an indicator tip sheet on measuring women's coalitions and movement building. While still drawing on more traditionally formulated indicators,[37] it does present a framework looking at how changes in women's coalitions and networks occur.

Celebrating experiences and perspectives: qualitative approaches

Qualitative methodologies, which help in capturing more complex social dynamics and contexts, are widely used in feminist MEAL. Most Significant Change, Outcome Harvesting, and observation are common examples, among other examples highlighted by the WROs and WLOs interviewed. In the DRC, a WLO mentioned the use of vignettes and Community Score Cards,[38] a methodology and tool that promotes civic engagement and participation through a process of community dialogues and discussions to assess the availability and quality of services in a community and is used to promote accountability and engage local leaders in the process so that changes can be tracked over time.

In this way, methodologies and tools can be "democratized". An example of this comes from Colombia, where a WLO described how tools can be a way not only to help their own institutional strengthening, but also to promote open and transparent processes that improve programming.

> *"We have maintained a satisfaction level of more than 80%, and this is a genuine interest of organizations. And that has been done because the tools are democratized. For example the OCAT[39], they adapted it as an improvement plan, and each one has their own plan. In the other projects, the MEAL tools are sometimes for the exclusive, hermetic, closed use of the organization that implements it, and it is a very technical analysis, an analysis of figures, and that is fine, but in the scenarios that are learning with them, they become tools in which organizations integrate them into their own organizational strengthening processes. What we learned [is] that all the tools are available to those who want to start integrating them [and] is a good practice that we will continue to apply in our future projects." (Fundación Surcos de Vida, Colombia)*

But it is not just the methodology and specific tool that is used, but the focus of monitoring and evaluation that makes it also feminist. It has a central focus on understanding gender inequalities and that participation is political, as well as seeking to ensure that the narratives, experiences and voices of women are valued equally to those of more dominant groups.[40] As noted earlier, feminist MEAL is co-designed and inclusive, meaning communities who are targeted by WRO and WLO interventions are involved in tool development, in the administration of methodologies, and in the analysis, interpretation and dissemination of results. The use of storytelling is another prevalent approach for sharing both examples and impact by grassroots organizations.

For MEAL to be feminist, it must be cognizant of the power dynamics inherent among the societies from which the data is being collected, and the varying capacities that different groups of people have to be listened to and heard. Indeed, the discourse about quantitative information and methodologies being more robust is still prevalent. However, is there really a need for this quantitative-qualitative debate? As noted by Batliwala and Pittman (2010), these tend to be "false

[35] Batliwala, Srilatha and Alexandra Pittman (2010) Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID). Capturing Change in Women's Realities A Critical Overview of Current Monitoring & Evaluation Frameworks and Approaches https://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/capturing_change_in_womens_realities.pdf

[36] https://www.spotlightinitiative.org/fund-and-support-womens-rights-organisations

[37] https://wphfund.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Tip-Sheet-Measuring-Coalition-and-Movement-Building_FINAL-28-Feb2022.pdf

[38] See: https://www.civilsocietyacademy.org/post/community-score-cards-a-powerful-tool

[39] An Organizational Capacity Assessment Tool (OCAT) is a tool used to assess an organization's capacity throughout and following the implementation of a capacity strengthening plan. For example: https://www.oxfam.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Oxfam-Canada-Capacity-Assessment-Tool.pdf

[40] Sielbeck-Bowen et al. (2002). Exploring feminist evaluation: The ground from which we rise. New Directions for Evaluation. Volume 2022, Issue 96.

binaries".[41] Whereas quantitative methodologies are important for generating statistics, qualitative methodologies are appropriate for the collection of information in open, dynamic, and participatory ways and as highlighted by many scholars are "more appropriate for feminist research by allowing subjective knowledge."[42] Qualitative research allows organizations and activists to share stories and demonstrate change, which is not always linear, nor able to be quantified. These approaches help to reduce the power hierarchies often present in quantitative approaches.

However, within the spaces in which many WROs and WLOs work, different messaging is provided to them, and they are obligated to focus on the "numbers".

> *"We came from a different type of systematization management, where it was more qualitative/ethnographic, and we had to adapt to something more quantitative. We tried to organize it by making material where we saw that we could record everything we were collecting, and we would organize it in some way to make it easier to present. That allowed us to organize the information, because we are normally more oral, more of discourse, in the language part. And yes, it was a little complicated to see that this is another framework, you have to adapt to another way of looking at the results. It made us think and make it difficult to agree on what we needed. And because of the Nariñense culture, which is too oral, we saw that we said, 'here we have this information,' and we have more than 90% or 100% left out, but we only need this information." (Fundación Surcos de Vida, Colombia)*

What may be lacking, as confirmed by many interviewees, is the need for feminist MEAL frameworks that both lend to reflexive and adaptable processes, and that can facilitate capturing dynamic and evolving or progressive changes and impact – essentially a way to describe "how change happens and how gender relations have been altered".[43]

[41] Batliwala, Srilatha and Alexandra Pittman (2010) Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID). Capturing Change in Women's Realities A Critical Overview of Current Monitoring & Evaluation Frameworks and Approaches https://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/capturing_change_in_womens_realities.pdf

[42] Westmarland, N (2001). The quantitative/qualitative debate and feminist research: a subjective view of objectivity. The Forum for Social Research, Volume 2. Accessible at: https://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/974/2124

[43] Batliwala, Srilatha and Alexandra Pittman (2010) Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID). Capturing Change in Women's Realities A Critical Overview of Current Monitoring & Evaluation Frameworks and Approaches https://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/capturing_change_in_womens_realities.pdf

Recommendations

Despite the incredible gains made by and dedication of WROs and WLOs to the utilization of feminist MEAL approaches in their work, there are inevitably gaps and a long way to go to ensure its widespread use. Not only does financing need to increase, but donors, INGOs, and IOs need to remain flexible and cognizant of local context, while equally promoting technical capacity in this area. The following recommendations come directly from the WROs and WLOs interviewed in terms of what the donor and international community can do to elevate feminist MEAL practices for transformative change.

- Donors, INGOs, and other international organizations need to have a greater understanding that the collection of certain data can cause harm and increase risks to women's rights organizations, women-led organizations, and activists, particularly in contexts of crisis, conflict, and humanitarian settings. Top-down and frequent requests to WROs and WLOs can have lasting consequences for these organizations and the populations with whom they work. Do No Harm and ethical considerations in MEAL must be maintained and take priority over data collection itself. WROs, WLOs, and INGOs have roles to play in advocating for "people over data."
- Donors, INGOs, and other international organizations can contribute to increasing the technical capacity of WROs and WLOs in feminist MEAL in various ways. This might include providing tip sheets and guidance notes regarding Do No Harm principles, capacity strengthening opportunities, or institutional funding opportunities to strengthen their organizational capacity to integrate feminist approaches so that they are able to provide quality and responsive programming that is adaptive to their contexts.
- Donors, INGOs, and other international organizations should only request data and assessments that are needed to inform programming, and that will be used, rather than insisting they be carried out just for the sake of doing them. This implies also ensuring that these actors act upon the recommendations that emerge from the learnings.
- Donors, INGOs, and other international organizations can facilitate feminist MEAL by being flexible to local context and understanding that local organizations they support have established trust and knowledge with communities. This flexibility needs to extend to the amount of data collected, the type of data collected, and the way data is communicated. WROs and WLOs should also advocate for donors to allow them flexibility in MEAL processes to be able to implement feminist approaches.
- WROs and WLOs must work together in solidarity to promote feminist MEAL practices, use data for transformative change, and learn from one another as they do, tapping into opportunities and expertise that exist within feminist movements and networks.
- There is a need to have more global standards and guidance on feminist MEAL beyond traditional INGOs and IOs who support local organizations, which are accessible to grassroots organizations, coupled with mentoring and coaching support in their application. These standards need to be context-based and provide sectoral-based guidance to areas like GBV, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), and humanitarian response.
- Increased financing by the international community is needed both for feminist MEAL and for programming for WROs and WLOs, including financing for gender analyses, gender-sensitive conflict analysis, feminist monitoring, and qualitative impact measurement approaches, among others. With this increased financing, donors must also think about sustainability in their interventions and ensure that their commitments are long-term.
- Where contextually appropriate, donors, INGOs, and IOs should introduce "Feminist MEAL" as an explicit concept in their programs, so that the term and approach become more widely used and understood.

Conclusion

This research aims to provide insight into feminist MEAL, as just one of many feminist approaches, as it is applied by WROs and WLOs in conflict, crisis, and humanitarian settings.

Irrespective of the terminology or language used by organizations, feminist MEAL is a powerful tool for WROs and WLOs in promoting the rights of women and excluded groups, advocating for transformational change, working in solidarity, and amplifying the voices of communities. WROs and WLOs, often with little resources or varying degrees of capacity, apply these approaches in participatory and inclusive ways that build mutual trust within their contexts.

Moreover, in conflict, crisis, and humanitarian settings, they adapt their MEAL processes frequently and remain flexible to the demands of their contexts. Donors, INGOs, and other international organizations have a key role to play in financing and supporting WROs and WLOs so they can apply feminist MEAL, including Do No Harm approaches. This includes being cognizant of burdensome requests and being flexible to adaptations that cater to the realities of organizations working in conflict, crisis, and humanitarian settings, as well as dedicating adequate funding to strengthen WROs' and WLOs' capacity and knowledge in feminist MEAL.

While feminist approaches and feminist MEAL are not new, there remains a gap in global standards and guidance that is accessible to all grassroots and local organizations. Many organizations who already apply feminist approaches to MEAL do so without necessarily having the knowledge of the concept of "feminist MEAL," and believe their sectors would benefit from further conceptualization and exploration of the term.

The various elements explored here intend to contribute to that collective conceptualization, with a focus on the perspectives, insights, and valuable experiences of the very actors who are implementing feminist MEAL approaches on the ground – grassroots WROs and WLOs. Their perspectives contribute significantly to this ongoing conversation, and should be taken into consideration by international, national, and local actors alike.

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