

Feminist principles on Power in Funded Partners

The Power Up Programme



February 2023



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“It’s about naming the power we hold, and mitigating it by building the strategy together; always creating spaces for sharing and learning – real recognition of different skills in the team and different knowledges in the team – about how you construct the relationship and work together.”

Samantha Hargreaves, WoMin

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Power Up: a programme funded by Comic Relief

1. Why are funded partnerships relevant to power and movements?

Feminist organisations that lead consortia /partnerships/ networks in funding applications and implementation usually hold power in relation to the other consortia partners. This power includes

- Knowledge
- Language
- Access to and control over resources:
 - Access to larger donors
 - Location closer to those donors
 - Direct relationship with donors and ability to control others' access to information
- Access to global:
 - Political spaces
 - NGO spaces
 - Networks
 - Donor networks and deliberative spaces
- Organisational capacity:
 - To manage funds
 - Multiple legal identities
 - Digital access
 - Communications linking local to global
- Convening power
- Consortium power over information, process, time-lines.

- In addition to this power that resides between the consortia/ partnership lead(s) and the partners, the consortium funder(s) hold power over the consortium as a whole, and consortium partners hold power over their local partners.
- For groups in intermediary roles, where despite being women's groups, they are also funders, how they hold the power described above is key to whether the overall partnership will actually foster the power of those most excluded by both women's movements and society.
- Women's rights organisations have to be continually alert to the reality of power differentials within the movement and actively work to mitigate them, if their practices are to match the feminist principles of equity, inclusivity, intersectionality, transparency and mutual accountability. The aim is to practice 'power with' and build the 'power to' of those on the margins, whether because of poverty, disability, sexual orientation or gender identity, caste, citizenship status or any other basis of exclusion.



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CREA, India

Aim

To build and sustain consortia to enable access to resources for women's rights organising in the Global South

Sources:

Towfika Sultana, Tanisha Chadha, Mageda Esolyo, CREA, 'Power and Collaboration', Power Up: feminist practices in addressing power in partnerships, 31 May 2022.



Co-create the entire process with work at national level being shaped by partners' needs and priorities."



How we used our power – strategies

- Working with others to jointly apply for funds to support women's rights organising in the Global South, including Count Me In, Women Gaining Ground and, Our Voices our Futures – all consortiums CREA has helped develop and coordinate.
- Spending substantial time – up to a year – setting up the consortium and working to develop principles and procedures.
- Co-creation of program activities – joint development of plans for each year. Local partners shape the agenda for their country and the approach – capacity strengthening or movement-building or advocacy etc.
- Shifting power by sharing access to spaces – for meeting funders, for doing advocacy
- Time for reflection – taking up issues we disagree on, with an external facilitator, bringing honesty and frankness to discussion.

Illustrative feminist principles of our partnership strategies

- Begin with power analysis so that we have a shared understanding of the power each member of the consortium holds and out of that conversation we articulate the feminist principles we want to guide us.
- Identify what roles and responsibilities each is best positioned to take on.
- Co-create the entire process with work at national level being shaped by partners' needs and priorities.
- Build in time for relationship and trust-building. Establish routine reflection spaces to discuss what is working well and what is not, and practice how to engage in transparent, honest conversations to find solutions.
- Use principle of 'sufficient consensus' so that when a partner cannot attend a meeting, this does not stop the group from being able to move ahead.



Womankind, UK

Aim

To join with feminist movements, partners, allies and supporters to achieve a feminist future.

Sources:

- Laura Brown presentation, 'Why use principles to inform partnership development', Power Up Workshop, 'Feminist principles in establishing, building and sustaining partnerships, 9 March 2022;
- Natasha Horsfield, 'Feminist practices in addressing power differences – a conversation among funders and INGOs' Power Up workshop, 24 March 2022;
- CARE (Womankind, WCoZ and WIPSU Annual Report to Comic Relief, Oct 2022;
- Womankind Strategy to 2030: [Our Feminist Future](#).

How we used our power – strategies

- Practice an accompaniment model working alongside women's rights organisations in their programmes and advocacy work when both agree there are advantages in working together for a common purpose.
- Flexible and pragmatic partnership approach; not 'one size fits all'.
- 2016-2021 Strategic Plan was guided by 'Principles of Partnership'. CARE partners have helped shape forthcoming Feminist Partnership Sub-strategy indicating the need to continue existing approach of inclusivity, being partner led and intersectional and supporting partners by working through co-creation and in a demand-driven way, to grow our collective capacity to enable collaboration across borders and across movements.

Illustrative feminist principles of our partnership strategies

- Demonstrate mutual respect among all partners, regardless of size or power of any one partner and respect for each other's mandate, obligations, principles of independence. Womankind will understand its own power and position enabling women to voice their questions, concerns, hopes and aspirations.
- Demonstrate mutual commitment to the principles of good governance, notably transparency, accountability and sound financial management. Minimise administrative and financial costs without compromising accountability and effectiveness.
- Build partnerships with diverse women's rights organisations based on feminist principles of solidarity and shared understanding, collaboration and care.
- Review and revise our approach to feminist ways of working including recognising the need for language justice, accessibility for disability inclusion and intersectional approaches to enable inclusivity to be at the core of feminist movements.
- Acknowledge complementarity among partners to draw on the diversity of the women's movement in any given context and to build on their comparative strengths and advantages and recognise and build on women's agency and collective action.
- Placing a strong emphasis on decolonisation for the emerging partnership strategy.
- A power-with approach to avoid replicating power imbalances – seeking to balance power intentionally and heightening our partner organisations' agency, so they are central in decision-making.
- Work with partners to bring in funding – guided by a Funding Charter which lays out principles for fundraising and financing work.

- Facilitate new conversation/s to unpack and develop shared understanding of feminist values in our partnerships.
- Review and revise our principles of partnership to better embed respect for wellbeing.

Fundraising principles

- Our fundraising centres the rights of women, girls, trans and intersex people and is partner led.
- We seek funders aligned with our values and never compromise on these to win funding.
- We ensure our funding practices do not compromise the safety and wellbeing of our staff, partners and individuals they work with.
- We collaborate and complement rather than compete with partners for funding.
- We work with partners to build reciprocal fundraising knowledge.
- We are transparent with partners about the sources and allocation of funding.
- We maximise funds for partners. This includes establishing small flexible feminist funds around advocacy ([Her Voice Fund - Womankind Worldwide](#)), movement strengthening ([Movement Strengthening Fund - Womankind Worldwide](#)) and Resilience grants. We focus on raising core, unrestricted, flexible and long-term funding.



We collaborate and complement rather than compete with partners for funding.

WoMin, Africa

Aim

WoMin, its allies and partners, hand in hand with grassroots women, organise in specific sites, build counter-power and counter proposals through solidarity and common platforms.

Sources:

- WoMin, Kebetkache and CNRG, Annual Report to Comic Relief October 2022;
- Samantha Hargreaves comments in Power Up workshop: Feminist practices in addressing power differences, 24 March 2022.

How we used our power – strategies

- Establish long term Memorandums of Understanding that are values aligned rather than on-off projects.
- Research, materials production and sharing on 'Right to Say No' – R2SayNo – six information sheets, two animated films, a model Terms of Reference for national research and a training kit for community activists.
- Supported 16 partners and allies in eight countries in West/Central Africa and nine allies in three countries in East Africa build a powerful architecture for convergence on the R2SayNO.
- Risk and safety support with and for partners.
- Supporting mapping/ baseline studies, building a shared understanding of R2SN, strategy building and development of common solidarity actions across the sub-regions.
- Kebetkache, Nigeria and CNRG (Centre for Natural Resource Governance), Zimbabwe provided training accompaniment & exchanges.
- Both countries have formed national platforms bridging multiple sectors (women's movements, farmers, fishers, extractives, environmental and climate justice).

Illustrative feminist principles of our partnership strategies

- Recognising that we are structured with 'power over' is the first step in shaping strategies to address it.
- Our primary strategy for addressing 'power over' is through jointly shaping partnerships – practising 'power with' rather than 'power over' through deep partner discussions that are political and clarify the place of funding relative to other roles we can play.



Recognising that we are structured with 'power over' is the first step in shaping strategies to address it."

2. Cross-cutting challenges and lessons learnt

Challenges

- Organisation that hosts /leads the partnership carries direct accountability to funders which may need or want things, in its own time-frames, that do not resonate with partners or which make demands, that partners consider unreasonable.
- Laws in the host country may place restrictions or requirements of 'compliance' that put them into a position of 'power over' partners.

Lessons Learnt

- Honest unpacking from the start of the implications of taking funds and going into a contract with a funder that has a particular orientation and set of expectations and collectively deciding whether to move ahead or not with this funding opportunity.
- Making explicit the related funder requirements and responsibilities each partner has in relation to these and revisiting these when staff change.
- Advance planning to see what local partners need in what time-frames and shape annual agenda around this.
- Together unpacking host / lead group's roles and how to navigate their mix of 'funder' versus activist/advocate / capacity support roles.

Challenges

- Many countries face new regulations, constantly changing rules related to work with international partners, funds allocation and distribution of the funds.
- Scrutiny and surveillance makes new partnership difficult.

Lessons Learnt

- Build long-term partnerships beyond specific funding initiatives.

Challenges

- Smaller or local members of a partnership, or very local groups may feel unrecognised.

Lessons Learnt

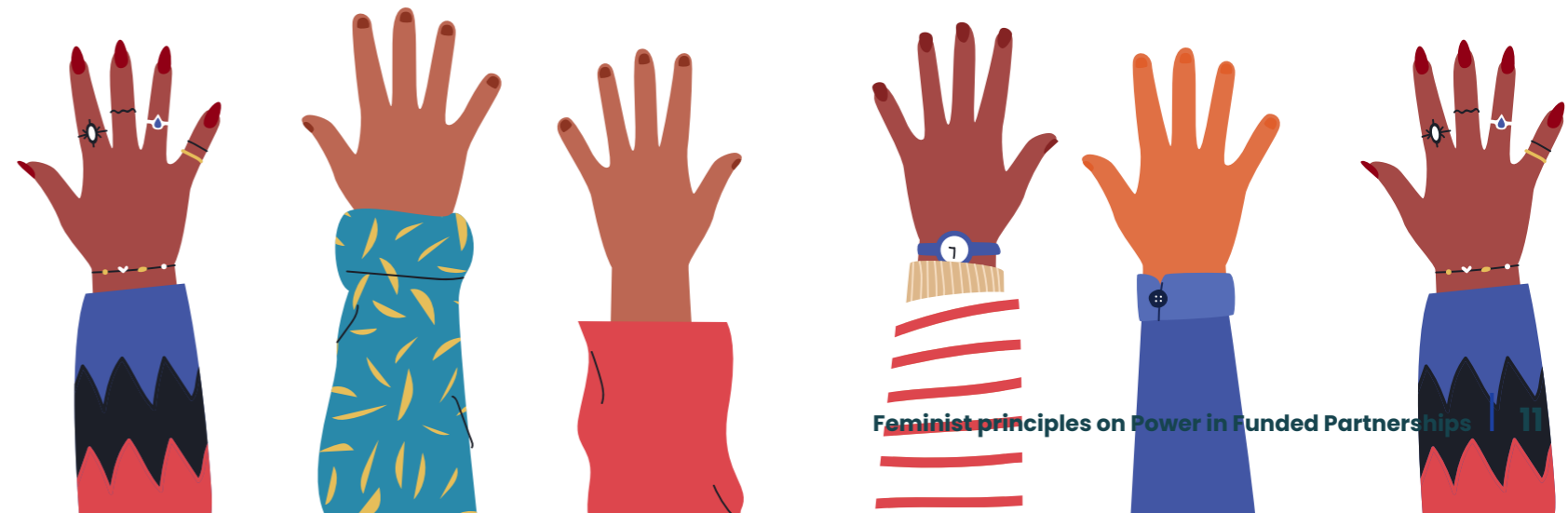
- Go into funding partnerships shaping the proposal together which creates more horizontal accountability.
- Recognise each group's unique strengths and how they contribute towards achieving the goals of the overall partnership.
- Make explicit the cross-cutting synergies between the groups.
- Together develop partnership contracts for mutual accountability and responsibility.

Challenges

- Consortium leads may become like funders rather than partners because we have resources to share.
- Tension consortium leads may feel as they self-identify as women's rights organisations but may be seen and treated by 'partners' as funders.

Lessons Learnt

- Co-create everything from the proposal and then the work plan onwards; offer capacity strengthening and do cross-movement convenings based on what issues partners see as opportunities.
- Keep reporting very simple.
- Plan donor visits and embassy visits with local partners so partners can meet and develop their own relationships with donors.
- Continually be alert to own experience of being treated as 'grantees' vs. 'partners' as self-reflect on how staff and the host organisations manage our power.
- Partners also build relationship with primary funder.



Challenges

- Tensions inevitably arise in relation to the processes, consultants contracted, or other issues.

Lessons Learnt

- Focusing at the start on relationship building means our collaboration will be more effective, have greater impact and be prepared for withstanding crises.
- Create spaces for feedback through monthly check-ins with partners, inviting both positive and negative input and having the time to identify what is working well and what is not working well, and collectively problem-solving.

Challenges

- Having a one-size-fits-all approach to resourcing partners and expectations of partners.
- The process of women and community-based women's organisations building confidence and agency is neither linear nor quick.
- Inclusion of marginalised groups that are not yet well organized places significant demands on consortium leaders and on those groups in terms of fostering 'power with'

Lessons Learnt

- Recognise that different local partners are at different levels in terms of capacity and resources – strengthen capacity and address any barriers to partners' full, equitable and meaningful engagement.
- Short term feminist schools must be complemented by longer-term and ongoing cadre building efforts that support women to deepen their knowledge, confidence, and ability to support movements and movement-led advocacy.
- Incorporating opportunities for exchange of experience enriches the work.

Challenges

- How to ensure those hosting the consortium don't take the spaces in global communications and advocacy that groups on the ground should be filling.

Lessons Learnt

- Orient partners to whatever global advocacy space the consortium is engaging. Support them to present their perspectives in that space, rather than consortium leaders taking that space.
- Share the benefit of being allowed into certain spaces by enabling partners to enter those spaces through our access.
- Promote partners as panellists, speakers etc on international panels and to media.

Challenges

- When one partner faces a challenge (like fraud or corruption) that goes into the public or funder space, all partners feel the consortium is at risk.
- How to navigate power dynamics among local partners even when lead partners are not in that country.
- When a group joins the partnership in hope of money and does not carry out the responsibilities they committed to at the start.

Lessons Learnt

- Set up a buddy system so that if one partner is having difficulty they have another partner to call on.
- Ensure there's a coordinator that is in very frequent contact with all partners so that they have built trust enough for a partner in difficulty to immediately share what is happening.



3. Resources

Batliwala, Srilatha. All about power: understanding social power and power structures, CREA. 2019.

Our Voices Our Futures – Vision on working with local organisations, CREA, APC, UHAI, Women=Men, Iniciativa Mesoamericana de Derechose Humanos.

4. Acknowledgements

This report was collated by Barbara Klugman based on the expertise and thinking of members of all Power Up groups who have participated in the Power Up learning process since March 2020; the Annual Reports to Comic Relief of the groups featured in this flashcard; and issues raised during many Power Up workshops, but specifically 'Feminist Practices in Addressing Power Differences', a conversation among networks and INGOs supported through Power Up, 24 March 2022, by:

- Fiona Wilks, Laura Brown, Natasha Horsfield, Womankind
- Katia Araujo, WIEGO
- Mageda Esolyo, Tanisha Chadha, Towfika Sultana, CREA
- Julie Marion, IWGIA
- Samantha Hargreaves, WoMin

Interrogating Power and Movements

These Learning Briefs form part of a series on diverse topics developed by participants in Comic Relief's Power Up Initiative. The initiative comprises 16 grantees with 34 partners, and aims to support work that builds power for women and girls. The initiative included contracting a learning facilitator, Barbara Klugman, to enable connections and learning between organisations to build their strength as movement constituents. Groups funded through Power Up are addressing a wide diversity of issues, and are themselves very different – from community-based organisations to funders to international NGOs and networks. Yet through conversations that began with lockdown in March 2020, they have found common cause in bringing a feminist analysis of power to movement-building and influence.

The Learning Briefs pick up some of the cross-cutting issues they have addressed. Each topic includes participants' understanding of how the issue is relevant to power and

movements followed by examples from a few groups of how they have both built and used their power – their strategies, and how they have influenced power – their achievements. They end with challenges and lessons learnt in addressing these, based on the collective experiences and insights of participants.

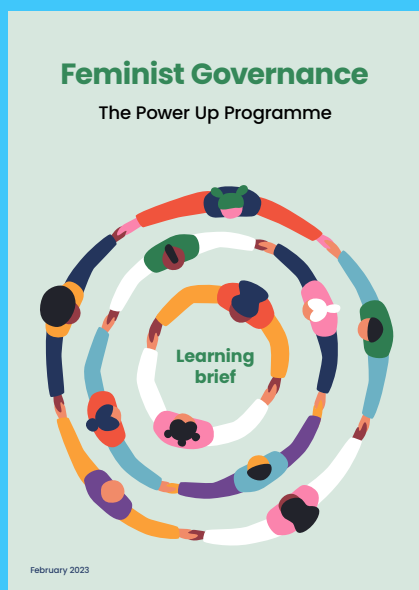
The Learning Briefs form Power Up's Year 3 Report to Comic Relief, and build on the previous reports each of which unpacked questions of power in movement-building and influence:

- How has work funded by Comic Relief's Power Up programme contributed to shifts in women and girls' power? 30 June 2021
- Feminist Resilience and Innovation in a Pandemic.pdf, February 2022
- Reporting back: How one funder succeeded in doing better, and realised they'd never get it completely right, February 2022

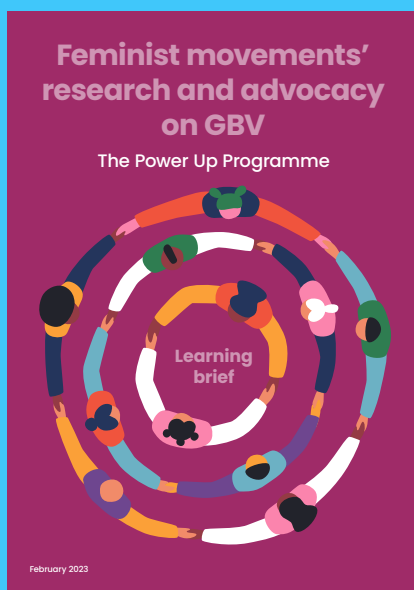
Barbara Klugman, February 2023



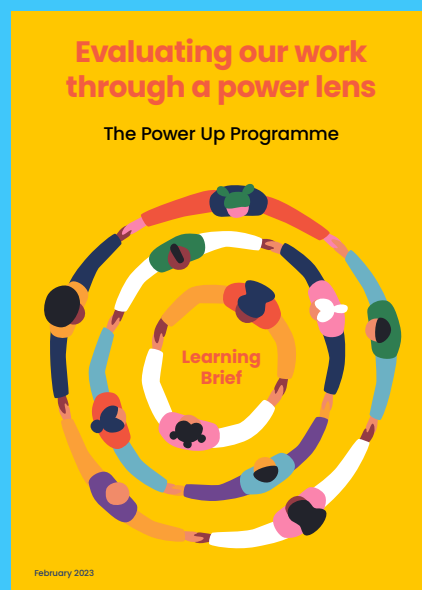
Other titles in this series:



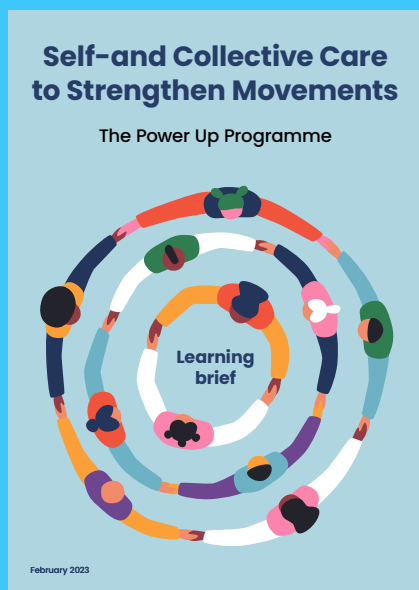
Feminist Governance



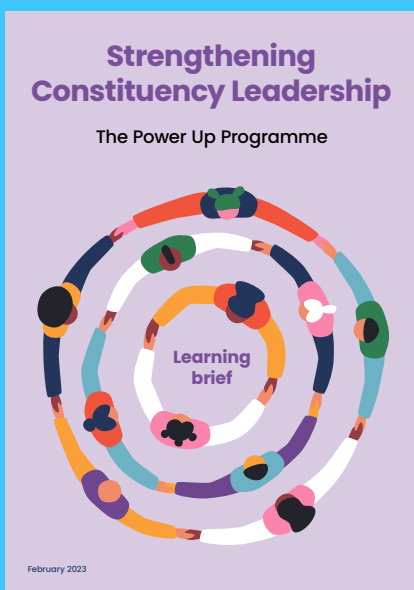
Feminist movements' research and advocacy on GBV



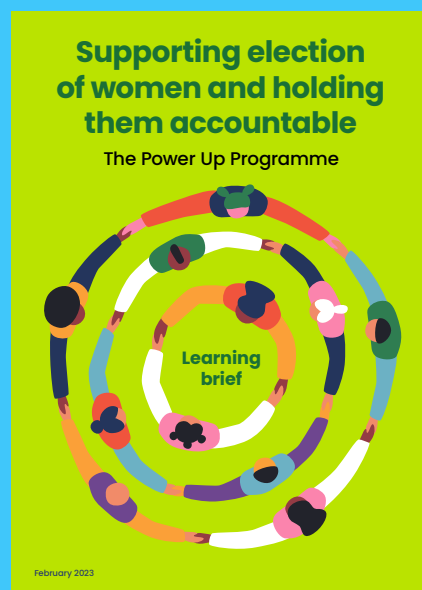
Evaluating our work through a power lens



Self- and Collective Care to Strengthen Movements



Strengthening Constituency Leadership



Supporting election of women and holding them accountable

Go to www.comicrelief.com/funding/reports-and-publications to access them