

# Strengthening Constituency Leadership

The Power Up Programme



February 2023



“

When you're thinking as an organisation about involving women with lived experience, let our interests be the starting point for this discussion – don't start by focusing on our current skills or resources or the problems we're facing. And rather than always coming to us and suggesting that we do a certain activity, listen to us about what we are interested in, what we think could be useful to the campaign.”

**A refugee woman in the Sisters-Not-Strangers Coalition, UK**

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Power Up: a programme funded by Comic Relief

# 1. Why is constituency leadership relevant to power and movements?

- Constituency leadership' refers to leadership by those with lived experience of an issue. We use different terms in our different contexts – constituency, community, lived experience, among others.
- Those with direct experience of a social issue or injustice, are 'experts through experience' and therefore best placed to define the problem, how they'd like to work with others to address it, and what they're calling for.
- Constituency leadership ensures that a movement works in ways appropriate to those most affected by the issue, which is key to effective organising.
- For these reasons they need both the agency (power within) and the position (power with) in women's rights movements to influence decision-makers (power to).
- The experiences of oppression, and of tackling it, provide essential anchoring evidence for these activists and the broader movements to argue their positions.



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**'Constituents' of the organisations participating in POWER UP, include women / womn / womxn who are organising against oppressions based just on their gender – such as gender-based violence – but also based on being poor, of a marginalised ethnicity, 'race' or caste, city dwellers, indigenous, informal home-based workers, in prison, lesbian, bisexual, pastoralists, queer, refugees, sex workers, trans, young, challenging the impacts of extractive industries and / or early married girls. There was also one organisation whose constituents include sex workers of all genders.**

## Vidyanikethan, India with 6 group consortium

### Aim

Nurture a movement to bring together victims of child marriage and empower them on their rights and tools of advocacy to voice out to achieve their rights and services.

Partners with Vidyanikethan are: SEVAK, REACH, PMSR, ARPANAM Trust & CRT

### Sources:

- IMAGE: Nurturing a movement of girls and young women as agents of change to ascertain their rights', Presentation at Power Up Conference 11 October 2022;
- Vidyanikethan Revised Annual Report to Comic Relief 2022, Anne Priya.



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



### How we built and used our power – strategies

- Built life-skills for self-awareness and self-actualisation for early married girls.
- Offered counselling with family members.
- Facilitated participation of early married girls and create opportunities for them to explore their learnings.
- Created the platform for them to speak on child protection.
- Supported young leaders from participants to being facilitators.
- 87 events to engage local political & religious leaders on issues of child marriage.
- Conducted research by the movement leaders to identify their issues and solutions to advocate with the government.

### How we influenced power – achievements

- Early married girls started sharing their experiences in community meetings.
- 256 young women developed into leaders, becoming resource people sharing knowledge in their communities, conducting campaigns and training newly enrolled members.
- The movement members represented the movement in advocacy and consultation meetings with government officials and departments to create child marriage free society.

## Women's Health and Equal Rights Initiative, Nigeria

### Aim

Advance and promote wellbeing & rights of LBQ women addressing:

- health impacts of patriarchy & homophobia;
- under-representation in LGBTIQ movement in Nigeria.

### Sources:

- Akudo Oguaghamba, WHER, 'Mobilising for impact: Sharing best practices and methodologies', Power Up Workshop, 4 November 2020;
- FRIDA/WHER Year 2 Annual Report Oct 2021;
- FRIDA/WHER Year 3 Annual Report Oct 2022.

### How we used our power – strategies

- Research and documentation including needs assessments with focus groups and informative interviews.
- Community and movement-building.
- Empowerment trainings.
- Provision of psychosocial support.
- With FRIDA and others, co-creation of LBTQ Leadership Toolkit.
- Bringing groups together to connect, learn, and strategise on ways forward in addressing their shared challenges.
- Advocacy.
- Sensitisation programmes training community influencers.

### How we influenced power – achievements

- LBQT groups in Nigeria are collaborating more, through forming collectives and collaborating on shared issues.
- Young LBQTI women engaged in 'ENDSARS' protests (Special Anti-Robbery Squad that is notoriously abusive) and declared a state of emergency on SGBV against women in Nigeria.
- In June 2021, National Human Rights Commission (HRC) engaged WHER to conduct a training for its directors and coordinators in all 36 states of Nigeria.
- HRC developed an action plan to promote and protect the rights of LGBTIQ people in Nigeria and stood as amicus curiae in litigation on sections of the Same-sex Marriage Prohibition Act 2014 which succeeded in December 2022.
- Other civil society groups have allied with LBQT groups in Nigeria e.g. inclusion of sexual and gender diverse people in Nigerian Feminist Forum 'Feminist 101' training, July 2021.
- More LBQT persons are engaging in mainstream human rights work, sitting on boards of organisations and becoming more visible and speaking up about their rights on social media and in mainstream human rights and development discussions.

## HomeNet, South Asia WIEGO, South Africa & Uganda

### Aims

- Support home-based workers (HBWs) as leaders, to develop their own organisations and agendas.
- Build HBW's digital, organising and communication skills.

### Sources:

- WIEGO/HNSA Annual Report to Comic Relief Year 3 Oct 2022; 'WIEGO's experience of movement building', Power Up Movement-building working group discussion 14 March 2021;
- Vanessa Pillay, 'WhatsApp was our organising tool', Power Up Conference presentation 11 October 2022;
- Added inputs Renu Golani HNSA, Katia Araujo and Vanessa Pillay, WIEGO.

### HomeNet, South Asia How we used our power – strategies

- Developed a Trainer's Handbook on Organizing, with IASEW, Jan 2022.
- Through 'My Digital Classroom' created digital literacy tools & trained 160 HBWs from 16 orgs in 8 countries & languages.
- Ran workshops on organising and communications with regular check-in meetings of trainees and their peers.

### HomeNet, South Asia How we influenced power – achievements

- From March –Aug 2022, In Bangladesh, India and Nepal worker trainees became trainers, conducting workshops by themselves using the Trainer's Handbook on Organizing.
- Those trained applied their stronger organising and communication skills.

### In both regions:

- These organisations participated in the formation of HomeNet International, engaging meaningfully in activities and opportunities.
- Greater in-country and regional solidarity.

### WIEGO, South Africa & Uganda How we used our power – strategies

- Used word of mouth to find home-based workers (HBWs) and WhatsApp Voice to plan and run meetings, and to make collective decisions.
- Built relationships with local radio stations to carry interviews and enable HBWs to share their experiences and demands to increase HBWs visibility.
- Alliance building with national campaigns such as the Campaign for the Basic Income Grant in SA to raise consciousness about HBWs among other workers and social movements.
- Convened 168 African HBWs from five countries to develop a strategic plan to create an African network..

### WIEGO, South Africa & Uganda How we influenced power – achievements

- The Uganda Working Group registered the Ngalo Buwereza Organisation Ltd as an organization for home-based workers. (7 Feb 2022).
- South African home-based workers established the Home Based Workers South Africa Association (HBWSAA).

## Young Women's Trust, UK

### Aims

- Build a movement of 1,000 young women.
- End the financial penalty faced by young women – unpaid work more equally distributed and young women have more choices about jobs they do, sectors, hours etc. and better career progression.

### Sources:

- Young Women's Trust Final Report to Comic Relief, September 2022;
- Eleanor Davies-Lawley, Young Women's Trust.

### How we built and used our power – strategies

- Running bi-annual Advisory Panel residencies where young women advise us on our organisational and outreach strategies including, for example, shared views on a financial literacy app.
- Training young women in public speaking, facilitation, campaigning and influencing.
- Mobilising and facilitating young women's access to decision-makers and media.
- Just Getting By annual research combined findings from our annual survey of 4,075 young people and 911 human resource decision-makers survey to understand young women's situation.
- Supported 61 young women facing digital exclusion with laptops, data and smart phones.

### How we influenced power – achievements

- Young women doing trainings for other young women including in media, in running webinars and workshops.
- 41 pieces of news coverage on 'Just Getting By' research including across BBC; Media mentioned YWT's campaigning 582 times Sept '21-Aug '22.
- 750 young women took action responding to four government consultations around flexible working and benefits and annual spending review.
- Key MPs and government officials and MPs met with young women who presented their issues.
- MP Sharon Hodgson raised questions in parliament after attending the launch of [One Size Fits No One](#).
- Government partially adopted two of YWT's policy proposals around investment in childcare.



**Taking part in experiences that help invoke change and help others share their views and be heard and respected. Additionally, when YWT takes on our ideas, it proves that we've been listened to."**

**Young women's response to survey, 'What makes you feel part of a movement?'**

# 2. Cross-cutting challenges and lessons learnt

## Challenges

- Constituents, when first joining a movement, seldom name the challenges they face as they experience them as the norm.
- They seldom see themselves as change-makers.
- Sometimes the opinion or values of some of constituents are not aligned with those of the organisation.

## Lessons Learnt

- Essential to support constituents in surfacing and questioning patriarchal values.
- Women who are marginalised have to become visible to each other to begin to recognise that they're not alone, and to see possibilities of being organised. It takes time for women to build confidence to act – don't expect them to do so immediately
- Importance of creating a community of like-minded women for solidarity and power in numbers.

## Challenges

- Those with lived experience of the issue we're working on – whether workers' rights or LGBTQI rights or indigenous women's rights – are most likely to face financial, educational and other barriers limiting their ability to play leadership roles. The challenge is how to support them in this journey.

## Lessons Learnt

- Offering essential resources and acknowledgement recognises barriers to the expertise and talent they bring / their ability to participate. This process builds their self-belief and encourages their participation.
- Be transparent about what you can do and be realistic about what you might achieve so as not to raise unrealistic expectations.

## Challenges

- Supporting organisations often make decisions on behalf of the women themselves, including representing them in forums
- Distinguish transactional campaigning e.g. signing a petition, emailing your MP from constituent-led and driven campaigning.

## Lessons Learnt

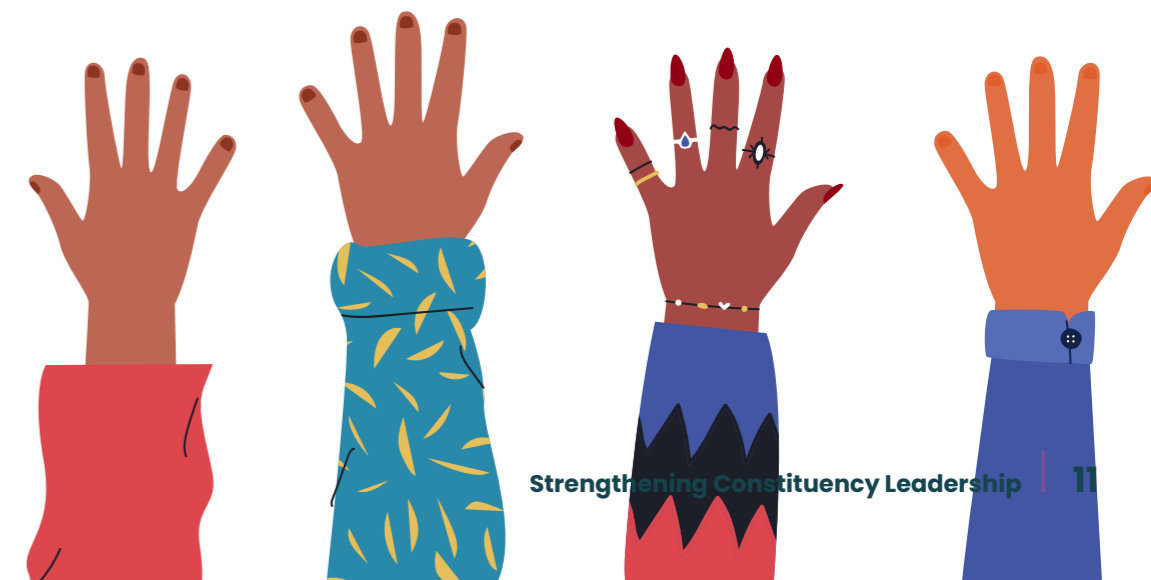
- Keep the principle of leadership by the community at the forefront of all processes and check in frequently about if and how well the organisation is practising it.
- Strategise collectively to shape demands and how to engage decision-makers, and build constituents confidence and skills, to be able to engage with whatever level of government or other decision-makers are the barrier to achieving rights.

## Challenges

- Lack of coordination and solidarity between affected groups; duplicated efforts and conflicting strategies.

## Lessons Learnt

- Building mutual trust and respect allows space for power to be shared.
- Transparency around resources, objectives and strategies, alongside putting in the time to build trust and shape collective agendas, with specific roles and responsibilities, helps to build a basis for partnership rather than competition (see Learning Brief on partnerships).



## Challenges

- The mainstream women's movement isn't always welcoming of marginalised groups (refugees, LGBTIQ, people with disabilities, indigenous women, women in prison) to feel they belong.

## Lessons Learnt

- The stronger the confidence women build the more they'll be able to influence the broader women's movement.
- Critical role of networking and dialoguing and supporting partnerships with other groups in the women's rights movement, bringing evidence and experience to help them 'get' why they need to stand in solidarity with organisations and actors from more marginalised, less mainstream issues or movements, so that those mainstream organisations and actors become advocates for inclusion.

## Challenges

- Restrictive laws in relation to civil society organising or rights of specific groups; and resultant insecurity and threats.
- Lack of supportive legal and political environment including both where laws aren't favourable to our issues and where they are, but are not implemented – decision-makers failure to implement and support.

## Lessons Learnt

- Ensure women have security training (including digital security) and resources to protect themselves, their families and their organisations.
- Network and build relationships with local government to foster trust and collaboration (where context allows).

## Challenges

- Disempowering social norms / socio-cultural obstacles in the community / pressure from family and community.

## Lessons Learnt

- The need for ongoing dialogues, engagement and communication within the community to shift norms and behaviour.

## Challenges

- Lack of sustained, flexible resourcing over time.

## Lessons Learnt

- Advocate to funders for flexible funding that enables us to meet shifting needs of constituents and enables their participation.



# 3. Resources

Young Feminist Leadership Toolkit, (FRIDA/ WHER)

Organizing Women Home-based workers in South Asia: A Trainer's Manual, HomeNet South Asia, in partnership with the Indian Academy for Self-Employed Women – IASEW, Sept 2021.

Peer Research – The Power of Shared Experience, Young Women's Trust, March 2022

We are workers: our home, our workplace, a facilitators guide, WIEGO August 2020.

# 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, including from notes of Power Up workshop on Strengthening Leadership of Constituencies, with Lived Experience, 4 November 2020; the Annual Reports to Comic Relief of the groups featured in this flashcard; plus the specific inputs of the following people in consolidating the opening rationale on why constituency leadership is relevant to power and movements, and the 'Challenges and Lessons Learnt' of this Learning Brief:

- Anne Priya, Vidyanikethan
- Geneviève Rose, IWGIA
- Katia Araujo, WIEGO
- Mbali Khumalo, FRIDA
- Akudo Oguaghamba, WHER
- Natasha Horsfield, Womankind
- Renu Golani, HNSA
- Tutsirai Makuvachuma, WIPUSU

Opening quote from: Women for Refugee Women/ Refugee Women Connect, Annual Report to Comic Relief, Nov, 2021

# 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:

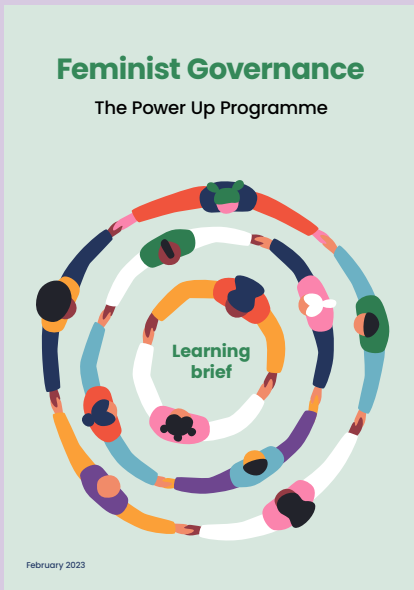
- [How has work funded by Comic Relief's Power Up programme contributed to shifts in women and girls' power?](#) 30 June 2021
- [Feminist Resilience and Innovation in a Pandemic.pdf](#), February 2022
- [Reporting back: How one funder succeeded in doing better, and realised they'd never get it completely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

Barbara Klugman, February 2023

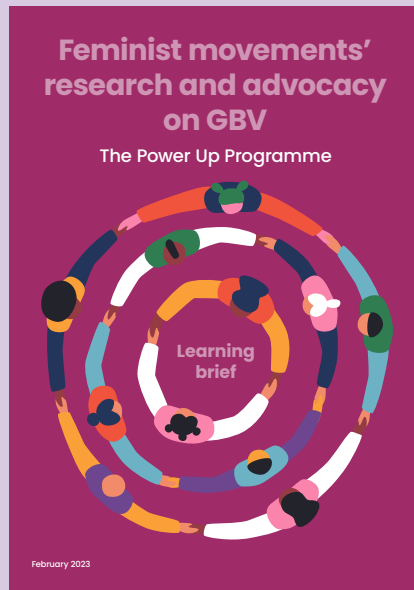




# Other titles in this series:



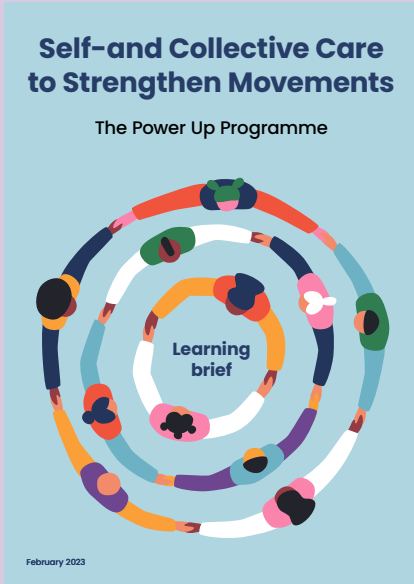
Feminist Governance



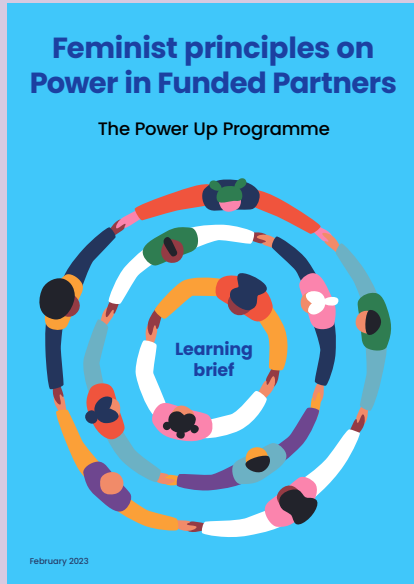
Feminist movements' research and advocacy on GBV



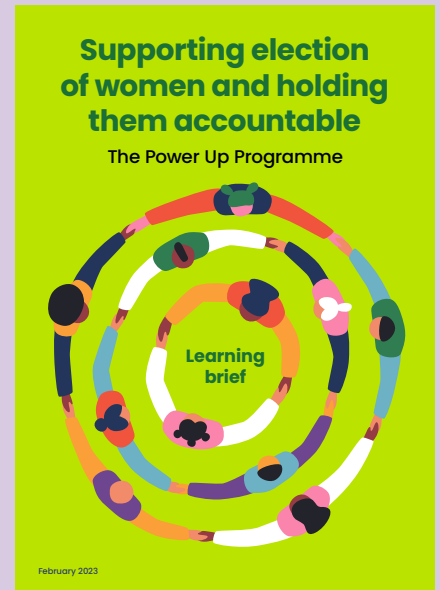
Evaluating our work through a power lens



Self- and Collective Care to Strengthen Movements



Feminist principles on Power in Funded Partners



Supporting election of women and holding them accountable

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