



FEMINIST RESILIENCE AND INNOVATION IN A PANDEMIC

Lessons from the Comic Relief
Power Up cohort



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POWER UP

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POWER UP GROUPS, PROPOSAL TITLES & ACRONYMS

Astraea – Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice: 'Online and in the Streets: Powering Up South Asian LGBTQI Women's Movements'

CREA – Creating Resources for Empowerment in Action (with three partners): 'All Women Count: Rethink power/reimagine agendas/reboot strategies in the feminist movement in India'

EVAW – End Violence against Women Coalition: 'Could Do Better: Pushing for a whole school approach to girls' safety and equality'

Fawcett Society (a consortium of seven partners): 'Equal Power'

FRIDA – The Young Feminist Fund: 'Shaking the Ground; Colouring the Sky: Strengthening LGBTQI Movements in Sub Saharan Africa'

- **WHER** – Women's Health & Equal Rights Initiative

IWGIA – International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (with three partners): 'Empowering indigenous women in Africa and Asia'

Leeds Women's Aid (a consortium of 10 partners): '**Women's Lives Leeds** (WLL) Voices'

PWC – Pastoral Women's Council: 'Empower - Embracing Pastoralists who Organise for Women's Empowerment and Rights'

- **MWEDO** – Maasai Women Development Organisation

Sappho for Equality; Point of View

UHAI-EASHRI – East African Sexual Health and Rights Initiative: 'Powering Up Sex Worker organising for Human Rights'

- **RUF** – Red Umbrella Fund

UAF-A – Urgent Action Fund for Women's Rights – Africa: 'Strengthening women's rights organising resistance and resilience'

Vidyanikethan (a consortium of six partners): 'Nurturing Movement of Girls and Young Women as Agents of Change to Ascertain their Rights'

WIEGO – Women in Informal Employment: Globalising and Organising: 'Empowering Women Home-based Workers'

HNSA – HomeNet South Asia Trust

Womankind Worldwide: 'Collective Action to Realise Equality (CARE): Feminist movement building in Zimbabwe'

- **WCoZ** – Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe
- **WIPSU** – Women in Politics Support Unit

WRW – Women for Refugee Women: 'Refugee Women – Empower and Change'

- **RWC** – Refugee Women Connect

WIP – Women in Prison: 'Power Up: Building the Women's Centre Movement'

WoMin, African Gender and Extractives Alliance: 'African women's voice, African women's development sovereignty: the right to say no'

- **CNRG** – Centre for Natural Resource Governance
- **Kebetkache** Women Development and Resource Centre

YWT – Young Women's Trust: Power Up

SUMMARY REPORT

This report describes themes identified by the 17 Power Up grantees and their partners, based on analysis of all of their annual reports and interviews with all but one of them. It also identifies possible areas for continued sharing and learning among groups as part of the Power Up peer learning process. Key themes are summarised here.

SHIFTS IN CONTEXT

Reports by Power Up groups at end of year one of Comic Relief's Power Up initiative named the major challenges of Covid and lockdown. These related not only to organisational communication and engagement with community constituencies, but to livelihoods of constituents, their exclusion from state and other social supports, and the well documented increase in gender-based violence. Many shifted their advocacy focus to addressing these, as well as taking action to address immediate livelihood and communication needs of constituents. By end of year two of Power Up, some of the continuing consequences of Covid on staff of Power Up groups included stress from personal losses and illness, loss of sociability, pressure of working while doing child education and family care, among other things. In addition, their constituents, too, were living in this context of continuing

uncertainty, fear, and stress, and for some, loss of livelihoods and vulnerability to gender-based violence.

In terms of political space, while a few managed to leverage the situation to draw more attention to their issue – for example gender-based violence – or to the constituency's further marginalisation because of lockdowns, in more cases they described closing of political space for organising and activism. For the Power Up groups, harassment and violence against, among others, sex workers, women opposing extractive industries, and LBTQI persons, escalated. A number of groups, and / or their constituents, faced arrests for protesting. In addition, in India, Zimbabwe and Kenya, groups had to address increased controls over, or surveillance of, those accepting foreign funding.

DIGITAL PLATFORMS AND SECURITY

One of the most significant consequences of the lockdowns has been how groups have developed their own capacities for working online, organising information online, organising and communicating with their constituents and those they aim to influence, telephonically or online. In some contexts, they have also had to address the security risks to individuals and organisations of surveillance by the state or others, or of abuse by opposition individuals or groups.

Many groups reorganised their resources in order to be able to equip, at minimum, the

leaders of the community or constituency groups they work with, with phones and data, and in some cases with iPads or computers. All offered training in how to use WhatsApp or Zoom or whatever was their main platform; some brought in specialist trainers or directed constituents to available online training.

Eleven groups have changed the platforms they use, in some cases for effectiveness, in some cases for security. All note the tremendous amount of time required to build constituents' ability to utilise these; and in one case the grantee closed office for two weeks

while it changed all of its internal and external platforms. In different contexts, constraints of access manifest differently as do solutions.

In one context constituents do not have smart phones, so phone calls have been the primary means of communication, while community leaders have been issued smart phones and are using SMS to send in information and to chat. In other contexts, constituents have been issued with iPads or computers in order to manage their own lives and be able to actively engage and advocate. Two groups described being infiltrated. In one case, where a phone is shared in the family, a (man) family member joined a Zoom meeting and privately chatted with girls; in another, a Zoom call was hacked. In both cases the groups took action and increased their preventive approaches.

Significantly, thirteen groups indicated that this crisis response had strengthened their relationships with constituents in some ways. In many cases they had instituted more frequent calls or check-in meetings. In many cases they were able to invite into their processes people who were geographically dispersed. In some cases the ability to advocate to decision-makers online gave those not in the capital a level of access they did not have before.

COVID ADAPTATION THAT GROUPS ARE LIKELY TO CONTINUE

Groups identified a range of adaptations they are likely to continue, including:

Sustaining digital capacity and actions:

- o closer contact between partners and with constituents;
- o building into budgets and workplans constituents' access to equipment and data and training them in using it;
- o enabling constituents faster access to knowledge and other supports through use of trainer-training processes;
- o disseminating information online, including through videos, comics and podcasts;
- o supporting constituents to use their power by advocating online.

Including emergency and dire needs as part of the organisation's work, recognising that at times even for an advocacy group, this kind of support is essential. Funders in the cohort are also adding emergency needs into their standard offerings.

Greater attention to **collective care and wellbeing**.

Shifting organisational policies and practices to address staff needs, among other things:

- o increasing the frequency of team and all-staff meetings as well as one-on-one meetings;
- o providing allowances or other supports for mental health or self-care;
- o holding each other accountable for their own self-care and establishing mechanisms for staff to pick up from each other so that days off are really days off;
- o shifting to four or four and a half day week.

THEMES ON MOVEMENT LEARNING AND MOVEMENT BUILDING

This section describes some of the themes present across the annual reports and interviews with grantees and their partners, beyond adaptations to Covid, although frequently they are interlinked.

History, trust and ownership

Most groups emphasised how the building of movements is a slow process premised on building trust among partners, and between grantees and their constituents. Part of the process of relationship-building is ensuring that partners and constituents are genuinely leading the analysis of the terrain, development of strategies, and assessment of if and how well their efforts are working, and if and how to shift strategies. Hence in the early phases of partnership development, intended outcomes relate to that process more than to any influence they may have on external stakeholders or decision-makers.

Building confidence to take action

Groups note that working on highly contentious issues, means putting substantial time into building women's knowledge of their rights, and confidence to challenge those with power.

Using research to enable participation and shape strategy

Thirteen out of 17 groups' annual reports described undertaking and then using research findings to shape strategy. In some cases groups involve constituents in the process, including through peer and participatory research processes. They described using the research to understand the context, constituent needs, as well as to shape messaging and campaigns for social change.

Some described research to challenge or reshape current conceptualisations, for example:

- WoMin African Gender and Extractives Alliance is developing a methodology and tools for designing an ecofeminist cost benefit analysis (CBA) of large-scale development projects to challenge the limited current framing of cost-benefit analysis.
- Urgent Action Fund for Women's Rights – Africa (UAF-A) is engaging feminist activists, healers and academics on communal, ancestral and feminist forms of collective healing practices in order to conceptualise 'healing justice' and how to programme to promote 'healing justice' in a pan-African context.

A few groups described research and engagement to strengthen feminist policy and practice in their own organisations.

Monitoring, evaluation and learning

Keeping a close eye on what is working and what is not working in the shifting context of the last year has been critical for most groups.

- CARE (Womankind Worldwide with Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe (WCoZ) and Women in Politics Support Unit (WIPSU)) implemented an 'advocacy tracker' that records the priorities for advocacy from grassroots women, the actions they have taken and the impact/results of the actions.
- WRW (Women for Refugee Women) and RWC (Refugee Women Connect) commissioned a participatory evaluation. Using the Power Framework (from my Power Up Year 1 report¹), constituents reflected on individual power, building a movement, narrative power and institutional power so that as those the

¹ [How has work funded by Comic Relief's Power Up Programme contributed to shift in women and girls' power?](#)

organisations seek to benefit, they could assess the progress of the project. This has formed the basis from which they will participate in shaping the work going forward.

- Vidyantikethan consortium described both a routine monthly process of data gathering and analysis to identify outcomes as well as training needs; and that each month each regional secretariat shares at least one success story to inspire movement leaders in other regions.
- Leeds Women's Aid described how the Women's Lives Leeds Consortium tested the contracting of an external developmental evaluator and found it so helpful that they plan to build this into all future proposals.

Some groups described having regular reflections, building it into their institutional fabric through weekly meetings in some cases, and / or mid-term and end-of-year processes. Others have carved out retreats in order to deepen collective reflection on the shifting context, its impacts on staff and on their organisations and constituents, and the implications for action. Many also describe creating space for engagement among staff and with partners when specific issues arise. A few groups indicated they are currently rethinking their approaches to monitoring, evaluation and learning.

Despite this, there's a general consensus that people tend to be busy and somehow monitoring and reflection time isn't adequately resourced or planned. In addition, challenges in virtual communications at times make it difficult at a distance to gather information or to understand the nuances of dynamics. Organisations are living this tension and doing the best they can within it.

Centring participation

Many of the groups describe constituent participation as being core to the mode of work. Some emphasise their experience that intentional listening can shift the organisation's understanding of its constituents as people, and therefore shift organisational strategies.

In some cases Covid required the organising work to move closer to the grassroots level where community leaders could still connect to constituents despite barriers in digital literacy. Hence the decision and process of groups deliberately shifting power from their NGOs to those 'with lived experience' / 'in communities' came up repeatedly.

One observed that decision-makers were more responsive to direct advocacy by constituents than to advocacy by the grantee's staff.

Participation as core to feminist governance

Thirteen Power Up groups explicitly engage their constituents to shape their strategy development. For example,

- Pastoral Women's Council's (PWC) 34 Women Rights and Leadership Forums (WRLFs) meet twice each month, organising district-level women gatherings; "Olturur Loo Ndomonok", to deliberate their issues.
- Women in Informal Employment: Globalising and organising' (WIEGO) and HomeNet South Asia Trust (HNSA) described how "Thirty-six home-based worker (HBW) organisations from 20 countries became the founding members of the global network representing more than 600 000 HBWs. Over 300 people attended the virtual launch and first Congress with 14 different languages interpreted. The Congress took over five hours with 14 different languages interpreted. Thirty-six affiliates across regions adopted the Constitution, presented regional reports, appointed a Working Committee, confirmed the international coordinator, and adopted an interim logo within this record time."
- Young Women's Trust (YWT) noted, "We implemented a new campaign planning process which positioned 18 young women at the heart of the decision-making process. Through a series of online workshops, they helped us decide what our policy asks should be for the current phase of our

#NoYoungWomanLeftBehind campaign and presented these to policymakers at a stakeholder event in Feb2021 for feedback. Once agreed, they then helped us decide the campaign actions and communications...”

Fostering alliances and partnerships

Insights on partnering in shaping and implementing the Comic Relief proposal

Reflecting on the process of operationalising partnerships where groups together bid for a Power Up grant, many groups noted that where they had not worked together before, or had not worked together on the issues in the Power Up proposal, they needed time after receiving the grant to focus on building the partnership. A few indicated that they had jumped into the work without doing the partnership development that was needed which caused difficulties later that they had to address. The key lessons is the need to set the terms of the partnership right at the start. Also that routine communications are essential, but not always easy to sustain.

Duplication and competition

There’s general recognition that the greater the range of groups committing to collective agenda-setting and action, the greater the chance of influencing public and political action. However, the barriers are enormous. Groups are often in competition with each other, for funds or recognition. It requires a significant investment of resources and time to build relationships of trust that enable collaboration.

- The Women’s Health and Equal Rights Initiative (WHER) described the significant challenge of poor and disorganised networking which causes duplicated efforts and conflicting strategies. In the context of this project, WHER continued to work to close this gap by bringing groups together to connect, learn, and strategise on ways forward in addressing their shared challenges.
- Womankind is developing a set of principles to guide partnerships.

The political moment – context – can spur collaboration, so timing is critical

Both the depth of the crisis precipitated by lockdown – in terms of vulnerability of livelihoods and to gender-based violence – and the desire to create a powerful voice for change, spurred some partnerships that had been nascent before Covid.

- The End Violence against Women Coalition (EVAW) described how 20 representatives across the women and girls and ending violence against women and girls sector came together in this period with a refreshed energy for building an alliance to speak to government with a unified voice as The Prevention Network.
- A number of groups working in South Asia noted their organisations had managed to broaden cross-movement and intersectional discourse on LGBTQI inclusion, in part by drawing attention to how the crisis was increasing dangers of violence faced by LGBTQI people, and getting other groups to include this in their focus on gender-based violence.

Building capacity for inclusion and intersectional action

Many of the Power Up groups are engaged in messaging and alliance-building and influencing other movements, for example to influence the women’s movement to stand in solidarity on LGBTQI or sex worker or refugee issues. The impact of the anti-racism movement, particularly on groups in the UK, is evident in the annual reports. A number of groups described seriously reflecting on their own internal representation, understandings and strategies.

- Fawcett Society organised a series of anti-oppression training for the Steering Group on Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred, antisemitism, homophobia and transphobia and anti-Black racism.
- YWT initiated an equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) review which consisted of an audit phase, a learning phase and is now moving into an action planning phase out of which is has shifted its approach to recruitment.
- The International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) developed a new gender strategy to define its work and

priority on gender issues for the next 5 years. The main goal of the gender strategy is to address the racial discrimination and violence that Indigenous women face, and thus the project is very much contributing to achieving their visions for supporting indigenous women.

Language justice

Language injustice was a theme raised by many groups. In some cases groups focused on questions of disability. Organisations are ensuring their website and social media are more accessible, for example,

- Creating Resources for Empowerment in Action (CREA)'s social media using captions for everything the organisation posts and shifting from English to local language conversations on feminist

leadership and how Covid had affected people; with sign language interpretation.

- UHAI East African Sexual Health and Rights Initiative (UHAI-EASHRI) found that as sex workers began organising in rural areas, they had “to think about language justice – people mostly speak vernacular in rural areas so how do we sustain that momentum of and support communities to create those safe spaces.”
- A number of funders have ensured that applicants can apply online in multiple languages, for example in the case of Red Umbrella Fund (RUF), in English, French, Russian or Spanish.

FUNDING MOVEMENTS

Trust-based accountability by funders providing continuous, flexible core support

Grantees expressed appreciation for Comic Relief's trust in them, and willingness to let them reshape their direction in response to the Covid crisis. Most notably they indicated that without this flexibility they would not have been able to transition to digital organising. They expressed the hope that their funders who had demonstrated this kind of approach, including Comic Relief, would continue with it going forward, as unrestricted funding enables shifting of strategies as the context shifts as well as respect for community priorities.

Funders supported as grantees of the Power Up initiative similarly note that their

approach centres around trusting that their grantees know what is best for them, because they know their context and communities.

- Power Up grantee FRIDA, itself a funder, noted how its own research had demonstrated that such funding, coupled with non-financial supports, supports the strength and evolution of young feminist movements. See <https://www.whattookyousoalong.org/documentary/frida-fund>.

Supporting a diversity of groups, including unregistered groups

Funders supported by Power Up noted the importance of being flexible and able to fund groups in diverse forms.



“Working on highly contentious issues, means putting substantial time into building women’s knowledge of their rights, and confidence to challenge those with power.”

POWER UP PEER LEARNING: POSSIBLE ISSUES TO PURSUE

Groups identified a range of issues they would like to explore further through the Power Up peer learning process. Some of this could be done as part of the build-up towards a final in-person or online conference if the group decides to hold one. Topics are noted as the basis for further consultation and shaping of a 2022 direction.

Governance, power and feminist leadership

– surfacing leadership and accountability principles and exploring issues ranging from co-leadership models, to strengthening leadership of communities and those with lived experience, and what governance systems are appropriate to constituency-led organisations.

- Continuing the theme of **partnerships**, learning from how various partners in Power Up have addressed their challenges.
- **Differences and similarities between Power Up groups: constituency-based organisations, networks and funders** in relation to:
 - how they understand and manage their roles as partners, supporters, funders, but also advocates in their own right;
 - how their partners and sub-grantees understand their roles;
 - how they organise their governance and in relation to questions of power and feminist principles.

Supporting women to stand for elections, and then **holding elected representatives accountable** is the focus of Fawcett, WIPSU and CREA and could yield mutual learning as well as insights for others in the cohort.

Community and activist **training programmes**

– what content, methods, curricula, processes are working well?

Inclusion of people with disabilities and generally building intersectional capacity

– how do we crash through disability being a barrier to inclusion in our own organisations and in organising our constituents? Similarly sharing of experiences of **strengthening an intersectional analysis and practice** within organisations and in movement building.

Revisiting digital organising, in particular what we are learning about holding ‘hybrid’ events.

Addressing **shrinking civil space** and better protecting our partners online.

Using what we’ve learnt from lockdown to **support preparedness for other crises**.

Gender based violence and the possibility of collaboration between groups.

Approaches to Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning

– continuing the conversation including the ‘doing’ of feminist MEL and learning from changes groups have implemented.

BACKGROUND

For Comic Relief, the Power Up initiative is an opportunity to explore how social movements develop and sustain themselves, what makes them effective and how they learn and adapt. This in turn enables insights about what funder practices are most effective in supporting movement building and effective movements.

As part of its learning process, Comic Relief contracted me as a learning partner to them and to the cohort of Power Up grantees. Based on grantees' priorities, I have facilitated a series of learning sessions on a diversity themes in 2020 and 2021. At the end of Year 1, Comic Relief asked me to review the annual reports to explore 'if and how this work is leading to women and girls involved having more power within their contexts', defining power as agency to 'define, decide, do'. The Power Framework developed from that exercise formed the basis for further engagement and consultation with the cohort. For its learning at the end of Year 2 of Power Up, Comic Relief asked me to identify themes emerging across the October 2021 annual reports, and to assess if the Annual Reporting Form worked better than the previous one. Findings on Comic Relief's reporting form and groups' experiences of Comic Relief and of the peer learning process are presented in a separate report. This report focuses on themes emerging across the reports and conversations with grantees in late 2021.

METHODOLOGY

The report is based on my analysis of each annual report, followed by interviews with all but one grantee. In seven cases, partners in their proposal to Comic Relief joined the primary grantee in the online interview. Interviews were done in confidence. In December 2021, I shared an anonymised version (bar references to Annual Reports which of course were done for Comic Relief) with Comic Relief. I sent all references to each organisation's annual report and any quotes of individuals interviewed back to the relevant individuals and organisations, to decide a) if they were happy with the wording or to make changes and b) if they wanted any of these to be kept anonymous, or to be named by the person who spoke and / or their organisation. I then made changes accordingly. I sent a next version to all Power Up groups in late January 2022, so they could prepare for two events in early February: a feedback session with Comic Relief; and a collective conversation on the themes arising, and ways of moving forward the Power Up peer learning process. Seeing the references to them in context of the full report, they could also indicate any necessary changes, before Comic Relief publishes the report.

SHIFTS IN CONTEXT

Covid lockdown consequences

Reports by Power Up groups at end of Year One named the major challenges faced as a result of lockdowns as not only organisational communication and engagement with community constituencies, but undermining of livelihoods of constituents, their exclusion from state and other social supports, and the well documented increase in gender-based violence. Many shifted their advocacy focus to addressing these, as well as addressing immediate livelihood and communication needs of constituents. These are not repeated here. However, by end of Year Two, some of the continuing consequences of Covid were described by Power Up groups. A number of groups lost staff members due to illness or death; others lost family and friends. Almost all groups describe negative impacts on staff wellbeing, and of that of their constituents, because of the losses

due to illness coupled with the difficulties of working and doing childcare and child education at the same time in the same space, in some cases because of loss of livelihoods, in some cases because constituents' marginalised situation meant they had less access to state and other Covid-related social supports. Some groups' livelihoods were directly impacted by lockdowns, notably that of sex workers and street vendors. The increase in gender-based violence continued. Vidyanikethan described an increase in child marriages influenced by the closing of schools and a decline in capacity of the state and other stakeholders' regular monitoring systems – 106 adolescent girls' pregnancies were reported from its project areas in the nine months preceding their report. In all cases, living in this context of continuing uncertainty and fear, with social support and the comfort of physical connection prohibited, has hugely increased stress levels of staff and constituents.

In terms of political space, in some countries and on some issues, Covid closed space. UHAI describes how in addition to livelihood challenges, Covid was used to further stigmatise:

“At the onset of the pandemic in our region, Sex Workers and other vulnerable communities were blamed for the arrival of Covid19 in their countries. The media carried the moralistic sentiment by the public and religious leaders that God was punishing them due to the sins of Sex Workers and others deemed to immoral. Due to this Sex Workers have faced heightened violence and their rights have been systematically violated as a result. The struggle for a dignified life for Sex Workers still remains as their lived realities portray the precarity of their lives underlined by insecurity, homelessness, stigma, violence and widespread abuse.”

Groups described some of the dynamics of lockdown in India, for example

“The barriers to structural change are considerably larger now that the community's priority needs centre on food security and shelter. This means that the landscape of power is shifting and more civil society organisations are being forced out of vital advocacy spaces due to their need to focus on urgent survival needs of their community; this has created a power vacuum that is then exploited by the increasingly authoritarian government. All of these factors have also led to deep burnout among movement leaders.”

In some cases Covid or other political dynamics opened opportunities for influence. A number of groups working in South Asia noted their organisations had managed to broaden cross-movement and intersectional discourse on LGBTQI inclusion, in part by drawing attention to how the crisis was increasing dangers of violence faced by LGBTQI people, and getting other groups to include this in their focus on gender-based violence. EVAW noted that in the UK there is an utterly changed external context including “Major national conversation about women and girls lived experiences after murders of Sabina Nessa, Sarah Everard, Nicole Smallman and Bibaa Henry – tying all the threads together to make the case for a joined up response to violence against women and girls.”

Backlash and closing political space

One group noted how backlash and discrimination is a normative part of the daily lives and the context of many groups work. One group noticed that because of this, groups seldom mention it,

“As activist work is contesting the norm while working to dismantle deeply entrenched colonial legacies to bring about change, the backlash activists experience is often normalised as a regular part of the work because it is often sustained and continuous. For example, though many of the groups conversationally mention one form of backlash or another, only [one] reported they had experienced backlash when formally asked in the report.”

But a number of groups noted consistent harassment and dangers faced by constituents. For example,

“Governments are putting in place restrictive laws for civil society organisations, they are controlling more their work and indigenous peoples’ human rights defenders, including women, are too often victims of harassment, arrest, violence or even killings.” (IWGIA)

Women in Prison (WIP) described the negative attitude from many in the UK public with regards to women who are in contact with the criminal justice system:

"A recent Ipsos Mori polling showed the British public believe rehabilitation services to be the least effective solution to cutting crime, which was less popular than even capital punishment. These attitudes are a major challenge for us."

For the Power Up groups, such harassment and violence includes specifically targeting their constituents, among others, sex workers, women opposing extractive industries, and LGBTQI persons.

Fawcett noted how women who could stand for office are put off by the prevailing hostile climate:

“Women in public life continue to be targeted by misogyny and abuse. These experiences of women in public life have implications for women’s willingness to put themselves forward for election and for the longevity of their careers.”

In some cases Power Up groups have been directly affected by this.

One group described how they “mobilised community members (men, youth and women) to boycott attending a public forum called by the President. This infuriated some government officials and political leaders from the ruling party and led to the arrest and temporary detention of ten people. We quickly mobilised and responded by reaching out to our NGO partners and lawyers’ bar association who immediately provided lawyers to represent those arrested. As a result of this quick response, the 10 people were released from detention within five hours and all charges against them dropped. In coming months, we plan to develop a comprehensive frontline human rights defenders’ policy and risk mitigation plan to guide us on how to respond in similar instances of government backlash.” (Anonymous)

“The Centre for Natural Resource Governance (CNRG) also stood with the Dinde community in its fight against the establishment of a new coal station by a Chinese investor. The state responded by arresting the leader of the Dinde Residents Association, Never Tshuma, on April 15th with accompanying inhumane and unjust bail conditions. After extensive advocacy work by CNRG and other allies like WoMin, to raise awareness on the human rights violations in Dinde, Mr Tshuma’s charges were dropped on July 30, 2021. Although the operating environment has continued to be hostile, CNRG has stood with women and the wider community to strengthen their capacity to fight back against the mine and the related repression.” (WoMin)

Six Power Up groups are working in India or supporting groups in India and all described the negative consequences of the Foreign Contribution Registration Act (FCRA) and implementation of the Citizenship Amendment Act and the National Register of Citizens. They have worked out a range of adaptations that have enabled the work to continue.

In Zimbabwe, where a number of Power Up groups work, some noted that government is trying to further close spaces in the build-up to the 2023 elections, including the intention to introduce a Patriot Act that would criminalise anyone criticising the government. They see this as a response to increased social media activism. In addition, the NGO Bill (to curb the powers of civil society) also seeks to limit what actors in civil society can do. A government department responsible for NGOs asked some Power Up groups to provide workplans and budgets for all their ongoing projects.

Groups noted that despite major protests by civil society groups, the threat of closure meant that they ultimately complied.

Similarly in Kenya governments sought to shrink civil society space even further through proposed bills/laws that would force NGOs to disclose the sources of donor funding in a bid to influence the impact of their activities. Authorities in Uganda also decreed that foreign missions and NGOs in the country share their strategic plans with them for approval in order for the Ugandan government to control the activities of these entities.

DIGITAL PLATFORMS AND SECURITY

Probably the most significant finding of this 2021 review, in relation to lockdown adjustments, is that thirteen groups described how going digital enabled them to increase their reach and the consistency of their engagement with their constituents.

Before lockdown, except for email, and possibly WhatsApp, the digital world was unfamiliar to staff of many groups and was entirely unfamiliar to many of their constituents. Building their staff capacities was often a first focus, while they also took on the process of ensuring their constituents' ability to participate in the new world of digital communication and organising. This was essential not only to ensure their inclusion in shaping initiatives and conducting advocacy, but also to ensure that they were not tripped up by security risks in relation to their personal information – their card numbers, their passwords and the like.

Closer contact between partners and with constituents

In the first meetings of the Power Up cohort, as lockdowns began, there was a general assumption that organisations would lose connection to their constituencies. Yet almost all groups describe how changes they made because of lockdown have strengthened their movements in certain ways. While all groups perceive in-person meetings to be important for relationship-building, and for taking action to influence others, many recognise that going virtual – as long as they support their constituents in how to use whatever technology is appropriate – has extended their reach.

Many groups described institutionalising frequent phone calls which at times means they're in more contact than they were when they relied on in-person visits.

“Online Zoom events are a transformational way to reach out to people across the country, enabling us to reach beyond the “Westminster bubble.” (Fawcett)

“Covid accelerated use of technology to bring organisations together – regular meetings online has had the benefit to ensuring we are far more aware of and tapped into what's going on in different regions of the UK; getting together has become so much more accessible and has helped more marginalised groups to be more informed on policy making going on in London. The feedback we've had is that it's been beneficial.” (Andrea Simon, EVAW)

“All this with meeting online has advantages and disadvantages but a lot of good things. Everybody has become very literate. Two years ago, we were all hopeless, and are now very good. We have more regular meetings with partners. It doesn't replace meeting in person but allows you to meet more regularly, be more updated on how things are going. People in communities are coming and talking with us, so we have a good sense of how people are receiving the project. Even though' there's online fatigue, it really helps.” (Geneviève Rose, IWGIA) “International advocacy is also more challenging online, as a lot of the lobbying that

usually goes on outside the official sessions is not possible. Access to key decision-makers has in some ways decreased, whereas in other ways there has been more openness from, for instance, UN special procedures to meet with indigenous peoples directly online, and in that sense opened up new spaces for advocacy.” (IWGIA)

“As a membership based organisation, these virtual platforms have been useful and helpful; they’ve created space for more participants to partake compared to physical events. We’ve reached a broader range and as a result we’ve increased our membership of organisations and of individuals. WhatsApp groups have also been used for those without access to online platforms like Zoom” (Sharon Manenji, WCoZ)

“The shift of responsibilities from the regional secretariat to the movement leaders and members can be witnessed during the COVID response activities. ... We will continue with using the technology – virtual meetings – we were able to reach more girls even in remote villages, we could talk with them...” (Vidyanikethan)

Vanessa Pillay (WIEGO) describes how at the start of this project to connect home-based workers in Africa they began identifying individuals and groups in South Africa and Uganda, under lockdown.

“The structure and strategy have unfolded organically. We started with there being no regional platform for home-based workers. But we wanted to stay in touch, to know how home-based workers were doing during Covid. So that’s how our regional platform started – meeting weekly for solidarity; just going around each country saying, ‘how are workers affected? what do we know about new cases? how are we coping at the moment? – sharing on Covid. Then this slowly expanded into ‘what does this mean for work?’. And then we started talking action.” The Ugandan groups established a working group and 19 home-based workers took on new roles as trainers, replicating training workshops in four different regions with the participation of 101 home-based workers (85 women and 16 men). In March 2021, the Uganda Working Group agreed to and started the process of registration to formalise the national network. A similar process took place in South Africa. Ultimately this way of working has enabled the groups to establish a home-based workers African Regional platform, all online. (WIEGO)

Nalemuta Moisan (PWC) noted that their training of trainers approach served them well in the Covid context because the work could continue at local level given they did not have a severe lockdown. The organisation equipped these trainers with smart phones and data enabling them to use SMS to keep the organisation updated. In addition, they kept connected with constituents by phone. While their constituents do not have smart phones, the organisation’s work over the years has included ensuring women have telephone communication for their lives and businesses, which stood them in good stead with Covid.

Pip McKnight (RWC) described not only how this mode of work enabled consistent contact, but how necessary it was.

“We knew people struggled but it’s given us deeper insight into the impact of isolation... more aware of that; in putting a programme or service together we have that awareness of importance of connectivity and connection. This concept of the check-in. Let’s take a minute to really talk about what’s going on with you, because we’re not having those conversations naturally face to face. It’s great.”

Added Venus Abdullah (WRW)

“We can offer services that are wider than [our town] – much more regional.”

WIPSU described how being connected online has enabled elected representatives – women councillors to link together through WhatsApp to get immediate supports.

“When facing a challenge they can ask, ‘I’m attending x meeting, how do I address this issue?’ and get support from others. This is something we’ll continue.” (Rumbidzayi Cordelia Machimbirike)

Constituents exercising greater power and advocating online

Groups described how community members have taken on greater roles in leadership.

“Covid was an opportunity. Before, everything was done by partners and their staff – organising meetings, deciding on programmes. But with Covid, we slowly shifted that part to our movement leaders as we couldn’t go into the field. In each village a few movement leaders could do this. , engaging community leaders; distributing of material and taking up issues. Covid was an opportunity to involve more movement leaders and members in monitoring and evaluation. This has been a major shift in our practice – after five years we can happily hand this over to our members, they can meet the objectives of this movement.” (Vidyanikethan)

A few groups described how lockdown enabled their constituents – once they’d built their confidence in the medium and on the issues – to meet with MPs and other decision-makers; something that may not continue post-lockdown:

“Some women felt much more comfortable attending online meetings with MPs than they would have done face-to-face meetings. Those who wrote to MPs felt confident doing so because they gained the information technology skills to draft and redraft, share these with others and then email them. With women’s increased confidence and skills using digital media, the team was able to communicate more fully and consistently with many more women to take part in the consultation around the Nationality and Borders Bill. The Sisters Not Strangers (SNS) coalition was able to meet more frequently, which resulted in more collaboration with grassroots organisations than anticipated.” (Venus Abdullah, WRW)

“No longer having to travel to London to meet MPs is brilliant in terms of cost and accessibility – and from the looks of it, we met lots of MPs in lockdown, but now they’re working in hybrid so getting meetings is hard; MPs aren’t allowed to have visitors in parliament. Zoom was a good thing for getting people in front of their MPs.” (Lydia Morgan, YWT)

“We learned that making involvement in actions easy for people really pays off – using quick forms (Microsoft or Google Forms to sign up and feedback), using campaigns software and platforms to create petitions and actions like emails to political targets, all helped to make it easy for people to engage and also for us to collect supporter data in one place.” (WIP)

Equipping and training constituents

Access to equipment and data had limited some of their constituents’ connectivity even before lockdown, but lockdown brought it to the fore as an issue. This is so from countries with income levels as different as the UK and Tanzania, which demonstrates the extreme marginalisation of some of the constituents of Power Up groups.

“questions of injustices on access to internet and laptops we’d not thought about, but we had to address.” (Stellah Wairimu Bosire, UHAI)

Many groups reorganised their resources in order to be able to equip at minimum the leaders of the community or constituency groups they work with, with phones and data, and in some cases with iPads or computers. All offered training in how to use WhatsApp or Zoom or whatever was their main platform. Some brought in specialist trainers or directed constituents to available online

training. In the first few months of lockdown, some grantees offered guidance to the Power Up cohort on how to work online, including tricks and tools, as part of the Power Up peer learning process.

Examples of action taken include,

- training a group of trans rights activists on digital security practices and tools (Point of View);
- integrating digital literacy skills-building to equip and empower women leaders and their organisations to utilise these tools during the pandemic and beyond (CREA, WIEGO/HNSA);
- encouraging holding of small virtual meetings to foster participation, before any larger events.
- getting Social Movement Technologies (SMT) to run digital campaigns training, which started in September 2020 and concluded in June 2021, with accompaniment by specialists. The programme supported a cadre of 45 African activists, the majority being women, receive training in the use of appropriate digital tools to support organising and campaigning. (WoMin)
- “In India each family holds one mobile phone, and apart from that we have given tablets. A few of our girls who are students needed tablets to be able to continue their education – we preloaded the syllabus and educational material where there’s no access by mobile; and every month we’d recharge their mobiles communication costs (with data).” (Vidyanikethan)

Many groups have indicated that they plan to continue with the changes they made. For example, YWT conducted a first pilot and is now in a second:

“Before the pandemic we were thinking about providing travel cards to our young women’s advisory people, as everything was done in person. Then some young women who were really engaged face-to-face disappeared completely throughout the pandemic which is when we realised they didn’t have the tech. We did a small test. We gave 21 young women three months of data, an iPad and free training we found online. We wanted to better understand the impact of digital exclusion on young women in our network, and provide appropriate support so they could participate fully and contribute learnings to future service development. As a result, young women reported that their mental health improved through being less isolated; they were able to access useful online services and courses; and it improved their work prospects. They also reported that they were more connected with friends and family. Those who were Advisory Panel members significantly increased the number of times they engaged with us. Young women also told us that whilst they were thankful for the support they received, a laptop would be more user friendly than an iPad, and that a year of data would be more helpful to continue to stay involved in our work. Based on feedback from them, we’ve now shifted that to providing laptops instead, and a year’s worth of data which we’ve connected with [a mobile phone charity] who gave us 45 sim cards with data on them; and we’re still pointing them to digital education, if they need it. We are currently running a further Digital Inclusion Fund pilot which implements and tests the effectiveness of such adaptations.” They note that the purpose is not only to enable their participation in the movement, but to also enable them to access the information they need for finding work, for managing their money, and so on. (Lydia Morgan and Annual Report)

Feminist knowledge creation and dissemination in accessible digital forms

CREA used this time to develop SELF stories through a series of videos, using comics made by girls in the academy, and recorded audio monologues of girls in their own voices. The videos were created on the most crucial themes in the girls' lives that were addressed in-depth in the academy.” – see CREA’s YouTube):

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLuOmNjZTIhxSra_M83OHG3FWkYPXimlgs. They also used Interactive Voice Response (IVR), an automated phone system technology that allows incoming callers to access information via a voice response system of pre-recorded messages. So they could use a simple mobile phone to dial in and listen to stories on issues persisting during

Covid such as caste and religion based discrimination that was happening; household burden on women that was creating lots of gender based violence at home.

“We created stories with a protagonist of one elected woman representative through whom we told the stories. Women heard these stories. They didn’t just listen to the stories, the women and girls, also health service providers and elected women representatives and even men listened but beyond listening they then recorded their own stories and shared these with us – using a simple method with mobile phones. This we’ve continued even after things have relaxed although the amount of listenership is declining, but easier to talk about certain pressing issues like sex worker issues, issues of women with disabilities or diverse sexual and gender identity. We had thought of reaching out to 1800 individuals but it went beyond 4000 individuals and we recorded many real life stories that people sent back.” (Smurti Sudha)

IWGIA described their shift to podcasts increasing their connectivity:

“Colleagues in Latin America have been doing podcasts for many years but it’s new for us. It’s nice to have this avenue now – donors don’t read reports and a lot of people don’t read big books; I think we should keep publishing but that targets a small number of people in universities. Podcasts have the possibility to reach out to a broader audience. Our partners really appreciate it and you can get a lot of information that’s up to date out there. Our partners in Asia have been doing video podcasts, also on Facebook.” (Geneviève Rose, IWGIA)

See also ‘language justice’ below.

Moving platforms for effectiveness of use

Power Up groups mentioned making the following changes **for effectiveness of use**:

- From Gotomeeting to Microsoft teams for internal and Zoom for external. (WoMin)
- Organisation-specific platform built to be more disability accessible. (CREA)
- Introduced Yammer for network online engagement including outside of formal meetings, although they’ve not used it long enough to be sure yet that it is the right platform for them. (EVAW) [Yammer is part of the Microsoft Suite: It says, “*Like a closed version of Facebook, Yammer lets co-workers chat, share files, hold surveys, and more.*”]
- Creation of an App that enables constituents to report any case of violence against women they experience or witness, so that the organisation can find that person and offer support; may require borrowing of a smart phone. It enables partners to send information by SMS and compiles it into an online system. (PWC) [<https://blue.social>: “*A free mobile app for you to use whether you’re at an event, conference, school or just hanging out with friends. Blue makes it easier to connect and share contact information with people you meet.*”]
- SLACK for internal communication. (UHA)
- Impact-stack as a campaigns and online fundraising platform – the set-up cost is about £2000 and it costs £300 a month. (WIP)

Increasing security

Many groups had to understand and address online security concerns including surveillance of human rights defenders and the need for safety in feminist organising, including within digital spaces. They had to learn about and take account of data protection legislation in each country. A number of groups indicated they had built staff capacity in relation to online security, so that they could, in turn support partners to build their capacity. One group set aside 10 days in which all staff only focused on the of their systems to new platforms, including staff training so they are comfortable in using them. It initiated what it called its ‘RAD process’ – Retention, Archiving, and Deletion – “to ensure the safety of our community’s information” at the same time as shifting to more secure platforms.(Mbali Khumalo, FRIDA) UAF-A described how it was framing its approach as “collective care, wellness and security.”

Specific changes made by Power Up groups **for increased security** include:

- from WhatsApp to Telegram (but not encrypted) (Sappho for Equality)
- from WhatsApp to Signal (UAF-A, CREA)
- shift to WIRE for internal communication (CREA)
- from Gmail or other mail to ProtonMail (FRIDA, IWGIA)
- from Dropbox or other cloud to Box (Anonymous)
- from Dropbox and Google Drive to NextCloud (FRIDA, CREA) though one noted that moving to open source software such as this has “come with a lot of glitches”
- from Next Cloud to Salesforce for even greater security (RUF)
- by using a Virtual Private Network (IVPN), Bitwarden (open source password manager), Authy (for two-factor authentication), Malware bytes (to protect against viruses or other types of security breach) (FRIDA)
- exploration of USSD – Unstructured Supplementary Service Data as a mode of sharing information when internet is being monitored (UHAI)
- development of an institutional security policy about access to data, and not exposing partners, and guidelines to support partners in addressing this. (UHAI)

Consultant support

Some groups hired in consultants to help them, for example:

- a digital security expert to establish a platform where WHRDs can communicate with each other. (UAF-A)
- a risk management organisation to deepen the organisation’s approach and provide specific risk analysis and management support to partners and allies. (WoMin)

Names of consultants used:

- CREATE (SA-based) – on digital literacy;
- Kamara (US-based) – on human rights protocols in risk management – <https://www.kamara.global>
- Social Movement Technologies (US-based) on digital organising – <https://socialmovementtechnologies.org>
- GLITCH (UK-based) – “championing digital citizenship” – <https://glitchcharity.co.uk>

Recognising and addressing limitations or challenges of digital communications

A number of groups tested processes internally before extending them. Noted FRIDA,

“By first experimenting and testing the platforms internally and then rolling these out to grantee partners, FRIDA is living by our own Tech Principles and not asking young feminist collectives to use tech we wouldn’t use ourselves. See FRIDA’s feminist tech principles: <https://youngfeministfund.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/FRIDAS-TECH-AND-DATA-PRINCIPLES.pdf>.”

The following limitations or challenges of digital communications were identified:

Constraints of access:

“I don’t think we can choose digital security [in our context] – someone may be using a son or husband’s phone. Asking women to Zoom – it’s the most frequently used platform – and then having to train them in it and then you have a whole lot of more digitally secure options you’d like to try, but then you’d have to train the women there as well, when they’re on someone else’s phone. ... In [our country] there’s no digital security anyway – if a woman is linked to the state’s ration systems or health care, everything is linked, so the government knows everything anyway.” (Navya D’Souza, HNSA)

“As far as partners are concerned – it’s not easy to use Signal and Wire as they need smart phones. So we stuck to WhatsApp; we tried as much audio-visual content we could share and trainers can share it with the girls.” (CREA)

Many groups described the ongoing challenges of language barriers and bad connectivity.

Constraints of infiltration

“When we’re sharing links to attend meetings, it goes to the spouse and we’ve had some cases where they participate – they want to know what we’re doing. But our photos are in Zoom, and in one case they privately chatted with some girls in the Zoom. But we found out and told our girls not to share the link with anyone, otherwise we can’t continue. So we overcame this problem.” (Vidyanikethan)

“Zoom is more popular but we have had uninvited guests so we’re building staff capacity in how to avoid hackers coming in; but one can only do so much. We’ve also built participants’ capacity like changing your name when you get into a virtual meeting. Resources permitting, it would be good to have another layer of security.” (Rumbidzayi Cordelia Machimbirike, WIPSU)

Keeping it reasonably simple and intentional

“One of the questions around use of platforms and digital spaces we’re grappling with is how to not be overwhelming and overwhelmed – we got enthusiastic about various platforms, set up spaces and channels and became overwhelmed with information and information sharing. We learnt not to try to replicate what being in an office feels like online. We had to rethink what spaces are needed, feel good for unity as a team, and help us do the work in the most effective way.” (Deniz Ugur, EVAW)

The Power Up peer learning sessions have included a number of presentations by grantees on how to work virtually, in particular how they are reaching their constituents. We have not yet shared lessons on hosting of conferences, nor explored what does and does not work in ‘hybrid’ models in different contexts.

Mbali Khumalo (FRIDA) shared lessons learnt when organising and running a three day regional (Africa) virtual convening for co-creation and strategising with over 100 participants. Key lessons identified include:

- “the self-care element – whether in personal or virtual, provide financial resources for people to take care; sometimes child care or identifying other needs of the people around participants so that participants can be fully present.
- centring participants in the agenda co-creation – we sent out a survey saying ‘this is what we’re planning’ and invited each and every one of the 100 people ‘please to let us know and you’ll be part of it’. We collaboratively created the agenda and looped everyone in. Some of the Power Up cohort were also part of the convening agenda co-creation committee.
- language inclusivity – for example we had Zimbabwean sign language interpretation. This symbolically represented taking seriously what we say about accessibility. Although people said it’s fine that the convening is in English, French and Portuguese, they wanted it celebrated in indigenous African languages. This begs questions of how could we feel a sense of belonging away from that colonial history. We decided in future to be more intentional about that, for example through poetry – something to involve different languages even while recognising the need for languages understood by most participants.

Digital can extend reach, but does not replace face-to-face in every way

Despite the extent of reach, and the ability to engage some constituents because of the shift online, many groups noted the losses. The physicality of relationships, the ability to be with and act in the space in solidarity with groups doing the work, the greater ease of facilitating communication and equity of voice in face-to-face meetings are all losses. Notes IWGIA,

“Our partners, including regional platforms NIWA (Network of Indigenous Women in Asia) and AIWO (Africa Indigenous Women Organisation), have been able to organise virtual events and campaigns and give inputs into important international processes for indigenous women. For example, NIWA conducted a 16 days campaign on gender-based violence through social media. The campaign reached out to almost 50,000 users.”

However, they note that this only goes so far,

“Meeting online has been really good, great in many ways that you were able to meet with a lot of people from different places with needing to travel – saves time and money – but in terms of movement building there’s need to be together. For example to link our partner network in Asia with one in Africa couldn’t happen in this period.” (Geneviève Rose)

COVID ADAPTATIONS GROUPS ARE LIKELY TO CONTINUE

All groups indicated their intention to continue with the adaptations made because of Covid lockdowns, in relation to digital capacity building, organising and advocacy described above.

Including emergency and dire needs in organisational response

A significant shift for those groups that were established to focus on advocating for shifts in public and political discourse and practice, was the recognition that their constituents were in dire danger and distress and needed practical support. Whether enabling marginalised groups to access government or charity social services, livelihood supports or ensuring spaces for individual or collective emotional care, for most groups this was an essential, but entirely new shift they felt bound to make. Yet it opened conversation among staff and with their constituents about the reality that many of them face significant challenges at times, that are not related to Covid or lockdown. As a result some groups are considering or have decided to incorporate this into their ‘normal’ work. Some illustrative examples:

Sappho for Equality shifted its strategies to prioritise livelihood support, crisis interventions and mental health to its LBTQI constituents. It ramped up its spaces for its community to engage on social media to create supportive spaces for dialogue and connection, hired an additional mental health counsellor to respond to the unprecedented number of calls it received from all over India and set up a referral system with groups working in other states. Learning from the limitations and challenges of short-term shelter as a crisis response, it supported individuals to engage in a range of livelihood activities to increase their ability to sustain themselves. They plan to sustain this approach.

HNSA added gender-based violence (GBV) to its agenda, despite that its focus is on informal work. Across the three South Asian countries participating in the Power Up project, gender-based violence as an issue gained even greater relevance among home-based workers in the aftermath of the pandemic. HNSA worked closely with home based worker (HBW) affiliates in each country to co-design the training workshops and tools relevant to home-based workers. Towards this, HNSA

quickly adapted its workplan and convened the first regional GBV Training of Trainers (ToT), disseminating its UNICEF-backed communication tool on the topic. In turn, HNSA supported the coordination and planning of replicating the GBV ToTs in Bangladesh, India and Nepal, including 16 physically held workshops with 8 co-operatives in Dhaka City with 240 women HBWs during the last six months. HNSA also produced an awareness-building film on HBWs and Violence as an educational tool for the workshops led by the HBWs. This work will continue. This focus is now part of its ongoing work.

Vidyanikethan indicated that less or no income to survive due to the lockdown motivated many of the movement members to improve their vocational skills and increase the livelihood of the movement members. They felt their presence and need to support the family with their income during the crisis. The repurposed project fund has not only supported the movement members and families on the relief and response activities, but also supported to rebuild their livelihood by providing various skill training to the EMG (early married girl) members (137 on saree design; 76 on artificial jewellery making), support to start up small trades and home based businesses. This focus will continue.

YWT indicated that its “Covid-19 Emergency Fund distributed £334,750 to 1,740 young women in small grants. We know that they needed this money to pay for essentials like groceries, bills and housing costs. We also know that young women are still struggling financially and the need for financial support and education remains. We have spoken with staff members from Women’s Aid and Women’s Resource Centre as well as included surveys in communications with their members to further investigate this area of need.”

Funders in the cohort adding emergency needs to their offerings

All of the funders supported through Power Up have extended the scope of their grantmaking to enable them to support “*emergency action based projects. The distinction of welfare work versus rights work may not be right – maybe we need a wholistic understanding.*” (Anonymous) In all cases, they plan to continue this:

FRIDA

“created community resilience grants ad hoc at the start of epidemic, and raised additional resources. We have now created these as part of FRIDA’s special grants offerings, recognising that Covid is just one instance of crisis and emergency – the need to support communities and resilience.” (Majandra Rodriguez Acha)

UHAI recognised and accepted that

“grantees were forced to shift focus to ensuring the survival of their communities and deprioritise core work.”

UAF-A indicated that

“As a fund, we never used to support applications for funding for awareness raising, but we realised in this instance that all the information dissemination that was happening was in mainstream languages on the continent, realised in most of these countries there are so many other languages and people don’t understand what is being said so we ended up finding sometimes there’s need to support information dissemination in ways that people understand – issues of language justice. We’ve also done a lot of support for braille communication including about Covid, about menstruation.” (Tariro Tandii)

Greater attention to collective care and wellbeing

The need for organisations to integrate care and wellbeing into their organisational and programmatic work came up repeatedly from many of the Power Up groups. This resonates in some ways with the Power Framework developed from last year's Annual Reports – that many organisations were aware of the need to build individual confidence and capacities in order for them to be able to influence others. Emotional wellness is now finding its way into this effort, initially because of the impact of Covid, but now in recognition that it is an ongoing challenge for people living on the margins.

“Last year came and most of us had Covid, and were exhausted. It became like a conscious intentional effort to put plans into self-care and wellbeing. We started with our organisation – went on a retreat to dwell more and think about what it means for us. We realised that because of all the expectations our community has of us, we're still not resting. We're talking about taking care while not taking care. The partners and community we work are very needy. While you want to take care of yourself, your partners need you to be present even while you're trying to pause. We tried an 'activist self-care clinic', saying 'if you don't allow me to rest, we come together and we take that rest'. Our direct partners in the LGBTIQ movement came together to talk about what's making us stressed, burning us out, making us want to quit. That's enabled us to talk about how our organisations and community are contributing to that. We held a bonfire night with key gatekeepers and influencers. The process helped us see that somehow we put pressure on ourselves. All those activities we're exploring made us aware that care has to be collective. Not an individual thing. It's an individual journey, but we have to do it collectively. We can't divorce the society – our ancestors did things collectively. I was telling a donor, self-care doesn't mean just yoga!! – that doesn't make me rest. But a walk in the woods... nature, trees etc. I'm resting then. We're now getting support from a donor to expand this aspect.” (Akudo Oguaghamba, WHER)

“Wellbeing of participants remains a big concern, especially given the psychological complications of trauma and lack of agency within an increasingly hostile system that you are simultaneously fighting. This was highlighted in our recent evaluation which found women felt frustration and distress at their own lack of personal movement and systemic change. We need to be prepared for things to get harder and ensure women have the tools to cope when things do. Celebrating small victories will be important such as changes at a local authority or statutory service level.” (WRW/RWC)

Funders too, have made this shift.

“Realising a lot of activists suffer without support, and seeing the value of them having spaces to come together and support each other in times of distress – UAF-A will continue to support this post-Covid. Before, we made sure grants had support for collective care and wellbeing but now because of Covid and realising people are suffering from a lot of mental health issues we've really taken it seriously – ensuring every grant has that component so people are really supported.” (Tariro Tandi) See reference to UAF-A's exploration of the idea of 'healing justice' under 'using research to shape strategy'.

“The mental health of UHA's staff and communities took a hit as a result of the uncertainty and adversity caused by the Pandemic. In order to ensure our collective resilience, we stressed the importance of self-care to activists within our organisation and communities.”

“Putting care at the centre of feminist organising during a global pandemic is a key learning of FRIDA.”

Shifting organisational policies and practices to address staff needs

A number of groups noted how the virtual world had brought new opportunities.

- working virtually provided evidence that the organisation could operate with virtual staff which means it can more easily address its desire to hire staff that are more geographically representative of the movement. (Paul-Gilbert Colletaz, RUF)
- shifting online has allowed more staff to get continuous professional development and for more than usual numbers to attend trainings. (Nalemuta Moisan, PWC)

At the same time, adjusting to working virtually has been a challenge or, in some cases, including where organisations already had staff in diverse countries, has drawn attention to the need for a stronger set of organisational policies and practices to support this. “Our organisation developed a guideline on working from home that it will share with Power Up peers.” (Judith Mtsewu, WoMin)

A number of groups have increased the frequency of team and all-staff meetings, as well as of individual conversations and have found that this has strengthened their understanding of the work, but also their sense of themselves as a unit.

In the Power Up peer learning session of 27 October 2021, there was discussion of the need for shifts in organisational culture: how the experience had surfaced the need to acknowledge and make visible emotional labour; and the need to really work at understanding individual staff experiences. Participants spoke about building organisational deliberative capacity so that staff can have open conversations with each other, naming different ways of seeing and ways of being and learning how to cope with these differences; how to honour staff members’ different realities and needs. They described practicing peer support and learning to negotiate meaning and understandings of their work in order to carve out more effective and satisfying ways of working. Many groups in Power Up have shifted organisational practices to try to address staff wellness.

Majandra Rodriguez Acha of FRIDA described how it has been very intentional in recognising and addressing burnout:

“We’re seeing the mental health implications of being a virtual organisation where Covid is one among multiple crises. Last year we talked about Covid support mechanisms – access to coaches and healers, emergency funding support for emergency situations related to the pandemic, and revisiting workplans, cutting back workdays and leave days. This year we made some of those pieces permanent practices: coaching and healing; one full month of office closure – two weeks in middle and two weeks at end (whereas before we had two weeks total); similarly the emergency support. Right now we’re in core operations mode and thinking how to extend this as permanent practices : we’re aiming towards a four day week; fewer work calls each day; having silent days not talking on slack at all and not being on any calls; trying to improve how we do our work planning.”

During the October 27 2021 peer learning session, reflecting on lessons learnt, participants described having initiated the following ways of incorporating staff wellbeing and ‘collective care’ into how their organisations work:

- Regular social moments (e.g. ‘happy hour’, celebration days, e.g. for birthdays)
- Increased mental health supports, “internal wellness fund”; “mental health allowance”; staff able to take ‘self-care’ days off, with no questions asked; ‘comprehensive medical insurance’
- A residential workshop (for staff) to unwind, unlearn, reflect and rework on ourselves
- ‘Circle time’ when staff can openly share
- Giving Corona Warriors certificates to all volunteers and staff, a real recognition of them
- Keeping in close contact with each other, rather than check-ins being random
- Holding each other accountable for own self-care, for their commitment to themselves

- Travel safety protocols
 - Recruiting more staff to cope with overload
 - Sabbatical leave
 - Shifting to a four or four and a half day week
 - Setting up mechanisms for staff to pick up from each other so that days off are really days off.
- During a Power Up peer learning session in January 2022, participants characterised this kind of attention to organisational culture – to process, to validation of each person, and to collective decision-making – as ‘feminist leadership’.

THEMES ON MOVEMENT LEARNING AND MOVEMENT BUILDING

History, trust and ownership

Most groups emphasised how the building of movements is a slow process premised on building trust among partners, and between grantees and their constituents. Part of the process of relationship-building is ensuring that partners and constituents are genuinely leading the analysis of the terrain, development of strategies, and assessment of if and how well their efforts are working, and if and how to shift strategies. Hence in the early phases of partnership development, intended outcomes relate to that process more than to any influence they may have on external stakeholders or decision-makers:

“you can’t achieve a strong movement in a two-three year project.” (Geneviève Rose, IWGIA)

“it’s not so much about consensus-building as about ensuring a sense of ownership over the process and believing it to be fair.” (Mukami Marete, UHAI)

Building confidence to take action

Groups noted that working on highly contentious issues, means putting substantial time into building women’s knowledge of their rights, and confidence to challenge those with power, as this example from WoMin partner Centre for Natural Resource Governance (CNRG), in Zimbabwe, illustrates.

“Vulnerable or marginalised group need motivation to assert their rights and challenge institutions. Whether the state or corporates that are infringing on their rights, it takes some time for the women to embrace that kind of mindset we’re trying to drive so that they begin to confront – whether the local leaders or leaders at sub-community level or national level. But we’ve seen it working – from the time we started with this programme where we’ve done interventions on the right to say ‘no’, and where we are now. We’ve seen women who used to be voiceless starting to take up their space and see certain issues they’d not seen as a problem, now tabling those issues. We’ve started to see some positive changes. For example, the Murowa mining company had been conducting mining exploration for diamonds since 2018. They clashed with villagers after setting up a camp at Danhamombe High School. The community was concerned that the activities of the company were disrupting learning activities and undermining plans to convert the school into a boarding facility. Women were particularly concerned about the safety of the young girls in the community with the influx of male miners. CNRG supported the women to organise to challenge the company. Among other things, it supported women with rights training, media exposure, planning for them to meet with the district structure, and on a separate occasion, a picket targeting the same. This took a lot of time as the women did not believe

they had the right to take a stand. CNRG also supported the community take up their complaints with a private law firm which won a legal victory such that the company withdrew its operations from the school.” See <https://newsreport.co.zw/news/2021/10/8/Murowa-Diamonds-finally-decamps-from-Chivi-School>

Using research to enable participation and shape strategy

Thirteen out of 17 groups’ annual reports described undertaking and then using research findings to shape strategy. This included to understand the political and economic and social environment which their constituents were experiencing. In some cases groups used this to involve constituents by gathering their perspectives on needs and shaping priorities for action. Many focused on the impact of Covid during 2020 and 2021, seeking evidence and insights to support strategic adaptation. For example:

UAF-Africa is partnering with the Institute of Development Studies in the UK to conduct its Healing Justice research in three focus countries (South Africa, DRC and Senegal). A researcher and research assistant were hired to conduct interviews with feminist activists, healers and feminist academics in each focus country. Another researcher was hired to conduct interviews from across the continent. The work started with a literature review of research and documented practices on communal, ancestral and feminist forms of collective healing practices. In addition, as a contribution towards data collection, women, transgender and gender non-confirming human rights defenders voiced and shared views, learnings and contributions healing justice on Feminist Republik social media and the Dzuwa online publication. Findings are providing insights on different topics including the role of the ‘collective’, within a healing justice paradigm; the ways in which healing justice is different from other forms of justice; the various dimensions of trauma unpacked by African feminists. A contextually nuanced understanding is emerging of the kinds of trauma faced by Africans WHRDs in different countries and enabling UAF-A to learn which aspects of Healing Justice make sense or resonate in different countries, and where there are similarities and differences across contexts. This is initial indication of which aspects might be worth developing as part of a framework for a pan-African context and what a contextualised healing justice process might look like.

IWGIA partners undertook national consultations on domestic violence against indigenous women with 36 indigenous women. This will input into research to study the prevalence of gender based violence in Northeast India that will be used to facilitate dialogues and reflect on solutions.

In November 2020, Young Women’s Trust “published our “Picking up the Pieces” research which combined findings from our annual survey of 4,000 young people (carried out by Yonder Data Solutions – previously named Populus Data Solutions), with in-depth peer research interviews with 60 young women across England and Wales. It has given us a unique insight into the economic, mental and emotional impact of the coronavirus crisis. ... Six months later we published another report “Lockdown one year on” where we surveyed 315 young women about the impact of Covid-19 and the Governments response. Their responses laid bare the increasing stress on their finances and the challenges of juggling work, childcare, and other caring responsibilities. It also showed the pressure cooker of a growing mental health crisis and that they felt the government response to the pandemic had made things worse for people like them.”

Many groups described peer research processes.

Kebetkache, a partner to WoMin, in Nigeria, used Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) in Okwuzi, with a focus to access to land and flooding which is destroying community crops and making life difficult. They trained and supported communities to do mapping. After this, women in Okwuzi carried out sensitisation of the wider community to prepare them for floods out of which they took action. One of their major interventions was a tree planting exercise in the community which has strengthened the resilience of the community to cope with the flooding.

In some cases, groups used research findings to shape messaging and campaigns for social change.

In June 2020, Women's Lives Leeds undertook two surveys: one on the effects of COVID on women during the pandemic and one on Women's Safety in Leeds. The team used the findings from the COVID survey to help shape a campaign, 'Shining A Light on Women's Inequalities' and four campaign messages to reflect what women and girls want: 'We have the right to equal employment options'; 'Our wellbeing needs better support'; 'Flexible healthcare is vital'; and 'Ask us and include us before you decide.' This in turn informed its advocacy with Leeds Mental Health that then incorporated attention to increasing mental health issues of women and girls due to disproportionate pressures, in its 2020-2025 strategy.

The Leeds Women's Safety Survey informed a major campaign "Switch on to Women's Safety – this has to include us all" where, similarly, recommendations are influencing Leeds city's bids.

The findings also informed WLL's advocacy to the Leeds Health and Wellbeing Board which entered into an alliance with WLL. It agreed to various steps including that general practitioners will distribute a flyer to new female patients from other countries to highlight their rights and support details covering topics such as domestic violence and abuse, 'honour-based' violence and FGM; promoting free menopause training to all GP surgeries in Leeds. It agreed to a focus on cervical screening and on shaping services to suit women with additional barriers. One of the major successes of this Alliance has been the coproduction of women only vaccines centres. This proved to be so successful that the learning has been taken and is being used to support local GPs to develop women friendly vaccination opportunities within their own surgeries.

The city and region (West Yorkshire Combined Authority) put in bids drawing on findings of Women Friendly Leeds' safety survey, for example to increase women and girls safety through a regional Safer Streets application that will include a focus on safer public spaces, a whole educational approach to women's safety, safer night time economy and the launch of the 'Ask for Angela – Leeds' initiative which has been hugely successful. (Jeannette Morris-Boam, Women's Lives Leeds)

WIP noted how effective partnerships have given them access to evidence produced by others.

"By taking a very collaborative approach to building the movement and working more closely with partners in the sector, we've developed working relationships which enabled the sharing of each other's data. For example, Crest Advisory have let us use their public polling results on attitudes towards women's sentencing and the new prison places to inform our campaign. Through those results we learned that the public were less likely to respond to gender, pregnancy or being a primary carer as reasons to not send someone to prison, but experiencing domestic abuse or mental ill-health made the public more amenable to alternatives to prison. We also learned there is strong support for funding women's centres, so in our media tactics we will focus on ensuring that the solution e. g. women's centres, is

given more coverage so we start getting women's centres synonymous with criminal justice solutions.

“Our learning, (including from the Crest Advisory and Ipsos Mori polling), has been that the keeping families together framing has helped shift the dial for mobilising public support but framing research showed that gender-fairness arguments backfire and people don't think women / primary carers should be treated differently, so continuing to use frames that work will be key.

“We also need to always talk about solutions, so gathering more evidence to show the impact of women's centres will give credibility to our calls and show people another way is possible, and ensure we're more pro-active in our media strategies.”

WoMin is innovating in how to build evidence to counter conventional arguments that ignore the lived realities of communities. It describes how

“progress has been made in the design of an ecofeminist cost benefit analysis (CBA) of large-scale development projects. An Advisory Committee is supporting methodology and tools development to assess ecological, climate, intergenerational, and sovereign wealth costs, all dimensions generally neglected in traditional cost benefit analyses. A desk-based survey of the existing experiences/ processes of cost benefit analysis has been written up and draft pamphlets on the Rights of Future Generations, the Financialisation of Nature, and the Custodians of Generations to Come have been produced for sensitisation and advocacy purposes. WoMin will pilot the cost-benefit analysis in Bombore, Burkina Faso, but the resources and the materials are already informing WoMin's support to other campaigns and organising efforts, including in Nigeria and Zimbabwe.”

Some groups undertook research on ways of strengthening their internal and partner feminist organising. For example,

“The work to deepen WoMin's functioning as a feminist organisation was taken up again in the second half of 2020 by a feminist consultant familiar with the organisation's history and internal dynamics. Surveys, bilateral convenings, and a collective meeting were convened in 2020, into early 2021.”

Specific research resources referenced

- Astraea with MamaCash: Vibrant Yet Under-Resourced: The State Of Lesbian, Bisexual, And Queer Movements - <https://www.mamacash.org/en/report-vibrant-yet-under-resourced>
- Astraea: [Nepal LGBTI Landscape Analysis](#); [Bangladesh LGBTI Landscape Analysis](#).
- FRIDA: The Young Feminist Pluriverse: key research on the impact of long term funding in sustaining movements): <https://youngfeministfund.org/frida-pluriverse/>

MEL with reflection and strategy time

Paul-Gilbert Colletaz (RUF) noted that much of their learning happens through the process of advocacy engagement itself, which talks to the key point that one cannot separate the doing from the learning; they ought to be entirely enmeshed with each other. Some groups described their routine processes of both gathering information and sense-making.

“The data and information are collected monthly from the regional secretariat and based on the compiled information, the plans are made with the team. The monthly data comprises both qualitative and quantitative data, which helps us to understand the demand from the members, changes and outcomes happening in the project areas. Based on the compiled data, capacity building events and series of training sessions were planned every month to

the leaders. Every month, each regional secretariat shares at least one success story of the movement leaders to share it with other regions, which inspires the other movement leaders and members. Movement leaders are involved in these monthly planning and review sessions. Annually, story book, video testimonials, and movement leaders profile books are published among the team to have the cross learning and build a uniform understanding.” (Vidyanikethan)

A few groups indicated they are currently rethinking their approaches to monitoring, evaluation and learning.

One has instituted an ‘advocacy tracker’:

“Structures at community level track what’s happening in communities – will tell us what duty bearers agree to do etc.– pick them up during conversations; derive an advoc plan. There's a google sheet everyone in Chapters has access to, and they input on these. We've structures at provincial level and they also feed into that. Our policy advocacy person coordinates it all. She assists in the tracking. She picks analyses emerging issues coming out – so we can make something a regional or national advocacy issue, and report back to communities as well.” (Sharon Manenji, WCoZ)

Notes Rumbidzayi Cordelia Machimbirike, (WIPSU)

“We also track at impact level – to have an appreciation of how duty bearers are responding to the different advocacy issues – sometimes through using Hansard [record of parliamentary debates].”

For Women’s Lives Leeds, a significant innovation has been contracting of an external developmental evaluator:

“We took advantage of going into lockdown – we couldn’t go out and do service engagement so we had a surplus and paid for an external evaluator to join us. We asked them to capture our learning to inform us and what we need to take on board. Sometimes we think we’re not doing anything so having them assess our progress helps us see how we’re doing. Also they’re playing a supportive role in helping us as they’re experienced in movements generally; they’re guiding us as well along that path – we’re taking advantage of their experience and learning. One thing I’ve learnt personally, whenever we write funding applications, is to put money into an external evaluator.” (Jeannette Morris-Boam)

For WRW and RWC, a significant innovation has been to involve constituents in doing their evaluation:

“We have collaborated on our first joint participatory evaluation to understand how power has shifted for women involved in this project. We are excited to work together this year to respond to recommendations to interrogate the power dynamics of movement building and to co-produce joint policies to protect the wellbeing of women involved. This work will help create a more sustainable and robust movement of displaced women going forward. It also provides a starting point for a comprehensive evaluation of this project, developed and led by women with lived experience. The participatory evaluation we carried out has shown us that employing a ‘grounded’ approach to evaluation, and this being managed by somebody external to the participating organisations, helps provide less bias in the data we get.

“... We commissioned this evaluation and worked on it together as we both had concerns that the focus wasn’t purposeful enough – we’re getting people together and responding enough, but not really thinking about power within those groups, or interrogating power; especially when you’re delivering a service to vulnerable population and asking them to be part of campaigns and asking them to be involved in the priorities of your organisation. There

were power dynamics that made us uncomfortable and we weren't doing enough to think about. We asked the evaluator to think about that. We've now taken the learnings from that evaluation and are looking – what we realised we need to do is agree a power framework with these populations and between our organisations.” (Pip McKnight, RWC)

Many groups make time for reflection. A number noted how key this has been to coping with the pandemic; how constituents read the changing environment, reflected, and this enabled the groups to shift strategies as needed. Anuradha Chatterji (CREA) noted that this also requires some 'unlearning',

“you have a set of experience and design your work, work in a certain way and then suddenly some situation changes and you have to readjust, rethink the way you work, question your own beliefs of your experience of how you've worked for so long and how you assume your partners and constituencies would react – you are sometimes surprised, sometimes not.”

Some described having regular reflections, building it into their institutional fabric through weekly meetings in some cases, and / or mid-term and end-of-year. Many also describe creating space for engagement among staff and with partners when specific issues arise. For example,

“We regularly meet on Mondays as a team and take stock of things – there's activity going on; but also looking at what opportunities are on the horizon. We've dropped some things when the women's safety agenda went through the roof in England, so we had to put other stuff on the side as this was an opportunity. So – credit to the funders – we've learnt that when there's an opportunity we've been allowed to take it and get on with it, rather than sticking to what we said we wanted to achieve at the beginning – otherwise we'd not have had such successes in Leeds. Taking the learning quickly, and adapting quickly.” (Jeannette Morris-Boam, Women's Lives Leeds)

The lockdown experience appears to have reinforced this need and the practice or indeed to have led organisations to set aside time in ways they had not done previously.

“Sappho for Equality took a reflective break to recharge – sit together, think through, evaluate for themselves; sometimes groups can do that. other example that comes to mind is Sappho for Equality's national conference they conducted in October – as an observer, also part of the queer movements- in India the movement has really fragmented so those moments when you think of making sure you make time to come together to think about various pieces, what from history we can take forward, what we can change – those reflections are really amazing for movements to learn. And emphasis on cross movement learning with an emphasis on feminism, gender based violence. ... Listening is also a methodology that needs to be reflected on, an activity that has to be taken up as a methodology – that fatigue is building up and we don't know where it is emanating from; common within a movement and with leaders – addressing and understanding fatigue is essential for queer social workers. Learning will come when we will open our ears with compassionate listening. Much needed in this context. Many fractures in this movement; many dynamics; given so many diversities with unique shapes and forms of discrimination and violence... needs time.” (Shreosi Ray)

Despite this, there's a general consensus that people tend to be busy and somehow monitoring and reflection time isn't adequately resourced or planned. In addition, challenges in virtual communications at times make it difficult to gather information, or to understand the nuances of dynamics, at a distance.

“Organisations learn a lot when they have time to reflect; that is a big structural thing that is not always available to movements – they're responding, reacting, on their feet. ... So time to reflect and re-strategise is key.” (Anonymous)

“Women home-based workers have increased time constraints due to family responsibilities that have accentuated during COVID-19 with entire family members staying at home. In turn, there was limited time for feedback to online activities. Additionally, regular monitoring of activities virtually was a challenge due to the unstable internet.” (WIEGO)

Organisations are living this tension and doing the best they can within it.

Centring participation

Many groups describe constituent participation as being core to the mode of work.

“To build a movement from the beginning you have to involve the movement members and leaders from design through to eval and that we’re doing now – we’ve involved leaders, a few members and agents of change among our movement. For example, every year in our project proposal, we said we’d do research. In 2021, we made it a research on impact of Covid in the lives of early married girls – child-led. More than 15 women leaders were involved from planning to reporting. They designed survey questions, did it all virtually over the phone. Likewise, if you want movements to be successful and sustainable, you involve them in all the activities and slowly they become the decision-makers instead of us taking decisions for them, even where we or external consultants support them in it from the back end.” (Vidyanikethan)

Groups emphasise that intentional listening can shift the organisation’s understanding of its constituents as people, and therefore shift organisational strategies. For example, Navya D'Souza of HomeNet South Asia, described how Covid required organising to move closer to the grassroots level where workers could still connect despite barriers in digital literacy. In this process, new issues emerged:

“Great to see how through grassroot member partnership we’ve been able to keep our ear to the ground and to see what else does it mean to empower a worker besides linking her to a trade union or cooperative. Organising means the worker has to be able to ensure she is not harassed at workplace, that she’s safe from GBV; that she has, as simple as empowering her to discern what is fake news and what is not, for her safety and that of her family. All of these blocks are coming in and showing us what an empowered worker looks like.”

The decision and process of groups deliberately shifting power from their NGOs to those with lived experience came up repeatedly.

“Women’s resilience during the pandemic taught us that, with the right support, they could move beyond crisis and gain the skills and confidence to re-build their lives, become involved in influencing and ultimately make change happen. But to fully understand what women needed, it was important to connect with them individually. Through one to one assessment and feedback, we were able to reach a much deeper awareness of what enabled women to progress beyond merely surviving. Listening: The importance of listening to asylum-seeking and refugee women has been at the heart of our success as a coalition. Listening, not only to the challenges and needs of the women, but also their interests and passions. As one refugee woman in the Sisters not Strangers Coalition said, ‘Listening, not only to the challenges and needs of the women, but also their interests and passions. 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.’” (Women for Refugee Women / Refugee Women Connect)

One observed that constituency participation had increased decision-maker responsiveness:

Case

“Staff who completed our feedback survey as part of our Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) process for this work, felt that increased engagement from young women in our campaigning and influencing work has helped drive engagement with MPs and policymakers. ... For example, after meeting young women about our campaign and their experiences, Stephen Timms MP and Charlotte Nichols MP subsequently went on to be speakers at our Policy Event in February 2021 and Pre-elections event in April 2021.” (Young Women’s Trust) One challenge raised was a tension between supporting activists to take up whatever issues they want to take up locally, versus building their engagement in the grantee’s priority national campaigns. This was more a tension of capacity – whether the Power Up grantee had the capacity to provide the level of supports needed by all those who participated in their trainings who chose to focus on local actions. (Lydia Morgan)

Participation as core to feminist governance

In a peer learning session in October 2021 UHAI described its approaches to feminist governance and accountability. It argued that a board of trustees goes only so far in feminist governance since the core accountability of the organisation is to its constituents, which means that they have to play a central role in shaping strategy and assessing its effectiveness.

Thirteen Power Up groups explicitly engage their constituents as part of their strategy development processes.

“We know the importance of having our policy asks rooted in knowledge that comes from our members’ frontline work.” (Deniz Ugur)

Some of these are evident in the cases on use of research described above, but not all are research processes. Many of the groups note that this kind of engagement, as well as the research processes already described, are key to ensuring that they adapt in response to the shifting terrain. For example,

Pastoral Women’s Council in Tanzania describes how “34 Women Rights and Leadership Forums (WRLFs), have continued to prove to be substantial and appropriate fora/platforms for the advocacy of women rights and mobilising local women to participate in decision making. They meet twice each month to discuss issues on their village, specifically women’s rights issues which are violations and women’s leadership, organising district-level women gatherings ‘Olturur Loo Ndomonok’, to deliberate their issues”; “We have also learnt, constantly assessing external risks to programme implementation is crucial to ensure effective delivery of impact. The Covid-19 pandemic has proved this to be true and in fact if we had not assessed the impact of the pandemic on the programme, we would not have remained relevant to the communities we serve and effectively deliver on project results especially around monitoring and addressing gender-based violence.”

Vidyanikethan in India describes how “Four consultation meetings with CSOs were organised during September 2020, July & August 2021 to discuss the issues, interventions and compile the idea for movement promotion for collective actions; 19 brainstorming workshops were conducted with CSOs in order to engage them in the movement building process.²³ District level CSOs were mapped and involved in the Movement activities at the regional level. 24 visioning and mission exercises conducted at the district and regional level for the movement leaders to articulate and internalise the objectives of the movement. Also streamlined the various clubs under the project such as: 139 early married girls’ (EMG) club, 24 Spouse clubs, 113 Family clubs and 168 Adolescent girls and boys clubs. These clubs have become the community platform to discuss the issues, cross learning

and knowledge sharing central to the community. During relief response activities the clubs functioned wisely and actively sort out the beneficiaries and strategies to reach the EMG's family during imposed lockdowns.”

Young Women's Trust in the UK describes how “We implemented a new campaign planning process which positioned 18 young women at the heart of the decision-making process. Through a series of online workshops, they helped us decide what our policy asks should be for the current phase of our #NoYoungWomanLeftBehind campaign and presented these to policymakers at a stakeholder event in Feb2021 for feedback. Once agreed, they then helped us decide the campaign actions and communications, one of which – a petition calling for the £20 uplift for Universal Credit to be made permanent and for the increase to extend to Carers Allowance too – was launched on International Women's Day.”

Womankind, WCoZ and WIPSU (Zimbabwe) describe how “CARE supported the collective discussions on priorities in each chapter meeting. All 11 Chapters conduct sub-national convenings which ensure that both the young and adult women are represented and it is from these platforms that advocacy issues are identified. In all organised advocacy strategies, the young women are actively participating in the processes.”

Constituents leading the organising and advocacy

These approaches are translating into constituents leading the organising and advocacy as illustrated in 'feminist governance' above. Another case is also illustrative:

Women for Refugee Women and Refugee Women Connect (UK) describe how “From March 2021 onwards the Sisters not Strangers coalition's campaigning focus has turned to the government's proposed changes to the asylum system. We held an online call to action event, which marked the launch of our campaign against the government's proposals to the asylum system. The agenda was created with asylum-seeking and refugee women, who led the event. An example of the liberating effects of leading the coalition's activities is this blog post by one of the asylum-seeking women who took part in the call to action event: <https://cov19chronicles.com/lived-experience-activism-sisters-not-strangers-a-call-to-action/> She says: 'I was the chair of the whole event. I had never chaired anything before and I had been so nervous but we had planned and prepared for this event for months. I was ready and I enjoyed every moment of the event. Five years ago I could not have dreamed of doing anything like this. I came to the UK from Uganda...for 14 years I was depressed and lonely. I missed my family, I missed my children. I was just living and waiting, waiting for the Home Office decision. It was refusal, and another refusal, but I knew I could not go back. I felt empty. No one understood or listened to my voice.’”

Fostering alliances and partnerships

Insights on partnering in shaping and implementing the Comic Relief proposal

Reflecting on the process of operationalising partnerships where groups together bid for a Power Up grant, many groups noted that where they had not worked together before, or had not worked together on the issues in the Power Up proposal, they needed time after receiving the grant to focus on building the partnership.

A few indicated that they had jumped into the work without the expected anchoring partnerships completely on board. As articulated by Katia Araujo, WIEGO,

“Coming together with identified implementing partners prior to concretising the project is critical to avoid hard to reach expectations. In managing challenging partnerships, the COVID-19 context provides an excellent opportunity to reassess initial assumptions of collaborations. Additionally, it offers an opportunity to adjust or remove any elements of the project that are not deemed priority at this moment or distract from identified priorities by home-based workers groups but still contribute toward the same expected results.

Groups pointed out the dangers of jumping into action without negotiating a shared understanding of the objectives, the roles and expectations of each group, and how they would assess progress along the way.

“In a partnership like Power Up, at least six months needs to be dedicated in terms of human resources and time, to really discussing power and collaboration, and then we can get down to the work.” (Mbali Khumalo, FRIDA)

Similarly, another indicated that they would have done better to set the terms of the partnership right at the start; that it is only now in the second year that they have really addressed some of the key challenges of partnering, and are in a position to go beyond considering questions of power between them, to considering how to shift power to their constituents. They note that movement building takes time, but this grant ends in a year. They’re trying to work out if they can ‘future proof’ some of what they have got going. (Venus Abdullah, Women for Refugee Women, Pip McKnight, Refugee Women Connect)

Some indicated that they met regularly; others that they started that way but as the work took over, time for reflection declined. One described using a WhatsApp group as a way of keeping informally connected.

A particular challenge noted, from a project management point of view, is where one person or organisation was responsible for reporting, and others for doing the work. In this context, routine communications are essential, but not always easy to sustain.

Duplication and competition

There’s general recognition that the greater the range of groups committing to collective agenda-setting and action, the greater the chance of influencing public and political action. However, the barriers are enormous.

WHER notes that “the broader context of organising, a significant challenge identified is poor and disorganised networking which causes duplicated efforts and conflicting strategies. In the context of this project, we continue to work to close this gap by bringing groups together to connect, learn, and strategise on ways forward in addressing their shared challenges. Outcomes shows that the more NGOs communicate, collaborate with each other and the community at large, the more effective and stronger they become. As a result, much of the focus of this project has been on deepening networking and alliance building as mentioned above.”

This reinforces points made elsewhere in this section about the need to have the resources and time to build relationships of trust that enable collaboration. A number of groups described the importance of negotiating purpose and principles as the basis for any partnership – an issue also raised in terms of partnerships in the bids to Comic Relief for Power Up, above. One shared its approach,

“[We] tried to set up policies that are clear, and a code of conduct we continuously refer to. Things are bound to happen in groups, so we try to have mechanisms to handle this – policies on such things and structures to respond to these issues. For example if there’s a committee and there’s a misconduct, they try to investigate and handle it. This ensures we stick to our mandate and objectives.” (Rebecca Gwaure, WCoZ)

WIPSU, in the same partnership, described some negative experiences with other civil society groups, so they are drawing on their internal experience (as described above) to address this:

“Over the last twelve months, the women’s movement has felt used for their expertise and knowledge by INGOs and other NGOs to add value to proposals but have been dropped during project implementation. The experiences over the last 12 months have prompted us to consider the development of partnership policies to outline the principles of working with key allies and stakeholders to protect themselves in the future. There continues to be limited funding going to women’s rights organisations and a lot of competition for the few resources available, with some organisations stealing ideas and including them in fundraising initiatives. This has contributed to an atmosphere of mistrust between organisations and lack of collaboration.” (Rumbidzayi Cordelia Machimbirike)

The political moment – context – can spur collaboration, so timing is critical

Both the depth of the crisis precipitated by lockdown – in terms of vulnerability of livelihoods and to gender-based violence – and the desire to create a powerful voice for change, spurred some partnerships that had been nascent before Covid. For example, EAW describes how

“20 representatives across the women and girls and ending violence against women and girls sector (including Girlguiding, Women’s Aid Federation England, Rape Crisis, Refuge and specialist by and for Black and minoritised women and girls orgs) - came together twice in this period with a refreshed energy for building an alliance to speak to government with a unified voice. The group set out key recommendations for what we believe needs to change and how in response to the review findings of the Office for Standards in Education. [See [Women's Groups call on Secretary of State for Education to create Whole Schools Approach taskforce](#)]. The Prevention Network has committed to working together more closely than before given the political context, has developed a Terms of Reference, joint principles, and understanding of where they have common ground. They have created an online information sharing network and in its most recent meeting hosted a presentation from Rape Crisis Scotland to learn of their development in the Whole Schools Approach project “Equally Safe at School” and how it was successfully implemented. They commented “Parliamentary arithmetic means it’s hard to be successful with any legislation unless you have government on your side. It became apparent that we had to work in coalition in order to increase our power and visibility. So that’s what we set out to do in response to Covid as our sector wasn’t getting any funding, and given the impact of lockdown on women and gender. There were no women around the crisis response table. So we had to develop joint principles, how to get funding to frontline, how to ensure emergency funds weren’t just a quick uplift and then a drop off – we had to influence how government would fund the sector.” They also noted that “one can’t plan for this kind of groundswell. One can envision it as a desired outcome, but not on what date it will happen.”

Sustaining collaboration and alliances takes intensive effort

Groups noted that it is harder to sustain support by other groups than it is to win their initial support. Winning allies who do not usually work on the grantee’s issue may be easy because of a political moment, widespread discussion of issues in the media and the like. But if such attention wanes, the ally may shift interest. So the grantees have to do both public engagement work to keep their issue on the agenda, and one-on-one work with each ally to find what it is that makes the issue relevant to each ally.

Building capacity for inclusion and intersectional action

Many of the groups are working with an intersectional perspective. This was well articulated by one person,

“It is so vital to an organisation like us which frames its works with an understanding of intersectional feminism, that you can’t assume your key beneficiary is the dominant white

culture. That has become very prevalent in how we approach every aspect of our work – what policy we seek to influence. For example, the Nationality and Borders Bill is as important as the Domestic Violence Bill. So the narrative of our work has to explain why we're working with different coalitions and groups – to all understand the work is human rights based and around inequalities – a shift funders also have to grasp – this is the future of the women's sector. And women's movement." (Andrea Simon, EVAW)

A number of groups in the UK have established groups for specific constituents who want space to engage with each other to shape their agendas and how to engage the group and campaign as a whole – in one case an LGBT group, in another women from BME (Black and minority ethnic) organisations, in another, women with disabilities. Women for Refugee Women and Refugee Women Connect are planning to host a symposium next year: "bringing together people from different movements because for the refugee and migrants movement to succeed and meaningfully serve the people we work with we need to link with housing movements, health movements, trade unions, LGBTQI+ and other movements; we can't work in isolation but there are no spaces to bring different movements together to deliberate and strategise, let alone ones that are well funded and well facilitated, for that conversation." (Venus Abdullaah, Women for Refugee Women)

The impact of the anti-racism movement, particularly on groups in the UK, is evident in the annual reports. A number of groups described seriously reflecting on their own internal understandings and strategies.

Fawcett Society organised a series of anti-oppression training for the Steering Group on Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred, antisemitism, homophobia and transphobia and anti-Black racism.

Women for Refugee Women and Refugee Women Connect noted that "The anti-racism movement, which was reinvigorated following the murder of George Floyd in the US, provided an important opportunity to emphasise the link between lived experience empowerment and anti-racist practices within the migration and asylum sector. In February, and under the auspices of the VAWG Anti-Racism Working Group, the Sisters not Strangers coalition held an event for workers in the sector on lived experience.

Young Women's Trust described how "In Autumn 2020 we began an equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) review which consisted of an audit phase, a learning phase and is now moving into an action planning phase. One outcome of this review is that we have begun to collect consistent and enhanced monitoring data across the organisation so that we can better understand who is underrepresented in our staff team, trustees and young women. One example of a consequence of this has been approaching recruitment / promotion in a different way with a focus on attracting underrepresented groups."

Some are working on strengthening their relationships and the inclusivity of their strategies:

Said the End Violence Against Women Coalition (EVAW), "Our anti-racist campaigning and internal analysis has helped us identify the need to take a broader perspective when campaigning for WSA (Whole Schools Approach), as a result we have connected with an organisation called No More Exclusions to support their policy positioning and to help us reflect on our asks and language in reference to perpetrators. We have invited them to contribute to our next Prevention Network meet in January 2022."

Women for Refugee Women and Refugee Women Connect: "Women used every opportunity through public events and arts collaborations to raise awareness of the intersection between asylum and social justice with potentially sympathetic audiences. These events were as widely ranging as a Borders, Racisms and Harms conference at

Birkbeck university attended by 30 academic activists to a reception at Marcelle Joseph's home for 30 art collectors."

Young Women's Trust: "From Oct-20 to Apr-21 we piloted a 6-month activist training programme (funded by YWT) to upskill young women with local campaigning skills. We recruited 36 women onto the programme and 26 of them completed it. We prioritised women of colour, young women with disabilities and young women without higher education. Due to Covid we have been unable to progress local campaigning activities however, the activists are fully committed to the charity and continue to guide and raise awareness about our campaigns."

IWGIA developed a new gender strategy to define its work and priority on gender issues for the next five years. The main goal of the gender strategy is to address the racial discrimination and violence that Indigenous women face, and thus the project is very much contributing to achieving our visions for supporting indigenous women.

Language justice

Language injustice was a theme raised by many groups. In some cases groups focused on questions of disability:

"We began to use tech to ensure our deaf and disabled members are able to access spaces they wouldn't have been able to – now we can ensure close captions that enable their participation online – so it was a springboard to think about all of our communications in large print, British sign language versions; now we couldn't think about putting on an event without sign language interpreters whereas we wouldn't have given priority to think about that before. So Covid has helped shift thinking." (Deniz Ugur)

A number are ensuring their website and social media are more accessible, for example, CREA described social media using captions for everything the organisation posts; shifting to from English to local language conversations on feminist leadership and how Covid had affected people; with sign language interpretation.

In some cases groups raised questions in relation to indigenous languages:

"Due to heightened surveillance in urban areas, our sex worker communities found the visibility of their work was attracting more negative visibility so they shifted towards rural areas – through the reports they sent us we can see organising happening there. We have to think re language justice – people mostly speak vernacular in rural areas so how do we sustain that momentum of and support communities to create those safe spaces." (Tina Lubayo, UHA)

Funders are broadening language access. For example,

- Red Umbrella Fund ensuring applicants can apply online in multiple languages (e.g. English, French, Russian or Spanish.)
- Urgent Action Fund - Africa "put into place translators and interpreters for all five African Union languages who do proofreading to improve our language justice work. We have in place English sign language interpretation (SLI) in place for even more inclusion." (Tariro Tandi)

Influencing men by including them in the movement

Pastoral Women's Council has had significant success in terms of increasing women's access to and control over land, and in getting women elected into decision-making power, in part through a strategy of influencing men decision-makers. This is not done only by advocating towards them,

but also by inviting them into the organising process, and using their participation, their listening to and learning about women's experiences, to influence their thinking and then their actions. They intend these men to play bridging roles, noted as 'linking power' in the power framework.

"We had some male inclusion so they work for the women's movement and to put them out of the gender box and play the part of the ambassadors on the women's rights space which can help to identify who are holding back women rights and are rigid to change. The gender box has become a critical issue that doesn't give women rights to access land, property, their voice to be heard in decision-making from family to community level. Now I'm saying in the process of building all these complex issues, firstly we work closely with district and local government like village councils and traditional leaders – see them as the people who can make final decisions for the community. We also work with men champions – knowing they can be the bridge for change in community social norms." (Nalemuta Moisan)

FUNDING MOVEMENTS

Trust-based accountability to funders

All the funders supported by Power Up emphasised the issue of trust as key to effectiveness, as articulated by one:

"For us it has been the aspect around trusting that our grantee partners know what is best for them. That has been the core. When you trust that activists or feminists or groups know exactly what strategies work for them, and not have premeditated interventions that you're thinking about. Allowing people to be creative, to give suggestions and for you to be open-minded in seeing this is how they think they can address this challenge that they have is a good way of supporting movement building. People need to feel trusted, that we trust that they know what works for them because they know their context and communities." (Tariro Tandi, UAF-A)

Another funder grantee pointed to Comic Relief's willingness to create an interface for learning as key to effective grantmaking:

"through speaking every six months with Comic Relief about what we're learning and developing; for example that we intended to use funds in one way but as we let the community drive the demand, we need to follow that." (Stellah Wairimu Bosire, UHAI)

Critical role of continuous, flexible core support

Many groups spoke with appreciation of those funders, including Comic Relief, who had allowed them flexibility in how to allocate their resources, irrespective of their original proposals' intentions.

"We are very grateful for the flexibility and responsiveness Comic Relief has enabled. This ensures that we have been able to take the time needed to critically reflect, and apply learnings to our planning going forward. The last +18 months have been incredibly challenging requiring us to adapt significantly and be as nimble as possible. We feel proud to work with a funder as Comic Relief who helps make this possible." (Deniz Ugur, EVAW)

They expressed the hope that these funders would continue with this approach going forward as unrestricted funding enables shifting of strategies as the context shifts as well as respect for community priorities.

Power Up grantee FRIDA, itself a funder, noted how its own research had demonstrated that such funding, coupled with non-financial supports, enables the strength and evolution of young feminist movements. See [What took you so long?](#) Similarly IWGIA described how small grants to women's groups enabled indigenous women to create change in their own communities and to improve

the lives and decision-making power of indigenous women, in a slow and ongoing process. They, and most Power Up groups, emphasised that movement building takes years, so funding needs to assume a long trajectory.

Core funds enabled shift to digital organising

As regards the transition to digital organising made by all groups, a number indicated they could not have done so without the flexibility of Comic Relief funds:

“without Comic Relief funding we’d probably give up the campaigning software – it’s an essential thing they’re funding.” (Women in Prison)

“Because of the opportunity for Comic Relief Covid Recovery Funding we applied for and developed a [partnership] Women Friendly Leeds website as part of a digital inclusion project as we had nowhere to host our movement, all our more vulnerable constituents could then access it. We also distributed loads of equipment and provided training that was then cascaded through the partners so women had both the means and opportunity to access the website and get involved online with the movement. Loads of phones and ipads and tablets to keep women engaged – data sticks and dongles were included. We spoke to our partners and said you’ve got these funds to make sure your most vulnerable service users are engaged in our movements – could be phones, data etc. Some of our partners have continued and topped it up (because it was a one-off) and feedback we’ve had is that over 800 women engaged through that programme over six months.” (Jeannette Morris-Boam, Women’s Lives Leeds)

Supporting a diversity of groups, including unregistered groups

Funders note the importance of being able to fund groups in diverse forms.

“Understanding that groups appear differently. We support groups in all their diversity – a CBO, a national organisation, a collective, one that’s registered or not. What we’re realising more and more because of the nature of the context in which people are organising, is that the organisations that were so structured, may no longer be serving the purpose. There’s value in understanding that there’s a bit of evolution in how people are organising and it’s okay. If you stick to supporting only orgs that are registered then you may be supporting groups that don’t have the same creativity or bring in nuances that exist in the organising frame itself. You have to be open to seeing what works. For example, when there are hashtags people rally behind, and want support around that hashtag as a collective, we support that – they’ve thought through it, and this is how they want to organise.” (Tariro Tandi, UAF-A)

POWER UP PEER LEARNING: POSSIBLE ISSUES TO PERSUE

With different staff focusing on different topics, most of the ‘learning groups’ made their way through the questions they’d set up, and then ended, notably the group on feminist and participatory monitoring, evaluation and learning, and the group on research and advocacy on gender based violence. Those looking at movements and leadership shifted into a focus on governance, feminist leadership and partnerships, which is still underway. In the interviews and annual reports, a number of groups identified new issues to explore further, or the possibility of returning to see what groups had initiated on the ‘completed’ topics of MEL and GBV, since the conversations, to share and learn on what was working well, and where challenges remain.

With one or two exceptions, groups do not see this space as one for collective action, but rather as one for deliberative learning for themselves and to take back into their own organisations. However, those few exceptions may be keen to explore collective action either through the Power Up process or separately.

This section lists some of the topics for potential deeper learning that were identified.

Governance, power and feminist practice and leadership

Surfacing leadership and accountability principles and exploring issues ranging from co-leadership models, to strengthening leadership of those with lived experience, and what governance systems are appropriate to constituency-led organisations.

“We are undertaking a deep Board renewal process and would appreciate a session which addresses the question of governance, and this can be strengthened from a governance, but also an accountability perspective.”(Reine Baimey, WoMin)

On wanting to continue discussion on feminist leadership:

“..so I think it’s interesting, probably I’m becoming a feminist – [laughs] – so I want to secure a feminist movement and also for feminists to know safe spaces to protect themselves in the movement.” (Nalemuta Moisan, PWC)

Influencing the shift of perceptions within mainstream Human Rights organisations through feminist leadership principles was raised

“We would like to explore the meaningful inclusion of people with lived experience in leadership. We would particularly like to work with other groups on how reporting can be carried out as an evaluation by those directly benefiting from the project.” (WRW/RWC and Venus Abdullah)

“creating space for meaningful participation of Female Sex workers as well as those from sexual and gender minorities in mainstream women’s rights organisations that continue to lock out minority women from opportunities for strategic partnerships and collaborations due to the negative/ conservative attitude they have towards issues of sexual and gender identity and sex work.” (Stellah Wairimu Bosire, UHAI)

Continuing the theme of partnerships

Women for Refugee Women and Refugee Women Connect will share their challenges and learning in relation to their Power Up partnership next year, as will other groups, including those who have developed partnerships policies that outline the principles of working with key allies and stakeholders.

Differences and similarities between PU groups: constituency organisers, networks and funders

As part of the theme of governance and feminist practice, the Power Up cohort may be uniquely placed for open conversations about recognising and managing power among different types of groups within the women’s movement – from those organising constituents to those providing supports to such groups, to those funding them; and those engaged in a mix of these activities. It may prove fruitful for this to begin with each of those groups doing their own reflections, as the funders supported by Power Up have already been doing. In particular,

- **Networks that are Power Up grantees** (HomeNet South Asia, IWGIA, WIEGO, WoMin, Womankind) may find value in unpacking,
 - o how they understand and manage their roles as partners, supporters, funders, but also advocates in their own right;
 - o how their partners and sub-grantees understand their role;

- how they organise their governance and in relation to questions of power and feminist principles.
- **Constituency-based organisations or coalitions** to draw out their issues of governance, power, feminist practices and leadership including Pastoral Women's Council, Sappho for Equality, Vidyantikethan, Young Women's Trust, Women for Refugee Women, Refugee Women Connect, Crea, Women's Lives Leeds, Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe, Centre for Natural Resource Governance and, overlapping with networks, WIEGO and HomeNet South Asia.

Supporting and holding elected representatives accountable

A number of groups are supporting women to stand for official positions, and then holding elected representatives accountable, including Fawcett, WIPSU and CREA. Discussion could yield mutual learning as well as insights for others in the cohort.

It begs questions about what makes democracies 'work'. Are we seeing new thinking on how democracy works, in which instead of relying on elected representatives to engage their formal constituencies, we build up empowered constituents who make demands of elected representatives, and find ways to hold them accountable?

Community / activist training programmes

Many groups run leadership, advocacy / campaigning and other constituency capacity development trainings. What content, processes, methods, curricula are working well? Might groups share their most innovative or most effective tools and methods? How do they assess effectiveness of these trainings?

Healing justice / collective care

What are groups who are deepening their work on these issues doing? What are they learning?

Inclusion of people with disabilities; building intersectional capacity

How do groups crash through this barrier to inclusion in their own organisations and in organising constituents? See language justice above – a number of groups are now routinely providing close captions and sign language; one providing information in braille.

“[We are] introducing disability seriously as a thematic cross-cutting issue, and now have a board member with a disability and looking at how to support staff members who have disabilities, ensuring they're supported in ways that are meaningful. Covid has somewhat made us reflect more on this.” (Tariro Tandi, UAF-A)

“A lot of our work in the future is going to be done around the intersectionality of disability rights and justice, their voices and visibility, their leadership and political participation, their voices on SGBV, and the advocacy around it with state and non-state actors. Thus if we could have sessions on structurally excluded people and their political participation, their voices and visibility and global advocacy agenda, that would be helpful for us.” (CREA)

What can others learn from this? Similarly on building their organisational capacities for inclusion of other minority or marginalised groups.

Similarly sharing of experiences of strengthening an intersectional analysis and practice within organisations and in movement building might yield new ideas or approaches. In addition, one group proposed that it would be good to host a session on relevance of the constituency each organises, to other Power Up groups: the relevance of GBV to other groups; of refugee issues; of informal work; of sex work; of women's imprisonment. This could extend to sharing what kinds of narratives support other sectors to understand the issues, such as Women in Prison using the framing, in relation to women in prison, of women who are 'swept into crime'.

Addressing shrinking civil space and better protect our partners online.

This issue was raised at the start of lockdown but groups have subsequently learnt a lot and have a lot to share.

“It has been very useful to hear from other organisations about their experience; from very different teams; definitely we can always learn more on how to build movements – concrete examples the others have and case studies are very interesting to hear about.” (Geneviève Rose, IWGIA)

“Comic Relief can support continuous analysis of what the gains were; what work was rolled back and seeing how to support moving forward while strengthening movements for disruptive moments in which anti gender and anti-rights movements thrive (because they're funded by the governments oppressing our communities) as opposed to civil society who would be less active.” (Shreosi Ray, Sappho for Equality)

Revisiting digital organising as lockdown ends

When and how to hold face-to-face versus online convenings; does hybridity work? how?

Using what we've learnt from lockdown to support preparedness for other crises

As articulated by one group:

“How can this also support preparedness for other uncertain and dynamic situations brought on by other crises such as those pertaining to the finance sector, digital meltdowns, global political shifts, to name a few that have an impact (directly or otherwise) on our work.” (Stellah Wairimu Bosire, UHAI)

What are the implications of many of us talking about 'mental health' impacts of lockdown given that the term has specific characteristics from a medical point of view. Would talking about wellness or emotional health be better? What can we learn from UAF-A's work on the concept of 'healing justice' as a comprehensive approach towards our work.

What have we learnt about the relationship between attention to individual wellbeing, empowerment and inclusion, and our ability to influence social change? Said WIEGO,

“While changes at the level of individual consciousness and capacity are essential in the empowerment process, the women home based workers' capacity to collectively organise around their needs and workers' rights are most likely to lead to public recognition of their individual rights as workers, women, and citizens.”

Gender based violence

“We would like to continue to explore possibilities to collaborate with the sub-group around advocacy on gender-based violence.” (WIEGO)

Approaches to Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning

Continuing the conversation including the 'doing' of feminist MEL and learning from changes groups have implemented drawing on insights gained during the Power Up process. For example Geneviève Rose of IWGIA suggested:

- Using new technology for identifying shifts.
- How to measure things differently – movement building – when you're building members at community level and women's groups; it's a lot about women getting more self-confident. I read an interesting report on how to measure innovation – progress on building hope, participation, resilience, dignity, trust.

MOVING FORWARD

Comic Relief commissioned this report as part of its own journey in building an understanding of movement building.

The themes identified here confirm key insights from the *Scoping Study for Comic Relief on Women's Movements* by Elanor Jackson and Kanwal Ahluwalia, Jan 2018. They also beg questions about in what ways Comic Relief can use its position to share insights generated. During two consultations on the report with Power Up groups in February 2022, Comic Relief invited groups to collaborate in planning how to share findings with other funders in the field, and indicated its intention to share findings with the original participants of its scoping exercise.

For me they surface the question of whether more could be gained by drawing out lessons learnt by different types of groups – those organising at community/ constituency level, those that are networks, those that are funders. The Power Up conversations on participatory governance that began in 2021 and will continue into 2022 open space for frank conversations among these different types of groups, and deeper understandings of how to embed feminist principles and practices across the women's movement 'ecosystem' as it were. The tensions between how groups learn and best communicate their work over the year, and the information required by funder reports, also remain a key area for engagement within Comic Relief and with other funders.

In an early February 2022 consultation on the report, groups identified which issues they want to take forward. Putting feminist principles into practice in relation to governance, partnerships and relationships between funders, international and national NGOs and community groups remain a key area of interest. The work on gender based violence will also continue. The issue of shrinking space for civil society activism and the safety of staff and constituents will be another key focus. In addition, groups are keen to share and support each other in using training and other tools they've found effective.

Power Up groups will consolidate these among other issues identified, at a conference later in 2022, shaping the objectives, the agenda, process and content. The conference will have time for participants to share achievements, expertise and experience among themselves, and time for sessions to share lessons learnt with the broader field.