

Evaluating our work through a power lens

The Power Up Programme



February 2023



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We adapted the Power Framework to use in our evaluation because it helps us to examine the different forms of power the participants encountered during the project. Being part of the evaluation group reiterated the fact that we are still strong women whose voices and inputs are invaluable, irrespective of our asylum/ refugee struggles. All thanks to Refugee Women Connect.”

Onyeka Kate Mbonu, Refugee Women Connect volunteer

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Power Up: a programme funded by Comic Relief

1. Why is evaluation relevant to power and movements?

- Many women's groups experience monitoring and evaluation as an exercise of funders' power over them in which their task is to demonstrate their compliance with donor expectations and contracts.
- Women's funds, women's groups that lead funded consortia or partnerships, are positioned to hold power over their grantees or partners; and similarly women's groups hold power over their constituents in relation to priorities and ways of working, because they hold the money, with monitoring, evaluation and learning as key tools in this process.
- Women's movements recognising this power and working to shift power towards constituents is key in the work, including in evaluating and learning from the work. Women's movements are committed to continual learning in order to ensure that the time, resources and emotional energy they put into their strategies is having the strongest possible impact in promoting the rights of their constituents, particularly marginalised and excluded groups.
- This begs questions of what it takes for funders, women's movement consortia and women's organisations to build their own accountability to their partners and constituencies into their monitoring, evaluation and learning processes while at the same time meeting donor requirements.

- It begs questions of how women's movements engage and persuade funders to support approaches to evaluation and learning that are empowering and useful to both constituents and funders.



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- Power in evaluation is also relevant to movements in relation to what gets evaluated. Do we focus on who did what and numbers of 'beneficiaries' who attended events, as funders so often ask?
- Or do we focus on if, how and why our actions are making headway in building women's and women's movement power and challenging and transforming the inequitable power relations of patriarchy.
- A feminist approach to evaluation also needs to continually be reflexive about the

power inherent in evaluation processes and relationships so that our movements model 'power with' in building cultures of collective, participatory learning that strengthen our effectiveness.

- For this reason Comic Relief consulted Power Up groups about its annual reporting form requirements and adjusted in response. It did not ask grantees to report against the Power Framework, but some chose to do so.

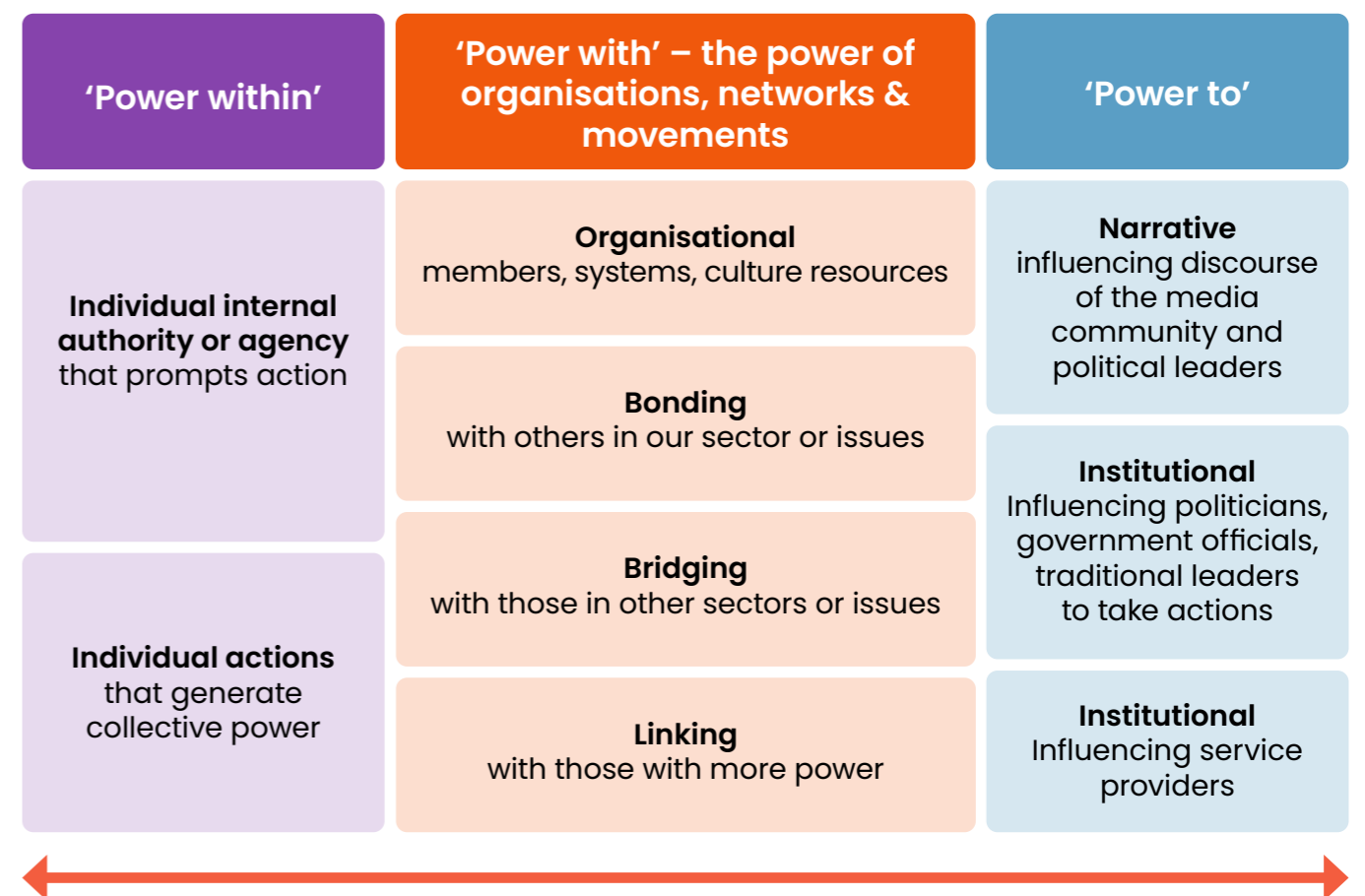
The Power Framework

– how women and groups supported through Power Up built and influenced power.

At the end of Year 1 of Power Up, Comic Relief asked Barbara Klugman to write a report on 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'. To explore what types of power this might include, she developed a framework from the discussions held by Power Up Groups

and from the literature, described in [How has work funded by Comic Relief's Power Up programme contributed to shifts in women and girls' power?](#) and illustrated below.

This Learning Brief includes two examples of how Power Up groups then drew on the framework in their own evaluation and learning approaches.



Urgent Action Fund–Africa

Aim

Make explicit our interest in transforming power relations by fostering grantees' interest in and ability to identify where power lies and if and how their strategies making progress in challenging and shifting power. Urgent Action Fund–Africa

Sources:

- Hiwot Tedla, UAF–A, 'Learning from UAF–A's approaches to MEL for movement-building and advocacy', Power Up Workshop 15 July 2020;
- Urgent Action Fund – Africa Annual Report to Comic Relief October 2022;
- Additional inputs from Hiwot Tedla.



Who actually has power to make the change you seek? How will you influence them? How will your intervention contribute to the bigger picture of transforming power to advance womn's human rights?"



How we used our power – strategies

- In our commitment to transforming power relations through resourcing African feminists and womn human rights defenders and their formations we ask grant applicants for a power analysis – who (individuals/groups) has power and will benefit by maintaining the situation as it is? Who actually has power to make the change you seek? How will you influence them? How will your intervention contribute to the bigger picture of transforming power to advance womn's human rights?
- We ask grantees to report on achievements in relation to their power analysis.
- Our MEAL team categorises the significance of outcomes harvested from grantee reports in relation to shifts of power at four levels (see figure below), which enables us to assess to what extent our grantmaking strategies are aligning with our strategic objective of transforming power.

How we influenced power – achievements

- Grantees have started reflecting on power since UAF–A asked questions about it in its reporting form and are now telling and sharing stories of change they have influenced.
- External evaluators contracted by UAF–A have shifted their own approaches to be cognisant of their power as evaluators.
- They now engage grantees not as evaluator and evaluated but rather with reflexive open processes of engagement that build grantees' power and confidence to tell their own stories and foster collective learning.
- These processes ensure womn, especially those who are marginalised, are at the centre of evaluation planning and analysis.

Women for Refugee Women /Refugee Women Connect, UK

Aim

Develop the capacity of our Expert by Experience advocates to build a movement of refugee women that can connect with wide audiences and policy makers to create genuine change and, since the project was about shifting power, this included to enable them to evaluate our efforts through a participatory evaluation approach.

Sources:

- Venus Abdullah, Women for Refugee Women, 'Monitoring and Evaluation Conversations and Challenges', Power Up Workshop, 'Power up: Participatory and feminist MEL – learning from and with each other', 16 March 2021.
- Additional inputs from Comfort Etim, Refugee Women Connect, Alphonsine Kabagabo, Women for Refugee Women.

How we used our power – strategies

- Nine refugee women from across our networks worked with an external consultant to develop their skills and confidence as Evaluation Leaders. After training, they put their learning into practice by carrying out a participatory evaluation of WRW/RWC over August / September 2022.
- They used the Comic Relief Power Framework – How has work funded by Comic Relief's Power Up programme contributed to shifts in women and girls' power? – and matched this against what we had said we would do in the project proposal to Comic Relief.
- The evaluation was qualitative and concerned with exploring the experiences, perspectives and opinions of women in our networks.

- The experience has led us to plan to continue using participatory evaluation with findings informing our Strategic Planning.
- We developed an action plan to implement the recommendations from the evaluation done by the leaders.

The participatory evaluation methodology included:

- One to one interviews with external evaluator, Tina Poyzer, and focus group discussion over zoom and telephone.
- The Expert by Experience Advocates in the evaluation group worked together to carry out the evaluation, collectively making sense of interview/focus group responses and analysing them, with back-up from the external facilitator.

Questions included:

- What does it mean, to you, to have power?
- In what ways does the organisation help you and other women tell their story so that positive change can happen?

How we influenced power – achievements

- The experience of going through the training and then undertaking the evaluation, talking with women involved in WRW/RWC campaigns built women's confidence and they are supporting themselves and other women, for example, working directly with medical professionals as creative influencers on issues surrounding maternity support for women seeking sanctuary in the UK.
- For the organisation's second evaluation, the women led the evaluation, setting the terms and interviews themselves.

2. Cross-cutting challenges and lessons learnt

Challenges

- Most organisations approaches to routine data collection, analysis, sense-making and reporting do not involve their constituents which means responses constituents give to evaluators are mediated by power differentials.

Lessons Learnt

- By having an external evaluator lead the process, constituents' participation and responses are not mediated through the power of the organisation.
- By having women with lived experience of the issues not just participate but shape the entire evaluation process, we gain insights into those women's questions, perspectives and priorities, unmediated by the power of external evaluators or organizational staff.

Challenges

- Most organisations put monitoring for compliance at the centre of their work and the whole MEL process is experienced as top-down and focused only on compliance and upward accountability to funders or bosses.

Lessons Learnt

- By institutionalising constituents' role in shaping evaluation of organisational performance, principles of shifting power become embedded through the organisation.
- By institutionalising space and time for reflection by constituents/ volunteers / grantees on their own and with staff, as well as for staff on their own, they experience using learning as the basis for strengthening strategies. This increases everyone's sense of the value of MEL for themselves and the organisation.

Challenges

- Routine monitoring tends to focus on outputs or, in response to funders' requests for information on 'impact on women at large', to have to guess at population-level impact.

Lessons Learnt

- By constituents shaping the questions, organisations learn how to keep improving in how they shape their priorities and ways of working to meet constituents' needs.
- By focusing on identifying progress towards long-term impact through smaller short-term outcomes mapped against the Power Framework, we can name specific and meaningful changes that alert us to if and how well our strategies are working to shift power at multiple levels.

Challenges

- Limited capacity for grassroots or community organizations to clearly demonstrate power analysis in their grant application and reports.

Lessons Learnt

- Funders should incorporate capacity strengthening – both through formal training and informally when in conversations with grantee partners – to enable them to conduct and use power analysis and thereby strengthen their ability to communicate what they are achieving.



3. Resources

FRIDA's Strategic MEL Framework, 2022

Resources from the field: UAF Asia & Pacific's Approach to Monitoring Evaluation Accountability and Learning

4. Acknowledgements

This Learning Brief was collated by Barbara Klugman based on the expertise and thinking of members of all Power Up groups who have participated in the Power Up learning process since March 2020, including from notes of Power Up workshops on feminist and participatory MEL: 6 May, 10 June, 15 July, 14 October and 4 December 2020, 16 March, 28 April (consultation on the Power Framework in this Learning Brief), and 15 June on taking forward the outcomes approach and / or power framework, 2021; the Annual Reports to Comic Relief of the groups featured in this Learning Brief; plus the specific inputs of the following people in consolidating the cards:

- Hiwot Tedla, Urgent Action Fund - Africa
- Comfort Etim, Refugee Women Connect
- Alphonsine Kabagabo, Women for Refugee Women

Interrogating Power and Movements

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

The Learning Briefs pick up some of the cross-cutting issues they have addressed. Each topic includes participants' understanding of how the issue is relevant to power and movements followed by examples from a few groups of how they have both built and used

their power – their strategies, and how they have influenced power – their achievements. They end with challenges and lessons learnt in addressing these, based on the collective experiences and insights of participants.

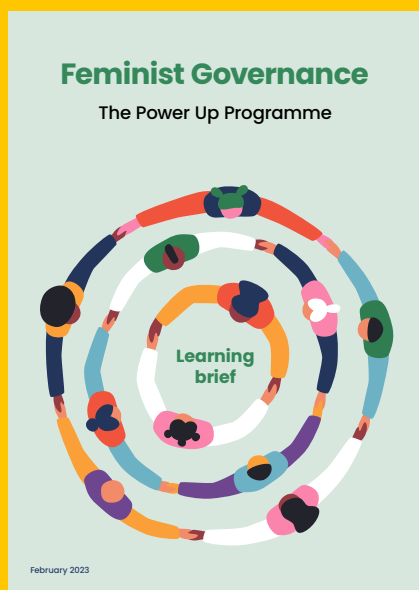
The Learning Briefs form Power Up's Year 3 Report to Comic Relief, and build on the previous reports each of which unpacked questions of power in movement-building and influence:

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

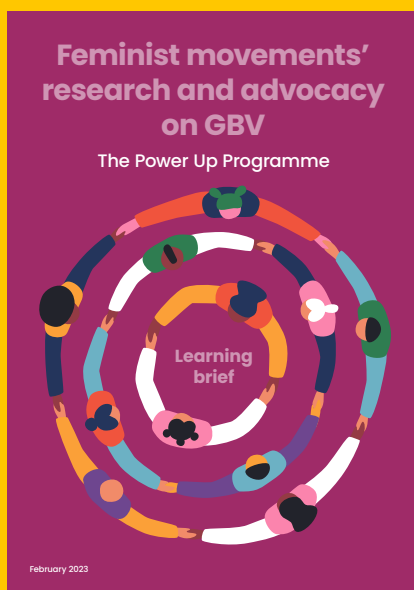
Barbara Klugman, February 2023



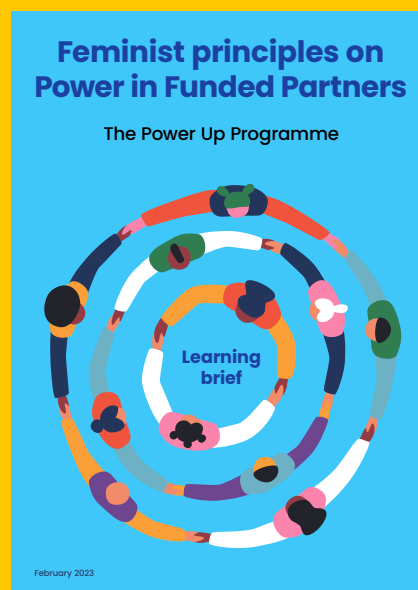
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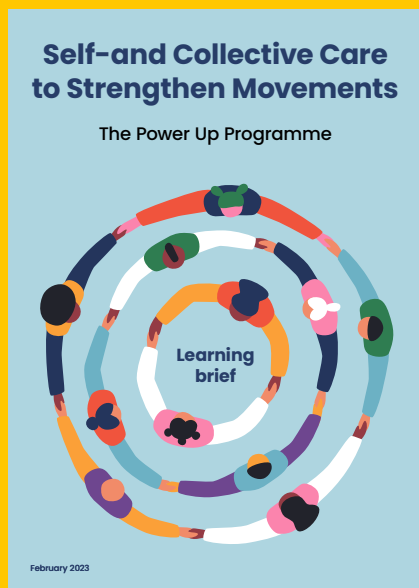
Feminist Governance



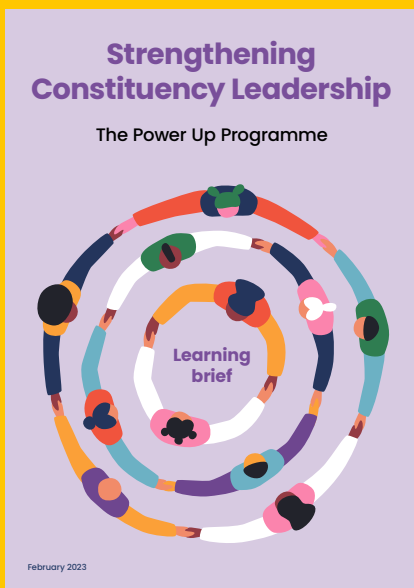
Feminist movements' research and advocacy on GBV



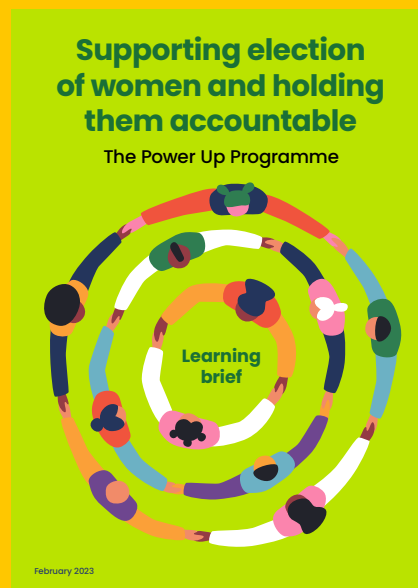
Feminist principles on Power in Funded Partners



Self- and Collective Care to Strengthen Movements



Strengthening Constituency Leadership



Supporting election of women and holding them accountable

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