Reporting Back: How one funder succeeded in doing better, and realised they'd never get it completely right.

Barbara Klugman

POWER UP

CONTENTS

POWER UP GROUPS, PROPOSAL TITLES & ACRONYMS

Astraea – Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice: 'Online and in the Streets: Powering Up South Asian LBTQI 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 LBTQI Movements in Sub Saharan Africa'
   o **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'
   o **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'
   o **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'
   o **WCoZ** – Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe
   o **WIPSU** – Women in Politics Support Unit

WRW – Women for Refugee Women: 'Refugee Women – Empower and Change'
   o **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'
   o **CNRG** – Centre for Natural Resource Governance
   o **Kebetkache** Women Development and Resource Centre

YWT – Young Women's Trust: Power Up

CONTEXT

For Comic Relief, the Power Up initiative is an opportunity to explore what funder practices are most effective in supporting movements and movement building. While its initial call for proposals, and the 'Start-up form' it required were in line with Comic Relief's usual approach, soon thereafter the Comic Relief team responsible for Power Up shifted strategy. They let go of the 'Start-up form' in part because within months of receiving their grants, the groups had to rethink their priorities and strategies in light of Covid and lockdowns. In line with the recommendations of the Scoping Study on Women's Movements that it had commissioned, it adopted a learning approach to its own practices.

After receiving grantees annual reports for Year 1 of Power Up, Comic Relief held a consultation with grantees about how they experienced the form and what could be improved. They revised the form for use in Year 2. This was somewhat complicated by Comic Relief also introducing Salesforce as a platform on which grantees could report, and some confusion for grantees as to what to report on the new form and what to report on Salesforce. As part of its learning process, Comic Relief contracted me as a learning partner to them and to the cohort of Power Up grantees. 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 annual reports, and to assess if the Annual Reporting Form worked better than the previous one. Findings on themes are presented in a separate report: Feminist resilience and innovation within a pandemic: lessons from the Comic Relief Power Up cohort. This report focuses on issues raised by Power Up groups regarding Comic Relief, the Power Up annual reporting form and the peer learning process.

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 the 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) to Comic Relief. I sent all references to each organisation's annual report and any quotes from individuals interviewed back to the relevant organisation, 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. Quotations that are not referenced are from annual reports. I sent a next version to all Power Up groups in late January, so they could prepare for a feedback session with Comic Relief in early February 2022, 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. While this report is for Comic Relief's internal use, this process ensured that grantees are accurately referenced and comfortable with how their experiences are represented.

HOW DID GROUPS EXPERIENCE COMIC RELIEF?

Comic Relief's support and flexibility are invaluable

The following text ably captures the perspective shared by most groups of tremendous gratitude for Comic Relief's support and flexibility:

> *"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)

It may be worth noting that those who have had funding from other parts of Comic Relief have indicated how very different the Power Up reporting experience has been. They found reporting on other grants from Comic Relief extremely demanding, with unhelpful and to their experience, often inappropriate, reporting requirements.

Communication lapses

Two groups expressed appreciation for Comic Relief having invited them into conversation about potential partnerships, but indicated that communication seemed to stop without concluding.

> *"For example, we took part in a meeting about a potential partnership with Mars at the start of the year, but after that initial meeting we never heard anything back; and were also canvassed about a booster pot without clear outcomes or next steps communicated."* (Anonymous)

A number of groups expressed anxiety about shifts in membership of the Comic Relief Power Up team and in the absence of their liaison persons, inadequate communication as to with whom they should engage.

EXPERIENCE OF THE PU REVISED ANNUAL REPORTING FORM 2021

Timing of reporting

A number of groups, and most particularly the funder intermediaries and others who sub-grant, supported through Power Up, raised a concern that Comic Relief's October timing for this form does not match the calendar year whereas the Power Up groups use the calendar year. As a result they are unable to report on grants over a year, or have to go back to earlier reports to do so.

"That's why I can't go to fullest of story because of awareness of timing – sometimes I'd have to go back to information I shared in year 1." (Paul-Gilbert Colletaz, Red Umbrella Fund)

Hence they did not always have at hand their own organisational analysis of achievements, what went well and what strategies to shift, in time for responding to the Comic Relief report. This meant they had to do this work as an additional activity, rather than it fitting seamlessly into their monitoring, evaluation, learning and reporting cycle.

Confusion around requirements

A few groups indicated that at the same time as they have very much appreciated Comic Relief's supportiveness and flexibility, the communication has not been clear enough on whether they still have to report against indicators in the start-up forms.

"In terms of accountability, when we started the grant there was a grant Start Off form that was used to formally approve the project with a formal MEL structure and indicators which Comic Relief commented on, and then we enhanced them and in the first annual report we reported back on all the indicators. This almost dropped off with the new form. The old one asked for each outcome for every indicator – so Comic Relief should have been very clear about what they are holding us accountable for. They've never referred back to the Start-up form and if we have any accountability to it or is it obsolete." (Laura Brown, Womankind)

They also expressed concern on lack of official communication about changes, and on how to do financial reporting in relation to those changes – in relation to project adaptations because of Covid, agreed upon in conversations with Comic Relief. For example,

"We were also not given formal approval and contractual documents showing the amendments or any guidance on how we should reflect the changes in our financial reporting. We did enquire about how to reflect the changes and were advised to follow a process that worked best for us which we did. However, because the donor financial template is fixed with formulas, it has been difficult to unravel this, taken a lot of time to work through and more guidance on this would have been welcomed." (Laura Brown)

Feedback on the new reporting form

Power Up groups had mixed experiences of the revised reporting form.

It was improved and worked well	Much improved but more can be done
11	5

Two thirds of the groups (11) described it in positive terms. Many found it clear, relevant and helpful in terms of sharing information and reflecting. Groups appreciated it being short and that it "invited a more overall, higher level of reflection." Some felt excited as it enabled them to tell their story.

"We used it to reflect on how we've done and what to do to overcome areas we were lacking – an opportunity for us to think about what we've done. On the signs of change

part – who have we influenced – it's good. We were able to reflect on what changes happened, very good, we liked that part the most." (Vidyanikethan)

Some of these nevertheless were not entirely sure what Comic Relief was looking for. For example,

"The overview, looking at risks, opportunities and learnings felt good to me. And then where we're getting to the long term shifts, positive, negative and actions, we agreed the questions are a little hard to get your head around what they're asking; so we were unsure if we're answering in the right way." (Lydia Morgan, Young Women's Trust)

Another raised this in relation to the question about risks, not knowing if this related to organisational risks or risks faced by the movement. One suggested that 2.4 and 4.1b seem to overlap and suggested that 4.1b could be changed *"to inquire about new risks and challenges, so partners could include new information/context as needed."* (Astraea) Similarly one group suggested the form distinguish organisational learning from programmatic learning.

A third (five) of the groups indicated the form is an improvement, but felt more could be done to strengthen it. A few of them questioned the value of separating out the pieces which made it difficult for them to tell a coherent story:

"…other funders are less rigid – I'm invited to tell the story: what's the context, what happened, what are your reflections, what's been the impact and how has that affected you for the year to come – and I can structure it as appropriate. That feels like a narrative whereas with the Comic Relief form I found myself asking 'which part answers which question here?' It was less easy to separate the opportunities from the learning and what happened last year." (Anonymous)

Some in this group felt that it was repetitive:

"Throughout the reporting form, there are questions around learning and challenges, and while we're sure it is not intended to be repetitive, as we work to fill out each question, we find ourselves repeating information throughout the report. Also, there could be a way for the questions focused on positive shifts/changes (and contributions to such, e.g. questions 2.1-2.3) could be collapsed into one. The same goes for the questions around the learning section (section 3)." (Astraea)

One said it felt too vague:

"The questions were a bit more vague, asking a lot about learning as opposed to impact – perhaps a matter of personal style. I like outcome reporting; I'm not a fan of the fluff." (Anonymous Interviewee)

However, others indicated that they liked the focus on outcomes.

Four mentioned that the restrictions on words was limiting. Three of these were partnerships where each partner has different things to report.

Notwithstanding the improvements, many thought their ability to reflect the work well would be improved by the form inviting one or two case studies, allowing a page for each.

In relation to Salesforce a few raised concerns:

"I find the Salesforce platform alienating and overly complicated to use – if in its work with Power Up, Comic Relief wants to engage movements that are fluid and without the kind of infrastructure that UK charities have, then it needs to ensure we don't spend all our time trying to navigate Salesforce, and it being alienating. It's a question of its appropriateness." (Anonymous)

Analysis of actual responses to the reporting form

I made a note of how each group responded to the questions on the form. This section describes my observations and thoughts about improvements.

Question 1.1: Please give us a short overview of whether you feel you are on track with your overall aims and plans for your work (400 words max.)

Most groups used this to detail, in point or summary form, key achievements rather than offering an overall high-level comment on progress in relation to overall purpose of the work.

As a result, almost everything had to be repeated again in subsequent sections. However, having written points once, subsequent sections didn't always carry the full information which required me to move up and down the document when drafting outcomes, to gather the full information on who did what when and where.

Perhaps if this question asked for only two sentences – one on to what extent they felt they were on track in relation to goals, and another on to what extent they felt they made progress in relation to sustaining or improving organisational capacities – this would give Comic Relief the introductory 'take' it was looking for. However, such brevity raises the question of whether this would add enough value to Comic Relief's overall understanding to be worth including.

Question 2. How is your work progressing?
2.1 asks about any changes in the issues; **2.2** about if the group's work has contributed to these any of the shifts observed; **2.3** about whether the group has managed to influence any of those they hoped to influence to make changes.

In a couple of cases, the group answered 2.1 in relation to broad changes in context or narrative, but by and large, responses to all three questions were indistinguishable. Some groups put very different information into each section, but it was hard to distinguish why certain information was in one rather than another. Other groups carried very similar information in at least two of the three questions.

A single question instead of three would likely elicit the required information without unnecessary repetitions or confusion as to what Comic Relief intended by each question. It would also allow groups to tell the story of the relationship between what they've done and the changes they have influenced. For groups engaged in multiple initiatives, the invitation to include one to three case studies or illustrative examples of no more than a page each might enable them to communicate their processes, achievements and adaptations better (i.e. covering questions 2 and 3).

2.4 asks about negative consequences for the organisation, or those the group works with or the issue.

Some groups responded to this in the same way as 4.1b.

3. What are you learning?
3.1 asks about learning in relation to the learning points raised in the Start-up form; **3.2** about what groups had done with this learning; **3.3** about if there were any new areas of learning; **3.4** about what groups were learning about the information and data they collect and how to use them to learn about how change happens.

Most groups did not distinguish between questions 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3 and there was a lot of overlap in responses between them. A single question on learning would suffice and be much less confusing, although the term 'learning' may itself be unclear. If the aim is to understand in what ways groups shifted strategies or even objectives, based on the experience described under 2, perhaps the question should be framed that way.

Six groups understood and answered 3.4 as a question about their monitoring, evaluation and learning approach and findings. One used it to refer to how it accessed research from partners. Others did not use it in a way that differed from the other questions in this section. A question about if and how groups have strengthened and / or used their MEL system and what, if any, challenges they are facing and addressing would be more specific and help Comic Relief understand to what extent each group was building its MEL capacity.

4. Key approaches for the next year
4.1a) on opportunities for your work **4.1b)** on threats and risks.

All groups responded clearly to each of these questions. This does not alter that some perceived overlap between 2.4 and 4.1b).

4.1c) "How will you make the most of the opportunities? How will you respond to the threats you've identified?" and **4.2** "Given all the above, what do you plan to carry out over the next year?"

In general, groups did not see much difference between these two questions. Most wrote a paragraph in relation to 4.1c) and then gave more specific intended actions either bulleted or in a paragraph for 4.2. There doesn't seem to be any value in separating these two questions.

It is worth considering whether they are required in light of 4.1a) and b). If 4.1a) asked what opportunities groups see and how they plan to make those most of them, that would allow a better flow of response and similarly in relation to 4.1b) on threats and risks.

Ideas from the field on reporting forms

As part of its process of testing reporting, suggestions from the field need consideration, including the question of what would happen if Comic Relief asked Power Up groups to simply send in whatever report they use for all core funders, or a reflection on how the year went and what they plan to continue or to do differently the next year, and why. Might this more open approach elicit the same information that the current reporting form seeks, and if so, might it do so in formats that are more intuitive for each group, and enable each group to express itself in ways that are consistent with its own approaches and ways of thinking?

Some ideas from the field are shared here:

New principles for grant reporting

Comic Relief participated in the IVAR process of developing principles to guide funder reporting requirements. The report from that process provides interesting food for thought about appropriate reporting requirements, under the principle 'Funders only ask for the information they need and use, and question whether they need bespoke reporting'. They propose that if funders need information not included in reports grantees are already producing, they should consider "whether this 'bespoke' reporting is proportionate to the size of the grant, the size of the funded organisation, and which other funders are asking for similar things." They provide the following examples:

Example 1 A funder giving a small grant asks for no reporting other than the organisation's annual report and accounts listing the grant, and may meet or visit the funded organisation instead to hear about progress.	Example 2 A funder giving a core costs grant encourages the organisation to put the time that would have been spent in grant reporting into a published learning report instead.
Example 3 All the funders of a large project meet regularly together with the funded organisation and receive one common report on progress.	Example 4 A funded organisation uses one funder's report template to report to all of their funders.

Source: *New principles for grant reporting, IVAR and Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, Dec 2018, p4.*

Suggested reporting form for funder intermediaries

FRIDA – a funder in the Power Up cohort – shared the Philanthropy Advancing Women's Human Rights (PAWHR) proposed reporting template. PAWHR is a partnership among twelve of the world's largest foundations to deliver more and better resources to women's rights organisations and movements. It mobilises funders to support the women's rights ecosystem. As part of the collective work of the group, they developed a common proposal and reporting template (below) which they propose that intermediary funders be asked to use for reporting, in no more than five pages. This prevents the funder intermediaries from having to write reports with different types of questions and different formats for each of their funders:

Progress made during grant period: (This section can include context and achievements)

Descriptions of grants made: (This section should provide a brief summary of relevant grants made during the reporting period; no more than 1.5 pages total).

Challenges: (This section should describe any obstacles your organisation faced and how you overcame or mitigated these challenges. We recognise that circumstances often change during the grant period, and we appreciate your candour in helping us address and learn from these issues.)

Lessons Learned: (This section should provide concrete examples of how this grant may influence your priorities or strategies in the future. What will you seek to replicate? What might it change? If applicable, describe how your strategy evolved during the reporting period.)

There is also a proposed financial reporting template.

#FixTheForm

There is an initiative underway called #FixTheForm which describes itself as "a scrappy grassroots international movement to identify (and fix!) the top pain points in grant applications. Feedback in 2,500 reviews of foundations on GrantAdvisor.org indicated that small (but impactful) changes to online grant applications represent the top opportunity for improvement in the field." The initiative is "curating practical recommendations and unique insights at a moment when the field is poised to make great changes." This could provide another useful avenue for Comic Relief to share what it is learning and also gain insights from others from the field.

See Kari Aanestad and Laura Solomons, Why We Need to #FixTheForm, https://blog.grantadvisor.org/why-we-need-to-fixtheform/ 15 Jan 2021

WHAT GROUPS WANT OF COMIC RELIEF

Continuing the Power Up Initiative

Many groups noted that building the partnerships in their Power Up proposals took time, and their overall movement building work takes time. Many groups asked whether Comic Relief will invite the current cohort to continue in Power Up. Some raised concerns that if Power Up does not continue, they will be unable to continue the work. This was particularly the case where Comic Relief is providing funds that no other funders support, and for new initiatives.

Philanthropic advocacy

Groups are keen to see Comic Relief using its learnings from the Power Up process to engage a) internally, building Comic Relief's understanding of the approach of core funding to movements, and reporting based on what actually happened rather than pre-set indicators, and b) externally to advocate to and influence other philanthropies.

> *"I really appreciate the lengths that you and Comic Relief are going to, around learning from not only the content of reporting but also how we are engaging with it – and that goes for the whole Power Up program. What I have been wondering a bit lately is where this learning will go for Comic Relief once Power Up comes to a close – and how Comic Relief might be thinking to influence the funding sector. That is a question for Comic Relief and not just you of course, Barbara. It would be super helpful for us all to have a touch point around purpose and goals for these learnings, from CR/PU team perspective." (Astraea)*

This coheres with the recommendations of the Scoping Study on Women's Movements commissioned by Comic Relief in preparation for the Power Up initiative.

Some asked that Comic Relief use its voice on specific issues, for example in inviting
> *"uncomfortable conversations, such as how to push back on trafficking. Where is Comic Relief's voice on this? It has strong policies on child protection, and against trafficking, but how does Comic Relief address the conflation of sex work and trafficking? Could they facilitate us speaking to the Comic Relief board?" (Stellah Wairimu Bosire, UHAI)*

> *"We invited Maria to join the funders sex workers donor collaborative (SWDC) – they could come and learn there. We do research, so we're able to show what funding goes to sex workers, and we do advocacy on anti-trafficking. We just developed our strategic planning. Comic Relief could occupy that space and stand proudly for sex workers' rights." (Paul-Gilbert Colletaz, RUF)*

THE POWER UP PEER LEARNING PROCESS

The sessions

The following sessions have been held or are planned. Note that '# groups' counts a grantee as one group and each partner in the proposal of that grantee as another group:

	DATE	TOPIC	WHO	# groups	# participants
	2020				
1	Mar-20	Agenda setting		26	35
2	04-May	How we're adapting our strategies, engaging our constituencies and influencing decision-makers		3	6
3	06-May	A conversation among monitoring and evaluation staff		22	28
4	12-May	How we're adapting our strategies, engaging our constituencies and influencing decision-makers		24	29
5	06-May	A conversation among monitoring and evaluation staff		22	28
6	1,2,3, June	Four repeat small group conversations			

7	01-Jun	Appropriate tech: communication tools being used by Power Up groups	WIEGO, YWT	10	13
8	05-Jun	Organising in a time of crisis – the Ushahidi Platform	WoMin	Run by WoMin	
9	10-Jun	An orientation to evaluating movement building and advocacy	Barbara	22	28
10	18-Jun	Beyond coping - wellbeing during these times	Hope Chigudu, Jude Clark	7	8
11	24-Jun	Gender-based violence – how to take action	EVAW, PWC, UAF, RWC	10	8
12	15-Jul	MEL – learning from UAF-A's approaches MEAL for movement building and advocacy	UAF-A, Fawcett	16	22
13	24-Jul	Power Up – what next?	Small groups	9	10
14	14-Oct	Feminist and Participatory MEL - the issues and what we want to learn	Small groups	11	16
15	27-Oct	How to connect with other movements including anti-racism in the UK	Mumbi	5	7
16	04-Nov	Supporting those with lived experience to lead their movements	WHER	8	11
17	18-Nov	Learning from the experience of the Forced Migration, SGBV and Covid-19 research project	RWC, Sereda	7	13
18	04-Dec	Approach to MEL & learning qus of Young Women's Trust	YWT	10	14
	2021				
1	03-Feb	Supporting those with lived experience to lead their movements	Small groups	9	11
2	24-Feb	Funders learning with each other	Open	5	6
3	03-Mar	What does it take undertake participatory research on GBV with the women we work with? How do we ensure it is empowering and useful for them? How do we ensure we do no harm?'	WIEGO, RWC	9	13
4	16-Mar	MEL – learning from each other's approaches on MEL for movement building and advocacy	Women for Refugee Women would be interested in a case clinic	9	13
5	24-Mar	How to move away from 'projects' to centre on movement building?	WIEGO	6	7
6	28-Apr	BK consultation on Power Framework and report for CR	Barbara	19	22
7	29-Apr	Funders learning with each other	Paul-Gilbert - Red Umbrella facilitates on platforms	5	7
8	12-May	How can we maintain, foster trust and growth in leadership of our movements in digital / virtual work spaces?	FRIDA	8	9
9	26-May	Covid seems to have taken us backwards on GBV. - challenge of both safeguarding women and how to engage men. How to engage men without diluting the attention on women's empowerment	PWC	4	5
10	02-Jun	PU Gender terms - which and why?	Saphho for Equality	5	8
11	15-Jun	MEL: Taking forward outcomes approach or power framework	Open	8	8
12	07-Jul	Movements	WLL, Vidyanikethan	5	5
13	14-Jul	Funding and raising funds for GBV work	Open	6	7

14	27-Oct	What I know now - revisiting how we've been, personally and organisationally, since the June 2020 workshop "Beyond coping – wellbeing in these times"	Hope Chigudu, Jude Clark	10	15
15	03-Nov	Governance – what are we testing and learning on feminist and democratic forms of governance and accountability to our constituencies?	UHAI	8	10
16	17-Nov	Partnerships – issues, challenges and what we are learning in building and sustaining partnerships, especially in joint bids for funding?	Open	11	15
17	Nov	Barbara one-on-one interviews			
	2022	**Forthcoming**			
1	26-Jan	Feminist leadership	YWT, FRIDA		
2	TBD	Challenges & lessons from Comic Relief partnership	WRW_RWC		
3	TBD	What issues to take forward? Conference?			

Publications
- Anya Stern, Jake Grout-Smith and Maria Hughes, Comic Relief: 18 August 2020: Navigating the role of funding in feminist movements
- Women in Politics Support Unit: 8 March 2021: Power Up! Resilience of the Zimbabwe women's movement in the face of crisis
- Barbara Klugman: 30 March 2020: Power Up: Creating 'community' across diversity during Covid-19
- Vanessa Pillay, WIEGO: 1 April 2021: Power Up: Voice notes - making home-based workers' voices stronger
- CARE: Womankind Worldwide, Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe and Women in Politics: Power Up! Resilience of the Zimbabwe Women's Movement in the face of Crisis
- The Year One report's Power Framework

Presentation
- Barbara Klugman: 10 November 2021: 'Distinguishing the facts from the interpretation – using Outcome Harvesting's 'significance' to assess shifts in women's power in an international funding initiative', Panel: Power in evaluation: ways of seeing it and entry points for doing things differently, Eval21, American Evaluation Association.

Participants' experience of Power Up peer learning processes

The peer learning space is exactly that – it is explicitly about holding sessions on topics that Power Up groups are keen to explore further and learn more about. It is entirely voluntary. One participant noted that what distinguishes it from other spaces is the focus on learning,

> *"A lot of our reflection is done with others, the Power Up space has helped make that connection clearly – helps you learn as you go on. The space is explicitly put as a learning space even though' we're sharing information as everyone can ask questions – I come back to the team thinking of that as a learning space, compared to any other meeting where I just present my way of working –in those, I'd just say I reported, rather than I learnt." (Paul-Gilbert Colletaz, Red Umbrella Fund)*

Proportions of groups by response to the peer learning processes.

Love this & give it priority	Attend when we can & see close resonance	No resonance
10.5	4.5	1

Most groups described the experience as extremely valuable, as captured by this group and their partner,

"really refreshing to have this diverse batch of groups coming together – really amazing" (Astraea)

"so many academic platforms where people can share ideas, but how many platforms where social workers can exchange dialogue especially when huge transformations are going on…" (Sappho for Equality)

A few groups articulated the tension between the desire to participate and time available; well captured by two:

"Obviously my capacity is limited so I'm not always able to attend; probably my reflection about them as been if I had more time I'd definitely find it interesting to hear from partners around the world on what they're experiencing and what things are like for them; but under the time pressure I have it's hard for me to prioritise that space – our contexts are so different so my learning is much more long distance so I can't find ways to absorb and apply and learn; I'm always interesting in learning about struggles of feminist organisations – so important to be able to do movement building well – to be able to connect across borders. But under the pressure I am it's hard to say I want to be with orgs doing totally different work in diff contexts; there is a lot of commonality in terms of values – I've learnt a lot in that sense;, and how we implement our values." (Deniz Ugur, EVAW)

"We do find the learning processes demanding as we juggle extreme work pressures, and the many challenges which COVID continues to present to our staff, allies, and partners. We take up offerings that will be of use to us, and hope and believe that this is Comic Relief's understanding too." (WoMin, Annual Report)

One person said she struggled with the frequency (Judith Mtsewu, WoMin), while another suggested they should be more frequent. (Sharon Manenji, Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe)

Women in Prison, which has chosen not to participate put it down to two things. Firstly, they argued that the context is such that experience from elsewhere will not resonate with those they are trying to influence. Secondly, they are a service provider, which is not the case with most of the Power Up groups. Even though Power Up funds them for advocacy, this is a tiny part of what they do.

"International arguments really don't work with our government now, they're thinking rule Britannia, a neo-fascist environment, about to rip up the European human rights act with the British human rights Act, arguing "but we're in the UK". This is part of why we don't have overlap with the other groups. … So there's no time for learning of the kind that the Power Up networking opportunity enabled. If we had time we would focus on personal development objectives and plans etc, mostly about improving or learning a new skill." (Sorana Vieru, Women in Prison) In their Annual Report feedback to Comic Relief they suggested, *"feedback mechanisms or canvassing opinion of grantees could be done via other ways rather than taking part in lengthy sessions – like a quick poll or email - and having more timely communications. We completely understand that it's helpful to have discussions to shape things going forward but it's helpful to offer other ways we can input when we are short on time."*

All groups in the first two columns above expressed regret about having to miss some sessions that did resonate, when other work demands had to take precedence. Notably a few people indicated

that they had listened to the recordings or read the notes, *"those summaries are a great addition – thank you so much." (Judith Mtsewu, WoMin)*

Many indicated the value of the events which they are articulated as a sense of solidarity, recognising that their issues are shared by other across boundaries,

> *"it has been comforting to know that 1) we are not alone in what we are facing in our work, and 2) to learn from our peers about their strategies to confront the pandemic. It has also been especially helpful to think about feminist learning & evaluation together, the work on that" (Astraea, Annual Report)*

> *"… getting to know someone from Ethiopia – a very privileged access to so many people working on so many human rights issues – that is itself a miracle that right now we can engage; and such platforms to just engage and pour out is enough for us – maybe it'll help us reflect later on" (Sappho for Equality)*

> *"those breakouts and talk to someone from a completely different location and to understand we're not the only ones going through this" (Sappho for Equality)*

> *"I think the great thing is that we would never be in the same room with these organisations every if this whole Covid thing hasn't happened; we'd never hear of their experiences and some of them are doing really innovative things and it's great the way they're addressing their problems. But when it comes to absorbing the learnings there wasn't really another network like ours – a unique model – so it's hard to pick up and use innovative things for others that work. But such a variety of organisations." (Navya D'Souza, HomeNet South Asia)*

> *"I really enjoyed it; there was so much –helped me think about things in a certain way. The really great thing about it was meeting these other people also doing things in this weird situation. Like an outlet. Interesting conversation over the photocopier that you're not having." (Pip McKnight, Refugee Women Connect)*

One noted she experienced great value for her personal development, in addition to the organisational value. (Vidyanikethan)

A number of the groups organising local constituents, expressed how they'd not previously operated on an international platform. While they found it frightening and were uncertain of their role, they did feel welcome and found it very useful.

> *"It's a new space for us – a lot of language is new for us. The first time we're finding ourselves as an organisation with donors; even though there's so much to learn, it's also a little bit intimidating. But it made us bolder. I feel we can do anything; we can do more – not just a grassroots organisation any more. Even though you're looking at it and having an inferiority complex – seeing what we've been able to achieve and that you see things you can do – it's helped me as a leader or an organisation to be bolder and also to aspire for more." (Akudo Oguaghamba, WHER)*

From my perspective what is striking is that all of the organisations that mentioned this anxiety about being new and unused to international spaces have contributed significantly to the ideas and insights discussed in the group. I also realised how I had not considered that having funders as part of the cohort might be intimidating for some groups. However, that there was this mix of geographies, focus populations and expertise all actively participating on equal terms, is what most people described as its particular value.

Seeds planted

Most participants described the value of the peer learning space in relation to how it gave them a sense of being part of and in solidarity with something bigger, broadened their understanding of the issues covered and gave them ideas. They also indicated the value of practical ideas that have pushed them to think differently. For example,
"We appreciate the online platform established for the Power Up partners and the different events organised … It has inspired us on how to use virtual platforms to link up with each other and build movement under difficult conditions." (Geneviève Rose, IWGIA)

"the last one on governance are issues we hardly discuss – triggered so many resonating points." (Sappho for Equality)

"[Our organisation] as an organisation or network doesn't call itself a feminist organisation so for me that was so energising to be in the room with outright feminist organisations – their programmes, how they speak, their interventions and how strong and firm they were about that work was a very exciting space to come into. That's why I've constantly asked for our constituents to have the same privilege – imagine if the women who we work with could come together in a cross-sectoral way like this." (Vanessa Pillay, WIEGO)

"The methodology of these cross learning sessions were interactive and ensured everyone's participation in the group. … It's a very good platform for us to learn – a cross-learning session, and then I'm sharing with our team members." (Vidyanikethan)

"I attended one Power Up session on pronouns – it was such an interesting conversation; one we might not yet be having currently in Tanzania, but it's putting us ahead of the game when we will be getting into this. That opportunity to explore topics that are outside of our ordinary realm. … I just found there are many names that genders are given rather than in our country, male and female, but I realise we have many names we can give people without them being undermined or their names abused." (Njeri Kagucia, PWC)

Issues taken forward

While most described the sessions as useful, they could not always pin down how they'd used them. However, some gave examples, along the following broad themes.

On movement building and leadership

"Also the workshops on movement building, what [our organisation] has done is created spaces of solidarity with our partners and networks and how they faced challenges, their strategies etc. So the workshops helped with this." (Mayuri Karna, CREA)

[After PWC ran a session on their approach] *"Vanessa [from WIEGO] also had a project on gender based violence in Tanzania and we connected with her and her colleagues who are trying to see how they can learn from us, especially on men's inclusion and using traditional men to respect women's agendas." (Nalemuta Moisan, PWC)*

On organisational strengthening, care and wellbeing

"Through the grantees' learning group meetings, we participated in the Wellbeing and Beyond Coping workshop facilitated by Hope Chigudu. We learned self-care strategies and basic breathing exercises as anchoring tools to regain nourishment and focus. This valuable learning experience was also provided to our partners in Uganda, where WIEGO commissioned Hope Chigudu to facilitate a Wellness Retreat to reassure the Uganda Working Group (15 women/2 men) of our support through this unusually challenging and stressful period. By integrating this activity, WIEGO added an new element of support to HBWs mental and emotional wellness amidst the increased impact of the COVID 19 pandemic on their lives and livelihoods." (WIEGO, Annual Report)

"A group shared how they don't have meetings on certain days. That has helped. I got feedback from my colleagues saying it has helped us in UAF – we plan our days knowing no matter what on these days there are no meetings." (Tariro Tandi, UAF-A)

"We started to focus on the strategies of team wellbeing - balancing the own wellbeing and the organisation wellbeing" (Vidyanikethan)

"definitely the issue of paying attention to our constituency's mental health. I have tried to facilitate access for our constituency to people like Hope and Jude who's given important ideas on how to do some of it with our constituencies. Jude just had a session this last Sunday with a group of South African women." (Vanessa Pillay, WIEGO)

One person indicated that after one of the sessions she brought in the idea of more focus on team building and learning, *"after the peer learning we started to change, focusing on staff learning as part of organisation building... we started practising that."* (Vidyanikethan)

One group was in the process of following up with another to advocate to them to take on an issue. (Sappho for Equality)

Two funders noted the particular value gained from meeting with the other funders in the cohort, *"having a space to coordinate and collaborate with other donors has possibly been the most powerful part."* (FRIDA)

Especially where they were funding the same groups or issues, by learning about what they were funding, and where they were having funding challenges or shifting strategies, funds had made adjustments to address those gaps. One noted as an area for continued engagement.

"How useful would the collaboration among Astraea, UAF, FRIDA, UHAI, RUF be in analysing power to enable us to power up movements and sustain them through the Pandemic and other crises." (UHAI, Annual Report)

On monitoring, evaluation and learning

Many groups described the value they gained from the MEL sessions, and having taken back ideas into their organisations:

"The MEL sessions have been great. I think I presented a case I needed help with and it really helped in looking at our impact framework and working with young women on

what level of influence they think they have – we're doing reflection workshops with women now – so it was helpful that way." (Lydia Morgan, YWT)

"We learnt various MEL tools used by other Power Up partners and able to upgrade our present MEL system." (Vidyanikethan)

"the MEL system you facilitated – the whole thing on the problem stream, policy stream was very useful – after that workshop I debriefed with the team and had a rich discussion with partners; don't know if they fully utilised it but they have tried to think about it – helped them think about how to keep MEL as part of the programme, not something totally separate." (Mayuri Karna, CREA)

Drawing on the power framework

A number of groups indicated ways they are taking forward the Power Framework that was developed to assess, from the Power Up Year 1 Annual Reports, if and how girls and women were exercising or influencing power. See <ins>How has work funded by Comic Relief's Power Up programme contributed to shifts in women and girls' power?</ins>:

"after we attended the session on the Power Framework, we found it very useful to better develop our own – learning from the session has also been important to use in terms of our relationship – how we coordinate with our partners in terms of our power framework." (Reine Baimey, WoMin) "Two members of the WoMin team as well as our partners, CNRG and Kebetkache, also took part in the session on 'power analysis' which strengthened our capacity to analyse the influence of power at the different levels of project implementation (local and regional)." (WoMin, Annual report)

"the power framework was perfect – 'yes this hits everything we're wanting to find out about'" (Pip McKnight, Refugee Women Connect); "it made total sense for us to use it to evaluate the work. I'd love to engage with it more as I'm not someone with lived experience of [our constituents] despite having engaged with the a hostile environment as a black migrant woman; so for me facilitating a space with them could be a good way of intentionally engaging power." (Venus Abduallah, WRW)

"The power up peer learning circles were extremely valuable to the feminist MEAL work we do.   It alleviated us to better understand and differentiate between feminist and participatory MEAL. In addition, the report produced at the end was an eye opener. It helped us to get an idea of how [we] as womn funder can do a power analysis taking into consideration power within, movement power, narrative power, and influence and institution power ." (UAF-A, Annual Report)

"The peer learning groups facilitated by Barbara enabled WCoZ to really analyse how the CARE project is enabling women in Zimbabwe to contribute towards the power shifts at different levels. This has enabled WCoZ to interrogate how the project is contributing to the broader sense and influencing change in communities. WCoZ has therefore looked deeply into how the CARE project is changing the Zimbabwean narrative on women's rights." (Womankind, Annual Report)

"We found that the power framework has helped our thinking. It has further reinforced the need to explore how we shift power in every area of operations. We have carried out the participatory evaluation with more meaningful engagement from the women we

work with as a first step to evolving reflection and learning." (Women for Refugee Women / Refugee Women Connect Annual Report with Venus Abduallah addition)

UAF-A: "We the MEAL team used the power framework to do analysis of our grantee partners report once last year. We have also shared that during one of the staff meeting. In UAF- Africa we also do power analysis at when grantee submit their application. We request them to complete the below questions in the grant application from.
• Think about power in the context of the situation, i.e, who (individuals/groups) has power and will benefit by maintaining the situation as it is?
• Reflect on the specific intervention you are planning to implement, who actually has power to make the change you seek? How will you influence them? (be as specific as possible to enable an effective strategic intervention)
• How will your intervention contribute to the bigger picture of transforming power to advance womn's human rights?" (Hiwot Tedla)

One of these groups used the Power Framework for reporting on its outcomes in the Annual Report, indicating that it was under the impression this was a requirement of Comic Relief's. But one of its partners indicated that they were indeed drawing on the framework for their own work.

Barbara reflection on the above

The Power Up peer learning space was set up to meet whatever needs the cohort of grantees identified. It was not set up as a community of practice with a specific social change or learning agenda. This is in part because at the start it had to simply test Comic Relief's hypothesis (theory of change) that there would be added value for each group, for movement building and for Comic Relief's learning, if this group had a space for peer learning. So the first year was spent in developing a practice that was experienced by participants as fully inclusive and as providing valuable personal space for reflection and learning, on issues that participants found useful for their organisations as well. The second year was spent 'finishing', for the time being, on topics that working groups engaged deeply, such as on working online, research and advocacy on gender based violence, and feminist MEL, while also opening issues of immediate concern, such as on feminist governance, partnerships and leadership which will carry through into 2022. The space also legitimised attention to self and the personal in context of the crisis of lockdown in particular, circling back to this at the end of 2021.

For this reason, my perception, which was confirmed through the interviews and comments in the annual reports, was that the process was very affirming for participants, even for some who were rather intimidated by finding themselves in an international forum and with some funders in the room. It also enabled people to experience a sense of solidarity, and to get ideas which made them think differently about an issue or confirmed their thinking, and at times which they took into their work to propose and do something differently.

There is an ongoing tension in the process between the range of issues groups would like to explore, and the time they can give to it. Similarly, a few participants expressed frustration at how little time there is for the deep conversations in couples or groups, yet the experience so far indicates that participants cannot cope with sessions longer than 1.5 hours. It is possible that a very focused process by diverse small planning groups, and then bringing insights generated into a conference might address some of these needs.

One person's comment in the interviews did capture the tension of being a learning space without its own single objective or evaluation criterion:

> *"how could we better internalise the learning or bring it in an intentional way into the organisation? I've learnt a lot but haven't tracked how that reflects in the organisation?" (Venus Abduallah, Women for Refugee Women)*

Almost all groups chose to comment positively on my facilitation, at times in response to my question as to whether they had any advice for me on how I facilitate. This is very rewarding personally. Examples include,

- "has been brilliant" (Deniz Ugur, EVAW)
- "Thank you for always being an amazing facilitator" (Stellah Wairimu Bosire, UHAI)
- "And the way that you facilitate also makes it so much easier to participate – allows almost everyone to contribute in the space and that makes it so much better because you get to hear from everyone." (Tariro Tandi, UAF-A)
- "I just want to express appreciation for your work, for the platform, you are a great ally; appreciated started the year with the wellbeing session; we're all over-achievers. Just pausing and stepping back that it's important to do self-care." (Katia Araujo, WIEGO)
- "My reflection on you Barbara is great – I really enjoy the conversations we have, facilitated well, I love that there's either an opportunity to learn from someone else, or help them with a problem they might have which is helpful." (Lydia Morgan, YWT)
- "you're doing a great job; you never lead; you always facilitate others to talk; that I like and I learnt from you that facilitation style." (Vidyanikethan)

I experience my own role as an ongoing navigation with power. As I am contracted by Comic Relief and part of my role is to support Comic Relief's learning, this gives me a close ear to the funder. At the same time, building an environment of trust among the group as a whole is essential for it to work as a space of solidarity and learning, which means that I have to hold any confidences shared by Power Up groups. The other dimensions of power I am navigating relate to my own positionality as someone coming out of an upbringing of extreme privilege and having chosen in my youth to walk away from my ostensible 'community' because it was so thoroughly implicated in human rights abuse. I have spent my adult life coping with the personal and political consequences of that decision coupled with my subsequent activism. As a member of an 'older generation' of feminist activists, how do I on the one hand, draw on the years of experience I have, and on the other, really deeply listen to and honour the ways of being and ways of seeing of everyone in this group, across boundaries of age, context, class, ethnicity, race, sexuality, gender expression, disabilities and religion. In a period in which it is becoming normative for groups to deride those with different lived experiences, I have been struck by the tremendous generosity of all the participants in the group towards me and towards each other; and by everyone's recognition that we all have much to share, and much to learn with and from each other.

Moving forward with the peer learning process

Out of the analysis of themes emerging from the annual reports, and interviews with members of each Power Up group, a range of topics for continued or new learning were generated. These are at the end of the second report on Year 2: Feminist resilience and innovation within a pandemic: lessons from the Comic Relief Power Up cohort.

The bigger question that Power Up groups may want to consider is whether, for this last year, the process should continue in its current form, or whether all or some of the participating groups wish to consolidate their efforts in any ways – whether sharing and development of specific advocacy initiatives, or tools, or pooling their insights to share with the field.

Whether to hold a Conference in 2022

Only after beginning the interviews for this report was I reminded by one group about the intention to have a conference in 2022, at which point I began asking groups if they considered it a good idea. I then emailed those who I had not originally asked. I have responses from 14 out of 17 groups. All who responded, bar one that indicated in general they are not able to engage with the Power Up peer learning process[1], expressed the desire to hold a conference. They articulated the purposes in a mix of ways all of which related to:

- the possibility of sharing what they have done and what they have learnt; within this, the possibility of each group choosing one intervention to demonstrate or at least present in detail to others so they might consider if and how they might pick it up;
- going more deeply into some of the issues touched on thus far;
- exploring if and how their issues are relevant to each other and their work could be more mutually reinforcing;
- potentially forming strategic partnerships for joint funding proposals or at minimum sharing information on funding sources.

Ten were keen on an in-person conference and the remaining four, while liking the idea of meeting in-person, were doubtful as to whether it would be possible given the ongoing Covid challenges. The interviews were conducted before the Omicron variant became apparent.

A virtual conference?

Some groups made suggestions as to how to move forward in the absence of a face-to-face conference.

One suggested that groups pool some of the Comic Relief resources they are holding in order to fund an appropriate digital platform for collective planning of a conference and holding that conference online.

Planning process ideas

While it goes without saying that the objectives, topics, and methods would all be co-created by participants, the 'how' of this would need a lot of thought and, should we go ahead, would be the topic of a consultation in early 2022, since groups would have to book times both for preparation and for the actual event, which would probably be in the second half of the year.

Issue-based groups
Discussions with a few groups explored the possibility of establishing small working groups which would both enable those in each group to deepen their understanding of each other's experience and expertise on their topic, and to prepare a session/ event/ moment with strong content and innovative processes for the conference. Should any such groups be in the same country or region, they could consider meeting face-to-face as part of their preparations.

Geographic-based groups
The question also arose as to whether in some cases, there would be value in partners working in the same country, doing a country-level event to share what they are doing and potentially
- share tools or processes they are finding effective

---

[1] Significantly, in the February 2022 consultations on the Year 2 reports, this organisation did identify issues they'd like to work on with others this year.

- identify any areas for potential collaboration, and if so, initiate steps to take this forward.

For example, there are five groups working in India, possibly six or seven if one includes work not funded through Comic Relief. There are five groups working in the UK; seven if one includes international groups based there. Where possible, this could be face-to-face; but otherwise online.

Having just run a large online conference FRIDA has generated some lessons learnt, beyond the need to centre participation, detailed by Mbali Khumalo in this article in Girls Globe. These may support our own thinking on this including:
- whether in personal or virtual, provide financial resources for people to take care; sometimes child care or addressing the needs of the people around the participants, so they can be fully present.

Given each group has some funds set aside for this event, we could discuss what incorporating this idea might mean in practice.

- language inclusivity.

While all the Power Up groups operate effectively in English, if the plans include participation of constituents of any groups, then we need to ensure language inclusivity, including people's ability to engage in their own languages. This may also be essential for all groups to be able to comfortably do deep reflection, or to share songs, artwork or other aspects of their strategies within the conference.

2022 decisions on moving forward

In two consultations, on this report and the broader report on lessons learnt, held during early February 2022, groups did indeed identify the issues they want to pursue and agreed on holding a conference around September 2022, with some sections to meet their own needs, and some sections for the field more broadly. It will be planned as an online event but this decisions will be reviewed mid-year in case Covid conditions make travel an acceptable option to participants.