

YOUNG FEMINIST LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK

**Young Feminist Organizing,
Movement Building and Activism**

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// AUGUST 2021

**GLOBAL
PLATFORMS**
NETWORK FOR
YOUTH-LED
ACTIVISM **act:onaid**

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS **PAGE 1**

ACRONYMS **PAGE 2**

1. INTRODUCTION **PAGE 3**

2. METHODOLOGY:

- REVIEWING ACTIONAID MATERIALS **PAGE 5**

- ONLINE SURVEY **PAGE 5**

- INTERVIEWS **PAGE 8**

- FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS (FGDS) **PAGE 9**

- KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS (KII) **PAGE 10**

- DATA PROCESSING, ANALYSIS AND VALIDATION **PAGE 11**

- LIMITATIONS **PAGE 11**

3. YOUNG FEMINIST ORGANIZING AND MOVEMENT BUILDING **PAGE 13**

4. THE EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG FEMINIST LEADERS **PAGE 16**

5. MAIN FINDINGS AND GOOD PRACTICE **PAGE 18**

6. CASE STORIES **PAGE 20**

GLOSSARY **PAGE 23**



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Young Feminist Leadership Framework (YFLF) is the labor of love of many people involved in shaping and designing the process of co-creating the framework with young feminists associated with ActionAid in different capacities. There have been many people instrumental in envisioning how this framework can be developed and how we are going to achieve it.

The process to develop Young Feminist Leadership Framework was designed, conceptualized and written by the consultants Kripa Basnyat and Leanne Sajor with the guidance of Anjana Luitel and Sheng Cabusao from ActionAid Denmark.

We recognise and appreciate the inputs from Global Platforms Bangladesh, Global Platforms Zambia, Global Platforms Palestine, Global Platforms Myanmar, Global Platforms Liberia, and Global Platforms Malawi in making this framework a reality. This framework was a direct contribution of wide and active participation of young feminists from Young Feminist Network in Bangladesh, Feminist in Kenya, Whisper for Humanity from Nigeria, Liberian Feminist Forum and Malawi's Feminist Macroeconomics Academy. We appreciate representatives and allies from AWID, African Feminist Forum and CREA for sharing their personal experiences and practices around young feminist leadership, movement building and organizing.

The advice and feedback received from Katherine Robinson throughout the process has helped tremendously to shape the existing framework. We want to thank Korto Williams and Baishali Chatterjee for providing the guidance in the earlier stage of the process.

This framework came together from the inputs of 72 young feminists and 19 allies from a total of 18 countries. We are grateful for their participation, honesty and trust in this process. We are hopeful this framework will help strengthen the work around young feminist leadership, organizing and movement-building within ActionAid and beyond.

ACRONYMS

AWID	Association for Women's Rights in Development
CREA	Creating Resources for Empowerment in Action
FEMA	Feminist Macroeconomics Academy
FGDs	Focus Group Discussion
GP	Global Platforms
GRPS	Gender Responsive Public Services
LGBTI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex
KIIs	Key Informant Interviews
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
YFLF	Young Feminist Leadership Framework
YLVO	Youth-Led Volunteerism in Local Level Responses Project
YUWM	Young Urban Women's Movement
YUW	Young Urban Women's Programme

1. INTRODUCTION

Today, half the global population is under 30 years old. Of the 1.8 billion young people in the world, 90% live in developing countries, and it is estimated that over 600 million are currently living in fragile and conflict-affected settings.¹ The COVID-19 global pandemic has impacted the most marginalized young womxn² experiencing multiple forms of discrimination and intersecting inequalities. Despite the brunt of the crisis felt by young people, especially young womxn (unemployed, underemployed, in low paying precarious jobs, in the informal sector, increased labor burdens), young womxn have mobilized and organized, demonstrating their potential to drive change. This is evident from the youth-led responses and accountability initiatives to address the threat of COVID-19 in Occupied Palestinian Territory and Nepal.³ The Youth-Led Volunteerism in Local Level Responses (YLVO) Project was launched in Nepal in May 2019 through ActionAid Nepal and local partner organizations and the outbreak of COVID-19 presented both an immediate challenge and opportunity to recently trained YLVO volunteers. They played a key role in disseminating accurate and authentic information about the virus. They also raised awareness about sexual and gender-based violence and early marriage. YLVO volunteers actively supported the government to distribute relief to vulnerable communities during the lockdown.⁴

ActionAid's approach in all the countries is that marginalized people who are subjected to discrimination must be at the center of their own struggle and it works to ensure that they acquire the ability and strength to fight for rights and social justice.⁵ ActionAid is committed to young activists' leadership and has youth-led networks and hubs for activism such as Activista, Global Platforms (GP) and Young Urban Women (YUW) Project. Activista is ActionAid International's global youth network, working with more than 250 partners and thousands of volunteers in over 30 countries. Similarly, Global Platforms are ActionAid's network for youth-led activism. The 10 platforms support movements, youth networks (including Activista), organizations and individuals who promote progressive social, political and economic change around the world.⁶ ActionAid's Young Urban Women's Programme addresses young women's economic rights and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).⁷ This lays the foundation for addressing young women's access to decent work and sexual and reproductive services simultaneously in three key ways: empowerment, campaigning and solidarity.⁸ YUW is ActionAid's flagship young feminist project and often the other youth network collaborates closely with GPs and Activista.

¹ Shifting power to young people in humanitarian action, ActionAid and Restless Development, 2019, pp.9

² The spelling of womxn with 'x' avoids the suffix 'men/man', and avoids binary language thus showing solidarity with and recognition of a diversity of people- LGBTQIA+, including trans people and those who choose not to identify themselves by gender, ActionAid's Feminist Research Guidelines, 2020

³ ActionAid: Youth-Led Volunteerism and Leadership in Local level Humanitarian Response s, ActionAid, 2021, pp.3

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Together for a Just and Sustainable World, ActionAid Denmark's Strategy 2018-2022, pp.3, Accessed at: https://www.ms.dk/sites/default/files/filarkiv/dokumenter/forening/ms_strategi2017_uk_0822_fin.pdf

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Global Baseline Report: Young Urban Women Programme, ActionAid, HDF and Norad

⁸ Exploring Interlinkages: Bodily Integrity, Economic Security and Equitable Distribution of Unpaid Care Work, A Research Study in Ghana, India and South Africa, November 2015

ActionAid has adopted feminist leadership principles which prioritizes self-awareness, self-care and caring for others, dismantling bias, inclusion, sharing power, responsible and transparent use of power, accountable collaboration, respectful feedback, courage and zero tolerance.⁹ ActionAid has consistently placed women and young people at the heart of its fight for social justice. ActionAid Global Platforms has been building young feminist leadership since 2015 through active engagement and meaningful participation of young leaders in different contexts and across campaigns. In absence of young feminist framework, ActionAid is using other existing feminist leadership models.¹⁰ The experience of five years working with young feminist leaders across the federation provided an opportunity to develop Young Feminist Leadership Framework (YFLF) informed by young feminists' leadership practices in their organizing, movement building and activism.

“Young people cannot be put into one basket. We need to recognise diversity within them and practice inclusion. Usually, womxn’s departments can treat young women’s issues as ‘youth issues’ and youth departments treat them as ‘women’s issues’ which does not allow young women’s work to be mainstreamed.”

This particular research was attentive towards the ways in which the COVID-19 pandemic impacted young feminist organizing, movement building and activism and deepen understanding on existing intersecting vulnerabilities and injustices that young feminist organizers experience and seek to address. The relationship between power and privilege with intersecting identities is connected with how young feminists experience their world. The research revisits ActionAid’s approaches on building young feminist activism to ensure that its commitment to building young feminist activists can respondsustainably to the emerging needs of a post pandemic world. However, it has also created opportunities to explore alternatives to design feminist futures for even the unregistered groups and networks.

“One of the allies from Zimbabwe shared that “activism has been vibrant in a different way. COVID-19 reduced the barriers and decreased the bureaucracy and NGOization leading to expansion of feminist activism in people’s movement and organizing.”

Objective

ActionAid Global Platforms envisioned a young feminist leadership framework focused on perceptions and practices of young feminists on movement building and organizing from their own perspective. The aim of the research is to support ActionAid Global Platforms Secretariat to establish a Young Feminist Leadership Framework drawing from the lived experiences and practices of young feminist organizing and activism from the Global Platforms Network, Young Urban Women Project and related projects of ActionAid focused on young womxn’s leadership and feminism. The research project intends to co-create a resource for young feminist movements and be instrumental in shaping ActionAid’s future approaches in supporting of feminist movement(s), organizing and activism.

⁹ Top Ten Basics of Feminist Leadership, ActionAid, Accessed at: <https://actionaid.org/feminist-leadership>

¹⁰ ActionAid Global Platforms is using Transformative feminist leadership approach developed by CREA, Accessed at: <https://creaworld.org/publications/achieving-transformative-feminist-leadership-toolkit-organisations-and-movements>

2. METHODOLOGY

Two independent feminist researchers were hired to co-design and administer the research study and to write the report with the collaboration of the Global secretariat. It adopts a qualitative research strategy using online in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and an online survey, supplemented by desk review of ActionAid materials including reports and outreach materials over a period of four months, which are described in more detail below.

Reviewing ActionAid Materials

While ActionAid is now conducting a systematic research study to build the Young Feminist Leadership Framework, it is also important to recognize that ActionAid has been doing young feminist programing and advancing feminist leadership principles for decades. This research study honors the work that has been done by different program departments and teams within the ActionAid federation who have dedicated their work to strengthen young feminist activists and movements. It was therefore important that the co-consultants began this research by looking at what has been done in the past. This required a thorough review of ActionAid materials specifically meeting reports and notes¹¹, official publications as well as outreach materials so we can ensure that the research study is building on existing work.

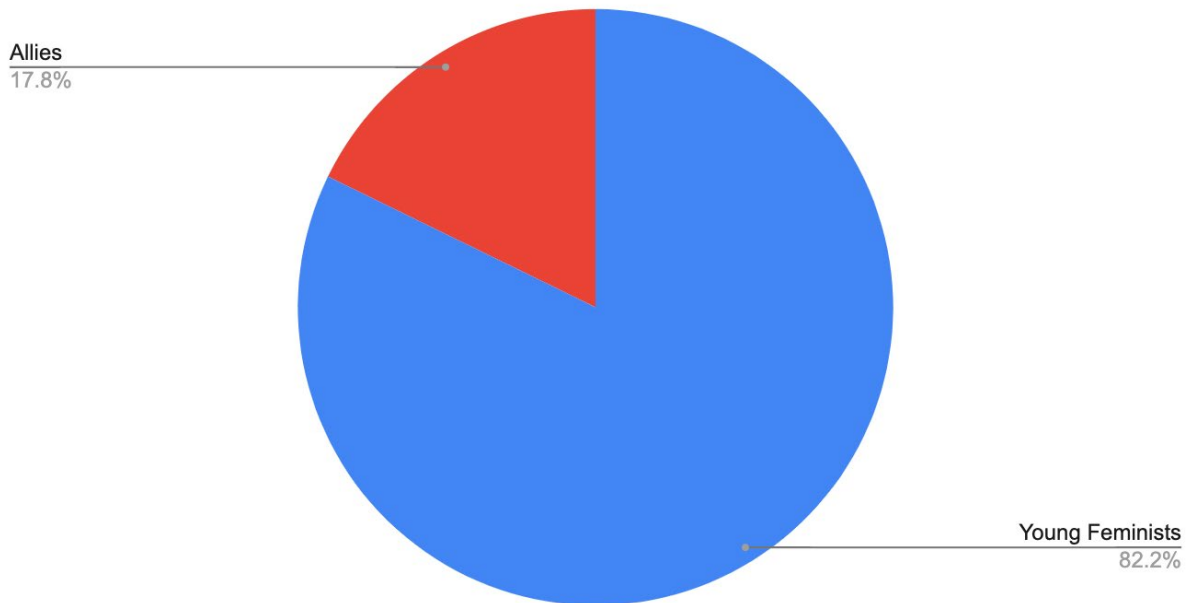
Online Survey

The consultants and ActionAid Denmark staff, with support from ActionAid's Youth Working Group and Women's Rights team in the Global Secretariat designed an online survey using KoboToolbox. The online survey aimed to reach out to members of the different programs within the ActionAid federation which includes the Global Platforms Network, Young Urban Women Project, Youth Working Group and Activista to gain insights into how they define young feminist leadership and activism, the strategies they use and challenges they face in their organizing. The survey was disseminated through coordinated communications via program leaders, staff members, and volunteers as well as social media platforms like Facebook where ActionAid's program related groups are held. The survey was launched on 11 December 2020 and was open for responses over six weeks, to accommodate end of the year holiday breaks. In total, the online survey collected **45 responses from the ActionAid network in 11 countries**, the majority of which are from young people.

¹¹ Young Urban Women Program 2014, Young Feminist Gathering Tanzania 2018

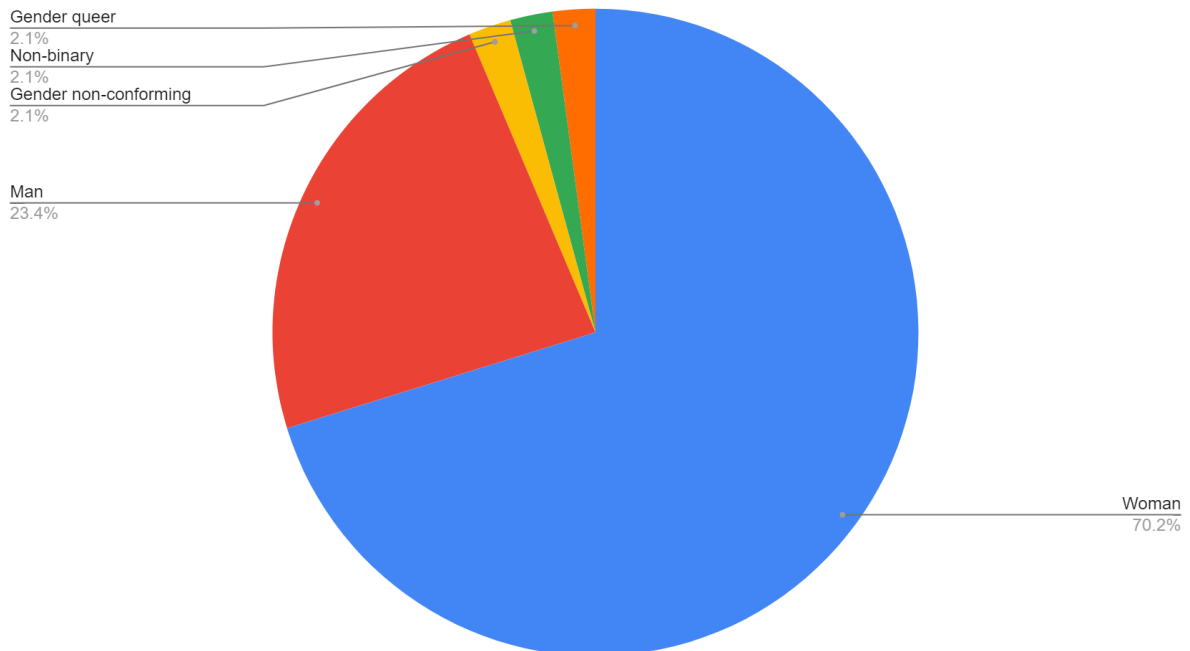
Survey Respondents by Self-Identification

ActionAid defines Young Feminists as 35 years old and under while Allies are feminists who are above 35 years of age.



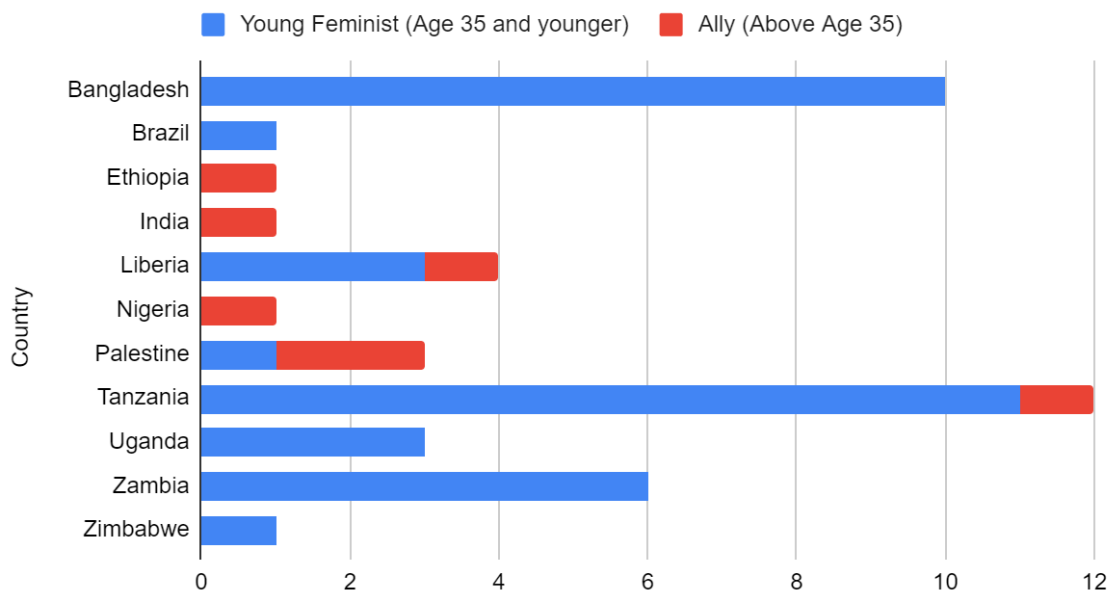
The participants were predominantly young feminists making up 82.2% of the responses and 17.8% from allies.

Survey Respondents by Gender (Self-Identified)

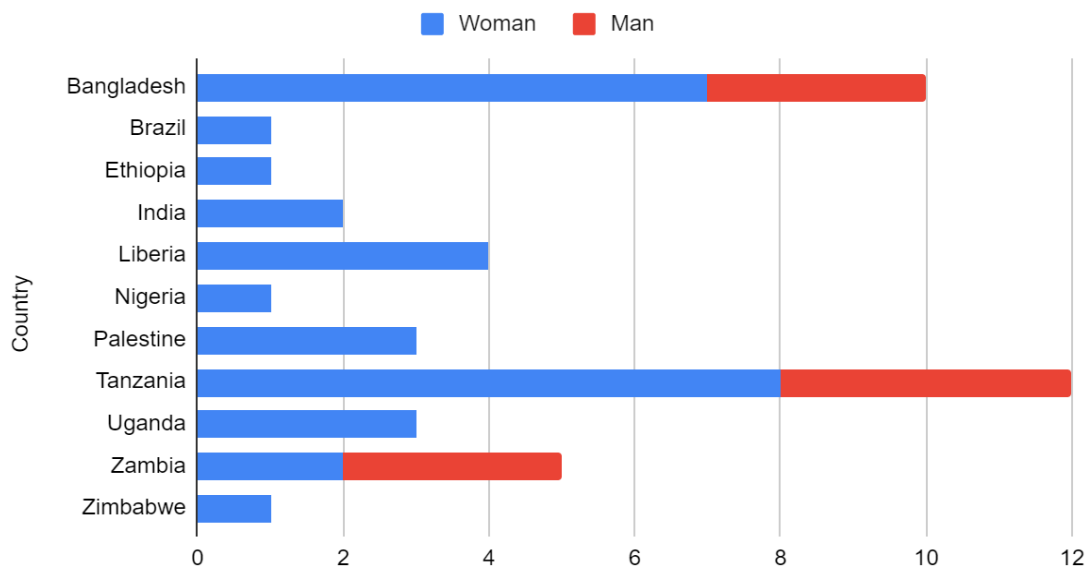


There online survey participants self-identified themselves as 70.2% women, 23.4% men, 2.1% were gender queer, 2.1% as non-binary and 2.1% as gender non-conforming. There were overlaps between different categories as participants could as many categories as they identified with.

Survey Respondents by Country and Age



Survey Respondents by Country and Gender



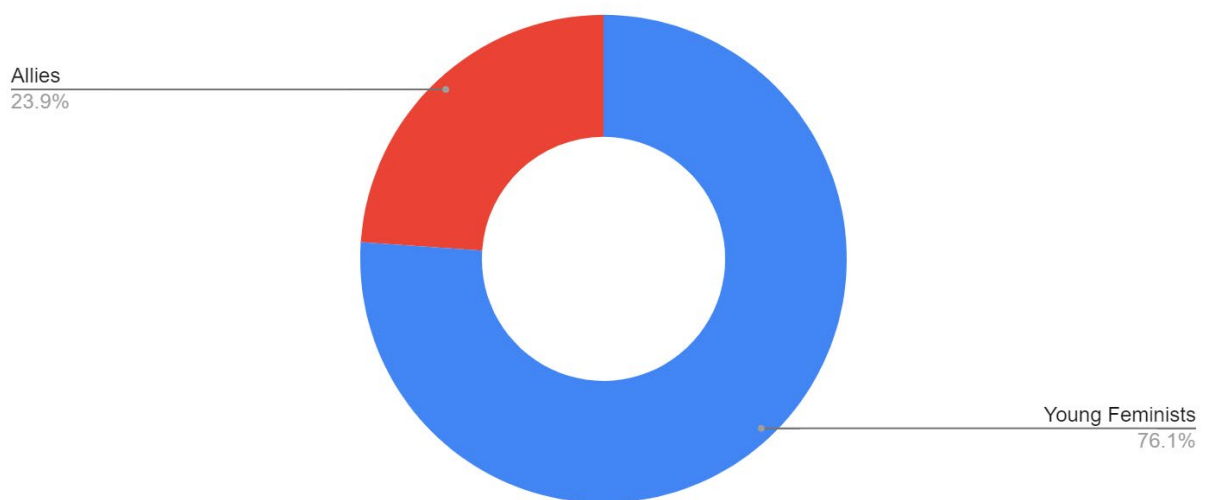
The online survey saw wide and highest participation from Tanzania followed by Bangladesh and Zambia respectively. There were representations from Liberia, Uganda, Palestine, India, Brazil, Ethiopia, Nigeria and Zimbabwe too.

Interviews

Qualitative interviews are important to delve deeper into the contexts, experiences, attitudes and meanings that research participants attribute to their feminist organizing and activism. The consultants and ActionAid Denmark staff, with support from ActionAid's Youth Working Group and Women's Rights team in the Global Secretariat developed an interview guide and the co-consultants connected with a total of **46 individuals across 15 countries, the majority being young people**. The consultants connected with the research participants through key informant interviews as well as focus group discussions online to deepen the insights and triangulate the responses to the survey questionnaire.

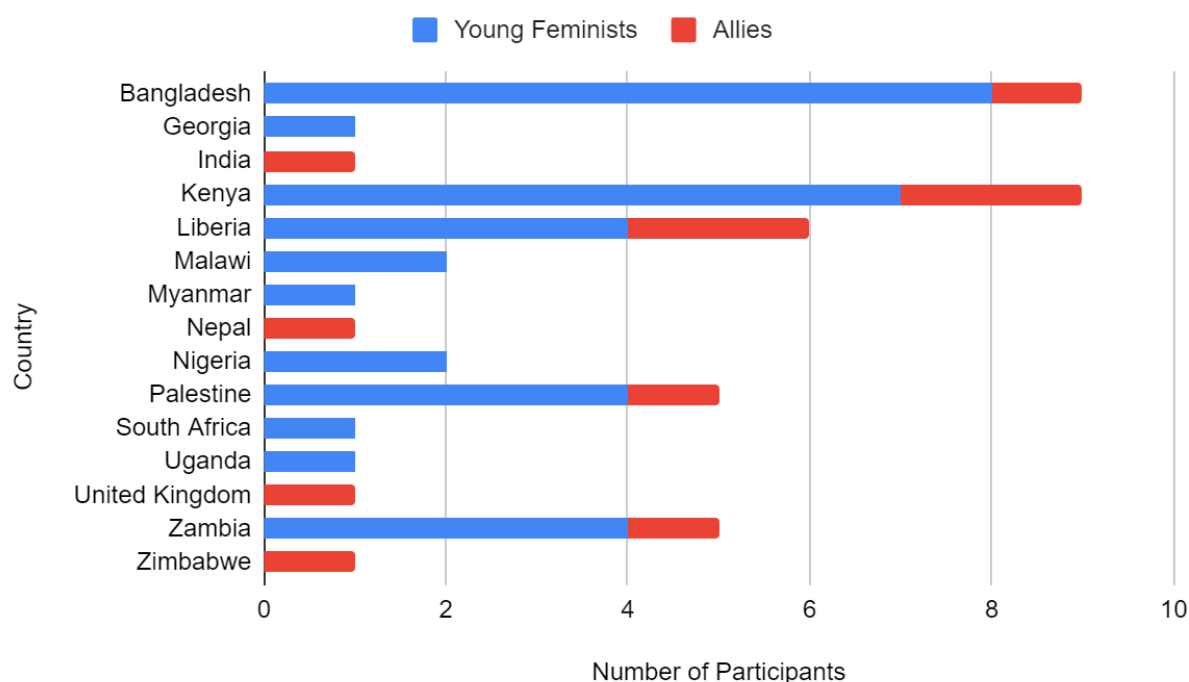
Interviewed Research Participants by Self-Identification

ActionAid defines Young Feminists as 35 years old and under while Allies are feminists who are above 35 years of age.



The participants for interviews were predominantly young feminists with 76.1% and allies with 23.9%. The allies included experts, supporters and practitioners of young feminist leadership, organizing and activism.

Interviewed Research Participants by Country and Self-identification

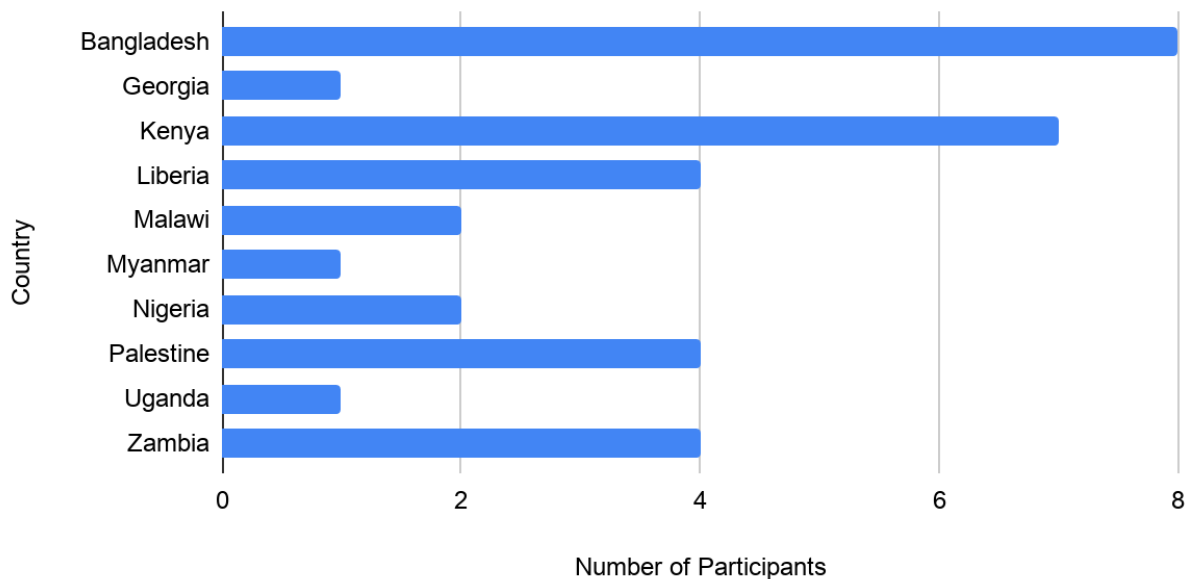


Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

The consultants and ActionAid Denmark staff, and ActionAid's Youth Working Group and Women's Rights team in the Global Secretariat believed that focus groups are a necessary approach to engage young feminists' activists in the research study. The purpose of this research method is to draw insights from young people by creating a safe, interactive and comfortable space with their peers. The research co-consultants were particularly aware of the real and perceived power differences between the young research participants and them as independent consultants. The focus group method was therefore important in mitigating these situations by putting the consultants in a moderator role to pose questions so that the participants can interact more organically in conversation with each other. The co-consultants conducted focus group discussions with a total of **34 young people** from **10 countries**. While the researchers tried to prioritize the use of focus group discussions with young people, there were **7 young people who had to do one-on-one interviews** because of scheduling and recruitment limitations which will be discussed in a separate section.

Young Feminists Interviewed by Country

Number of interviewed research participants who identified as "young feminist" by

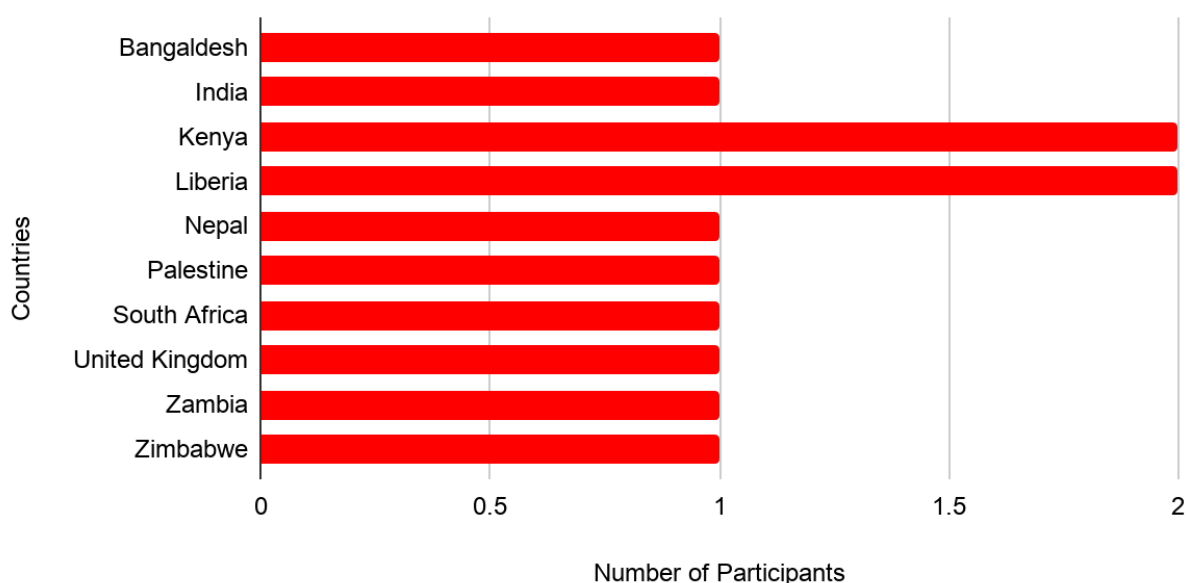


Key Informant Interviews (KII)

Key informant interviews were in-depth one-on-one conversations that were primarily done with research participants who we knew identified as “allies” to young feminists, or feminists above the age of 35 who worked in the field of feminist movement building and/or in support of young feminist leadership and organizing. Key informant interviews were a useful approach to this set of participants because they were typically people in decision-making positions that influence the experiences of young feminists within the ActionAid federation. The in-depth discussions allowed for space, time and confidentiality to probe deeper into their attitudes, beliefs and experiences that are related to topics of program design, leadership and decision making, as well as resource and support to young feminists. It was also a safe space for allies to be able to reflect on their positionality and allyship. In total, **12 allies were interviewed from 10 countries** who represented ActionAid community members from staff and volunteers as well as a couple of individuals with feminist organizations outside of the ActionAid federation.

Allies Interviewed by Country

Number of interviewed research participants who identified as "allies" by country.



Data Processing, Analysis and Validation

Data from the interviews and survey were consolidated, processed and analyzed by the independent researchers and initial findings were shared with the research participants through two validation processes: (1) A validation workshop was facilitated with young people to hear their reflections and feedback, and (2) a 2-page summary of the initial findings were shared with the allies as well as young feminists who could not attend the workshop because of scheduling limitations where they provided written feedback. The inputs received through the workshop and the document were consolidated and shaped the second phase of the analysis which resulted in the Young Feminist Leadership Framework.

Limitations

The COVID-19 pandemic has undoubtedly changed all research and learning and the consultants were particularly attentive to the impact of the pandemic on the young feminists. This shaped the research design, most notably the data collection process. ActionAid feminist research principles¹² as well as researcher of social movements, Della Porta¹³ explains the importance of establishing trust with research participants in social movement studies in order to execute in-depth interviews that could provide a rich source of data to analyze from. Having to do this online and with our limited time, we made an effort to communicate our intentions for the research study and demonstrating our feminist values. Online interviews limited observable data in the participant's setting including our ability to perceive non-verbal cues and communication. It also barred any digitally excluded participants, those who have no or limited access to the internet,

¹² ActionAid, 2020. ActionAid Feminist Research Guidelines. *ActionAid International*. Available at: <https://actionaid.org/publications/2020/feminist-research-guidelines> [Accessed May 10, 2021].

¹³ della Porta, D. (2014) 'Social Movement Studies and Methodological Pluralism', in della Porta, D. (ed.) *Methodological Practices in Social Movement Research*. Oxford University Press. doi: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198719571.001.0001.

from participating in the study. Unless the participants already knew each other, establishing a safe space for the focus group discussions can sometimes be challenging online when people are unable to see each other and with young people living with their families, this often meant that they were taking calls in communal spaces where privacy and disruptions can be difficult to manage. While there are a number of limitations to executing this research online, it also created an incredible opportunity to connect with people from multiple different countries within the four months of the research process which would not have been possible in person. The research also benefited from the fact that the co-consultants are drawing from survey responses as well as desk research to triangulate data sources.

Another limitation of this research study, or perhaps it can be considered as a clear boundary with the scope of work, is that the analysis primarily draws on experiences within the ActionAid federation. Young feminists' movements and activists are immensely diverse and this research study does not attempt to represent all their ideas, strategies, experiences and recommendations. It is important to remember that while this work attempted to connect with other feminist organizations, this study ultimately draws from ActionAid affiliated research participants.

Finally, another notable limitation of this research project is that it was only conducted in English. An international research project such as this would ideally have time and resources to engage young feminists in their native language so we can address English supremacy, as well as making this study accessible to people with disabilities. This would also be much more in line with how ActionAid Global Platforms delivers their programs, which are translated to local languages. This dynamic came across strongly when we interviewed allies among the ActionAid staff because country officers are able to speak English but their programming and interactions with young people are done in their native language. Not having the means to translate or interpret any of our research meant that in particular countries, we could not speak to the young feminists, the very community that this research study seeks to engage. However, in Bangladesh, there were two non-English speaking participants but could understand English. So, their responses were translated for the consultants. This mostly reflects that young feminists themselves were open and committed towards making it an inclusive process.

These three challenges are important reminders of the global and local context in which this research study is being delivered. While many of these things are beyond the co-consultants' control, these challenges were met by a sincere attempt and genuine desire to practice feminist values every step of the way, to be as inclusive and transparent as possible, and to practice accountability to the research participants in the process.

3. YOUNG FEMINIST ORGANIZING AND MOVEMENT BUILDING

For many young feminist's, feminism means equality in opportunities, rights and roles between genders and gender non-conforming people. The concept was mostly associated with gender inclusiveness, social inclusion, diversity and justice. Some connected feminism with belief and practice, called it a spirit, a struggle and an ideology, values and lifestyles and even a movement. **Young feminists organizing and movement building is young, inclusive, democratic and intersectional in its approach and mostly informal and voluntary based unregistered groups practicing shared power to challenge existing unequal power relations and structural hierarchies.** Feminist movement building is a collaborative effort guided by feminist values and principles geared towards improving lives and status of womxn, queer and gender non-conforming persons. One of the allies shared that there is a need to foster an understanding of the process to support young feminist on the ground and not make it a human resource exercise.

“Feminist leadership is a practice of promoting feminist principles in leadership structures and processes. Feminist Leadership is also about shared power and accountability to remove structural hierarchies that often perpetuate unequal power relations and promote corporate values that are heavily rooted in patriarchy. Feminists seek liberation, equality, equity and justice.”

A. Young Feminist Tactics

An important aspect of this research is understanding how young feminists define and practice their feminist leadership and organizing work which is as diverse as the different contexts in which they are operating. Young feminist research participants prioritized convenings, trainings and creative communication strategies to build awareness and capacity among peers. This is often done through community building approaches which include establishing safe spaces online and offline for young people to identify and voice the issues that impact them. An example of this is expanding on the workshop training that they have received through different ActionAid programs. This meant replicating or using the parts of the training they received from ActionAid and facilitating it in their own communities.

Toolkits from ActionAid such as the Human Rights Based Approach Tool along with training on Transformative Feminist Leadership as well as other toolkits from other feminist organizations have been incredibly helpful in enabling them to train other people. The young feminist group from Malawi had a more systematic approach by establishing a Feminist Macroeconomics Academy which uses a structured curriculum on issues related to feminism and economic justice. Awareness raising can also take a more organic form, like the young feminists in Bangladesh who organize *Addas*, which are informal discussion groups. While there is not a set curriculum or workshop design for *Addas*, it works towards the same goal of cultivating safe and inclusive space for young people to explore feminist ideas and to engage with issues that impact them.

Young feminists research participants recognize that raising awareness alone is not enough to change the inequalities and unjust conditions in their communities, therefore mobilization and advocacy is an important strategy for their work. This is done online and offline to call attention to specific issues that they prioritize. An example of online advocacy are Twitter campaigns that have been useful to call out or address politicians and other stakeholders to speak directly to power that would not be otherwise accessible to young people. They coordinate their messages and publish their stories on Twitter which they see as a site of engagement. This was true for

Feminists in Kenya who organized online even before the COVID-19 and the pandemic helped them to gain more credibility to get their work recognized as ‘real work.’

While social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook were once primarily seen as a place for outreach, it is now also used as a forum for advocacy. Instagram, Facebook and independent online blogs are also used to publish their research and analysis to amplify their demands. Young Feminists in Zambia are using these platforms to raise awareness around gender and sexual minorities. Prior to the COVID-19 global pandemic, many young feminists also used artistic tools like poetry, music, and theatre to mobilize people in public spaces. Young feminists in Malawi shared that it is important to use non-elitist modes of communication especially for grassroots organizing. Digitalization is an important aspect of the work, but this needs to be balanced with other forms of communication and engagement that can resonate to different people.

While some young feminists research participants connect their work to international processes like the Commission on the Status of Women; the International Labor Organization’s C190 which is the first labor standard that comprehensively addresses violence and harassment in the world of work; or the Beijing Platform for Action Review, many really focus on their organizing and movement building locally. There is an interest to learn from the experiences and tactics of young feminists from other places and contexts, but the focus of their work is primarily to address issues in their communities which is discussed in more detail below.

B. Young feminists Issues

As drawn from the online survey, 82.22% of the research participants were young feminists who were predominantly womxn but also included 6.67% from gender and sexual minorities. 55.56% represented or reflected direct association with Global Platforms, 22.22% were from Young Urban Women Project and remaining were from other ActionAid projects. The young feminists work on a wide range of areas of gender-based violence, environment, economic/tax justice, mental health, youth, grant management, agriculture, sexual and reproductive health rights, education and leadership. Young feminists practice values of equality, inclusion, equal participation, respect, honesty, fairness, love and compassion. The young feminists predominantly practice intersectional feminism and are a part of various young feminist movements and networks. The COVID-19 pandemic led to new initiatives including online and social media campaigns, and educational videos, blogs and podcasts. Many rapid response interventions were carried out to distribute relief materials, raise awareness on COVID-19 regulations and guidelines and hold the leaders accountable. The impact of pandemic is such that all traditional forms of organizing have been suspended and has further exposed young people to violence as their freedom has been curtailed and their possibilities of interacting and finding solutions are severely affected.

C. On intergenerational Dialogue and organizing

Only 17.78% of survey participants have participated in intergenerational spaces created intentionally. The participants mostly appreciated the networking and learning from older feminists. *One of the participants shared that the leadership communication gap was bridged through the fellowship program offered by the African Women's Leadership Institute through effective engagements with different generations of feminist leaders.* However, few young feminists felt a sense of intimidation from older feminists’ knowledge and put them higher on a pedestal.

“There is always a point of contention and tension between generations on strategies, priorities, ageism (both ways) and on LGBTI rights. Defining values,

practices and ensuring safety of space for accountability, mutual respect and non-negotiable (i.e. zero tolerance for abuse, discrimination and stigma) can help to support bridges for learning (both ways)."

There are some clear distinctions between allies and young feminists. Young feminists predominantly use technology and social media, adopt intersectional practices, exercise self and collective care and are building solidarity actions to challenge gender binary norms. Young feminists demand to be treated equally and recommend the older feminists to evolve with time, be accessible and co-create plans for sustainable and just feminist activism. There are opportunities to support deeper political education and consciousness that can support feminists' movement(s). One of the young feminists shares her message as *nothing can be achieved if we build walls between us, learn to evolve with the time but hold still to the core. Build bridges so you can bring in more newer feminists into the fold.* There are homophobic and transphobic attacks and attacks on gender and sexual minorities to conform to social norms and what is socially acceptable. This does not let young feminists thrive in their organizing and activism.

Young feminists from Kenya share that...

"There is a challenge of disconnect between older and younger feminist. We do not align with respectability politics. Our politics directly aligns with disruption, talking truth directly to power and being loud, honest and vocal as possible. They have access to structures, donors, formalization, respectability and tend to be not as vocal and have no agency. They have respectability and formality, but it is not helping us in achieving gender justice. Young feminists cannot access intergenerational spaces also because they are considered as problems, too radical and loud. They are not considered diplomats which young feminists do not embody. The same way we organize online is also work which needs to be validated as different people organize differently. There is a need to find a middle ground."

However, the inherent intergenerational relationship between women supporting each other to learn, grow and thrive cannot be ignored and denied. One of the allies challenged the dominant narrative around animosity and chasm between different generations. There are stories and experiences of being supported by our grandmothers and mothers, of being given opportunities in work without any experience and acting as a strong foundation to fight together against the gender inequalities.

"One of the allies from Zimbabwe shared that we must not make generational disagreements and not pass it on. We should manage our acrimony and inability of resolving conflict in our generations itself."

53.33% of the survey participants shared that the support for feminist movement building, organizing and activism is not enough. Majority of them have raised the need for financial, technical and technological support, capacity building/training, mentoring, networking, safe physical and online spaces, mentoring, books and articles for learning. Furthermore, create favorable conditions to establish accountable sustainability systems and gain government support. There are some internal movement strengthening exercises required to move away from projectized working style and cultivate strong bonds among young feminists. There are external challenges which are systemic, structural and environmental including state pushback, social taboo and backlash, shrinking civic spaces, misogynistic tendencies, false propaganda around the word 'feminism' and lack of awareness in society about its importance in achieving gender equality.

"There is a need to free the concept of 'feminism' from propagandas."

4. CONTEXT SETTING: THE EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG FEMINIST LEADERS

The first set of findings include the shared experiences of young feminists in their activism and organizing. This is an analysis of shared values, principles and political ideology that describe young feminist leadership and feminism which have been included as ‘shared experiences of young feminists.’

1. Womxn’s Rights, Gender equality and Intersectional feminism: For many young feminists, *Feminism is a framework, a belief system and an ideology*. Young feminists define ‘feminism’ not just through a gender or racial equality and womxn’s rights lens, but also push the framework to be intentionally intersectional.¹⁴ They question and challenge the white cis-heteronormative framework to be inclusive of racial, non-binary, sexual and gender diverse people. Furthermore, young feminists question existing injustices and gender inequalities. One of the research participants shared that the *‘Mostly young feminists are intersectional in their approaches,’* a departure from earlier generations. Younger feminists understand and practice intersectionality more deliberately, and some in the older generation may be less open to sexual and gender diversity. While being a feminist can give a sense of belonging, it can also mean a huge responsibility which comes at a cost. Having courage to openly identify as a young feminist invites **backlash from the society** starting from prejudices, labelling them as ‘non-marriageable material’ to being severely bullied in the cyberspace. Identifying as a young feminist comes at a cost and the cost is higher in conservative and fundamentalist society in the country like Bangladesh and Myanmar.

2. Ageism: Age is a key factor in their practice and experience of feminism. It is imperative to look at ‘age’ more politically as it can entail power and privilege. Age can be a common thread that binds Young Feminists together and can also be a gap and challenge when working with the older feminists. There were also questions around how we define ‘young’- and should we limit Young Feminists as per the age or include people who are new to the concept of Feminism. *One of the allies shared that age can be a privilege creating a barrier for others. I might take up others' space. There are cases where older feminists have internalized patriarchy. Age can be a barrier to young feminists to voice out their opinions, access spaces and resources, and lead in those spaces due to older feminist's gatekeeping.* There is already a hesitation and unsureness in young feminists to be on equal footing as older feminists due to their age, years of experience and knowledge. This is causing segregation in the feminist movement where older feminists are seen as ‘overpowering’ and young feminist are seen as ‘rebels’. There is a need to listen to different perspectives and inability to do so should not lead to creating differences instead. Intergenerational cross-movement solidarity is required to challenge the existing socio-economic inequalities.

¹⁴ It was coined in 1989 by professor and black feminist Kimberlé Crenshaw to describe how race “intersect” and overlap with class, gender, and other individual characteristics. Crenshaw is not really concerned with questions of identity and representation but more interested in the deep structural and systemic questions about discrimination and inequality. It’s basically a lens, a prism, for seeing the way in which various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other. We tend to talk about race inequality as separate from inequality based on gender, class, sexuality or immigrant status. What’s often missing is how some people are subject to all of these, and the experience is not just the sum of its parts. Accessed at: <https://time.com/5786710/kimberle-crenshaw-intersectionality/>

“Intergenerational spaces for me years back are a very scary space to be in, even feminist intergenerational spaces...It is very difficult for me when I know that we are in a space that even before you look at me for who I am, you look at me for my age.”

3. Rural/urban: The differences between rural and urban organizing and movement building came up strongly in our research. The tools, strategies and approaches need to be context specific. There was a call for non-elitist mediums to engage feminists in movement building. It is also about the language and resources being accessible to all. In most of the cases, the opportunities are limited and fixed in urban areas. This has also raised a few important areas around how we can build an ecosystem which is young feminists friendly to support the movement building and let their organizing and activism thrive. The interventions are usually catering to young feminists from the urban sector which excludes people from the rural areas where there is more need to break social taboos. There is a need to understand why youth are not proactive to participate. Youths are living in scattered environments, sometimes it is hard to organize them all at the same point resulting in low participation of young womxn. Borrowing ideas from social movement building, the Young Feminist Movement in Uganda comprises a structure that recognizes the role of development partners headed by a Chair-Lady and the General Secretary. A structure with five positions, clearly holds the priorities of young womxn living with disabilities at the center. A change in structure, policies and its functionality, investment in capacity strengthening and awareness raising in rural areas can encourage participation of rural young feminists in movement building and organizing.

4. Global South and Global North: Research participants shared their personal journey of feminism which stemmed from their personal experiences and also the opportunity to access safe spaces to learn about feminism, movement building and organizing. While this process from the personal to the political is a common thread among research participants, the power dynamics between places and spaces needs to be interrogated. One particular scale of inquiry is between the global North and global South. The challenges that research participants experience around movement building and organizing are often local in nature but elements of it can also be related to global inequalities and incongruities of wealth, resources and power. Often large organizations and leaders in the global North have more access to power and resources which has deep impacts on how young feminists are able to grow and navigate their leadership and movements in the global South. It is therefore important to understand the global characteristics of seemingly local problems and the history of local and global problems, including imperialism, colonialism and slavery.

5. Leadership of Young Feminist from the Global South: Young feminist organizing needs to be truly led by young feminists. Young feminists who participated in this research study questioned the validity and true representation in work that involves young feminists but are ultimately planned, designed, and executed by feminists' allies or those who are older white cis-heterosexual men from the global North. The concerns are clearly around whether the young feminists from the global South have the leadership in defining their own agenda and hold decision-making positions and **not to consider young feminists as a tokenistic representation**. There is a need to build trust in Young Feminists leadership from the global South and work strategically to ensure young womxn from the global South are empowered in decision-making positions. As one of the allies shared, “we need to say, “I trust and believe in you and your work!”

“Young feminist leaders are not given much space to lead in movements that include both young and older feminists. There is a perception that young womxn are there only to learn and listen.”

5. MAIN FINDINGS AND GOOD PRACTICE EMERGING FROM YOUNG FEMINISTS' ACTIVISM AND ORGANIZING

Young feminists shared the following recommendations towards shared characteristics and approaches of a young feminist leadership framework. The following is a list of emerging practices and approaches to young feminist organizing, which should be central to any young feminist leadership framework.

1. Centrality of local context and community experience: Young feminists' activists are motivated by their own experiences and that of their community. Their organizing is rooted in their own context and responds to the issues that their communities are facing. Organizing tactics are therefore developed from the bottom up and take form by responding to salient needs or issues in their personal lives. While feminist ideologies and approaches that are developed elsewhere can provide perspective, translation to local context and genuine ownership has been a challenge for this kind of approach. A few of the young feminist research participants reported that while they are working on social and gender justice, they don't necessarily identify themselves as a feminist due to the stigmatization of the word "feminism" in their communities. It is therefore important that a **Young Feminist Leadership Framework both uplift and hold space for the diversity of experiences and approaches from local contexts.**

2. Practice feminist governance and leadership within and beyond the NGO structure: Young feminists are thinking about and building new ways of organizing and collectivizing. Registering as a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) is one way of gaining visibility and legitimacy but many are exploring ways of coming together outside of this model by choice or because of circumstance. A number of the young feminists are not registering their groups for political reasons which brings up new opportunities as well as challenges in accessing power and resources. Research participants emphasized the need for a genuine practice of feminist governance and leadership in whatever model young feminist organizers choose to come together. This means living into feminist values and finding integrity with one's practice. Allies have often assumed that young feminists are always ready to provide voluntary service. It is important that allies recognize what young feminists bring to the table and compensate them for their time and efforts. Practically, this also means **feminist allies should shift power to young feminist groups and leaders by giving them space, decision making power, material and financial support to set their own shared-agenda.**

3. Deepen feminist partnerships: Young feminists are key actors within a larger ecosystem of feminist, human rights and social, economic and climate justice movements in their context and wider community. Research participants are interested in deepening partnerships with these diverse actors to explore opportunities for collaborations, learning and leadership. One aspect of this is to ensure that the young feminist leadership framework adopts an ecosystem approach to movement work, which means recognizing that there are many different types of organizations and actions necessary to create social change, and to this end young feminist activists and organization should continue to connect with other movements in each of the contexts they operate. Young feminists that we spoke to subscribe to an intersectional feminist analysis and their organizing practices reflect these values. Deepening coalitions, partnerships, networks and alliances is a priority in their work because, *"There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle*

because we do not live single-issue lives.”¹⁵ Research participants also spoke about the need to establish a critical evaluation of feminist standards in all the partnerships the organization seeks to build and core to this is an alignment around the Young Feminist Leadership Framework.

“There should be more feminist partnerships and feminist trainings. ActionAid partnerships and training built who I am today and I am so grateful for it. I really wish and hope that younger womxn can access these spaces and training.”

4. Integrate a holistic safety, security and protection framework: Research participants expressed concerns around backlash to their organizing and activism online and offline. While they have found ways of developing their own self and collective care which includes an idea of safety and security, they also welcome the formal development and integration of a holistic framework. **A holistic safety, security and protection framework would be embedded in the idea of self and collective care** online when most interactions are digital due to pandemic restrictions, and also offline- as underscored by the physical threats faced by young feminists.

5. Values aligned fundraising and resource mobilization initiatives: Access to resources and funds is important to the success and sustainability of young feminist movements, organizing and leadership. However, resources alone will not ensure the success of their movements and for their leadership to thrive. It is therefore important that the Young Feminist Leadership Framework cultivate values alignment in their fundraising and resource mobilization initiatives. This means providing young feminist with the technical support to materialize their resource needs and it also means working closely with funders to advocate for more resources to young feminist leadership and activism. It is imperative that donors and funders recognize young feminists as leaders in the movement. Donors and funders should **cultivate genuine partnerships with young feminist activists which means providing the flexibility and eliminating bureaucratic processes** in consideration of the contexts of the groups. Although it was not specifically suggested by the research participants, interviewees often discussed the need for more funding for young feminist groups grounded in trust-based philanthropy.¹⁶

6. Intentional power sharing in intergenerational dialogue: For many of the young feminists who participated in the research, intergenerational spaces have largely been unintentional and uninterrogated which typically means that they work with someone who is older in a more senior position but there is rarely or no recognition of that aspect of the relationship. In these cases, experiences of ageism become unspoken. Other frequent experiences of intergenerational spaces have been patronizing, tokenizing and isolating where there is only one young person invited to a majority older, more senior space. Young feminists recognize the opportunities for mutual learning, growth and collaboration that can be cultivated in intergenerational interactions but this requires an intentional facilitation from design to implementation so hierarchies can be dismantled to make room for **genuine partnership where power is shared in an equitable way**. Young feminists are not only thinking about this in relation to their work with senior feminists but also with younger ones. One of the young feminists’ research participants shared:

“This is the time for us to start raising the next generation that we are looking at now, but not the way we were raised. Let’s give them the space that we were not given. That’s the space that [we] did not see or experience in intergenerational spaces.”

¹⁵ Lorde, A., 1982. Learning from the 60s. *BlackPast* . Available at: <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/1982-audre-lorde-learning-60s/>.

¹⁶ Trust-based philanthropy begins with understanding and confronting systemic power imbalances. *Trust Based Philanthropy*. Available at: <https://trustbasedphilanthropy.org/values> [Accessed March 21, 2021].

6. CASE STORIES OUTLINING YOUNG FEMINIST LEADERSHIP PRACTICES IN ORGANIZING AND ACTIVISM

Global Platform Bangladesh's young feminist space "Adda"

Young people do not have space to openly and safely talk about issues impacting their lives. Interviewees explained that in the context of Bangladesh, many issues young people identify as "feminist issues" such as sexual and gender identity, gender-based violence, domestic violence and self-care, are taboos and are difficult to discuss which is a prerequisite to organize around.

Recognizing these challenges, young feminists initiated the Young Feminist Futures Project, which they describe as "a network of young people, groups and youth movements who are working on different issues but their common issue is feminism." They use diverse and creative initiatives for capacity building and advocacy to work collectively with the goal of challenging the "taboo of feminism, which is still prominent in our society."

One of the specific initiatives by Young Feminist Futures Project is *Adda*. They explain, "*Adda* in the south Asian context is an informal gathering of people, where they discuss anything. In our culture *adda* is something people love to attend because there is no specific rule, you can discuss anything."

Young feminists in the project organized monthly *addas* where they select an issue that is relevant in their own context and is related to feminism, in the past they have talked about issues of consent, marriages or sexual violence, self-care among others. These topics are selected by young people in the project and the discussions are facilitated by them as well. These group discussions were well attended and provided the safe space young people needed to connect with each other, openly discuss ideas and explore feminist values amongst their peers.

"As one of the young feminists shared, "In Adda we identify problems, unlearn biases together and address them."

When the COVID-19 pandemic prohibited in person gatherings, the young feminist organizers decided to move *adda* online. An unexpected outcome of this seemingly logistical or practical decision was powerful.

"You know, LGBTQI issues are still a big taboo in Bangladesh and some other south Asian countries. We are not allowed to talk about these things frequently and in open forums. So, these online addas provided some opportunities to organize and discuss these issues...organizing addas are giving space to the untold stories of our communities."

Malawi's Feminist-Macro Economics Academy (FEMA)

The FEMA is an alliance which ActionAid Malawi and partners started resulting from the Activist-Her project which is focusing on feminist-macroeconomics and challenging government and IFFs to ensure the national budget is gender responsive and promotes equality. The Alliance is a space of capacity building for young women and women to critique and analyze budget documents

and share their lived experiences. It also provides a platform for engagement and mobilization.

Young feminists established FEMA to make the public services and policies gender responsive. The broader issue around public services and macroeconomic policies are taken as a domain of men. It advances feminist economies, which centre care and the wellbeing of citizens rather than GDP. Also teaches young feminists about the intersection of patriarchy, neoliberal capitalism, colonialism and imperialism.

Feminist Macro-Economic Alliance Malawi, has organized a national African Feminist Macro-Economics Academy, targeting womxn's rights advocates and movement leaders from across Malawi, to take them through intense courses on Feminist Macro-Economics and how regressive policies play a vital role in transforming lived realities of African womxn in particular.

FEMA is a learning platform for young womxn from diverse backgrounds designed to enhance their capacities to understand, analyze and interpret macro-economic issues and policies as well as monitor public debt. The Academy provides a platform for young feminists to build their capacities on different content through a well-structured curriculum with three modules. The teen week Academy creates space for learning for young feminists to be influencers of change.

“There was a lot of engagement and because of the collaboration, there is activity on social media too. We are even looking at the linkages of the different cohorts and how they can work together to gain socio-economic justice.”

The modules are packaged to help in the engendering of feminist lens in the formulation of macroeconomic policies in the country. The young feminists aged 15-34 must be willing to learn about feminist macroeconomics and use the learning in their communities.

Young Feminists in Kenya organizing in the Digital Spaces

‘Feminists in Kenya’ which is basically a social movement of feminist activist who create feminist knowledge, amplify feminist discourse and organize in the Digital spaces. It started online and explored what feminist movement building looks like for young feminists. When Feminists in Kenya’ (FIK) started the work, they were not registered in a formal way and made their presence in social media. FIK created an online space to talk about sex, sexuality and to articulate feminist policies. This slowly grew into a feminist movement.

They have organized a March called ‘Total Shutdown Kenya’ that was held in four cities Busia, Kisumu, Mombasa and Nairobi. FIK were fighting and advocating for the Government of Kenya to respond/take action against high cases of femicide and VAWG. FIK had developed a Memorandum of Demand as they wanted femicide to be declared as an emergency and develop a National Action Plan on femicide and GBV.

“We are big on speaking truth directly to power and organizing in our radical ways that are tangible for the community.”

FIK works with feminist lawyers and looks at GBV from a feminist perspective and give feminist politics and voice in the legal space. How can we make the laws feminists as it has been used in different ways to subjugate womxn and girls? We do movement building and disruption in legal space.

“What makes us unique is we are using these radical ways and speaking our truth and being as vocal as much as possible without considering respectability and formalization, we are disrupting everything.”

FIK were using online platforms even before COVID-19 which has offered them an opportunity to reach numerous people and nothing much has changed for us but the pandemic has helped to validate their work as actual work. Otherwise, people did not recognize their work and called them 'keyboard warriors' as they are making noises online. Many of these young feminists are facing cyber bullying which forces them to quit activism and social media. There are 10 people in 40 in the WhatsApp group who have decided that they have had enough of online violence. This reflects a need for stronger policies to protect womxn, girls, sexual and gender minorities. Police brutality and state surveillance has increased due to COVID-19. Young Feminists take a break from online activism for self-care and resume with organizing, movement building and activism once they are recharged.

Young Urban Women's Movement in Ghana

The Young Urban Women's Movement (YUWM) is an organized group of young women in urban areas across Ghana with the aim of empowering them with skills, knowledge and attitudes to challenge and address structural barriers that prevent marginalized and excluded young women from fully enjoying their economic security, bodily integrity and addressing their burden of care. The movement also challenges inequality and demands accountability at various levels (local, national and international) for ensuring that young urban women are able to enjoy their rights.

The movement is an outcome of a project titled 'Young Urban Women: Life Choices and Livelihood Project' started in 2013 by ActionAid Ghana. This is a multi-country project which is operating in Ghana, South Africa, Kenya and India. Members mobilized themselves into groups and this has since developed and grown into a vibrant movement on its own with a membership of about 3,500 young women between the ages of fifteen and twenty-five years across 3 cities (Accra, Tamale and Bolgatanga). These are young urban women living in informal settlements, working in an informal economy and do not have secured jobs.

The Young Urban Women's Movement envisions a feminist future where, young urban women are leading, are in charge of their own lives, have full freedom and control of their rights, valued and appreciated, economically secured and in charge of all their incomes. Their approach is to build power of the most excluded, create an enabling environment and agency of young womxn over critical life-choices, campaign for gender responsive public services (GRPS), change perceptions and build solidarity with community leaders and connect young womxn and their groups to social movements.

The young womxn have been involved in many campaigns and advocacy initiatives at the local, national and international level, influencing decision-making and building a platform to challenge discriminatory practices, sexual harassment and social imbalances. Movement members have conducted water audit and follow-up campaigns in 3 cities necessitating the Ga West District Assembly to officially recognize the group as a stakeholder and invited them for a meeting to discuss plans to address the water supply gaps in their communities. As a growing movement, the young women have grown into advocates influencing Ghana's current youth policy and adolescent health policy.

GLOSSARY

The following definitions were drawn from the [Feminist Movement Builder's Dictionary by Just Associates \(JASS\)](https://www.justassociates.org/sites/justassociates.org/files/feminist-movement-builders-dictionary-jass.pdf)¹⁷.

Activist: Someone who cares deeply about injustice, inequality and/or the wellbeing of others and the planet, and who takes or organizes political action with others and is driven by a belief in an alternative, and the hope and conviction that a better world is possible.

Feminism: A range of theories and political agendas that aim to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women due to sex and gender as well as class, race, ethnicity, ability, sexual orientation, geographic location, nationality, or other forms of social exclusion. Feminism as a political agenda has evolved over centuries, shaped by the politics of each historical moment. For example, many early feminists (in the 1700s and 1800s) were involved in abolitionist movements and made the linkages between women's bondage and slavery. Since the turn of the 20th century, the different historical surges of feminist political organizing have been referred to as "waves," defined primarily by feminists in the Americas. The first wave of feminism focused on legal rights, such as the suffragettes struggle for the right to vote in the early 1900s; second-wave feminism focused on a broader range of forms of subordination in the private realm, including violence against women, reproductive rights, women's roles in the family. Third-wave feminism, more heavily influenced by feminist movements around the world and post-structuralist thinking, recognizes that there are multiple feminisms operating and emphasizes diversity in theory and practice, demanding greater space and recognition of the feminisms shaped by different generations, ethnic and sexual groups, and different classes, among many other elements.

Feminist leadership: An evolving way of thinking about leadership in which power and positions of authority – among individuals, in organizations and within movements – in the state and elsewhere – are used to create inclusive processes and structures that privilege people who have been traditionally excluded, foster democratic participation, and operate on the basis of authenticity, legitimacy and accountability to constituents or stakeholders. (Batliwala, 2011a)

Gender equality: Enshrined in law, this refers to measurable, equal political representation, status, rights and opportunities. Gender equality does not imply that women and men are the same, but that they have equal value in society and should be afforded rights and treatment as equals.

Heterosexism: The individual, institutional, and societal/ cultural beliefs and practices based on the belief that heterosexuality is the only normal and acceptable sexual orientation. (Griffin and Harro 1997)

¹⁷ 2013. *Feminist Movement Builder's Dictionary*. 2nd ed. [ebook] Available at: <<https://www.justassociates.org/sites/justassociates.org/files/feminist-movement-builders-dictionary-jass.pdf>> [Accessed 19 May 2021].

Homophobia: The fear, hatred, or intolerance of lesbians and gay men or any behavior that falls outside of traditional gender roles. (Griffin and Harro 1997)

Intersectionality: Coined by feminist academic, Kimberle Crenshaw (please see footnote 13). An analytical tool that helps to understand and respond to the ways in which multiple aspects of each person's social identity and status intersect to create unique experiences of oppression and privilege. The concept evolved in part as a response to a critique that "women" as a political category over-generalized women's experiences, privileging white, middle class women, while making invisible the ways that race, class, colonialism, and other factors of discrimination contribute to the experience of oppression. Intersectionality aims to move beyond overly simplified conceptions of identity – such as "working class" or "indigenous" – to examine complexities of multiple sources of privilege and subordination. (Miller et al 2006)

Movement-building: A process of organizing and mobilizing communities and/or constituencies to respond to common problems and concerns; the organizing process involves developing a shared analysis of why the problem exists, a common vision and agenda for change, and short and long term strategies; movement-building also requires that those involved define shared principles and mechanisms for communication, roles, responsibilities and all of the internal governance of the movement itself.

Organizing: Deliberate action intended to bring people together to develop leadership strategies and the collective capacity needed to confront a common issue or push an alternative justice agenda. For justice organizing, the people involved are often those who are disadvantaged by the system or excluded from decision-making venues and their allies. Ideally, people gradually take on greater leadership in addressing problems and build organizations and movements bound by mutual respect, trust and common purpose.

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