

**LEGS
TALK
WITH
MOTHERS
AND
DAUGHTERS**

A MULTIGENERATIONAL

FEMINIST DIALOGUE

**THE GLOBAL
DIALOGUE SERIES**

TO EACH OTHER

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We rely on the support, assistance, and contributions of many women and organizations to make the Global Dialogue Series a success. The challenge is to bring together a diverse group of feminist activists from around the world, with emphasis on the Global South, and conduct and document important conversations about issues that are critical to the future of the women's movement.

CREA, the Center for Women's Global Leadership and the Youth Coalition would like to thank all the participants of the meeting for their wisdom, honesty and good cheer, and all their staff for their diligent work in organizing the event.

Special thanks to Anahi Russo, Beth Martin, Charlotte Bunch, Cynthia Rothschild, Deb Oestreicher, Geetanjali Misra, Ioana Contu, Joana Chagas, Neha Sood, Pramada Menon for making this dialogue and publication possible.

LISTENING

TO EACH OTHER

LISTENING TO EACH OTHER: A MULTIGENERATIONAL FEMINIST DIALOGUE

30 SEPTEMBER – 03 OCTOBER 2007

RUTGERS UNIVERSITY
NEW BRUNSWICK, NEW JERSEY, USA

**THE GLOBAL DIALOGUE SERIES
WORKING PAPER 2**

BUILDING ALLIANCES FOR GLOBALIZING WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS: THE GLOBAL DIALOGUE SERIES

Building Alliances for Globalizing Women's Human Rights is a CREA initiative. Four global dialogues on select women's human rights themes form part of this initiative. These dialogues are being organized by bringing together activists from around the world, especially those from the global South. This initiative is founded on the understanding that if social movements connect globally, share strategies, and learn from each other, a more just, peaceful, and tolerant world is possible. CREA collaborates with partner organizations to conduct the dialogues.

The four dialogues are:

Building Alliances Globally to End Violence Against Women. This dialogue focused on how issues of violence against women intersect with gender, sexuality and human rights. 5–9 July 2004; Bellagio, Italy.

Strengthening Spaces: Women's Human Rights in Social Movements. This dialogue focused on how diverse movements engage with women's human rights and how movements can strategize to affirm women's human rights. 31 October–1 November 2005; Bangkok, Thailand.

Listening to Each Other: A Multigenerational Feminist Dialogue. This dialogue attempts to bridge the gaps that exist between different generations of feminists working on women's human rights issues. 30 September– 03 October 2007; Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey, USA.

Ain't I a Woman? A Dialogue between the Violence against Women and Sex Workers' Movements. This dialogue will focus on how the violence against women movement can broaden its scope to include violence against sex workers.

PREFACE

This working paper is based on the proceedings of an international three-day dialogue entitled *Listening to Each Other: a Multigenerational Dialogue on Activism and Women's Rights*, convened by the Center for Women's Global Leadership (CWGL), the Youth Coalition for Sexual and Reproductive Rights (YC), and CREA, held at the office of the Center for Women's Global Leadership at Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey, USA. This dialogue was convened to address multigenerational issues affecting feminist and women's human rights activism, movements, and organizations. Apart from being a part of CREA's initiative, Building Alliances for Global Organizing on Women's Human Rights, it was also a part of CWGL's ongoing projects dedicated to building feminist leadership in human rights and of YC's efforts to bring young women's voices to diverse global arenas.

MAN O T S I D O B T M I

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

Significant progress has been made in the repositioning of women's rights as part of human rights discourse. As the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna established (in 1993):

*...the human rights of women are inalienable, integral and an indivisible part of universal human rights. The full and equal participation of women in political, economic, social and cultural life, at the national, regional and international levels, and the eradication of all forms of discrimination on grounds of sex are priority objectives of the international community.*¹

However, realization of these rights remains more an aspiration than reality for most women. As rights organizations move into the 21st century, the growth of social, religious, political, and economic fundamentalisms poses serious challenges to global feminist and women's movements. These movements are working in increasingly hostile social and political environments where women's participation is threatened and often punished.

The meeting described in this working paper addressed the challenge of broadening and renewing feminist movements by examining the obstacles to and opportunities for multigenerational alliance and collaboration. Diversity and inclusiveness in areas such as race, class, language, sexual orientation and religion have long been recognized as important to women's movements. Diversity across generations is also critical, because the sustainability of organizations depends upon accessing "new blood"—not just helping hands, but fresh ideas that inform dynamic leadership—as well as the ability and

the structures to benefit from wisdom of those shifting away from positions of leadership.

Sponsored by CREA, the Center for Women's Global Leadership, and Youth Coalition, the meeting was a structured dialogue held over three days at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey, USA, in October 2007. Participants included 26 feminist activists from civil society organizations in 16 countries across 6 continents, with a particular focus on experiences from the global South. The activists ranged in age from 20-something to 70-something. Up for discussion were a variety of issues relating to age and leadership, including age-based stereotypes, the gendered aspects of aging, institutional obstacles to maximizing effective participation by younger activists, power relations seen through a multigenerational prism, the role of language and communication technologies in segregating and unifying the generations, and—throughout—strategies for building and renewing leadership in global women's movements.

The format of the meeting included trigger presentations by individual participants, small group discussions (organized by age and interest categories), and larger group discussions to maximize opportunities for the exchange of ideas and experiences. Focused attention was paid to identifying best practices for building and sustaining multigenerational leadership.

This working paper reports on the ongoing age-related challenges recognized by meeting participants, and outlines opportunities and strategies to address those challenges both across the global women's movement as a whole and within individual organizations.

SEVEN CURRENT CHALLENGES FOR MANAGEMENT EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES FOR C

CURRENT CHALLENGES

Women's movements across the world are working in increasingly hostile social and political environments, where participation is threatened and often waning. As part of the New Brunswick dialogue's investigation of the challenges and opportunities for broadening and renewing feminist movements globally, a range of likely barriers to such collaboration was addressed, including increased institutionalization of women's movements, attitudes and perceptions, and pressure from fundamentalist movements.

INSTITUTIONALIZATION

Women's movements have taken a variety of forms across the world; however, over the past couple of decades, feminist mobilization and organization has become increasingly institutionalized. While institutionalization can be positive, as more rigid structures can provide consistent and stable support for activists, these same structures may exclude some, potentially limiting the reach of women's movements.

Working towards women's human rights is now seen as a career with definite entry points and opportunities for professional advancement. Although the potential to make a living as an activist is largely seen as a positive development, Alexandra Garita, of the USA, pointed out that it may be difficult to know how to get involved in feminist movements if you are not already working toward advancing women's rights within a formal structure.

The desire to be valued, acknowledged, and supported was repeatedly expressed by participants across the generational spectrum. It was noted that women's movements are experienced differently by different generations, who leverage different organizing strategies. For example, activists from earlier generations tended to organize around United Nations events. Today's young activists are organizing virtual communities. Still, unless one is part of an organization, options for development and fluid change within the movement are limited.

Another aspect of the institutionalization of women's movements is the tendency for organizations to self-segregate. For example, a small group discussion that included participants from younger generations surfaced a desire to define, claim, and invent their own forms of feminist activism. This group also raised concerns that even when organizations give lip service to youth participation, little is done to create opportunities for meaningful participation—young people may be called in only when there is a need for someone to take on boring and mundane jobs—which can make organizations less attractive to young people.

Some women's organizations focus solely on the young. Young activists expressed a desire for the creation of safe, supportive, affirming, and participatory environments for newer actors. Because such environments are not readily available to many actors, they may consciously choose not to participate in existing systems of power, and instead create their own structures.

Members age out because we believe it's important to have young people's faces as part of decision-making processes.

JOANA CHAGAS, BRAZIL

PERCEPTUAL BARRIERS

Dialogue participants identified a range of attitudes and perceptions that present barriers to multigenerational collaboration. These included the ways in which perceptions about age are culturally constructed; the attitude that the women's movement lacks relevance to younger women; and the effective invisibility of women in the middle generations, who are neither just starting out nor closing their careers.

PERCEPTIONS ABOUT AGE

Where does one generation end and the next begin? Dialogue participants recognized that this is a fluid concept. Participants explored how age may be considered both chronologically and experientially, and may be constructed differently depending on the social, cultural, or economic context.

Multigenerations exist at all points of the age spectrum.

PATRICIA LICUANAN, PHILIPPINES

Enisa Eminova spoke of her experience as a second-generation activist in the Roma women's movement, and as a fourth-generation activist in the Roma movement as a whole.

The socioeconomic context of aging was explored, with participants noting that the child of a middle-class family will likely have a very different experience of age than the child of a family in poverty since that child may have to work to support the family at an earlier age.

In Brazil, poverty takes a child immediately into adulthood.

JACQUELINE PITANGUY, BRAZIL

In addition, the gendered perceptions of age and aging were addressed. In many of our cultures, women are devalued as they age, while men gain power and status. One participant referred to the stereotype of "old boys' clubs," which presupposes the wisdom and power of older men. Questions were raised about whether feminist movements and organizations where older women are in leadership positions have had an impact on gendered perceptions. Are we creating "old girls' clubs"? Do the social and gendered constructions of age contribute to how older and younger women are sometimes pitted against one another? Charlotte Bunch, of the USA, suggested that there are "forces that manipulate" these entrenched perceptions "quite consciously."

Women's issues may be filtered through a generational prism: issues that topped the agenda of the global women's rights movement in the 1980s and 1990s are not necessarily headlining women's rights agendas today. The ways we perceive and are perceived within movements and organizations is colored by age.

Asma Khader, of Jordan, spoke about how some young activists in her country have adopted very traditional and closed-minded views, while some activists with decades of experience are dynamic and progressive in their leadership styles and in their approaches to current issues and challenges. Some young leaders have adopted patriarchal styles as heads of their organizations, thus closing themselves off from other young women. Age is not all that matters, she emphasized. Styles of leadership and organizing are crucial—how inclusive or exclusive we are in terms of welcoming all generations and whether we pigeonhole people based on age.

RELEVANCE

Perceptions of what feminism means are often shaped by negative portrayals in the popular media and throughout society. These portrayals cast feminism as a concept imported to the global South from the West; and, further, a concept that is deeply threatening to the traditional fabric of society. Talk about women's human rights may be perceived as endangering established social arrangements within families and cultures, and as leading to anarchy.

The successes of the past women's movements have—it is likely—made life easier for most young women today, but they often don't identify with the women's movement. Because the history of the global feminist movement is primarily oral, our capacity to join with other movements or broaden our own movements has been limited. Young women may not see the connection between the rights and freedoms they now enjoy and battles fought by previous generations of feminists.

Many young women feel that feminism is outdated—too strong, too radical—and that feminist agendas today do not include young women's concerns. For instance, feminist activism typically targets reproductive rights and freedom from domestic and sexual violence; however, young women feel the movement is not advocating adequately on issues relating to young women's rights of sexual expression, sexual health, and access to sexuality-related information.

Participants proposed that we speak and write publicly about feminism in our lives and work—to name *practices* as feminism rather than focusing on specific organizations or affiliations. This

would help to build a more inclusive perception of feminism; in other words, to be a feminist means adopting certain practices, rather than belonging to, accumulating, or being enrolled in particular organizations, credentials, or courses.

WOMEN IN THE MIDDLE

In discussions of the need for collaboration and communication between younger and older generations of feminist activists, women who are no longer in the youngest generation but not yet in the oldest generation often get ignored. They are no longer seen as rising young stars doing creative and visionary work, nor are they yet the *grand dames* acknowledged for their wisdom and experience. Conversations organized around *young* and *old* sometimes don't leave space for the contribution of those in the middle, who negotiate a path between the strategies of older generations (taking to the streets, building coalitions face-to-face) and younger generations (extensive use of virtual spaces).

Participants in this generational group spoke of the challenge of wanting to remain active and political, but needing to survive financially. Is it necessary to move from social activism to employment with a nongovernmental organization (NGO), a step that means joining the establishment, by some measures?

PRESSURE FROM FUNDAMENTALISM

...large numbers of young women have been mobilized by reactionary political agendas...these movements are out there recruiting [and] promoting traditional values.

GEETANJALI MISRA, INDIA

The global political climate is characterized by growing fundamentalist movements which have been effective in eroding human rights and civil liberties.

Many women believe that they should obey or adopt patriarchy—that's the majority in our society, and they have their own movements.

ASMA KHADER, JORDAN

Cynthia Rothschild noted that in the USA young women face organizing challenges in the context of the War on Terror. She referenced Suzanne Pharr, who commented that in some instances, organizing itself has been deemed terrorist activity, and there has been “no strong social justice movement to support their dissent or broad political visions.” As a result, more and more young people are entering the criminal justice system, which increasingly targets people of color. The USA has manipulated the War on Terror to clamp down on activism to the extent that issues of sexuality and reproductive rights have been targeted under the “amorphous rubric of antiterrorism”

Participants noted that fundamentalist movements have also had an impact on the effectiveness of the human rights framework in contemporary feminist organizing and movement building. To some extent, fundamentalist groups have appropriated human rights discourse to advance their own conservative agenda. At the same time, the increasing influence of various fundamentalisms around the world has threatened the legitimacy of human rights claims.

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ACROSS THE MOVEMENT

I am in a movement for social justice, which means pushing every possible boundary of freedom and dignity—I happen to be positioned, located, self-identified within feminist and larger women’s movement, simply because that is the political lens that I use. But unless I acknowledge that this is a much larger space and involves many communities and organizations, some of whom I work with, some of whom I don’t, I think we miss the big picture and end up ghettoizing ourselves—not helpful to new actors, not helpful for expanding.

ANASUYA SENGUPTA, INDIA

Dialogue participants identified a set of key challenges for the women’s movement as a whole. These involve reframing feminism for a multigenerational (as well as global and multicultural) audience, communicating movement history, and building a better understanding of how women enter movements, so we can leverage that moment.

REFRAMING FEMINISM

Feminism is often portrayed negatively by the popular media and is frequently rejected as a framework or social project by women of all ages. Conversation at the New Brunswick meeting repeatedly returned to the current state of the global feminist movement (and within that, feminist and women’s movements at local, national, and regional levels).

There are many vibrant, person-to-person, local movements doing fantastic things.

LYDIA ALPIZAR DURÁN, MEXICO

How do feminist and women's movements intersect with other local, national, regional, and international movements (e.g., movements supporting indigenous people's rights, the rights of women in sexual minority groups, and the rights of sex workers)? When women choose to ally with their faith or ethnic communities, do women's movements fully embrace this diversity? How do such movements differ regionally? How are we engaging movements at the grassroots levels—are we assuring that they have a place at decision-making tables?

Participants acknowledged that a discussion about feminism and the language we use to articulate it is necessary. Some participants suggested that we need to *market* feminism as sexy, cool, and pleasurable.

Gender equity has been co-opted, but feminism has not—if they use it, they demonize it—we might want to consider as a strategy—reclaiming/reframing feminism in a more positive way.

LALAINÉ VIADO, PHILLIPINES

On the whole, dialogue participants agreed that feminism involves a set of nonnegotiable core values that reflect global diversity and the multicultural context of many societies. However, because the word *feminism* is perhaps culturally specific, we should develop strategies to identify local and culture-specific expressions of feminism. Participants agreed that a positive slogan (or slogans) should be formulated to attract more feminists to the movement.

One strategy, since feminism is perceived as a bad thing, is in how we market ourselves—We must show who we are fighting against—if we show we are fighting against fundamentalisms, feminists contra fanatics—then all of a sudden we're not bad anymore.

WANDA NOWICKA, POLAND

COMMUNICATING OUR HISTORY

Few would dispute that women today benefit from the past struggles and triumphs of the feminist movement. Such benefits may include the right to vote, abortion rights, education for women, and legislation that protects against domestic violence and oppressive social practices. Among older women's rights activists, there is a sense that young women do not recognize the struggles that went into achieving those rights, and do not

make the effort to learn about the history of which they are beneficiaries. Since they were born into an era when these rights are already accessible, younger women may not value the significance of activism.

On the other hand, the feminist movement has not been highly effective at communicating its history. There is a sense that rhetoric has been handed from generation to generation without being grounded in history, contributing to ignorance and misconceptions about feminism's goals and achievements. This has been detrimental to feminism's ability to attract younger women and sustain itself.

The history of the feminist movement is mostly informal, communicated from individual to individual. While oral history is important, information that relies on person-to-person transmission tends to lose meaning and context over time and distance. Dialogue participants affirmed the importance of committing time and resources to research, putting our collective knowledge into theory, and documenting our history. Participants also considered strategies to create new institutions, identify resources, and allocate time for learning, training, and knowledge sharing at regional and local levels.

MOVEMENT ENTRY POINTS

While some individuals may enter feminism in their early twenties, others may come to it later in life. How, where, and when we enter is informed by our life experiences, which are contextualized by social, political, and economic factors. Because of the increasing institutionalization of the women's movement, as discussed above, it can be difficult to know how to get involved. This raises questions about whether the movement has become exclusive and inaccessible.

Today, many young women enter the movement through institutionalized settings such as schools where they take courses, or while working at NGOs. Some participants raised the concern that these entry points may be exclusive in comparison to more grass-roots entry points; others suggested that institutional entry points—such as university women's studies programs—are important for revitalizing and broadening the movement.

Dialogue participants emphasized the value of mapping exercises to explore the ways in which they became involved in feminist activism and to explore how new actors might enter the movement. Bene Madunagu, of Nigeria, spoke of how the *Girls' Power Initiative* was successful in getting youth to organize and represent themselves by participating in a planning process for an upcoming nationwide feminist forum. As part of the planning process, the girls have identified the feminist issues they care about and have mapped their own entry into the forum.

Strategizing about how to best leverage existing entry points, participants identified needs to develop clear mechanisms for inclusion around language, accessibility, and mobilization; harness and build skills (using popular means) within the movement to engage more people; establish structures and systems to better integrate new people into organizations and movements (create welcoming spaces at entry points); and use identity politics without narrowing the political agenda, which could squeeze out other interests and claims.

**ORGANIZATIONAL
VALUES
WITHIN ORGANIZATIONS**

WITHIN ORGANIZATIONS

It's not about waiting for someone to give you leadership, but how you exercise leadership in whatever position you are in.

CHARLOTTE BUNCH, USA

In the context of the widespread institutionalization of women's movements, feminist organizations that seek to broaden and renew their participation and effectiveness face a specific set of challenges around negotiating power relationships with respect to generational concerns, creating spaces to facilitate cross-generational learning opportunities, and supporting members' transitions.

POWER AND ABUSE OF POWER

We have always critiqued patriarchal structures for hidden power, hidden ways in which men control outcomes—the back rooms, the country clubs, where decisions are made—we have to also be very self critical, map out our own structures where power gets hidden.

SRI LATHA BATLIWALA, INDIA

Power carries with it negative connotations, as do notions of authority and hierarchy. Dialogue participants challenged this censorious view of power, exploring its beneficial uses as well as its abuses. It is important not to lose sight of unequal power relations; however, it is also important to examine the ways in which we all have power and agency. Exploring the ways in which power is used and abused within organizations and movements can support the cultivation of practices that appropriately use power and challenge its misuse.

Discussions addressed formal, informal, and hidden power. Changing institutional power structures requires exploration of how we unconsciously interact with power based on how we have been socialized. For example, young women may find themselves excluded from strategic decision-making opportunities because of traditional cross-generational power relations.

Analyzing power dynamics within our organizations reveals hidden power, as evidenced by boycotting or ignoring certain events; not showing up to meetings; leaving; failing to prioritize; and defining who is *in* and who is *out* and who makes decisions, represents, or fulfills certain roles. To address such issues, members of an organization need to have a certain level of confidence in each other and in their common endeavor.

A number of strategies designed to equalize power relationships in the context of visibility within and outside the organization were identified:

**MAKE DIFFERENT PEOPLE VISIBLE:
ALTERNATE REPRESENTATION OF THE
ORGANIZATION AT EVENTS AND MEETINGS.**

- Create transparent mechanisms so groups of friends do not have a monopoly on resources.
- Rotate positions within decision-making forums (secretary, president) frequently.
- Establish quotas for boards of directors, panels, and other spaces of decision-making, representation, or meeting, and regularly refresh participation.

Abuses of power occur in the context of imbalances between those who do the work and those who take the lead. Abuses of power may also be engendered in the context of unequal access to resources and institutions. Discussions of abuse of power explored both conscious and unconscious forms, which vary in their visibility. It was agreed that unconscious forms of abuse are more pervasive and deeply felt by victims. Participants noted that those who hold positional authority may take advantage of titular subordinates by assigning inappropriate tasks.

Within organizations, there are inherent challenges to resolving abuses of power, as issues of loyalty come into play. We have no problem standing up to these abuses when we see them in external contexts, but when abuses are carried out by admired colleagues and leaders, resolution is complicated.

Ironically, some organizations, while struggling for the empowerment of various groups, employ staff who feel disempowered because of internal power dynamics. Dialogue participants emphasized the importance of integrating democratic feminist values into the way we work, including an imperative to name and confront abuses of power. The creation of mechanisms to bring power imbalances and abuses of power to the surface was recommended. Further, participants agreed on the need to confront abuses of power in ways that lead to healing and change rather than damage and rupture.

At the same time, all organization members should recognize that conflict and disturbance are a natural part of organizational life; committees, staff meetings, and other activities should be managed with the expectation of some conflict.

Many times ...there was ...some expression of making it smooth and cordial, and I do think that while that's important, there is also a question of whether change can be smooth and comfortable. We need to learn within the movement to operate within discomfort.

SALMA MAOULIDI, TANZANIA

Also cited was a tendency for feminist organizations to adopt family models (with organizational leaders standing in for mother figures) that enable power abuses. It was suggested that organizations avoid discourse that reinforces a *family* dynamic and stick to the rhetoric of *team* or other non-family group. Work should be done to explore and institute different models of leadership and feminist governance.

Other areas for further work and exploration include:

- Undertake processes of critical self-reflection, both individually and organizationally.
- Employ pre-emptive strategies to foresee and prevent abuses.

- Utilize new strategies in performance assessment to reduce opportunities for abuse.
- Establish a regularly scheduled (semi-annual or annual), anonymous staff well being questionnaire, have it analyzed by a neutral external person, and address its results together with staff.
- Consider decision making by consensus: particularly in smaller organizations, consensus can help to ensure that feminist principles and policies are sustained through leadership changes.
- Understand when to relinquish power and responsibility.

BUILDING LEARNING PARTNERSHIPS

As dialogue participants discussed the importance of creating ongoing opportunities for learning, they challenged traditional concepts of mentoring. In the conventional formulation, mentoring is a one-way process in which an “older and wiser” mentor imparts knowledge to a “young and green” mentee. Counter to the conventional formulation, participants envisioned a multidirectional model based on learning partnerships in which individuals with different skill, knowledge, and experience sets both contribute to and benefit from personal and professional development activities.

The role technology plays in young peoples’ movements in general and young feminist movements—it actually shapes not just the means of communication but also the politics of different movements. With internet communication; when you can contact people in different ways, it is easy to say you are anti-institution and nonhierarchical—this shapes the way we think and see the movement. But when we talk with older women who are not part of this technical universe, maybe their politics are different. How do we create connections between these movements?

IOANA CONTU, ROMANIA

Some activists currently in formal positions of leadership feel they are expected to play mentoring roles but are unprepared to do so. It is important to realize that one may be a mentor not only by actively teaching, but by serving as a role model or an inspiration. Also, the skills and contributions of young people

should be valued; for example, with their aptitude for newer technologies, they can help build new strategies for organizing and mobilizing.

While the need for mentoring and professional development is acknowledged, this need is not a priority when it comes to allocating resources such as time and money. On the contrary, staff development is typically at the bottom of priority lists. Even informal opportunities for development may suffer due to perceived limited resources, as when leaders decide to take on tasks themselves because they believe there is not enough time to teach someone else how to do it. Challenges also arise in the context of older generations facilitating access to connections and spaces for younger generations—the difficulty is in being supportive allies without being maternalistic.

Strategies for establishing learning partnerships include:

- Formalize a space for staff to teach and share experiences, knowledge, and skills. Also consider forums, interactive media, and evaluations.
- Create informal learning spaces; e.g., structure learning time into work, such as showing a work-related film and providing an opportunity for discussion.
- To facilitate learning, consider variety of tools that are accessible in terms of content and language: listservs, training, documentation, building partnerships, action research, dialogue, reflection, exchanges, internships, observation, co-mentorship, publications.
- Value the contributions and skills of young people such as the use of newer technologies and create opportunities to learn from them new ways of organizing and mobilizing.

TRANSITIONS

*We're the in-between lot, we need to go somewhere,
but where?*

PRAMADA MENON, INDIA

Participants discussed the NGO-ization of the women's movement—a reflection of the fact that many individuals are

coming out of women's studies programs and entering paid activist careers. There are few options for making a living as an activist outside existing NGOs. Participants pointed out that consultancies are a necessarily limited option, due to fierce competition (and often cross-generation competition) for the same small pot of opportunities. While some activists might be inclined to start new organizations, participants raised concerns about the dearth of opportunities in their current roles to acquire the skills required for success. As one participant noted, there are no schools that teach you how to do this.

Multigenerational concerns were raised about leaders holding onto formal positions of power longer than was useful—for both the organizations and themselves. In discussions in small groups segregated by age group, it became clear that transitions were not only about entering and exiting organizations but about changing roles. The kinds of transition addressed included moving from being unpaid activists to joining NGOs, moving from mid-to senior-level positions, and moving on from senior-level positions.

Financial security is also a cross-generational concern. Young activists struggle to make ends meet while juggling jobs, school, family, and unpaid activism work. Dialogue participants in a small discussion group that represented the middle generation spoke of asking themselves, *How and where can I be most effective as an activist, yet survive economically?*

Participants suggested that organizations should create enabling environments in which newer actors can take initiative and older actors can re-invent themselves. When older activists and leaders detach themselves from formal roles, they're not detaching themselves from their movement, ideas, insights, or innovations. There is a need for processes and structures to elicit contributions from experienced activists and leaders who are no longer in formal roles.

Overall, a need was identified for organizations to better facilitate transitions, value participatory leadership, and recognize the contributions of new actors. Feminist values and principles should be integrated into the management of the organization, fostering a culture of respect that promotes synergy and commitment.

To support this culture, organizations should establish structures that ease leadership transition, including opportunities for individuals who leave formal roles to continue to contribute to the organization informally—for example, providing expertise as needed without worrying about day-to-day duties.

Time, energy, and commitment should be invested in orienting newer actors. Further, organizations should investigate the skills and interests of their members and match these to the work that needs to be done, so that seniority or position is not the key factor in assigning work. People will thrive in an environment of professionalism balanced with spontaneity—where they are given permission to take risks and have ownership of their successes as well as their mistakes. A collective vision for the direction of the organization and its leadership should be established, clearly communicated, and adjusted as needed over time and based on input from members, including the insights, perceptions, feedback, and questions of newer actors.

Specific strategies were identified to support a culture of transition:

- Rotate positions: provide opportunities for people to take on different roles, thus expanding their knowledge, skills, and experience and equipping them for future leadership roles.
- Institute term limits for positions to avoid misunderstandings over reassignments and replacements.
- Provide and continually update professional development opportunities across the organization.

CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION

In the past decade, we have seen increasing emphasis on the inclusion of youth in feminist as well as other movements, locally, regionally, and internationally. Does inclusion of new actors and new voices necessitate the exclusion of the wisdom and experience of older actors? Are older actors able to create welcoming spaces such that those newer to the movement can share their experiences and raise issues of concern without feeling like token representatives? It is important to resist the paradigm of generations pitted against one another. Rather, we need to create inclusive and respectful spaces where activists can share and learn across differences in age and experience.

The New Brunswick meeting itself (and meetings like it) embodies one strategy for addressing the generational disconnect: bringing together feminist activists of different generations from all over the world has opened cross-generational lines of communication and laid the groundwork for a range of initiatives to broaden women's movements. The meeting was particularly unusual in that it brought together not just "young and old," but also included the typically forgotten "middle"—this helped to investigate the impact of issues along a generational continuum and avoided reifying the young/old dichotomy.

The meeting identified many problems and issues faced within the women's movement and began to develop strategies to strengthen and renew our movements by harnessing the power of all the generations. The dialogue concluded with participants making plans for what they wanted to do to address multigenerational issues within their organizations

and movements. They committed to share the outcomes of the discussion in their personal and professional circles upon returning to their respective countries. Most participants felt that the dialogue had initiated a process of self-reflection that would continue. Further commitments were made regarding documenting and sharing histories as well as successes and challenges in leadership transition. A project was initiated to *write out power*, focusing on abuses of power within organizations and movements.

We have identified a range of strategies for making organizations more hospitable to members of all generations, including enabling newer actors to take on greater responsibility, which is vital to regenerating feminist leadership. It is also important to develop new, advisory roles for current leaders who are transitioning out and identify resources to ensure financial sustainability so we can benefit from the wisdom and experience of 'older' actors while creating space for newer leaders. Integrating a multigenerational approach to leadership development will certainly contribute positively to initiatives that build and sustain feminist movements globally.

At this stage, the priority is to integrate these strategies into our work at the organization, network, and movement level. We need to make sure that feminist values and principles inform our institutional policies and practices just as they guide our activism.

DEBATING PARTICIPANTS MATTERS

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CREA advances women's human rights and the sexual rights of all people by building leadership, strengthening civil society organizations, influencing social movements, expanding discourses, and creating enabling social and policy environments.

The Center for Women's Global Leadership (CWGL) develops and facilitates women's leadership for women's human rights and social justice worldwide. CWGL's programs promote the leadership of women and advance feminist perspectives in policy-making process in local, national and international arenas.

The Youth Coalition aims to ensure that the sexual and reproductive rights of all young people are respected, guaranteed and promoted, and strives to secure the meaningful participation of young people in decision-making that affects their lives, by advocating, generating knowledge, sharing information, building partnerships and training young activists with a focus on the regional and international levels.

C R E A

Center for Women's  Global Leadership


youth coalition