

THE **GAME** CHANGER



HOW A
**FEMINIST FOREIGN
POLICY** COULD
TRANSFORM
SOCIETIES



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Erin Hunt, Mines Action Canada

Editor: Madeleine Winqvist

Graphic design: Gabriel Holmbom

CONCORD Sweden

Address: Högbergsgatan 31 A

116 20 Stockholm, Sweden

www.concord.se

CONCORD
SWEDEN

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INTRODUCTION

While this report is being written, the world is facing several intertwined crises that are hindering progress and creating a backlash against human rights globally. The aftermath of the pandemic, growing hunger and poverty, the climate and nature crises and the rewinding of democratic progress are all factors with a particular negative bearing on gender equality. At this point in our history the need for bold, progressive leadership is absolutely crucial. A feminist foreign and development policy has the potential to make real change by addressing the root causes of inequalities, and the uneven power relations that exaggerate the impacts of these crises, or even create them, and by contributing to a more just, peaceful, sustainable world. This publication points the way for governments and donors ready to embark on that mission.

The purpose of this publication

Behind this publication are sixteen Swedish civil society organisations coordinated within the CONCORD Sweden platform. We hope it will encourage a dialogue between policy makers and civil society, in particular EU policy makers and EU civil society, on how to step up the work on gender equality globally, sparking an interest in and building understanding about feminist foreign and development policy.

No standardised format setting out what a feminist foreign and development policy should contain has yet been agreed, and the differences between existing policies are plenty.¹ However, our interactions over the last eight years with Sweden's feminist foreign policy have put us in a unique position to identify a number of concepts and approaches that are key to a genuine, and successful, feminist foreign and development policy. When they are applied, the policy can be a powerful tool, capable of transforming lives, changing harmful structures and norms and building inclusive, sustainable and peaceful societies. For us, a true feminist foreign and development policy is:

- gender-transformative: always aiming to change unequal power relations and transform discriminatory and harmful norms, practices and structures
- intersectional: addressing all multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and oppression
- grounded in a human rights-based approach
- about local leadership
- dependent on strong global leadership
- coherently implemented and should guide all policy areas relating to and linked with foreign policy

An EU feminist foreign and development policy

The EU still has a long way to go when it comes to systematically and coherently implementing gender-transformative and feminist principles in all areas of its external actions.² However, there is not only an urgent need, but also a window of opportunity, for the EU and its member states to step up their efforts in this area. As an influential global actor driven by core values such as equality, democracy, and respect for human rights, the EU has the potential to be a progressive global leader for gender equality within a feminist foreign policy framework. The current Gender Action Plan for external actions (GAP) III,³ the EU Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2019-2024⁴ and the LGBTIQ Equality Strategy for 2020-2025⁵ are all important political initiatives to build on.

A potential feminist foreign and development policy for the EU has in fact already been explored by various EU policy makers. For example, in 2020 the EU parliament adopted a resolution in which it called on member states to adopt a feminist foreign policy.* In 2019 the Greens/European Free Alliance group in the European Parliament published a study on what a feminist foreign policy could mean for the EU,⁶ while the Socialists and Democrats Group has called for a feminist foreign policy in their position paper on gender equality and women's rights.⁷

* The European Parliament resolution on Gender Equality in EU's foreign and security policy was adopted by 477 votes to 112: European Parliament, European Parliament resolution of 23 October 2020 on Gender Equality in EU's foreign and security policy, October 2020, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2020-0286_EN.html

How it started – and how it is going

In 2014, Sweden's feminist foreign policy was introduced by the government in office at the time* in order to raise gender equality higher on the Swedish political agenda and to cement Sweden's position as a global leader in this field. Although previous Swedish governments did have a long-standing commitment to gender equality, this feminist foreign policy introduced more extensive political objectives for it and put pressure on the Swedish Foreign Service to mainstream gender equality throughout its organisation and into other policy areas.**⁸

Since then, several other countries – including Canada, France, Luxemburg, and Spain – have followed suit. Recently, both Germany and the Netherlands have embarked on their own respective processes of developing feminist foreign policies.⁹ Furthermore, international non-state actors and research centres like the Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy and International Center for Research on Women, together with numerous scholars, have taken on the task of problematising the concept and developing it further.¹⁰

About this publication

In the following chapters we will illustrate why the above concepts and approaches are essential to a feminist foreign and development policy, what they mean, and how they can be applied in practice. To complement our arguments and analysis we will highlight experiences from the feminist foreign policies of former Swedish governments and from Spain and Canada. For this latter piece we are grateful for support and contributions from La Coordinadora, the Spanish Development NGO Coordinator, and Mines Action Canada.

Finally, language and words matter. In line with our intersectional perspective we aim to be inclusive, as we believe that a feminist foreign and development policy should be intersectional, anti-racist and de-colonial. Patriarchal structures affect everyone, irrespective of gender, and they affect us differently owing to multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. In this publication we sometimes refer to women and girls, or women, girls and LGBTQI persons, or women and girls in all their diversity – remaining mindful, however, that gender is a constructed, non-static concept, and always recognising that intersecting factors other than gender also matter.

* In 2014 the government consisted of the Social Democratic Party and the Green Party.

** Shortly after entering office in October 2022, the new government of Sweden, made up by a coalition of two conservative and one liberal party, governing with support from the nationalist party Sweden Democrats, declared not to continue with a feminist foreign policy, although pledging to be a strong voice for gender equality and women's and girls' rights in the world. See for example: *BBC, Sweden ditches 'feminist foreign policy'*, 19 October 2022; CONCORD Sweden, *Analys av höstbudgeten 2022*, 8 November 2022, <https://concord.se/analys-av-hostbudgeten-2022>

ABBREVIATIONS

EBA	Expert Group for Aid Studies (Sweden)
GAP	Gender Action Plan
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GGR	Global Gag Rule
ICPD	International Conference on Population and Development
IRCC	Agency for Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada
LGBTQI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Intersex
MDPA	Multidimensional Poverty Analysis
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
SGBV	Sexual and gender-based violence
Sida	Swedish International Development Agency
SRHR	Sexual and reproductive health and rights
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WPS	Women, Peace and Security

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1 A Transformative Approach to Gender Equality

Gender stereotypes and restrictive norms around femininity, masculinity and sexuality lead to exclusion, discrimination and human rights violations. Policies that aim to challenge destructive social and gender norms require support from a holistic and gender-transformative approach that works to tackle social norms at all levels: individual, community/local, societal/national and global.

POLICY MAKERS SHOULD ADOPT A TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACH consistently in all areas of foreign policy, including those that essentially build on and fuel harmful gender norms such as arms exports, defence and security policies. These areas are traditionally dominated by masculinity norms of power, control, and violence, where a shift to a gender-transformative approach would imply a complete turnabout in analysis, strategies and goals.

2 Using an Intersectional Approach to Address Inequality and Power

Because of overlapping systems of discrimination, injustice and abuse, people, especially women and girls, are subjected to multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and marginalisation based on their sexual orientation, gender identity and/or expression, physical ability/functionality, age, socio-economic status, ethnicity, minority status, religion, or other systemic inequalities. An intersectional approach entails understanding these overlapping systems and power relations and contextualising policies and programmes to the particular needs of certain groups, and it must be both a core principle and a key analytical tool in a feminist foreign and development policy.

POLICY MAKERS SHOULD PROMOTE SYSTEMIC CHANGES, including decolonialisation and a fair distribution of resources, with special emphasis on groups of people who are facing intersecting forms of discrimination. They should also consult with a wide range of feminist movements, organisations and actors within civil society.

3 Putting Human Rights Front and Centre

A human rights-based approach places rights at the centre of any policy or action and includes key principles like the interrelatedness of human rights, meaningful participation, accountability, and – last but not least – non-discrimination and equality. It focuses on those who are being marginalised, excluded or discriminated against. In this regard, a human rights-based approach is a tool for emphasising the underlying reasons for the failure to uphold human rights, and the root causes of gender inequalities, as well as for ensuring that duty bearers and other actors, including businesses, fulfil their obligations to all rights holders.

POLICY MAKERS SHOULD ENSURE THAT A HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH is applied to all actions, strategies, and policies within the policy's framework, for example by making sure that all people, including groups who are facing different and intersecting forms of discrimination, are meaningfully consulted and are asked for their consent in processes and matters that affect their lives.

4 The Role of Local Leadership for Gender Equality

Local feminist leadership is a prerequisite for defending the rights of women, girls and LGBTQI persons and challenging destructive social norms. Feminist movements play a crucial role in standing up to attacks on the democratic space – which puts them at risk of facing various forms of violence themselves. Despite their importance, local feminist organisations are grossly underfunded.

POLICY MAKERS SHOULD SUPPORT LOCAL SOLUTIONS and invest in people working for sustainable change in their own communities, including by setting clear funding targets. They should offer safe spaces for local women, girls and LGBTQI persons and should put in place effective mechanisms that allow them to participate meaningfully in decisions that affect their lives. Supporting local civil society actors who are setting their own agendas is also fundamental to furthering the decolonisation of the development cooperation sector.

5 Global Leadership for Gender Equality

The merging of conservative, religious and cultural traits with the rise of extreme nationalist and populist movements is one of the key drivers of the global backlash against gender equality. To counter this movement while pushing the gender equality agenda forward requires both a global voice and strong leadership, that dare to lead the way and that can contribute to building alliances, especially globally.

POLICY MAKERS SHOULD SHOW GLOBAL LEADERSHIP by calling a foreign policy “feminist” to allow for a more consistent strategic voice at the global level. They should ground a feminist voice in national and domestic policies and measures and all aspects of the work of government departments. Leadership is about being at the forefront and, inclusively, leading the work for women’s and girls’ rights and gender equality globally in times of opposition and polarisation by taking bold, innovative actions.

6 Gender-Neutral is a Myth – No Area is Exempt

Several policy areas – such as infrastructure; water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH); security; defence; migration; climate change and environment – have remained largely gender-blind. No area, however, is gender-neutral. Applying a strong gender analysis to all areas of foreign policy, including those often disconnected from gender equality, needs to be the essence of a feminist foreign and development policy.

POLICY MAKERS SHOULD INVEST IN GENDER EXPERTISE and institutional ownership at all levels and layers of the foreign service, from headquarters to embassies, ensuring that policy commitments on gender equality are matched by financial commitments and that there are dedicated funds for gender-transformative actions in all policy areas.



CHAPTER

1

A TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACH TO GENDER EQUALITY

Transforming harmful gender norms at all levels


Gender inequality has long been associated with persistent discriminatory social norms* that prescribe power relations and roles between men and women in society. This chapter will show that, to make a real change, a feminist foreign policy needs to have a transformative approach that analyses, tackles and changes deeply rooted harmful social norms at all levels, including at the highest policy level.

Gender stereotypes and restrictive social norms around femininity, masculinity and sexuality directly affect individuals' choices, freedoms and capabilities. They lead to both direct and indirect exclusion, discrimination, and human rights violations. For example, norms on what it means to be a “good girl” or a “real man” lead to strict control of female sexuality, movement, and overall life choices. The norm for being a “good girl” often means restricting girls' interaction with boys, which can limit their freedom of movement. This also affects women's and girls' access to both political and economic rights. Meanwhile, a “real man” is not expected to “behave like a woman”, nor to have a relationship with another man: this attitude can lead to harassment and violence against persons with non-conforming gender identities or sexual orientations. Social norms that dictate that the appropriate roles for women and girls are as caregivers, and that their bodies belong to their husbands, result in the marginalisation of women and girls and their exclusion from a range of areas, including education, economics/work and decision-making at all levels.¹¹ At the highest political level, masculinity norms of power, dominance and violence still shape many political areas, not least security agendas, and limit the transformative potential of foreign policies.

**THE NORM FOR
BEING A “GOOD
GIRL” OFTEN
MEANS RESTRICTING
GIRLS’
INTERACTION
WITH BOYS**

Today there is a wealth of evidence to show that transforming social norms is key to gender equality.¹² Gender-transformative approaches are strategies that create opportunities to challenge destructive social and gender norms. They address systematic oppression and gendered power inequities – the unequal distribution of power and control between people of different genders. For a sustainable shift in unequal gender power relations, and to achieve gender equality for all, positive social norms must be strengthened and harmful social norms must be trans-

* Social Norms are reinforced via social approval for the people in the group who adhere to them and ostracization and punishments for the persons who go against them (Overseas Development Institute 2022)




formed. We need to tackle the structures reinforcing the discriminatory social norms that lead to women's, girls' and LGBTIQI persons' rights being violated, removing these norms both from their daily lives and also from the higher policy areas that dictate how we see the world and, in turn, what political priorities we adopt. A feminist foreign policy should underline the intention to go beyond merely reforming existing structures – to transform them.

To illustrate the need for feminist foreign policy to be transformative, this chapter will zoom in on two areas: policy on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) as one area, and security policy as the other. The cases relating to SRHR/SGBV will demonstrate the need for transformative norm change at all levels: global, national, community and individual. The case of security policy will show that some foreign policy areas in themselves essentially build on and fuel harmful gender stereotypes, including masculinity norms around power, dominance, and violence, where a shift to a gender-transformative approach would entail a complete turnabout in analysis, strategies and goals.

Applying a gender-transformative policy approach to SRHR and protection against SGBV

Harmful social norms lead to a range of human rights violations – including violations of SRHR such as access to contraceptives and safe abortions and access to comprehensive sexuality education, the right to bodily autonomy and protection against SGBV – with devastating consequences for the lives and health of all people. To transform social norms, including those that hinder the fulfilment of SRHR, we must tackle them holistically. With a feminist foreign policy, states should support transformative norm change at all levels, including by having a strong voice in the global arena arguing for greater recognition of the role that social and gender norms play for the fulfilment of SRHR and protecting people from SGBV. A transformative approach means facilitating changes from the bottom up, for example through support to interventions that tackle individuals' and communities' attitudes and beliefs relating to the importance of controlling girls' bodies and sexuality. It also means support for changes from within, by supporting programmes that empower and mobilise young people to recognise gender stereotypes and to advocate for SRHR, both their own and those of others, and for their right to be protected from SGBV. Finally, harmful gender norms should also be transformed from the top, through policy and financial support for work on eradicating the discriminatory policies and laws that have come about because of harmful social norms and gender stereotypes. For example, tackling legal barriers to young people's access to sexuality education and contraceptives, or the criminalisation of LGBTIQI persons.



**TO TRANSFORM
SOCIAL NORMS,
INCLUDING THOSE
THAT HINDER
THE FULFILMENT
OF SRHR, WE
MUST TACKLE
THEM HOLISTI-
CALLY**

Unpacking harmful gender norms in security policy

As will be further elaborated in Chapter Six, a feminist foreign policy is interlinked with and must engage with all areas of foreign policy. One policy area that often lacks a feminist lens and that systematically excludes gender-transformative approaches is security policy, including what comes under national security and defence policy. Security is often understood as defending nation-states against external enemies, by military means.¹³ Such a security focus is often built on masculinity norms such as control, violence and dominance, overlooking the harm done to individuals and groups of individuals – which is taken into account in what is known as human security.¹⁴

National security and defence may, for example, promote the arms trade but ignore both the effects of weapons proliferation on human security and how these effects are gendered. The proliferation of weapons fuels armed conflict and increases insecurity, poverty, and inequality.¹⁵ Weapons reinforce unequal power relations, both between men and women and between a state and its people. They increase the risk of violence against women, girls and LGBTQI persons, in both the private and public spheres, and cause them to limit their movements and participation in public and political areas for fear that they are not safe, and may be attacked. Exporting arms to conflict areas, and to states that violate the rights of women and LGBTQI persons, for example, legitimises a state's oppression and reinforces harmful gender norms and power relations.

THE PROLIFERATION OF WEAPONS FUELS ARMED CONFLICT AND INCREASES INSECURITY, POVERTY, AND INEQUALITY

A transformative approach to security policy recognises and unpacks the close interlinkages between “traditional” security policy and harmful gender norms, thereby revealing how such a policy builds on and cements these norms. A transformative approach shifts the focus from defence and national security to human security. It promotes preventive and peaceful methods, including disarmament and arms control, across all elements of foreign policy. It also looks at how gender norms affect disarmament and arms-control policies and practices, and shows how we can change these norms to facilitate progress in both security and gender justice. In fact, a transformative approach to security policy can be a powerful tool for promoting just, gender-equal and peaceful societies free from violence.

EXAMPLES AND LESSONS FROM SWEDEN'S FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY

Holistically tackling social norms to fulfil SRHR

Social norm change is recognised as a key strategy in Sweden's work for gender equality in general and for the fulfilment of SRHR in particular. Sweden's commitment to challenging discriminatory norms that make it difficult for women, girls, young people and LGBTI persons to enjoy their SRHR and be protected from SGBV has been spelled out in the government's annual action plans for feminist foreign policy and in the 2019 Handbook on Sweden's feminist foreign policy.¹⁶ Examples of Swedish support for transformative social norm changes at the individual and community levels include large-scale support for the UNWomen programme entitled Engaging Men and Women for Gender Equality, and the MenEngage Alliance international network. The work of the MenEngage Alliance includes reconstructing a non-violent identity for men, encouraging the adoption of healthy masculine behaviours and empowering men to be positive and supportive partners and role models for other men, including on SRHR, in the eradication of SGBV and in men's health in general.¹⁷ Sweden has also supported a large number of programmes and partnerships investigating new (and established) strategies and methodologies for social norm change that involve religious and cultural institutions, gatekeepers and community leaders as key agents in changing the harmful gender norms that contribute to SGBV and violations of SRHR.

Support from the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida) for changing social norms and attitudes toward LGBTIQ minorities on societal and legislative levels has included support for LGBTIQ communities and organisations, together with interventions to target particular politicians and decision makers who are seen as receptive – or at least not hostile – to LGBTIQ rights. Such programmes have involved targeting celebrities, well-known artists and media, and using social and traditional media to reduce stigma and change norms.* Sweden also helps fill evidence gaps relating to social norm change and the linkages with gender equality and SRHR, including by supporting the research on SRHR and social norms undertaken by the Expert Group for Aid Studies (EBA).¹⁸

* For example through the framework agreement with RFSU, support to RFSU's partners and the long term cooperation with UNDP and ILGA

Sweden's arms policy: building on and cementing harmful gender norms

There is a fundamental conflict of interest between feminist foreign policy, with its stated ambition to be transformative, and an arms trade that instead cements harmful norms and policies. The Swedish law on arms exports lacks a clear gender equality perspective, not to mention a transformative approach.¹⁹ Sweden's arms trade policy essentially builds on traditional masculinity norms around national defence, power and dominance. The current implementation of the policy neglects factors such as how arms can be used for violent oppression or to uphold harmful norms and structures²⁰ that threaten human security and gender equality. The policy and its implementation also lack an analysis of the gendered effects of state resources being spent on armaments and militarisation rather than being invested in common goods, such as health-care and SRHR, education and other areas central to achieving gender equality.²¹ Exporting arms to countries with high levels of gender inequality and gender violence legitimises the governments and policies of these countries, and risks undermining parallel efforts for gender equality being made under foreign policy.*

* In the years of Sweden's feminist foreign policy, Sweden exported arms to among others Brazil, Hungary, India, Pakistan, the Philippines, United Arab Emirates and Qatar, despite clear knowledge of abuses of women's rights in recipient countries. See: Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), *Submission to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 80th [77th] session, Review of Sweden, 2021* for discussions on gender equality and arms exports in these specific cases. For a current list of recipients see Government of Sweden, Government Communication 2021/22:114, *Strategic Export Controls in 2021 – Military Equipment and Dual-Use Items, 2022*, <https://www.regeringen.se/4ad571/globalassets/regeringen/dokument/skrivelse-202122114-eng.pdf>

RECOMMENDATIONS

A feminist foreign and development policy with a transformative approach should:

- ➔ Contribute, including through financial support, to strengthening actors at all levels who are working to address the stereotypes, norms and attitudes surrounding masculinity, femininity and sexuality that currently hinder the fulfilment of a range of human rights, including SRHR and the right to be free from SGBV. This includes strengthening the capacity of organisations contributing to SRHR and LGBTQI, girls' and women's rights, and those focusing on the role and engagement of men and boys, to help change rigid, harmful social norms at individual and community level. It also includes supporting the introduction of policies that address deep-seated discriminatory norms and harmful gender stereotypes, prejudices and practices²² and the eradication of gender-discriminatory laws and policies.
- ➔ Apply a feminist and transformative approach consistently in all areas of foreign policy, including in security policy – a policy area that essentially builds on and fuels harmful social masculinity norms relating to control, violence and dominance. This should include challenging patriarchal structures and prioritisation in arms exports, defence, and security policies. Human security should be made the focus of these policies.

ORGANISATIONS THAT HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO THIS TEXT:

The Swedish Association for Sexuality Education (RFSU), The Swedish Peace and Arbitration Society, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) Sweden

EXAMPLE: CANADA

Canada's Efforts to Apply a Transformative Approach to Security and Defence Policies in line with its Feminist Foreign Policy

Canada announced its feminist foreign policy in 2017. Despite promises of a policy document outlining the policy's principles, approach, and commitments, to date no such document has been published. This has contributed to the failure to implement the policy in a holistic and structured way. However, the key components of Canada's feminist foreign policy are: Feminist International Assistance Policy; the Women, Peace and Security National Action Plan; the trade agenda; and the Defence Policy (Strong, Secure, Engaged). Some of these policy documents demonstrate an intent to incorporate a transformative approach.

For example, Canada's National Action Plan for Women, Peace and Security, which also applies to the agency for Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), addresses the issue of masculinity norms in the military by working to change the institutional culture of harmful and inappropriate sexual behaviour in the Canadian Armed Forces.

In its effort to create a legal framework that focuses on human security, rather than merely national security, Canada has also demonstrated an ambition to bring a new, more transformative perspective to security policies. One example was at the Convention on Conventional Weapons in 2018, when the Canadian government hosted a side event²³ with civil society groups to provide an intersectional feminist analysis of autonomous weapon systems. The event focused on how weapons that target people, based on pre-programmed algorithms that are racialised, gendered and otherwise categorised, will result in the violation of human rights and human security.

ORGANISATIONS THAT HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO THIS TEXT:

The Swedish Peace and Arbitration Society



CHAPTER

2

2021 Pride Parade in Skopje, North Macedonia.
Photo: Maja Janevska Ilieva

USING AN INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH TO ADDRESS INEQUALITY AND POWER

Understanding and revealing how multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination play out over the course of a life allows policies and programmes to be designed in ways that promote inclusivity and transformative change. An intersectional approach, therefore, should always be a guiding principle for a feminist foreign and development policy. In this chapter we will show why, and give concrete examples of what it means in practice.

What is intersectionality about?

In policies and programmes, girls, women and LGBTQI persons are often regarded and treated as homogeneous groups, which is far from the reality. Depending on their physical ability/functionality, age, sexual orientation, gender identity and/or expression, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, minority status, religion or other systemic inequalities, they are subjected to different levels of discrimination and marginalisation.²⁴ This is because of the intersecting and multiple forms of discrimination, injustice and abuse, but also of privilege, power, protection, advantage and potential for empowerment.²⁵

An intersectional approach is about understanding these overlapping, and often marginalising, categories, systems, and structures in the context of particular power relations. It helps us avoid generalisations about women, girls, LGBTQI persons and feminism, as it considers the interconnected nature of social and political categorisations, and their interactions, as they apply to a given individual or group. Intersectionality must therefore be a core analytical principle and guide for action in a feminist foreign and development policy. An intersectional approach requires us to contextualise policy and programme planning and implementation and adapt them to the particular needs of particular groups.

**AN INTERSECTIONAL
APPROACH REQUI-
RES US TO CONTEX-
TUALISE POLICY
AND PROGRAMME
PLANNING AND
IMPLEMENTATION**

Meaningful consultations – the foundation for intersectional and transformational change

As a guide to evidence-based policy development, researchers²⁶ have highlighted the many dimensions that global and local inequalities impose on marginalised and excluded populations, including those that relate for example to racism and coloniality. Local, national and regional systems of inequality can reflect and are often exacerbated by global hierarchies, historical systems of oppression, and geopolitical disparities and inequalities in wealth, power and privilege.* For a policy to be transformative and designed from an intersectional perspective, it needs to be rooted and founded in meaningful consultations with people who have been discriminated against in various ways.²⁷ This is equally important in order to avoid reproducing a discourse embedded in historical and/or colonial inequalities.

INTERSECTIONALITY – HOW IT CAN BE APPLIED IN PRACTICE

An intersectional approach to social protection

Social protection involves measures that support individuals and households such as pensions, child benefit, unemployment benefit and parental leave, as well as access to health-care and social insurance, all of which are essential in advancing gender equality.

It is crucial that social protection schemes systematically consider intersecting factors, such as sexual orientation, gender identity, age, disability, etc., and how they can limit people's access to social protection.²⁸ However, social protection schemes, for example those run by the World Bank²⁹ and other development banks, are often targeted at people who are defined as extremely poor. The targeting methods used to identify “the poorest” are often inaccurate, as they exclude large sections of the intended target groups³⁰ and seldom take into account intersecting/overlapping vulnerabilities or the fact that poverty is multi-layered.

IT IS CRUCIAL THAT SOCIAL PROTECTION SCHEMES SYSTEMATICALLY CONSIDER INTERSECTING FACTORS, SUCH AS SEXUAL ORIENTATION, GENDER IDENTITY, AGE, DISABILITY

From an intersectional perspective, universal social protection systems would be a more effective way to reach groups at risk of being left behind. They are nationally defined policies and programmes that give equitable access to all people and protect them throughout their lives from poverty and risks to their well-being and livelihoods. A concrete example is universal pensions, which are provided on an equal basis for all individuals above a certain age. In this way they accommodate intersectional factors of gender and age and more accurately reflect women's unpaid care work – thereby increasing gender equality between older people.³¹

* Although the ideas underlying intersectionality existed before, the concept as such was introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989: Kimberlé Crenshaw, *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics*, University of Chicago Legal Forum, 1989. <https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1052&context=uclf>.

Applying intersectionality to health-care, including SRHR

Health-care policies and practices to a large extent still lack an intersectional approach that would take into account for example the social, psychological, cultural or religious influences on health and well-being. This means that health-care services are developed, and related decisions are made, without any consideration of the complexities of people's lives, especially the lives of those whose identities are racialised and genderised.³²

To change this, health-related programmes and policies need to consider all discriminatory factors and must be adapted accordingly. This is work that starts with identifying and consulting the people who are being excluded, or are at risk of exclusion, to make sure the interventions address the discriminatory elements and do not replicate them.

Health personnel must also have the ability and know-how to combat stigma and, without prejudice or discrimination, to meet the needs and respect the rights of people seeking health-care – whether for sexual and reproductive health or their overall health, treating everyone with respect regardless of, for example, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or sex characteristics, age, HIV status, migration or refugee status, or ethnicity. Furthermore, health and SRHR services need to be designed to take different intersecting factors into account, and for example to apply a life-course perspective. This could mean making youth- and LGBTQI-friendly services available for adolescents and LGBTQI persons, and adapting services to the particular needs of the elderly, without prejudice. Like many health challenges older persons grapple with, these are the result of sexual and reproductive events earlier in their lives, such as early or frequent pregnancies, female genital mutilation or sexually transmitted infections.³³

Intersectionality and discriminatory legislation – the example of religious family law

To ensure that women, girls and LGBTQI persons, in all their diversity, enjoy their SRHR for example, programmes and policies need to consider the religious and cultural contexts and then direct efforts towards changing the practices that discriminate. In other words, an intersectional perspective is needed in order to understand the impact of religious and customary family law on gender equality. Family law can often regulate issues such as the legal age of marriage, the right to enter freely into a marriage, marital rape, divorce, custody of children, inheritance laws – all crucial for ensuring equal rights, economic empowerment and the right to citizenship. In many countries, issues of marriage and family relations are further regulated by religious family law, and handled by religious courts, or by customary law, which is handled by traditional courts. Hence religion and culture can, depending on the context, be either a protective or a discriminatory factor for women, girls and LGBTQI persons. This gives power and responsibilities to leaders and institutions. Engaging in dialogue with religious and cultural actors is therefore an important strategy when addressing these types of intersecting factors of discrimination.

EXAMPLES AND LESSONS FROM SWEDEN'S FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY

Support for social protection

Promoting social protection systems that apply a gender perspective and encompass the whole life cycle has been a priority for Swedish feminist foreign policy and is seen as a means to strengthen women's and girls' economic opportunities and rights.³⁴ Sweden's support for social protection almost doubled between 2018 and 2021, as the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted both the need for it and its importance. Although most programmes that are supported are poverty-targeted, the vision is to support the establishment of universal social protection systems through the gradual expansion of coverage. This work, if designed well, has the potential to make an impact on everyone, in spite of intersecting vulnerabilities across a person's life cycle.

Moreover, through its development cooperation Sweden is supporting countries aiming to expand social protection gradually, working with actors focusing on non-discrimination and inclusion. These investments are often the result of a Multidimensional Poverty Analysis (MDPA) used by Sida to analyse the different dimensions of poverty and their effects on different groups. In this analysis, the linkages between social protection and crisis mitigation have become evident.³⁵ MDPA takes intersectionality into account when analysing power and voice and trying to understand socio-cultural hierarchies and relations, and it thus recognises multiple grounds for discrimination such as gender, age, caste, class, religion, ethnicity and sexual identity.³⁶

An intersectional analysis in words and practice

Since 2019 intersectionality, including a life-cycle perspective, has featured more prominently in the action plans of feminist foreign policy, for example in work to help societies recover from COVID-19.³⁷ The handbook on feminist foreign policy published in 2019 states that “the policy is based on intersectionality” and the “reality in which people live”.³⁸ The efforts to integrate a stronger intersectional perspective into Sweden’s feminist foreign policy has also been noted by researchers. For example, one study observed that there were “signs of an emerging reformed discourse that strives to transform postcolonial powers”.³⁹ The same study, however, also highlighted that much of the policy tended to “reproduce essentialist discourse”⁴⁰ rather than actually challenging and seeking to transform post-colonial and other power structures, adding that: “Sweden’s FFP pays limited attention to the importance of other factors than gender, and mainly builds on mainstream liberal feminism”.⁴¹

In its in-depth strategy report for the Global Strategy for Gender Equality and the Rights of Women and Girls 2018-2022, Sida recognises that, in its future gender-equality work, the intersectional approach needs to be developed and deepened.^{42, 43} The same report, however, shows some gaps in its intersectional analysis. For example, where it discusses gender disaggregated statistics and gender equality research, there is no reflection on how categories other than sex/gender, and to some extent age, are important.

The examples above highlight the important attempts made to integrate an intersectional approach into key feminist foreign policy documents and strategies, including in development cooperation, and the importance attached to partners in this work. They also illustrate how challenging it can be to be consistent and apply an intersectional analysis across all policies, strategies and practices, at all levels.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A feminist foreign and development policy that applies an intersectional approach should:

- ➔ Be guided by an intersectional perspective, ensure policy coherence and a multi-disciplinary analysis within and between all policy areas, such as development cooperation, foreign affairs and foreign trade.
- ➔ Promote systemic changes, including de-colonisation, and a fair distribution of resources, while focusing on the fair treatment of all people, with special emphasis on those groups who are often marginalised or discriminated against; and in doing so, always consider intersectional factors of discrimination.
- ➔ Include and consult with a plurality of feminist movements, organisations and actors within civil society, including faith-based actors, addressing specific contexts and the qualitative aspects of equality, discrimination and justice. Recognising that no one size fits all, every policy, strategy and programme needs to consider who is represented, and should meaningfully consult those who have critical knowledge about strategies of resistance and transformative change.
- ➔ Make sure that statistics and other data collected are disaggregated according to sex, gender, age, sexuality, class, religion, race and other intersecting categories, and that decisions and interventions are based on an analysis of the data and designed accordingly. To do this, it is necessary to support and train local organisations and researchers safely to collect data on communities that are hard to reach or are politically marginalised.

ORGANISATIONS THAT HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO THIS TEXT:

ACT Church of Sweden, Afrikagrupperna, PRO Global/Pensioners without Borders

EXAMPLE: SPAIN

ROOM FOR CIVIL SOCIETY AND POST-COLONIAL DISCOURSE IN SPAIN'S FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY?

In 2021 the Spanish government published its feminist foreign policy.⁴⁴ While to date Spain has limited experience of implementing its feminist foreign policy, one noteworthy aspect is the substantial engagement of Spanish civil society actors in the discussions on it. This engagement has also drawn attention to the involvement of local feminist movements and organisations from the global South, as well as to the need for a decolonial discourse on feminist foreign policy.

Spanish civil society – an important voice in the debate on feminist foreign policy

Through a system of advisory councils with representatives from civil society, the private sector and unions, Spain has an institutionalised mechanism for multi-actor consultations on new legislation and other types of documents.⁴⁵ This has allowed for important space for civil society dialogue on various political topics. Through its working group on gender equality, the Council for Development Cooperation has made important contributions to the discussions around Spain's feminist foreign policy. In February 2022, for example, the gender working group presented a detailed report⁴⁶ with recommendations for how to progress the feminist foreign policy. In addition to acting through the gender working group, Spanish civil society organisations have also engaged directly with the government.

A key ask, which has been put forward by Spanish civil society and the Council for Development Cooperation's working group on gender equality, is the genuine inclusion of local feminist movements from the global South. The demand is that local feminist organisations and movements should have a real say in setting the political priorities for Spain's policies, local as well as global, including when the priorities for Spanish feminist foreign policy are being set.

A multidimensional perspective – a way to ensure local voices and knowledge

To ensure that local perspectives are to the fore, the Council for Development Cooperation's working group on gender equality proposed a "multidimensional" perspective to guide the feminist foreign policy. This perspective encompasses decolonial and intersectional feminist concepts that challenge not only patriarchy but also structural racism and post-colonial power relations, while strongly emphasising local knowledge and contextual diversities. Feminist foreign policies launched so far have been criticised for not taking these aspects sufficiently into account.⁴⁸ While Spain's feminist foreign policy does include an intersectional perspective, and highlights the need for inclusive partnerships, it does not go so far as to put local civil society movements at the centre of the policy or to attach much importance to challenging discriminatory power structures.⁴⁹

With a push from civil society, attention has, however, been paid to the issues of colonialism, post-colonialism, racism, etc. in the debate around the feminist foreign policy. An initial exchange of views on these same topics has also taken place between the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation and civil society organisations.



CHAPTER
3

Community health workers South Africa.
Photo: Hope Khoza, Afrikagrupperna

PUTTING HUMAN RIGHTS FRONT AND CENTRE

A human rights-based approach is about the realisation of rights as laid down in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights instruments.⁵⁰ Human rights are inherent in all human beings, regardless of race, sex, age, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, sexual orientation or any other status.

A human rights-based approach is an important tool for tackling the root causes of inequalities and advancing human rights for all,⁵¹ and it should therefore be a basic component of a feminist foreign and development policy. It includes key principles such as the interdependence and inter-relatedness of human rights, equal and meaningful participation and inclusion, accountability, and non-discrimination and equality.⁵² In this chapter we will look into some of these principles and see how they are relevant for and applicable to a feminist foreign and development policy.


Non-discrimination and equality – it's about tackling the root causes

A human rights-based approach focuses on those who are being marginalised, excluded or discriminated against, and on the root causes of the non-realisation of their human rights. This often requires an analysis of harmful gender norms, different forms of discrimination, and power imbalances.⁵³

In line with the non-discrimination principle, all interventions within the framework of a feminist foreign policy thus need to analyse and address the underlying root causes of gender inequalities. For instance, if a priority is to strengthen women's, girls' and LGBTQI persons' economic empowerment and to increase their participation in the labour market, the root causes that hinder these groups from playing an equal part in economic development must be carefully analysed and firmly addressed. Root causes here could be harmful gender norms that limit women's, girls' and LGBTQI persons' SRHR, expose them to SGBV, keep girls out of school, or cause an unequal distribution of unpaid household work. Focusing on root causes also gives an understanding of how different rights are interrelated.

Similarly, while women play an essential role in food production, this sector is in many ways challenged by gender-blind rules and practices that exacerbate inequalities. When sup-

A HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH IS IMPORTANT FOR TACKLING THE ROOT CAUSES OF INEQUALITIES



porting small-scale farmers and their role in food production, underlying discriminatory factors affecting access to and the control of natural resources (such as seeds or land) need to be tackled. Restrictions placed on seed sharing, and the centralised decision-making around reproduction, lead to homogeneity and monopolised ownership. This in turn creates vulnerability, as it makes local – often female – farmers reliant on external, often expensive inputs.

Accountability towards rights holders

Accountability is a means to make sure duty bearers fulfil their obligations towards rights holders in a society. Duty bearers have three levels of obligation: to respect, protect and fulfil every right. This means they need to apply the “do no harm” principle and to work pro-actively to make sure all people, without discrimination, can fully enjoy all their rights.⁵⁴ This all-encompassing way of working must be applied to all the policies and actions of a feminist foreign and development policy.

Although states are the principal duty bearers, non-state entities, such as business enterprises, also have a responsibility to respect, protect and fulfil people’s rights.⁵⁵ Even though business activities have profound and multiple consequences, very often negative ones, for the lives of people and for the environment, the existing standards on business and human rights are voluntary. One way for governments to ensure that businesses are accountable to rights holders is through rules and obligations on human rights and environmental due diligence. Besides taking measures to prevent corporate human rights violations, governments also need to make sure that businesses can be held (legally) liable when harms do occur, and that victims have access to justice.⁵⁶ Processes are underway at the UN and EU levels to regulate business activities with binding rules on business and human rights. At the EU level, a directive known as the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive has been proposed, while a treaty that is more victim-centred, and focuses on respect for human rights and redress, is being negotiated at UN level.⁵⁷ Governments with a rights-based feminist foreign and development policy should pro-actively support both of these processes and work to make them as strong as possible.⁵⁸ Any treaty or regulation emerging from the processes needs to adopt a gender-transformative approach and include clear commitments to tackle the disproportionate impacts of corporate activities on different groups of people, especially on groups often discriminated against or being marginalised.



PROCESSES ARE UNDERWAY AT THE UN AND EU LEVELS TO REGULATE BUSINESS ACTIVITIES WITH BINDING RULES ON BUSINESS AND HUMAN RIGHTS

The right to be meaningfully consulted

“Nothing about us without us”, goes the famous quote.⁵⁹ Meaningful participation is a key principle in a human rights-based approach, and is just as much a means as a goal in itself.⁶⁰ And – as discussed in the earlier chapter on intersectionality – it is fundamental to a feminist foreign and development policy.

So, to ensure accountability there must be mechanisms for meaningful participation and complaints in place, whereby rights holders, civil society and other stakeholders can hold duty bearers to account. This applies to all interventions in all areas. For example, when states or businesses are planning corporate activities that affect local communities – e.g. plantations, extractive projects like mining, or large-scale energy projects – the communities should be meaningfully and safely consulted and asked for their consent. Special efforts must be made to reach and consult those groups that are often discriminated against or marginalised, such as women, LGBTQI persons, children, elderly people and indigenous and/or rural communities. Owing to discriminatory gender norms, women for example are far less likely to be landowners,⁶¹ to have secure access to land or to have proper security of tenure or title deeds. Even in countries where laws and regulations state that women have a right to own land, in practice they are often excluded and alienated from ownership of land. Then, lacking title to land, women are often excluded from and disproportionately affected by insufficient consultation. These types of barriers, which can limit the right of different groups to be consulted and to say no, must be fully addressed.

**TO ENSURE ACCOUNT-
ABILITY THERE MUST
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EXAMPLES AND LESSONS FROM SWEDEN'S FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY

A not-so-feminist foreign trade policy

The Swedish government recognised the importance of trade in a rights-based feminist foreign and development policy by developing a feminist foreign trade policy that encompassed several key areas such as the formation of trade agreements, the design of trade-related development cooperation and the importance of addressing women's working conditions.⁶² This acknowledgement, however, was not fully reflected in practice.

A burning issue in the field is to move from voluntary standards to binding rules on business and human rights. Instead of showing leadership in pushing for the development and implementation of binding rules, Sweden voted against the UN resolution on the elaboration of an international human rights instrument that would be legally binding on businesses. Since then, Sweden has remained passive, failing to show commitment in the process of developing the treaty. While claiming to be waiting for a joint EU position, Sweden was not one of the EU member states that collaborated to push the EU for a negotiating mandate.⁶³ Regarding EU's own due diligence directive, Sweden welcomed the initiative and held the position that a gender perspective would be reflected in the directive, but remained critical to that the directive would go beyond due diligence obligations to cover corporate governance also.

Despite developing and adopting binding rules for business regarding human rights and the environment, to fulfil their human rights obligations states need to ensure policy coherence. This applies to all areas, not least trade and investment agreements.⁶⁴ Even though trade agreements formed part of its feminist foreign trade policy, Sweden continued to sign – and to abstain from withdrawing from – trade and investment agreements awarding unilateral rights to corporations to bring claims against states through private, non-transparent court mechanisms that very often undermine the rights of the people. This unique, privileged form of dispute settlement, available to foreign investors under many international investment agreements, enables these investors to bypass domestic court systems, while host states confront high costs in defending claims, regardless of outcome.

It should be in the interest of all governments with a rights-based feminist foreign and development policy to ensure the supremacy of human rights and to address the negative impact that trade and investment agreements could have, both on the full enjoyment of human rights and on the state's ability to respect, protect and fulfil these rights.⁶⁵

High-level meeting put spotlight on environmental defenders

Three hundred and fifty-eight human rights defenders were murdered around the world in 2021, a majority of whom worked on land, environmental and indigenous rights.⁶⁶ To highlight this situation, in 2022 Sweden, together with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, hosted a High-level event on Environmental Human Rights Defenders at the 49th session of the UN Human Rights Council. The meeting was in line with a commitment made by the Swedish government in the 2021 feminist foreign policy action plan to give visibility to the situation of women environmental human rights defenders, including through multilateral normative work.⁶⁷

The event highlighted the dangerous circumstances for environmental human rights defenders, who faced increasing threats, intimidation and violence. Representatives of groups directly affected had been invited, and the two environmental defenders who took part in the panel were both women. The meeting outcome document,⁶⁸ drafted by Sweden and signed by more than sixty other countries, highlighted that women environmental human rights defenders – especially in rural and indigenous areas – are often at the forefront of movements protecting the environment. It also acknowledged that women face additional, gender-specific obstacles, risks and reprisals, including sexual and gender-based violence. It called on states to ensure that support for measures to ensure security and safety for environmental human rights defenders must be gender-responsive and adapted to the particular gendered attacks, threats and harassment that they encounter. The event is a good example of how duty bearers can demonstrate accountability and compliance with their human rights obligations including by listening to the people, the rights holders. It also illustrates an acknowledgment of how the right to live free from any form of violence or threat, the right to organise, the right to a healthy environment and women's rights are all interdependent.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A feminist foreign and development policy that puts human rights front and centre should:

- ➔ Properly apply a human rights-based approach to all actions, strategies and policies within its framework, including by ensuring the primacy of human rights obligations over trade and investment agreements.
- ➔ In line with the principle of accountability, push for and engage in processes to introduce binding rules on business and human rights (including human rights and environmental due diligence), with strong gender perspectives, both at EU and UN level.
- ➔ In line with the principle of full, equal and meaningful participation, include and ensure meaningful consultation of all affected people, without discrimination, and seek their consent, in all processes and matters that affect their lives.

ORGANISATIONS THAT HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO THIS TEXT:

Afrikagrupperna, the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (SSNC),
We Effect



COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKERS

COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKERS ARE SICK AND TIRED OF ABUSE

R3 500 IS AN INSULT FOR COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKERS

COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKERS DESERVE BETTER WORKING CONDITIONS

COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKERS ARE SICK AND TIRED OF ABUSE

R3 500 IS AN INSULT FOR COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKERS



CHAPTER

4

Members of The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation's
partner organisation WORIIWA in Liberia.
Photo: Wolobah Sali

WHY LOCAL LEADERSHIP IS ESSENTIAL IN BRINGING ABOUT CHANGE

Local civil society actors and leadership by them are prerequisites for gender equality, and for the rights of women, girls and LGBTQI persons as they defend and legitimatise the importance of gender equality and rights, either by being watch-dogs or by challenging and transforming harmful gender norms and roles. In doing so they must be able to operate freely and be protected in an increasingly hostile environment of anti-gender actors. Furthermore, local civil society actors need to be recognised as relevant contributors to change. The fundamental principles underpinning Swedish feminist foreign policy – known as the four “Rs” – have aimed to improve women’s Rights, Representation, Resources and Reality⁶⁹ – essentially to support, promote and listen to a wide range of local civil society organisations so they can accelerate national and global movements and enable sustainable, gender-just change. In this chapter we will elaborate on these practices which can enhance local leadership.

How to support local leadership in achieving change

Strengthen a wide range of local actors for gender-just sustainable change: Research demonstrates that a strong women’s movement is the single most important factor in bringing about strong legislation for women’s rights and measurable improvements in gender equality on the ground.⁷⁰ It is important to support local civil society actors so that they can set their own agendas, produce local knowledge, and hold local and national decision makers to account. This also helps to decolonise the development cooperation sector and guide it away from donor-driven agenda setting. Initiatives that derive from local needs and are driven by a diverse range of local actors – women, girls and LGBTQI persons in all their diversity – reinforce the relevance, legitimacy and sustainability of any action. For instance, local women peace activists have unique insights into what drives conflict, and are therefore key actors in conflict prevention and local mediation. We can see a similar trend in disaster risk reduction, where women and gendered minorities are well placed to identify gender-responsive early warning signals.⁷¹

SUPPORT LOCAL CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS SO THAT THEY CAN SET THEIR OWN AGENDAS

Funding of diverse feminist initiatives and movements: Very few donors of development aid have specific targets for funding women's rights organisations, and as a result only 0.57 per cent of all bilateral aid goes to women's rights organisations or institutions,⁷² while even less funding is allocated to LGBTQI organisations.⁷³ Considering the important contribution local organisations make to sustainable change, the overall funding for these organisations must increase. In addition, it is important to look at the type of funding they are given. If they are offered more long-term funding, e.g., for core support, local organisations working for gender equality can build and play a better part in local and national movements and networks that help change legislation, norms and practices over time, rather than just carrying out activities within the limited period of a project. Also, it is important to recognise that donor requirements are frequently too demanding for smaller organisations or networking initiatives to manage. Alternative means of support must be considered. Finally, support is often provided in silos, separating for instance initiatives to end gender-based violence from those tackling climate change. This creates obstacles for local networks wishing to collaborate and grow stronger together.

DONOR REQUIREMENTS ARE FREQUENTLY TOO DEMANDING FOR SMALLER ORGANISATIONS

Meaningful participation of feminist actors: All too often, feminist actors do not have access to the spaces where important decisions are made.⁷⁴ This is especially true when it comes to topics that are not perceived as traditional "women's issues", such as security policy. The prevailing gendered hierarchisation of experiences and expertise can be seen in the obstruction of women's participation in peace processes. Local women peacebuilders say that they are not perceived as having the "right" qualifications to participate in consultations, whereas men's knowledge is often welcomed simply on the basis that they have borne weapons.⁷⁵ The exclusion of women's rights organisations, and other organisations working for gender equality in political processes and policy dialogues, has far-reaching consequences as it leads to gender-blind policymaking and undermines the vital role women play in advancing inclusive and local efforts, whether it be in peacebuilding, food production or climate adaptation. To promote meaningful participation by women, girls and LGBTQI persons, embassies can play a constructive role by providing safe meeting spaces, protection, and visibility, and moreover by acting as a conduit between local and international actors. If locally anchored feminist activists are invited to events such as high-level meetings and seminars, the position and status of these local actors will most likely be raised.

Ensure the protection of women human rights defenders in a shrinking space:

Without protection mechanisms such as a safe space, women's, girls' and LGBTQI persons representation in political and public life will remain constrained, which in turns means that gender and women's perspectives will be left out of policymaking and decision-making. Fighting for your rights in many contexts today brings on slander, attacks, threats, and even death. Generally, these are directed at a person, even if the target is the organisation they represent or work for. Many women human rights defenders and women environmental human rights defenders report several different forms of pressure. By political actors, they are criticised for bringing aboard "foreign values" that conflict with perceived traditional gender roles. From their families, communities and organisations, they are subjected to misogynist comments as means to miscredit their political agency. Discrimination and violence are often perpetrated with the aim of ending the defenders' activism and engagement.⁷⁶ It is vital to recognise these challenges and provide support and a means of protection, including a safe space where individuals or organisations can recuperate so that they can continue their important work.

EXAMPLES AND LESSONS FROM SWEDEN'S FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY

Local actions for legal protection from gender-based violence

One of the objectives in the previous government's annual action plans for Swedish feminist foreign policy was to ensure women's and girls' freedom from physical, psychological and sexual violence. In its action plans, the government pledged to work with all relevant actors, including civil society, to achieve this goal.⁷⁷ In line with this, Sweden has funded several local women's rights organisations working to improve legislation and accountability in order to eradicate SGBV. For example, in Liberia the Swedish government has funded ten local women's rights organisations and LG-BTQI organisations through the Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation. Several of these organisations had been campaigning for a new Domestic Violence Bill. Their campaign lasted five years, and by means of countless sit-ins, demonstrations and advocacy meetings it finally succeeded in August 2019.⁷⁸ One year later, in August 2020, the same organisations took to the streets again to protest at a surge in sexual violence as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. This led the President of Liberia to declare a state of emergency and launch several tools to address the violence. Several embassies in Liberia, including the Embassy of Sweden, also supported the appeal by the local women's rights movement to put pressure on the Liberian government to implement the new legislation and the roadmap.⁷⁹

Local actors striving for peace

Another objective in the action plans of Sweden's feminist foreign policy has been the participation of women and girls in preventing and resolving conflicts and in post-conflict peacebuilding. The mid-term review of the 2015-2018 action plan conducted by the Foreign Service highlighted Sweden's contribution to the incorporation of a clear gender perspective in Colombia's peace agreement.⁸⁰ Findings confirm the role Sweden played in ensuring a clear gender perspective in the agreement through consistent support to local civil society organisations, and women rights' organisations in particular.^{81, 82} A significant change in terms of women's participation occurred following a landmark National Summit of Women for Peace in October 2013, organised by nine Colombian women's organisations and backed by UN Women and key development

partners such as Sweden.⁸³ At this summit around 450 representatives of Colombian women's organisations from almost every department in the country came together and put their key demands to the negotiating parties, including women's participation at every stage of the peace process. Following the summit, the government of Colombia appointed two women as plenipotentiary negotiators and established a sub-commission on gender. This support from states like Sweden, including reliable funding and space for dialogue, has been essential for the women's movement in Colombia and its work to achieve sustainable peace.

Local engagement in ensuring land rights for women

Women's and girls' economic rights and empowerment was a key priority of the previous Swedish government and was reflected in its feminist foreign policy action plans⁸⁴. Ensuring socio-economic rights for women, girls and LGBTQI persons, in all their diversity, requires a multifaceted approach. This includes for example legal reform, transforming gender-discriminatory norms and behaviours, women's empowerment and addressing women's and girls' lack of access to various resources such as land and natural resources. Through its development cooperation, Sweden has supported local initiatives focusing on this type of work. For instance, with support from the Swedish organisation We Effect, a women's rights organisation strengthened the capacity of six local organisations to address gender equality in Tanzania. Together with women and men in the communities, these organisations succeeded in securing tenure and land rights for women. Key strategies for change were building on women's own knowledge and experiences, providing them with safe space, engaging men in transforming traditional harmful norms and roles at household and community level, and ensuring meaningful participation by women in decision-making. By being elected to land committees, and with their new leadership positions, women could amplify their voices in decision-making processes and justify their land and tenure demands.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A feminist foreign and development policy for local leadership should:

- ➔ Support local feminist organisations and networks in setting their own agendas which derive from local needs in order to achieve long-term, sustainable change. This will further decolonise development cooperation and move away from donor-driven agenda setting.
- ➔ Set (higher) targets for flexible and core funding which can support stand-alone or interlinked initiatives by local women's rights organisations, small grassroots initiatives, networks, and a wide range of civil society actors working on women's or LGBTQI rights, or gender equality.
- ➔ Establish mechanisms for safe dialogue between government actors and local women, girls, LGBTQI activists and women (environmental) human rights defenders to ensure transparent and accountable decision-making grounded in local actors' lived reality and recommendations.
- ➔ Recognise how the shrinking democratic space affects women human rights and environmental defenders and LGBTQI activists differently from their male counterparts, by providing support for protection, including the means to create safe spaces in which to recuperate and to strategise collectively.

ORGANISATIONS THAT HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO THIS TEXT:

The Kvinna Till Kvinna Foundation, We Effect, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) Sweden



A photograph of a large crowd of people at a conference or event. Many individuals are holding up small, rectangular cards or badges. The scene is captured in a monochromatic yellow-green color scheme. In the foreground, a woman with long dark hair is smiling and holding up a card. To her right, a man with glasses is also smiling and holding up a card. The background is filled with more people, some holding up cards, creating a sense of a large gathering.

CHAPTER

5

GLOBAL LEADERSHIP FOR GENDER EQUALITY


To succeed, efforts in pursuit of equality, democracy and justice have historically required the courage and commitment of champions and leadership. The struggle for gender equality and the rights of girls and women of all ages and circumstances is a prime example of this. In this chapter, we will elaborate on key strategies for a successful global leadership on gender equality and highlight elements and approaches that we believe are key to sustainable, equal, and just outcomes.

Although the world is far from being on track to achieve gender equality by 2030, some important progress has been made over recent decades. This progress would not have been possible without the efforts of girls' and women's human rights defenders and other civil society organisations, dedicated researchers, and a handful of governments that took on the role of global leaders, tirelessly raising their voices for gender equality in global fora. As gender equality is a highly politicised issue, it needs countries and other global actors and alliances to dare lead the way and ensure continued dialogue.

Resistance and contestation around gender equality in the global landscape

Gender equality and the advancement of women, girls and LGBTQI persons, in all their diversity, are essentially issues of democracy and human rights. Nevertheless, these issues have long been severely contested. This is not a new development. Since the 1990s, gender equality and the notion of gender have been under attack globally. In some contexts, even the word "gender" has become an excuse to withdraw from global frameworks such as the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women or the Istanbul Convention, creating significant obstacles to the advancement of women's, girls and LGBTQI rights. The anti-gender movement objects to the concept of gender for a variety of interlinked reasons, but a central argument is that the term is a denial of biological sex and that it undermines the natural (or divine) character of the heteronormative nuclear family. Underlying these arguments is fear of the challenge that gender equality and justice pose to patriarchal orders and traditional, dominant power positions.

One of the drivers behind the current backlash in the global context is the merging of conservative religious and cultural attitudes with the rise of extreme nationalist and populist movements. Well-resourced ultra-conservative politicians, journalists, civil society organisations, academics and religious leaders have joined forces with authoritarian or populist



leaders.⁸⁵ Jointly they use their wealth and influence to gain strategic ground in many parts of the world. Europe is no exception. These trends of opposing gender as a concept, and gender equality, are clearly manifested in, for example, how negotiations in the UN⁸⁶ and the EU have repeatedly broken down when it comes to using the language of gender and, in particular, when access to safe and legal abortion, sexuality education and LGBTQI rights are discussed, but also issues such as climate change and food security, land use, and human security. In the UN, it has been decades since gains in key resolutions were made to advance and safeguard sexual and reproductive rights. In this contestation and backlash, girls' and women's rights defenders and organisations, organisations working for the advancement of SRHR and the rights of LGBTQI persons, together with other civil society groups pushing for gender equality, are facing multiple forms of violence world-wide – including death, threats, and slander – simply for standing up for these universal rights. In this challenging context, global voices and strong leadership that help build alliances are needed at all levels – local, national, regional and – most especially – global.

Key strategies for global leadership, and the role of governments

There are some central strategies and approaches that have been key to advancing the gender equality and women's rights agenda in global forums.

Say it out loud: To begin with, calling a foreign policy “feminist” allows for a more systematic and strategic voice at the global level. By labelling a foreign policy “feminist”, a government is placing gender equality high up on its political and diplomatic agenda and signalling clearly that it is working in opposition to the anti-gender movement. The very term challenges the patriarchal tendency of applying simple binary, polarising categorisations to people, places and relationships. It enhances opportunities for a government to build alliances with other actors, thereby becoming more inclusive, and it promotes more systematic and strategic approaches in global processes and forums. A feminist foreign and development policy creates strong incentives for a resolute and persistent global voice that, regardless of resistance or opposition, keeps the dialogue alive and pushes the gender equality agenda forward. To swell a systematic and strategic global voice, a feminist foreign and development policy requires an overall framework and a range of tools for strategic thinking and action around gender equality and the power hierarchy – at all levels, including globally. It should include a concrete, time-bound action plan that obliges the government to detail out its priorities.

Walk the talk: Furthermore, there is a need to “walk the talk”. A global feminist voice needs to be grounded in national and domestic policies and measures, urging for key women's rights and gender equality goals to be achieved domestically, and not only abroad at diplomatic missions or in development cooperation. A country's highest political lead-

ership, including the prime minister or president and all relevant ministers, must make it their priority to promote gender equality systematically, in all contexts; including internally, within government departments, with and in parliament, as well as with the general public and in all international contexts. For a unified, systematic and strategic voice that is heard globally, feminist foreign and development policy should involve capacity-building within the entire foreign service at headquarters, embassies and other missions abroad, creating valuable opportunities for continuous dialogue and learning among staff as well as with civil society, private actors, researchers and others who should be seen as key partners.

Find common ground and build alliances: As polarisation on the subject of gender continues to intensify, strategies both to combat this polarisation, and to safeguard gender equality in the areas where it is most contested, are crucial. Being a global leader on contested issues such as LGBTQI rights, SRHR and SGBV entails acting in a way that moves positions forward while, at the same time, not fuelling polarisation. This is not an easy task, and it involves engaging with a broad range of actors, whether governments, civil society, researchers and academia, foundations, private actors or multilaterals. Meanwhile, defending and promoting the UN frameworks that safeguard gender equality and the rights of women, girls and LGBTQI persons requires such a leader also to build bridges: to engage in dialogue with actors belonging to either the group of moderates, a silent majority or “the movable middle” on issues relating to SRHR, LGBTQI and women’s rights – in other words, those who do not necessarily oppose these rights, but who are not pushing for progress on them either. One strategy that can combine safeguarding sensitive areas with reaching out to groups not yet convinced is to find entry points, for example under the large umbrella of SRHR or LGBTQI rights. This strategy involves breaking up a sometimes triggering “package” of rights and focusing instead on particular substantive issues and challenges that may affect women’s and girls’ SRHR over the course of their lives.⁸⁷ Examples of these are, inter alia, what we can do to end child, early and forced marriage, teenage pregnancy, maternal mortality, female genital mutilation, and violence against widows and older women. To move the agenda forward, what is needed is to find a path of mediation and diplomacy that combines being vocal, and clear, and not backing down on contested areas with, at the same time, finding common ground and entry points for dialogue and learning. These aims are not mutually exclusive in terms of a feminist foreign and development policy.

Be inclusive: Finally, a feminist and rights-based leader for global gender equality should strive for inclusive policy making that involves and recognises the lives, agency and knowledge generated by girls, women and LGBTQI persons “on the ground” and how their situation at different times of their lives is tied to (global) policies. Global leaders are often distanced from the reality of people’s everyday lives. Feminist global policy work should therefore include providing safe spaces where diverse voices can influence and set agendas during interactive consultations at global and all other levels.

EXAMPLES AND LESSONS FROM SWEDEN'S FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY

Systematically moving the agenda forward in an inclusive manner: the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda

Since launching its feminist foreign policy, Sweden has at least twice held important positions in international institutions which allowed it to take its global leadership on the WPS agenda one step further. The first opportunity was when Sweden held a seat at the UN Security Council in 2017-2018, the next was Sweden's chairpersonship of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in 2021. As Chair of the OSCE, Sweden used its position to push the WPS agenda in several ways. For example, Sweden set up an Advisory Group on Women, Peace and Security which consisted of politicians, academics and civil society representatives from various OSCE countries, all with in-depth knowledge of the WPS agenda.⁸⁸ This group met and advised the Chair on how to move the WPS agenda forward in the OSCE throughout the year. Secondly, Sweden appointed a Special Representative on Gender, who was allowed to stay on for the following year when Poland took the Chair. Throughout the year Sweden arranged some high-level meetings, conferences and expert exchange opportunities on the subject of the WPS. As the Chair, Sweden made a point of meeting with local women's rights organisations in almost all visits to OSCE missions, thereby helping to raise the status of women's rights organisations in the region, which led to some of them being included in certain political dialogues that had previously been closed to them.

Reducing polarisation – engaging religious actors

One of the most highly polarised UN processes where opposition to SRHR has gained a good deal of traction is within the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), where arguments about sovereignty, religion and culture are often used to prevent stronger SRHR commitments. Reducing this polarisation is crucial, and here one important strategy is to show that SRHR and gender equality on the one hand, and notions of sovereignty, religion or culture on the other, are not mutually exclusive. Sweden's commitment to the ICPD agenda remained a priority under its feminist foreign policy, with a strong ongoing emphasis on including a broad civil society voice in these spaces. For the last five or more years both faith-based

and secular civil society have been included in the delegation, and the Archbishop of Sweden was included in the delegation to the 2019 summit in Nairobi. This demonstrates that it is consistent with a feminist foreign policy to build bridges and alliances with all actors, to ensure SRHR for all. In the case of Sweden, the importance of dialogue with religious actors was spelled out as priority within the feminist policy action plan,⁸⁹ to ensure gender equality for all.

Initiating new, innovative, large-scale global initiatives for joint action: the She Decides Campaign

In 2017 Donald Trump reinstated the so-called Global Gag Rule (GGR), a policy that blocks US funds to organisations or groups that provide information about abortion rights or advocate for abortion rights (or perform abortion services). In practice, the GGR affects funding to a large range of health actors and providers, including those focusing on midwifery or maternal and newborn health in general. Immediately after the reintroduction of the GGR Sweden, together with Belgium, the Netherlands and Denmark, formed a coalition called the She Decides movement,⁹⁰ with two objectives: to raise awareness about the global consequences of the GGR and to raise funds to mitigate its detrimental financial and health impact. The campaign played a key role in formulating a clear response and kickstarting a counter-Gag Rule movement. She Decides built on the existing engagement on a particularly burning gender issue to mobilise support quickly and build alliances. Out of something that was a disaster for gender equality in the world, She Decides created a focused counter-movement of positive energy and joint action.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A feminist foreign and development policy for global leadership should:

- ➔ Label the foreign policy “feminist”. Calling it feminist allows for a more inclusive, systematic and strategic voice at the global level and places it firmly in opposition to the anti-rights/anti-gender agenda. Calling it feminist aligns it with long-term commitments and enables the development of a range of strategies and tools.
- ➔ Integrate a feminist voice into government departments, at all levels, to include feminist ownership and leadership at the highest level (prime minister/president). A feminist voice therefore needs to be rooted in national and domestic policies and implementation as well as in foreign policy.
- ➔ Collaborate and engage with a broad range of actors promoting human rights, including women’s, girls’ and LGBTQI rights, as well as SRHR and feminist, organisations and faith-based actors. This is a way to ensure strong alliances and common ground with like-minded actors, and engage in dialogue with unexpected allies such as moderate or “movable middle” states, and other actors.
- ➔ Take the forefront and, in times of opposition and polarisation, inclusively lead the work for women’s and girls’ rights and gender equality across the globe. This means constantly taking new and innovative actions that are based on clear evidence.

ORGANISATIONS THAT HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO THIS TEXT:

ACT Church of Sweden, Plan International Sweden, PRO Global/Pensioners without Borders, The Kvinna Till Kvinna Foundation, The Swedish Association for Sexuality Education (RFSU), We Effect





CHAPTER

6


GENDER-NEUTRAL IS A MYTH – NO AREA IS EXEMPT

In this chapter we will elaborate ways to incorporate a gender analysis into all policy areas that are part of and interlinked with foreign policy, as this is essential if a feminist foreign and development policy is to be credible and successful.

Since the Beijing Platform in 1995, applying a gender lens to policies and programmes has been seen as a standard approach to achieving gender equality globally.⁹¹ However, some policy areas – such as infrastructure, WASH, security, national defence, migration, climate change and environment, etc. – have to a great extent remained gender-blind. This means that power relations and factors of gender discrimination have been considerably neglected, and gender-transformative work consequently absent, in those areas – further exacerbating structural barriers and gender inequalities. For a feminist foreign and development policy to be successful and credible, a transformative, intersectional and rights-based gender analysis applied across all areas, including those that have historically been treated as gender-neutral, needs to be a core feature.

Nothing is gender-neutral – Gendered and intersectional impacts must be analysed in all political areas

A truly transformative, intersectional and rights-based gender analysis is key to understanding not only the complexity of power relations and gender-based discrimination, but also how this is manifested in and interlinked with different policy areas. Only when the interlinkages between gender and issues such as natural resources, climate change and biodiversity loss are uncovered can appropriate measures be taken. This can mean, for example, ensuring that disaster risk reduction is inclusive, or increasing women's access to and control over land, markets and other resources in the agricultural and small-scale fisheries sector. It can also mean supporting feminist movements as they challenge the destructive extraction of fossil fuels, promoting a just energy transition,⁹² or promoting the full, equal, effective and meaningful participation, representation and leadership of women and girls in all their diversity in decision-making bodies and processes on the climate crisis, pollution, biodiversity loss and environmental degradation, at all levels. This is important because women, girls and marginalised groups in many countries are disproportionately affected by and vulnerable to climate change and environmental degradation. As the main providers of food, water and fuel for their families, they are more dependent on natural resources which, thanks to the climate crisis and environmental degradation, are becoming scarce. This scarcity amplifies the existing inequalities that limit women's and girls' access to education and economic opportunities and exposes them further to health risks, for example from the burning of biomass for heating and cooking.⁹³




Furthermore, as humans are social beings, they are socialised into performing different gender roles in all segments of society – roles that always entail a power bias and vulnerability, making it important to have policies based on a gendered analysis. For instance, women and girls are responsible for 80 per cent of the world’s household water collection,⁹⁴ and are more vulnerable to abuse and attacks, in particular SGBV, while fetching water or using a toilet.⁹⁵ These are aspects that require policies to match the reality, which is never gender-neutral.

Investing in gender expertise and collective ownership at all levels

For a gender analysis to be properly integrated into all policy areas, gender expertise needs to sit across every layer of foreign services. All units within the foreign ministry, as well as other governmental bodies involved in the implementation of a feminist foreign and development policy, should have dedicated staff with gender expertise. Other governmental bodies includes departments for defense and climate and environment, as well as embassies and (semi) governmental institutions and agencies.

The responsibility for this, however, should not fall solely on gender experts. Rather, it must be shared by all staff as well as the political leaders as discussed in a previous chapter (Global Leadership for Gender Equality). This requires that knowledge about a transformative, intersectional and rights-based gender analysis is broadly spread and that collective ownership of gender equality is ensured at all levels of the institutions. For this to happen, there need to be clear guidelines on roles and expectations and a continuous investment in knowledge that is based on the needs, knowledge and lived realities of people “on the ground”. Furthermore, practical tools such as a comprehensive action plan for feminist foreign and development policy, encompassing all relevant policy areas and a follow-up system for its implementation, are needed to support the institutionalisation of ownership and accountability.



**THERE NEED TO BE
CLEAR GUIDELINES
ON ROLES AND
EXPECTATIONS AND
A CONTINUOUS
INVESTMENT IN
KNOWLEDGE**

Interlinking gender equality with other areas is a two-way street

Making sure that a gender analysis guides all policy areas requires these areas to be treated as important in achieving gender equality – and vice versa. For example, it is just as important for climate and environmental experts to feed into the work of gender equality units as it is for gender equality experts to inform other policy areas.

In international negotiations, key negotiators must work closely with gender experts, who should also be included in official delegations. Likewise, when other policy areas are the subject of international negotiations on gender equality, as in the yearly sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women, experts in those areas should be members of that delegation. This to make sure that all key interlinkages between gender and the other policy areas are fully captured.

Joining hands

Teaming up with other like-minded governments can be an important strategy when pushing for gender perspectives in areas that to a large extent remain gender-blind. In international negotiations this can mean joining or leading a group of countries that support progressive, gender-transformative language in outcome documents, declarations or similar, and pushing jointly for specific gender strategies or action plans.

Ensuring financial commitments

Integrating a transformative and intersectional gender analysis into all policies and steering documents is not enough. To have an impact, these efforts need to come with financial commitments. From 2020 to 2021, no more than four per cent of the world's total bilateral aid was dedicated to initiatives that had gender equality as a principle or a main objective, a decrease of one per cent compared to the previous period (2019-2020). It gives an idea of how grossly underfunded gender-transformative efforts are globally.⁹⁶

Another example: when governments in international discussions on security matters raise the importance of women's participation in peace processes, they must accompany the push by committing enough resources to this type of work. The failure to allocate sufficient resources has in fact been among the most serious obstacles to the implementation of the WPS agenda.⁹⁷ Research confirms that this disparity between policy commitments and the financial allocations needed to achieve them is a challenge for gender equality and women's empowerment overall.⁹⁸

EXAMPLES AND LESSONS FROM SWEDEN'S FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY

Mediation networks – an effective way to strengthen women's influence in peace processes

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, security is one policy area where there has been limited progress in integrating a strong gender perspective. Most efforts have been limited to the international policy level – this despite the proven importance of women and girls playing active roles and having real influence in peace processes.⁹⁹ In 2021, only 19 per cent of conflict-party negotiators or delegates in United Nations-led or co-led peace processes were women.¹⁰⁰ Some important steps have been taken, however, such as the setting up of the Swedish mediation network for women, introduced by the former Swedish government in 2015, within the framework of its feminist foreign policy, with the aim of increasing the number of women mediators.¹⁰¹ The launch of this Swedish network in 2015 was accompanied by the joint launch of the Nordic Network of women mediators in all five Nordic countries: Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland and Iceland. Since then, several other regions have followed suit and created their own networks for women mediators. Today we have the Nordic Network, the Fem-wise African Network, the Mediterranean Women's Network, Women Mediators across the Commonwealth, the Arab Women Mediators Network, and the Southeast Asian Women Mediators Network, all of which are part of a Global Alliance of Women Mediators.¹⁰² The spread of similar networks to other parts of the world is an important result of this initiative, and the fact that networks now exist in regions where there are conflicts means greater chances for local women mediators to be called on. The most significant impact is that it has contributed to the strengthening of women's influence and participation in peace processes and has shed light on the centrality of women's meaningful participation in efforts to achieve sustainable peace.¹⁰³ The networks have made it possible to share learning and build capacity, which has led to a greater acceptance of women in a mediating role.

Sharper focus on gender equality in climate financing and multilateral climate funds

With the introduction of the feminist foreign policy, the level of gender integration* in Sweden's climate financing increased sharply in 2014 and has remained high at an average of 85 per cent during 2017-2020.¹⁰⁴

Sweden has played an important role in pushing for ensuring gendered analysis and perspectives in multilateral environmental and climate funds such as the Green Climate Fund, the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) and the Adaptation Fund. In these funds, Sweden has worked for the development of ambitious new gender equality policies and concrete plans for their implementation, as well as for strategic recruitments to strengthen the knowledge of gender equality in these funds' secretariats. As a result of these efforts and those of other like-minded countries, the GEF adopted a Policy of Gender Equality in 2017¹⁰⁵ as well as a new gender strategy and gender action plan in 2018,¹⁰⁶ including a guide on how to advance gender equality in GEF projects and programs.¹⁰⁷

Including WASH in the Swedish feminist foreign policy

Women and girls have specific hygiene needs for reproductive health during menstruation. Therefore, menstrual health is a crucial component of WASH.¹⁰⁸ After close dialogue between the Swedish foreign ministry and the Menstrual group, led by WaterAid, this area was included in the 2022 update of the feminist foreign policy action plan. It gave particular emphasis to the connection between WASH, SRHR and girls' right to education with focus on how lack of access to WASH in schools affects many girls' school attendance and performance. The action plan further highlighted the interlinkages between lack of WASH, negative gendered roles and women's and girls' exposure to violence including SGBV.¹⁰⁹ The attention given to these interlinkages between WASH and gender equality in the Swedish feminist foreign policy was the result of persistent civil society engagement with the former government on these matters.

* Meaning projects/programmes that are marked as significant and principal (score 1 and 2) on the OECD DAC gender equality policy marker system and thus counted as gender equality focused aid by the DAC: [Minimum-recommended-criteria-for-DAC-gender-marker.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/dac/minimum-recommended-criteria-for-dac-gender-marker.pdf) ([oecd.org](https://www.oecd.org))

RECOMMENDATIONS

A feminist foreign and development policy that makes gendered interlinkages should:

- ➔ Ensure that transformative and intersectional gender analysis is applied in all policy areas and areas of work, including in security policy, climate crisis and environmental issues, as well as WASH. Furthermore, a feminist foreign policy action plan should include objectives and priorities that will enable intersectional and gendered changes to all these policy areas.
- ➔ Ensure that all departments, units, embassies, and agencies that are involved in implementing a feminist foreign and development policy have knowledgeable, dedicated, and well-resourced staff with gender expertise that feel ownership of these issues.
- ➔ Ensure that policy commitments on gender equality, including on the WPS agenda, climate, environment and WASH, are matched with sufficient financial commitments and that there are dedicated funds for gender-transformative actions in all policy areas.

ORGANISATIONS THAT HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO THIS TEXT:

Operation 1325, the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (SSNC),
WaterAid, We Effect



CONCLUDING REMARKS

Throughout the publication we have argued for and demonstrated that six concepts and approaches are essential to a feminist foreign and development policy. These concepts and approaches should not be treated as a smorgasbord from which governments and policy makers can pick and choose, based on what is convenient or best suits other political interests and priorities. The concepts and approaches outlined in this publication are all essential ingredients and fulfil functions that are important if a feminist foreign and development policy is to work.

We can also conclude that the different concepts go very much hand in hand. For example, intersectionality is about understanding how different systems of discrimination intersect and affect different groups of people differently. Addressing these systems of discrimination requires challenging and changing power relations, structures, and norms. In other words, tackling discrimination demands a transformative approach, and vice versa. Similarly, integrating gender analysis into all policy areas of foreign affairs is not about mainstreaming gender in the sense of adding “women” and “girls” into policies and programmes – it is about making sure that all policies and programmes contribute to changing discriminatory structures, behaviours, legislation, traditions, etc. In other words, it is about integrating a transformative and intersectional gender analysis coherently and systematically.

A theme that ties all six concepts and approaches together is the centrality of people’s meaningful and inclusive participation in all the decision-making processes that affect their lives. For policies, programmes or actions, whether at global, national or local level, to be transformative, intersectional and human rights-based, a diversity of local actors, including feminist, women’s rights and LGBTQI organisations must be involved. Only by listening to the voices and expressed needs of the groups of people who are directly affected by discrimination, repression, conflict or poverty, or the organisations that represent them, can there be viable solutions for transformative change. A foreign and development policy that involves local actors, and contextualises interventions according to their needs, is also equipped to challenge Western-centred, (neo)colonial and racist discourses and prevent them from being replicated.

If it incorporates the concepts and approaches highlighted throughout this report, in line with our recommendations, a feminist foreign and development policy can be a powerful and effective tool for governments and policymakers to have a substantial positive impact on gender equality and on all people and societies. A feminist foreign and development policy can create strong incentives for the emergence of a brave and persistent global voice that, regardless of resistance and opposition, keeps the dialogue alive and pushes the gender equality agenda forward.



RECOMMENDATIONS

– A Call on Policy Makers to Take Action for True Progress on Gender Equality and for Just, Peaceful and Sustainable Societies.

A feminist foreign and development policy should:



BE TRANSFORMATIVE, INTERSECTIONAL AND HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED

- Apply a transformative and intersectional approach consistently in all areas of foreign policy, e.g. development cooperation, foreign affairs and foreign trade, climate and environment, including in areas that are still to a large extent gender-blind or are regarded as areas of “national interest”.¹¹⁰

- Promote systemic change and a fair distribution of resources, focusing on the fair treatment of all people, with special emphasis on groups that are often marginalised or discriminated against, while always taking intersectional factors of discrimination into account.

- Aim to promote, ensure and secure the full enjoyment of human rights by all people, without any discrimination, and apply a human right-based approach to all actions, strategies and policies within its framework, including in trade and investment agreements.



BREAK HARMFUL NORMS

- Including through financial support, contribute to strengthening regional, national and local actors as they challenge the stereotypes, norms and attitudes surrounding masculinity, femininity and sexuality that currently hinder the fulfilment of a range of human rights, including SRHR and the right to be free from SGBV. This includes strengthening the capacity of a diversity of organisations working on gender equality and women’s rights.



PROMOTE MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION

- In line with the principle of meaningful participation, include and ensure proper consultation with a plurality of feminist movements, organisations and actors within civil society, including faith-based actors, in processes and matters that affect their lives.

- Establish mechanisms for safe dialogue between government actors and local women, girls, LGBTQI activists and women human rights and environmental defenders, to ensure informed decision-making based on these local actors’ lived reality and their recommendations.

- Recognise how the shrinking democratic space affects women human rights and environmental defenders and LGBTQI activists disproportionately. Provide support for protection, including the means to create safe spaces in which to recuperate and to strategise collectively on how to move forward.



ENSURE FUNDING

■ In line with an intersectional approach, support local solutions and the diverse range of local feminist organisations that represent various groups of women, girls and LGBTQI persons. The support should make sure to utilise these actors' potential as agents of change in the development of their own lives and societies.

■ Ensure that policy commitments on gender equality are matched by financial commitments, and that there are dedicated funds for gender-transformative actions in all policy areas. Set (higher) targets for flexible and core funding which can support stand-alone or interlinked initiatives by local women's rights organisations, small grassroots initiatives, networks, and a wide range of civil society actors working on women's or LGBTQI rights, or gender equality.



SHOW LEADERSHIP

■ Label the foreign and development policy "feminist". Calling it feminist allows for a more inclusive, systematic and strategic voice at the global level and places it firmly in opposition to the anti-rights/anti-gender agenda. Calling it feminist aligns it with long-term commitments and enables the development of a range of strategies and tools.

■ Integrate a feminist voice into government departments, at all levels, to include feminist ownership and leadership at the highest level (prime minister/president). A feminist voice therefore needs to be rooted in national and domestic policies and implementation as well as in foreign policy.

■ Make sure to find common ground and build strong alliances with like-minded actors, states, civil society, researchers and academia, foundations, and multilaterals, but also engage in dialogue with moderates and actors in "the movable middle".



MAKE IT WORK

■ Ensure that all departments, units, embassies and agencies involved in implementing a feminist foreign and development policy have knowledgeable, dedicated and well-resourced staff with gender expertise, and that ownership of gender equality and of a feminist foreign policy is institutionalised.

■ Make sure statistics and other data collected are disaggregated according to sex, gender, age, sexuality, class, religion, race and other intersecting categories, and that decisions and interventions are based on the analysis of the data and designed accordingly. To do this, it is necessary to support and train local organisations and researchers to collect data, safely, on communities that are hard to reach or are politically marginalised.

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Swedish civil society organisations' work on monitoring and influencing Sweden's feminist foreign policy 2014-2022

CONCORD Sweden monitors and influences the foreign and development policies of both Sweden and the EU to promote gender equality and the equal rights of all human beings.

A working group consisting of around 25 Swedish civil society organisations, members of the platform has monitored and advocated on the feminist foreign policy since it was introduced. One way in which the working group influenced this policy has been through regular dialogue with the government. For example, almost every year we have been invited to consultations on the yearly update of the feminist foreign policy action plans. Many of our inputs were reflected in the action plan for the following year, resulting in action plans that were stronger and more wide-ranging.

Another key method used in this work has been to produce in-depth reports in which we critically review the policy and its implementation and put forward concrete recommendations to the government and other Swedish policy makers. Our first report, "How feminist is Sweden's foreign policy?" (available only in Swedish) was published in 2016 and followed by another one in the same format the year after.

In 2017 Sweden entered the UN Security Council for a two-year term. The working group published a report ahead of that, making recommendations on how the government could use the feminist foreign policy to influence and ultimately transform the work of the Security Council. Our "Recommendations for Sweden's feminist foreign policy in the UN Security Council 2017-2018" is available only in Swedish.

The following year, ahead of the Swedish parliamentary elections in 2018, the working group published the "Civil society declaration for a feminist foreign policy", in which we describe the greatest challenges facing Sweden's feminist foreign policy, together with our definition of, and recommendations for, a feminist foreign policy.

Sweden aims to be a leader when it comes to both fighting climate change and ensuring gender equality globally. However, these issues and perspectives are not interlinked in Swedish policies. The report "Feminist policies for climate justice" (2020) describes the key links between gender and climate change that need to be understood and addressed in Swedish and international policies.

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