Feminist Accountability Framework

A Living Document for a Co-designed Plan to Move Together from Theory and Promise to Practice and Action
A Feminist Accountability Framework

To begin by always thinking of love as an action rather than a feeling is one way in which anyone using the word in this manner automatically assumes accountability and responsibility”  
— bell hooks

Glossary

In the spirit of accessibility, we have tried to utilize clear language throughout this document and minimize the use of jargon, technical language, and acronyms. However, some acronyms are unavoidable. Here is a short glossary of terms to help any reader, including one with little background knowledge of this issue, get quickly up to speed. This Framework has been translated into French, Spanish, and Portuguese.

Generation Equality Forum [GEF]
Co-Design Group [CDG]
Feminist Accountability Framework [FAF]
Commitments Dashboard [CD]
### Introduction

Only 1.9% of all funding makes it to women and girls, and these numbers shrink further for people with additional marginalized identities. For example, the amount of funding Black feminist social movements get is less than half of one percent. Accountability in this context takes on a new sense of urgency: these numbers must change, and fast, if any meaningful progress is to be made towards gender, racial, and social justice. Accountability is a particularly important principle in philanthropic and development efforts given the overlapping histories of abuse, exploitation, racism, colonialism, and violence that have often flowed from north to south, eroding trust that many communities have in foreign actors.

The Generation Equality Forum (GEF) that took place in two parts in 2021, first in Mexico City and then in Paris, set out to change the numbers above. As ambitious as the famous United Nations 1995 World Conference on Women in Beijing that marked a significant turning point for the global agenda for gender equality, the GEF convened hundreds of governments; women’s, feminist, and youth-led organizations; international organizations; members of the private sector, and philanthropies. Together, these actors along with designated GEF Action Coalition leaders launched a five-year action plan towards the shared goal of producing “irreversible, quantifiable results for women and girls in all their diversity,” while also accelerating progress on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

The 2021 GEF raised the world’s hopes, attracting, at the time of this writing, over 2,500 Action Coalition commitments and 1,000 commitments to the Compact on Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action, with a stunning aggregate estimated value of US $40B.

GEF also laid out admirable accountability principles to guide its vision: local agendas should inform commitments (interpreted here to mean the agendas of feminist grassroots groups); data should be accessible, not least so people can hold commitment makers accountable; and local communities, including historically excluded and marginalized groups, should lead their own programs and accountability mechanisms.

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1. The Women & Girls Index (WGI), October 2021
2. See Black Feminist Fund’s “The Dire State of Funding for Black Feminist Movements — and What Donors Can Do About It”
3. There are six Action Coalitions leading GEF efforts by topic: 1) Gender-Based Violence; 2) Economic Justice and Rights; 3) Bodily Autonomy and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR); 4) Feminist Action for Climate Justice; 5) Technology and Innovation for Gender Equality; 6) Feminist Movements and Leadership.
5. Global Fund for Women and our Co-Design Group also consider the inclusion of all gender diverse people essential.
Our Feminist Accountability Framework (FAF) lays out a bold, precise, and actionable plan to help move GEF’s agenda, these thousands of commitments, these billions of dollars, and these multiple stakeholders, as well as GEF’s own accountability standards\(^6\), from theory and promise to practice and action. True to our intersectional feminist values, it was co-created by a 22-member group of grassroots gender, racial, youth, and social justice leaders in the Global South, with a focus on Africa, Asia-Pacific, Latin America, and the Caribbean.

Our Co-Design Group (CDG) is led by some of the communities most affected by gender inequity and best poised to provide solutions and drive change. It is informed by the six-member Steering Committee that helped assemble, advise, and fund us. We are Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC); people with disabilities; queer, transgender, and gender non-conforming people; and key populations\(^7\). Forty-five percent of the CDG is youth-focused and youth-led. Overall, the CDG is made up of communities that will be critical for delivering on GEF’s promise of putting agenda-setting processes in the hands of those most impacted by structures of oppression, inequality, and extraction.

In addition to bringing representation of decision makers beyond traditionally well-resourced groups, the CDG also brings extensive engagement across all GEF Action Coalitions as well as expertise in grassroots mobilization; community-led processes; data collection and analysis; communications; and advocacy. Our local, national, regional, and global perspectives inform all that we do. And the bonds we have formed with one another help to facilitate work centered in justice, collectivity, and transparency.

To begin co-designing a process of feminist accountability, we needed to reach a shared understanding of needs and interests around GEF among our group and its constituents. We engaged in intensive rounds of radical listening with one another and with global advocates to discern needs and gain context.

Our mission, then, was to create the document you are reading now — a Feminist Accountability Framework that flips the current power imbalance to affirm the centrality and the expertise of affected and marginalized people, and in so doing switches our position from objects, tokens, or stand-ins to subject experts. And this story of how we got there is as important as the story of what we found and what we recommend.\(^8\)

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\(^7\) Groups within the CDG further center key populations in their programming such as people who engage in transactional sex, female sex workers, men who have sex with men, transgender people, and people who use and inject drugs. Learn more with KESWA Kenya.

\(^8\) Much of our thinking about the concept of accountability builds on the powerful work done by trailblazers before us, so we acknowledge and incorporate the extensive existing work on accountability, largely led by youth, throughout this FAF. Some of the referenced documents include but are not limited to: Africa Young Women Beijing+25 Manifesto, Young Feminist Manifesto “Purposeful” Report, and Youth and Girl-led Accountability Report: Recommendations to the Generation Equality Forum.
The sheer scale of commitments, as well as the accountability standards GEF has set, centering grassroots movements, have the potential to rewrite the playbook on what it means to truly involve all stakeholders in decision making, agenda-setting, and implementation.

What became clearer the longer we talked, from when we first started convening mid-2022 through our first large-scale hybrid in-person meeting in Cambodia in January 2023, was the link between power and accountability. We found that when those with localized, community-held expertise form true partnerships with decision-makers, we create a whole more powerful than the sum of our parts.

We note here four key areas of constructive calling in that took place within and around the GEF process:

1. Youth pushed back over tokenistic representation and reiterated the GEF Young Feminist Manifesto’s call for substantive participation defined as roles that include decision-making, leadership, strategizing, and co-ownership.
2. Jargon impeded our access to information. If we as grassroots feminists could not understand what was being conveyed through the available data, we were powerless.
3. Even once we understood the data, there was no mechanism for meaningful engagement with the commitment makers.
4. And presence minus meaningful engagement advanced nothing, unwittingly turning a process that was meant to be interactive, extractive instead.

— Jac sm Kee, Numun Fund Co-founder, Feminist Accountability Co-design Group Member

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1. GEF Young Feminist Manifesto, page 2.
We found collective frustration at these findings, particularly the exclusion of community-held knowledge which is vital to the success of any endeavor to advance gender justice. Yet we found few official modes to express and act upon this frustration.

We further investigated our findings through community discussions, including with resource partners, to better understand how a co-designed accountability mechanism could fill these gaps. Clearly we needed to move ahead with an eye towards power as a lens across all our findings. Hence our decision to enter into a co-design process rather than reinforcing a top-down power dynamic with Global Fund for Women or any other funder, partner, or ally.

Our mission, then, was to create the document you are reading now — a Feminist Accountability Mechanism that flips the current power imbalance to affirm the centrality and the expertise of affected and marginalized people, and in so doing switches our position from objects, tokens, or stand-ins to subject experts. And this story of how we got there is as important as the story of what we found and what we recommend.

We pursued three strategic undertakings to kickstart the co-design process:

1. Analyzing data from GEF;
2. Comparing and contextualizing that data with other, non-GEF individual and multi-funder commitments on gender equality; and
3. Synthesizing and mapping our findings as well as related research from our peers and allies.

Using the raw CD data, we were unable to replicate descriptives provided such as the US$40 billion in total commitments. Instead, we discovered duplicate commitments across Action Coalitions, varying degrees of information/missing information across commitments, and differing applications of the commitment coding frameworks. It was not possible on the country or Action Coalition level to assess precisely which commitments were going where, what money and resources were specifically committed, whether the total amount listed represented money that was previously pledged or new pledges, or whether that money was actually moving [being distributed].

This problem was worsened by the large number of commitments that were listed as “global,” even in the updated dataset released in September 2022, and the sizable amount of funding they represent. Though they accounted for a full 22 percent of all commitments, including seven commitment makers who made commitments over $100,000,000, there was insufficient detail to discern their purpose or implementation.

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10 Much of our thinking about the concept of accountability builds on the powerful work done by trailblazers before us, so we acknowledge and incorporate the extensive existing work on accountability, largely led by youth, throughout this FAF. Some of the referenced documents include but are not limited to: Africa Young Women Beijing+25 Manifesto, Young Feminist Manifesto, “Purposeful” Report, and Youth and Girl-led Accountability Report: Recommendations to the Generation Equality Forum.
11 Our August 2022 analysis focused on government and philanthropic commitment makers who made commitments that included a financial value. We selected this subset for having the highest financial value of all commitment maker types. Due to duplications, we analyzed 195 commitments in total. While this was with an earlier version of the data, updates in September 2022 found similar trends. We use related research to describe these.
12 CDG analysis revealed only 21 percent of commitments to be of “High” quality in terms of the completeness of information provided.
14 Amongst the seven commitment makers, they made a total of 26 commitments.
All of these information gaps present a major hurdle for those seeking to hold commitment makers accountable. Just as importantly, they impede commitment makers’ ability to make informed decisions regarding the best use of their resources.

Second, amongst the 195 commitments made by government and philanthropic commitment makers that CDG was able to analyze, the group expressed some skepticism about the correlation between funding and need, finding:

1 **An inequitable distribution of commitments:** Despite the fact that 29 percent of the world’s women and girls live in Eastern and South East Asia and 26 percent live in Central and Southern Asia, India was the only country from those regions receiving a relatively high number (five from bilateral and philanthropic funders) and value of commitments (US$319.2 million). In UN Women’s analysis, over half of all identifiable commitments are intended for sub-Saharan Africa, but less than 10 percent are slated for Latin America and the Caribbean.

2 **Significant differences in the number of commitments for different Action Coalitions:** From our initial analysis, funders had registered 78 commitments to Gender-Based Violence, while only six commitments were made to the Feminist Action for Climate Justice Action Coalition. Across all commitment makers, the number of Gender-Based Violence commitments far exceeded commitments to other action coalitions, such as the Feminist Action for Climate Justice Action Coalition, which had 210 commitments compared to Gender-Based Violence’s 804.

3 **Few commitments dedicated explicitly towards Queer, Indigenous, rural, youth-led and Disability-related issues and communities, for people who use drugs, for people who contend with mental illness, and to people who engage in transactional sex including key populations for the CDG such as Black transgender people.** For example, UN Women found nine percent of overall financial commitments were directed towards indigenous women and only eight percent for the LGBTQ+ community.

4 **Few commitments dedicated explicitly to grassroots organizations, Women’s Rights Organizations (WROs), and local organizations:** Few commitment makers in our analysis explicitly identified women’s rights or local organizations as implementing agencies, with the exception of Germany. United Nations agencies were the most frequently identified (32 commitments) by bilateral or philanthropic commitment makers as recipients.

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15. The highest number of commitments were made to countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, specifically, Uganda [7], Burkina Faso [7], and Kenya [6]. India was the only South East Asian country that registered nearly as many (5 commitments).
16. Generation Equality’s September 2022 Accountability Report
17. Commitments Dashboard, accessed February 26, 2023
18. Generation Equality’s September 2022 Accountability Report
19. Sixty-six of Germany’s commitments, and half of their overall commitments were for these implementing agencies.
In sum, the CDG analysis of commitments discerned two primary obstacles to accountability: a lack of data transparency and accessibility, plus a significant divide between current commitments and the needs and priorities of feminist organizations/actors.

The CDG analysis also found that these same impediments permeate the Action Coalition indicators and targets. The indicators did not convey information critical to feminist priorities, such as understanding progress/impact by gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender presentation, etc. Further, an emphasis on the passage of laws and policies as indicators of success neglects the simple but critically important fact that laws alone do not ensure that resources, services, or protections are accessible, particularly for the most marginalized groups.

In addition, the Action Coalition emphasis on quantitative indicators, without the benefit of the kinds of embedded and contextual perspectives local grassroots feminist organizations can provide, often led to different Action Coalitions pursuing conflicting goals. For example, the CDG identified conflicts between the Technology & Innovation Action Coalition’s emphasis on constructing multinational technology structures that may displace Black and indigenous communities, for which the Action Coalition on Climate Justice Action Coalition’s has a goal of preventing displacement of these communities.

One of our more surprising findings came out of a broader, forthcoming commitments analysis: the year 2021 did not see a significant increase in the value of commitments to Gender Equality, even with the GEF event aimed at galvanizing greater support. In fact, 2021 demonstrated a decrease in the financial value of commitments, which means even fewer funding opportunities for feminist and WROs. In 2021 alone, only 0.34% of overall aid went to “women’s rights organizations and movements, government institutions.” Our findings in the co-analysis process both corroborate and expand the findings of other peer organizations that have also sought to build understanding and accountability by improving access to/use of GEF data.

For example, Association for Women in Development’s initial commitment analysis foregrounded the CDG’s concerns about the difficulty of discerning whether the total amount listed represented money that was previously pledged or new pledges. UN Women, in their Accountability Report, noted their own data’s challenges, as well as the fact that only 26 percent of commitment-makers had completed the first round of the survey. Data 2X analyzed GEF indicators from a data perspective, highlighting the need for investing in gender data as a form of accountability. The Young Feminist Manifesto served as an important call for the needs of co-creation, co-ownership, accountability, and substantive participation rather than tokenism.

Two CDG members led prior efforts to translate data from GEF to their contexts. FEMNET’s early analysis of commitments by country offered an accessible, useful means for country partners to understand GEF commitments. Nala Feminist Collective’s work to adapt action coalition indicators from a young feminist perspective offered important alternatives to monitoring GEF’s impact. These efforts inspired the CDG’s thinking about how to re-imagine accountability in the wake of their own discoveries regarding gaps in both data and commitments. Having done our due diligence regarding data analysis, compared that data to other non-GEF individual and multi-funder commitments on gender equality, synthesized and mapped our findings, and benefited from the pioneering work and wisdom of our peers and allies, we created an alternative Feminist Accountability Mechanism—a feminist feedback loop for establishing a shared sense of data, a reframing of indicators, and the means for regular input and updates from the people it’s intended to serve.

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21 In 2019, US$842M in development funding was to “women’s rights organizations and movements, government institutions.” By 2020, this was US$776M; by 2021, US$554M (OECD statistic, accessed February 20, 2023).
Feminist Accountability Mechanism

Our Feminist Accountability Mechanism is a plan to support stakeholders from various backgrounds to seek feminist accountability. A practical, workable mechanism, it centers and supports local communities and grassroots organizations, including historically excluded and marginalized groups, to lead their own programs and accountability mechanisms.

That said, this is a living document — open to comments and feedback — and an evolving mechanism. It demands revision as we discover new and better ways to move forward. And it will, by design, include more and different regions and participants going forward.

Phase 1: Data

Our initial findings — broadly — demonstrated the need for valid and accessible data, presented in an aggregation that meets stakeholders needs for information. This includes making the available data on GEF understandable to specific audiences as well as identifying and tracking indicators about the needs and gaps that are relevant to feminist organizations and actors in that specific context. For that reason, we determined that translating the global GEF data to national and local contexts was an important first step.

We developed a country-specific focus, selecting countries that could represent the three regions, who were highly involved or implicated in the GEF process, who may be in politically opportune moments to push for change (for example, the election of progressive or feminist-friendly national governments), and/or who had a CDG member who could provide access to and context to the data and connection to key stakeholders. We aimed to create geographic representation while still retaining coherence to the original purpose by selecting countries who had either received a high value or high number of commitments, which is to say they would be places we might expect a greater impact from GEF overall.

Feminist accountability looks at the gray areas. It's about ensuring that we are not being extractive. It recognizes the interlinkages to human rights and that contribution comes at a cost. It recognizes that data is cognizant of different types of knowledge and that resources need to be invested to move beyond usual forms of data collection."

— Memory Kachambwa, Femnet, Feminist Accountability Co-design Group Member
We selected eight countries, spanning across Asia Pacific, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Latin American and the Caribbean regions: Cambodia, Fiji, India, Nepal; Burkina Faso, Kenya; Brazil, and Guatemala. For example, we chose Kenya because it has 220 commitments made in the GEF process and multiple, well-networked CDG members could lead subsequent phases of the work.

Lead CDG members for each country will lead work with consultants to identify key indicators, identify data sources, and establish a process for the regular collection, cleaning, and representation of the data in accessible and useful products. Both the data sources and the presentation of that data (content and format) will evolve through each cycle, through interpretation and feedback from CDG stakeholders. For example, as our picture of the implementation of GEF commitments in a certain context evolves, other indicators and data sources may be identified and selected to track.

Our goal is not to produce numbers without meaning. Storytelling and national citizen data, especially disaggregated data by race and gender, when available, will be used to promote the voices, perspectives, and analyses of country partners. Often considered “non-official sources of data”, they are decisive voices in determining to what extent GEF is aligned with the country-level needs of feminist movements from a community-led perspective, instead of a commitment-maker perspective.

At a regional and global level, Global Fund for Women will continue to provide connection to the broader GEF and gender equality funding landscape. While our analysis focuses on the eight countries, we will conduct the global reviews of regional trends that include and go beyond the original eight-selected countries. Through the annual reviews, we may identify if and whether additional countries may be important to add and utilize our existing structure and process to integrate them into this mechanism.

Phase 2: Feedback

To achieve gender equality and transformative change by 2026, the GEF must include those who are at the frontlines and who know the most important agendas to achieve, including actors who are currently not involved with GEF processes. An important part of our mechanism is communicating, receiving feedback, and incorporating the work of real changemakers - feminist movements.

Building on the country findings from step one, the CDG will engage a broader set of stakeholders – beyond those who have heard of GEF – with the data in support of a further analysis and contextualization through discussion around the following areas:

A Priority: What priorities do you have? How are they addressed in our findings?

B Gaps: Are there gaps in the data presented? What did we miss in the analysis?

C Sourcing: What other data can we include? For example, further disaggregated data; data from non-United Nations sources including regional, feminist, and/or academic organizations and institutions; and stories/lived experience

D Additional Context: What other additional information is needed? Does the analysis align or contradict commonly held perceptions?

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27 This includes commitments where Kenya is listed as one of several implementation countries, but excludes commitments listed to the region and/or global.
The CDG will lead the stakeholder engagement process with a participatory and community-based approach that includes accessibility, time and language justice accommodations, and creates a feminist feedback loop. We will not only gather but adjust in real time our efforts based on the stakeholder engagement in this step. No process of feedback is set in stone and we will continue listening across different bodies, timeframes, and constituents.

**Phase 3: Advocacy**

The third step in our proposed Feminist Accountability Mechanism includes leveraging steps one and two described above [gathering and socializing data, respectively] to fuel and boost powerful, impactful, evidence-based and community-led advocacy taking place at the local, national, regional, and global levels.

In the culmination of our Feminist Accountability Mechanism, we will aim, through our own efforts and with partnerships, to connect our data findings and analysis to advocates at multiple levels in support of their gender justice agendas, clearly, accessibly, and on their own terms.

In this phase the CDG will provide relevant data to advocates to boost their gender justice initiatives and efforts, on their own terms. This will take place primarily across two main areas:

1. **The CDG as a group will work to capacitate global advocates with data including with factsheets and briefings that are relevant to key advocacy opportunities. In support of gender justice advocacy at and around international fora such as the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) including by creating and sharing a public mapping of such global advocacy spaces and opportunities and capacitating advocates for success in these spaces including with data briefings, factsheets, messages, etc;**

2. **An outreach and distribution plan to ensure data reaches and engages local, national, and regional advocates, influencers, and leaders, regardless of any prior existing relationship to or understanding of international and/or formal settings such as GEF. At the country level, CDG advocacy leads in each of the 8 pilot countries will lead in creating a country-specific outreach and distribution plan, with each to determine their own participatory methodology. For example, the YP Foundation is having several in-person community-led conversations around GEF and alignment with their own agendas to inform the content and format of data that will be most useful.**

As part of these strategies, the CDG will work in partnership with in-country experts, consultants, and influencers to create and distribute media materials including graphic images, toolkits, media releases, and more in culturally appropriate and relevant contexts and in a diversity of formats. Each strategy will also deeply consider the needs of rural and/or disconnected areas whose access to the Internet is impacted by the digital divide, and also for areas or communities for whom government surveillance and crackdowns limit freedom of expression and organizing.

This phase is about pushing beyond data for data’s sake, and instead opting for “data for change.” Thus, like many parts of our Framework, this plan is an active/living plan and may change based on advocates’ feedback, input, and leadership.
Conclusion

Throughout all phases of our Feminist Accountability Mechanism, Global Fund for Women will continue to provide three key kinds of support: technical support, convening and grantmaking. Throughout the implementation phase and in line with the principles of feminist funding Global Fund for Women will further resource the CDG to continue leading this collective feminist accountability initiative that stems directly from local, lived experience and evidence-based recommendations.

Our FAF presents a new playbook for integrated involvement that licenses us to set agendas and convenings, make decisions, address conflicts, and determine, allocate, and monitor resources. It offers a mechanism with the potential to engage local feminist organizations, leaders, and activists thoughtfully, regularly, and deeply in creating priorities, in driving the analysis and interpretation of data about us, and in advocacy as we work together with multiple stakeholders to achieve irreversible, quantifiable results for women, girls, and all those impacted by gender injustice globally.

Co-Design Partners

African Women’s Development and Communication Network (FEMNET)
Articulação de Organizações de Mulheres Negras Brasileiras (AMNB)
Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE)
Asociacion civil Iniciativa latinoamericana por los datos abiertos (ILDA)
CRIOLA
Diverse Voices and Action (DIVA) for Equality
Fundacion de Accion Social e Integral Mujeres de Asfalto
Gender and Development for Cambodia (GADC)
Gender Mobile Counselling Initiative
Girls For Climate Action
Initiative Pananetugri pour le Bien-être de la Femme (IPBF)
International Youth Alliance for Family Planning (IYAFP)
Key Affected Population Health and Legal Rights Alliance (KESWA)
Nala Feminist Collective
Numun Fund
Odara Instituto da Mulher Negra
Red de Salud de Las Mujeres Latinoamericanas y del Caribe
Revista Afirmativa - Coletivo de Midia Negra e Feminista
The YP Foundation
Women with Disabilities Development Foundation (WDDF)
Young Feminist Europe
**Sterring Committee**

Athena Network  
Batonga Foundation  
Fós Feminista  
Restless Development  
The Asian-Pacific Resource & Research Centre for Women (ARROW)  
Women's Environment & Development Organization (WEDO)

**Facilitator and Resource Partners**

The Feminist Accountability Framework for the Generation Equality Forum is a multi-stakeholder initiative housed and facilitated by Global Fund for Women, and funded by Children’s Investment Fund Foundation, Ford Foundation, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and Open Society Foundation. Global Fund for Women facilitated a series of online and in-person spaces to build an accountability framework that reflects feminist priorities; create methodologies and tools to collect and analyze data for accountability; support capacity strengthening to implement the designed feminist accountability approach and advocacy strategies; and build comprehensive and responsive communications and advocacy plans.

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