

LESSONS FROM GLOBAL SOUTH FEMINIST ORGANISING

Insights from 'Our Voices, Our Futures' -
A Global South-led Consortium



OVOF Consortium Members

- ◆ CREA (Creating Resources for Empowerment and Action Inc.)
- ◆ APC (Association for Progressive Communications)
- ◆ UHAI – The East African Sexual Health and Rights Initiative (UHAI EASHRI)
- ◆ WO=MEN Dutch Gender Platform
- ◆ IM-Defensoras (Iniciativa Mesoamericana de Mujeres Defensoras de Derechos Humanos)

Partners in OVOF Focus Countries

- ◆ Bangladesh
- ◆ India
- ◆ Kenya
- ◆ Lebanon
- ◆ Sudan

OVOF External Evaluation Agencies

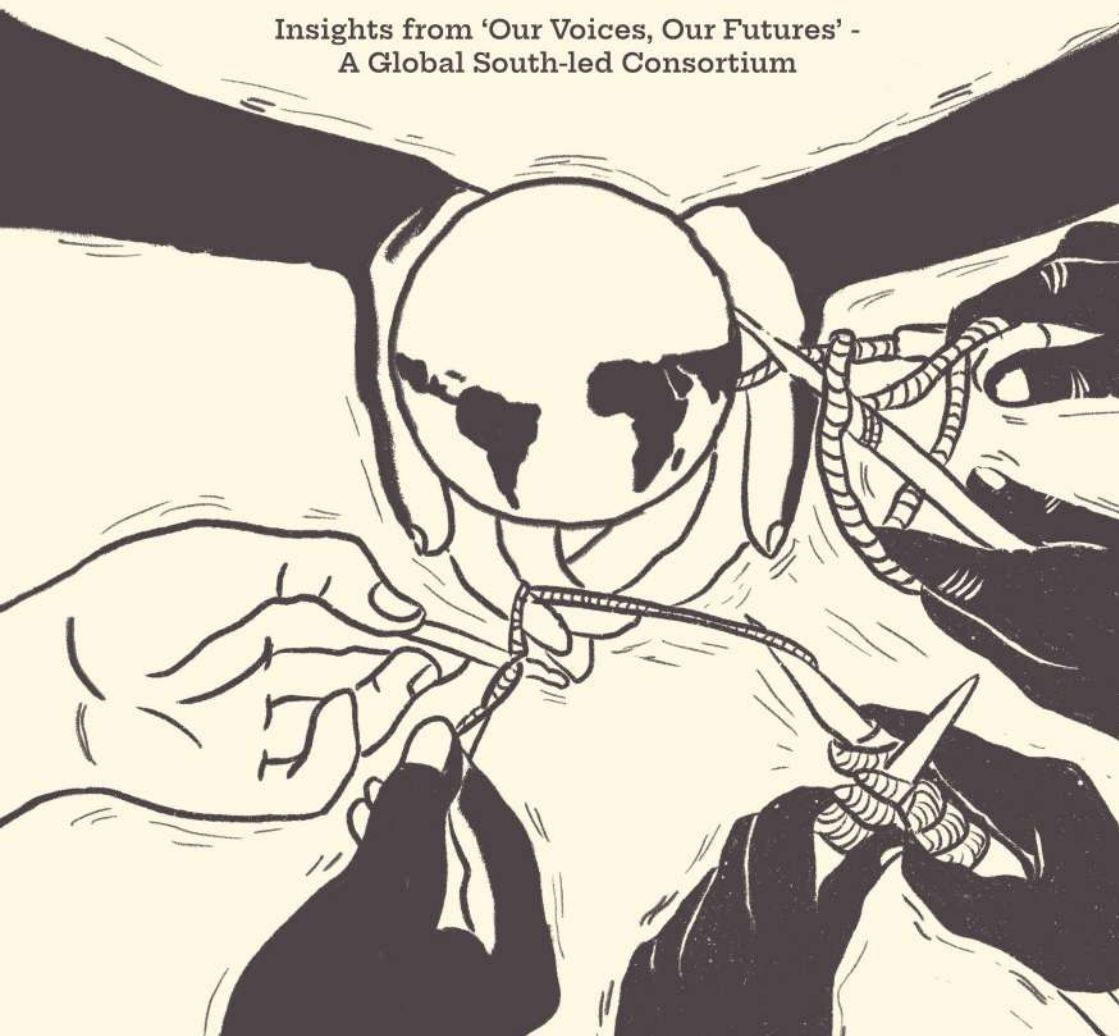
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Introduction



“The old world is dying and the new world struggles to be born.

Now is the time of monsters.”

- Antonio Gramsci

The year is 2026, and there is paranoia about a possible World War III. Black rain descends upon Iran, and the thick smog blocks out the Sun. This dystopian scene caused by IOF missiles blowing up Iran’s oil refineries follows the double-tapping of a girls’ school by US missiles, killing hundreds of schoolgirls.

Israel’s genocide has almost completely demolished Palestine. The Epstein Files, which are possibly the most triggering material for survivors of sexual violence to ever come out, are being used as psychological warfare.

The USA has gotten rid of DEI and USAID. Focus and funding in the EU are being re-prioritized towards militarisation. The Netherlands, a long-time key funder of feminist movements, quit its feminist foreign policy and implemented budget cuts.

All this has led to the worst funding crisis that feminist movements and organisations have ever faced. COVID-19 had already exacerbated pre-existing inequalities, disproportionately harming marginalised communities in the Global South.

Anti-gender and anti-rights movements are well-resourced and increasingly embedded within state institutions and international policy spaces. AI tools, which are expanding rapidly in the hands of a few Big Tech companies, are a key accelerant of violence - from Grok being asked to put women and children in bikinis, to OpenAI and Claude being used to launch those missiles at Iran and Gaza.

Hope feels like a fast dwindling resource.

Hence, it is more important than ever to remember that this hopelessness is engineered. The Disaster Capitalism Complex is a trillion-dollar economy. They invented the “shock doctrine” to use our disorientation to push their nefarious agendas with little resistance. To build hope, we must resist; and to resist, we need hope.

"Action is the antidote to despair."

- Joan Baez

Joan Baez singing 'We Shall Overcome' made it the theme song of the Civil Rights Movement. In India, it was literally translated into Hindi as "*Hum Honge Kaamyab*"; to Bengali as "*Amra Korbo Joy*"; to Assamese as "*Ami Hom Xophol*"; and to Malayalam as "*Nammal Vijayikkum*". In Bangladesh, they have another Bengali version, "*Ek Din Shurjer Bhor*". We have been using art and adapting it to our local contexts, to agitate and protest across the Global South for decades.

"Marginality is much more than a site of deprivation....

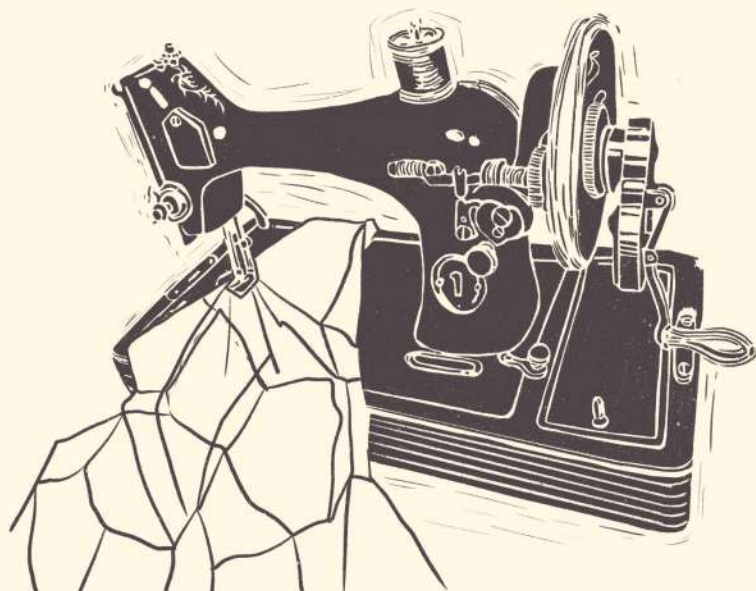
It is also the site of radical possibility, a space of resistance."

- bell hooks

Feminist movements are negotiating shrinking civic space, rising authoritarianism, and the constant pressure of survival. Despite this, organisations are demonstrating extraordinary resilience, adapting rapidly, building cross-border solidarity, and sustaining in real time. In 2021, some of these organizations from the Global South came together to create a historic consortium - '**Our Voices, Our Futures**' (OVOF).

The organisations were:

- ◆ **CREA** (Creating Resources for Empowerment and Action Inc.)
- ◆ **APC** (Association for Progressive Communications)
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OVOF worked to **amplify the voices and visibility of structurally silenced communities (SSC)**:

- ◆ **Sex Workers**
- ◆ **LBTQ** (Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer people)
- ◆ **WHRDs** (Women Human Rights Defenders)

By partnering with local organisations in the following countries:

- ◆ **Bangladesh**
- ◆ **India**
- ◆ **Kenya**
- ◆ **Lebanon**
- ◆ **Sudan**
- ◆ **Uganda**

Across 3 key arenas:

- ◆ **Online Spaces**
- ◆ **Physical Public Spaces**
- ◆ **Legal and Policy Spaces**

By defending the rights of SSCs and expanding their inclusion and participation in these 3 spaces, OVOF aimed to build the capacities of feminist movements to advance gender equality.

OVOF was **unique** among myriad interventions targeting gender equality, because it specifically aimed to achieve the inclusion of structurally silenced communities within broader feminist movements, using **arts, media, culture, technology, and direct advocacy**.

Building feminist movements was a key strategy and result of OVOF.

Through their programs' learnings, we have distilled the following insights that are hopefully useful to feminist organisers across the Global South.

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Train-the-trainer!

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Advocate!

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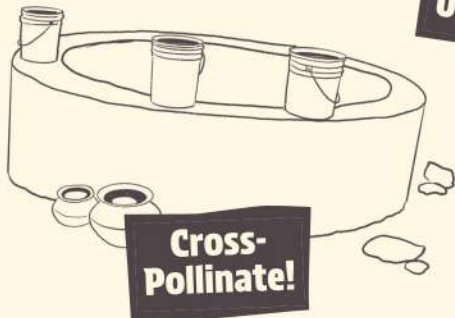


**Think Global,
Act Local!**

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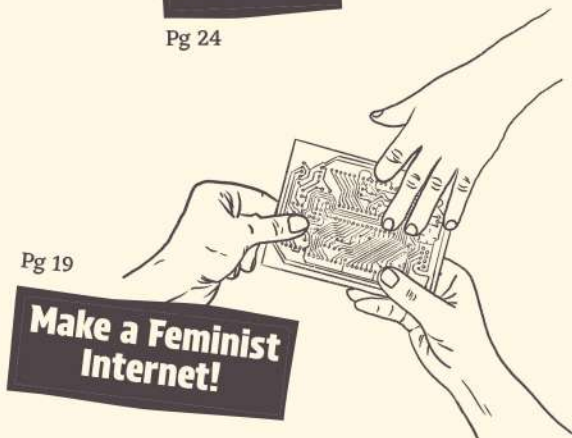
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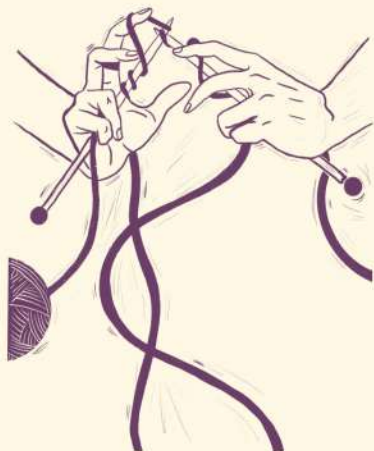
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Create Safe Spaces!

Create safe spaces by centering healing, solidarity, and community-led decision-making.

Feminist safe spaces are sites of collective power and political consciousness



Feminist movement building requires creating spaces where structurally silenced communities can move from isolation to collective identity and shared political analysis.

Bangladesh: A workshop responding to internet shutdowns during the **July revolution** didn't just teach generic digital security; it created **space for collective processing** of the implications of the government crackdown, and enabled participants to document the security and communication strategies they had adopted to stay safe and connected.

Safe spaces serve multiple interconnected purposes

Sudan: The partner's feminist hub in Cairo for activists fleeing war **provided not only physical shelter but a community for processing collective trauma, sharing stories of survival, and maintaining feminist networks** across displacement, ensuring the movement survived even when the country was torn apart.

Kenya: A **cybersecurity training** enabled the organization to not only launch SRHR campaigns but also **create a safe psychosocial support space** and partner with another organization to assist LBO members facing legal challenges.

Uganda: Wellness hubs for 275 LBO communities **combined healing with leadership development and feminist storytelling.**





Do Artivism!

Arts, media, and culture are powerful activism tools to challenge dominant narratives.

Create platforms where structurally silenced communities tell their stories on their own terms



Uganda: Three SSW activists recognized that different audiences and purposes require different media forms, so they did visual art documentation through both a **podcast series and a public exhibition.**

Bangladesh: An art exhibition was deliberately staged at **Bobby Guru Maa's dera** rather than in a conventional gallery. By bringing the public into the dera **rather than extracting Hijra stories into sanitized gallery spaces**, the initiative challenged who gets to occupy cultural spaces and whose environments are deemed worthy of artistic production. **This transformed a stigmatized space into a site of cultural production and public engagement**

India: Rural journalists from structurally silenced communities were trained to **report in local languages and dialects**, ensuring stories were told from SSC perspectives rather than being filtered through mainstream media gatekeepers.

SWANA region: The Kohl Journal uses publishing and archiving to build queer feminist analysis that **reframes regional politics through resistance rather than victimhood.**

Use Artivism to foster healing, political consciousness, solidarity, and resistance



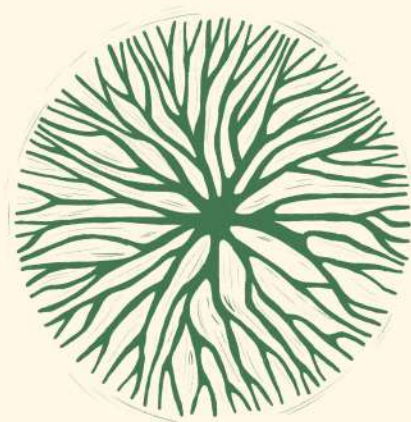
Art can provide a unique safe space or stigmatised communities, both online and offline, and offer opportunities to recuperate, share, network, and strategise, which is particularly critical in repressive contexts.

Uganda: The ArtVism studio provided **150-180** structurally excluded communities with **materials and space to process trauma through creativity** in a time of national uncertainty and repression, recognizing that particularly communities who have been structurally excluded from higher education levels need platforms beyond written or verbal expression to share their journeys.

Build collective support systems for artists

Individual creative capacity means little without collective infrastructure, networks, and social capital to sustain cultural production as ongoing movement work rather than one-off projects.

India: **14 filmmakers** came together not just for skills training, but explicitly to build connections amongst themselves and introduce each other to circles to which they would otherwise have no access. By facilitating these connections, the project enabled **filmmakers to train others, support each other, and find new outlets for their films.**



Use creative media for advocacy



Uganda: The “Can We Play?” documentary combined storytelling with strategic distribution to sports institutions, transforming creative work into an advocacy tool that **shifted the Futsal Federation’s approach** and changed attitudes in specific clubs, even as the Anti-Homosexuality Act 2023 and National Sports Act amplified hostility in Uganda.

India: An organisation’s **media platform organized two roundtables** with stakeholders, showing **how consistent journalism from SSC perspectives** can build legitimacy and create openings for direct engagement with power holders.

Global level: OVOF organised its first **two-day Artivism in Action event in New York at CSW68**. It included exhibitions, film screenings, crafting tables, workshops, and dialogues to highlight feminist movement building and advocacy in stigmatising and largely criminalised contexts.



Train the Trainer!

Create cascading knowledge, skills, and systems to make movements independent.

Build collective self-sustaining capacity

Don't extract knowledge from communities. Instead, do capacity building for analysis, action, and mutual support that strengthens entire movements rather than individual leaders. This will ensure movements are not dependent on external "experts", but are self-generating and sustainable.

India: In a **digital storytelling training**: **112 structurally silenced persons became trainers** themselves, who then trained **7,500** community members.

Uganda: **The holistic security workshops'** participants then trained peers in their communities.

Sudan: In **Feminist Transformative Leadership Training Institutes**, participants didn't just gain skills, but formed a feminist network ensuring ongoing collective learning and mutual accountability, with some launching **Womxn in Peace** while others became facilitators curating future cohorts.





Advocate!

Use evidence-based advocacy to influence policy

Advocate based not only on principled positions, but also on systematically generated **evidence that legitimizes communities' experiences**. This creates a credible basis for policy engagement. Feminist pedagogy validates lived experience as expertise.

Bangladesh: The **Cyber Safety Working Coalition** conducted advocacy meetings with the government, culminating in the government's decision to **repeal the Cyber Security Act 2023** and enact the new **Cyber Safety Ordinance 2025**, which incorporates many recommendations on addressing technology-facilitated gender-based violence.

India: Research into challenges faced by queer and trans persons were used to make submissions towards the **LGBTQI+ policy developed by the Tamil Nadu Department**.



Pair advocacy with public outreach



Lebanon: A sustained consultative drafting process to review and finalise a bill on online gender-based violence, deliberately **paired legal drafting with public and media campaigns** to extend engagement beyond closed policy spaces. This shows that **legal advocacy requires both technical expertise and broader constituency-building to create political will for change**.

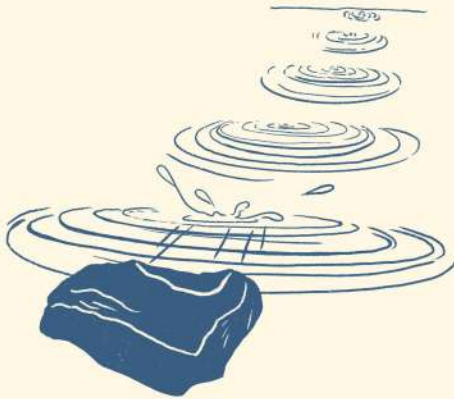
Use legal mechanisms to protect communities and advance rights

Bangladesh: A public interest writ petition challenging the **eviction of Harijan (Dalit) community members** secured a High Court status quo order that has prevented eviction and enabled the community to continue residing in Mironzilla Colony.

Advocacy resulted in **greater participation of Dalits in District Legal Aid Committees** and improved access to **healthcare for Dalit tea worker communities, including four months' maternity leave and free sexual and reproductive healthcare services.**



Use legal advocacy for movement building



Use law strategically to shift power relations, build collective political consciousness not just individual rights claims, and create new possibilities for structurally silenced communities to assert their humanity and rights.

Bangladesh: Five human rights organisations in solidarity secured **court orders that recognized Dalit communities' right to dignity and housing.** Also, **organising tea garden workers** around their rights has resulted in intersectional movement building.

Lebanon: Legal drafting of an anti-OGBV law consultation involving survivors, NGOs, judges, and MPs ensured that the **legislation emerged from lived experience** rather than top-down expertise, and coupled it with public awareness campaigns to **build social movement pressure alongside institutional change**.

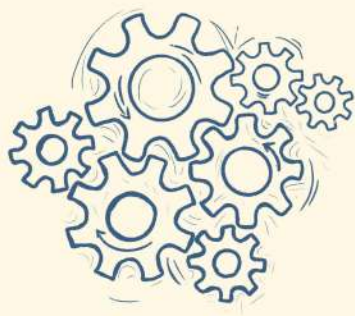
Uganda: Legal clinics for female sex workers who use and inject drugs created infrastructure not just for individual case support but for documenting patterns of abuse, building legal literacy within the community, and **preparing the movement for strategic litigation**.

Engage local power-holders and gatekeepers to shift attitudes and institutional practices

Formal policy change means little without shifting the attitudes and practices of those who implement policies and hold power in communities.

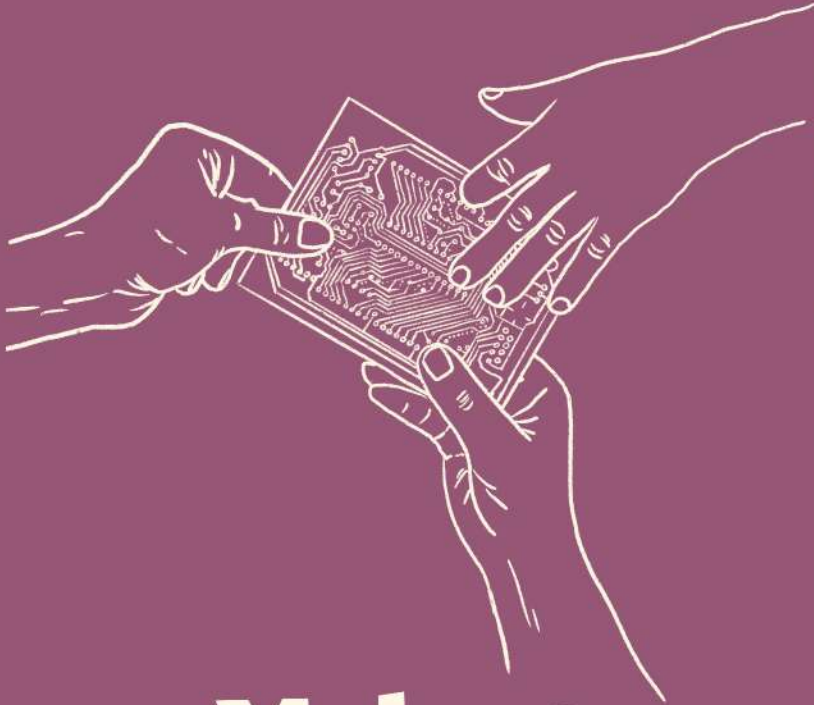
Kenya: A one-day dialogue with 30 influential community actors, including **police officers, boda-boda riders, bar owners, and village elders**, created space for mutual understanding that reduced stigma and initiated behaviour change among community gatekeepers, resulting in increased recognition and **respect for sex workers and reduced violence and harassment**.

Interactive empowerment forums with female sex workers that focused on legal awareness and role-play exercises reported **increased confidence in asserting rights** and began referring peers to legal and protection services.



Trans-focused dialogue forums with families of trans and gender diverse individuals in rural Busia **reduced stigma and built a community-led support network that advocates for trans rights**.

Rural community leaders, police, healthcare workers, and religious leaders engaged in dialogue forums, centring LBQ communities' voices and **building trust with power-holders, leading to reduced discrimination and improved institutional responsiveness**.



Make a Feminist Internet!

A collective framework for imagining and demanding digital environments free from discrimination.

Build collective digital infrastructure

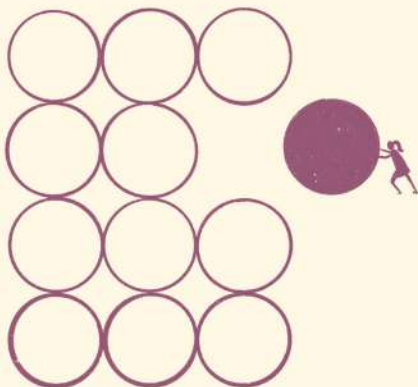
Kenya: Young community leaders from Kakamega and Homabay who participated in TGBV training went on to **create their own digital platforms, which now serve as safe spaces** for political dialogue, legal literacy, and SRHR awareness.

Uganda: The Gender and Internet Governance Exchange brought together various SSCs to collectively analyse internet governance, **develop a shared understanding of Feminist Principles of the Internet** in the local context, and commit to forming a coalition for ongoing policy review and advocacy, **transforming isolated digital users into a coordinated feminist movement with collective demands.**

Others formed a digital network of around **100** queer community leaders and activists that became the **most used space for activism on queer issues in Uganda** due to the AHA law and the hostile environment, recognizing that when physical organizing is criminalized, digital spaces become critical survival infrastructure requiring intentional community building and collective security practices.

India: A researcher developed a **bilingual game** and worked with five LGBT organizations to **create their own social media and privacy policies**, recognizing that digital participation requires both technical skills and organizational governance frameworks tailored to specific risks.

Lebanon: Research on feminist online advocacy was linked with learning circles, working groups, and targeted training to create conditions for **Lebanese feminist activists to analyse their risks together**, adopt improved digital security practices, and coordinate their online advocacy more intentionally.



Create accessible digital literacy pathways



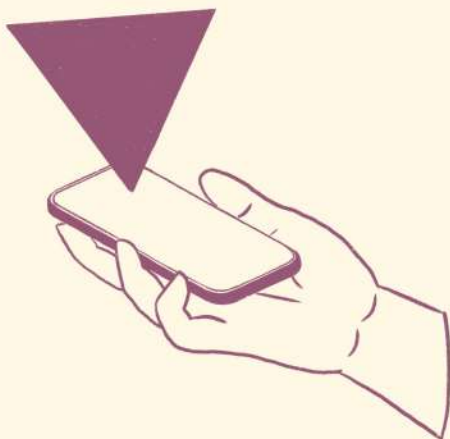
Address structural barriers to technology access.

Uganda: The Q-Tech hub went beyond individual skill-building to create feminist digital commons with free Wi-Fi, computers, and collective learning spaces where SSCs could access information, develop digital activism capacity, and participate in feminist networks.

India: A peer-led pathway from basic smartphone use to active digital advocacy was built by starting with community needs, training trusted local leaders first, and designing short, focused sessions around tools people already own.

Reclaim online spaces

Kenya: Community leaders and LBQ activists who received digital rights training shifted from being previously silent or unaware to actively confronting online violations in political spaces such as WhatsApp groups, and a woman who experienced cyberbullying is now leading awareness sessions and preparing to run for office again.



Use tech as Feminist tools.

Technology can be used not just for protection or communication, but also as a strategic tool for data collection, evidence generation, and advocacy that shifts institutional practices and policies.

Bangladesh: A zine documenting shutdown survival strategies transformed lived experience into an **accessible format that can inform future responses.**



Kenya: **Digitized LBQ-specific SRHR and mental health data** in Kiambu were used to advocate for inclusion in the **Key Population Technical Working Group**, ensuring LBQ voices in health decision-making and services.

A **2020 research and toolkit on OGBV against LBTQ communities** amplified the voices of LBTQ communities targeted online and equipped activists with **practical tools for safety, advocacy, and allyship**, with findings used to guide movement building, support norm change, and ensure that digital spaces are recognized as critical arenas for rights protection.

India: Radio Jamia, **expanding from a 15 km radius to universal reach through podcasting**, demonstrates using technology to democratize access to content on gender and communities' leadership. **Seven films in Hindi** with English subtitles by young structurally silenced persons, used both in-person gatherings in Mumbai and digital connections across India and South Asia, demonstrating how multiple formats and platforms can maximize reach while maintaining quality and depth.



Ensure Holistic Protection!

Caring for ourselves and others is crucial for political organizing.

Ensuring personal well-being is essential political work. This is not auxiliary to movement building but foundational to it. Holistic protection approaches include:

- ◆ * Increasing physical safety
- ◆ * Attention to mental and physical health
- ◆ * Digital security and care
- ◆ * Providing legal support
- ◆ * Healing from individual and collective trauma
- ◆ * Strengthening collective care

Digital security is not just a technical issue. It is an **inseparable dimension of activist security**. It should be a part of **holistic protection approaches**.

Uganda: Holistic security workshops for 50 HRDs in Jinja and Mbale addressed both digital and physical threats while attending to wellbeing, understanding that activists navigating multiple risks need integrated protection strategies.



Cross-Pollinate!

Grow Feminist movements by **intentional transnational knowledge exchange**.

Use international platforms like the **Generation Equality Forum** and **Commission for the Status of Women**, not merely for visibility, but to build concrete cross-movement solidarity networks, coordinate responses to anti-rights actors, and extract institutional commitments that shift power relations in global policy spaces while ensuring local struggles and innovations from places like Uganda shape international feminist discourse.

Interventions such as these **build movements** where **power, knowledge, and capacity** are continuously shared, reproduced, and expanded throughout the network.



Fundraise Unconventionally!

With conventional streams of funding drying up, we need to get creative and think out of the box.

Community-Based Funding Models

Crowdfunding, both online and offline, is increasingly becoming a popular funding model to secure the financial support needed to continue feminist organising beyond institutional donor dependency..

SWANA region: The Kohl Journal made a strategic decision to return to long-term publishing despite severe funding losses and ongoing violence, investing in archiving and collective authorship by exploring **community-based funding models to sustain its operations.**

This exemplified how feminist media can sustain collective knowledge production even under crisis, ensuring these perspectives endure beyond immediate donor cycles or political repression.

This **shift from reactive, crisis-driven engagement to sustained queer feminist knowledge production** represents feminist commitment to building enduring intellectual and cultural infrastructure even when conditions seem impossible, recognizing that movements need sustained platforms for developing theory, analysis, and vision—not just emergency response capacity.





Think Global, Act Local!

Meet communities where they are, and expand access beyond traditional barriers of geography, literacy, and time.

Develop context-specific solutions

The interventions and participatory approaches should centre the specific realities, threats, and knowledge of the particular structurally silenced communities.

The following adaptations reflect feminist understanding that information access is a justice issue. For example, communities with caregiving responsibilities, irregular work schedules, or limited mobility need flexible and accessible formats.

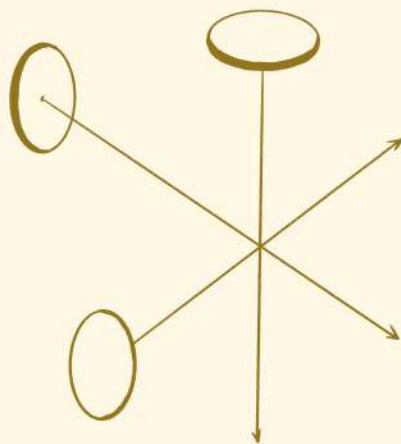
India: **Radio Jamia** transformed from a community radio station into a podcast format with universal reach accessible anytime, anywhere.

A **manual in local languages** was created out of a digital storytelling training addressing literacy and language barriers.

Bangladesh: A **queer-led CBO** digital safety training was preceded by sessions across different parts of Bangladesh to assess local contexts and existing tech needs, thus ensuring that **training material was relevant and localized rather than importing external frameworks** that might not address actual risks faced by queer communities in Bangladesh.

Lebanon: A specialized **helpline for both online and offline GBV**, alongside awareness sessions, ensured survivors could access integrated psychosocial and legal support.

CREA's leadership toolkit was localized via interviews and collective discussions with **SWANA feminist and queer leaders**, ensuring the resource reflected regional realities rather than imposing external frameworks.



Notes

Use this free space to write or doodle your reflections,
or create your own extension of the zine!



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or create your own extension of the zine!



We Shall Overcome!

These lessons from 'Our Voices, Our Futures' Consortium show us that while the current global landscape is designed to manufacture despair, it has inadvertently **strengthened the resolve of feminists from the Global South and led to new, creative solutions.**

By sustaining cross-border alliances and centering those most silenced, **OVOF turned marginalized spaces into the very engines of transformation.** These interventions prove that solidarity is not just a sentiment, but a tangible infrastructure.

We hope that by sharing these insights, **feminists can use this offering not just as a static blueprint, but as a dynamic, reflexive, and evolving conversation** as well.

The 'Our Voices, Our Futures' legacy is a testament that the **path forward is shifting from a model of survival to one of radical possibility**, by investing in the collective genius of the Global South. While we are in an age where we are forced to live through revenge restoration fantasies, **we will emerge as the architects of a new, just world.**

OUR VOICES
OUR FUTURES

