
Intersecting Movements Resisting Authoritarianisms

*Feminist and Progressive
Analysis and Tactics*



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Intersecting Movements Resisting Authoritarianisms: Feminist and Progressive Analysis and Tactics

A report analyzing the local and transnational manifestation of authoritarianism, and mapping resistance across contexts.

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Table of Contents

1	Introduction	4
2	Where We Are: Reflections on Authoritarian Regimes	6
2.1	A Global Surge:	6
2.1.1	Imperialism	6
2.1.2	Religious Dogmatism	8
2.1.3	Manifestations of Patriarchy	9
2.1.4	Neoliberalism and Authoritarianism	9
2.2	Consequences of Authoritarian Repression:	10
2.2.1	On Progressive Movements	10
2.2.2	On Policy	11
2.2.3	On Funding	12
3	Ways Forward: Challenges and Priorities	13
3.1	Challenges of Strengthening Solidarities	13
3.2	Priorities for Overcoming Fragmentation, Grounding Intersectionalities	14
3.3	Challenges of Sustainable Activism	16
4	Ways Forward: Tactics to Strengthen Solidarities	18
4.1	Cultivating Sustainable Activism	18
4.2	Forging Resistance:	19
4.2.1	Converge	19
4.2.2	Cooperate	21
4.2.3	Analyze	22
4.2.4	Engage	25
4.3	Build Innovative and Flexible Funding	26
5	Conclusion	30
6	Strategic Proposals	31
6.1	Grounding Intersectionalities, Forging Sustainable Alliances	31
6.2	Regenerating Progressive Analysis	31
6.3	Sharing Tactics	32
6.4	Innovative and Flexible Funding	32
7	Annex	33
7.1	Interviewees	33

1 | Introduction

Despite the spectacle of his presidency and personality, Donald Trump's election does not stand as a unique phenomenon on the global political stage. Rather, it rests in the familiar company of other right-wing, authoritarian governments the world over, all stitched from unique local elements, but bound by neoliberalism and an adaptable global capitalism. A fact acutely demonstrated by the October 2018 election of Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, a far-right, former army captain who succeeded on a platform of deregulation, privatization, "law and order" rhetoric, and blatantly patriarchal policies.

The intent of this report is to tie the threads of "resistance" to these right-wing regimes, by working with those on the ground to assess their conditions. On its face, this is not a unique goal, as many feminists and progressives have undertaken analyses of the current geopolitical moment. However, *Intersecting Movements Resisting Authoritarianisms* fills a critical gap in existing analyses by:

- i. Seeking out a cross-movement assessment of authoritarianism from activists, scholars, and funders.
- ii. Foregrounding a more bold, intersectional, and productive feminist analysis resting in both women's organizations and other progressive movements.
- iii. Unpacking the tactics and needs of groups grounding their intersectional analysis in concrete action and relationships.

Regions Refocus¹ and Leila Hessini² (henceforth abbreviated together as RR) occupied a unique position to interview activist intellectuals engaged in this report due to their history of building intentionally cross-movement, cross-regional, and explicitly feminist spaces. Allies from RR's work welcomed the space to reflect on their robust work and feminist approaches. The questions they were asked did not lead with Trump, but allowed more flexibility to assess the state of global progressive organizing as a whole, towards re-building genuine solidarities across borders to resist authoritarianism and imperialism across contexts, including the USA's. With support from Open Society Foundations' Women's Rights Program, the project sought to take the pulse of new articulations of feminist agendas, experiences of alliance-building across movements, and strategies for strengthening solidarities in the context of the global authoritarian surge.

Between late 2017 and early 2018, RR conducted a total of 31 interviews with participants in 19 countries, across the regions of Africa, the Arab States, the Caribbean, Central and South America, Europe, North America, South Asia, and the Pacific. RR conducted one follow-up interview with a Brazilian respondent in November 2018, in

1 Regions Refocus fosters feminist and progressive solidarities for justice by facilitating policy dialogue between civil society, government, academia, and the UN within and across regions and movements.

2 Leila Hessini is a global feminist leader and social justice advocate with over twenty years of organizing, advocacy and grant-making experience promoting an intersectional lens to advancing human rights, gender equality, and economic and reproductive justice in the United States and globally. Leila served on the senior leadership team of Ipas from 2002-2016, co-founded a feminist consulting firm Strategic Analysis for Gender Equity (SAGE), and led the Ford Foundation Cairo office's gender work. Leila is currently Vice President of Programs at Global Fund for Women.

the context of Jair Bolsonaro's electoral victory. Respondents come from human rights organizations, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) networks, progressive think-tanks, queer collectives, a Dalit rights group, academia, donor institutions, movements for food sovereignty and social justice, and development organizations.³ These interviewees were identified based on RR's allies and their suggestions; while featuring a range of viewpoints, the project made no attempt to be representative or to draw wide-reaching conclusions about specific regions, movements, or contexts. Rather, this report intends to provide a snapshot of views and suggestions on potential ways forward for feminist and progressive alliances, including new ways of formulating cross-regional and cross-movement solidarities.

The report is organized into three sections:

- i. A political reflection and analysis of the various contexts in which our interviewees find themselves, along with commonalities they highlight;
- ii. Their challenges and priorities as progressive activists in these various contexts; and
- iii. A compilation of tactics to strengthen cross-movement and cross-regional solidarities.

The report concludes by distilling the concrete suggestions and ways forward identified by the respondents, which offers a useful reference for progressive and feminist activists and organizations as well as for donors.

As Tulika Srivastava (Women's Fund Asia) reminded us in her interview, "There is no one agenda." RR has relied mostly on quotations to enable the respondents to speak for themselves and to avoid falling into the trap of generalizing based on the unique experiences of the activists with whom we spoke.

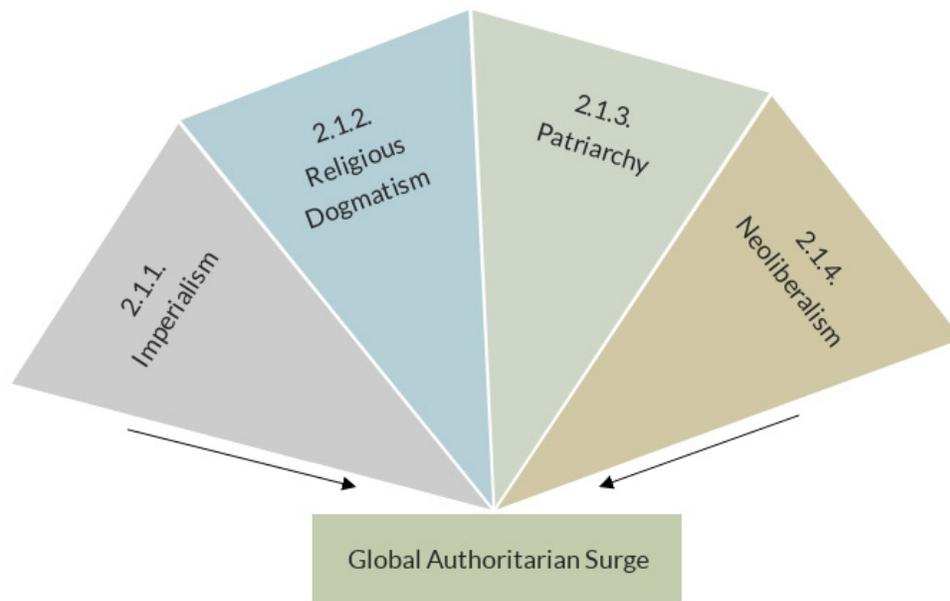
3 A complete list of interviewees can be found in the Annex of this document (p32).

2 | Where We Are: Reflections on Authoritarian Regimes

2.1 A Global Surge

With the election of new far-right leaders and the growth of conservative movements throughout the world, interviewees perceived a global surge in authoritarianism. Often these newly-empowered right-wing elements revive long-standing regressive narratives. Tatiana Cordero Velásquez (Fondo de Acción Urgente para América Latina y el Caribe hispanohablante) felt that her region had “gone back to the ‘70s or ‘80s,” requiring activists to revive human rights battles they thought they had won. Richie Maitland (Groundation Grenada) saw this swing as a global infection of social “viruses [that] gain and lose ground over time,” rather than steadily marching towards progressivism. Other interviewees, including Ghiwa Sayegh (Kohl: a Journal for Body and Gender Research), emphasized the local dimensions of the right-wing, which “doesn’t translate the same way” in each region.

Participant Analysis of the Global Authoritarian Surge



2.1.1 **Imperialism**

As participants discussed the global growth of conservatism, Donald Trump often emerged as a focus. Some saw him as simply another manifestation of a larger pattern. Edurne Cárdenas (Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales, Universidad Nacional de Lanús) framed Trump as “the caricature of what has happened in the rest of the Americas,” referencing shifts to the right in countries across the continent. However, Trump and other US conservatives have also deepened this pattern by strengthening reactionary forces elsewhere. One form this has taken is the direct monetary support of other authoritarian movements. For example, Ximena Andión Ibañez

(Instituto de Liderazgo Simone de Beauvoir) pointed out that the political power of evangelical Christians has risen in Mexico as it has in the US, supported by conservative US funders. Similarly, Sonia Corrêa (Sexuality Policy Watch) mentioned the Koch brothers' funding of the "neoliberal far right" in Brazil, and the continually growing avenues for these alliances under an adaptable global capitalism.

Sonia emphasized the shifting nature of these material connections, explaining that while the transnational influence of conservative actors on the Brazilian right was diffuse in 2017, it became flagrant during the 2018 Brazilian elections and, in particular, after Bolsonaro's victory. For example, Sonia pointed to prominent meetings between the Israeli right and Bolsonaro that, in one particularly illustrative instance, was also attended by Brazilian evangelical leaders and high-profile US conservative figures. In this period, transnational exchange between far-right actors has gone beyond funding and ideology to include strategic and technical support. However, despite becoming more flagrant, financial support for the right in Brazil and Latin America has become increasingly decentralized and informalized. This has implications for progressive actors in the global South in particular, who lack the resources and infrastructure to track flows of funding and support between right wing actors.

In other contexts, however, the "Trump effect" was less material and more symbolic. Andrea Kämpf (German Institute for Human Rights) shared her sense that right-wing parties in Germany received a "backwind" from the US election (with "real support" coming from Russia). Similarly, Heba Khalil (Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights) described the rightward trend of the US government as lending credibility to Egypt's conservative administration. Richie Maitland expressed that when "an idea has the backing of the United States, their public stance pushes minorities further underground and makes advocacy more difficult"; this validation emboldens the Caribbean right-wing, he continued, by signaling that "the tide is on the other side." In the Pacific, Noelene Nabulivou (Diverse Voices and Action for Equality) added that this influence extends into the policy arena as well, where governments continue to fall in line with rapid US policy changes to maintain coherence. These examples illustrate how even Trump's domestic policy decisions carry significance beyond US borders.

As an important counter-point, many stressed that the election of Donald Trump was not a paradigm shift, but simply another chapter in American imperialism and racism. Yao Graham (Third World Network-Africa) detailed that both Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama advanced neoliberal and militaristic policy in Africa, which also deepened economic and social marginalization and structural inequality on the continent. Describing these policies as stemming from the fundamentally neo-colonial nature of US-Africa relations (rather than simply a Democrat or Republican position), Yao saw Trump's Africa policies as likely to continue this trend.

Marginalized groups in the US are more than familiar with the repression and threat that Trump represents; as Colette Pichon Battle (US Human Rights Network) summarized, "many of us have been living in the [supposedly "new"] national reality for some time." Shailly Barnes (Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival) asserted that conservative forces, specifically white nationalists, who have both empowered and been empowered by Trump, have in fact been active for some time, cycling in and out of power depending on the

presidential administration and its cultural implications. According to Cathy Albisa (National Economic and Social Rights Initiative), a key factor in Trump’s victory stemmed from his ability to tap into long-standing political divisions such as the nativist “our jobs vs. their jobs” strand of the labor movement. When analyzing specific policy actions, participants emphasized that repressive actions attributed to Trump, such as deportations, have been consistent through both liberal and conservative regimes in the US.

2.1.2 Religious Dogmatism

Participants discussed the ways in which religious dogmatism permeates many conservative movements. Sonia Corrêa suggested the “clear rise of evangelicals” in Latin America, “not only in Congress but in society,” has been fundamental to the rise of authoritarianism in the region. Sonia pointed to the ideological and institutional integration of conservative religious, political, and economic forces, providing examples of the Mayor of Rio being an evangelical pastor presiding over the renaming of streets after religious figures, and the growing influence of “Catholic constitutionalism” across “judicial systems in Latin America.” Tatiana Cordero similarly saw the Catholic Church and the state fuse in the region to produce a package of fear and backlash, particularly around women’s rights and SRHR. The political mobilization of conservative religious forces is also explicit in India, where Sagari Ramdas (Food Sovereignty Alliance) spoke of the nationalist right wing deriving much of its power from creating an “us” and a “them”, made possible through a Hindu agenda through which “it’s easier to create the Other, which in this context is Muslims, Dalits, and Adivasis.”

In the context of deep ideological and institutional integration between conservative religious and political actors, Sonia Corrêa suggested the Vatican offers a potent pathway for external actors like the US to exert political influence in Latin America. One avenue is the Vatican’s engagement with US academics through networks and institutions implicated in far-right knowledge production. In addition to being enmeshed in conservative networks, Sonia emphasized the Vatican also contributes to right-wing analysis through “the proliferation of theological documents” relating to gender and sexuality. This pathway between religious institutions and US political influence has also extended to Africa and the Caribbean. For example, Jessica Horn (The African Women’s Development Fund) detailed the profound impact of evangelical organizations in Africa, who used USAID funding to push a conservative agenda, a phenomenon that surged during George W. Bush’s presidency and only declined somewhat under Obama. Similarly, Rhoda Reddock (University of the West Indies, St. Augustine) witnessed the growing influence of US evangelicalism and global neoliberalism in the 1990s in the Caribbean, and today sees this conflict with the increased efforts to acknowledge indigenous history and culture.



We are still fighting against religious conservatism, from the colonial times 500 years ago on these issues ... It is directly affecting the quality of women's lives.

Andrea Terceros Hans
Vecinas Feministas

2.1.3 Manifestations of Patriarchy

Participants highlighted the ways patriarchy fundamentally structures global conservative movements. In India, Sabika Abbas Naqvi (Pinjra Tod) described manifestations of patriarchy in misogynistic harassment, especially in online spaces, towards women, journalists, queer people, and Dalits, even resulting in online “mob lynching.” Offline, she noted, there was patriarchal symbolism at play with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, unmarried and therefore seen as “unhampered,” and whose bragging about his “56-inch chest” blatantly combines machismo with authoritarianism. However, she was also quick to add that the problem extends to the left as well, which is also “patriarchal, Brahminical, and living in its own ivory tower.” Ximena Andión Ibañez also saw Trump exhibiting, and therefore legitimizing, sexist behavior.

In Latin America, Tatiana Cordero noted an ongoing infiltration of state political structures by reactionary forces aiming primarily to curtail women’s and LGBTI rights. Sonia Corrêa described how these reactionary forces have articulated their position as a rejection of “gender ideology,” a “retrogressive umbrella that covers sexuality education, transgender rights, gender equality, abortion, and gay and lesbian rights.” Sonia pointed to the right wing in Colombia using their rejection of “gender ideology” as justification for voting against the peace agreement, and the prominence of the term in Mexico’s constitutional reform debates. Other manifestations of this include the growing “feminazi” rhetoric, cited by Ana Falú (National University of Córdoba, UN-Habitat UNI Gender Hub), which ironically aligns feminists with fascism itself, as well as campaigns in the region with the motto of “don’t mess with our children,” as described by Tatiana Cordero. Sonia emphasized that the broad, right wing rejection of progressive values under the term “gender ideology” is linked to religious dogmatism (discussed in the previous section), evident in a constellation of conservative religious institutions in Latin America promoting the idea of “gender ideology as neo-colonization.” Sonia further suggested that the willingness of the political left in the region to counter these narratives is compromised by their alliances with the conservative religious and social forces that perpetuate them.

2.1.4 Neoliberalism and Authoritarianism

Some participants offered a macro-level analysis of global authoritarianism, synthesizing various trends. Tatiana Cordero viewed the right-wing surge as “closing spaces of civil society,” wherein states remained democratic on the surface but participatory democracy was stripped of any real power to protect human rights. Wanda Nowicka (Equality and Modernity Association) illustrated a Polish populist rhetoric surge, wherein the hyper-elite “pretend to be anti-elitist and are populist in agenda and language representing supposedly the ‘real ordinary people’ or the ‘Nation,’” while still advancing an agenda that only benefits the few. Noelene Nabulivou presented a similar analysis and pointed to what she called an “emptying out” of the state as it is captured by corporate forces. This stripping of national governments provides a useful opportunity, Noelene indicated, for “re-articulation of the development state” during this time of crisis.

Many interviewees offered an important reminder that at the heart of these renewed conservatisms lies neoliberalism. Participants in Latin America emphasized that both liberal and right-wing governments gave major concessions to mega development projects and agribusiness. For example, Sonia Corrêa emphasized the fact

that the Partido dos Trabalhadores/Workers' Party on the political left in Brazil was allied with big construction companies, including Chinese capital. Wave after wave of these global capitalist undertakings under both the right and left have had a material and ideological impact, one Cathy Albisa saw as an "acceleration of the neoliberal model... cannibalizing not only itself but everything in its path." Sagari Ramdas described this acceleration as a final union between capitalist and fascist thinking, wherein "national capital is not separate from global capital." As such, Sonia emphasized that in confronting authoritarianism, progressive movements and allies must rigorously analyze the growing trend of the political left entering into coalition with neoliberal and neo-conservative actors.

2.2 Consequences of Authoritarian Repression

Alongside analysis of the roots of right-wing repression, participants detailed the concrete effects of conservatism on the dynamics of their own progressive movements, related policies, and funding struggles.

2.2.1 **On Progressive Movements**

The surge of right-wing repression has sparked **renewed resistance**. Tatiana Cordero asserted that with the election of Trump, "resistance became again a word that was not to be feared but to be reclaimed." This includes for long-standing groups that have been organizing for generations, producing "the fruits of 40 years of feminism in the region." Ana Falú expressed hope that, despite the fear Trump and others produced, millions of women would continue to protest on the streets around the world.

Activists from across the Americas and South Asia noted a strong rise of **intersectional organizing** that has united feminist, Dalit, indigenous, labor, sex worker, and other movements to foster collective opposition to authoritarianism. Richie Maitland analyzed this as the effect of disparate groups unifying against one "hegemonic evil," which allowed "more linkages to be drawn."



We have to acknowledge that despite our current hopefulness, that we are in a moment of defeat and there are reasons for this. Why did the vast majority of the population believe in those people and not the progressive alternatives? We need to think about this.

Dalia Abd El-Hameed

Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights

In particular, **queer activism** has grown in many areas, both in itself and in solidarity with other movements. Participants shared examples of queer women supporting Mapuche land rights in South America, of the Egyptian uprising creating space for solidarity between queer and left groups, and of queer (including transgender) groups and sex workers in Africa cementing a stronger institutional base and undertaking "leading edge work" (Jessica Horn) such as pushing for institutional standards and defending issues in court spaces. However, the growth of queer activism also poses problems: Akhil Kang (Queer Dalit Collective) emphasized that "queer networks are a glorious example of how international solidarity can really mess up things," for example with the complex politics of categories like "MSM" (men who have sex with men) and the dynamics of HIV funding. He continued, "With pinkwashing, it's sad how

extremely fascist capitalist regimes use the LGBT persona to come on to cultural localized identities.”

Despite positive examples of resistance, interviewees shared, to some extent, an overall sense of defeat. Some described feeling stuck in a reactive mode, responding to current crises without the time or space needed to seriously process the new challenges from conservative forces and the changing landscape of technology and political possibility. This presents a circular dilemma: despite the increased need to thoughtfully assess repressive violence to formulate an effective progressive response, activists are constantly forced to address immediate crises, depriving them of the time and resources to reflect critically on the bigger picture.

2.2.2 On Policy

Conservative movements have had considerable impact on both national and international policy. This influence has extended to all arenas of political life, from local government to international arenas, and issues ranging from environmentalism to tax cuts for elites. Of broad concern for the interviewees was the shifting role of the US in international politics, particularly as manifested in new waves of funding cuts.

Beyond the violence effected by neoliberalism (with the US as a key proponent), many noted the dangerous consequences of Trump’s **abdication of key US roles in policy spaces**. Interviewees noted that the US has pulled back in arenas where progressive gains were possible, including from the Open Government Partnership (OGP), women’s rights, and in the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. As such, a challenge arises: “How should we reclaim these spaces and make them useful for us?” asked Wanda Nowicka.

Others, however, were quick to **caution against US “leadership,”** which they saw as a continuation of imperialist hegemony. While noting losses under Obama, Vince Warren emphasized that his organization’s political analysis operates from an understanding of American empire, necessitating a “larger level of systemic and integrated thinking – [on] environment, living wage and labor, health care, [and] democratic institutions.” Andrea Kämpf added that while gender politics especially have worsened since Obama’s presidency, many in Germany had witnessed the long-term negative effects of US interventionism, notably through the invasion of Iraq. Yao Graham highlighted the impact of the US on international leftist solidarity, citing the UN Security Council vote to condemn the US decision to move its Israeli embassy to Jerusalem. Traditionally, Yao explained, a broadly anti-colonial foreign policy led African countries to “almost reflexively” vote with Palestinians even if they were doing business with Israel. However, increasingly under Trump, the US has generated pressure to break up this progressive policy bloc.



The voices that are widening the agenda – LGBT, indigenous, and youth – are included and active ... The bodies of the murdered women turn into political bodies. Millions are challenging the backlash, the conservative trends. Demonstrations, platforms, political actions of different types reflect the emancipatory capacity of women and also the society as a whole.

Ana Falú

National University of Córdoba, UN-Habitat UNI
Gender Hub

2.2.3 On Funding

Funding, especially for actors reliant on public sources, also represents a hard-hit arena of global conservatism, according to many interviews. In areas ranging from HIV treatment to climate finance, authoritarian governments have imposed severe funding cuts nationally and internationally. Within this context, **SRHR** emerged as a specific concern. For services like preventing unwanted pregnancies and sexual and reproductive care, reductions in funding streams under the “global gag rule”⁴ have diminished already limited resources. Interviewees emphasized that these cuts have had a domino effect, particularly as funding cuts intersect with local realities such as casteism, mega-development, and religious dogmatism. As Andrea Kämpf put it, “when you don’t have women’s rights, then LGBTI [people] and everyone else is even worse off.” Ximena Andión similarly stressed that the most marginalized women in her region (impoverished, indigenous, Afro-descendant) were most hard-hit by these attacks on socio-economic and sexual and reproductive health rights.

Even when funding does flow, it can remain a barrier to effective work. Ghiwa Sayegh detailed that a “good activist/bad activist” debate continues to rage over what funding sources are acceptable. Accepting funds from more contentious sources (such as the US State Department) can taint progressives’ credibility and brand activists as complicit. This concern was given weight by other interviewees’ detailing of conservative global funding streams. Heba Khalil, for example, discussed how the current Egyptian regime has propped itself up using large sums from Saudi Arabia and the United States. Participants expressed that the impact of conservative forces on funding encompasses the reduction of available resources as well as shifts in the direction, source, and political purpose of available funds. Additionally, funding flows can themselves be restrictive. For example, Sonia Corrêa noted that a key challenge of the progressive response is that their own funding does not reflect the transnational nature of far-right networks; with their resources earmarked for nationally focused projects, progressive actors have limited capacity to network transnationally in a sustained and meaningful way. After analyzing the myriad conservatisms confronting them, participants detailed the challenges and effective strategies they have encountered in organizing resistance.



Under Obama it was clear when we were working domestically or on foreign policy—clear what they are moving forward and what they aren’t and what we will fight and what civil society can push forward. As a result, [organizing] in the US was able to advance some policy work and to push Obama, but under the new administration all bets are off. We need more opportunities to work across geographies and advance global solidarity.

Vince Warren

Center for Constitutional Rights

4 The global gag rule prohibits any organization receiving U.S. funding to engage in discussion of abortion, including with their own independent funds. Health providers or organizations that refuse this condition lose all US funding, including for non-abortion related care. See <https://www.engenderhealth.org/media/info/definition-global-gag-rule.php>

3 | Ways Forward: Challenges and Priorities

In addition to providing insightful, grounded analysis of our contemporary geopolitical context, interviewees offered their reflections on ways to overcome the challenges pertaining to progressive and feminist organizing, and on priorities going forward to work collectively for gender, economic, and overall structural justice.

3.1 Challenges of Strengthening Solidarities

Firstly, interviewees framed the need for feminist organizing to overcome shared obstacles to collective work. According to respondents from Nigeria, Egypt, Germany, and the US, feminist movements tend to be perceived as exclusionary. Participants shared examples of criticism of feminists, such as their perceived alignment with dominant class, race, and language identities, and as Heba Khalil described, “quite isolated to academic circles and activist groups” rather than interlinked with other movements. For example, Jessica Horn faulted mainstream feminist groups in Africa for failing to connect with collectives of HIV positive women despite young African women as a group experiencing the fastest growing rate of infections. Fadekemi Akinfaderin-Agarau (Education as a Vaccine) spoke of the need to challenge the reluctance of mainstream women’s groups to engage on issues of LGBT rights. In the Pacific, Noelene Nabulivou criticized established civil society networks for leaving out “a newer set of organizations like youth-led, HIV positive peoples, LGBTQI, feminist groups,” and not “reflecting what is going on in the region.”



The challenge is nothing new: the faultlines of race. Formal feminist spaces are claimed by an agenda driven by the priorities of white women, who don't always understand that issues that don't affect them as much or at all are women's issues too. There is this sort of entitlement from what is often very narrow gender activists to define women's issues from the white perspective.

Cathy Albisa

National Economic and Social Rights Initiative

Interviewees from Argentina, India, Nigeria, and Mexico noted the **fragmentation** within existing feminist movements and agendas. “How do you have a common voice of so many different people or groups?” asked Edurne Cárdenas. While an overall acknowledgment seemed to exist that “solidarity and networking across movements and initiatives is essential,” as articulated by Sabika Abbas Naqvi, several interviewees voiced the difficulties and frustrations of working across movements. A key challenge being, as described by Jasmine Lovely George (Hidden Pockets), that “Trump, Modi, and the President of Turkey can get along, but two feminists can’t.” As “feminism has become more plural,” Sonia Corrêa articulated, “problematic strands are appearing.” Jessica Horn suggests that in African women’s movements, this includes an increasing embrace of pentecostal Christianity and the consequent need for the “defense of secular space even within women’s movements.”

As political contexts become more fraught, for example in the US after the election of Donald Trump, one civil society leader illustrated the perception of **hierarchies** placing certain groups over others. “The prioritization of the immigrant rights movement... plays out in a way that leads many folks to believe that they are being left behind, because there is not enough work to integrate the immigrant rights movement into the broader human rights movement,” shared Colette Pichon Battle. Cathy Albisa agreed, expressing that other than immigrant rights-related “moments of crisis that have risen to the top of everyone’s radar,” groups struggle to integrate work across constituencies and issue areas in a lived and meaningful way. “If we don’t use that Black feminist theory of intersectionality as a methodology of engaging in these alliance-building issues,” Colette continued, “the only thing that can happen is exotification or a post-agenda consultation with people who are directly impacted or who should be in alliance.”

Working with groups across issue areas and **varying positionalities** is difficult. As Noelene Nabulivou shared, “It takes so long to move through the politics of the realities of international NGOs being in the same space as grassroots-led people’s movements, as indigenous groups, as feminist groups.” Differences of class, race, and funding play into these politics and complicate attempts to work across issue areas or to collaborate with bigger or differently politically positioned groups. The need to move beyond shallow attention to “women” or “gender” towards a feminist praxis of intersectionality was frequently mentioned throughout the interviews. Elaborating on this point, Sonia Corrêa articulated the need “to visualize this in new forms of connections and resistance across boundaries,” to “operate intersectionally—really, not just in words.”

3.2 Priorities for Overcoming Fragmentation, Grounding Intersectionalities

Reflecting on the priorities going forward, Fadekemi Akinfaderin-Agarau asserted, “If we are able to find people who are feminist and [know] the indivisibility of our struggle, we will have the ability to communicate the linkages [... rather than] compartmentalize human beings’ experiences and realities.” Interviewees examined underlying efforts to integrate work and movements, and, in Sonia Corrêa’s words, the need “to rethink deeply our understandings and conceptions.” “The field needs to reposition itself,” Vince Warren stated; feminist agendas should not be considered “in isolation from the systemic trauma and violence that is happening in communities that are being pushed down.”

“Alliance-building is always dependent on shared politics,” expressed Jessica Horn. Similarly, Tatiana Cordero suggested, “The possibility of articulating different struggles and seeing them as one” is essential to shared political struggle. Cathy Albisa shared that she is heartened by examples of a handful of younger movements in the US that engage broader movements beyond the typical scope of feminist organizations: “We need more feminists leading broad movements,” she expanded, “because that’s what will influence and shape broad movements.” Cross-regional progressive alliances “will become even more important,” Yao Graham concurred, towards a “broad mobilization against neoliberalism.”

Cathy Albisa challenged the framing of “solidarity,” which she positioned as potentially less relevant than other lenses, suggesting instead the need for “some way of figuring out how to have thoughtful, **integrated agendas** [... to] incorporate the various needs of various communities” within each other’s daily work. Similarly, Ximena Andión emphasized the need for feminist groups to also work on racial justice and class issues to build more expansive understandings of inequalities.

Examples of cross-movement work grounded in intersectional praxis

Vince Warren highlighted the work of the Center for Policing Equity in the US, which connects mass incarceration to HIV/AIDS, combining public health and criminalization concerns through initial analysis and subsequent movement-wide conversations.

In another US-based example, Cathy Albisa illustrated her organization’s efforts to engage traditional labor and environmental justice movements, to build a shared, “more holistic view of economic development.”

Noelene Nabalivou described her work in a Pacific climate coalition “to bring to it not just the gender language... but feminist (critical and interlinkage) perspectives” including into organizations that do not explicitly focus on gender.

Alliance-building, as a potential counter to this closing space and/or strategy for amplifying influence in this new context, formed the subject of much discussion during the interviews. Heba Khalil shared two positive examples from Egypt, one arising out of Egypt’s reporting to the UN Human Rights Commission in 2012-2013. During this process, the Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights brought together student organizations, around 70 independent labor unions, and a diverse range of civil society groups to collectively report on the status of economic, social, and cultural rights in Egypt. Similarly, a coalition of ten organizations is working to develop an online tool to monitor progress on economic and social issues in Egypt. Even in politically difficult situations, strong networks figure out

Given the obstacles faced by feminist and other progressive movements, activists from a range of contexts (Lebanon, Argentina, India, Trinidad and Tobago, and the US) expressed the need to “think creatively of new alliances and **new ways of working** across movements that are not confined to traditional alliances,” as Ghiwa Sayegh explained. As the “Ni Una Menos” movement has gained influence in Argentina, Eburne Cárdenas articulated that “we have to be clear in our minds to understand what we are developing in this moment,” and how new actors and social movements are taking up space as political players. In the United States under Trump, Cathy Albisa described the shift within her organization and others of increased dedication to “trying to reach out to other people, connect to broader networks, participate more in stitching an integrated tapestry of movements.”

In the Caribbean, Rhoda Reddock described new alliances forming between traditional feminist groups and private sector women executives, despite different politics and positioning. In the context of anti-caste organizing in India, Sagari Ramdas described efforts to “step out of our traditional comfort areas” because, in order “to understand how the enemy is operating, you have to understand how you are trapped in those dialogues yourself.” Sonia Corrêa added that these newer formations become even more important given the erosion of traditional organizing structures, namely unions.

3.3 Challenges of Sustainable Activism

Even where gains have been made in collaborative advocacy or alliance-building, ensuring their sustainability can be an ongoing challenge. Nayyirah Shariff (Flint Democracy Defense League) illustrated how newly energized organizing and cross-movement collaboration, such as in response to the water crisis in Flint, Michigan, may struggle to continue when, for example, the international news cycle moves on to other topics. Tulika Srivastava and Fadekemi Akinfaderin-Agarau highlighted that insufficient intergenerational collaboration means younger movements start over in isolation from, or in competition with, entrenched institutions. Jasmine Lovely George emphasized the need to work with “seniors in the alliances to remind us how to strengthen alliance-building. Further, as both Rhoda Reddock and Ato Kwamena Onoma (Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa) mentioned, maintaining relationships and momentum presents a challenge after workshops and other opportunities to exchange are organized.



Since 2014, we are constantly battling the need to always be on the defensive; instead of working on the issues we want to work on, we have to figure out how to survive ... we are in an existential crisis all the time, [which is] taxing, exhausting, and lessens our productivity and our ability to think outside of the box and think about alternatives and how to change the system.

Heba Khalil

Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights

Nearly all respondents shared experiences of struggling with collective burn-out within “overstretched” organizations and movements, as Noelene Nabulivou put it. There is a “definite depletion of resources, whether material or human,” explained Ghiwa Sayegh. In the face of rightward trends, “the left and the feminist movement have been reduced to a reactionary state,” asserted Jasmine Lovely George, and “people are so tired of marches against everything,” said Andrea Terceros Hans. Given everything that small, underfunded organizations are trying to accomplish, “how do you give this kind of time and commitment to dialogue and sustaining it, to create a fine balance... when you also have your own alliance building?” asked Sagari Ramdas. “Part of what makes it work is bandwidth, to reach out to people in different arenas, meet with them, talk to them, learn things we don’t know,” asserted Cathy Albisa, but effective solidarity is near-impossible when “people are running on fumes.”

Generations of overburdened organizers and leadership in combination with “the mental and physical trauma faced by those on the front lines” create contexts where “the folks coming up with the most innovative ideas and approaches, who are taking the biggest risks and have the highest levels of accountability, are not being resourced and not being given time to recover, recoup, or take time for themselves,” Colette Pichon Battle articulated. This has widespread implications for organizations and their effectiveness in collective and specific struggles.

Specifically, widespread burnout may contribute to **failures of imagination** within organizations or movements. “Few people are imagining politics as fundamentally different to what is actually happening,” Akhil Kang lamented. Similarly, Yao Graham pointed out that “We’ve all increasingly lost some of our wing-vision,” with organizations focusing on “the ever-narrowing group [they are] working on.” Shailly Barnes spoke of organiza-

tions and people “coming up against our own limitations of what we think is possible, [because...] the organizing and political models on offer, institutional guidance, etc., have all limited our understanding of how change happens.” Alliance-building among the leftist movement in Egypt is thwarted by gatekeepers, illustrated Dalia Abd El-Hameed, who criticized the belief amongst certain feminists that change towards women’s rights is legitimate only “when the society is ready [and] it will come from the bottom instead of the top.”

4 | Ways Forward: Tactics to Strengthen Solidarities

4.1 Cultivating Sustainable Activism

On the issue of cultivating sustainable activism, several participants spoke of the need to take time to evaluate and assess the trajectory of their work and its results, noting the lack of space dedicated to this kind of “checking back” (Andrea Kämpf). “A re-evaluation of the thinking of the big picture and next steps” is needed, expressed Wanda Nowicka. Heba Khalil echoed this, explaining that “when you’re in the situation you lose the bigger picture” and that “an assessment or evaluation of our performance... would be very useful as an exercise.” Specifically, Colette Pichon Battle shared USHRN’s decision to frame their 2017 biennial conference as “a healing, reflection, strategy space,” in acknowledgement of the daily and generational trauma faced by most of the network’s membership and the way systemic racism marks some “bodies as deserving of rest, retreat, or reflection” and tells others to “keep pushing through it.” Colette explained, “We are trying to create spaces that challenge that and say that we are valuable enough to keep ourselves going.”



Activism on sexual violence during the [2011] revolution managed to create the seeds for a stronger feminist movement, the seeds of which are flourishing in terms of the causes the feminist movement is adopting now, whether it is related to abortion, to women in the judiciary, to more sexual and reproductive health and rights, to the queer agenda and more acceptance and autonomy for the LGBT population. This is a huge change.

Dalia Abd El-Hameed

Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights

Defending past gains emerged as a call by respondents. Tatiana Cordero explained that through “movements of resistance and for the advancement of human rights, women’s rights, LGBTQI rights, and collective rights of indigenous people, [we have achieved] gains we cannot lose... so we need to strengthen those movements.” Sustaining, in addition to strengthening, was a point articulated by Yao Graham in the context of African continental activism and cross-regional engagement: in the face of the “relative weakness of progressive forces around the globe... rebuilding and regrouping... is very key.” Key to sustainability, in Andrea Kämpf’s words, is to have “a process in which to engage,” one that “grow[s] from the bottom,” with national and regional dimensions “that you can link to, and which you can enhance further.”

However, the issue of “shrinking space” for civil society further complicates this picture, as identified by respondents from Poland, Mexico, Germany, and Fiji, in the context of both national and intergovernmental policy spaces. “Given the closing spaces for civil society and how difficult it has become to do advocacy at the national or regional levels,” Ximena Andión elaborated, “the power of connecting movements is very important.”

4.2 Forging Resistance

Sharing specific examples of how to build alliances and what kinds of spaces are necessary, respondents pointed to the need for deliberate efforts for activists to converge, cooperate, analyze, and engage.

<p>Converge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create spaces to connect • Facilitate regional exchange • Consolidate alliances • Cross-movement dialogue spaces 	<p>Cooperate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Align agendas • South-South solidarity • Knowledge exchange
<p>Analyze</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen alternative paradigms • Cross-regional and cross-movement learning and analysis • Consciousness raising 	<p>Engage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted, strategic convening • Diversifying spaces of engagement

4.2.1 Converge

Finding **spaces to connect** with other activists, while essential, has become increasingly difficult. Wanda Nowicka lamented that “the UN is becoming less and less friendly as a space, which doesn’t give enough opportunities to be a meeting and working space as it did before.” Given this context, Edurne Cárdenas expressed, “We have to rethink the spaces [to identify those that are] useful to work toward global and regional solidarity.” Citing the model of the UN conferences of the 1990s, which brought together broad swaths of activists and organizations from throughout the world, Edurne articulated the need to build “a global movement, a regional and global identity” – beyond cheap “solidarity” expressed through social media.

Manjula Pradeep (Navsarjan) and Ghiwa Sayegh each shared their dreams of a large gathering along the lines of the ‘90s conferences. Manjula envisions “an international conference for women from discriminated communities... to build alliances. We have started building these spaces but much more needs to be done to strengthen this.” Ghiwa expressed her wish to be part of “a big convening that brings together different groups [for] a knowledge production forum, that works on the global South [and...] looks at intersections and interlinkages in this context.” Manjula added, “The kind of support we need is holistic, it is not just financial support,” describing the kind of solidarity that can make a difference, especially among women and other “marginalized” groups. “We need to see our struggles as linked,” Fadekemi Akinfaderin-Agarau asserted, globally and across North-South lines, while acknowledging regional specificities and differences.

These questions also point to the limits of online activism. Wanda Nowicka illustrated that although it is now “much easier to be connected... the quality of engagement is not as it was”; while allowing for greater connections, social media also provides perhaps more superficial solidarity. Sagari Ramdas agreed, explaining that there is “no substitute for face to face” meetings to build connections and alliances. Online activism also runs the risk of cooptation, as Jasmine Lovely George illustrated, including through the proliferation of BuzzFeed and other un-nuanced quick reads. Technological and communications differences between regions can also exacerbate gaps; Richie Maitland explained, “We are not as communications-savvy as some of our global North allies; we don’t have the art of messaging down.”

“**Regional exchange** is important,” articulated Andrea Kämpf, because of the tendency towards “common developments.” For example, Ximena Andión shared that “we’re working along with other countries in Latin America, especially South America, to develop our plans and to talk about issues of transparency and including gender,” as well as human rights and governance more broadly. “Creating contexts for people to meet,” added Richie Maitland, is a valuable aspect in creating the sorts of “deep interaction” that enables sharing ideas and catalyzing collaboration within a specific region. Heba Khalil expressed the desire to strengthen regional coalitions, or “to even provide a space where there is a possibility for a new type of coalition, of radical engagement with the [regional] situation.” Sabika Abbas Naqvi mentioned that she preferred to foster conversation between South Asian feminists rather than look to the US to lead on (or hamper) issues like abortion rights.



The struggle is to come up with a methodology to triage and prioritize so it's not random. Given this explosion of activity in the world, more people are reaching out [requesting solidarity]. What's our guiding principle for where we put our energy? What you need is a mechanism to make it easy, [a way we can] lend our contacts and name but make it take up less time.

Cathy Albisa

National Economic and Social Rights Initiative

Alliance-building would also be useful at the national level, pointed out Sonia Correa and others. “The ground level is very important at this stage,” Sonia said, especially as a foundational first step before any regional or international organizing. Similarly, Andrea Kämpf shared that “especially [for] human rights situations, exchange at the working level is something we are trying to do, to re-think ties and cultural exchange.” Similarly, “broader exposure to some of the other struggles would be very helpful,” Nayyirah Shariff expressed, sharing an example of bringing approximately 250 residents of Flint to Washington, DC to meet with activists working on related struggles. These kinds of spaces are powerful to counter isolation, Nayyirah continued, and generate collective understanding “that we’re part of this broader struggle and we all need to be involved for us to overcome.”

Noelene Nabulivou illustrated the national work of DIVA for Equality, building “grassroots, increasingly autonomous women’s hubs within urban, poor, rural, and remote communities around Fiji. DIVA is doing things like a feminist knowledge and skill building workshop every year now and that has helped” to strengthen the feminist movement there. In the US context, Colette Pichon Battle highlighted the new sustainable energy and economic democracy coali-

tion under US Human Rights Network, which works “to connect folks working on energy democracy, energy efficiency etc. to environmental justice communities” and together “develop work that will offer real information and strategy around what we need to dismantle, what we need to build, and organic relationships that allow for that to happen simultaneously.” The coalition will include “both policy folks, who tend to lean more to the white educated group of people who want to do good work, and people who are directly impacted by extractive economies (oil and gas, coal, other types of mining and extraction) but also folks impacted by the reality of mass incarceration, which is an extraction of people from communities.”

Dialogue and exchange are essential “to consolidate alliances,” expressed Ana Falú. “We need to debate more,” she said, towards “a political feminist agenda.” Andrea Terceros Hans echoed this point, calling for “a dialogue between us, [because] we are not hearing each other.... We should really try to create a space where we can sit together and, first of all, talk.” Tatiana Cordero explained that current “manifestations [of geopolitics] are very contextual, they are historical, the configuration is changing also. In terms of the exchanges and the dialogue, how do we ensure that these dialogues in themselves are breaking those power relations? That is vital.” Vince Warren also called for “more intersectional work, more time to listen and strategize.”

These **cross-movement dialogue spaces** are what is needed, articulated respondents from the US, India, Lebanon, Mexico, and across Africa. Manjula Pradeep shared the example of the Chalo Nagpur gathering, which included a cross-section of women, including Dalits, Muslims, indigenous women, and sex workers, in a “self-funded, people-led, and beautiful experience,” without major power battles. “If we believe in giving equal space, it should go to all women from different movements,” Manjula concluded. Similarly, Sagari Ramdas articulated the need to “spark cross dialogues to listen to one another across social movements that proactively try and create spaces” to meet in person, “not as a one-off process but continuous involvement.” Spaces are required, Sagari continued, “where diverse communities can engage in dialogues on the crisis we are in and how we understand [it], how we draw upon the power of analysis and our understanding of the macro and micro world and then come up with our understanding of transformation.”

4.2.1 Cooperate

Respondents spoke of the difficulties they face in **aligning agendas** in solidarity with other organizations. In the US in the context of the Flint, Michigan water crisis, for example, Nayirrah Shariff explained the “infrastructure for community organizing” is thwarted by the dominance of large foundations. Activists in Lebanon, the US, and Trinidad spoke of the increasing isolation felt in their countries and regions, by both progressive movements and the communities that make up their (potential) constituents. “It becomes difficult to find each other sometimes,” Ghiwa Sayegh elaborated, “and we want to work as accomplices, rather than signing a petition – which becomes a neoliberal way of expressing solidarity.”

Ghiwa Sayegh expanded on this commodification of solidarity, especially internationally, suggesting “it does reinforce the binary of ‘us vs. them.’” Rather than across the global South, which Ghiwa framed as a preferred alternative, solidarity “has always been constructed as a one-way route.” Emphasizing the need for **South-**

South solidarity, Jessica Horn spoke of similarities in both issues faced and actors involved. For example, while African activists work on the role of China in Africa’s extractive industries, “we have no links to the Chinese feminist movement... or [to] Chinese activists working on those issues,” she said. Ximena Andión added, “South-to-South exchange of knowledge and solidarity is very important,” and expressed the need for more of these opportunities to connect.



Recently, USHRN partnered with Sierra Club and the BlueGreen Alliance to hold human rights learning circles, building an intersectional analysis around different human rights violations happening in Detroit. These brought together migrant rights workers, [people working on] labor and trade, water access, climate, and criminal justice, for a two-day session ... We are on the same side but not yet on the same team, and those tensions have to be aired, by taking the time to take people through a process where they can see the intersection of migrant rights issues to US trade, of environmental justice to criminal justice. There’s no new coalition formed. There is simply a new way of looking at the work people are doing every day and an understanding of where [one] issue intersects with other issues.

Colette Pichon Battle

US Human Rights Network

The challenges of **communication** are central to these barriers to cooperation. Andrea Kämpf explained, “Often the impression I get is that people are discussing very similar issues, like repercussions of people cooperating with international complaint mechanisms or the role of economic actors, but they’re not linked and they are being discussed at different levels.” As much of the strategizing work happens through closed listservs, which are necessary for confidentiality, “how can you link these communities?” Andrea asked. “There has to be a better way to have communications infrastructure or communications networks that can help,” Shailly Barnes opined.

Difficulties of language – specifically the injustices of English dominance and the resulting challenges in communications, as highlighted by Ana Falú – as well as technology, hamper efforts towards collective strategizing. “It’s been hard to create narratives that connect the different issues, and I think we sometimes don’t understand the power and the importance of communication work, to communicate narratives around these issues, for example, gender and environment or gender and defense of territory” Ximena Andión expressed. Shailly Barnes lamented, “We have all this communications technology and we still haven’t figured out how to be in communication with each other. This is a real challenge, in every way: sub-regionally, regionally, globally.”

Ghiwa Sayegh added, “I want to see more cross-movement and cross-national **knowledge exchange**... to work together and find where we can converge,” such as on feminism, militarization, immigration, and sexuality. Speaking of the African Feminist Forum, Jessica Horn expressed, “It’s been really, really crucial to keep pushing on the fact that we need to have all kinds of people in the space, that includes queer people and sex workers... to ensure that there’s a positive presence and leadership of people from different communities and identity bases.”

4.2.3 Analyze

Challenging the **dominance of neoliberal thinking** – in economic paradigms and scholarship in general – was raised by respondents in the African, South Asian, and Caribbean contexts as a fundamental objective of pro-

gressive movements. “Alternative thinking has been sidelined,” illustrated Rhoda Reddock, especially as young people receive education in the US and the UK that is devoid of political economy analysis or economic history. “Today, with regional governments in crisis, we’re hearing more of the policies based on the Washington Consensus, with the associated jargon and prescriptions e.g. pushing devaluation, privatization, marketization etc.,” Rhoda continued, discussing how the University of the West Indies’ leadership has, “in a situation of scarcity, adopted this hegemonic thinking.”

Ato Kwamena Onoma shared that “Neoliberalism has sort of won out in Africa and the most depressing thing is there isn’t a lot of theory of contestation compared to other parts of the world.” Echoing Rhoda, Ato explained, “This shifts the scholarly paradigm, and shapes the higher education environment and the possibilities that scholars have. It’s hard to find scholars that are not steeped in neoliberal thought.” Sabika Abbas Naqvi articulated that “People have been brainwashed to such an extent to this agenda of ‘economic development’ and ‘liberalization’” has taken over, which has both economic and social implications, including the entrenchment of patriarchy. Sagari Ramdas called, therefore, for a feminism that is both anti-patriarchal and anti-capitalist: “In the feminist movement, I ask the question of whether we have the luxury, any longer, of looking at women’s agency [as] devoid of a larger structural issue,” because “without a structural understanding and analysis of the connections between fascism and global capitalism, we cannot organize strategically.”

To address these gaps and challenge this dominance, participants called for **cross-regional learning** as a fundamental element of global solidarity. “There are many lessons we could be learning from different movements around the world,” offered Shailly Barnes. Tatiana Cordero shared that it would be useful to learn “What’s going on, how do you go about it, what type of critical elements are there to be accounted for in terms of protection and security... exchange of knowledge is absolutely vital, and that has to be done cross-regionally.” Shailly concluded, “We have very few spaces where that kind of exchange can happen and leaders can learn from each other’s experiences.”

This is particularly important, Jessica Horn added, in the context of globalization and the impact of US foreign policy, for example, on other regions of the world. “If things are happening in the United States, and they’re going to affect Africans in particular countries or the region as a whole, it is helpful if American feminist activists also provide briefings, do the analyses, and help understand what the implications are, so that from a domestic or national level within African contexts people can also respond and anticipate and get sense of what might be happening,” Jessica explained. Naureen Lalani (Asia Safe Abortion Partnership) asserted that “global allies” are important for her work in Pakistan, to “learn from the challenges they faced, their successes, interventions taken by diverse group of people in different countries.” This learning can be particularly helpful in terms of “experiences of cross-movement work that we can learn from,” added Ximena Andión.

Deliberate efforts to build capacity among movements was recommended by a range of respondents. Sagari Ramdas called for political education and stimulating community leadership, while Heba Khalil expressed the need “to build our capacities and enhance our skills in ways that can help us reflect on what we’ve done, and on

an agenda for the time to come.” Jessica Horn identified “consciousness raising” as a key element in building shared politics, as a foundation for alliance-building and collective work. Greater inclusivity would be achieved through “more capacity-building among feminist organizations to talk about other issues, and to work on other issues,” Ximena Andión added.



We need time to think across. There's a need for substantive exchanges to understand what is happening in different spaces and points in a manner that contributes to them to rethink and reorganize their own ways of resisting in their own constraining circumstances... Putting people together in a room, to figure out what is going on, a better sense of what is happening, with people coming from different sides - macroeconomics, most liminal ground levels of exclusion, people taking politics... We need a better sense of what is happening before doing anything.

Sonia Corrêa

Sexuality Policy Watch

Respondents highlighted specific ideas for how to engage in this cross-regional, cross-movement learning. Rhoda Reddock recommended “trainings on political economy and feminist theory,” for both feminist and non-feminist movements. Specifically, Sagari Ramdas called for “a shared, more proactive space” in which to analyze the nexus between fascism and capitalism in contemporary contexts. Briefings and clear action items would be useful, according to Jessica Horn, to share thinking and “concrete assessments, so that we can also actually work out what we can practically do.” Heba Khalil shared that “anyone active with imagining social change in Egypt is constantly looking for educational opportunities,” such as teach-ins. Both Nayyirah Shariff and Noelene Nabulivou illustrated the importance of learning while doing collective advocacy, bringing community activists to “really see the politics and power at play,” in Noelene’s words. “Learning more about how other groups face transnational organizations... doing thought exchanges with other people, seeing what their struggles are and the fact that all of our struggles are connected, would be really helpful,” Nayyirah explained. Paired with deliberate debriefing, as Noelene emphasized, these spaces of exchange can be important catalysts for strengthening movements and their strategies.

Beyond collective learning, respondents called for the fomenting of more **critical analysis**, to generate more progressive thinking and bolster related advocacy efforts. “We should be active in producing knowledge,” asserted Ato Kwamena Onoma, including through building conversation between African scholars. Yao Graham mentioned the need to “strengthen our collaborative research relations within a research community,” and Sonia Corrêa referred to “creating spaces for conversations and exchanges for critical thinking that are not tied up to outcomes and products automatically.”

Recuperating heterodox analysis is essential as a foundation for policy change, Noelene Nabulivou asserted. This in turn “requires a lot of change in civil society” to enable that kind of knowledge production, she explained. Ximena added that “arguments that are based on research, which we’re trying to do, is important in trying to convince” policy-makers and people in other movements. Other respondents echoed this need for critical theory on a range of issues. Manjula Pradeep called for building critical caste theory along the lines of critical

race theory; Andrea Kämpf expressed the need to formulate a new economic paradigm to counter orthodox dogma; and Ghiwa Sayegh pointed to feminist knowledge production and methodologies. Creating collective, “nuanced understandings” is important, respondents articulated, for strengthening both advocacy work and its policy impact.

4.2.4 Engage

Building on a foundation of reflection and critical analysis, effective engagement was established as a precondition for alliance-building and integrating agendas in the contemporary geopolitical context. “We don’t have a strategy of dealing with the right-wing,” described Tulika Srivastava. Andrea Terceros Hans echoed this: “We have a lot of anger and we are moving as one, but in reality, we are not doing this effectively.” Sagari Ramdas expressed the need to sharpen global strategy through “critically analyzing political decisions we’ve made.” Noelene Nabulivou illustrated, “I’m hearing so much more from indigenous women’s groups [and] grassroots organizing groups,” which have not been “given the space to be articulated and worked on in genuine solidarity. How do we do the urgent action response with each other? I feel like we’ve given those tasks to certain groups, and then I’m not clear on accountability.”

Figuring out ways to work around politically difficult situations – to “reflect on how best to engage [and] where is the most strategic place for us to intervene,” in the words of Vince Warren – is a central preoccupation of many of the interviewees. “In terms of how the feminist agenda is being articulated and responses to current trends,” Jessica Horn stated, “there is a need for some **targeted convening**.” Learning from the strategies of various regional and country contexts would also be beneficial. Heba Khalil shared the example of human rights groups in Egypt “devising different ways forward: going under the radar as if this is temporary; new ways of working, for example all operating online, doing our own activities as if individually but part of a bigger strategy and collaboration, and that becomes a way of survival.” Jessica illustrated recent meetings convened by the Urgent Action Fund in Africa, which she described as helpful “because it’s a moment when we’re trying to get a sense of what’s happening, and sort of re-align and work out what needs to be done.”



How are we responding to this geopolitical context we are talking about? The method of protests and demonstrations on the streets is not enough. We are trying to find a way in which different sectors can sit together to make one strategy, ... to find out one way to talk together.

Andrea Terceros Hans
Vecinas Feministas

In terms of **engaging with governments**, respondents in contexts as different as Egypt and the US spoke of deciphering innovative ways to work with state power. Heba Khalil explained that Egyptian civil society organizations see participating in UN spaces as a way to broker opportunities to meet with government officials at the national level. “We want to find the opportunity or the space to have a conversation with the government again,” Heba said, “to have a dialogue on issues but also to start undoing clear animosity between state institutions and civil society.” In the US context, Cathy Albisa expressed, “It’s not just that our movements are in siloes, it’s that

our strategies are. We haven't figured out how to link them up especially in terms of actually taking power." She argued that civil society should get beyond its discomfort with "being those who are powerful" through electoral politics, in addition to working to influence governments from a place of principle. "We need to claim governments, make them our own ... become decision-makers, people who operationalize and work from the inside," Cathy said.

Respondents also spoke of the need to foment strategies for engagement outside direct government advocacy. "Our initial thinking was how to locate ourselves in a movement-defense context instead of policy fighting context," expressed Vince Warren. Similarly, Fadekemi Akinfaderin-Agarau said, "If we are able to focus more on public education and public engagement and use that to cultivate a movement of people that go beyond the traditional NGOs, we can make more impact." Sabika Abbas Naqvi echoed this emphasis on education, particularly for gender sensitization. Working with non-traditional allies, such as religious leaders, was mentioned by Richie Maitland as a way of influencing extremist Christian dogma through peer messaging. Sabika also spoke of the need to work on media advocacy and lobbying, to stimulate public awareness of "people across political spectrums." She highlighted innovative cultural forms of organizing, including poetry recitations and public performance, which contributes to "opening up public spaces to women that were mostly only open to men." Finally, Cathy Albisa suggested that the "most effective way to move things for women and people with non-traditional gender identities, etc., is actually outside of traditional feminist spaces." Rather than talking amongst ourselves, Cathy argued for feminist infiltration of a range of spaces, "and because you're there at the table your issues will be included."

4.3 Build Innovative and Flexible Funding

The interview process elicited much specific feedback about funding, namely how donor priorities can hamper or support the aims of various progressive and feminist movements. Several respondents challenged the strict categorization often employed by funders, who direct resources based on their schemas and definitions rather than on nuanced understandings of regional specificities. This is particularly relevant for Latin America, Tatiana Cordero shared, where funders delineate resourcing patterns based on international markers of "poor" or "least developed" countries, rather than taking into account the very real needs of populations and movements within middle-income states. In Africa, resources earmarked for specific regions cannot be spent on broader, continental alliance-building work, a situation that creates challenges for regional networks like Third World Network-Africa. Yao Graham illustrated the long-term effects on certain areas of work due to the dearth of Pan-African funding, where few "organizations [have] the flexibility, with the resources, as well as a political commitment to spend resources to fill that critical gap between what each organization generates for its own work."

These constraints suggest the need for a broader approach, one that reaches across thematic and regional categories to fund promising work, movement-identified needs, and thought leadership where it occurs. In the US context, both Colette Pichon Battle and Cathy Albisa spoke of the need to direct funding in non-traditional ways. "We need funding in the [US] South, going to communities that understand everyone's new political reality as a daily practice," Colette opined. "For Southern grassroots leadership, the knowledge we have in particular is



The Black male unemployment rate in New Orleans is 40%. Despite all of the hype around the investment and entrepreneurship being funded in New Orleans, which is true, none of the people getting the money are from New Orleans and very few of them are Black ... We are missing that because [the philanthropic] sector sees business as the enemy, but for Black, brown, indigenous folks, entrepreneurial business is their only source of income. Yes, we want to eliminate extractive capitalist labor-violating business, but look at this good example of business, this cooperative model rooted in an intersectional analysis led by the front lines.

Colette Pichon Battle

US Human Rights Network

whereas international funding favors narrow, conservative attention on anti-corruption initiatives, particularly in extractive industries. “At this point,” Tatiana continued, “we really cannot keep on moving like that, wanting to have certainty. It’s important to move with care, with uncertainty.”

Colette Pichon Battle echoed this perspective, asserting, “These times are calling for courage - courageous leaders and also courageous and innovative funding.” As organizations and movements figure out how to operate in new and newly integrated ways, donors will also have to change their ways of working, and “some of the money has to get to people who can take risks at the edges,” she said. She shared the example of two businesses that emerged in the post-Katrina context in New Orleans, both worker-owned cooperatives led by Black men (see box), as examples of innovative new collectivities. Similarly, Rhoda Reddock spoke of the need to direct resource flows to cooperatives and various alternative economic activities.

Limited funding is also fostering competition between organizations, respondents shared. Fadekemi Akinfaderin-Agarau explained, “[In] the broader feminist movement... we are keeping these closed circles, and we are not able to open up for new people to come into the space and run with the messages.” Fadekemi pointed to donors as “pitting us against each other” with organizations turning insular and “looking for individualized attribution.” Ximena Andión spoke to international donor pressure on movements “to include a gender perspective,” which can border on instrumentalism if the opportunities for cross-movement alliance-building are not properly carried out.

surviving white supremacy, innovative and alternative economies and sustaining ourselves, and building community.... That’s where the solutions, innovation, [and] leadership is going to come from,” she elaborated. Cathy raised the question of whether feminist funders are looking beyond the mainstream women’s rights organizations to fund leaders working with a broader understanding of “women’s issues,” encompassing economic justice work like the Fight for 15, “because those are women, disproportionately, and it’s a gendered experience, a lot of single moms in that situation [of working for unlivable minimum wage], but you don’t see those links.”

Rather than funding in a manner sensitive to interlinkages, donors are perceived as following conservative, linear prescriptions. “They want a recipe,” Tatiana Cordero said, “with the steps clearly identified, the outcomes and the projections in a linear fashion.” Yao Graham also critiqued “the hegemony of orientation that these international [organizations and donors] have,” that directs “the bulk of the money that is spent by donors from outside [to] traditional, conservative perspectives.” He shared the example of African organizations “seeking to link the discussion of human rights, environment, and corruption as a development issue, which is trying to be more progressive,”

“We need funders to support smaller, state-level organizations to lead convenings of larger groups and to help us all think and work more intersectionally,” offered Vince Warren. “Those closest to the communities are seeing different things,” he continued, and these should guide donor priorities. This kind of funding is essential “to make advocacy more effective at regional and international level,” illustrated Andrea Terceros Hans. “We need resources to develop our capacities, dialogues, [in] alliance with all sectors (government, social movements, etc.) to build a solid movement,” she elaborated. Tatiana Cordero shared an example of how her organization functions in distributing small grants: Fondo de Acción Urgente specifically targets “cross-movement articulation” through rapid response funds, “to strengthen the feminist movement, but also the relationships with other movements.”

Along these lines, Fadekemi Akinfaderin-Agarau asserted, “There needs to be a stronger conversation amongst funders, especially those that are supporting grassroots work, on how to support a culture of movement building and fostering collaboration.” She warned of the dangers of donors “advancing the NGOization of the continent,” a concern echoed by Noelene Nabulivou, who lamented the “marketization of the movement” as feminist groups are strengthened. Akhil Kang echoed that the “hegemonization of funding” carries severe costs for local movements, and for feminist knowledge and strategy, in Noelene’s framing. Through her organizing experience in Flint, Michigan, Nayyirah Shariff observed that resources tend to flow according to decisions of the “non-profit industrial complex,” rather than through an examination of the needs of communities or organizations on the ground. Yao Graham summarized: “The way the donor communities formulate what their interests are definitely has an influence on what [the work] becomes.” In an environment of scarce resources, “people take the monies that will enable them to survive,” he said, which elevates certain perspectives and priorities over others according to the logic of funding streams rather than of effectiveness or importance.

Rooting her analysis in a Black feminist agenda, Colette Pichon Battle spoke of the need “to figure out how, when disasters happen, to collect and funnel money down to the women in the thick of it (as opposed to these male-led or white-led institutions that take 40% of their overhead and put stringent grant reporting on the \$2 that made it to the ground).” She shared the example of targeted leadership investment undertaken by the Maya Wiley of the Center for Social Inclusion, who gathered nascent leaders in the post-Katrina Gulf. A decade later, ten of this original cohort are running national organizations or working in philanthropy, success that Colette directly pegged to the Center’s support “at a very early stage [that] allowed



Most of the money that has come in for the water crisis is for children under the age of 6, and the way that decisions are made with how that money is being distributed is problematic. Many of the people making those decisions were the ones that were part of the cover-up, and in some instances they are using the money to fund their pet projects. \$7-8 million has come in so far and the largest culprit is the Dolly Parton Imagination Library, sending books to kids. We asked, how many authors of color are included in these books? The answer was zero. 65% of the population of Flint is African-American and 10% is Latinx and this is what you choose?

Nayyirah Shariff
Flint Democracy Defense League

for respite, reflection, exchange, thought leadership, [and] critical thinking.” Finally, respondents advised that the most effective funding targets are where work is happening. “If we are talking about equitable and inclusive distribution,” Manjula Pradeep posed, “can funding received be re-organized to go to where it is needed, without stigma and discrimination based on an identity type?” Similarly, Cathy Albisa stressed that “Foundations need to get serious about building actual power in people who are impacted and marginalized.” Instead of rewarding “beautiful reports and the show of analysis and language,” donors should seek and support “the actual strategy that shifts power,” she added.

5 | Conclusion

In the context of authoritarianism's worldwide growth, underpinned by an adaptable global capitalism and neoliberal hegemony (of which Donald Trump is but one example), the guidance and reflections included here indicate a pointed way forward for allies, donors, and progressive and feminist collectives like those represented by the interviewees.

Collectively, the interviews upon which this report is built sketch the current challenges confronting progressive and feminist collectives (from right-wing regimes, broader neoliberal structures, funders, and each other), and detail effective strategies to overcome them. Due to limited capacity and time, and constant crisis, participants illustrate the difficulties of undertaking reflection and producing rigorous assessment to develop these approaches. They therefore call for funding, time, and space to develop robust critical analysis to engage more effectively with current political contexts, especially collectively in a collaborative reflection process. Perspectives they shared indicate that movements are often fractured, especially by hierarchies, and sometimes intentionally by regressive forces.

In terms of potential solutions, many interviewees point to the importance of adopting intersectionality as a guiding frame, a lens that has already been a cornerstone of organizing in some movements for many years. Stimulating and strengthening cross-movement work can also address the need for new, transnational alliances, promoting the exchange of tactics and the collective building of political and communications strategies in true solidarity (as opposed to an increasingly commodified solidarity and online-only "support"). A full list of tactics emerging from this process is detailed in the following section, "Strategic Proposals."

Interviewees described feeling stifled by rigid funding requirements and donor micro-management, and instead suggested flexible, courageous, holistic funding that targets priorities defined on the ground in support of what is working. Long-term, consistent funding sources are essential to prevent and heal frequently-cited issues of burnout and limited capacity, and to strengthen and sustain collectives. The strategies and positive examples compiled here provide direction for effectively confronting a political context of (renewed) repression, marked by an infiltration of the state and global funding cuts and recent takeovers by right-wing alliances. These purposeful connections will ensure that feminist and progressive collectives share strategies and build true alliances to support each other in global struggle.

6 | Strategic Proposals

6.1 Grounding Intersectionalities, Forging Sustainable Alliances

- Foster cross-movement encounters to create linkages that ground intersectional approaches and spur broad mobilization against authoritarianism and neoliberalism.
- Invest in (cross-)regional engagements, with local and national organizing as an organic foundation.
 - » South-South exchange is especially critical to building alternative pathways for international organizing.
- Organize across generations and cultivate a shared memory of tactics and trajectory.
- Manifest “solidarity” through concrete fulfilment of shared responsibility (rather than shallow gestures).
- Strategize for infiltration of non-feminist progressive spaces to inject feminist analysis into intersecting issues such as labor, migration, etc.
 - » Similarly, expand “narrow” feminist spaces by bringing in newer groups and allies to link anti-patriarchal and anti-capitalist analyses.
- Build in processes for extended engagement and follow-up to convenings; avoid “one-off” meetings.
- Provide resources like spaces, funding, and time for rest, retreat, and reflection amidst the pressures and constraints of organizing.

6.2 Regenerating Progressive Analysis

- Contest and confront the totality of neoliberal thought, including by generating analysis rooted in alternative paradigms, recovering suppressed heterodox thought, and grounding a research agenda that is informed by and informs activist priorities.
- Expand the fragile infrastructure for tracking ideological, strategic, technical, and financial flows between far-right actors transnationally. Identify the key actors, map their channels of exchange, and build a detailed picture of far-right networks.
- Extract information from within imperialist/interventionist countries on their foreign policy, especially towards the global South.
- Perform further autopsies of progressive losses and the rise of authoritarianism.
 - » Analyze and confront instances of the political left entering into alliances with corporate interests and conservative religious forces, which in turn constrains their agendas and discourse.
 - » Defend existing progressive victories and design strategies to resist future attack.
- Debate and refresh progressive, feminist agendas by convening spaces for in-person analytical exchange.
- Bolster the capacity of feminist and other progressive movements to apply a political economy and feminist analysis, and dissect the convergence of fascism and capitalism.

- Apply existing theories as a blueprint to generate new analysis adapted to local contexts (e.g. building a critical caste theory out of critical race theory).
- Conduct research that connects seemingly isolated issues to substantiate interlinkages and provide a platform for intersectional advocacy.

6.3 Sharing Tactics

- Collectively craft effective communications strategies to convey and support activism.
 - » Intentionally work against the dominance of the English language.
 - » Level the playing field in terms of technological access and know-how.
- Utilize the UN and other intergovernmental arenas to bridge strained relationships between civil society and national governments.
- Share best practices in the face of security concerns and dangers faced by activists in the form of online hacking, threats, etc.
- Share and learn from the strategies of groups operating in politically restrictive contexts, including deciphering creative ways to engage state power.
- Raise popular consciousness and engagement to cultivate a movement of people beyond traditional NGOs by holding teach-ins, develop general audience content, canvass, host public events, etc.

6.4 Innovative and Flexible Funding

- Expand funding from an interlinkage approach, beyond mainstream women’s rights organizations to include organizers working with an intersectional understanding of “women’s issues.”
 - » Local, autonomous organizations in particular need resources to continue doing grounded, organically cross-movement work.
- Earmark resources for long-term capacity building, critical reflection on movement strengths and weaknesses, and dialogue to consolidate political visions.
- Deploy rapid response grants to support local, urgent work across movements.
- Fund regional work in addition to national-level organizing.
- Break from restrictive funding practices such as:
 - » Siloing of movements by single issues
 - » Country-specific (rather than regional) funding
 - » Hyper-focusing on “least developed” countries to the exclusion of struggles in “middle-income” countries
 - » Strict funding reporting requirements (such as detailed result expectations), which grassroots groups often lack capacity to meet
 - » Over-funding global NGOs headquartered in the North (but installed in the South) rather than autonomous groups formed in the region
 - » Demanding linear progression rather than allowing for organic, grounded work to unfold

7 | Annex

7.1 Interviewees

Name	Location	Organization
Sabika Abbas Naqvi	India	Pinjra Tod
Dalia Abd El-Hameed	Egypt	Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights
Fadekemi Akinfaderin-Agarau	Nigeria	Education as a Vaccine
Cathy Albisa	USA	National Economic and Social Rights Initiative
Ximena Andión Ibañez	Mexico	Instituto de Liderazgo Simone de Beauvoir
Shailly Barnes	USA	Poor People's Campaign
Edurne Cárdenas	Argentina	Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales, Universidad Nacional de Lanús
Tatiana Cordero Velásquez	Latin America – Regional	Fondo de Acción Urgente para América Latina y el Caribe
Sonia Corrêa	Brazil	Sexuality Policy Watch
Ana Falú	Argentina	National University of Córdoba, UN-Habitat UNI Gender Hub
Jasmine Lovely George	India	Hidden Pockets
Yao Graham	Africa – Regional	Third World Network-Africa
Ana Paula Hernández	Central America – Regional	Fund for Global Human Rights
Jessica Horn	Africa – Regional	The African Women's Development Fund
Andrea Kämpf	Germany	German Institute for Human Rights
Akhil Kang	India	Queer Dalit Collective
Heba Khalil	Egypt	Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights (ECESR)
Ato Kwamena Onoma	Africa – Regional	Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa
Naureen Lalani	Asia – Regional	Asia Safe Abortion Partnership
Richie Maitland	Grenada	Groundation Grenada
Noelene Nabulivou	Fiji	Diverse Voices and Action for Equality
Wanda Nowicka	Poland	Equality and Modernity Association, ASTRA Network
Colette Pichon Battle	USA	US Human Rights Network (at the time of interview)/ Gulf Coast Center for Law & Policy
Manjula Pradeep	India	Navsarjan
Sagari Ramdas	India	Food Sovereignty Alliance
Rhoda Reddock	Caribbean – Regional	University of the West Indies, St. Augustine
Ghiwa Sayegh	Lebanon	Kohl: a Journal for Body and Gender Research
Nayyirah Shariff	USA	Flint Democracy Defense League
Tulika Srivastava	India	Women's Fund Asia
Andrea Terceros Hans	Latin America – Regional	Vecinas Feministas
Vince Warren	USA	Center for Constitutional Rights