

# Feminist MEL



Samen  
Werkt.



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## 1. Introduction

In the first half of 2023, MEL coordinators of several Strategic Partnerships (SPs) and Monitor, Evaluation & Learning (MEL) representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) have entered the dialogue to discuss MEL in the Strengthening Civil Society (SCS) framework. Among the points discussed are the current reporting guidelines and the use of Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB) quality criteria for evaluation. It became apparent that differences exist between progressive Feminist MEL approaches and the donor MEL approaches of the MFA.

Parallel to the SP MEL dialogues, the Women's Rights and Gender Equality Task Force (WRGET) of MFA, Count Me In! and Power Up! Consortia started to explore feminist MEL jointly approaches as part of the new Feminist Foreign Policy for the successor of the current SCS policy framework (including the SDG5 fund), and other policy frameworks in all thematic areas of MFA's work. These parallel initiatives resulted in collaboration and commitment to organising a learning session Feminist MEL.



*Izabela Markova*

## 2. Learning session Feminist MEL

### 2.1 Objectives and Learning Questions

To design the learning session on Feminist MEL, two preparatory meetings with the core group members took place. During these preparatory meetings, the main objectives, key takeaways and formats of the session were discussed. This led to the following three objectives with corresponding learning questions:

#### **Objective 1: joint learning**

- Why is adopting a Feminist MEL approach essential and valuable?
- What are the fundamental principles and practices of Feminist MEL?
- What are the opportunities and obstacles to implementing Feminist MEL?
- What are the differences and similarities between feminist, community-led, decolonised, and localised MEL approaches?
- What are Feminist tools and methodologies of data collection and analyses?

#### **Objective 2: Explore opportunities and obstacles to integrating Feminist MEL in the successor to the current SCS policy framework (including the SDG5 fund).**

- How is Feminist MEL different from the current requirements for the SCS policy framework (donor-driven MEL)?
- What obstacles and opportunities exist for implementing feminist MEL in the SCS policy framework and Feminist Foreign Policy?

#### **Objective 3: what are good practices of how Feminist MEL can be applied?**

- What are inspiring, practical examples of implementing Feminist MEL principles?
- What are concrete examples of how organisations navigate the IOB criteria for evaluation?

## 3. Objective 1: joint learning

### 3.1 Why Feminist MEL and why now?

For the last 10 years, many WROs and civil society organisations (CSOs) have been experimenting with Feminist MEL. Feminist MEL challenges rigour and notions of objectivity along with the entrenched evaluation approaches that undervalue the breadth of knowledge systems and practices from the Global South. It challenges the entire MEL process by asking questions about the actual value for women in the context of specific questions, how to measure that value, which techniques to use to ensure and enable participation of women and diversities, how to collectively (re-)define evaluation concepts to capture power imbalances; and about how to communicate evaluation findings in favour of crosscutting learning. Hence, it has a valuable contribution to generating knowledge and understanding. Doing so places women's experiences, leadership and solutions at the centre of inquiry instead of focussing primarily on the value for donors.

A part of the current interest in Feminist MEL comes from the attention placed on Feminist Foreign Policies. The existence of Feminist Foreign Policies requires us to interrogate all aspects of development practice from a feminist lens. Nowadays, bilateral donors are investing in WROs and feminist movements. Hence, it is essential to rethink how we do MEL so it aligns with the envisioned social change these organisations and movements are supporting. This type of social change is non-linear, complex and takes time, meaning we need to adjust our approach to doing MEL.

The current commitment to localisation and decolonisation creates additional imperatives to reimagine how we do MEL. These agendas have a focus on power and shifting power in common. These also need to apply to monitoring, evaluating, and learning. The current way of doing MEL is limiting us all. The type of change we envision through the Strategic Partnerships is non-linear, complex and long-term. The data collected through MEL processes should be data for social change instead of only feeding donor accountability systems. Donor-driven MEL does not help us in our attempts to diagnose problems and find solutions in diverse and sometimes rapidly changing contexts. For donor-driven MEL to not only benefit accountability systems, it is crucial to explore how it can also benefit programmatic improvement for WROs and feminist political projects.

### 3.2 Who are we referring to?

Different partnerships work in different ways. They work at different levels with a variety of social groups. Depending on the partnership and the project, some CSOs work with southern-based partners, including WROs, while others work more directly with people of communities. The people we work with comprise different social groups, including young women, non-binary, intersex and trans people. Similar to women, these groups face gender-based discrimination and oppression. Hence, in this report, we refer to all these groups in their diversity.

### 3.3 Key principles of Feminist MEL

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#### Participation & Power sharing

Feminist MEL is a way of generating knowledge by centring the experiences and expertise of people we work with. It promotes shared decision-making and puts emphasis on knowledge-generating and learning processes that are meaningful, accessible and relevant to the movements, coalitions and alliances. Feminist MEL requires us to use a power analysis and understand power dynamics prior to starting the actual MEL process. This also includes bringing to the fore the power of evaluators and facilitators. When starting the MEL process, the people we work with have the power. They co-create the tools and approaches, and they are acknowledged as knowledge experts on all the issues that impact them. Feminist MEL requires us to use a power analysis and understand power dynamics prior to starting the actual MEL process, which includes bringing to the fore the power of evaluators and facilitators.

#### Examples of good practices:

- To create awareness of power dynamics; (I) facilitate space for open discussion about power imbalances; (II) conduct a power analysis of stakeholders, and (III) formulate positionality statements by evaluations.
- Implement participatory approaches that support reflection and mutual learning in partnerships.
- Create spaces where people we work with can actively participate in defining main questions of the MEL process.
- Be creative when designing the monitoring framework and keep in mind that collective is better than aggregated.

- Facilitate mutual learning with respect to MEL and incorporate MEL practices and knowledge of people we work with.
- Ensure that MEL tools are co-created with people we work with to include what is important for their aims. Subsequently, ensure that they have access to MEL tools in accessible formats and languages.
- Create spaces where those we work with can share their stories that go beyond what has been shared in reports

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#### Intersectionality

Feminist MEL takes into consideration diverse social groups. The realities of these diverse social groups can, however, not be siloed. Hence, Feminist MEL does not attempt to box different social groups, such as ‘young women’, or ‘LGBTQI+’ in the same way that Results-Based Monitor (RBM) systems do. Intersectionality is an inherent condition of the human being and not solely an approach. Feminist MEL, in particular, focusses on the complex effects that influence experiences and roles of those we work with. These diverse experiences and roles are, in turn, shaped by unique social characteristics. Feminist MEL tools need to account for different experiences based on overlapping forms of discrimination and oppression that the people we work with face.

#### Examples of good practices:

- MEL systems should be kept flexible and less burdensome. Current donor-driven MEL approaches solely benefit accountability systems, making MEL systems burdensome for the people we work with. Instead, such approaches

should shift towards MEL systems that actually serve those who are using the system.

- Understand how people we work with reflect on their realities and what marginalisation looks in their contexts. Ensure that they are involved in and have access to the MEL tools in accessible formats and accessible languages.
- Prioritise security over reporting. For security reasons, partners are not always in the position to look for the Internet and download your reporting tools. In such situations it is crucial to be flexible and rethink if and how you ask them to report.

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### Collective learning

In Feminist MEL, we accept multiple ways of knowing and value the contextual knowledge that lies within the movements we aim to support. Learning is prioritised as central to the movements. Hence, Feminist MEL ensures that all generated knowledge across diverse audiences is used to solve challenges and meet needs, to foster cultures of learning among feminist organisations, and to contribute to existing literature.

#### Example of good practice:

- Incorporate questions on learning in MEL tools to guarantee that those we work with can continuously share lessons learned and promote evidence, decision-making and collective understanding
- Prioritise relationship-building as part of MEL systems by facilitating open spaces for joint exchange and learning.

- Promote spaces for collective knowledge generation. As previously stated, the collective is more meaningful than the aggregated.
- Be creative in socialising learnings, as there are plenty more options than solely written reports.
- Promote linking and learning among people we work with to guarantee mutual learning and real collective understanding.

4

### Care & wellbeing

From a Feminist perspective, care is a precondition for activism and for organisational health. And this belief should also permeate the MEL practice. The principle of care and wellbeing ensures that people are valued as humans, supporting their emotional and psychological needs, and prioritising mutual support and connection. An important dimension of care and wellbeing is ethics and safety. Ethics and safety are strongly interrelated with the earlier stated principles of power and intersectionality. By prioritising safety and security, Feminist MEL recognises that safety and security varies according to power. From an intersectional perspective, social groups, and women in particular, carry higher risks as a result of their social characteristics. Hence, each context requires a thorough power analysis with an intersectional lens to identify risks and assure the safety and security of diverse social groups.

### Examples of good practices:

- Guarantee safety, security and well-being in MEL systems by implementing do not-harm principles of those affected by interventions.
- Psychosocial care should be offered to those who participate in evaluation processes. Furthermore, feminist evaluators should try to understand the forms of care within communities and ensure they are in place to be activated before the onset of any evaluation process.
- Always seek consent from those people who are affected by interventions to participate in MEL activities. Organisations can do so by incorporating a section on consent in all MEL tools. In some situations, information and data should remain confidential to guarantee the safety and well-being of people. Respect this at all times, even when donors ask for the information.
- Those providing information should always clearly understand why it is being collected and how it will be used.
- Certain terminology can be problematic in certain contexts, making it unsafe to operate with the same wording in all contexts (and the situation can change over time), so MEL tools need to be flexible enough to accommodate different ways of talking about the same thing.
- Advocate on the donor community about the potential risks of 'transparency initiatives' for human-rights defenders.

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### Facilitating role

Feminist MEL values everyone's expertise and seeks to use MEL tools to facilitate meaningful exchange. This means letting go of the conviction that those based in the Global North are the experts in MEL processes. Rather, those in the Global North should focus on solidarity actions and co-facilitating since civil society, WRO and CSOs own their own stories and experiences.

### Examples of good practices:

- Train people we work with to capture and tell their stories. It is important to do so, as it contributes to their inclusion and participation in MEL processes and activities.
- Allow partners to train the evaluation team in facilitation roles that better fits their needs.

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### Celebrate diversity

Generally, Feminist MEL does not dictate certain types of tools, data and analyses. Instead, it carefully assesses what information is meaningful in a specific context and values diversity over coherency. Hence, Feminist MEL tools are not always written or verbal – they may originate from indigenous knowledge systems, such as artwork or weaving. Feminist MEL celebrates the diversity of communicating and respects this when asking communities to contribute their knowledge and understanding of change. Sharing diverse stories is an essential part of this.

**Examples of good practices:**

- Select Feminist MEL tools and methodologies that incorporate multiple benchmarks of success, that use both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods, that prioritise qualitative data over quantitative data to promote storytelling of significant changes from those affected by interventions.
- Develop these tools and methodologies with an understanding that social change is actually a process and is not limited to the end result only.
- Stories should be selected by the people we work with to encourage the construction of knowledge 'from below'.

### 3.4 Obstacles for implementing Feminist MEL

**Monitoring is often the biggest pain point and reporting is heavy.** Collecting data and reporting on many quantitative indicators is heavy due to effort, but also because of the misalignment between reporting requirements of donors and feminist principles. The story emerging as a result of donor-driven reporting requirements does often not tell a true, complete story of change.

**Results-based Monitoring and reporting are linked to donors' risk tolerance and accountability-driven systems.** The SCS policy framework is funded by Dutch taxpayers. Hence, it is argued by the MFA that there is a strong demand to show results to taxpayers and the Parliament. It is important to first clarify what type of results are expected by tax-payers and the Parliament. Subsequently, we should ask ourselves how to find a balance in getting these pieces of data

ready while still providing space for partners to do their work and not be sidetracked by producing information for IATI or limiting and simplifying data. If appears that a focus on results is inevitable, it is crucial to be transparent to partners on why certain data is needed and how it will be used. This should also be clarified by the donors themselves.

**The issue of trust is evident across a range of funding decisions and practices.**

It is linked to risk and risk tolerance, which is an accountability issue. It is also a question of partnership and how donors understand and work in partnerships. [HREFN](#) illustrates that a trust gap can manifest in several ways, ranging from withholding funding to micromanaging activities and strict reporting requirements. Although Feminist MEL pleads for more flexibility and less burdensome MEL systems, the issue of trust can prevent a shift towards Feminist MEL approaches. Trust needs time to develop and building on good practices of working in trust-based partnerships can be valuable in the successor policy framework.

External factors, such as anti-feminist movements, gender resistance and backlash, may hinder a transformation towards Feminist MEL. In the context in which WROs and feminist movements are operating, the expectation that women's rights and gender equality results will happen in a way that is linear and positive is problematic. Gender equality change often involves one step forward, two steps back and holding on to previously won ground, especially in relation to legislative and policy change. In the current context of backlash, we need MEL approaches that account for this reality.



**Donor-driven MEL impedes the strengthening of people within organisations and, hence, conflicts with Feminist MEL.** MEL has to be put at the centre of the needs and possibilities of people we work with. To do so, requirements must be easily met by partners. By ignoring this, external consultants are often hired solely to respond to high accountability requirements, preventing the strengthening of the people, communities and organisations.

**Often, women's material realities are not placed at the centre of MEL practices.** If these material realities are not considered as a key driver for real participation, Feminist MEL will not be possible.

**MEL is not always understood as a political activity that is part of the entire change process.** By acknowledging that Feminist MEL is not value-free, it also acknowledged that no single assessment framework or tool will be sufficiently enough to unpack gender inequalities and the social factors that contribute to these inequalities.

Donor-driven MEL approaches take power imbalances and dynamics insufficiently into account. As illustrated in the Feminist MEL principle 'power & power sharing', it is important to challenge these hierarchies in the MEL process between the evaluator and the 'evaluated', and between the donor and those participating in projects.



*Ipsita Divedi*

## 4. Objective 2: Opportunities and obstacles for integrating Feminist MEL in the successor policy framework

The new policy framework offers an opportunity for the MFA to transform its MEL systems and processes by adopting a feminist approach to doing MEL. In order to support the implementation of feminist MEL, the Dutch MFA and the rest of the strategic partnerships need to have a different approach to risk (and risk tolerance) and accountability towards promoting a true trust-based partnership.

Feminist MEL's key principles offer guidance on how MEL systems and processes can be transformed. There is no *one-size-fits-all* or one way of doing Feminist MEL. However, the preceding subchapters offer insights into why we promote Feminist MEL and how we can improve the MFA's (and the strategic partners') MEL practice so as to truly be transformative in our partnerships and programmes.

### 4.1 Differences between Feminist MEL and donor-driven MEL

The donor-driven criteria for MEL evaluation do often not align with Feminist MEL principles and practices. Table 1 illustrates the main differences between both MEL approaches.

Donor-driven MEL	Feminist MEL
Rigid results-based monitoring and reporting	Simplified, flexible approaches for tracking change and monitoring progress
Narrow definitions of what counts as progress and results (e.g. key performance indicators)	A wider lens of what constitutes data
(Upward) Accountability driven	Learning-driven, our focus is on downward accountability to the people we work with, horizontal accountability between the partners in a project, and upward accountability to donors.
Led by donor information needs	Led by data needs of local WROs and feminist organisations
Focus on linear ways of change	Focus on complex ways change may happen (contexts impact the change process)
More focus on extracting information from people we work with (one-way data collection & largely quantitative)	More focus on generating information and data with people we work with (two-way data collection and mixed methods with plenty of room for storytelling)
MEL staff and evaluators as experts that extract data and write reports	MEL staff and evaluators as facilitators that facilitate data collection & reporting processes

Table 1: differences between Feminist MEL and donor-driven MEL approaches

## 4.2 Key recommendation on Feminist MEL in the successor policy framework and Feminist Foreign Policy

The policy formulation period is an opportunity to revisit how the current result frameworks of the strategic partnerships were framed previously and how accountability systems were shaped by whom, for what, and why. In the successor policy framework, it is important that the policy recognises:

- that results-based management is extractive and puts/passes on burden to the strategic partners (recipient end of the aid chain)
- that there are other meaningful ways of assessing (reporting) and learning from the work that we do. MEL should be embedded as part of the social change process rather than an add-on (i.e. something 'done to' people)
- the power dynamics at play at every point of the MEL journey: *whose reality counts and who counts reality and why?* There is a need to shift the relationships of power in MEL processes
- that Feminist MEL offers a transformative (or alternative) framing of what rigour is and what counts as knowledge
- that women in all their diversity, are central to giving meaning to the change that they experience
- women's experience, leadership and solutions (i.e. their knowledge) should be placed at the centre of inquiry (data collection, sensemaking, knowledge creation & use)

- that feminist MEL offers shifts and adaptations to the current tools and systems and needs to be linked to more social justice evaluation orientation
- that in true partnerships, trust and mutual accountability are important aspects of partnership building and strengthening.

Table 2 (on the next page) presents a range of recommendations on what to include and to exclude in the next policy framework. Some of these are actions that strategic partners/alliances can do themselves, while others are actions/recommendations for the Dutch MFA. These key recommendations for the MFA, include:

- Transfer the responsibility of reporting to IATI to the MFA, at least for the results reporting;
- Combine results-based management with a focus on reporting on fewer indicators and shifting from onerous accountability reporting to a learning focus; and;
- Rethink the IOB criteria and reassess what counts as "quality" evaluation and by whom

### 4.2.1. Transfer the responsibility of reporting to IATI to the MFA, at least for the results reporting

The annual results reporting to the MFA generates a lot of data that can be used for IATI. However, publishing in IATI has become a burdensome task for organisations and consortium members. IATI as a platform is also highly technical and excludes small, informal (women's rights) organisations which do not have the capacity to understand and meet the requirements of the platform, let alone access internet bandwidth to be able to publish.

#### **4.2.2. Combine results-based management with a focus on reporting on fewer, less restrictive indicators and shifting from onerous accountability reporting to a learning focus**

Reporting on fewer, less restrictive indicators will lessen the reporting burden that is passed on to Southern-based organisations. In the next policy framework, the focus should be on shifting away from output monitoring that focuses on collecting and consolidating “numbers”. What is the bare minimum that the Dutch parliamentarians want to know? A dialogue on and co-sharing of decisions on the results framework for the new policy will offer space for shared ownership and decisions related to indicators, reporting requirements and their frequency. Further, it is important to acknowledge that the starting point is the programme design and priorities of the people we work with rather than the pre-setting of indicators that are not able to capture non-linear and complex change processes.

The new policy framework should also focus on promoting learning as defined by the diversity of social groups and southern-based partners. Feminist MEL is about learning and capacity strengthening - it is a reflexive way of generating and engaging with data and information in an action-reflection-learning approach, instead of solely “something you do on people” or an extractive way of collecting data.

#### **4.2.3. Rethink the IOB criteria and reassess what counts as “quality” evaluation and by whom**

The development of the new policy framework offers an opportunity to make use of the learnings of the midterm review process.

Especially on the reflections on the IOB criteria which are currently perceived as “tightly held Western beliefs about evaluative practice”, a practice that imposes requirements aligned with Western views of rigour, bias and analysis frameworks. Although the IOB criteria intend to promote and ensure quality, the practice of meeting these criteria has reinforced inequity and unequal power relations in evaluation. In line with the feminist MEL principles, we encourage the MFA to reassess what “quality” evaluation is and challenge the dominant definition of rigour on what knowledge is and how knowledge is gained, which only speaks to colonial and Global North’s view of MEL.

Further, there are merits in exploring the use of more feminist and social justice orientations to evaluation, which aligns with Feminist MEL practice and acknowledges complex and intersectional pathways. Donor-driven MEL and evaluation frameworks do not acknowledge this. Feminist evaluation is rooted in analysis that acknowledges challenging power and patriarchal or colonial structures as non-linear, complex and precarious. It requires different forms of data and analysis, including (but not limited to): data collection driven by and shared by participants; analysis frameworks that embed and offer a basic power/gender analysis; and prioritises language justice and accessibility. Lastly, feminist evaluation promotes inclusion and empowerment by creating space for the people we work with to exchange and share experiences and give meaning to the change that they are/have experienced.

## What to include and what to exclude in the successor policy framework

General	Participative MEL approaches	Resources & time	Baselines, MTR's & Endlines	(Basket) Indicators	Reporting & IATI
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Make MEL systems less burdensome and increase flexibility to capture and deliver the diverse stories and experiences of those we work with.</li> <li>○ Prioritise continuous reflection, which includes elements of learning.</li> <li>○ Include a Feminist MEL approach throughout the entire programme implementation process.</li> <li>○ More focus on learning instead of accountability pressure.</li> <li>○ Having meaningful conversations with</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ MEL should not be extractive but participatory where possible in all MEL phases, from planning to the dissemination of results. Co-designed, co-created or participant/partner-led MEL are preferred approaches.</li> <li>○ The learning agenda should be informed and owned by feminist movements themselves.</li> <li>○ Allow for participative approaches, suited to the needs of those we work with. Suggestions are:</li> <li>○ Increase storytelling and qualitative data</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Decisions on MEL capacity strengthening needs for partners lay with partners as much as possible, including budget.</li> <li>○ Less training in the traditional sense, rather focus on mutual learning (donors, programme staff, communities).</li> <li>○ Allow for proper MEL budgeting (3-10% of the total budget).</li> <li>○ Adaptability and longer time-frames within programmes to support people we work with in a sustainable manner.</li> <li>○ Leave room at the beginning to create a Feminist MEL framework, or allow an inception phase that includes conversations with people we work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Include more flexibility in content, approach and purpose for baselines, MTR's and endlines.</li> <li>○ More flexibility in terms of criteria for evaluators being independent evaluators.</li> <li>○ MTRs should focus on learning in addition to solely effectiveness. These different objectives should be decided upon by the project.</li> <li>○ Selective MTRs, not for all programmes. Make MTRs optional and allow projects to choose whether to do internal or external MTRs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Adaptive management applies to MEL, meaning ToC's and result frameworks can be adjusted based on progress, feedback received etc.</li> <li>○ Focus on impact and understanding of how context movements define impact (understand the process rather than solely the outcomes).</li> <li>○ Stimulate approaches that focus more on unintended effects/outcomes.</li> <li>○ Including changes in power dynamics as an outcome.</li> <li>○ Adaptive MEL, so no predefined indicators. If pre-defined indicators are unavoidable, focus on fewer, simplified, and</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Different contexts allow for a variety and diversity of MEL data and information; hence, requests for aggregation or summaries of data are not always useful or possible.</li> <li>○ Prioritise meaningful data that accounts for non-linear, complex and long-term change processes.</li> <li>○ Prioritise reporting requirements – What do donors actually need to know and what do they do with the info?</li> <li>○ Lighter reporting, especially for the years of the baseline and MTR. This is also a message to partnerships, which often tend to write extensive reports.</li> </ul>

<p>the donor on results and learning.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Increased attention to accountability to communities (downward accountability).</li> <li>○ Intersectionality not as a nominal variable but as a power and oppression analysis acknowledging the different places of oppression that women experience in their diverse realities.</li> <li>○ Do not change requirements after grants have been approved.</li> <li>○ Discuss risk and trust.</li> <li>○ Consider gender as women's rights rather than focusing on gendered</li> </ul>	<p>and less quantitative indicators.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Flexibility for more creative MEL methods and tools for data collection and reporting (videos and audio).</li> <li>○ Flexibility for simple and participatory reporting methods, such as outcome harvesting.</li> <li>○ Methods such as disaggregated data, case studies and gender action research.</li> <li>○ Sense-making workshops.</li> <li>○ Invest in formative research.</li> </ul>	<p>with to define MEAL approaches.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Invest in local learnings.</li> <li>○ Sequence of annual planning &amp; MTR is too tight.</li> </ul>		<p>less restrictive indicators and abolish targets for basket indicators, as the type of change envisioned is non-linear.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ MFA should design the results framework with people we work with well before the start of the programme.</li> <li>○ Fewer indicators.</li> <li>○ Moving away from unique numbers (quantitative indicators).</li> <li>○ Allow partners to choose if they want to disaggregate.</li> <li>○ Include the analysis of resistance.</li> <li>○ Get rid of the rigid indicators.</li> <li>○ Disaggregation of basket indicators.</li> <li>○ No donor defined indicators, rather defined by civil society members.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Allow for creative ways of reporting instead of solely written reports.</li> <li>○ IATI: no results reporting, only financial reporting.</li> <li>○ IATI reporting should not be a mandatory, and project results and learnings are shared in annual reports and other products with MFA. MFA can then translate annual reports in IATI.</li> <li>○ Ensure that accountability to communities is embedded in project proposals and throughout implementation.</li> <li>○ Reverse the process. Instead of designing basket indicators and asking partners to pick from that list, build aggregated data from the information sent by partners, based on their impacts maps.</li> </ul>
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<p>expectations (SOGIESC inclusive).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Given global and intersecting crises – expand/disregard priority countries.</li> </ul>					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No partner disaggregation when reporting.</li> <li>Reframe the IOB criteria related to bias.</li> <li>No third-party monitoring (from the north).</li> <li>No data quality assessments.</li> </ul>
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*Table 2: What to include and what to exclude in the successor policy framework?*

## 5. Objective 3: Good practices of how Feminist MEL can be applied

### Gender resistance and mitigation

A first good practice for implementing Feminist MEL is to look at the gender resistance social groups face during the process of being in a programme. Donor-driven MEL mainly looks at the extent to which indicators have been achieved. By doing so, the voices of people we work with get lost. To understand their experiences with respect to gender resistance and backlash, it is key to capture their stories. By doing so, we can better understand where resistance comes from. Is it individual resistance? Is resistance coming from communities? Is it coming from the government? Or perhaps family?

Subsequently, partners can look into mitigation of different types of resistance and undertake action to make their programmes more flexible and deal with the resistance social groups are facing. Understanding resistance and mitigation is a continuous process that has to be repeated, since backlashes and resistance may return in different stages of programmes.

Kvinna till Kvinna conducted a pilot with one of their partners in Palestine by using an application called Sense Maker. Participants of the programme were asked questions about their experiences with gender resistance and backlash. Their stories were captured with Sense Maker, providing Kvinna Till Kvinna with an analysis of the type and level of resistance women faced. Subsequently, Kvinna Till Kvinna was able to bring in targeted mitigation to overcome resistance and guarantee the participation of women in their programme.

### Action and meaningful reflection processes

Action and reflection processes are practical and effective ways to implement a feminist approach into practice. During these processes, strategies, successes, and challenges are being discussed with feminist movements or WROs, helping organisations to continuously learn and achieve goals.

In field discussions with the women, Pekka Indonesia focuses on meaningful reflection rather than on simply monitoring progress. They do so by avoiding the use of structured language like monitoring or evaluating. Avoiding these terms allows them to build deeper relationships with the communities they serve and respect Feminist MEL principles that processes are always respectful, collaborative, and responsive to needs.

### Processing large amounts of different data from different partners

When dealing with large amounts of different data it is tempting for organisation to create a coherent story to make sense of data. Nonetheless, it is important to continuously respect the diversity of stories and experiences, and understand the context where these stories and experiences come from. Feminist MEL values the social, cultural and historical context in which programmes operate. Hence, as part of gender equality, organisations should appreciate the diversity of stories rather than creating a coherent story.



### **Creative methods to collect data**

During the Mid-Term Review of Power Up, creative submission was used as method to collect data. This method allowed the people they work with to share their stories in any format they felt comfortable with. Further, it allowed them to use their own language and illustrate change through their daily activities. Formats to share stories included artwork, videos and voice notes. With creative submission, Power Up acknowledges that different cultures communicate in different ways and that sharing experiences and stories by participants is optional. By centring accessibility in all forms and ensuring that everyone can tell their story in a way that feels comfortable to them, Power Up respects the Feminist MEL principle of Participation and inclusion. The creative submission was important in their commitment to creating an inclusive and empowering space for women. Based on pacas experiences, we work with grassroots women-headed families. They can tell their life stories using their own language or show them through their daily activities. Hence, it is essential to use various methods and media to capture stories and life experiences.

### **Linking and learning**

In the case of Leading from the South consortium, the partnership promoted Linking and Learning spaces for co-creating knowledge across countries and cultures to promote the co-creation of knowledge, exchange of experiences and sharing of challenges. Those instances clearly reinforce the L component of the MEL practice by allowing the co-creation (an aspect in which donor-driven MEL has a lot of difficulties to address).

### **Navigating the IOB requirements**

Donor-driven approaches do not always align with principles and practices of Feminist MEL. Hence, Power Up! consortium has established the Power Up Consortium MEL Coordination Unit. This unit is an important resource for organisations, including Pekka Indonesia, to navigate the complexities of incorporating Feminist MEL into IATI and the IOB requirements. By cooperating with this unit, Pekka can ensure that their MEL practices are both effective and align with their values of gender equality and social justice. Pekka, as an organisation that is committed to Feminist principles, recognises the importance of working with evaluators who share similar Feminist principles and values. Rather than considering evaluators as neutral and unbiased, Pekka sees evaluators as facilitators and critical friends who can help them to better understand the challenges and success they face. This matches the key principle of Feminist MEL that MEL staff and evaluators are solely facilitators of MEL processes.

### **Navigating the IOB criteria - Alternative criteria to orientate MEL practices**

In the case of Leading from the South consortium, the partnership went through the collective elaboration of a "statement" on the Leading from the South approach to MEL, in which they systematised 10 feminist practices on Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) in order to complement IOB Criteria with more sensitive, feminist, context based and participatory ways of understanding and implementing MEL.

## 6. Follow up

### 6.1 Follow up learning questions

Although many objectives and corresponding learning questions have been tackled, it would be relevant to design activities to deepen certain learning questions, such as:

- What are the differences and similarities between feminist, community-led, decolonised, and localised MEL approaches?
- What are Feminist tools and methodologies of data collection and analyses
- How can we guarantee that the voices of people we work with can have an active participation on the design phase? (ToR preparation, MEL plans elaboration, planning and monitoring frameworks design, etc).
- What are additional inspiring, practical examples/ways of implementing Feminist MEL principles/practices?
- What are additional, concrete examples of how organisations navigate the IOB criteria for evaluation?
- How would you suggest handling the diversity of partners in large programmes (PoV) in relation to being flexible towards the partners and making sure we generate information with partners rather than collecting information from them?
- What do you need to be able to make the shift towards feminist MEL (qualities, capacities & resources)?
- How to meet donor requirements, while focussing on learning for movements?



*Cecilia Castelli*

## Colophon

This report captures the content of the learning session on Feminist MEL on 10 October 2023. It summarises presentations, the panel discussion, the Zoom chat, and valuable input of the co-creative process towards the session. It also captures additional knowledge and reflections on principles of Feminist MEL and policy recommendations. Contributors to this report include: Rosette Nanyonjo (Count Me In! consortium), Rana Khoury (Kvinna Till Kvinna), Jenny Sonesson (Kvinna Till Kvinna), Rom Romalwati (PEKKA Foundation), Fitria Villa Sahara (PEKKA Foundation), Kaushi Kogar (Just Associates), Carol Miller (Gender at Work), Lori Cajegas (Power Up! Consortium), Ghada Jiha, Senior Programme Manager, (Gender at Work), Alma Magana (Just Associates), Noura Shahed (Save the Children), Kim Groen (Save The Children), Lila Aizenberg (Leading from the South), Jaynie Vonk (Oxfam Novib), and Frédérique Been (Partos).



## Annexe

### Session outline

- a. Setting the Scene: Why is it time for a serious conversation about Feminist MEL? (Carol Miller, G@W, Canada)
  - How does Feminist MEL relate to and overlap with the localisation agenda, decolonisation, and donor Feminist Foreign Policies (FFPs)
  - What have we learned over the past ten years as Feminist MEL practitioners about the opportunities and obstacles to doing Feminist MEL?
  - Let's be clear about our terms: why is the 'M' in MEL the biggest pain point for F - MEL, and what can we do about it?
- b. What is Feminist MEL, and what is the difference with donor MEL approaches? (Rosette Nanyonjo – UAF Africa)  
 The presentation discussed what FEM MEL is (including key principles) and what is the difference with donor MEL approaches. Insights from the [blog](#) were shared.
- c. Panel discussion: Experience using Feminist MEL approaches (Fitria Villa Sahara & Rana Khoury).  
 The panel discussion covered the following three questions:
  - What are some of the practical ways of implementing FEM MEL?
  - How do you navigate results reporting requirements/IATI, and IOB requirements from a FEM MEL perspective?
  - If you are to mention one element that should be included in the successor framework and one element that should be skipped, what would those be and why?

### Panellists

1. Fitria Villa Sahara (PEKKA, Indonesia) spoke to the PU! program while also drawing on specific examples from PEKKA.
  - The presentation responded to each of the 3 prompting questions in the outline, drawing on examples of 'monitoring and reporting' with local Women's Rights Organisations (WROs); the PU! MTR efforts to use Feminist Evaluation and a call for specific elements to be dropped from the successor framework (e.g., "counting" up outputs/output indicators: What value do they add to the impact story?).
  - The presentation ended with 3 key messages that PU! would like to share with the MFA on why F-MEL can improve the MFA's ability to tell its impact story while supporting feminist movements in doing their important work more effectively.
2. Rana Khoury (Kvinna till Kvinna)
  - How Feminist MEL has been implemented in Occupied Palestinian Territories and definitions on red lines, how they have been using it and partner experience of the process.

### Participants

Over 160 participants joined the session. Participants included:

- MEL officers and programme coordinators of the Strategic Partnerships
- MFA MEL focus points
- IOB

- MFA Strategic Policy Advisors
- MFA FFB cluster
- Partos members and partners interested in Feminist MEL
- Consultancy agencies and independent evaluators