

Shared Language Glossary Centring Girls and Girlhood



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The Shared Language Glossary Centring Girls and Girlhood | A glossary that provides a shared understanding of terms and concepts through a framing that centres girls' and young feminists' power, wisdom, and experience.

Developed in 2025 with the foundational collection and analysis provided by the [Stories of Girls' Resistance](#)

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Glossary Library Introduction

The language we use—and how we define it—shapes how we understand the world, how we act within it, and how systems and structures function. Words are not neutral; they reflect the dominant narratives and values embedded in our cultures, institutions, and communities. They influence behavior, inform practices, and can either reinforce harmful stereotypes and divisions or foster empathy, inclusion, and deeper understanding. When used intentionally, language becomes a powerful tool for change—shaping more just and inclusive ways of working and being.

Grounding ourselves in a critical understanding of **narratives**—and their power to shape our realities—allows us to be intentional in defining the words and framings we use. The creation of a shared language, through a collective glossary or library, fosters openness and mutual accountability. Recognising that language is always evolving enables us to reclaim agency in co-creating terms and narratives that honour and reflect our individual and collective experiences. This work is especially vital when speaking about girls and girlhood, whose agency, stories, and struggles have too often been erased, sanitized, co-opted, or shaped by patriarchal norms and societal expectations.

This glossary seeks to centre and honour the power, wisdom, and lived experiences of girls, young feminists and communities who have been systematically oppressed, marginalised, and harmed—particularly by language that has been used to define, constrain, or erase their existence and realities. It is intended as a resource for and about movements, funding, philanthropy, and all sectors connected to, working with, or led by girls and young feminists. While not exhaustive, its aim is to foster connection, collaboration, and shared understanding. In a world where knowledge is too often gatekept, siloed, and used to divide, this glossary offers a small contribution towards building a collective memory rooted in justice, solidarity, and care.

With a commitment to our communities, their diversity, and continuous learning and unlearning, we will update this shared language glossary annually. If you would like to contribute or support the expansion or refinement of this offering, please email us at hello@ourcollectivepractice.org with the subject line: Shared Language Glossary.

It's crucial to acknowledge that the definitions of each term aren't intended to be rigidly fixed, as there exist significant diversities in how different communities define them, and these definitions are continuously evolving. This diversity, mirroring the diversity of a healthy ecosystem, is incredibly important as it reflects and honours the rich tapestry of our society and communities. Therefore, the aim of the glossary isn't to dictate but to offer a framework for a shared language that can be flexibly adapted and employed to construct a critical analysis of the concepts that mould our perception of the world. Additionally, it challenges us to move beyond the assumption that we all share the same understanding or definitions, encouraging us to move towards dialogue and the collective knowledge of learning/unlearning/relearning.

Throughout this glossary we bring terms to life using text and quotes from the Stories of Girls' Resistance, the largest ever collection of oral and narrative history focused on adolescent girls' and young feminists' lived experiences and activism. These stories ground these definitions in the realities, power, and dreams of girls and young feminists themselves; ensuring that meaning is not abstract or imposed, but emerges from their voices, struggles, and visions. In doing so, this glossary becomes not only a linguistic tool but also a testament to the knowledge and agency girls and young feminists hold in reimagining language and shaping new futures.

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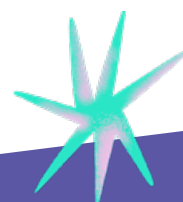
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Accountability

Accountability is the sustained (long-term) collective responsibility we hold for our shared well-being, care, and safety—and for the impact of our actions and decisions on one another. This includes material impacts such as the use of resources and time. In all social justice work, accountability is a core practice. Acts of resistance often emerge in response to the absence of accountability; an absence that has been institutionalised and normalised by systems that perpetuate harm while evading responsibility to the very communities they impact. Girls' and young feminists' work, organising, and efforts are deeply rooted in accountability to each other and their communities. Whether through collective decision-making, redistributing resources to those most impacted, or showing up consistently in times of crisis, their activism embodies a powerful ethic of care and responsibility that challenges the extractive and unaccountable systems around them.

Activism

Activism is an individual or collective action and effort aimed at creating social change. Activism can take many forms—large or small, digital or physical—and be led through a wide range of approaches. It may involve protesting, rallying, writing letters, engaging in political education, volunteering, supporting or developing campaigns, and more. Activism can be a single moment or an ongoing commitment.

For girls and young feminists, activism is often rooted in lived experience. Positioned at the frontline of injustice, many girls and young feminists face systemic vulnerability and marginalisation. As a result, girlhood itself frequently becomes the starting point of resistance; where activism is not only a choice but a necessity for being, existing, and navigating the world.



Tactics That Undermine Accountability | Divide and Conquer

- Collective responsibility is fractured into individualism
- The consequences of actions and decisions are dissociated from those who cause them
- Harm goes unrepaired and unresolved
- Conflict is silenced, and only homogenous ideas are uplifted and supported—suppressing dissent and flattening complexity
- Communities facing the greatest oppression and injustice are left to “handle” their own struggles, while the systems responsible remain untouched
- Root causes are ignored in favor of superficial and short-term “solutions”
- Projects are prioritised rather than systemic agendas
- Constant cycle of harm that is deepened and replicated

Colonialism, imperialism, industrialisation, and technofeudalism are among the most significant threats to accountability. These systems thrive on exploitation, extraction, and the erosion of collective care and responsibility.

Stories of Girls' Resistance

Across historical moments, locations, ages and identities girls and young feminists are pushing back and imagining better worlds for themselves and us all. Since time immemorial, girls and young feminists have been pushing back—in their homes, families, countries, and across the globe. They have pushed back against the everyday oppressions that are so often synonymous with girlhood, and against the forces that define and form the nature of that oppression.

Girls resist marriage, they resist violence, they fight to stay in school, they push back against how others name them, and shame them, and seek to separate them from the platforms and resources that are their right. They fight to take up, access, and reshape space. Girls and young feminists resist because to resist is to live, breathe, and be in the world as a girl.

“*It gives you the satisfaction of the fact that whatever you were doing had been able to bring some change in the lives of women and girls of the present generation. That inspires me to do more things. It doesn't allow me to sit in comfort and that is the only reason why I keep on resisting..*”
– Shahzadi, Pakistan

“*I believe I'm a person fighting for her right as a woman, fighting for her right as a girl, as a Palestinian, and I'm trying to include all of that in my resistance, in my activism. I believe that I'm fighting a lot of social problems: patriarchy, inequality, and gender inequality. I believe that I'm a feminist. I'm against occupation, I'm against settlements, I'm against anything that has to do with injustice. Anything that has to do with inequality—any type of race, any type of sex, any type of anything around the world. I believe that everyone should be equal, everyone should have justice, peace and equality. That's what I am fighting for. I'm fighting for my freedom as a girl and for my freedom as a Palestinian.*” – Janna, Occupied Palestine

“*Now I see the importance of activism and what information could really do for people. Because of the ignorance of not knowing, sometimes a lot of women and girls are in certain situations and that ignorance of not knowing passes down, passes down, passes down until we have generations of women that just accept certain things as law.*” – Janece, Barbados

Activist

An activist is an individual who engages in sustained efforts towards a specific social justice agenda or goal. Activists use a variety of tools, tactics, and strategies in their work, including art, protest, political education, community organising, and more. While some people self-identify as activists, others may prefer terms like organiser, activist, political educator, or other roles that reflect their unique approach and identity. Regardless of the terminology, what unites activists is a deep and ongoing commitment to creating meaningful social change.

Adultism

Adultism is a form of oppression that privileges adults while systematically devaluing, dismissing, and disempowering children and young people. It is rooted in the belief that adults are inherently superior in knowledge, capacity, or worth, and it shows up in social norms, institutions, policies, and interpersonal relationships. Adultism manifests through controlling young people's decisions, silencing their voices, and limiting their access to power and resources. For girls, adultism often intersects with patriarchy, racism, and other systems of oppression, making their experiences of marginalisation even more acute.

Ageism

Ageism refers to the discrimination, stereotyping, or marginalisation of individuals based on their age. It can affect people across the age spectrum, but in the context of this glossary, it particularly refers to how young people—especially girls—are routinely underestimated, excluded from decision-making, or denied autonomy because of their age. Ageism shows up in language, policy, institutions, and interpersonal relationships, often reinforcing hierarchies that privilege adults and devalue youth.

Agency

Agency is the ability to make choices, act on them, and influence the world in ways that reflect one's values, needs, and desires. It is about having power over one's own life, including the capacity to imagine different futures and to take action towards them.

Agency is not only individual; it can also be collective, expressed through community action, resistance, and solidarity. For girls and young people, agency is often undermined or denied due to systems of oppression such as patriarchy, ageism, racism, and colonialism. Yet even within restrictive contexts, girls and young feminists continuously exercise agency—whether through everyday acts of defiance, organising for justice, caring for their communities, or dreaming of liberation.

The capacity to take action or to wield power. Conventional social change efforts often involve top down, expert, and/or externally-driven approaches that treat primary beneficiaries as targets, rather than agents of change. In contrast, movement-building and other efforts to build power explicitly seek to engage and support primary beneficiaries in defining and driving the change that they themselves wish to see. [Definition adapted from Jass Just Associates Feminist Movement Builder's Dictionary.](#)

Stories of Girls' Resistance

Ageism and adultism are a common and recurring reality for girls and young people, appearing in the home, at school, in their organisations and collectives and in broader movement spaces. It looks like limited access to spaces and places, not being taken seriously or trusted for their contributions, reduced to tasks such as note taking and making coffee, or being outright excluded from opportunities, conversations, and decisions. This can result in being made to feel small, insignificant, and powerless. While girls and young feminists face many forms of discrimination based on their multiple identities, ageism is one that is particular to this moment in their lives.

“*I guess the hardest thing when I was starting out was being taken seriously, and I guess this kind of goes back to the gatekeeper attitude. It was just the idea that you needed to be involved in advocacy for this amount of years to be taken seriously or you need to have done this or that in order to have an opinion on something. I found that to be very problematic for me because I felt like a lot of ideas or a lot of ways of moving forward were being suppressed.*” – D, Kyrgyzstan, Stories of Girls' Resistance Storyteller

“*There is also a stereotype—it's not only because we were girls but because we were young. So I was confronted by many incidents and many situations where my skills and abilities were questioned because I was young. Before seeing anything, before seeing my work.*” – Mariam, Occupied Palestine, Stories of Girls' Resistance Storyteller

“*You're a girl under 18, you're a kid. They are like we have seen this struggle before you. Take this slowly. Ageism ... I don't come from a very privileged family ... when I'm involved in these spaces when it comes to gender and politics they're not seeing you as someone who can contribute. I think as a girl I found it very problematic. They are like you are young, listen to the elders. Not seeing you as someone.*” – Rachael, Kenya, Stories of Girls' Resistance Storyteller

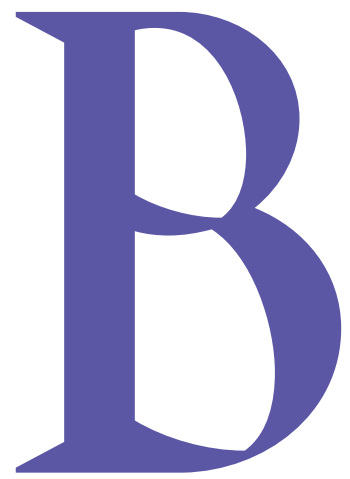


Bilateral funder

A bilateral funder is a government or state entity that provides funding sourced from national budgets. The concept of bilateral funding emerged after World War II as part of an international development framework, adopting a one-on-one financial assistance model between nations—hence the term “bilateral,” derived from the Latin bi- (two) and lateral (sides).



Historically, this funding mechanism has primarily facilitated financial transfers from colonising nations to formerly colonised countries under the guise of “aid.” However, such funding is often tied to stringent requirements or conditionalities that recipient nations must meet to access the funds, disregarding the fact that colonial nations accumulated their wealth through theft, oppression, and exploitation. These conditions can range from implementing economic policy reforms to aligning with the geopolitical interests of the donor country, effectively limiting the sovereignty of the recipient nation. In recent years, there has been a growing movement to shift from traditional aid models to reparations frameworks. Advocates argue that reparations provide a more just and equitable approach by addressing the historical and ongoing harms caused by colonial exploitation. Reparations aim to rectify systemic inequities and redistribute resources in ways that prioritise the autonomy, self-determination, and leadership of formerly colonised nations and their communities. Feminist movements have been at the forefront of this push for reparative justice, demonstrating across sectors how such models are both necessary and possible. Despite these efforts, most bilateral funders continue to allocate significant portions of their budgets to multilateral agencies, such as the UN. While some bilateral funders have supported feminist movements and efforts through a diversity of efforts such as funding coalitions that directly resource social movements led by women’s and feminist funds and organisations, only a fraction of these funds reach girls and their initiatives/efforts. This disparity highlights the urgent need for funding systems that genuinely centre the power of girls and young feminists.



Building girls’ power

Building girls’ power starts with recognising the power they already hold and actively supporting them to access, express, and grow that power in tangible ways. It’s not just about building individual power, it’s about fostering collective strength, shared purpose, and political consciousness.

As girls and young feminists build their individual power, they begin to understand that the harm and oppression they face—and that their families and communities endure—are not personal failings but systemic injustices. These issues are shaped by larger forces of inequality and discrimination. Through this awakening, they realise their struggles are not isolated but shared by many others.

In building collective power, girls and young feminists find solidarity. They connect with those who face similar barriers or who share common values. Together, they organise—not just in response to injustice, but in pursuit of justice. They unite to confront oppressive systems and demand transformative change. This is political work at its core: rooted in lived experience, propelled by a shared vision, and sustained by community action.





Caste

Caste is a deeply entrenched system of social stratification that assigns individuals a fixed status at birth based on historical, cultural, religious, and often spiritualised beliefs—particularly prominent in South Asia, but with global manifestations through diaspora, colonialism, and systemic racism. This system enforces rigid hierarchies of purity and pollution, privilege and exclusion, which determine access to land, education, livelihood, safety, and dignity.

Caste-based oppression intersects with patriarchy, classism, and disability, disproportionately affecting caste-oppressed girls and young feminists who experience multiple, compounding forms of violence—both institutional and interpersonal.



Despite centuries of marginalisation, Dalit, Bahujan, Adivasi, and other caste-oppressed girls continue to lead powerful movements that challenge silence, reclaim histories, reimagine futures, and build solidarities rooted in justice and liberation.

Understanding caste-based oppression helps us see how systems of power work and why the leadership and resistance of caste-oppressed girls is so important for building a more just world.

Charitable industrial complex

The charitable industrial complex is a term used to describe the nexus between capitalism and philanthropy, which functions to maintain systems of oppression and control through charity that avoids addressing root causes, systemic change, or reparations. Rather than dismantling inequities, it serves as a mechanism to censor dissent, uphold existing power dynamics, and reinforce socio-economic hierarchies that perpetuate marginalisation. This system operates under the guise of generosity but often silences transformative movements by dictating the terms of funding and prioritising donor-driven agendas over the needs and voices of communities directly affected by injustice. It is important to note that this term is part of a broader critical systemic analysis of industrial complexes of oppression, such as the military-industrial complex and the prison-industrial complex. These terms were coined and collectively developed by social movements through intergenerational framings to name and call out the oppressive systems that need to be abolished. For a more in-depth definition of related concepts, see the term **“nonprofit industrial complex”** below, as developed by INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence.



We were in a meeting with the donors, the United Nations, and they were asking us: tell us what you want from us. We were so angry and I'm saying: we don't want your bags of food, even though we do need food, but we need political actions ... We are forgotten.”

– Asria, Western Sahara, Stories of Girls' Resistance

Colonialism

Colonialism refers to the violent practice by which powerful nations invaded, occupied, and exploited other lands, peoples, and resources—often through aggression, coercion, and systemic control. Rooted in ideas of racial, cultural, and civilizational superiority, colonialism imposed foreign rule, extracted wealth, and attempted to erase Indigenous and local knowledge systems, spiritualities, and ways of life.

Today the structures and logic of colonialism persist through ongoing global systems of domination that maintain racial capitalism, cultural erasure, extractivism, and unequal access to power and resources.

“

I'm against the occupation. I'm against settlements. I'm against anything that has to do with injustice. Anything that has to do with inequality. I believe that everyone should be equal, everyone should have justice, peace, and equality. That's what I am fighting for. I'm fighting for my freedom as a girl and for my freedom as a Palestinian.” – Janna, Occupied Palestine, Indigenous Girls, Dreams and Resistance

For girls and young feminists, particularly those from Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and racialised communities, colonialism shapes lived experiences of dispossession, gendered violence, and systemic marginalisation. Yet, it is also within this context that powerful resistance emerges: through reclaiming ancestral knowledge, rebuilding community-based systems of care, language revival, organising for land and sovereignty, and imagining futures beyond colonial frameworks. Understanding colonialism is essential to naming structural harm and honoring the radical leadership of girls confronting and transforming these legacies.

Community organising

Community organising is a process by which a group of people come together around a shared concern or problem and work together to find a solution that includes taking measures to influence the policies or culture surrounding them. Community organising often starts by addressing a concrete, unmet practical need and evolves to address the structural causes of the problem, thereby transforming power. A critical element of organising is the development of community leaders, using the organising process to better understand political dynamics, change, and organising. [Definition adopted from Jass Just Associates Feminist Movement Builder's Dictionary.](#)






Stories of Girls' Resistance

In secret gatherings, in schools, on the streets, in savings clubs, on factory floors, and in friendship groupings, girls and young feminists are gathering with other girls and young feminists and older allies. Just as the survival of girls and young feminists is so often linked to the reality of collective community, so too is their resistance. Throughout the stories in the collection, a number of girls' and young feminists' first moments of resistance is when they engage in public protest or moments of collective organising. As they step into their power in formation with others, they come to see the fullness of their power as political actors and with that, their ability to reshape the world around them. Whilst for many girls and young feminists entering collective organising space is a natural part of their resistance journey, for other girls and young feminists it is through contact with collective action that their resistance begins. No matter their entry point, girls' and young feminists' relationship with collective organising is conflicted and contradictory—and as we can hear so viscerally in the stories documented in this collection—and full of the possibility and power needed to change the world.

“*I think about what different groups of people are doing and different movements. That's the whole point. That for me is collective power and I've always been in support of that. It's like each person is holding this stick of fire and when you have your small stick of fire, it can feel so small, like you're not doing very much. And it's like, if you're trying to warm yourself up, it's like, oh, it's just a small fire. But imagine every single person holding a stick of fire just putting it all together and this big flame—we'll all probably be burned by it because it's so powerful. I think it's important that we stand in solidarity with one another, no matter which region you're focusing on, whatever issue, at the end of the day, you care about. We're human beings and we care about each other and that's collective power. It's what really makes a difference and brings about the change that I think we've been talking about.*” – Glodie, United States, Stories of Girls' Resistance Storyteller

“*I started connecting with people, I started joining different groups, and I started to believe that I cannot be doing this on my own. Because as much as it's part of me and I love it, and this is how I define myself, it's also draining. It's exhausting. A person needs a sense of belonging to a group and a community. So they can carry on with their autonomy and they can continue to nourish and evolve as people.*” – Sandie, Occupied Palestine, Stories of Girls' Resistance Storyteller

“*I started to look around and I found actually—I found a lot of groups, I met a lot of people who all of them right now are my best friends. We started to organise demonstrations in the street and other peaceful activities like distributing flowers with a small letter: what the demonstrations are for, what is our demand, what is our request, why are we doing this? We aren't people who want to destroy the country, we're people who want to build this country.*” – Ahed, Syria, Stories of Girls' Resistance Storyteller





Connector and autonomous efforts (within girls' and young feminists' ecosystems)

Connectors and autonomous efforts within girls' and young feminists' ecosystems include girls and young feminists and/or allies acting as connectors across various initiatives. These autonomous efforts enable flexible and creative organising methods, which may not always fit neatly into the categories of networks, organisation, group/collectives.

Corporate funders (private sector funding)

A corporate funder is an organisation that provides funding to other entities through its private budget. Many corporate funders benefit from tax incentives, which reduce their tax liabilities based on the funding they allocate to organisations. In some cases, these incentives allow corporations to significantly lower their tax obligations, with some even receiving refunds despite generating substantial profits. [Meaning corporate funding has been used as a strategy to avoid paying a fair share of taxes, redirecting public responsibility into private control.](#) While these incentives are a significant driver for many corporations, some take a more nuanced approach to their funding. In some cases, corporate funders are employee-owned, with funding sourced from pooled employee resources, reflecting a collective commitment to specific causes. Additionally, corporations often establish foundations as vehicles to distribute funds, further increasing their tax incentives. Corporate funding can include grants, investments, and sponsorships.



Decolonisation/Decolonise

Decolonisation is the ongoing collective process and political strategy towards liberation that centres the communities and lands impacted and oppressed by colonisation. This process is deeply rooted in justice, reparations, and the healing necessary to address the harm caused by colonial oppression and its enduring legacy. Colonisation has historically relied on strategies such as exploitation, displacement, collective punishment, ethnic cleansing, and genocide—practices that persist today through expanded forms of colonialism (imperialism, neocolonialism, technofeudalism, etc.). Decolonisation requires dismantling the systems that create colonisation and sustain inequalities at all levels. This involves the reparations and return of stewardship and management of community resources and lands, transformation of governance structures to be community led and representative, and centring the stories, knowledge, and lived experiences of those directly impacted by colonisation. Colonial systems are built on oppressive ideologies designed to gain power and resources, including racism, patriarchy, casteism, ableism, and heteronormativity. Indigenous and Black communities working across the world through social justice movements have largely driven and worked materially to decolonise their lands and advance the material agenda of decolonisation. Some examples include the Haitian Revolution towards independence, the Land Back movement, and the Free Palestine movement.

Depoliticised

To be depoliticised means to strip an issue, experience, or action of its political meaning, context, or power. This often involves framing systemic injustices as isolated or personal problems, rather than as the result of larger structures of oppression such as patriarchy, racism, colonialism, or capitalism. Depoliticisation can happen through language, media, education, or policy—and it often serves to maintain the status quo by discouraging collective analysis, resistance, or action.

In the context of girls and girlhood, depoliticisation shows up when their struggles are portrayed as individual hardship or vulnerability rather than as resistance to structural violence. It also occurs when their activism is celebrated in ways that are sanitised, made palatable, or disconnected from the radical traditions they stand in. Reclaiming the political nature of girls' and young feminists' lives and leadership is essential to challenging the systems that seek to silence, co-opt, or erase them.

Strategies employed by oppressive states and systems to create an illusion of “neutrality,” ultimately aiming to preserve economic, political, and social control. This tactic is employed to undermine activism, resistance, and organising efforts rooted in political agendas for societal transformation. Originally termed an “anti-politics machine,” it has been implemented globally. Depoliticisation typically involves stifling dissent, restricting civic spaces, and disincentivizing or criminalising political participation. [Definition adopted from Towards Our Liberation.](#)

Disability

Disability is not only a medical or individual condition but a social and political construct that reflects how ableist structures exclude and oppress those who deviate from dominant bodily, mental, or sensory norms. This perspective insists that disability should not be viewed as a personal tragedy, but as a legitimate and valuable part of human diversity. It also offers a critique of narratives that reduce disability to an individual story of overcoming, instead promoting the building of accessible, caring, and politically active communities.

In this framework, girls and young people with disabilities not only face multiple forms of oppression (based on gender, age, class, race), but are also protagonists in movements that imagine and build other possible worlds: more just, inclusive, and radically human.

“*In a world where the dreams of feminist girls and young women were supported, we would not dream of having our basic human rights respected. We would be able to go out on the streets without fear, to study, to get a job or a house without that being seen as merely a wish. Our dreams would be oriented to our personal development, to leave our mark in a collective way.*” – Gianna Mastrolinardo, Argentina, Narrative Revolution Fellowship

Gianna is a young woman with motor disabilities from Argentina, anti-ableist feminist, artist, and activist. She is currently part of [Orgullo Disca](#). From the activism of Orgullo Disca, disability is reclaimed as a political identity that challenges pathologisation, pity, and invisibility. Orgullo Disca celebrates lived experiences, shared struggles, and ways of life that resist ableism.

Documentation

Documentation, or the act of documenting, is the process of collecting and recording stories, knowledge, experiences, dreams, and other forms of expression through various mechanisms that preserve a past, present, and future collective memory. It can take many forms, including oral traditions, written records, performance, song, photography, and more. Documentation is an ongoing process, whether consciously or unconsciously engaged in, that contributes to the creation of narratives about how we experience, understand, and learn about the world and our communities. Through documentation, we collect and preserve the rich diversity of all living experiences, making it accessible to both weave and learn from each other. What is documented—and how it is documented—has profound implications for whose stories are told and who gets to shape the narratives that influence society's values and priorities.

Our Resistance: Stories of Disability Rights Activists

Documenting Disability Rights activists' stories of resistance is a deeply political act. The stories of girls and young feminists with disabilities are often ignored or told from the perspective of others, portraying them through a tokenising and paternalistic lens of “inspiration” or pity. By erasing the full humanity, richness, diversity, and multidimensionality of people with disabilities, society stigmatises, generalises, and stereotypes the community at large, which consciously and unconsciously furthers violence and injustices across every aspect of their lives. [Our Resistance: Stories of Disability Rights Activists](#) is a feminist storytelling project working to counter these narratives and uplift the stories and efforts of Disability Rights activists working to remake the world.

“*The truth is that it is important to be able to share our own experiences, our struggles, and to recognise our interconnection with each other. To know we are not alone—the system may want us to think that, but we can't let it crush us.*” – Mariana Veliz Matijasevi, Argentina, Our Resistance Storyteller





Stories of Girls' Resistance

Girls and young feminists participation and liberation is weaponised and seen as a threat. The very act of being present and the presence of their bodies exist as a challenge to the status quo. They are labelled extremists, terrorists, good girls and bad girls, spoiled girls, bossy girls and boss girls, witches, whores, and so much more. Their resistance is criminalised, ridiculed, laughed at and ignored.

With little recognition, many of the women and girls in these stories played a direct role in overturning repressive governments, toppling dictators and leading revolutions. As freedom fighters, militants, protestors, paramedics, students, artists, poets, strategists, theorists, caregivers, cooks, and so much more. Some have to flee, finding freedom outside their countries. Some find joy and liberation in studying abroad and in claiming their autonomy, while others are forever trying to find a way back. Many join or lead efforts to rebuild what comes after change and revolution. And almost all experience lasting individual and intergenerational trauma, a weight on their shoulders, deep pain and loss, and the burden of displacement. Yet throughout it all, despite it all, because of it all, girls are somehow, gloriously, powerfully, always there. Indeed, all history is girls' history.

Dominant narratives

Dominant narratives, sometimes referred to as “mainstream” or “common” narratives, are prevailing stories that shape culture, policies, and societal norms. These narratives are constructed by those in positions of power and influence—such as governments, corporations, media, and other institutional bodies—and they serve to reinforce the status quo, often marginalising or erasing alternative perspectives. Dominant narratives tend to reflect the values, beliefs, and interests of those who hold power, while erasing and ignoring the experiences, struggles, and contributions of marginalised communities. These narratives are strategically constructed to maintain control and reinforce a specific status quo; hence, the term “dominant” is rooted in the concept of domination. Historically, dominant narratives have been employed to create and legitimise ideologies that serve particular political, economic, and social purposes, often with the goal of securing power and economic gain for the few at the expense of the many. This process works seamlessly, as those who seek power and wealth frequently control large platforms of media, news, and information consumption. In

the current context, we see this in both traditional news outlets and social media, where narratives are shaped to support certain interests and maintain power dynamics. Through the concentrated control of information, these dominant narratives are amplified, leaving little room for counter-narratives or alternative viewpoints. The result is a cycle in which the stories and histories of marginalised groups are either erased or distorted to align with the interests of those hoarding power and wealth. An example of this is the construction of race or caste as a dominant narrative. Race and caste were created as social constructs to establish hierarchical orders, serving to justify the exploitation and subjugation of certain groups. In this way, the dominant narrative of race and caste has been used to legitimize slavery, colonialism, segregation, and other forms of systemic oppression, deeply embedding itself in political, economic, and social systems worldwide. Similarly, gender, sexuality, and class have all been shaped by dominant narratives that reinforce power imbalances, with patriarchal and capitalist ideologies systematically marginalising women, LGBTQIA+ individuals, and the working class.



Dreaming (collective dreaming)

Dreams are images, sounds, ideas, thoughts, and feelings that explore expanded, alternative, and new realities or possibilities in a space unconstrained by physical and unnatural limitations. The act of dreaming is, in other words, planning, strategising, and rethinking beyond the artificial boundaries imposed on bodies, souls, and minds. It is a space of safety and being, a reminder not to fear and a space where existence is enough. Dreaming is a critical tool—and resistance—long used in worldbuilding by social justice movements advancing collective agendas towards liberation. Girls and young feminists wield this tool with extraordinary power. Anchored in care, determination, and creativity, they use dreaming to strategise and push forward demands, propositions, and calls to action about what the world and their communities could become. It serves as an imaginarium of possibilities where collective dignity is centred.



Every great dream begins with a dreamer. Always remember, you have within you the strength, the patience, and the passion to reach for the stars, to change the world."

– Harriet Tubman¹

Diversity

Diversity refers to the presence and recognition of differences within a group, community, or society. Encompassing individual uniqueness and distinctions within communities and groups, diversity spans attributes such as race, ethnicity, gender, age, disability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, education, and every facet that contributes to one's identity, values, and experiences. Diversity is not just about representation or variety, it's about inclusion, equity, and shifting power.

In the current context, especially in the last decade, diversity has been co-opted to claim change without making any substantial transformation. This often manifests as a checkbox approach that prioritises symbolic gestures over meaningful inclusion, thus masking systemic inequalities and failing to address the deeper structures of power, privilege, and oppression that continue to marginalise certain groups. When embraced fully, diversity strengthens communities, movements, and knowledge by honouring the unique contributions and wisdom each person brings.

1. Tubman was known for her predictive visions that began when she was 13 years old. She began to fall unexpectedly into sleep-like states and reemerge with stories of her vivid dreams. These dreams would often support her navigation of dozens of enslaved people to freedom.

Emergent narrative

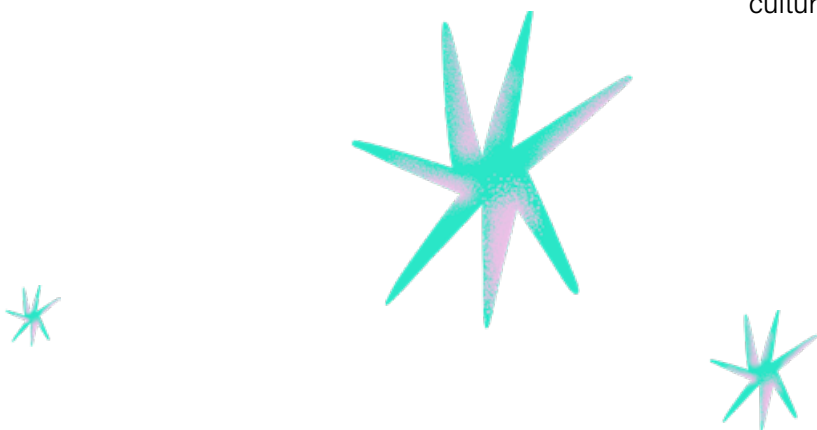
Emergent narrative contests and competes with dominant and opposition narratives. It refers to a story or meaning that unfolds organically from the interactions, experiences, or actions of people, rather than being predetermined or imposed from a top-down authority. Emergent narratives are shaped by the lived realities, dreams, and resistance of people on the ground. For example, a narrative about girls' leadership that emerges from their own organizing work, language, and culture is emergent as opposed to a narrative created by a funder or an NGO campaign to fit their agenda. Dominant narratives are collectively generated, not top-down, are adaptive and evolve over time, reflect local context, culture, and power dynamics, and they often disrupt dominant or imposed stories.

For example, the #EndSARS movement began as a decentralized youth-led protest against police brutality, particularly the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS). There was no single leader or predetermined narrative. Instead, the stories that emerged came directly from young people sharing their lived experiences on social media through videos, tweets, and testimony about violence, injustice, and their vision for safety and dignity.

Over time, the emergent narrative became broader than police reform and evolved into a story about youth disillusionment with government corruption, systemic inequality, and the reclaiming of public space and voice. This wasn't orchestrated by an NGO or external campaign, it came from the ground up, shaped by collective experience, digital culture, and the energy of those most affected.

Evidence

Evidence encompasses diverse forms of knowledge and meaning-making that emerge from both quantitative and qualitative data, including—but not limited to—lived experience, collective memory, community wisdom, critical analysis, and embodied realities. It challenges dominant epistemological frameworks that have historically privileged data produced through extractive, positivist, and colonial research methodologies—approaches that often distant knowledge from the people and communities it concerns. This definition affirms that oral traditions, artistic and written expression, ancestral knowledge, and intergenerational storytelling are rigorous and legitimate sources of evidence. For evidence to be valid, it must be accountable to and grounded in the communities from which it emerges. When knowledge is produced in isolation from those directly connected to the evidence, it loses context, meaning, and legitimacy and risks fundamental inaccuracies due to a lack of understanding of the data's social, cultural, and political realities.



Historically, evidence has been used as a legal and scientific tool to validate imperialist ideologies, supporting the exploitation and domination of colonized peoples by labelling them as “inferior” or “unfit.” The very mechanism of “evidence” is rooted in legacies of evolution, deeply entwined with eugenics where institutions, including philanthropy, have long benefited from and built upon. What is deemed “true” is based on specific reasoning or categories established by those who hold power and control over the narrative. Thus, when analysing evidence through a decolonial and feminist framework that centres the voices and experiences of girls and

young feminists, it is essential to critically dismantle the ways in which the framing of evidence has been used to uphold systems of oppression. This includes challenging the dominant paradigms that privilege Western, patriarchal, capitalist, ageist, ableist, and heteronormative ways of knowing and doing, which by design exclude, ignore, erase, and co-opt the knowledge, experiences, and stories of Indigenous, Black, Brown, and marginalised communities. Girls, in particular, have borne a compounded and exacerbated impact, as their stories, knowledge, and strategies have been consistently ignored, marginalised, and co-opted throughout modern history.

Stories of Girls' Resistance

The Stories of Girls' Resistance is the largest ever collection of oral and narrative history of adolescent girls' activism, offering a window into girls' lives and their resistance in all of its messiness, pain, and power. This evidence-building initiative was a site of political action of feminist praxis in the best traditions of activist scholarship in and of itself. Grounded in global South-rooted feminist epistemologies, in particular, that of narrative knowing, oral herstory and counter-storytelling. Narrative knowledge is created and constructed through the stories of lived experience and the (collective) sense-making of those stories.

Oral history as a methodology offers an opportunity to make available data and history from those who have been most often marginalised or whose voices are silenced or ignored in traditional knowledge production. Such shared processes of meaning-making offer valuable insight into the complexity of human lives, cultures, and behaviours, and in this case, the hidden social history of girls' resistance across places and time.

In these methodologies, who is doing the research is important. The deliberate decision to collaborate with regionally rooted story curators and collectors is directly linked to feminist knowledge production, where the idea of a “neutral” interviewer is rejected in favour of a narrative that is produced through the dialogical relationship between curator and storyteller, storyteller and story-collector. This aligns with Indigenous storytelling practices, which affirm that the subjectivity of peoples' experiences is both politically and intellectually valid.



Storytelling is a powerful tool of resistance. Stories remind us that we're dealing with people's lives, not data and concepts; so we have to embrace their complexity and messiness, rather than avoid it. Storytelling is also a wonderful way to understand what can actually bring about change. If you ask people who are directly affected by patriarchal oppressions to tell you about their agency rather than their suffering, you get a much better understanding of what the issues are, and you can come up with more impactful solutions.” – Françoise Moudouthe, Stories of Girls' Resistance Curator



“

For me when I think of solidarity I think of it in terms of feminism. As a young girl, I felt solidarity coming from my girlfriends, sisterhood. From them I feel so affirmed and so loved and less burdened. I feel the burden of patriarchy on my back, but with them we share the burden. So much love comes from that sharing and that unity. It gives you energy for the fight ahead. Solidarity is imagining freedom together. It might just be an experiment. But at least if we start it, maybe someone else will continue it.” – Zemdema, Ethiopia

Feminism

Feminism is a global, diverse, and evolving movement and practice that seeks to end all forms of oppression, especially those rooted in **patriarchy, capitalism, colonialism, racism, ableism, cisheteronormativity, and casteism**. It includes a range of theories and political agendas that aim to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women due to sex and gender as well as class, race, ethnicity, ability, sexual orientation, geographic location, nationality, or other forms of social exclusion. Feminism as a political agenda has evolved over centuries, shaped by the politics of each historical moment. For example, many early feminists (in the 1700s and 1800s) were involved in abolitionist movements and made the linkages between women's bondage and slavery. Since the turn of the 20th century, the different historical surges of feminist political organising have been referred to as “waves,” defined primarily by feminists in the Americas. The first wave of feminism focused on legal rights, such as the suffragettes struggle for the right to vote in the early 1900s; second-wave feminism focused on a broader range of forms of subordination in the private realm, including violence against women, reproductive rights, women's roles in the family. Third-

wave feminism, more heavily influenced by feminist movements around the world and post-structuralist thinking, recognises that there are multiple feminisms operating and emphasises diversity in theory and practice, demanding greater space and recognition of the feminisms shaped by different generations, ethnic and sexual groups, and different classes, among many other factors. [Definition adopted from Jass Just Associates Feminist Movement Builder's Dictionary.](#)

Feminist and women's funds

Feminist and women's funds and foundations are dedicated exclusively to advancing feminist work and often arise in response to the significant underfunding and systemic challenges faced by feminist movements. Examples include the Central American Women's Fund, the Black Feminist Fund, and the Urgent Action Fund. [Definition adopted from the AWID Funding Ecosystem report.](#) While some feminist and women's funds are inclusive of girls and young feminists, they remain the exception, and the funding specifically directed to girls and young feminist-led work remains limited.

Funder

A funder is an individual, collective, organisation, agency, or government entity that provides financial support to an individual, collective, group, organisation, or agency. Funders come in many forms, each with varying motivations, structures, and approaches to supporting causes, initiatives, efforts, social movements, etc. For example, individuals might engage in mutual aid efforts, contributing directly through cash transfers or supporting autonomous funding initiatives. They may also be individuals with accumulated wealth, using their resources to support causes they believe in. There are also funds, such as feminist, women's rights, and environmental funds, which are developed by groups of people or organisations pooling their resources to fund projects, initiatives, communities, or specific causes. These funds are often rooted in shared values and collective decision-making, ensuring that the distribution of resources aligns with the group's mission. There are also public and private foundations that are part of the philanthropic sector, faith-based funders, and international development funders and aid organisations, or corporate funders.

Funding ecosystem

A funding ecosystem comprises those leading social change (e.g., activists, organisations, networks, and movements) and those who support their work (e.g., philanthropic funders, governments, and activists who generate resources themselves). These actors operate within a much bigger structural context of environmental, political, and social realities that determine the distribution of resources, who holds the power over and access to them and who does not. [Definition adopted from the AWID Funding Ecosystem report.](#)





Gender

Gender is a **social and historical construct**, which means it is not something we are born with, but something that has been shaped over time by society, culture, and systems of power. It includes the roles, behaviours, and expectations assigned to people based on how their bodies are perceived, often within a binary of male and female.

These gender roles and norms are not natural or fixed, but rather created and enforced through institutions like family, religion, media, law, and education, often serving patriarchal, colonial, and capitalist interests. This has led to systems of inequality and violence that particularly affect girls, women, and trans, non-binary, and gender-diverse people.

In movements for girls' resistance and liberation, understanding gender as something that was made and therefore can be **unmade and reimaged** is powerful. Girls and young feminists challenge restrictive norms and create new, expansive ways of being. Their struggles show that gender can be a source of **identity, expression, and power**, not just oppression.

Girl

A girl is a child or young person who identifies as female, encompassing both cisgender and transgender female-identifying individuals. The term "girl" typically refers to those under 19 years old, representing a spectrum of phases and experiences influenced by factors such as age, race, and socio-economic and political contexts. It's crucial to acknowledge that non-binary individuals may relate to aspects of girlhood at various points in their lives without it defining their entire identity. Moreover, "girl," like "race," is a societal construct, shaped by identity and systems that uphold particular norms. Thus, a critical part of centring girls and young feminists and their stories, experiences, power, and dreams is to focus on how they seek to define and shape girlhood.

Girl- and/or young feminist-led groups/collectives (within girls' and young feminists' ecosystems)

Girl- and/or young feminist-led groups/collectives within girls' and young feminists' ecosystems are often newer and may still be in formation. Some remain small to align with their strategy, while others may be part of larger organisations, functioning as a distinct arm focused on or led by girls and/or young feminists. Registration status varies, with some groups being formally registered and others operating informally. Additionally, groups and collectives sometimes emerge during crises to serve specific purposes, such as addressing immediate needs during emergencies or political moments like elections.

Girl- and/or young feminist-led organisations (within girls' and young feminists' ecosystems)

Girl- and/or young feminist-led organisations within girls' and young feminists' ecosystems are typically established to last a few years, and have a leadership structure and a long-term focus. They are deeply embedded in a range of social justice efforts and often work in coordination and collaboration within their communities and beyond. Some organisations are legally registered, while others are not. The decision to register or not often reflects a balance between context-specific needs and the potential risks of formalisation. In contexts where their work is criminalised due to restrictive policies on funding, freedom of association, expression, and movement, registration can increase vulnerability.

Girl-led

Girl-led refers to initiatives, collectives, and organisations that centre, support, and respect the leadership, experiences, demands, voices, dreams, and strategies of girls. While girl-led spaces prioritise the contributions of girls, they are not exclusive to girls alone. Intergenerational spaces are also integral, as girls are active participants in a wide range of social justice movements.

Girlhood

Girlhood refers to the period of life defined by being a girl and forming relationships with other girls, children, young people, and the communities—along with the presence or absence of resources—that shape one's vision and understanding of the world. Girlhood is profoundly influenced by political and socio-economic contexts and is often marked by experiences of violence and injustice. Many girls are prematurely forced into adulthood—a process described by [Palestinian scholars as Unchilding](#) and more recently termed [adulthoodification](#). This shift occurs when girls and young feminists shoulder caregiving, economic, and labor responsibilities typically associated with adults or when their childhood ends abruptly due to criminalisation, violence, and life-threatening conditions that jeopardise their very existence.

At the same time, girlhood is a space of immense agency and potential. Despite the multiple challenges they face, girls around the world exercise power and resistance, whether through their everyday acts of survival, resistance, or organising for change.

“*I don't know if I have a really bad memory, but I think my resistance was so subtle that I don't recollect. Because, if you've noticed, it's a bit hazy when it comes to girlhood because I've always been this way. It sounds crazy but I don't even remember a moment, because in subtle ways, I was always resisting.*”
– [Ulemu, Malawi](#), [Stories of Girls' Resistance Storyteller](#)

“*Girlhood is not just a process that you go through, it's a community.*” – [Krystal, Jamaica](#), [Stories of Girls' Resistance Storyteller](#)

Girl's roadmap to revolution(s)

Girls utilise creative, diverse, and ever-evolving strategies to resist oppression and ignite social change. Through these tactics—ranging from storytelling and art to protest and mutual care—they chart their own roadmaps towards the worlds they dream of and envision. Their resistance is not only a response to injustice, but a powerful act of world-building rooted in imagination, solidarity, and courage.



Stories of Girls' Resistance

Resistance is political and connected to power—in how it is framed and how it is practised. In challenging power, girls push back against neoliberal economic structures, the climate crisis, sexism, misogyny, white supremacy, homophobia, transphobia, poverty, imperialism, expansionism, war, militarism and religious fundamentalism.

Girls are not only reimagining a world where none of this exists, they are creating it through bold, creative, and sharp tactics and strategies. Girls are practising and defining resistance so broadly that it defies easy categorisation.

The very tactics and principles they bring to their resistance are unique to girls. They are redefining leadership models, pushing back against the need for formalised structures, and bringing entirely new ways of applying feminist principles to their work from the generations before them.

Girls ground their work in the radical imagination necessary to recreate a world so entrenched in systems of inequality. They practise joy as an act of resistance and are deeply connected through sisterhood and solidarity in ways that reflect Audre Lorde's teachings: "I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are different from my own." While they reimagine the world and resist, agitate and transform to create that world, they find new ways of doing this for themselves and each other.

Reflections on early experiences of resistance shed light on how power builds over time, debunking the common narrative of a singular girl who suddenly found—or was given—her power and how the act of resistance creates space for girls to come into their power. Often, by the time we see a girl or woman in a movement or other social change space, she has been finding ways to resist as a way to merely exist since girlhood.



Imagination (feminist collective imagination/imaginarium)

Imagination, specifically feminist collective imagination or imaginarium, is a political praxis of re-envisioning alternative realities while mapping pathways to achieve them. It transcends individual creativity, centering collective dreaming and resistance as tools to challenge systems of oppression and injustice. This process weaves together current contexts, stories, art, culture, and politics with alternative, regenerative frameworks —such as speculative futures—creating a bridge to transformative possibilities. Afrofuturism, Indigenous futurism, and cosmic visioning have long been engaged in the practice of imagination, offering rich traditions of envisioning liberated futures rooted in ancestral wisdom, cultural resilience, and radical possibility.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is an analytical tool that helps to understand and respond to the ways in which multiple aspects of each person's social identity and status intersect to create unique experiences of oppression and privilege. The concept evolved in part as a response to critiques that “woman” as a political

category over-generalized women's experiences, privileging white, middle-class women, while making invisible the ways that race, class, colonialism, and other factors of discrimination contribute to the experience of oppression. Intersectionality aims to move beyond overly simplified conceptions of identity, such as working class or Indigenous, to examine complexities of multiple sources of privilege and subordination. [Definition from the Jass Just Associates Feminist Movement Builder's Dictionary.](#)

Intermediary Funder

An intermediary funder is an organisation that receives funding from donors and redistributes it to organisations, collectives, and/or individuals. There are various types of intermediary funders, each with distinct approaches and practises. Examples include donor-advised funds, giving circles, community foundations, fiscally sponsored pooled funds, feminist funds, women's funds, and social ventures. [Donor-advised funds, in particular, have experienced significant growth in recent years.](#) However, it is important to critically analyse intermediaries based on their approach and practises, as not all operate with the same level of accountability or community engagement. For example, [donor-advised funds often lack accountability, provide tax incentives for donors, and do not require that funds be directed to communities.](#) In contrast, social justice-focused intermediary funds typically prioritise moving resources directly to grassroots movements. These funds often emphasise accountability to the communities they serve, centring their needs and voices in decision-making processes. Feminist and women's funds, for instance, are often rooted in decolonial, participatory, and trust-based funding practices, ensuring that resources reach communities and movements at the frontline of social justice work.

Stories of Girls' Resistance

Despite, or perhaps because of, the immense challenges girls and young feminists face, a common feature of their activism is the way they engage in the radical practice of imagining the world not how it is, but how it might be. And they bring this imagination back to bear on the present, in the ways they learn, play, organise, invent, and care for themselves and each other. Indeed, it is likely their imagination that will lead us all to liberation.

“*There is a girl who is the daughter of my sister that I accompany, and thinking about her, I would say ... that it is worth imagining, it is worth dreaming, that it is worth being angry. That ... all people can be angry and have a mood but that they are not alone, that here in Guatemala, that here in their house, that there in Latin America they are not alone because we are thinking about them, not for them, but that we are thinking about them. Wanting to build better environments; safe, healthy, happy, dignified, rebellious, feminist, and, above all, women's environments.*” – [Joseline](#), Guatemala, [Stories of Girls' Resistance](#) Storyteller

Movement building

Movement building refers to the sustained effort of collectives of groups of individuals, organisations, and communities, working collectively to strengthen their power, resources, impact in pursuit of specific social justice agenda or shared vision of social change. It involves utilising a diverse range of strategies and tactics, continually evolving to respond to current needs and to remain relevant to the moment. Throughout history, movement-building strategies and efforts change and are adapted and bring key examples that support current change. [As described in the “We Rise” toolkit from JASS associates:](#) “Movement building isn’t linear, and there isn’t a formula or one right place to start. Like any kind of change, it both leaps ahead at times and loops back at others.”



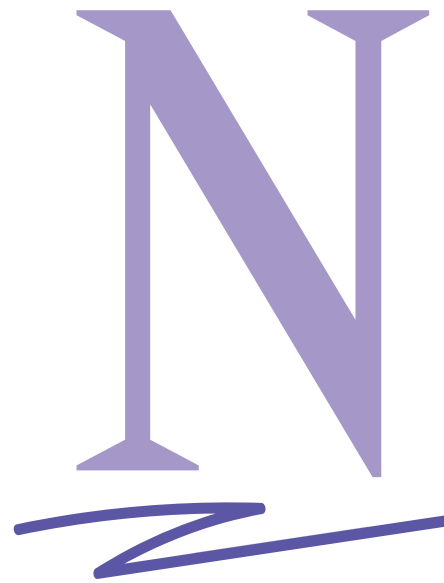
Multilateral funding

Multilateral funding, similarly to bilateral funding, and rooted in the same historical legacy, comes from governments. However, it is pooled from multiple governments and typically coordinated by international organisations such as the World Bank or the United Nations. These entities are considered mechanisms to coordinate and streamline aid from multiple sources. Examples for gender equality include the UN/European Union’s 500-million-euro Spotlight Initiative to End Violence Against Women and UN Women’s Fund for Gender Equality. The vast majority of multilateral funding goes either directly to governments or stays within development agencies themselves. This type of funding is especially bureaucratic, suffering from financial inefficiency and tied to “economic growth” models of development that are not rights based. [Definition adopted from the AWID Funding Ecosystem report.](#)



Narrative

A narrative is a collection of interconnected stories woven together over time, repeated, and reinforced across different mediums and media to convey a larger story about the world and the worlds within it. Narratives, whether consciously or unconsciously constructed, shape systems and form the fabric of our individual and collective experiences—affecting everything from policies and resource allocation to cultural norms and societal expectations. For girls and young feminists, their narratives are often framed within dominant narratives (see definition above), where their dreams, stories, and strategies of resistance are erased, co-opted, underfunded, and ignored by power holders across movements, sectors, and issues. Yet, they are at the forefront of critical narrative change (see definition below) efforts to reimagine and show the world what is possible.



Narrative change (reclaiming narratives)

Narrative change refers to the intentional shift and transformation of dominant narratives (see definition above) through long-term, reinforced strategies. These strategies can be employed in diverse ways, and many communities and actors have been utilizing them as tools for resistance, liberation, and systemic change. Social justice movements have long recognized narrative change as a critical strategy to challenge oppressive systems and inspire transformation. Some examples include: 1. decolonial movements that have illuminated how coloniality operates as an oppressive construct, shaping global power dynamics, knowledge production, and cultural norms, while also reclaiming Indigenous, Black and marginalised voices and histories. 2. Anti-racism movements have exposed the deeply entrenched nature of structural racism and redefined collective understandings of equity and justice. 3. Queer liberation movements have shifted societal narratives around gender and sexuality, challenging heteronormative constructs and affirming the validity of diverse identities and experiences. [Girls and young feminists have been at the forefront of narrative changes, making critical issues not only visible but central to broader movements for justice.](#) Their efforts include challenging capitalism and centring climate justice by advocating for new economic realities that support collective well-being and centre environmental sustainability; pushing for anti-patriarchal movements

and bodily autonomy by leading campaigns for gender equality, reproductive rights, and the dismantling of patriarchal structures; and utilizing social media creatively by countering misinformation, censorship, and propaganda by amplifying grassroots voices and promoting alternative narratives.



Narrative change is a political act to reclaim our narratives. It is a process through which marginalised communities, particularly girls and young feminists, seize control over the stories and language used to describe their identities, struggles, and experiences. Historically, narratives about girls and women, especially those from oppressed communities, have been written by those in power—perpetuating stereotypes, erasing their agency, and framing them as passive victims. Reclaiming narratives is a radical act of resistance and empowerment, enabling girls and young feminists to define themselves on their own terms, tell their own stories, and challenge dominant discourses that seek to confine or control them. It is through reclaiming narratives that they can articulate their visions for justice, challenge harmful systems, and transform societal perceptions.”

– Priyanka Samy, Dalit Feminist Activist, [Girls and Girlhood: Resisting, Dreaming and Building New Worlds](#)

Networks (within girls' and young feminists' ecosystems)

The networks within girls' and young feminists' ecosystems are local, national, regional, or international coalitions that connect various actors within the girls and young feminists ecosystem. They coordinate efforts, share resources, and advocate for broader social, legal, and cultural changes. Many of these networks are initiated and led by girls and young feminists, or through intergenerational collaborations. Some are also established in response to crises to support coordination and move resources at speed and with the agility needed.

NGO-isation

NGO-isation is a phrase to critique the dominance of NGOs within social justice organising efforts. It also refers to a trend toward the professionalisation and institutionalisation of civil society, and a shift in accountability from communities and constituencies to financial donors. Although NGOs take on many forms and are not inherently problematic, the critique holds that NGO-isation often weakens social justice efforts by depoliticising them, replacing grassroots organisation that challenges power with technocratic institutions that soak up donor funds even as they become increasingly removed from the needs, experiences, and priorities of grassroots mobilisation. [Definition adopted from the Jass Just Associates Feminist Movement Builder's Dictionary.](#)

“There has been an NGO-isation of our movements. The girl groups and girl activists that do not fit within the framing of this NGO-isation are losing out [on funding opportunities]. We [as funders] need to trust groups that do not fit within those set boxes we feel comfortable engaging with.” – Françoise Moudouthe, Stories of Girls' Resistance Curator



Non-profit industrial complex

The non-profit industrial complex (NPIC) is a system of relationships made up of the state (or local and federal governments), the ruling classes, foundations, and non-profit/NGO social service and social justice organisations that results in the surveillance, control, derailment, and everyday management of political movements. The state uses non-profits to monitor and control social justice movements; divert public monies into private hands through foundations; manage and control dissent in order to make the world safe for capitalism; redirect activist energies into career-based modes of organising instead of mass-based organizing capable of actually transforming society; allow corporations to mask their exploitative and colonial work practices through “philanthropic”

work; and encourage social movements to model themselves after capitalist structures rather than challenge them. Definition adopted from [INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence](#), a collective of radical feminists of color. The non-profit industrial complex has been popularised largely through the work of INCITE! and in relationship with movements and social justice organisations. The definition of the charitable industrial complex, as discussed on page X, is more widely used outside the United States and the term “non-profit” is not always understood in the same way internationally. However, these two concepts are directly connected, and the work that INCITE! developed contributed significantly to the development of the charitable industrial complex framework.



Stories of Girls' Resistance

As girls interact with the complex monetary forces in the context of formalised structures and institutions, the pull towards professionalisation and the profound impacts of NGO-isation start to show up in a multitude of damaging ways.

At best, these institutions can serve to sweep girls along with their own agendas—often imported from elsewhere—in a tide of power and resources, of acronyms and impenetrable processes, and where the girl is all but erased. At worst, we see the emissaries of aid reinforcing—often by design—the very structures that marginalise girls in the first place.

“We were in a meeting with the donors, the United Nations, and they were asking us—tell us what you want from us. We were so angry and I'm saying—we don't want your bags of food, even though we need food, but we need political actions ... We are forgotten ... Charity is so vertical—it goes from the top to the bottom. Solidarity is horizontal—it respects the other person.” – Asria, Western Sahara

“I'm no longer interested in the NGO, the non-governmental industrial complex. I don't want to participate anymore in affirming that NGOs are actually a solution. No, they haven't been a solution for me and they won't be a solution for me in the future. What I've learned from NGOs is that the idea of creating consensus and creating a collective dream allows you to have different, multiple ways of getting to the end result. If liberation looks different for all of us, liberation has many roads for all of us, and I don't need to be the one telling you this is the right route for you.” – Po, Kenya





Organising

Organising refers to the different strategies used to mobilise and bring a community or communities together to build collective power and drive collective action with focused tactics and concrete goals, aimed at both short-term and long-term social change objectives.

Stories of Girls' Resistance

There is no singular way girls organise and girls are constantly reimagining new ways of being and working collectively—from the informal to formal and everything in between. Some collective resistance is sparked in response to a particular social or geographic context or catalytic event, lending towards an informal structure. Many choose to remain informal for both practical and political reasons, and very often as a way to remain safe in this work. Many will remain unregistered and opt for a more flat or decentralised rotating leadership structure. Some sparks of resistance become ongoing campaigns or formations such as collectives, groups, or organisations. Self-led organising is critical in shaping and supporting the emergence of girls' resistance, and girl-led spaces provide brave and safe spaces for girls' autonomy to emerge. While they can start to take on more organised or formalised elements, often, girl-led collectives aim to disrupt more traditional models of organisations and hierarchical leadership models, redefining parameters of collective work and horizontal decision making. Girls' resistance can not easily be boxed and is not necessarily linear, but it is deeply embedded in personal experience and local context.



Philanthropic sector (philanthropy)

The philanthropic sector refers to a field that holds significant economic, political, and social power with the intent to move financial resources for social benefit. The sector controls vast sums of money, with billions of dollars managed largely [by foundations that have grown rapidly in the past two decades as income inequality has reached peak proportions and tax waivers for the ultra-wealthy continue to increase](#). The philanthropic sector, even though largely directed by philanthropic foundations that hold the majority of the funds, also includes charitable organisations worldwide, such as public foundations, funder collaboratives, and funds. Notably, a significant portion of this wealth is concentrated within countries with colonial legacies, such as the United States and the United Kingdom, where mass wealth accumulation has historically been a common practice. The actual data on the amount of funding held within the philanthropic sector across the world is not readily available due to the lack of regulation that exists within the sector. While we do not have this exact data, we can estimate that based on patterns in the US, most of the wealth held within the philanthropic sector is not actually moving to communities, with trillions in funds staying in endowments. In essence, many foundations serve as warehouses to invest and hold funds while benefiting from those deductions. As the True Cost of Billionaire Philanthropy report describes, philanthropy in its current state often serves the ultra-wealthy to ["burnish their public image, amplify their political voice, and protect their assets."](#) While much of the field of philanthropy replicates injustices and an unsustainable economic model like capitalism, there are a handful of foundations, philanthropists, regranting intermediaries, and affinity groups grounded in shifting from [charity to justice](#). [This means there is an initial or in-depth understanding of historical injustices and a commitment to move towards social justice and feminist practices seeking systemic change](#). These organisations are primarily focused on moving resources directly to those driving change and centring those most impacted by injustices. The move towards this shift in the philanthropic sector is relatively new, largely led by social movements seeking accountability and allies.

Political

Political refers to anything related to power, governance, decision-making, and the systems and structures that shape our lives and societies. It includes formal politics—such as governments, laws, and institutions—but also everyday actions and choices that challenge or uphold power dynamics.

For girls, young feminists, and marginalised communities the political is deeply personal. Their struggles, identities, and resistance are political because they confront systems of oppression like patriarchy, racism, colonialism, and capitalism. To be political is not limited to participating in elections or institutions, it can also mean organising, protesting, creating art, building community, or simply surviving in a world that denies you your rights. Naming something as political is a way to recognise that it is shaped by power and that it can be transformed.

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Stories of Girls' Resistance

When girls ask why, they seek answers beyond themselves; in the words and wisdom of others, in books and films; in mythology and popular narratives. Other girls, not yet in a conscious relationship with oppression, stumble across a word, a phrase, a book, a space, a place that opens up a whole new way of looking at the world; a portal into a politicised existence. No matter where or how she finds them, spaces of consciousness raising and political education are an essential entry point for—or next step in—girls' journeys of resistance.

“Books play a very important role or part in my life. So in 1980, the first book that I read—a political book—was the biography of Albert Luthuli, *Let My People Go*. And I read that book. That was also like a turning point for me. I think reading that and then I started to read a lot of other books about what happened in other countries. I remember there was this one book about this woman and guerrilla warfare. The book's name was *Domitila*. I don't know who the author is but I read that one. We had—it wasn't like a book—to get photocopies. We didn't have money to go buy books. If you got somebody who's got the book, then you ask for the book and then you make copies and then you distribute the copies amongst ourselves.” – [Revenia](#), South Africa

“Writing is resistance and has been a part of my resistance as well because writing is also how I practise my politics, so put that act of setting experience into language, setting thought into language, making it exist, giving it a face, giving it memory and defining it—I see that as political as well.” – [Sadia](#), Pakistan

“CBC (Caribbean Broadcasting Corporation) used to run these Black discussions. It was like a public access show, that we must have gotten access to or something like that. But it was this interview show and all these Black scholars and civil rights people, they would come and be interviewed on this show and they invited someone every Sunday. Of course, you know we were watching this two, three, four seasons behind. I remember being so blown away and this was around the same time that I had discovered Malcom X's autobiography and his collected speeches. A lot of Angela Davis. Even though I had read all of my mother's Black history books, my mother had a pretty impressive library in those days. It was very intellectual. I used to read for boredom, not necessarily interest. So, I read everything and had the information in my head. You know, being raised as Black is beautiful, Black power, the daughter of Black nationalists, all that kind of stuff, it was all intellectual. It's all something very removed until it hits you personally and that was around the time when it hit me personally.” – N'Delamiko, Barbados

Political Being

By [Mafoya, Narrative Revolution Fellow](#)

Political being
Apparently, I am a political being.
From the first flutter of my lashes
To my final sigh at dusk,
I am a political being.
When I dance beneath the storms,
Reveling in the rain on my unbound skin,
When I taste the sweetness of a delicate orange,
I am a political being.
When I scream, thunderous with joy or despair,
When I wage war on tormentors

Or offer solace with a gentle smile,
I am taking political actions.
The clouds now vines upon my head
My breasts humming songs of freedom,
My body, whether clothed or bare—
Everything is political.
So I will breathe the air of the entire world,
Delight and revel with every sense,
Burst with wild joy in crowded streets.
For if everything is political,
I will be the truest expression of myself

Power

Power is the ability and capacity of individuals or groups to influence, control, and impact access to spaces, the allocation of resources, actions, and the setting of agendas. It also determines who makes decisions and who holds authority over those decisions. Power is not just about authority or control—it also involves the ability to shape narratives, define norms, and influence outcomes. It can be exercised both overtly and subtly, often determining the course of societal, political, and economic systems. While traditional forms of power are often concentrated in the hands of a few, power can also be decentralised, decolonised, and wielded by marginalised communities to challenge dominant systems and reclaim autonomy, dignity, and push forward social justice agendas.

Power analysis

A power analysis centres power as a critical lens for understanding whose agency, dreams, ideas, needs, voices, leadership, and demands are prioritised—both in current realities and in visions for change. In efforts towards systemic transformation, power is too often unexamined, avoided, or dismissed as too complex or irrelevant to funding models or operational timelines. Yet without directly addressing power, only the symptoms of systemic injustice are tackled. Incremental improvements or isolated harm reduction may occur, but the root causes of oppression remain intact. Centring the power of those most marginalised within their communities opens up possibilities for transforming systems and structures in ways that benefit all. This principle is clearly illustrated by the global disability rights movement: increasing accessibility for people with disabilities ultimately increases accessibility for everyone. Power analysis illuminates how power shapes every facet of life and systems, creating the conditions to fundamentally shift inequities and build a world where all can thrive. [Click here](#) to learn more about a systemic change analysis framework grounded in power dynamics.



Your power is relative, but it is real. And if you do not learn to use it, it will be used against you, and me, and our children. Change did not begin with you, and it did not end with you, but what you do with your life is an absolutely vital piece of that chain. The testimony of your living is the missing remnant in the fabric of our future.” – Audre Lorde

Protectionist framework

A protectionist framework, typically within the context of children or marginalised communities, refers to an approach that prioritises safety, care, and protection, often emphasizing vulnerability and the need for oversight and intervention. While well-intentioned, this framework limits autonomy and does not centre the power, dreams, or leadership of the people or communities it seeks to protect. It often positions individuals as passive recipients of protection rather than active agents of their own change and protection. The protectionist framework originated from an international development perspective, with a focus on safeguarding vulnerable populations from harm, exploitation, and neglect. In the context of girls, this framework is derived directly from the children’s protectionist model, which centres adult knowledge and power through a patriarchal and colonial lens. This approach tends to disenfranchise girls, further compounding the injustices they face, as it overlooks their voices and agency in favor of external control.





Race

Race is not a biological fact but a social and historical construct created to justify systems of domination, including slavery, colonialism, and white supremacy. It is used to assign value, power, and opportunity unevenly across societies, shaping people's lives and access to resources, safety, and dignity. Race must be understood alongside gender, class, sexuality, and other forms of oppression—what we call intersectionality—to see how power operates and how resistance is built. Girls and communities racialized as Black, Indigenous, or people of color resist daily through care, imagination, organising, and storytelling, offering powerful visions for justice and collective liberation.

Resistance

Resistance can be understood as both individual and collective political action and efforts seeking to dismantle systems of oppression, such as colonialism, imperialism, white supremacy, patriarchy, and ableism. Resistance as a liberation strategy has been led by and grounded in the experiences and wisdom of communities and people across the world who have endured oppression, violence, exploitation, and silencing. Thus, the very existence of those who resist, their self-determination, and autonomy are forms of resistance in the face of systems of oppression aimed at dominating and erasing their existence. For girls and young feminists, resistance becomes forced upon reality to exist due to the multiple and compounded ways in which girls and young feminists face marginalisation and exploitation. To live, to breathe, to be a girl in this world — that's why girls and young feminists resist.



Resilience

Resilience refers to a profound response system encompassing social, community, individual, and systemic elements that enable a group to rebound, reconstruct, or adapt in the face of challenges, while also acquiring knowledge and capabilities that empower it to confront contextual adversities with increased strength.

“Resistance is resilience for me. My resistance is building vision for myself. My resistance is filling in the holes that I came here with generationally or that I've gotten, pockmarks that I've gotten as I have been moving around, bumping and thriving in the world. And filling in those holes for myself. Giving all that I have in my body and my heart to live the life that I want to live. Resistance is resilience, resistance is joy.” – Ebony, United States



Stories of Girls' Resistance

Girls' resistance—formal and informal, individual and collective, within generations and intergenerationally—cuts across all struggles for justice and freedom. They resist at the intersections of age, gender, land rights, climate justice, LGBTQIA+ rights, anti-war movements, and so much more. Girls and young non-binary people have sparked, led, and sustained transformational change throughout history: from the anti-colonial movements across Southern Africa to the Arab Spring, the Standing Rock movement on the traditional territory of the Sioux and the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, to the child labour rights movements in Latin America.

Resistance refers to the formal and informal, bounded and unbounded, spontaneous and organised, individual and collective ways in which girls push back and imagine better worlds for themselves and all of us. From secretly learning to read, to questioning the gendered burden of domestic duties at home, to grabbing the microphone at a political rally, to leading revolutions; girls are resisting the many abuses of power they experience in different ways. Sometimes, seemingly small acts of resistance work to transform her world, and often plant and nourish the seeds for decades of resistance to come.

Resistance takes many shapes and forms: from standing on the corner with five people and a couple of signs to joining or leading the masses, from surviving her own girlhood to bringing the next generation into the world, from fighting grand injustice to simply living life on her terms. Resistance is an act of defiance in the home where she starts to find her voice and validate her power.

First acts of resistance lead to second and third acts building over time, to the moments where girls are sparking, leading and sustaining movements. Resistance is all of this and everything in between, defined and redefined over lifetimes. Throughout it all, the intention is always the same: to create change for ourselves and those around us. To imagine, and therefore inhabit, a different kind of world.

“For me, any step, whether it's in a word, me saying no, choosing to tweet, walking the streets, any steps taken to deny the oppressor, that's resistance.” – Edna, Uganda

“When I started moving outside and reading materials, I got to understand that everything that frustrates me—the plight of women and girls in village—is nothing but a system in our society which is under the patriarchy and they do not want women to come out of their homes, get independence, and achieve empowerment.” – Shahzadi, Pakistan

“Resistance is something we do in our everyday lives ... when we simply speak to our family members, teach our own relatives, brothers, and sisters that we are, in fact, primarily people, personalities, individuals, and only then women, men, mothers, and so on. When we educate children—this is also resistance.” – Salt, Kyrgyzstan

Sexuality

Sexuality refers to the wide spectrum of ways people experience, express, and relate to desire, intimacy, pleasure, and attraction—across emotional, physical, and relational dimensions. It includes sexual orientation, practices, identities (such as lesbian, bisexual, queer, pansexual, asexual), and how people relate to their own bodies and the bodies of others. Sexuality is not fixed or solely individual but shaped by social norms, power structures, and histories of control, especially under patriarchy, colonialism, racism, casteism, and ableism. Sexuality is a vital part of our identities, not separate from struggles for justice and dignity. Affirming diverse sexualities is central to feminist visions of freedom and happiness.

Social change

Social change refers to a long-term collective political transformation of societal structures, norms, and values towards a just society. Social change involves clear efforts to dismantle systems that uphold and perpetuate discrimination, inequality, and marginalisation based on a multitude of identities and factors such as race, gender, class, sexuality, and disability. It encompasses both the gradual shifts in attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours at the individual level and the systemic changes within institutions, laws, and cultural narratives. True social change is not incidental and requires sustained, coordinated action across communities, movements, and generations. It is rooted in solidarity, courage, and the ongoing work of reimagining and rebuilding the world we want to live in.

For girls and young feminists, social change is deeply personal and political. It means confronting the intersecting systems that restrict their rights, agency, and futures. It is about creating conditions where girls and young feminists are safe, free, heard, and respected; and where they have the power to shape the decisions, structures, and cultures that impact their lives. Girls and young feminists are not just affected by social change, they are leading it.

Social justice movement(s)

Social justice movements are made up of individuals, collectives, groups, and organisations working together towards a shared vision of justice, equity, and systemic transformation. Collectives, individuals, groups, and organisations working together towards a shared social justice goal, cause, effort, or agenda. These efforts are sustained over time and remain in constant evolution to meet changing societal needs and contexts. Social movements address a wide range of interconnected and intersecting issues, including but not limited to disability rights, abortion rights, racial justice, climate justice, education access, gender equity, and land sovereignty.

Rooted in collective power, social movements aim to dismantle the systemic root causes of injustice and inequality. They are not static; they grow, adapt, and transform in response to shifting political, cultural, and social realities. This evolution can be seen in the ways movements reframe their language and strategies to centre those most impacted; for example, the shift from the disability rights movement to a disability justice framework, or from environmentalism to climate justice.

For girls and young feminists, social movements provide spaces to lead, organise, and build collective power. Despite being historically excluded or overlooked, girls and young feminists have always been at the heart of transformative movements—challenging oppressive systems, amplifying community voices, and reimagining what justice looks like.



Solidarity

Solidarity is a political consciousness, understanding, action, and practise rooted in the recognition of our inherent interdependence and connection within our struggles and collective liberation. It acknowledges that injustices are interconnected—not isolated—and that true liberation must be collective. Solidarity means refusing to see others' oppression as separate from our own and instead, committing to collective action, care, and resistance that centres intersectionality and long-term transformation. Solidarity is not charity or saviourism—it is standing with, not speaking for.

Source funders

Source funders are entities that control large amounts of resources and they do not need to fundraise from others; these include bilateral donors, private foundations, corporate foundations, and high-net-worth individuals. Because they do not rely on external funding, they have the ability to control narratives, define, and prioritise funding streams. Source funders often create funding streams which in turn drive what kind of work gets funded, documented, and amplified and they design frameworks that get replicated by those seeking funds. There are very few accountability mechanisms in place for these funders, and therefore they are able to act with little accountability to the people for whom funding is intended.

Stories of Girls' Resistance

To speak of the collective story of girls and their resistance is to speak also of the allies, accomplices, teachers, mentors, and guides who have walked with and lifted up girls. Indeed if girls have been resisting since time immemorial, sisters and aunts—and sometimes brothers and uncles—have been walking with them too. Solidarity is displayed wherever there is resistance, right where girls are—from the bus fare silently slipped into her pocket so that she can run, to the prized copy of liberatory literature passed from father to daughter, to the invitation into feminist space by a movement aunt where her activism begins. Solidarity is a precursor to collective action and people and powers movements, but also a site of resistance in and of itself. Indeed, even just to name the role of sisterhood, siblinghood, and solidarity is a political act, a counter to the dominant narrative of the single girl leader that so proliferates formalised spaces, and a living example of a different kind of way to be together in the world.

“ *I don't call them allies, I call them sister feminists. They are feminists who have started this journey way before me but I had to go to them, I had to find them, I had to humble myself enough to want to learn from them. That has been something very powerful to realise that the work and the journey that I'm on, another woman has lived it, and maybe what I'm living, they have lived it.”* – Judicaelle, Burundi

“ *Solidarity to me is standing together and supporting one another in a particular situation or circumstance. It's very powerful and amazing to be part of a solidarity group. What binds us together is our values, principles, and commitments on a social issue, and of course our rage! I think with that rage and that anger you see the injustices in the world and you want to make things right; you want people to have access to justice; you want people to have their voices, their struggles heard—you want to do something about it!”* – Mamta, Fiji

Sustainability

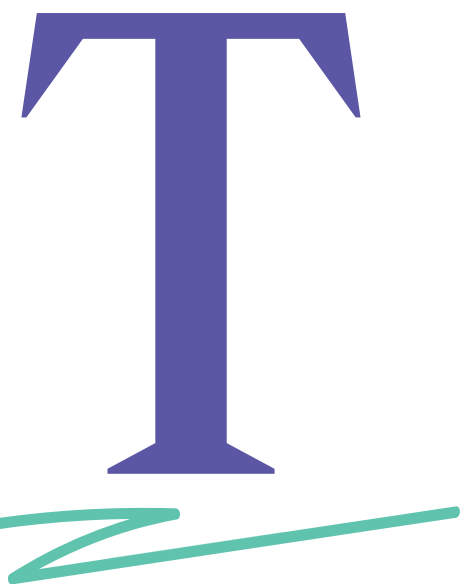
Sustainability is a political demand and a practice of resistance against extractive, colonial, and capitalist systems that exploit land, bodies, and labour. Rooted in Indigenous, Black, Dalit, peasant, and feminist movements, sustainability challenges the false narratives of “development” imposed by colonial powers and global elites—narratives that have historically justified environmental destruction, forced displacement, and systemic dispossession. Rather than centring profit or “green washing” solutions, sustainability in this framing is about collective survival, reparations, and the reclamation of autonomy over collective resources, ecosystems, and futures.

For girls and young feminists, especially those on the frontlines of climate crises and environmental violence, sustainability includes the fight for safe, nourishing environments to live and grow; it's about intergenerational well-being, collective care, and the right to imagine futures free from violence, displacement, and destruction.

Systemic change

Systemic change refers to the fundamental transformation of the structures, policies, and norms within a system. To understand and implement systemic change, we must understand power. Specifically, whose agency, dreams, ideas, needs, voices, leadership, and demands are centred in relation to the desired change.

“A lot of people just think girls don't have a voice. I hate when people say we work for the voiceless. Who told you they're voiceless? They always have a voice, it just needs to come out.” – Josephine, Sierra Leone, Stories of Girls' Resistance



Transfeminism

Transfeminism challenges the gender binary and advocates for the liberation of all people, regardless of their gender identity, affirming that gender is diverse, fluid, and expansive. Feminism must be trans-inclusive, or it is not truly feminism. At its core, feminism is the effort to dismantle all systemic oppression, exploitation, and exclusion to

create systems that support our collective dignity, freedom, and safety. Feminism recognises that liberation cannot be achieved unless it includes all marginalised identities, particularly transgender and gender-nonconforming individuals. This includes the rights and lives of trans women and transfeminine people, who have long been excluded from mainstream feminist discourse. When feminism fails to include transfeminism, it is being co-opted and utilized to perpetuate exclusion and reinforcing cisnormative ideals that limit gender expression and the experiences of trans and gender-diverse individuals. Trans exclusionary feminism (TERFism) is not feminism but an oppressive agenda that seeks to be an exclusionary stance that is deeply colonial in nature. The imposition of rigid gender norms and the erasure of non-binary and trans identities can be traced back to colonial systems that sought to control and impose Western ideals of gender and sexuality upon Indigenous cultures. These systems sought to erase the multiplicity of gender identities that existed within many cultures long before colonialism.



Young feminist(s)

Young feminists are individuals from across the gender spectrum committed to a social justice political agenda through an explicitly feminist framework, usually 30 years old and under. However, systemic injustices can create barriers to accessing political education and resources, and a clear feminist perspective may develop in one's late 20s or early 30s. Therefore, the age range is extended to include individuals up to 35 years old.

Young feminist(s)-led

Young feminist-led refers to initiatives, collectives, and organisations that centre, support, and respect the leadership, experiences, demands, voices, dreams, and strategies of young feminists. While young feminist led spaces and efforts prioritise the contributions of girls, they are not exclusive to young feminists alone. Intergenerational spaces are also integral, as young feminists are active participants in a wide range of social justice movements.

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