



THE FEMINIST ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT TOOL



Development Cooperation
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THE FEMINIST ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT TOOL

A TOOL TO OPERATIONALISE THE CHARTER
OF FEMINIST PRINCIPLES FOR AFRICAN FEMINISTS

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THE AFF WORKING GROUP 2010

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“I have never felt offended by being addressed as a feminist, but rather humbled and daunted at the responsibility it bestows on me. Feminism remains a positive, movement-based term, with which I am happy to be identified. It signals a refusal of oppression, and a commitment to struggling for women's liberation from all forms of oppression—internal, external, psychological and emotional, socio-economic, political and philosophical. I like the word because it identifies me with a community of confident and radical women, many of whom I respect, both as individuals and for what they have contributed to the development of the world as we know it.”

— Professor Amina Mama —



Introduction

The Charter of Feminist Principles for African Feminists (The Feminist Charter) was adopted at the 1st Regional African Feminist Forum which took place from 15th - 19th November 2006 in Accra, Ghana. The Feminist Charter serves as a guiding framework for our analysis and practice as feminists. Since its adoption, The Feminist Charter has been used as a mobilising tool, disseminated widely and discussed in a number of forums and gatherings. National feminist groupings have shared the charter with their constituents in a number of countries including Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Uganda, Tanzania and Zimbabwe.

The Feminist Charter sets out the collective values that we hold as key to our work and to our lives as African feminists. It charts the change we wish to see in our communities, and also how this change is to be achieved. In addition it spells out our individual and collective responsibilities to the movement and to one another within the movement.

Two key recommendations were made in 2006 as mechanisms for operationalising The Feminist Charter. The first was that it be popularised and disseminated widely through such actions as translation into local languages, and the use of ICTs such as websites, blogs and so on. The second was that it be developed into a tool which women's organisations can use for monitoring their own institutional development as well as peer review with other feminists. In this way, The Feminist Charter can be seen as an accountability mechanism, assessing our commitment to the principles we have articulated and adopted.

The Feminist Organisational Development Tool

The Feminist Organisational Development Tool (OD Tool) has been developed in response to the identified need for a mechanism by which to operationalise The Feminist Charter. It is designed to be used as a tool for



organisational development and learning, training, staff and board development, monitoring and evaluation, peer review and exchange, as well as a tool for self improvement and reflection. Whilst developed primarily for women's rights organisations, the ODTool is a useful resource for all activists and those interested in extending their knowledge and understanding of feminist theory and practice in Africa.

Recognising that women's rights organisations in Africa are at different levels of development in terms of capacity, staff size, budgets and so on, and also cognisant of the constantly shifting landscape and context in which African feminists work, the tool steers away from the 'one size fits all' approach of many OD tools. Rather its approach is to ask a series of questions designed to encourage joint dialogue and conscious thinking and analysis of the organisation's commitment to the principles of The Feminist Charter. This tool seeks to enable organisations and individuals to develop their own priorities within the confines of their capacities, contexts and resources. As such there is no scoring mechanism for the answers given. Instead it is hoped that the information generated from the exercise will contribute to greater learning of the challenges and successes that organisations have had so far in carving out a feminist identity not just in their programme content, but in their organisational infrastructure (policies, systems, staff and so on) as well.

As with The Feminist Charter, the OD Tool seeks to engage on a number of levels. The first part of the exercise is geared towards strengthening our understanding, analysis and values, and aligning that to our practice at the individual and collective levels. A number of case studies have been included to provide additional examples of how a number of organisations operationalise their feminist principles. We welcome more such examples from your experiences. An Additional References section has been included at the end in order to direct the users to further reading material by African feminists on these issues addressed by this tool. It is not meant as an exhaustive list and all are encouraged to add, adapt and revise as needs be. This OD Tool is a work in progress. In its development, it has been shared, commented and improved on in a number of forums. Most notably:



- The African Feminist Forum Working Group Meeting, Dakar, Senegal; September 2009
- The Chief Executive Officers' (CEO) Forum on Leadership and Management, Kampala, Uganda; September 2009 – Convened by The African Women's Development Fund, the meeting sought to create space for board and senior management staff of regional and sub regional women's rights organisations to address the challenges of leadership and management in women's rights organisations. The tool was welcomed as having provided alternative perspectives and means by which strategies to address these challenges can be advanced.
- The African Women's Leadership Institute Specialist Training for Senior Women Leaders at ActionAid International, August 2010 – Convened by Akina Mama wa Afrika and ActionAid International, Africa the meeting provided an opportunity to test the efficacy of the tool with senior women leaders in generic organisations.

How to Use This Tool

Using the tool to discuss and explore collectively with all staff and board members will be one way of identifying gaps in the organisation but also encouraging intergenerational dialogue and learning. However, the discussions should start with the self. There are several ways in which it can be done depending on the particular circumstance. Flexibility and adaptability are the tenets of this tool. The following are some recommendations for its use.

- Ensure that the space that you have created is a safe and positive one in which free exchange of ideas, experiences, and suggestions are welcomed and valued. Try as much as possible to eliminate hierarchies of age, class, designation and so on.
- Ensure that you have allotted adequate time to engage as deeply and as meaningfully as possible (this time can be staggered depending on your circumstances).



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- Be as honest and as open as you can in your responses to these questions. Remember there are no wrong or right answers.
 - You may choose to undergo the exercises on an individual basis. If so it would help to share your responses with someone trusted who can give you objective feedback.
 - As a collective, document your responses (according due diligence to confidentiality and privacy). This exercise is meant as a process that helps us move from one point to another in our attempt to operationalise The Feminist Charter. As part of that documentation is essential.

Remember to give us feedback on the process and your additional recommendations. We look forward to your comments, experiences and feedback both positive and negative. Good luck and have lots of fun doing it.

Our sincere thanks to all those who have supported the development of this tool. In particular we wish to thank the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, MDG3 Fund who provided the resources for its development and publication. Special thanks are also due to Bisi Adeleye-Fayemi, Hope Chigudu and Sarah Mukasa who compiled it. Thanks too to all those who gave feedback, ideas and thoughts on its development including Jessica Horn who provided much of the bibliography for the Additional Resources section.

The African Feminist Forum Working Group
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I. Individual Ethics

A social movement is as strong or as weak as the individuals who are a part of it especially (though not exclusively) at the levels of leadership. Thus any dialogue that aims to build a strong movement needs to begin with individual/personal reflection. This section seeks to underscore this principle. It sets a series of questions for personal consideration and contemplation at 4 key levels: the concept of feminism; our organising and networks; feminist solidarity and self care and well being.

“As individual feminists, we are committed to and believe in gender equality based on feminist principles...”



1.1 The Concept of Feminism

“As African feminists our understanding of feminism places patriarchal social relations structures and systems which are imbedded in other oppressive and exploitative structures at the centre of our analysis.”

This section is about strengthening our understanding of the concept of feminism and its relevance to our work and lives as feminist activists. It seeks to strengthen the link between theory and practice. Our conceptual understanding of feminism forms the foundation for our activism and it determines the priorities we set for ourselves as a movement. Thus, it is important to create time, space and to devote resources in our organisations to strengthen our learning, understanding and scholarship on feminist theory. This section sets us thinking on how we can do this.

- What is your understanding of the concept of feminism?
- What is your source of information about feminism? (e.g. Personal experience? Friends? Media? Publications? Workshops? Formal training? Other?)
- What formal training have you undergone in feminism?
- How often do you discuss the concept of feminism with your colleagues at work?
- How often do you discuss the concept of feminism with your personal friends?
- How do you apply your understanding of feminism to your work?
- How do you apply your understanding of feminism to your personal life?

*For us, religious fundamentalism is a form of terrorism against women. Its manifestations are varied but its purpose is the same everywhere: the control of women and therefore the refusal to recognise them as autonomous human beings and citizens.
Ait-Hamou, Louisa. 2004. "Women's Struggle against Muslim Fundamentalism in Algeria: Strategies or a Lesson for Survival?". *Warning Signs of Fundamentalisms.**



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- What is your own understanding of religion and spirituality within the context of feminist organising?
 - What is your own understanding of culture and tradition within the context of feminist organising?
 - What aspects of feminism have you found to be difficult or contentious and can you share some strategies of how you have dealt with them?



1.2 Organising and Networking for Feminist Transformatory Change

*“As individual feminists, we are committed to and believe in gender equality based on feminist principles which are...
- the effective participation in building and strengthening progressive African feminist organising and networking to bring about transformatory change”*

A strong movement requires that we build networks and alliances that can strategically enhance the aims of our movement. Are the networks we build reflective of the constituency of African women in all their diversities? How do we ensure that their interests and concerns are reflected in the agendas we put forward? In our activism, it is important to reflect on the networks we belong to (and if we do not as yet belong to any, to think of which to join) and how we strengthen them. This section asks a series of questions that helps us think about key considerations on networks.

- What organisations and/or networks do you belong to?
- What roles do you play in these networks?
- What principles informed your decision to join these networks?
- Please give examples of two things that the networks you belong to have achieved in terms of advancing feminist values and interests.
- How does your organisation build linkages across levels of activism, e.g., between those doing grassroots work and those doing advocacy at the public-policy level?

*The degree to which women representatives can facilitate changes in gender power relations depends among other factors on the relative autonomy of the women's movement as well as the depth of engagement by women's movement with and within each party.
The existence of an autonomous women's movement can direct the terms of women's inclusion as well as act as a constituency holding the dominant party to account.*
Tadesse, Zenebeworke, 2002.



- How does your organisation forge alliances and agendas between and with women from distinct locations, sectors, movements, ages, ethnicities and backgrounds?
- Does your organisation have a programme for strengthening activist and feminist leadership, especially amongst marginalised women?



1.3 Feminist Solidarity and Mutual Support

“As individual feminists, we are committed to and believe in gender equality based on feminist principles which are...

- A spirit of feminist solidarity and mutual respect based on frank, honest and open discussion of difference with each other”

The mechanisms we put in place to provide support and solidarity are what sustain a movement particularly in times of adversity. Do we see it as our personal responsibility to be part of the process that creates these mechanisms? Do we actively pursue these responsibilities? This section seeks to focus us on the importance of feminist solidarity and how we might go about it.

- How often do you invest in nurturing and building friendships that can support you in your personal and professional life? Please give two examples
- How often do you create the space to learn, reflect, and develop real relationships based on solidarity, honesty, respect and dignity?
- How do you demonstrate your solidarity to a fellow feminist colleague/friend who is in need of support? Please give two examples.
- How do you reach out to and embrace diverse groups of women who may not necessarily be a part of our regular circle of friends or colleagues.
- How often do you respond to email alerts?
- What feminist issues do you blog about?

Whether consciously or unconsciously, there is no doubt that some women participate in defining and bestowing respectability. One of the ways in which patriarchy has been entrenched in Zimbabwean society is by dividing women, offering them limited power and social approval in exchange for behaviour strictly policed along binary lines. Women who are thus divided, and who label and insult each other continue to service patriarchal structures.

Hungwe, Chipso. 2006 "Putting them in their place: "respectable" and "unrespectable" women in Zimbabwean gender struggles. Feminist Africa, Issue 6. Cape Town: African Gender Institute.



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- How often do you call women you know (who are not close friends) if you hear that they are going through a rough time?
 - In what manner do you go out of your way to observe milestones with other women, i.e. travelling for birthdays, weddings, funerals, etc?



1.4 Self Care and Well Being

*“As individual feminists, we are committed to and believe in gender equality based on feminist principles which are...
- The support, nurture, and care of other African feminists, along with the care for our own well-being”*

A critical feminist concern is the need for women to value themselves enough to create time to respond to their needs and well being. Given the challenges generated from having to juggle multiple responsibilities, many women focus far too little attention on their own health, well being and needs, often ignoring them until the problems become acute. This section reminds us that self care is a political act of resistance to patriarchal notions that relegate women to the duties of care giving and nurturing of others at the expense of their own well being. This section asks a series of questions that examine our own practices on self care as well as that of the institutions we work for.

*Friendship in the women's movement has been enriching, nurturing, sustaining and life giving. The movement has provided emotional support, loyalty and comradeship.
Hope Onigudu*

- What challenges do you face balancing your personal and professional obligations?
- What strategies have you used to manage these challenges?
- How often do you take the time to reflect on your physical, emotional and spiritual well-being?
- Do you regularly set aside time for your own care and well-being?
- What challenges do you face in creating space to relax?
- Do you support your colleagues and friends to do the same? Please share some examples of the things you



do on a regular basis to promote your care and well-being.

- What policies does your organisation have in relation to the care and well being of employees?



1.5 Documenting Feminist Agency

“As individual feminists, we are committed to and believe in gender equality based on feminist principles which are...

- The acknowledgement of the feminist agency of African women which has a rich Herstory that has been largely undocumented and ignored”

Our 'herstories', our contributions to the development of our communities, nations and continent and even the globe as African women are largely missing from the historical accounts and narratives. Thus African women are invisible and patriarchy has consigned them to the realms of 'unimportant, expendable, and worthless.' To what extent to we as activists mirror these notions? What do we know about our feminist ancestors or do we not consider this important? This section asks a series of questions that challenge us to think of the critical importance of documenting our struggles and achievements.

- Have you documented your story (in any form) and shared it with others?
- Have you documented and shared the story of other women who have inspired you?
- Do you know the herstories of at least four African feminist ancestors? If yes, how do you use the information you have to raise the visibility of these figures?
- What specific insights have you gained from reading herstories?

Information and knowledge generation

...together with many other writings by women under the rubric of 'gender and democratisation' reveal the major difference between the immediate post-independence Africa and today. Unlike the past, highly vocal women's organisations have been able to disturb the silences and expose the centrality of women and gender in the construction of political identities...

...Undaunted by the hostile environment, women's organisations have focused their energies on exposed the limits of basic civil and political rights that exclude the "private" spheres of marriage and family life from democratic scrutiny. We now have detailed and context specific accounts of a vast array of culturally sanctioned practices that are classified as violence against women. These practices take place in a multitude of arenas: the household, the community, schools, workplaces and streets.

Tadesse, Zenebeworko. 2002. "Gender and Democratisation in Africa: The Long Road to the Front Seat". AGINewstetter Vol 10, July



2. Institutional Ethics

Our institutions provide the mechanisms through which we mobilise and organise as social movements. It is important therefore to devote time to strengthening our institutions so that reflect our values and principles. As feminist organisations in Africa, we are often resource strapped and struggling to cope with several layers of challenge. As such whilst many of us would like to devote time to building feminist institutions, often the pressures of day to day management and survival leave little room for the wider yet critical considerations of building feminist institutions. There are very few signposts to how this can be done. This section seeks to explore possible areas for considerations. What does feminist leadership and governance and accountability mean or look like within the context of leading our organisations? What is feminist management practice and what are some of the indicators we can point to? And what are all the implications of this in relation to running multi generational organisations? These are some of the issues explored in this section.



2.1 Feminist Leadership, Governance & Accountability

“As feminist organisations we commit to ...

-Affirming that being a feminist institution is not incompatible with being professional, efficient, disciplined and accountable.”

- How does your organisation define feminist leadership?
- In your opinion, which leadership models/practices obstruct or impede feminist leadership?
- Does your organisation have clearly stated and explicit organisational values? Could you share what these are? Which ones would you consider to be feminist?
- What systems do you have in place to ensure that your values are internalised by board, staff and other key stakeholders such as the members (for membership organisations)
- What if any challenges do you have in implementing and monitoring the adherence to these values by board members in the organisation? How have you addressed these challenges?
- Does your organisation have a written position on the role of men in leadership, governance and management? If so please state what the policy is?
- If your organisation does not have a written policy on the role of men in the organisation do you think it needs one?
 - If so please state what that policy would be?
 - If not, please state why?
- Do leaders in your organisation lead by example? Please give examples of ways in which they do/do not lead by example.

If we define democratisation as a process where people struggle individually or in groups in order to secure and effect inclusion and participation in the governance and management of their societies and communities (Parpart, 1986), then the discrimination against Zimbabwean women through stigmatization and violence prevents them from fully participating in this process. Such efforts at participation are undermined by a discourse of "unrespectability" that is sufficiently far-reaching to include even female politicians, and delineate them as "prostitutes". Women may therefore be reluctant to engage in politics; or, when they do, they serve conservative and patriarchal agendas. Obbo notes that at a 1972 conference of the All Africa Women's Organisation in Dar es Salaam, 200 women leaders from 41 countries spent much valuable time discussing the foreign "menace of miniskirts and hot pants" instead of addressing political issues that affected their female constituencies. This she attributes to women's fear of not "playing the right game in a man's world" (1986: 158). It is commonly held that politics in Zimbabwe is a "dirty game", but especially so for women.



- What qualities does your organisation look for in the selection/election of your governance board members or Trustees?
- Does your organisation have Governance Guidelines, which specify things such as job descriptions, code of conduct, term limits, board performance, etc?
- List the tensions (if any) that your organisation has in balancing the need for a nurturing feminist space with the desire to be professional and efficient.
- Who has power in your organisation?
- How do you address power challenges in your organisation? Is there a stated policy to address power and authority breaches or challenges in your organisation?
- Is your organisation a secular space?
 - If so, please state how you safeguard it as a secular space
 - If not, please state why it is not a secular space
- How does your organisation build its constituency?
- How is your organizational constituency's feminist consciousness developed?
- What strategies does your organisation use to reach out to those who are anti-feminist?
- What mechanisms does your organisation use to ensure that the state is accountable to women?
- What strategies does your organisation use to account to women?
- Does your organisation have processes to ensure that those who benefit from your programmes/projects have a significant voice in setting the agenda?

The following remark, cited by Obbo, succinctly summarises how female participation in either university or national politics is regarded: "A progressive and intelligent woman who participates in politics is regarded as a hooligan. She is said to have every possible fault, bad behaviour and so on. She isn't worth anything; she is finished" (1986: 159). Gaidzanwa (1995) shows how the term "prostitute" in Zimbabwe is mobilized against women in the political arena in order to delegitimise women's initiatives to democratise private and public life. For example, women such as Shuvai Mahofa and Margaret Dongo have been branded as prostitutes.

Hungwe, Chipso, 2006 "Putting them in their place: "respectable" and "unrespectable" women in Zimbabwean gender struggles. Feminist Africa, Issue 6. Cape Town: African Gender Institute.



2.2 Management and Institutional Processes

“As feminist organisations we commit to . . .

- Using power and authority responsibly, and managing institutional hierarchies with respect for all concerned. We believe that feminist spaces are created to empower and uplift women. At no time should we allow our institutional spaces to degenerate into sites of oppression and undermining of other women”

- Is yours a feminist organisation?
 - If so what makes it a "feminist" organisation?
- How does it character, approaches and strategies differ from other organisations, even those led and constituted by women?
- What systems does your organisation have in place to ensure that staff members internalise your feminist values?
- What if any challenges do you have in implementing and monitoring the adherence to these values by staff members in the organisation? How have you addressed these challenges?
- In your organisations what constitutes "success"? And how do you measure your impact?
- How do Line Managers in your organisation support the people who report to them?
- What systems does your organisation in place to ensure that women in your organisation feel cared for and respected?
- Does your organisation produce annual reports and audited accounts?
- What financial systems of control do you have in your organisation?



- Does your organisation have regular staff meetings?
- Does the organisation have clear human resource policies that are shared and clearly understood by staff?
- How often are the organisational policies reviewed? Who in the organisation is part of the process of review?
- Does the organisation have a clear communications policy (both for internal and external purposes)
- Who in your organisation is responsible for ensuring that your organisation is kept abreast of the national labour laws and requirements in which your organisation is located?
- What special measures if any, over and above statutory requirements has your organisation taken to respond to the needs of women employees?
- What are the diverse needs of different generations of women in your organisation, and has it incorporated those needs in its human resources strategy?
- Do all staff in your organisation have up to date contracts with clear job descriptions?
- What have been some your organisational experiences regarding conflict resolution?
- Do leadership and staff in your organisation take the time to reflect on the organisations, herstory?



2.3 Multi Generational Organising

“As feminist organisations we commit to ...

- Exercising accountable leadership in feminist organisations taking into consideration the needs of other for self-fulfilment and professional development. This includes creating spaces for power-sharing across generations”

- What challenges (if any) do you have working with younger women in your organisation/network?
- What challenges (if any) do you have working with older women in your organisation/ network?
- Are you able to give examples of specific programs you have to attract and keep young women in your organisation/ network?
- How do you sustain links with 'older' feminist activists in your network?
- Have you developed feminist messages that can be understood by young women in their teens or twenties?
- Have you documented the experiences of older feminists in your organisation/ region/ community?
- Do you consciously promote the leadership of younger women in your organisation?
- Does your organisation have a stated policy on promoting the leadership on young women? If so please state what that policy is.

I come from a family that believes in a lot of hard work, but my determination to work harder was inspired by the women who had made it to the top. Listening to the way these women spoke about the issues that affect women, the opportunities for women, and how women should fight for their own emancipation, all this inspired me tremendously.
Tshoko Ruzvidzo



2.4 Information and Knowledge Generation and Management

“As feminist organisations we commit to . . .

- Striving to inform our activism with theoretical analysis and to connect the practice of activism to our theoretical understanding of African feminism”

- Does your organisation have a Knowledge Generation and Management Strategy?
- What challenges do you have in the area of information and knowledge generation and management?
- What challenges do you have gathering information on feminist issues?
- Does your organisation have a resource centre? Does it have publications that are explicitly feminist? Please describe
- Does your organisation have a collection of material (books, articles, documentaries, etc) written by African feminists?
- Does your organisation encourage and support all forms of artistic expressions and different ways of generating feminist knowledge?
- Do you have access to an African feminist bibliography? Please share the title(s).
- Does your organisation have an IT strategy? Please describe in one or two sentences.

Women researchers tend to shun “controversial areas of research”, concentrating instead on topics likely to get sponsorship or funding, and are more “respectable” (Mama, 1996: 85). Women who engage in politically or socially radical research projects are branded as stubborn and “unrespectable”.

Hungwe, Chipso. 2006 “Putting them in their place: “respectable” and “unrespectable” women in Zimbabwean gender struggles. Feminist Africa, Issue 6, Cape Town: African Gender Institute. P44