

WOMEN'S REGIONAL NETWORK: WHAT WE LEARNED IN OVER A DECADE OF PEACEBUILDING

This document highlights lessons learnt, challenges, and reflections on building a network and key initiatives for potential future activists to take forward. It is our hope that these reflections and recommendations can support the next generation of feminist network builders who continue the ongoing and ever needed work of advocating for women's rights.

THE WOMEN'S REGIONAL NETWORK MODEL: BUILDING A NETWORK OF MEMBERS

A commitment to movement building over project-based work.

The Network remained a voluntary based organisation and was founded on the principle that members are committed to movement building. This allowed for great accomplishments with minimal staff, minimal funds and difficult security and visa situations in conflict affected areas. This model provided the Network with both the resilience and flexibility to continue to operate in hostile security situations and funding environments. This is evidenced by the successful modelling of the Network in the East African Region which continues to flourish.

Recommendations:

- Think critically about what it takes to build a network of members.
- Member selection determines sustainability and credibility with donors and communities.
- Connect to grassroots movements and ensure inclusion in all dialogues and convenings.
- Define the organisation's goals and core values with members using a bottom-up grassroots model that centres community voices.



Community Conversation with IDP women, Kunduz, Afghanistan

CHALLENGES

- Secure ethical and sustainable funding, from diverse sources who share your vision.
- Back a volunteer network with a team skilled in fundraising, administration and logistics.
- Register and locate the organisation in a place where core values align, compliance requirements are feasible and fundraising and financial transfers are simple.
- Develop governance structures and policies in a timely fashion to streamline programmes, improve transparency and clarify decision making.
- Set up comprehensive financial accounting and audits at the start to meet donor and transparency standards.

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Women's Regional Network Founding Meeting, Kathmandu, Nepal

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REFLECTIONS FROM THE FOUNDING MEMBERS

- Cross-border organising is essential for feminist movements focused on women, peace, and security.
- Foster solidarity and collaboration among diverse groups facing similar challenges.
- Transcend national boundaries to share strategies, experiences, and resources to amplify the voices and demands of women.
- Collectivise action to enable activists to address the interconnectedness of issues such as gender-based violence, militarisation, and human rights violations, recognizing that peace is not just the absence of conflict but the presence of justice.
- Centre marginalised women and their participation in policy making processes that affect their lives and communities.
- Strengthen local movements that contribute to a more comprehensive and inclusive understanding of security that prioritises the needs and rights of all women.

What we have in common
yields to what is different
but still we somehow forge
from shared purpose, one thread
of stories. Listen, these voices
you ignore, reveal hidden realities,
clues to your vaunted ambitions.
You will not fix the world.
They will, if you listen.
Hoarse voices on deaf ears—
how anyone ever built peace.
And still, together, we worked,
hope, words, hands, love, heart.

Swarna Rajagopalan, 13, in 65, October 1, 2024

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LESSONS LEARNT

- **Ensure women themselves identify the issues in their families and communities and amplify these voices.**
 - Women's voices should be directly documented without imposition of research frameworks, allowing narrative to emerge, through community conversations to ensure their voices are at the centre of research and policy recommendations.
 - Shed assumptions on what counts as insecurity, violence and conflict for women. These can appear in predatory development projects, through communal violence and other structural forms of insecurity.
- **Take an intergenerational and intersectional approach.**
 - Non-hierarchical feminist leadership is key.
 - An intersectional approach across geographic, religious and ethnic identities should take into account caste, class, race, sexuality and acknowledge the impact of multiple levels of marginalisation.
 - As many key communities as possible should be represented and challenges to their representation identified and overcome.
 - Encourage young women to take on leadership roles to ensure their voices are represented, safe spaces for two way dialogues are facilitated, and mentorship is prioritized.
- **Trust between network members and information sharing is crucial.**
 - Decision making, funding, governance structures and opportunities need to be transparent to members resulting in better member ownership of the network.
 - Create a list of shared core values, ensure face-to-face meetings and informal time to build trust, overcome biases, and generate long-lasting and collaborative relationships. This ensures a collective voice and builds on the commonalities of women's lived experiences.
- **Connect and communicate with other networks across regions and countries.**
 - Understanding the commonalities of women's experience of conflict across countries and regions builds solidarity and creates a united voice to strengthen common advocacy efforts and build sustainable peace.
- **External communication of the network's work is vital for effective advocacy.**
 - Communicate both women's stories and experiences, as well as data and statistics to support this.
 - Include clear, tangible, and realistic recommendations.
 - Advocate widely and with one voice.



Launch of the Community Conversations, India International Center, Delhi, India



Women's Regional Network Working Group Meeting, Dubai, UAE

A ROADMAP FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

- Continue to amplify the voices of women, empowering local communities to conduct their own documentation and advocacy.
- Create, consolidate and support public platforms for women's testimony, identifying gendered concerns and demanding accountability.
- Innovate learning opportunities that bring youth together across borders, making gender, peace and security knowledge accessible and training a new generation of activists.
- Take a holistic, regional approach to the protection of women human rights defenders who are at risk, supporting their relocation and financial needs through cooperation between local and international organisations.
- Support new regional initiatives and young feminist-led networks, financially as well as through capacity building and advocacy. The WRN [seed initiatives](#) exemplify this legacy.



Community Conversations, Assam, India

In regard to earlier generations, our ideas and approaches to feminism, might be wholly different, but they are led by very similar core principles, that we envision a world of equality, we envision social justice, we envision liberty.

— Ananya Kundu, Former Women's Regional Network India Coordinator