



Making waves: how young women can (and do) transform organizations and movements

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spotlight

Throughout the past few decades, women's and feminist organizations and movements have sought to become more inclusive and representative of the diversity of women's experience. In cases where spaces and strategies have emerged in response to this, the needs of the most disenfranchised women have been addressed. Nonetheless, power differences amongst women based on class, age, race, caste or ethnicity, to name a few, have been the cause of great friction in attempts to organize for change. Increasingly, the issue of creating spaces for young women in women's organizing has become more controversial as efforts to 'integrate young women' have been more rhetoric than reality. There are good intentions to 'regenerate the movement' given the growing challenges for the future of women's rights (from HIV/AIDS to war to religious fundamentalism, for example) but the ways and means employed to include young women have not always been successful in practice.

This Spotlight describes some of the reasons why many young women are not finding an easy path into women's human rights and gender and development work. It offers up practical strategies, showing how to build strong multigenerational organizations and movements.

Why encourage young women into the movements?

1995 was a watershed year for thousands of organizations and individuals working for equality, development and peace. The UN women's conference and NGO meeting in China mobilized hundreds of young women to develop their own projects, present their specific proposals for the Platform of Action, and open spaces for participation as part of women's and feminist movements worldwide. Since then, young women have continued to create their own organisations and networks and have started to actively

participate in decision-making processes at different levels. From Latin America to South East Asia to East Africa, several women's and feminist organizations have been organizing training institutes, programmes and scholarships to support the participation of young women. But many newcomers and young women inside women's and feminist organizations are frustrated by the ageism and elitism that still predominate in women's rights and gender and development work. They argue that the inclusion of young women has not been seen as a priority for the majority of women and feminist leaders around the world, yet its benefits are obvious. Based on extensive consultations with women leaders of all ages, the authors suggest several key arguments for a more inclusive space for young women.

a) Reinventing Ourselves

"...to live to get the whole job done, great movements must reinvent themselves. To sustain themselves, movements must not only grow: they must change. This is not only because times inevitably change. It is because we ourselves have changed the times. Thus, we must react in part to our own history." – Bella Abzug, US¹

As Bella Abzug so clearly articulates, in order for movements to grow and keep moving, they have to reinvent themselves. The realities in which young women were born and currently grow have been affected by the transformations achieved by women's and feminist movements over the last three to four decades in different parts of the world. Today, young women are experiencing dramatic changes in their lives (the latest stage of globalization, new information and reproductive technologies, increasing poverty, population explosions, the existence of diseases such as HIV/AIDS, and so on).

The unique life experiences and vision of today's young feminists are important assets

for the movements as they attempt to reinvent, to be relevant for all women, and to respond in new and creative ways to the current challenges movements and organizations face. Many young women are asking critical questions about power relationships within women's and feminists organizations and movements and are trying to create their own spaces and organize activities to engage more youth (both women and men) in struggles to advance women's rights and development issues. By also using more flexible definitions of activism and exploring new ways of engagement, younger generations can help to create the creativity and momentum to move forward.

b) Consistency

Recognizing the power differences, privileges and oppressions associated with the diversity of conditions experienced by women who participate in organizations and movements is something that feminist movements have tried to embrace, in principle. However their inclusivity and democratic practice have not always been optimal. Internal power differences and struggles have characterized most of the movements, and the generational/age factor has played a part in them. If feminist organizing is to be consistent with its principles of democracy, transformation and inclusion, then intergenerational movements need to emerge more explicitly.

c) Building strength and sustainability

In a context of shifting terrains, where stronger right-wing and fundamentalist forces are obstructing the advancement of women's rights, it is even more critical that feminists focus on strengthening and building more cohesive and inclusive movements and organizations. For example, this has been clear in some United Nations conferences such as Cairo +5 and Beijing +5, where the active presence of organized, progressive young women had an impact in terms of counterbalancing and

confronting right wing groups, strengthening the presence of the women's and feminist movements as a whole. The full incorporation of more women from different generations is central to building strong and sustainable movements and organizations for both the present and the future.

What constrains young women's integration?

Now that more initiatives exist to support the integration of young women into feminist and women's movements and organizations, the rationale for doing so is more widely understood. Nonetheless, as more efforts take hold, several constraints can be observed:

a) Limitations of traditional definitions

Over the past thirty to forty years, feminist and women's organizations and

movements have developed a shared (and some would say fixed) vision of the 'ideal' activist/militant/feminist ways of organizing. This paradigm has been resistant to transformation. As such, some women, and particularly many young women, have experienced the constraints of others' beliefs that their participation was only valid if it fulfilled certain prescribed types of activism and organizing. But in reality young women are taking what has already been done or initiated and building on it to take on the new challenges facing the advancement of women's rights. This discrediting of what young women have to offer is contradictory to the objective of creating a movement of diverse energies and visions.

b) Needing to understand intersections of youth and gender

Women's and feminist movements and organizations know a lot about the implications of traditional gender roles and stereotypes in young women's lives. But they have little

"Understanding that young feminists are today's leaders becomes critical as we recognize our own accountability in power relinquishing and power sharing within feminist movements."

Participant, DAWN 20th Anniversary Celebrations, 2004

knowledge about the implications of the social construction of youth for young women. Young women, as both young and female, are subject to a societal devaluation which affects their self-determination, including control over their bodies, their capacity to enjoy their rights, their access to power, as well as their freedom to participate and organize. Similarly, both the youth and gender conditions experienced by young women influence the way in which they see themselves and the way women from other generations relate to them, and project their visions, values and prejudices onto them.² These conditions also influence the type of actions that are promoted for their empowerment.

It is important to move beyond defining young women in terms of just an age group in order to gain a better understanding of the needs, visions and problems faced by young women and of the way in which these influence their participation. This can be done while acknowledging the diversity of young women, in that all come with different experiences, visions, expectations and ways of engaging.

c) A lack of commitment from young women?

Women who have had a long-term engagement with women's and feminist movements may perceive 'newcomers' with a degree of suspicion. Many believe that young women who become involved in women's and feminist movements through, for example, gaining employment in a sympathetic organisation, do not always have the same passion and commitment to the struggle as do those who came through collective, political organizing that predates many women's organizations.

However it is possible to identify many factors which suggest otherwise:

- Women's and feminist movements have experienced an 'NGO-isation' process within the last two decades. In many countries, the way of becoming involved in the movements today is by doing work with an organization (either paid or volunteer).

- Benefiting from achievements of previous generations of feminists, young women in many parts of the world (usually from the middle classes or elites) have more access to university education in diverse fields, and become interested in becoming professionally involved with feminist organizing. This is positive because it means that human resources available to contribute to women's and feminist movements and organizations offer better qualifications and can bring in specialized knowledge and skills.
- Women who make the decision to work for feminist or women's organizations are in many cases making a commitment to the cause by doing so, since the wages and benefits are considerably less than if they were to work in the private sector. These women decide to stay in feminist and women's organizations because that is where they want to be.

"Some young women just look at working in your organisation as a stepping stone in their career path. So in the time they want to spend with you, if you do not fulfill that, they do not allow themselves to learn other skills or experiences from being involved with the organisation."

Pramada Menon, India

- Many young women might not seem 'passionate' about the movements because they are not exposed enough to the real politics and substance of the work of the organization and feminist movements. As one woman who has been in the feminist movement for many years put it, "Sometimes, we have not been able to communicate our passion, we have not created enthusiasm in young women, and I feel there is a distance between us and them." The daily work routine gets staff

caught up in short term problem-solving and often burdensome administration, creating even more barriers to building long-term vision and commitment to social change.

d) A lack of recognition

A common complaint from those feminist leaders who have waged battles for decades is the feeling that many young women do not recognise and acknowledge the importance of the achievements of those who preceded them. Additionally, many young women do not know the feminist movements'



history, or are not well acquainted with what it took for women to gain ground throughout the last decades. As one young feminist has said, “We do not see sometimes that there is a history and transition, a long process that we need to acknowledge and that somehow we, as young women, are a product of that history as well.” Feminists from older generations have suggested that while they see a value in having women who are permanently raising questions about how movements and organizations work, young women tend to be negative critics only.

“Young women in Malaysia have started initiatives such as listserves for discussion of critical issues affecting young women. The problem, though, was that the young women involved gradually moved on to other things and there was no succession plan that would allow the initiative to continue. So for me, a big problem is that many young women still need to look at their inclusion and involvement beyond the level of the individual and translate that into what is best for the collective.”

Tan Beng Hui, Malaysia

occurs, young feminist leadership neither expands nor becomes more visible.

f) Roles assigned to young women

A typical complaint from young women who are participating in women’s and feminist movements and organizations is that the kind of work they are assigned to do is mostly logistical, and that they are commonly excluded from strategic discussions, decision-making, and similar activities. Many young women come into organizations with an

e) Who speaks for whom?

The issue of representation is a complex one for most social movements, including women’s and feminist movements. Young women too are not exempt from these tensions.

Women activists from different parts of the world have raised the concern that some young women who participate in important agenda setting venues tend to speak on behalf of ‘young women’ as a cohesive group, as if anybody could speak on behalf of such a diverse demographic. This generates tensions, particularly when young women are ‘brought to the table’ just because they are young and not necessarily because they are doing work on particular issues of relevance to young women, or have been working within youth movements. Bringing in young women without information, work on the ground, or analysis of issues does not help to build movements and leads to generalisations about young women’s lack of analysis or low profile.

There are also those young women who are able to access resources and spaces to participate within women and feminist movements and organizations, but who nevertheless seek to keep out other young women. Where this dynamic

academic degree or with experience of participation in other movements or spaces. They therefore tend to get frustrated and discouraged if the only roles they are assigned is as office clerks or information technology troubleshooters.

“I am not sure of the other regions, but from this side of the globe, come to any women’s conference and you will see young women from women’s organisations heavily burdened, not by the predicaments of the future, but by the tons of documents on women’s rights for shipping back home to be arranged in the shelves when these young women return. Young women dominate the logistics part of the women’s movement.”

Lalaine Viado, Philippines

Young women are most likely to be offered participation in forums and conferences in sessions which feature cultural activities, such as presenting theatre plays, dancing or singing. Feminist leaders and organizers need to ensure that young women are not ghettoised into this type of activity but also get the opportunity to participate in the larger discussions and decision-making processes.

g) Discrimination and stereotypes

Sometimes the work done with young women tends to reinforce stereotypes about youth, particularly female youth, which in turn does not help to facilitate their full empowerment. This has included a lack of theoretical and methodological analysis of gender/age/generation power relations that would allow feminist actors to transform power and privilege and at the same time develop new ways of interacting that will strengthen movements.

By reinforcing stereotypes such as young women are inexperienced, they do not know what they want, they do not know anything about feminism, they need to be taught, they do not read, they are not interested in political struggles, and so on, discriminatory discourses or practices get reinforced, and with them, the underlying power relations.

Related to this are some common assumptions that exist in many societies about the ‘natural competition and conflict between generations’: young versus old. This assumption is at play in the relationships among women from different generations in women’s and feminist movements, creating in some cases unnecessary divisions and tensions, and preventing a more fluid engagement among women of various ages.

h) Resources

A recent trend has emerged of providing funding to support young women’s participation. This has generally been positive, because it has encouraged more organisations to develop programmes tailored to young women. However, some of these initiatives were born out of resource availability rather than as the result of strategic and ideological reflection on the part of the organisations themselves. There has been no comprehensive assessment of the impact different initiatives have had on empowering young women and supporting their work and active engagement with the movements.

At the same time, young women operating from within the organisations and movements are facing great challenges to access resources to support their organizations and networks. It is common that

young women’s organisations do not meet the common institutional requirements of funding agencies and some receive grants that have to go through a more established organization, rather than directly to them as grantees.

Where to go from here: some ideas for action

a) Promoting intergenerational dialogue

As has been proven through intergenerational dialogues, training institutes and projects, multi-generational work can build on the experiences, richness and diversity of all women who contribute to movements and organizations.

But multigenerational work and dialogue needs to go beyond just addressing issues of power, mechanisms of inclusion and the needs of young women, and move away from the confrontational perspective of

‘young versus old.’ It should create spaces that enable all participants to contribute to a broader reflection about other important issues in relation to the political agenda, strategies for action and movement building. Methodologies and facilitation for these kinds of processes need to take into account the need for an inclusive and safe

environment, one that aims at building bridges and identifying commonalities, and identifying difficulties in terms of power, leadership and mechanisms of inclusion/communication, as well as tensions and unspoken expectations or concerns that women from different generations might have about each other.

b) Different ways of organising

Diverse types of organising and participating enable those involved to make important contributions to advance feminist agendas. Many different ways of organising and doing activism are possible: formal political participation, influencing public policy, providing services to specific groups, mobilizing people through the internet, using the arts as a means to raise awareness and build support, organizing a picket or a rally, running training sessions and capacity-building,

“We must have the courage to name ourselves in new ways to reflect the new locations and new agendas we bring to national and global struggles, to create solidarity platforms through which we can contest, celebrate and envision our new directions, to interrogate and challenge ageism and the privilege and authoritarianism associated with it.”

Patricia MacFadden, Swaziland



Case Study 1: Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN) – Working with a New Generation of Feminists

In September 2003, DAWN, a well-known international feminist organization, held its first ever Feminist Advocacy Training Institute for young women from the Global South, in Bangalore, India. DAWN had two main reasons for organizing this Institute: firstly, when the organization started its advocacy activities there were very few guidelines on how to go about it; secondly, the organization saw the importance of sharing this knowledge and of contributing towards building sustainable and multigenerational movements that see the world from a feminist perspective.

This event was just the beginning of DAWN's strategy to bring the younger generations of women into the organization and into advocacy spaces. At the Institute itself, younger feminists had access to feminists from three different generations and had the opportunity to engage in dialogue with some of the 'doyennes' of the movement and to strategize how to best move forward collectively.

Following the training, participants continued taking part in regional activities where they played a key role in

structuring meetings and delivering content in collaboration with the more experienced feminists.

At DAWN's recent 20th Anniversary Celebrations, these younger feminists played an active role in co-hosting and organizing some of the panels of the workshop, in particular the intergenerational dialogue. Through their participation, the younger feminists explored issues of (i) leadership and power; (ii) sexuality, spirituality and sustainability; and (iii) identification of allies and adversaries. This dialogue was part of DAWN's overall multigenerational strategy.

The example of DAWN is useful in that it demonstrates a recognition followed by a conscious effort by the organization to become multigenerational in every sense. DAWN has committed to continue building on this strategy and its younger membership is keen to be included in contributing and participating in feminist organizing.

More information:
www.dawn.org.fj

Actions to involve young women

Case Study 2: ELIGE and GEM Intergenerational Project (Mexico)

The Youth Network for Reproductive and Sexual Rights (ELIGE) and the Group of Popular Education among Women (GEM), have organized two Intergenerational Meetings to reflect on the goals and achievements of the feminist movement in Mexico, and to take an honest look at its strengths, weaknesses and vision for the future.

At the First Intergenerational Meeting of Feminists in 1999, participants decided that an effective examination on the status and future of the feminist movement could only be attained if older feminists, who wield the most power in the women's movement, were to engage with younger women - who will shape the movement in the future, and have the potential to influence its current path. A six-month exchange process was initiated to facilitate intergenerational interaction. This paired women from different parts of Mexico with a history of participation in the movement with younger women working with ELIGE or other organizations from different states of the country.

This experience was presented at the Second Intergenerational Meeting of Feminists, improving the participants' understanding of the other generations' perspective and providing for a better-informed discussion on the realities of Mexico's feminist movement. Deliberations on the internal structure of power and leadership in the feminist movement produced a clear articulation of problems

associated with power relations. Feminists with longer service to the movements were made aware of the jargon and the restrictive unofficial requirements that hinder young women's entry into the movement, while young women gained a more complete picture of the context and history of Mexican feminism. Building on these findings and the diverse experience of the participants, ethical principles for the feminist movement were agreed upon. Inclusiveness, cohesiveness and power-sharing were deemed to be essential to the continued success of Mexico's feminist movement and the participants all agreed that multigenerational cooperation opened important spaces for discussion, debate and compromise which, if explored, could pave the way to a far stronger and reinvigorated feminist movement.

This case study shows a way in which feminists from different generations were able to work together in a two-year long project, commonly designing and implementing it, and contributing a space that helped to strengthen Mexican women's organizations to engage in a process to promote young women's inclusion and participation, and additionally to have discussions and come up with actions that work with the broader women's and feminist movements.

More information: [in Spanish]
www.laneta.apc.org/generacionesfeministas or
elige@prodigy.net.mx



Case Study 3: Young Women in Action (Zambia)

Young Women in Action is a group of young women, most of who were already actively involved within the women's movement, who formed an organization that would address the needs of young women and initiate dialogue with the rest of the movement from a position of equal power. YWA's vision is of empowered young women realizing their full potential in all aspects of life, effectively contributing to the women's movement and national development and encouraging young women to work for the removal of barriers, gaps and prejudices such as appointment into decision making positions, access to training between women of different ages, race and beliefs in the women's movement.

YWA also works intergenerationally with other women's groups to promote mentoring of young women by preparing them to take up leadership positions and to be responsible citizens. The organization lobbies within the women's movement to include young women in programming and activities. YWA tries to ensure that separate spaces are created

to capacitate young women to become more active and that their organizations and movements will represent and address issues of a critical constituency within society. In addition, the organization actively creates spaces for intergenerational engagement and dialogue with sister organizations.

One of the major NGO networks now has twenty young women active in the organization (as apposed to zero before the group started lobbying). This network has also adopted a policy in their strategic plan about young women's inclusion and participation within it. Another achievement has been the establishment of a multigenerational forum which conducts campaigns, demonstrations, and advocacy on matters affecting girls and young women such as sexual abuse and violations of women's rights. YWA coordinates this particular network.

More information:
pmngonga@yahoo.com or
irenelungu@yahoo.com

Actions to involve young women

Case Study 4: AWID's Young Women and Leadership Institutes

One of AWID's strategies to strengthen feminist movements and organisations is the Young Women and Leadership Institutes (YWLI) which aim to facilitate a process for young women (from a particular region) to analyse the forces that shape their lives and to assess what actions to take either individually or collectively to deal with them effectively. The methodology for the Leadership Institutes includes information sharing, capacity-building, networking and strategising.

In 2003, AWID held its first regional workshop in Cape Town: *Tackling HIV/AIDS and Poverty in Africa*. In 2004, as a follow-up to the regional meeting held in 2003, and to further young women's involvement in agenda-setting at the national level, AWID conducted Leadership Institutes in Kenya, Nigeria and Zambia.

One of the achievements of the Institutes is that they represent a successful collaboration between national, regional and international activists and practitioners – thus ensuring that the connections between the three levels are visible throughout the process. Secondly, a follow-up mechanism is ensured as one of the partners for each of the Institutes has been a young women's organisation. Lastly, the Institutes have an extensive focus on building young women's analysis (gender, human rights, economics)

and their leadership and advocacy skills. By focusing on a key area of concern for young women (for the Africa institutes the focus was HIV/AIDS), participants were able to use very practical examples and engage with existing policy instruments, opportunities and gaps. From this juncture, participants are able to build on their analyses to develop strategies (with very concrete interventions and timeframes) for working towards this vision of social change.

Methodologies were developed and refined as each Institute was held and a comprehensive set of skills emerged, located within the broader fight for social change, for young women to become more engaged and more involved in meaningful ways. AWID will continue to support local young women's organising with follow-up activities to ensure that the energy mobilized through the Institutes is sustained for young women's integration and involvement in feminist movements and organisations. To allow this work to continue, AWID will compile a manual for other young women who want to do these types of activities in their own contexts. Lastly, AWID will expand the experience of the Institutes by moving to another region in 2005.

More information:
www.awid.org/ywl



Case Study 5: Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM)

FWRM runs an Emerging Leaders' Forum (ELF) which is a year-long programme and part of their Young Women in Leadership Project. The Forum participants consist of young women between the ages of 18 and 25 years who come from a diverse range of religious, ethnic and professional groups. The main objective of the Forum is to introduce emerging leaders to issues facing young women in Fiji and internationally. Young women participate fully at all levels of the project, from planning and implementation to the activities themselves.

The first group of Emerging Leaders graduated in May 2004. The group dealt with issues surrounding leadership, feminism, business, the environment, reproductive health, the media, human rights, tourism, poverty, and the law with particular attention on the role of women in each area. Participants have indicated that they are sharing what they learn with their friends and families; they are challenging traditional gender roles within their families and classrooms. Overall, there was an increased confidence amongst the participants which has resulted in them becoming more vocal within their communities. As a result, many have volunteered with various organizations, taken part in other international events, set up a youth internet library in Fiji, participated in Fiji's National Youth Parliament and the International Youth Parliament, designed human rights awareness campaigns for youth, and set up their own small businesses.

One former participant is the Young Women's Representative on the FWRM Board. She is also part of the Young Women's Working Group that voluntarily helps the Young Women's Officer with creative input into the planning and implementation of the project. Even after graduation, participants remain passionate about the women's movement and human rights issues and meet monthly to discuss topics for a monthly 'ELF hour' on the community radio station *FemTALK*. They form an excellent network, particularly as they come from a variety of backgrounds and work or study in different fields. At FWRM's last AGM in 2004, there were more young women present than ever before. The ELF is supported by programmes such as a journal for young women entitled *GrrlTalk* which aims to empower young women by providing them with basic information on various subjects of importance; and *HeadStrong* which is a compilation of essays by young women in FWRM's Emerging Leaders' Forum (ELF).

FWRM's experience shows that when an organization or network allocates resources and creates concrete spaces to promote the inclusion and participation of young women, they start taking the lead and creating their own activities and this in turn contributes to strengthening their work as a whole.

More information:
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Actions to involve young women

Case Study 6: Sista II Sista “Freedom School for Young Women of Color” (USA)

Sista II Sista launched its first programme during the summer of 1996. It was created as a response to the lack of community spaces that focused on the experience of young women of color in New York City, USA. Sista II Sista is a collective of women of color of different ages. They believe that it is important to create structures that model their vision of a society based on justice.

One of Sista II Sista’s main activities is the “Freedom School for Young Women of Color Personal and Political Development”, created in 1996 to involve young women in personal and political development through an exploration of cultural identity, community organizing, and long term relationship-building. The Freedom School consists of interactive workshops, physical activities, field trips, organized action projects, and a ‘herstory’ project. The four major components of the programme are:

1. Whas Da Deal? On Tha Real! Creative activities are used to encourage young women members to explore their identities in terms of gender, race/color, age, and class. Workshop topics include: Gender Roles, Sex and Relationships, Revolutionary Sistas, Violence Against Women, Hip Hop and Activism, and more.

2. Whose Streets? Our Streets! Community Organizing: young women of color are encouraged to envision themselves as leaders. They collectively identify problems that affect their communities and learn how to fight to

change them. Currently they are working on a project focused on making both cultural and institutional change combating violence against women in the local neighbourhood.

3. My Temple, My Power! Physical Development: This component explores the important links between having a strong mind, strong spirit and a strong body. Workshop topics include Break-Dancing, Afro-Dominican and Yoga, Self-defense, Capoeira, Spirituality, and many others.

4. Herstory, Ourstory! Growth Through SistaHood: Throughout the summer the young women meet to share their stories and create a collective ‘Herstory.’ The ‘Herstory’ piece is a creative expression project that uses a combination of creative writing, drama, dance, video, and music.

Sista II Sista Freedom School is an example of an activity created by young women for young women, organised for several years now, where young girls from different communities have access to a comprehensive capacity-building programme, that includes physical activities, reclaiming herstory of women’s struggles, building an identity as part of that struggle and providing them with skills and tools to get actively involved in community work.

More information:
www.sistaisista.org

and organising performances in streets and public places to disseminate information and raise awareness are some methods currently used. Young women are taking on many of these methods themselves in new ways and enriching them.

c) New ways to be an activist

Feminists can make explicit and critically review the criteria being used to measure true commitment and

engagement as good activists. For example, smart self-care has not always been one of the parameters to measure who is a 'good activist'. Young women from different regions have expressed concern about the level of burn-out and health problems suffered by many longstanding

leaders of women's and feminist movements, and sometimes of themselves (as they realize they are repeating ways of activism that are not very sustainable). Young women seem to understand self-care as something that encompasses taking care of one's health, of close relationships, of having a private life, of time to rest. How to have all of this and be an effective activist at the same time has to be an issue for all those activists engaged in women's rights for now and in the future.

d) Condescending attitudes

Sometimes initiatives that promote young women's participation have been misunderstood and limited by others' condescending attitudes towards young women's proposals or expressions, considered wrong purely because of the initiator's supposed lack of maturity or experience. Keeping an open mind about young women's contributions and ideas could allow those already established within movements to build more respectful relations with growth and learning for all women involved and contribute to movement building at the same time.

e) Rethinking the meaning of 'experience'

Experience is a term commonly used in movement-building and organizational-strengthening conversations and strategy design, particularly when talking about young women's participation. It is important to challenge what is understood by 'experience', who has experience, how experience is gained and perhaps most importantly, what

are the kinds of experience that participants/members of movements and organizations should have to make them stronger, more effective and sustainable.

A common assumption in women's movements has

"As part of a group of young women who created our own organization, we face different problems, such as lack of infrastructure, lack of funding... Being independent has a high price for us, but it is important because we decide what we want to work on... But getting funding is a challenge, because many times we do not have the information, or contacts... It is difficult because it limits our capacity to make our work continuous, sustainable and effective."

Nicole Bidegain, Uruguay

been that 'experience' is something that one acquires with time and therefore those women with more time in the movement are 'the most experienced'. This is partially true; however newcomers to the movement of all ages bring unique experiences and knowledge as well (for example, on information technology, their participation in other movements, their own vision of particular issues, and ways to reach other audiences).

Consider this example (with complex implications beyond what is described here). We have a 28 year old woman and a 45 year old woman. Without knowing them, the common assumption in movements and organizations is that because she is older than the other, the latter has more experience (life experience tends to get equated to work or movement experience). When analyzing the movement/organizing experience of the two of them, we find out that the younger woman started her activism when she was 14 year old (involved with a student movement, with a feminist movement and also working with a grassroots' housing rights group), and the older woman started her participation when

she was 31 (and has worked in the same organization since then). So, who has more experience in terms of participation in movements and organizations?

The common assumption that it is the older woman affects the way in which the younger woman is perceived, the spaces and initiatives to which she gets invited to contribute, her access to resources and the roles she plays. Both of their experiences are important for feminist and women's movements, but their contributions are of a different kind and their value should not be defined in terms of age.

"Women from older generations should bring their experience to the table... but should not use it as means to block the participation of other women in the movement."

Charlotte Bunch, USA

In the same way that women's and feminist movements have used transforming language as a strategy to foster change, they need to review the language used when talking about young women's participation, contributions or engagement in movements and organizations. Diverse experiences and knowledge that every person brings to the organization and movement can be celebrated and respected.

f) Naming and resolving tensions

Women's and feminist movements and organizations have not always been good at dealing with tensions and resolving them. From the kind of debates, differences of opinion, and challenges posed by the issue of young women's participation (such as 'why should they participate?', 'why should the older leaders give up their space?', 'is there anything new that young women bring to the movement?', 'can we talk about a young women's perspective?', etc.), it is clear that there are tensions about their role, their access to spaces and the contributions they bring to movements and organisations.

"I do not think that because someone is young, we have to be condescending... We need to build a relationship that is not 'mother/daughter like' ('maternaje'), but a respectful political relationship... But just because they are young, I do not have to tolerate everything they do, because if young women want to participate, they must take things seriously... If there are things to criticize, I will criticize..."

Lilian Celiberti, Uruguay

In order to advance, it is essential to name the tensions that do exist and confront them with honesty and a willingness to resolve them. It is important to also create concrete mechanisms to deal with the tensions in an empowering and effective way.

g) Rethinking mentorship

Mentorship needs to be critically reviewed and refined in order to make it more effective. Mentorship programmes have been one common response to the issue of integrating young women into organizations and movements. But as with the issue of experience, questions need to be asked about the term and its use, for example: What is a mentor? Who is a mentor? Who can mentor whom?

The traditional definition of mentorship implies a clear unequal power relationship. One person – the mentor – is the one who knows, who has the experience, and the other person or persons – the mentees – are the ones who need and can benefit from the knowledge and experience of the mentor. This is the traditional way of defining and seeing mentorship. But there are others. If it can be acknowledged that each person engaging in a mentorship process is at the same time a mentor and a mentee; that all people involved teach, share and learn in the process. In this way the initial power relationship of mentorship is somehow redefined, and the participants are located in a more empowering process.

Young women themselves have done quite a bit of reflection about this with women from other generations, and, some young women have become mentors of other young women. In some cases, young women also mentor women from other generations on different issues. Whatever the age dynamics, mentorship can be clearly defined by what is to be shared and by making explicit at the beginning of the relationship what each party brings to the other.



h) Capacity-building and allocating resources

As women's and feminist movements and organizations, we need to allocate financial and human resources to opening up spaces for training newcomers to the movement (both young and not so young). This will create an opportunity for all newcomers to take ownership of the language and to understand the dynamics of feminism and feminist movements through access to non-formal educational spaces where that information is provided. Training and other capacity-building activities can also be multigenerational activities, but should not be one-off activities. Consideration should be afforded to where young women least participate, why they are not able to participate in those areas and how to strategically build capacity to enable participation. Training should be followed with support activities which keep track of whether the training has helped, what additional resources are needed to assist continuous development and also to provide opportunities to allow the young women to use the skills gained.

It is clear that mentoring is a useful resource for integrating, motivating and including newcomers to organizations and movements. But if people who could mentor others (who in some cases are in leadership positions) do not allocate time to do it, it will not happen. People who could mentor others should move beyond their stated desire to transfer knowledge and experience into actually doing it. They should also bear in mind that resources allocated should include time and energy.

"I must confess that the passion of being a feminist was triggered by me working here [in my organization]. My greatest inspiration to date is the former director; she took her time to mentor me and always saw the potential in me. With such inspiration I began to discover a part of me I had not explored; I wanted to be free.... She taught me that I can be a fighter, I can make my own rules and succeed in life, that I can be what I want to be if work hard in it, that the world is at my feet!"

Chiedza-Kimberly, Zimbabwe

i) Creating spaces

The issue of building inclusive women's and feminist movements and organisations should be one for *all* women who are part of them. The integration and meaningful participation of young women is part of a broader discussion on how movements and organizations create mechanisms, allocate resources and resolve tensions that arise from these actions.

A useful exercise might be to analyze what could be ways to promote meaningful participation of young women.

Meaningful participation would be the situation whereby women who take part in different kinds of decision-making processes of organizations/movements have the necessary information and understanding of the

issues discussed to enable them to give their views freely and to have a real capacity to have their input taken into account.

In order to facilitate these discussions, organizations and movements may want to ask themselves some pertinent questions that could help to advance their work and strategies:

- What mechanisms for inclusion of newcomers does the organization/movement have?
- What are the opportunities for diverse women to participate meaningfully in different decision-making processes?
- How does the organization deal with young women's participation beyond 'tokenism' or space filling?

- Does the organization have any affirmative action policy for newcomers or for young women? What kind of policies? What resources have been allocated for that?
- Within the specific context of the organization/movement what are the criteria for facilitating full and meaningful participation of young women and newcomers?
- An important collective discussion should be about the key information/knowledge that a newcomer to the movements needs to have in order to participate meaningfully, for example: names of key organizations and networks in the local women's movements; basic notions of history of the women's movement (a history that provides both a local and international perspective); acronyms and common terms/jargon used by the organization or movement; and key texts/literature that should be read in order to be informed about the organization/movement's vision, mission, strategic objectives, main programmatic activities, political positions, etc.

Let the discussion continue

This paper has raised several issues, provocations and recommendations towards more inclusive women's and feminist movements. The authors, Lydia Alpizar and Shamillah Wilson, would welcome any comments or questions that this paper may have raised.

Please share your thoughts, proposals and experiences with them at: lalpizar@awid.org and swilson@awid.org. We will further share these ideas with you on www.awid.org.

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Endnotes

¹ B. Abzug (1996) "Women Will Change the Nature of Power", in B. Abzug and D. Jain, *Women's Leadership and the Ethics of Development*, UNDP Gender and Development Monograph Series, 4 (August), as quoted in Adeleye-Fayemi, B. (2004) "Creating a New World with New Visions: African Feminism and Trends in the Global Women's Movement", in Kerr, J., E. Sprenger and A. Symington, eds. (2004), *The Future of Women's Rights: Global Visions and Strategies*, Zed Books, 48.

² Alpizar, Lydia and Bernal, Marina (2002) "La construcción social de las juventudes" [The social construction of youths], in *Journal Última Década: Youth Citizenships*. Research Notes. No. 19, Viña del Mar- Chile: CIDPA, 2003.

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