



# Stories of Change AWID Forums

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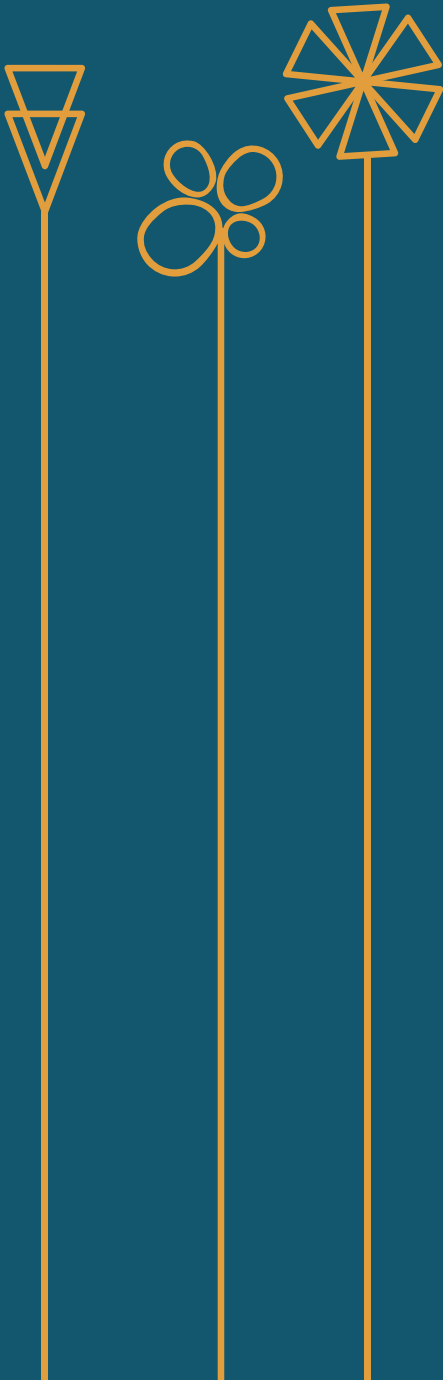
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Montevideo and Asunción, May 2022

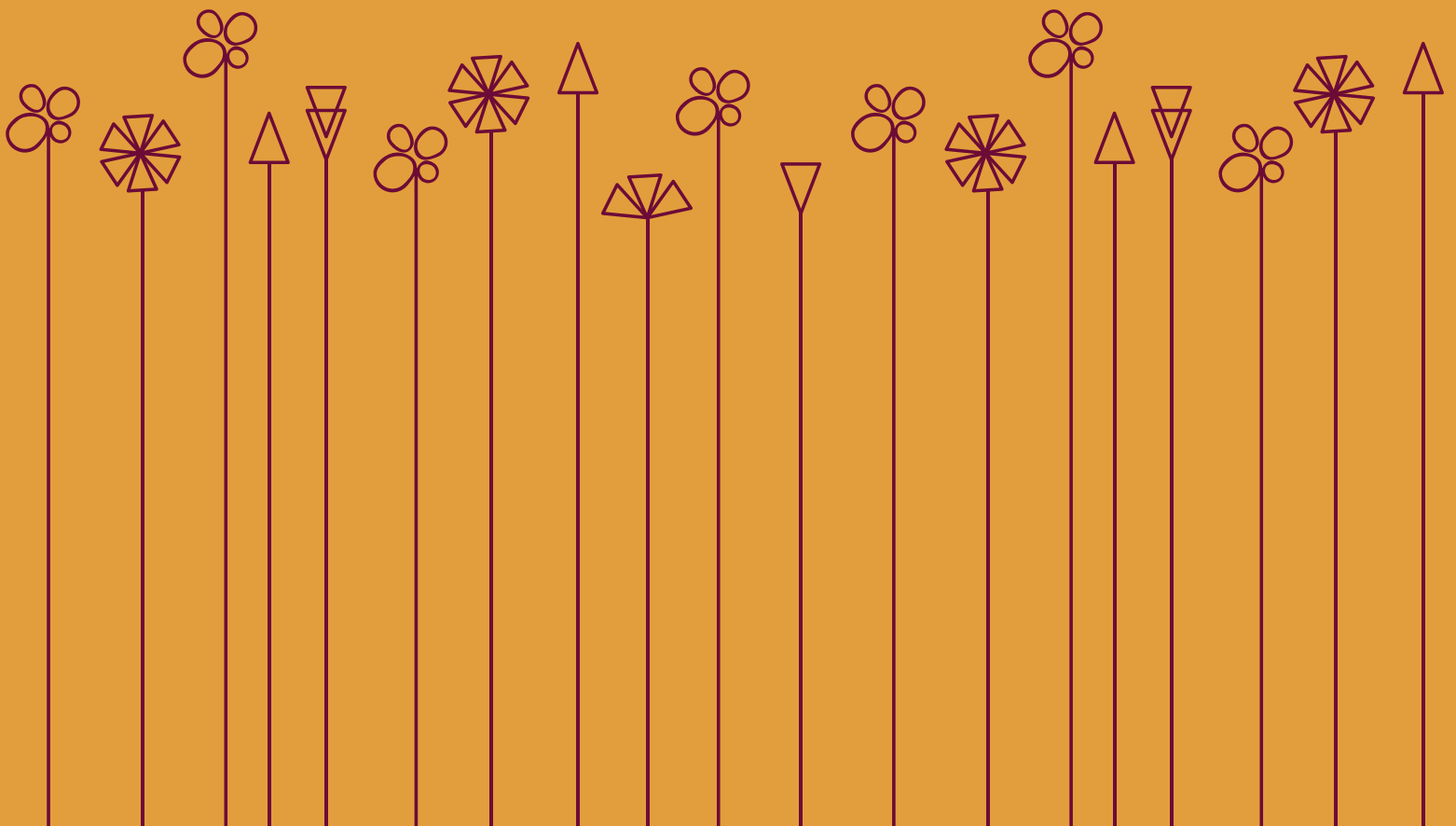


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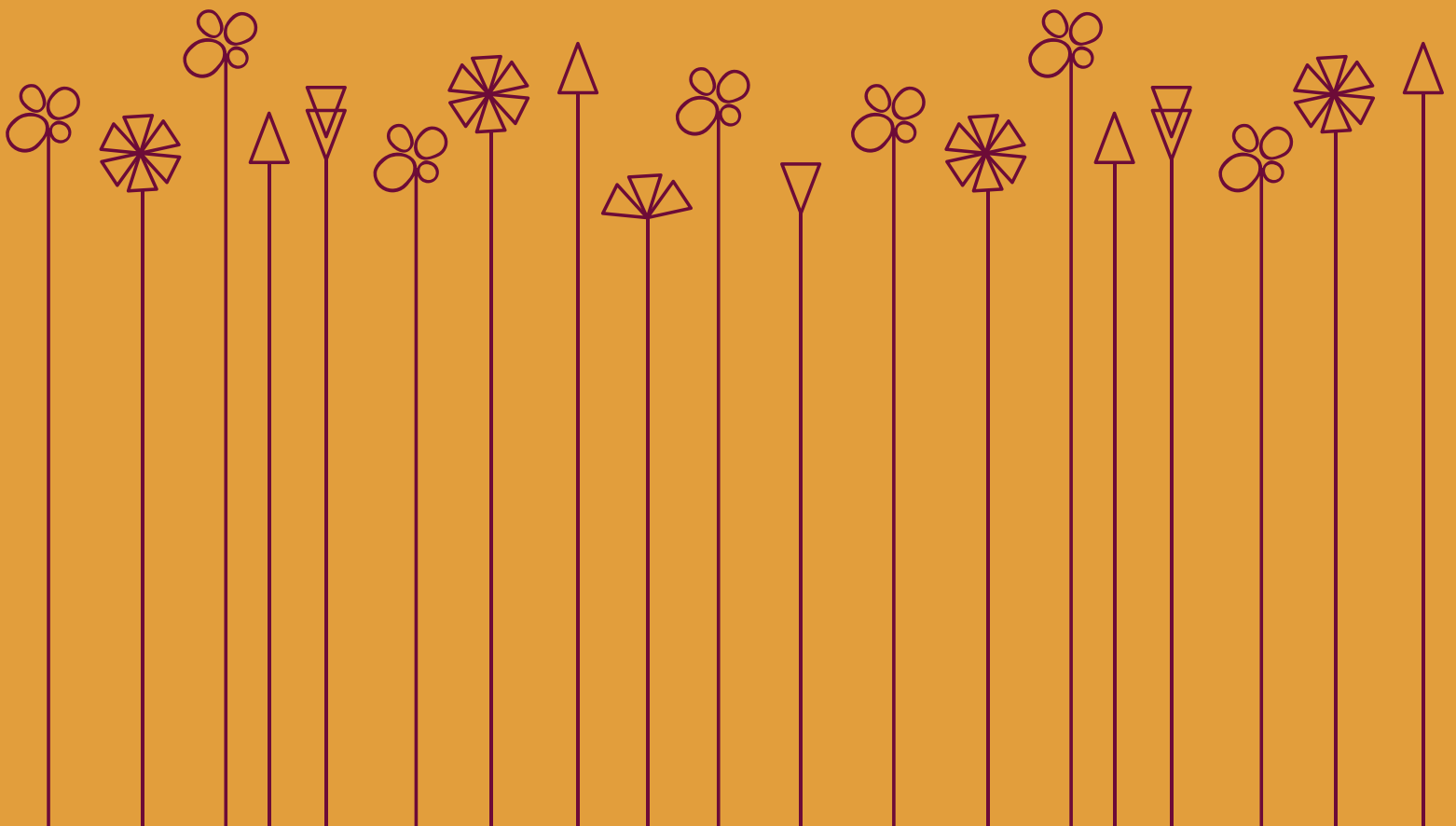
*At the Forum there is so much dancing, so much laughing - all the practical stuff, but also the spiritual stuff. Why is that important? Because we are human beings. Strategies and systems are the tools of machine-making but before the work we do, we are the people we are. We live in bodies that break, grieve, feel joy and laugh.*

*OluTimehin Kukoyi (Nigeria)*



*There is the work that gets done in the meeting, and then all the rest that is about building connections and power between us, and building trust, shifting attitudes about what is possible, visioning together. All this is as important, if not more important, than the conversations about where we are at, what are the strategies, what are we learning. All our change processes rely on the relationships we build at spaces like the AWID Forums where you dance together, your humour comes through, your real self, you tell stories. That is what makes the difference - it is not your smartness or your understanding of policy: it is the human connection. The human aspect is about 50% of what it takes to shift policy, particularly when you are outside and working with people inside the institutions.*

*Nicky McIntyre (Scotland/USA)*



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## Introduction

We open this report with two quotes from our interviewees that eloquently summarise why they and we think that AWID Forums are important for Feminist movements.

For the collective “we” that created this report (interviewees and consultants), movements are fabrics of relationships based on political and personal trust among human beings who, with all our limitations and imperfections, are seriously committed to the idea of making this beautiful planet of ours a fairer place particularly for women, trans and non-binary persons in all our diversity. The Forums are important as a key space where these relationships have emerged, have been developed, and preserved, over the years and across continents, generations and identities.

In this report we will analyze what makes the Forums an enabling environment for those relationships holding together our movement and our struggles. We invite you to walk with us along the path (methodology) that we traveled, to then go into the Forums’ contributions to Feminist movements, their limitations, and their future considering the systemic crisis we are immersed in.

This report is based on what we heard from 42 amazing and very diverse feminists who have attended one or more AWID Forums as well as on our own experiences and readings of evaluations of past Forums (from reports to blogs). Of course, nothing that we write claims to represent what all feminists in the world think (we could not talk to all of them); it is just one shared view among many possible ones. Sometimes we mix our interviewees’ voices with ours, and in that case they are in italics, without identifying the speakers (eg. The AWID Forum is seen as a movement space, *THE space ours, the space of this nebulous thing called the Global Women’s Movement*). In highlighted quotes, speakers are (almost always) identified.

We hope this report will be helpful to those planning future AWID Forums and also other in-person regional and thematic spaces.

## Our methodology (the path we traveled)<sup>1</sup>

We designed our methodology keeping in mind the Most Significant Change (MSC) approach.

The core principles of our methodology were:

- Collective listening and knowledge-building among all involved
- Respect, patience, creativity and good humour while also ensuring confidentiality for those consulted, and trust building

The Steps:

### 1 Drawing the path

What we wanted	What we did
Draft a roadmap to define how our consultation would proceed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Read reference materials (reports, blogs, articles)</li> <li>- Agreed on the project framework and Inception Report with AWID</li> <li>- Drafted the Inception Report further developing the consultation roadmap (what, when, how, who, with whom)</li> <li>- Opened a space in AWID's social media to identify key informants among members</li> </ul>

### 2 Collecting data

What we wanted	What we did
Listen with empathy and alertness, travelling across past and future Forums with our interviewees and picking up the seeds for stories.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Invited people to be part of this consultation; shared informed consent and data protection forms with them; responded to their queries and found ways to accommodate their needs.</li> <li>- Drafted and agreed on the scope of work for the video and graphic illustration teams.</li> <li>- Something important happened: in the interviews we experienced so much openness, joy and richness that we did many more than had been planned (passing from 10 to ... 42!) and efficiently substituting for the focus groups that had been originally considered.</li> <li>- Interviews were recorded, analyzed and translated.</li> <li>- Identified 22 stories of change related to the Forums. 5 of them were selected by AWID to be made into videos; and 3 into graphic illustrations.</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> In the Annex to our Inception Report you can find the questions we asked in the interviews and the matrix where we organized the information. In Annex 3 to this report you can find more details about our interviewees.

3  
Analysing and communicating data

What we wanted	What we did
To organise what we had heard; to create products that appeal to audiences' emotions and intelligence. To deliver finalised products that are inspiring, and also enjoyable to read and watch.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Collaboratively developed the script for each story and graphic illustration (among us, the storytellers and the video/illustration teams)</li> <li>- Filmed and edited the 5 stories in video</li> <li>- Produced the 3 graphically illustrated stories</li> <li>- Prepared a draft report documenting the Forums contributions to feminist movements and proposals for the future.</li> <li>- Gathered comments from interviewees and AWID; incorporated comments and produced the final versions of reports, videos and illustrations, approved by the storytellers.</li> </ul>



## What does the Forum mean to Feminist movements?

### 1. A global “room of our own”

*THE space (is) ours, the space of this nebulous thing called the Global Women’s Movement. It is a feminist space and, as we shall see later, a space for the most inclusive, challenging and innovative feminist expressions. There is nothing lukewarm or shallow there; there is a fearless discourse, very strong, determined and critical on the situation of women’s rights and that has been an inspiration.*

This is valued because, *even if different visions and ideas about feminism converge there, it still is a space of our own, free, where we don’t need to convince governments or other actors.* Being in the majority and not needing to be defensive in a hostile environment is an atypical situation for feminists that *opens up space for understanding, reflecting, exchanging with others.*

There is no other “space of our own” at that global scale and of that magnitude. This is key because the other global spaces where feminists meet feel foreign to them. With UN spaces (like the Commission on the Status of Women, or CSW) losing legitimacy for being ineffective and having turned into battlefields against an increasingly overwhelming opposition, and others like Women Deliver being coopted by corporations, the Forum has become more and more a decisive space for global feminist organizing.



## 2. An agora

Through the years, the AWID Forum has been the space where many went to make their feminist or women's rights issues and their own existences seen, heard and integrated into global agendas. This already started at the Washington Forums (1983-1999) that for feminists like Peggy Antrobus, Charlotte Bunch and others, were the most fertile space to *bring Feminism into development*.

Indigenous women (IWs) point out that *certain colonialist patterns are replicated within the Feminist movements itself, like feeling pity for us, and spaces like the AWID Forums have given us the opportunity to change those paradigms*. That experience of the Forums as a vehicle to leave victimisation behind is shared by sex workers (SWs) and women with disabilities (WWDs). Feminists following UN processes went to the Forum to explain why doing so mattered to a broader audience (while also developing strategies with the more involved ones). For those working on technology, the degree to which their issue was integrated into the Forum space was *an indication to what extent the broader feminist movement was getting a sense of tech as a Feminist space*. Identities and issues that the Forum created space for – from young feminists (YFs) to Black Feminists (BFs), from the role of the Arts to that of self-care – felt validated at regional and national spaces by that *global embrace*, leading to new challenges and changes in practices (see examples in Annexes 1 and 2)

## 3. A snapshot that is also a viewing point and a megaphone

*It's like a concentration, a moment where you can get a sense of what feminists from around the world are doing; what innovative thinking, analysis and strategies are happening; how feminists are unpacking the world to change it*. That snapshot has influenced the direction many participants would follow in post-Forum years (because of what they learned, the people they met, the biases they left behind) and also – when the Forum had a strong presence in its context, like the huge demonstrations in Istanbul (2012) or Cape Town (2008) – conveys a powerful message on feminist potency and its diversity.




## What have the Forums contributed to feminist movements?

### A. Movement, strength, perspective

Some of our interviewees organise regional convening spaces (in Latin America, Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific) that they consider strong and indispensable, while others live in regions where such spaces do not exist (like MENA). However, everybody agrees that feminists need a space in which to think of and feel ourselves as a global movement. Why?

- Because ours is a global struggle: we have common problems that tend to be caused by global powers so the solutions also have to be global. In spaces like the AWID Forum activists see, listen, touch and feel all this in the bodies and voices of their peers across the world.
- Because often global spaces are safer for activists (they are less likely to be under surveillance by their States there, for instance), and they enable national meetings (Turkish and Kurds in Istanbul) or sub-regional ones (Palestinians, Lebanese and Egyptians women in Bahia) to occur.
- Because the AWID Forum broadens our vision, *gives you even more nuances than the ones we already have in our regions*. That distance helps us to hear, understand and incorporate new ideas from a more relaxed space. *Some transgressive ideas can only be brought up by someone external.*



*I remember stepping into a session on sexuality and people with disability and I will never forget how that session made me face lots of biases that I was not even aware I had until I entered that room and was there right in front of those compañeras listening to their life experiences told in the first person.*

*(Claudia Sancam, Nicaragua-Bolivia)*

- Because in some discussions that have been or still are controversial at a regional level (like the role of YFs, sexual or gender dissidents), the global space is perceived as *friendlier and more open*.
- Because it breaks regional hierarchies and changes power dynamics – some activists who are recognised in their regions enjoy being more anonymous and challenged at the Forum while the less recognised dare to make themselves heard (*Inhibition was off!*)

The Forum experience is about feeling part of a movement, *a collective that is greater than you, not just as an individual or the representative of X organization. That movement is global, huge and diverse. And it is a sweeping force of solidarity that has the power to change the world.* That often unforgettable experience leads participants to feel they got *a massive shot of energy* and it is vital for those who are isolated and oppressed in their context. It also increases their *confidence, courage and commitment* to their struggles.

## B. Otherness, an earthquake for biases, solidarity

Its diversity is one of the most mentioned and valued aspects of the Forum. *Spaces like the Forum can be your only opportunity to see other worlds, to broaden your view behind the little parcel where you sit.* “The Forum opened up the world to me” is often heard from frontline activists attending for the first time but the same happened to seasoned participants, including donors, who attend with a “learning agenda” and prioritise what feels unknown to them.


That diversity is not a coincidence but the product of a political decision by AWID and those individuals, organizations and networks that have shaped the different Forum editions. The Forum typically *takes issues, conversations and constituencies from the margins to the center of Feminist agendas* (SWs, WWDs, IWs, WHRDs, BFs, YFs, collective care, arts, technology), *removing the taboo, affirming that they are part of the Feminist movement and helping the rest of us to understand and support their claims* or to incorporate them into our practices.



*Our collectives came back from the Forum knowing that we were not an exceptional, weird type of feminist: we were internationalist in our discourse and local in our practice. We were more connected than what we had known: spaces like the AWID Forum were just made for people like us. That made quite a difference.*

*(Sara Abu Ghazal, Palestine/Lebanon)*

This works because – even with its ups and downs – it is done on the basis of welcoming diversity, encouraging dialogue, *building bridges to walk together, accepting each one as they are and stepping into each other's shoes*. The feeling of being accepted, lovingly welcomed, valued and treated with dignity was unanimous across our diverse set of interviewees, from the funder who did not feel perceived as a walking money bag to the teenager, the Indigenous woman who does not consider herself a feminist, the one who wears hijab or the one who did not speak English and had left her country for the first time. That acceptance is the key that allows learning to happen at the Forum and the weaving of relationships that are a key Forum contribution to movements in the long-term.



*It was very important to see prostitutes with a lot of autonomy and proud of being who they were. I found their attitude, their autonomy marvelous. I was moved by their presentation.*

*(Tidinha, Brazil)*

## C. Learning

*It is a unique space in that there you learn new things, hear new things, meet people you never thought you would meet. You may get angry about something and then you go “Maybe I should take the time to understand ...”*  
Everjoice Win (Zimbabwe)

In the loving environment that the Forum creates – accepting, full of possibilities and energy – one learns. Over time those learnings are translated into changes in participants’ lives, perspectives and practices.

The knowledge shared is based on the participants’ and organizers’ experiences. It is a horizontal learning, from movement to movement, that is not experienced as formal or as imposed. Some learnings are practical and concrete. Others involve new ways of seeing the world and oneself. *Organizing is happening less and less within the containers of organizations for multiple reasons including surveillance in some contexts, so access to meeting spaces is critical for collective learning and unpacking.*

## D. A lab


The stories and examples shared in this report illustrated in all its richness the projects, initiatives and re/configurations that to a lesser or greater extent drew their inspiration from the Forum or from the relationships, learnings and conversations that it enabled. In this sense, it is important not to see the Forum as an event but as the *epitome* of broader collective feminist processes that AWID contributed significantly to drive with its research, publications and other in-person meetings like Where Is the Money (Queretaro, 2006) and the YFs Leadership Institutes in Africa and South-East Asia. Another key element in these processes have been the pre-Forum meetings (for YFs since Cape Town, the Tech Exchanges before Bahia and the Black Feminisms Forum)



## What enables the Forums to be labs, agoras, schools, rooms of one's own and viewing points... (among many other things)?


The Forums are spaces of **freedom** at many levels: from the possibility to show one's ignorance and learn (because you are among your people and not trying to convince powerful actors), to express dissent (as local activists did in Bahia about the Forum venue) or to the positive attitude to sexuality and not just in the case of lesbians (i.e. sex workers at the Forums were able to speak of their own sexual pleasure).

- The Forums are **safe spaces** and for many participants that freedom has a deep meaning: *We bring many people, that given the situation they face, have all their energies focused on what is going on at home or in their context because it is an urgent matter of survival. So AWID creates a safer space where they can be out of that pressure, relax, breathe, cry, meet people from other countries who are in similar situations.*
- The Forums are **fun**, stimulating, full of creative methodologies and opportunities to learn about using your body and your emotions. Nobody undergoes a transformation if they are bored! *The AWID Forums spread joy and activism, not from a victimisation perspective but by connecting people's strengths. There is a collective link created through dancing, through art, that then leads to deeper conversations being possible.*



*The Istanbul Forum gave us validation about being lesbians. In our context we were criticised, told that we were radical because we were lesbians. And at the Forum our sexuality was celebrated instead of us being asked to tone it down.*

*(Sara Abu Ghazal, Palestine/  
Lebanon)*

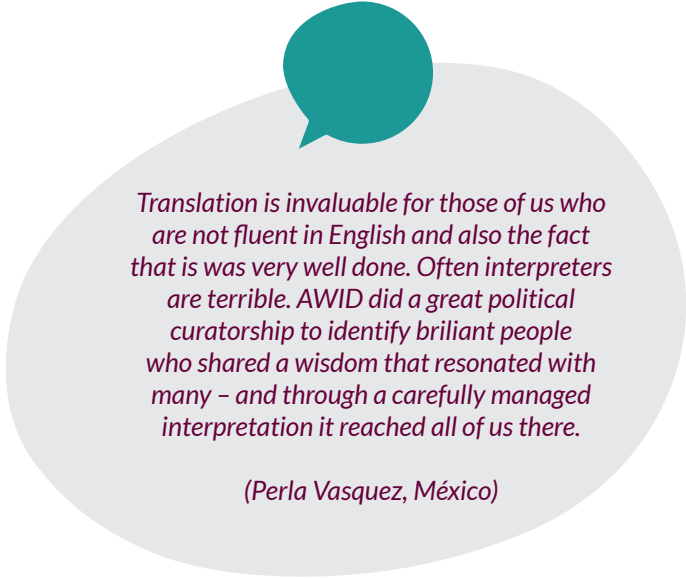


*My journey into queerness started there. As a young Black Queer, I could be authentic there. Throughout my life I had a longing for that feeling, specially now living in Europe that feels isolating. Some people never get to experience that in their life. Surrounded by a sea of people experiencing the same feelings and being so open about it I felt safe to explore those feelings.*

*(Jamila Abbas, Egypt-The Netherlands)*

- Because they are so big and so diverse, the Forums enable **serendipity**: *at the Forum you bump into people, that starts a whole new train of thought, of being, of possibilities; you find out about things you never knew you would be interested in but they look good on the day's agenda or your friends are going to that session....* The possibility to “assemble your own Forum”, combining more intellectual sessions with playful or artistic ones, makes participants feel they are there *with their entire selves* (and smashes hierarchies among different forms of knowledge).
- The Forums are **bold**. Our interviewees valued AWID's openness to listen and accompany new ideas, to do things differently, to say (and let be said) what had not been said. In the Forums this has been conveyed not only through words but, most importantly, through actions that reflected political decisions by AWID and the Forums' co-creators. One example is the gender neutral bathrooms in Bahia where a team was available to explain to participants why that decision had been made and what it meant to trans and non-binary participants. Another example, also from Bahia, was the session in which *one of the rapporteurs was deaf. There was sign language so she could play that role and then people had to sit and wait. In the feedback we received from that session, people said they had understood practically how you build such an inclusive space, what it means for timing, methodology, logistics and the kind of interpretation you need to make available.* Another example was providing interpretation into Kurdish language at the Istanbul Forum, acknowledging it as a national language of the host country.

- The Forums are not any global space but one **where Southern Feminisms have a key role**. That perspective – from the majority of the world – is very marginal in other global spaces where feminists gather (UN, Women Deliver).
- At the Forums there is spontaneity galore but **nothing is improvised**. The Forums content is the product of years of collective work by an increasingly diverse and large set of activists, networks and organizations. The quality of the Forums content is much recognised and praised.
- The Forums are expensive but they could not be cheaper. **They are expensive because they would be inaccessible** for a large number of persons and activists who without a scholarship would never had been able to attend. For instance, people with disability that need to travel with their assistants, or those who do not speak the colonial languages that is the *lingua franca* in most global spaces (English), among many others.



*Translation is invaluable for those of us who are not fluent in English and also the fact that it was very well done. Often interpreters are terrible. AWID did a great political curatorship to identify brilliant people who shared a wisdom that resonated with many – and through a carefully managed interpretation it reached all of us there.*

*(Perla Vasquez, México)*





## Forum limitations

All limitations mentioned by our interviewees were shared in a constructive way. They understand the magnitude of organizing a Forum and see these limitations as challenges to overcome.

What prevails is the acknowledgement of how much has already been done and the trust that more will be done to overcome these constraints, as well as the desire that the Forums continue.

There are limitations that go beyond what AWID could solve (as migration restrictions or travel requirements post-COVID) that are very important but will not be addressed in this section as we prefer to focus on aspects where AWID could introduce changes in the future.

### 1. Scholarships

There is unanimous recognition of AWID's efforts to grant scholarships and of how numerous and diverse their recipients are. There is also an understanding that not everybody can be funded. But some regions were mentioned as under-represented: French-speaking Africa, South-East Asia, the Pacific islands and Central Asia.

### 2. Translation /interpretation

This is one of the keys to the inclusive nature of the AWID Forums. We heard a need to keep investing and improving it, including by having more interpreters who know our Feminist language and by multiplying the languages in which the Forum is translated/interpreted.

### 3. Inclusion and exclusion

The effort to be as inclusive as possible is highly recognised but there is always a limit to how far the Forums can go and it is important to name and own that limit. *As the Forum got bigger, the list of people whose politics have to be taken care of, whose identities to be accommodated also grew and now we have a long list. It is hard to organise themes and decide what to leave out. It has also been hard to be comfortable*

*with saying 'We can do this much and not everything'. It is about trade-offs, deciding what to privilege, what to do less of, what not to do. And it is very hard.*

#### **4. Too much vastness of the ocean**

Some interviewees said that the number of participants and of activities were like an ocean where they and others felt lost. A difficult but unavoidable tension for the Forums lies in how to combine two (understandable) needs: of all collectives to be heard and seen and of all participants to have not only a manageable agenda but also one that leaves room for the unexpected, for rest and enjoyment, all aspects of the Forums that are also praised. This is something AWID as an organiser always struggles with and makes huge efforts – that are seen and recognised – to find creative solutions for (but, of course, the perfect one has not yet appeared!). It is worth mentioning that those attending the Forums as organized movements did not feel overwhelmed because they knew where to go, what was interesting for them, and what their goals were.

#### **5. Racism**

Structural racism permeates the minds of many White participants who haven't reflected enough on White privilege. Unfortunately a few BFs have had to face racist attitudes at the Forums: being exoticised, interrupted, and ignored when speaking, etc. AWID has acknowledged this and worked to reduce the probability of its happening, including by conveying a clear message saying that racist behaviours are unacceptable at the Forums, but this remains an ongoing challenge.

#### **6. Western/ised thinking**

This is an intrinsic and hard to overcome limitation because it requires a political decision to do away with what is still considered (the only) valid forms of knowing and organizing in Feminist movements. This includes hierarchical formats like panels and plenaries. The Forums, highly praised for being radical and unafraid of quantum leaps, may be dare to take this one in the future...

*Willingly or not, all forms of thinking and organizing are defined by a Western model for fully abled people, who understood and process information in a certain way. If you don't have those skills, if you don't think fast and know how to navigate it, (the Forum)*

*is a difficult space to be in. You need a certain educational level and degree of exposure to Western culture to be effective, otherwise it can be a space of much loneliness and exclusion. We don't practice as much solidarity as we say. We all need to grow in this regard.*

## **7. Accessibility**

AWID has a long (and valued) history of work with WWDs so the Forums can be and indeed are, every time, more accessible. We know this is a never-ending story and there is always something more to be learned. *In our ongoing collaboration with the Forums and other in-person feminist spaces we keep thinking about access.... This is central for us - that thinking about access emerges from a place of recognition, as we still face multiple micro-exclusions. It has been a mutual learning process with the organizers.*

## **8. Accessibility and safety vs alternative spaces**

Many participants (and organizers) are uncomfortable with the Forum venues being luxury and corporate hotels or conference centers. Often those venues have been challenged by feminists due to their labour practices or to the environmental damage they have caused. However, the Forum requirements on accessibility (for WWDs but also those needing interpretation in several languages, among others) and safety (controlled access which is important for gender and sexual non-conforming participants and for defenders at risk) make it difficult to hold it in more alternative and politically acceptable venues.

## **9. Breaking free of one's own cage**

Several interviewees mentioned the temptation to stay in the safe spot of one's own issue, region or known language as something hard to overcome at the Forums. Our stories show that daring to explore the unknown "pays". In the future it could be interesting to find creative ways for AWID to actively encourage such explorations.



## The future of the Forums

It is unanimous among our interviewees that **the Forums are needed as the only global feminist convening space whose agenda is set by the movement itself and where there is space for radical positions and for all our diversity.**

In this time of fragmentation, there is an urgency to make room for Southern feminisms agendas, for the ongoing emergence of new voices and for collective healing that the Forums can host better than any other space.



*There is nothing like being in a shared space, exchanging body energies, looking into somebody's eyes and forging connections, seeing the world and doing something together. Events like the Forum are among the strongest of the global feminist movement – there we celebrate and we learn what it is that we want to protect and defend at all cost. They fill you with a kind of pause in a long walk – it's like finding a stream. They rejuvenate, and that is much needed given how hard the world is. They are also key for us to recognize that something is important – it happened with young feminists, sex workers, black feminists. That is critical and we cannot depend on the UN to do it for us.*

*Jac s m Kee, Malaysia*

### But ...

Environmental challenges are real and we need to be aware of them. Feminists care about this even though for many it is the price we have to pay every four years as the Forum contributions deserve it. Some go a bit further: *“I will stop meeting in person when soldiers stop going, in person, to invade countries”*.

The Forums are costly, not just in terms of money but also on the bodies for those who often travel for days to attend, take a while to recover from jet-lag, enjoy themselves a bit and then travel back for long days. So age, disability, having small children and living outside cities are some factors that, like it or not, exclude (or lead to self-exclusion) from in-person meetings.

And, of course, restrictions of movement persist (with COVID or without): “*The world is becoming so restrictive and so dangerous. The biggest worry is that you cannot guarantee people’s safety. This becomes a huge burden on the organizers*”. (Amina Doherty, Antigua)

## And then... ?

Our interviewees also agree in that, even with its challenges, the format that could best fit the Forum is the hybrid one (combining in person with virtual activities). How to make it work?

### 1. Thinking as a movement – “Meeting less”<sup>2</sup>

Like several of our interviewees said, before COVID “anything became a meeting”. If there is a positive legacy of the pandemic, it is the possibility to ask ourselves when, how and why it is worth meeting in person and when it is not. But for that assessment to really make a difference, it will need to be made at the movement (and not just organizational) level. There is consensus among our interviewees that a global event like the AWID Forum (or regional convenings) certainly justify meeting in person while, for instance, many internal or strategy meetings can easily be done virtually.

### 2. To go on including – “Meeting all”

The virtual world also excludes – for instance those based where only a small percentage of the population has access to electricity or activists under serious electronic surveillance (who so much need to meet with others), among many others. The hybrid Forum should take (digital) inclusion as seriously as the (only) in-person Forum has always done it.

### 3. Loving absences – “Only for those who need it”

Only a few will be able to meet in person in a hybrid Forum. Many of our interviewees called for those who have already attended many Forums to, as painful as it may be, leave their place to those who have never gone.

<sup>2</sup> It is May 1st around the time we write this report, Workers’ Day, and that old Italian saying from the 60s is everywhere: “*Lavorare meno, lavorare tutti, produrre il necessario, redistribuire tutto*” (Work less, work all, produce what is needed, redistribute everything) so we decided to apply it to the future of the Forums.

*You have to give space for new people to become infused and excited. Pair people up – one flies, one doesn't. (Janet Price, UK)*

#### **4. Maximise the convening – “Redistribute everything”**

Many ideas were shared about how to maximise the “Hybrid Forum”, from preparatory events (regional, thematic) to virtual pre-Forums (for skill learning or to showcase the work done across the world) and of course a much-beloved and praised classic: (in person) convenings organized by networks and others before and after the Forum.



### **If the Forums persist, it is because there is something in them that our movements need to preserve**

In the words of our wise interviewees:

*Operating virtually works for the Global North so they are pushing us to do that more and more. And in the Global South our ways are communal, we don't schedule everything, we enjoy spending time with each other. All this scheduling and having a script for everything is diminishing our quality of life as a movement. (Purity Kagwira, Kenya)*

*The meeting of people who are very different from each other is valuable. If you feel uncomfortable in a virtual space, you just walk away or mute. When you want to come further on a particular topic, when there are issues that need to be discussed and solved, then screens are not enough. (To Tjoelker, The Netherlands-Benin)*

*One of the feminist values that we believe in is how we bring out our experiences, our feelings; how we combine experience, thinking, heart-mind-body as our sources of knowledge and interaction. Things are very different if we can meet and touch, have direct eye contact, see the other's expressions, dance together. That is not replaceable, not even with Metaverse. The time we spend together, feeling the warmth – being recognized, loved, included – that is energy, energy for our souls. (Nani Zulminarni, Indonesia)*

(Without the in-person Forums) *We will miss the opportunity to exchange, to learn, to be inspired; we will miss the dancing and the joy. We will miss those connections among movements and all our diversity. That was always present, dancing and that joy that brings us together and is linked to our rights.* (María Manuela Sequeira, Nicaragua-USA)

## Conclusions

*There is a lack of intellectual stimulation, analysis, understanding what your work is leading to – of a space that shows you new directions of work and keeps you invigorated. When you feel the absence of a space, that is a testament of why the space is needed.*

Vinita Sahasranaman, India.

The stories we collected through this brief research show that the Forum is a hugely valuable space for feminists at the individual, organizational and movement levels. It is THE space where, for a few days, the world becomes feminist; where what was an unreachable utopia in our contexts becomes our daily bread. If we come from a country at war, there we cease to hear the bombs; if we are not allowed to dance in public, we can do it until we drop; and nobody will judge us for how we dress (or undress). There we can afford not to know, to ask and to learn; to be surprised, to doubt, to find something we never knew about or imagined; to stay in silence, to do nothing, to do something for the first time, to do the unexpected. It is a space for deep personal reshaping, where ideas, possibilities and questions are sown that, as we have seen, flow into projects and actions that go far beyond the personal, months or years later.

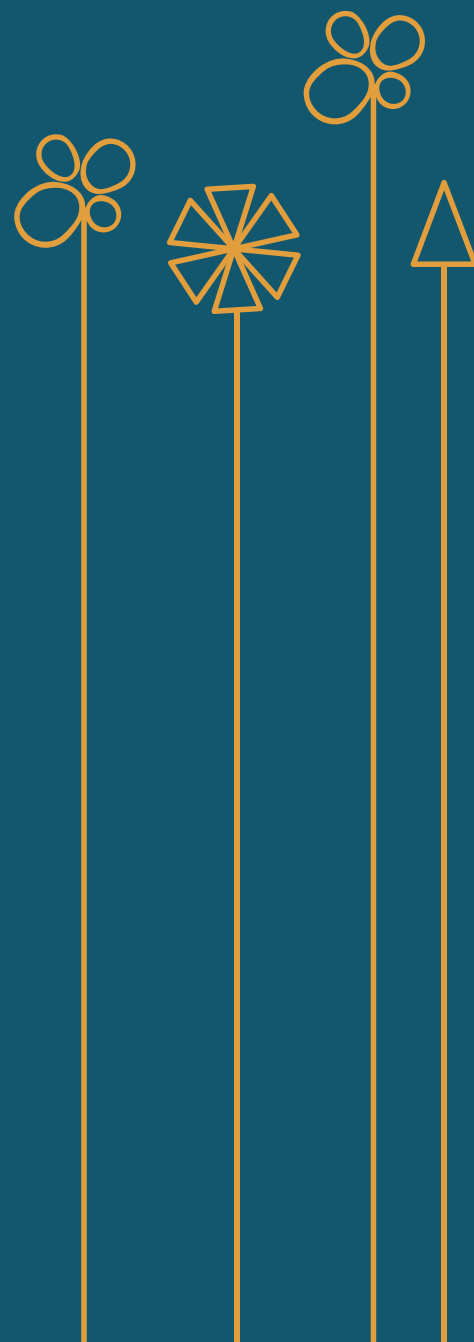
The voices we heard say that the Forums still have a lot to give, that they are indispensable but also need to change because our times (and ourselves) have already changed. To change in order to preserve what cannot be surrendered: the meeting, the freedom, the creativity, the courage to go for the unexpected, the deep questionings. From what we heard, change is moving in the direction of a hybrid Forum where some will be there in the flesh and others in the screen, but not just that.

Experiences show that historically those who got most out of the Forums have been those who organized in advance and attended as movements, with a clear agenda (and room for surprises) and the generosity to decide (or give up) on individual participation toward a collective purpose. Maybe it is time to learn from these experiences and broaden that collective perspective even more. As Cindy Clark, one of AWID's current co-EDs, suggested, the Forum could cease to belong just to AWID and become more explicitly a space for antiracist, anticapitalist feminisms that celebrate solidarity and the power of women, trans and non-binary persons in all our beautiful diversity.

Maybe the Forums will change their identity over time, but for the moment those who also made the most of them were those who understood what the Forums are (and can be) and are not. The Forums are meeting, learning and discovery spaces where we can open ourselves up to worlds that are different from the ones we inhabit. They are privileged platforms for introducing new issues, new populations and new questions to the global feminist movement. They are quite precise tools to check what is happening with global feminist movements. That is all – and it is plentiful.



# Annexes



## Annex 1

### Some examples illustrating the Forums contributions to feminist movements

#### The economy of the Forums

- In Cape Town, Verónica Cruz, from Mexico, talked to a donor that thought resources could only be channelled through organizations based in Mexico City because those in the rest of the country were unable to manage them – and got the funder to change her mind.
- For some feminists in managerial positions, the Forum’s participants list is a resource to reach out to candidates for staff or consulting positions.
- Six months before the Forums some Indigenous women used to start collecting handicrafts and artistic products made in their communities to be sold at the Forum – that was a great income-generating and cultural exchange opportunity that Mónica Alemán (Nicaragua/USA) calls “an alternative economy in action”.
- The convenings held by many organizations before or after the Forums (sometimes in collaboration with AWID) with participants whose travel expenses are already covered are a great way to save and more strategically use the time those activists spend abroad. Charlotte Bunch (USA) told us about how the International Coalition of Women Human Rights Defenders held a strategy meeting in Cape Town at a time when its own resources would never have allowed them to meet. Sometimes those meetings are the starting point for important projects, as happened with the JASS members meeting before the Bangkok Forum; nowadays, South-East Asia is one of JASS’ most developed regions (as told by Nani Zulminarni, from Indonesia).

## Other Forum stories

Five of the many stories that we heard have been made into videos, and another three into graphic illustrations. Here we summarise some more stories:

### From Africa:

- Awa Fall Diop and her Senegalese colleagues realised at the Forum that they needed a generational change as their Feminist Forum in Senegal was attracting few YFs. They created a program called “On the footsteps of Aline Sitoye, queen, feminist and resistant” funded by the African Women’s Development Fund (AWDF). This program has mobilised not only YF women, but also men, and these young people are among the leaders of social transformation in Senegal today. Another product of their learnings was the African Feminist Institute that brings together 35 YFs from 23 French-speaking African countries to experience the same energy as at the Forum: it is massive, inclusive, and solidarity prevails.
- In the Cape Town Forum, the organizers of the African Feminist Forum organized an informal workshop to identify their feminist ancestors. From there emerged a documentation project called Feminist Ancestors (as told by Jessica Horn)
- With the expertise acquired through conversations with other participants at the Forum, in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), activists advocated with authorities at the local, community and provincial level and sensitised communities so the welfare of the victim became the priority in all interventions against sexual violence. Previously, the UN agencies approached this issue in such a way that most of the budget was devoted to sustaining the ‘international organizations’ industry’ (as told by Justine Masika Bihamba)
- Jamila Abbas (Egypt-The Netherlands) was one of the youngest Black Feminisms Forum (BFF) participants and she could not stay for the AWID Forum as she had to go back to school. At the BFF she found a space where she could authentically be herself as a young queer Black feminist, surrounded by women like her, her loving and empowered feminist elders. She still misses that feeling that she never experienced again, and that, according to Jamila, many young Black women will never know. At the BFF she did not feel diminished or ignored for being very young; on the contrary, she felt accepted, accompanied and supported by older women she admired. She felt her young

age was not an impediment for her to speak up and have her experiences validated. Full of feminist confidence and fire, she went back to school and created a Feminist Club together with her English teacher. At the club, girls and a few boys not only discussed taboo subjects and painful experiences of violence following the model of the BFF dialogues but also explored feminist poetry and literature. Girls at the club realised that the school dress code was enforced particularly upon Black and Brown girls, who were the most sexualised, while boys and White girls were able to sidestep it as much as they liked. The girls organized themselves, put pressure on the authorities and managed to get the school to move to adopt a single dress code for both girls and boys.

- For Djamila Touabet, from Algeria, accessible tourism is intrinsic to health and welfare. By the time she attended the AWID Forum in Bahia she had been working for years on disability rights and autonomy. But she had not yet imagined a project around tourism. That project was inspired by what she heard at the Forum from other women with disability (WWDs) from India, the USA, Canada and other African countries with whom she is still in touch, and by the fact of seeing so many WWDs who had traveled so far to be at the Forum. There she also met people from the African Women's Development Fund (AWDF) that ended up funding the accessible tourism project when Djamila went back home and applied for it. She is currently developing a new project, focused on deaf people, that is a phone app for simultaneous translation. She says the Forum gave her new wings for her projects and she was impressed by how accepted and welcome she felt. Djamila's start-up is now part of a network of 54 accessible-tourism companies around the world.

### From Latin America:

- Articulación Feminista Marcosur has no doubt that it was because of the AWID Forum in Guadalajara that their campaign against fundamentalisms (*Tu boca es fundamental*) which was introduced there to the global feminist movement got amplified. Something created in a small country like Uruguay and by a Latin American network was taken up by several countries in Asia and Africa (as told by Lucy Garrido)

- Elena Reynaga, from Argentina, is the executive secretary of the Latin American and Caribbean Sex Workers' Network. *"The AWID Forum gave us the opportunity to be the lead characters in our own story, because for many years before that, in women's rights spaces, others have spoken on our behalf"*. For Elena and her *compañeras* from the network, the Forums allowed them a significant degree of personal freedom, a safe and welcoming space where they could break taboos about sexuality and set aside repressions and biases. They also met sex workers from around the world there and realised they were facing similar violence. They hugged each other as sisters and the energy that gave them lasted for many years and many struggles. At the Bahia Forum there was a tribute to Gabriela Leite, a leader of the Brazilian sex workers' movement who had recently passed away. Some abolitionist feminists left the room but the majority of participants stayed and honoured Gabriela. For Elena that meant that the Forum was a rare space where she had more sisters than opponents.

### From the Caribbean:

- As UN spaces that had been key for feminists in the 90s were becoming less and less relevant, feminists like Peggy Antrobus, from Barbados, started to see the AWID Forum as the key space for feminist organizing. For Cape Town, Peggy joined forces with young activist Amina Doherty to put together a Caribbean delegation. Both agree, that for them and others involved, that project was a huge learning opportunity at many levels, from how to do intergenerational work efficiently and enjoy it to the acknowledgement that it was important for the Caribbean region to split from the "LAC" (Latin America and the Caribbean) cage to access funding on its own and set its own priorities. The diversity of the delegation was also important – it included, among others, domestic workers and LBT activists who had not previously met and who were able to overcome biases and start working together when back in their countries. For domestic workers, the Forum helped them to go back to their roots as a more radical movement and step away from the "NGO-ization" trend. The Forum also sowed the seeds for a regional convening held after Cape Town and for stronger advocacy toward

Caribbean-specific funding. Twenty years later, Amina leads a Caribbean-specific funding program at the Equality Fund and a feasibility study to create a Caribbean Feminist Fund has just been concluded.

- Tania Duarte-Díaz is a young Afrodescendant trans woman from the Colombian Caribbean (Cartagena city). She is an activist for queer and non-binary rights and defines herself as a fighter for Afrodescendant intersectionality and for making queer Afrodescendants visible and heard. She also studied Philosophy. She did not know much about Black feminism before attending the Black Feminisms Forum and the 2016 AWID Forum in Bahia. Also, she had never been to such a large event. The BFF first and then the Forum taught her about the rich heritage of Black Feminist thinking and its huge diversity while also opening up new ways of understanding development, a women's rights agenda and how what happens at the global level influences what happens locally. Tania's only contact with feminism had been briefly at University and she thought it was just something about European thinkers frozen in books. The Forum showed her a very diverse, Black and Brown, cis and trans feminism, embraced by many working-class women. Tania now defines herself as a Black trans feminist and works as such in her context.

### From Asia:

- When Nani Zulminarni, from Indonesia, attended her first international feminist convening in her region (Asia), she was told that she could not be a feminist and wear such a patriarchal symbol as the hijab. Nani, who thought of herself as a feminist, felt diminished and opted to stay away from those hostile spaces. Years later and thanks to JASS, she met AWID at the Where Is The Money meeting (2006) in Queretaro and was surprised to see nobody was making any comments about her hijab. When invited to be a plenary speaker in the Cape Town Forum she decided to take that risk. There she felt heard, taken seriously, embraced and accepted as a feminist just as she was, without any demand that she become somebody else. That gave her huge self-confidence, friendships that she still treasures, and contacts that allowed her to raise awareness about her struggle for the rights of women without husbands in Muslim societies. At the Forum she was also invited to

join the Musawah network by one of her feminist heroines, Zainab Anwar. That projected her small Indonesian organization – Pakka – into the world. Nani says the Forum changed her life as she dared to believe she was/could be a feminist, and celebrated being embraced even by the most radical feminists. Back home, others in her organization felt validated by learning that there was international support and recognition for their struggle that still, today, is ignored or rejected by many in their context.

### From MENA:

- Zelal Ayman – from Women for Women’s Human Rights-New Ways, in Turkey – devoted almost half of her working hours for a year and a half to help organise the 2012 AWID Forum in Istanbul. For Zelal, it was like going to University to learn how to organise a large event in democratic and participatory ways and how to communicate with women from contexts very different from her own. She also discovered the realities of regions that she had always wanted to know more about, like Latin America and Africa. Zelal was responsible for arranging the plenaries’ translation into the Kurdish language, something that had never been done in Turkey before for an event of that magnitude. Even today when some members of the Turkish women’s rights movement reject the possibility of including interpretation into Kurdish in an event, Zelal reminds them that AWID did it, acknowledging that it is one of the country’s languages. And it often works. Organized by Zelal and her colleagues, more than 300 Turkish women – most of them grassroots activists – participated in the Forum. Besides learning methodologies that they still use, they found a safe space to meet, know each other better, communicate and understand each other – a space that was “at home” but also “outside”, with the distance that a global space creates. Many still remember the huge diversity of the Forum, that opened new worlds for them, and of the peaceful and vibrant March in which they walked across the Istanbul streets embraced by that feminist world they had just discovered.

## From North America:

- In 1995 during the Global Conference of Women in Beijing, Nancy Natilson who had been working for years in corporate international banking and wanting to switch to the non-profit world to work toward further equity for women, found her home in a humble little table that AWID had set up. First she became a volunteer for the organization, later she became a long-standing Board Member and has attended all Forums except the last one (Bahia, 2016). That trajectory changed her personally along with the focus of her work. Nancy went to the Guadalajara Forum (2002) to speak about micro-finance, as she was convinced that credit was the best way to help impoverished women. There she found activists from many different movements who taught her that the causes and solutions for poverty were much more complex. *“I understood intersectionality by getting to know a very diverse set of people and attending different workshops at the Forum”*. Nancy reframed the micro-credit programs she was supporting and her journey through intersectionality led to her incorporating reproductive rights and health as key elements in those programs as well as supporting small local reproductive health clinics across the USA. Her interest in women’s health issues led her to learn meditation and at the Istanbul Forum she was part of the self-care team. As a White, USA-born woman, Nancy says one of the most important things she learnt at the Forum was to *“step out of the way and let women decide on their own how to use resources”*.

## From the world:

- The Forum enabled the emergence of an informal global network of feminists and women with disabilities (FWWDs) who found in it a space that always agreed to transform itself so they could have an increasingly greater presence and voice there. That informal loving network was key for FWWDs. The Forum also brought them information and the possibility to articulate more radical positions (particularly with regard to sexuality) as well the opportunity to see the links between their realities and those of other communities; as such, it was one of the spaces contributing to the shift



from “disability rights” to “disability justice”. The Forum also enabled their meeting feminist organizations and movements and creating partnerships like the one around the One Billion Women Rise marches in India that moved from not considering FWWDs issues to having them at the front of their marches, including their demands and producing outreach materials specially from them. It also allowed FWWDs to meet donors (for instance, UAF Africa supported WWDs in Cameroon to rebuild their livelihoods in the midst of the civil war) and build enough self-confidence to approach them. (as told by Janet Price, UK; Geeta Misra, India; and Ruth Acheinegeh, Cameroon-USA)

- Everjoice Win, from Zimbabwe, worked for 15 years at ActionAid as International Head of Gender. At first, she had no staff assigned to her area. She talks about the key role the Forum played in “feministising” ActionAid. Bangkok was the first Forum where grassroots partners and staff, including very senior staff, attended in large numbers – some of the high level staff was shocked by the presence of lesbians but grassroots partners provided very positive feedback and said that the world had opened and enlarged itself in front of their eyes. Through many years and loads of patience, ActionAid not only continued attending the Forum but also even funded it, and many of its country offices expressed their preference for funding grassroots partners’ participation at the Forum instead of at CSW because their feedback was that at the Forum they learned and never felt disempowered. Today, every single ActionAid strategy includes women’s rights as a key axis. The Campaign launched by ActionAid and others on violence against women and their relationship to HIV came out of conversations held and relationships forged at the Forum. The Forum also helped ActionAid to “win over” allies working on land rights (like Via Campesina) for whom many years ago gender issues were just “divisive”. For Everjoice, the Forum was also a “job bank”: every time there was a vacancy at the INGO, she would go through her Forum contacts, make sure they could apply and in many cases helped them to be hired.
- The Forum and other in-person convenings organized by AWID as part of the Where Is The Money (WITM) project contributed to create a transnational young feminists (YFs) movement in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century that not only transformed feminist philanthropy with the creation of FRIDA but also instilled in it a greater capacity for taking risks and trusting first young women and then girls as autonomous grantee partners. Three of

the protagonists of that process (Amina Doherty, Purity Kagwira and Perla Vazquez) told us how it changed them personally (by improving their self-esteem, making them feel part of a community, learning and understanding new realities and launching their professional careers), and the influence those global experiences had on their feminist regional/national activism and that of other YFs (enabling them to challenge power structures to open more spaces for YFs who felt validated by a global community of friends that still persists).

## Annex 2

### And at the Forum our interviewees also learned about...

*I have been a women's rights activist for many years; however, it was the Forum that gave me a feminist perspective on my actions*  
Awa Fall Diop, Senegal

- **Indigenous worldviews and interculturality**, both very useful for domestic violence litigation cases
- The **role of art** in development and how to express ideas through art
- How to integrate **spirituality** into feminist work
- That **women with disability** have a right to work
- The need for anticolonial and transnational approaches to movement building; how to pay more attention to **intersectionality** and give a central role to historically oppressed movements in feminist work
- How to critically use **information and communication technologies**
- Lots of practical information on **digital resilience and security**
- **Economy** and development in general
- How to incorporate **self-care** into working with victims of violence
- How to work in a systematic way but also take good care of others
- How to communicate with women from very different backgrounds
- What **trans and sexual diversity movements** were
  - That it was possible to have a political dialogue with LGBTIQ activists and find out that their struggles overlapped with women's rights ones
  - That **medical abortion** was possible
  - That the **right to abortion** means something very different in Latin America than in India (where selective abortion of female foetuses is a serious concern)

- That **sexual and reproductive health and rights** meant not just family planning but having control over one's sexuality
- That the movement of people with **disability** /functional diversity and the one lead by those born with **intersex** bodies share a common struggle for autonomy, inclusion and non-discrimination
- That **intergenerational work** is important and it was not happening in our region
- That gender injustices are very **complex** in their reasons and also in their solutions
- That there were also Black Feminists in Colombia and in Morocco and in France

## Annex 3

### Our Interviewees

N°	Name	Location
1	Amina Doherty	Antigua
2	Awa Fall Diop	Senegal
3	Charlotte Bunch	USA
4	Clau Corredor	Colombia
5	Claudia Sancam	Nicaragua/Bolivia
6	Djamila Toubet	Algeria
7	Elena Reynaga	Argentina
8	Everjoice Win	Zimbabwe
9	Flora Luena Santos Rodrigues da Silva	Brazil
10	Geeta Misra	India
11	Jac s m Kee	Malaysia
12	Jamila Abbas	Egypt/The Netherlands
13	Janet Price	UK
14	Jessica Horn	UK
15	Jurema Werneck	Brazil
16	Justine Masika Bihamba	DRC
17	Laura Inter	Mexico
18	Lucy Garrido	Uruguay
19	Lydia Alpizar	Costa Rica/Mexico
20	Maiga Djingarey Ibrahim	Mali
21	María Manuela Sequeira	Nicaragua/USA
22	Matilde Gonçalves (Tidinha)	Brazil
23	Michelle Reddy	Fiji
24	Mónica Alemán	Nicaragua/USA
25	Mónica Enríquez Enríquez	Colombia/USA
26	Morgan Carpenter	Australia

N°	Name	Location
27	Nancy Natilson	USA
28	Nani Zulminarni	Indonesia
29	Nicky McIntyre	Scotland/USA
30	OluTimehin Kukoyi	Nigeria
31	Peggy Antrobus	Barbados
32	Perla Vasquez	Mexico
33	Pramada Menon	India
34	Purity Kagwira	Kenya
35	Sara Abu Ghazal	Palestine/Lebanon
36	Shareen Gokal	Pakistan/Canada
37	Tania Duarte	Colombia
38	To Tjoelker	The Netherlands/Benin
39	Toutou Ahmed Jiddou	Mauritania
40	Vinita Sahasranaman	India
41	Virisila Buadromo	Fiji
42	Zelal Ayman	Turkey

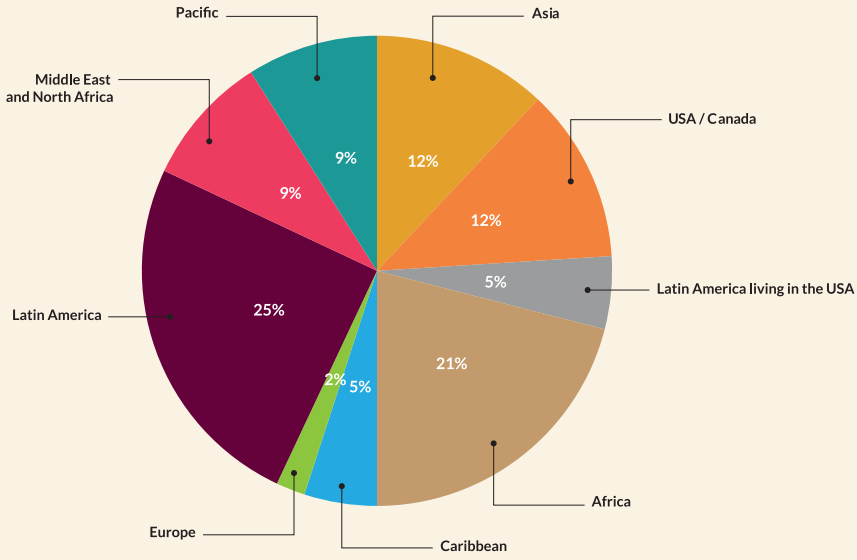
## AWID Members who contributed through social media

N°	Name	Language
1	Abdrahamane	English
2	Alibel Pizarro H.	Spanish
3	Anne Gathumbi	English
4	Annicca Holmberg	English
5	Clarisse Sess	French
6	Dzeneta Agovic	English
7	Ellacarin Blind	English
8	Erandi Avendaño	Spanish
9	Espérance Kaj Kut Namalanga	French
10	Eva Zillen	English
11	Fany Lilian Tórréz Rodríguez	Spanish
12	Gloria Cano Legua	Spanish
13	Huong Nguyen	English
14	Inés Leskaj	English
15	Joyce Oluoh	English
16	Khadidiatou Wane	French

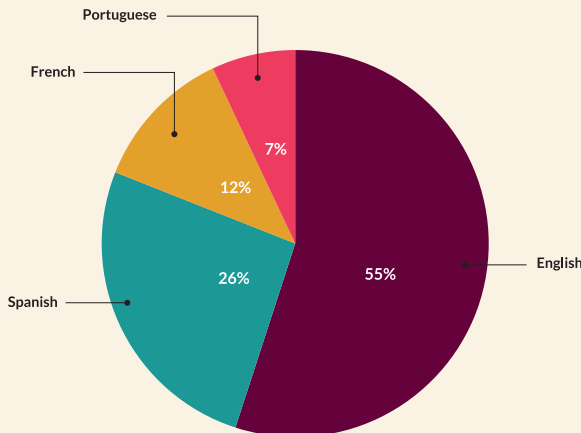
N°	Name	Language
17	Khouloud Bidak	English
18	Krishanti Dharmaraj	English
19	Leticia Mireille Michelle	French
20	Louise Dayis	English
21	Margaret Greene	English
22	María Palomares Arenas	Spanish
23	María Teresa Fernández	Spanish
24	Mariana Carvajal	Spanish
25	Mónica Mendizábal	Spanish
26	Paola Brambilla	Spanish
27	Ruth Acheinegeh	English
28	Sabiha Syed	English
29	Shamsun Nahar	English
30	Souzen Joseph	French
31	Tiffany Mugo	English
32	Verónica Cruz	Spanish

Note: Five of our interviewees (Djamila Touabet, Justine Masika Bihamba, Maiga Djingarey Ibrahim, Nancy Natilson and Toutou Ahmed Jiddo) originally came into this project as AWID members who made contributions through social media and then kindly agreed to be interviewed.

### Location of the interviewees

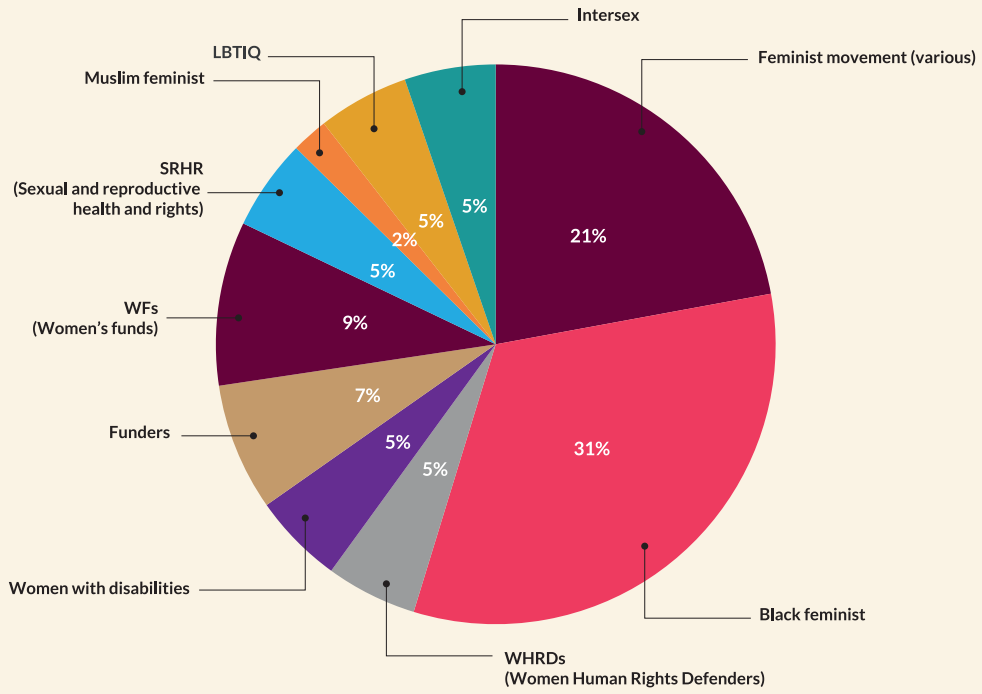


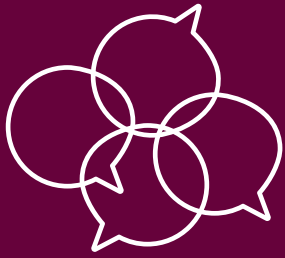
### Languages



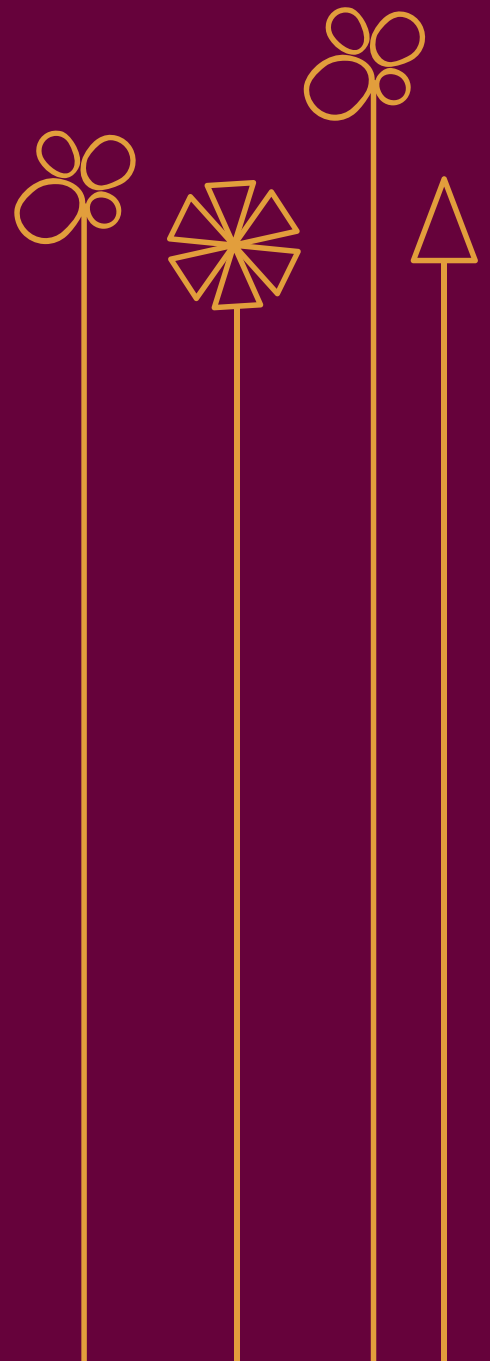


## Movements





# Stories of Change AWID Forums



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