

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY - 2016 AWID FORUM EVALUATION REPORT

The AWID International Forum brings together feminist and women's rights leaders and activists from diverse movements, development practitioners, and donors from around the world. This global convening consistently proves to be a critical space to collectively energize and shape the analyses, agendas and alliances that drive strategies to make gender justice and human rights lived realities.

The product of a two-and-a-half-year process of co-creation by hundreds of partners, presenters, artists, facilitators, and innovators, AWID's 13th International Forum was held September 8-11, 2016 in Bahia, Brazil, under the theme of "Feminist Futures: Building Collective Power for Rights and Justice". The 2016 Forum made the case that the current context presents a particular urgency for cultivating stronger collaboration both within diverse feminist and women's rights movements and in alliance with other movements for justice.

The 2016 Forum Goals were to:

1. Celebrate the gains of the past 20 years by diverse social movements and critically analyze the lessons we can carry forward.
2. Assess our current reality to locate the opportunities and threats for advancing the rights of women and other oppressed people.
3. Explore strategies for mobilizing greater solidarity and collective power across diverse movements.
4. Inspire, energize and renew strength and purpose.

The following highlights reflect principal achievements and insights that emerged from the extensive Forum evaluation process.

FORUM ACHIEVEMENTS

Despite the challenging contexts in which the 2016 Forum took place (the Zika epidemic, a strike by Brazilian foreign-service workers, the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff and subsequent turmoil), it succeeded in bringing together over 1800 participants from 120 countries and territories across all regions of the world. For 96% of participants who responded to the post Forum evaluation survey, the Forum was a major source of inspiration and energy. 98% of participants considered it an important convening space for feminist movements and expressed hope that AWID continues to organize forums.

The Forum lived up to most participants'

expectations: 59% of Forum evaluation survey respondents declared to be very satisfied with the Forum and 34% somewhat satisfied. **The 2016 Forum program was rich and innovative.** Over 150 sessions were delivered in different formats on a variety of topics ranging from bodily integrity and freedoms, to gender-based violence in the workplace, to strategies for building collective power. A dynamic Arts and Culture strategy wove program elements together. The first-time Black Feminisms Forum (BFF), held on September 5 and 6, brought together 250 Black feminists from all over the world to co-create a powerful space to build and strengthen ongoing, intergenerational, transnational connections among diverse movements of Black feminists. Other Forum events included the self-organized Donors' Day – which gathered 100 representatives of funding institutions - and the Young Feminist Activism Day – which gathered over 120 young feminists to forge strong alliances. These events

allowed various feminist movement builders to share visions and agendas for greater solidarity and collective power across global movements, regions and sectors.

Diversity at the 2016 Forum was powerful. The vast range of participants at the Forum in terms of region, language, age, identities, and movement affiliations was historic. Many participants celebrated this as a demonstration of a power shift within global feminist movements and the creative cultivation of new foundations for building inclusive and intersectional solidarity across movements. This diversity was no accident. It was the result of deliberate and effective strategies: connecting with priority constituencies before, during and after the Forum and promoting their ownership of Forum processes and spaces, as well as using an inclusivity lens in every decision and devoting resources toward promoting a safe and affirming space. We heard from Black feminists, young feminists, women with disabilities, sex workers and transgender activists who felt they had been able to make the Forum space their own in ways that were meaningful to their agendas.

The 2016 Forum was a major source of energy and inspiration for 96% of participants. Energy and inspiration are the currency on which feminist organizers rely to capture the social imagination of individuals, families and communities, and direct them towards actions for change.

The Forum was a vital, deeply necessary platform for feminist learning and global activism: the depth and breadth of the program, strength of speakers and facilitators, diversity of participants and spaces, the critical exchanges, creative, visionary process and knowledge-building in collaboration with partners before, during and after the Forum. Participants celebrated a wealth of new knowledge and strategies on issues ranging from funding to climate and environmental justice, the importance of well-being and collective care and the role of the state and

democracy. The Forum also facilitated conversations on cultivating an intersectional lens and putting it into practice. Above all, it is worth noting that the top three learnings reported by participants spoke to the importance of sharing and learning from others' experiences, working together to be stronger, and cooperating across movements.

Finally, **the 2016 Forum helped lay foundations for emerging cross-movement work.** 92% of participants gained an increased sense of solidarity with other Forum participants. At the Forum and beyond, bridges are being built among a variety of organizations from different movements and regions. Initial examples include, among others: linkages between disability rights and climate justice activists leading to participation by a feminist with disabilities in the Global Gender Climate Alliance Innovation Forum on the sidelines of COP22; and participants from the Pacific building connections across disability and transgender organizing in the region. Processes like the BFF, Forum umbrella and cross-movement sessions, and "hubs" were opportunities for actors from diverse movements to co-create spaces, exchange analysis, and lay the foundations for exploring joint action. After the Forum, we received close to 200 proposals for Seed Grants that build on the cross-movement momentum sparked by the Forum.

CRITICAL INSIGHTS

Our feminist futures will be self-determined.

Writing our feminist futures requires a transformation not only within the existing systems of oppression and exclusion (gender, caste, race, class, disability, etc.), but within our movements too. We have not been immune to replicating acts and practices of oppression and in order to be catalysts of hope, we need to embody transformation as well. Centering and shifting power to those historically rendered invisible and voiceless

is itself a feminist project and requires intention, preparation, collective investment and practice.

Bold Visioning. The Forum promised an envisioning of feminist futures, but a collective process to reach these visions seemed a tall, if not impossible, order. The creative process led at the Forum by our artistic partner, Fearless Collective, was a profound contribution to a field in which organizers are constantly looking for energizing tools that facilitate forward-thinking strategies and agendas. Sharing these tools widely beyond the Forum can support the iterative processes of formulating feminist solutions that will bring the future into the present.

Arts and Culture as a strategy of change. Arts and Culture is a strategy and vocabulary that bridges a range of feminist and social justice experiences in powerful and visceral ways. It is capable of quickly building a community from strangers and emerging allies. When done well, and in complement to other strategies, it can cut to the core of the issues and provide coherence, analysis and a vision for moving forward. It can summon courage and inspire action, and bind movements together. Artists are an important constituency in feminist organizing, and are some of the most effective organizers themselves.

Elevating self- and collective care. There is a universal concern on how to sustain the energy and power of our movements, preventing burn-out, caring for our constituencies so they can maintain their work and activism. There is a wealth of knowledge and political understanding of self and collective care, healing justice, ancestral practices and feminist transformative leadership that can be exchanged cross-regionally. It is critical to allocate time, space, and funds to address individual and organizational wellbeing, not just as an additional activity, but one that is incorporated in *how* things are done.

Sharing space with and celebrating stigmatized bodies. Bodies that are often stigmatized, shamed and scapegoated in their communities found space at the Forum to experience celebration instead of stereotypes and denigration, generating openness and affinity. Much is still to be learned and unlearned about one another, but a foundation of kinship is laid that allows cross-movement solidarity to seep in and take hold. Our collective power will be built from the enormous diversity, companionate listening and engaging and connecting the plurality of feminist agendas and solutions.

