



Feminist Humanitarian Network

Strategy 2020 - 2025

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Context

Crises disproportionately impact women and girls, aggravating pre-existing gender inequalities, and negating the access women and girls have to their rights.

Worldwide, women’s rights organizations (WROs) working at grassroots, local, and national levels in the Global South advance and protect women’s rights through organizing, advocacy and campaigns, and essential service delivery, including sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) services and the provision of shelters and safe spaces.

When an emergency strikes, women and their organisations are often the first to respond, playing leadership roles in their communities to ensure ongoing access to basic rights for women, in all of their diversity, and for “marginalised” groups, ensuring nobody is left behind. Yet when the humanitarian machinery kicks in, WROs’ roles are undermined and their voices ignored. They are excluded from



funding opportunities and from decision-making bodies and processes, and there is little accountability to them.

WROs are forced to use the limited resources they have available to them to respond to the emergency, compromising their long-term sustainability. The basic needs and rights of the women they work with are often overlooked.

To ensure that WROs, their humanitarian efforts, and their roles providing critical services and driving the advancement of women’s rights at grassroots and national levels are not undermined in emergencies, it is critical to transform the global humanitarian system into one that is guided by feminist principles. Feminist principles and ways of working includes being committed to women’s rights and gender equality; being intersectional, inclusive, holistic, collective, and collaborative; ensuring safety and safe spaces, accountability and transparency; and, critically, recognizing unequal power dynamics and taking action to address them and shift power where necessary.

Donors and other humanitarian actors have committed to advancing gender equality and supporting women’s leadership through the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, the World Humanitarian Summit (and commitments to the Grand Bargain), under the Call to Action on Protection from GBV in Emergencies, at the Oslo Conference on Ending Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in Humanitarian Crises, and most recently the Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action Compact. The commitments are there, but sufficient action has not been realized.

Climate change, increasing conflicts, urbanization, and a growing population are all contributing to a rise in emergencies, which are affecting more people across the world than ever before. This means that responding to crises within communities around the world is an everyday reality: “the new normal”, not an exceptional moment.

The humanitarian system must be transformed.

The Feminist Humanitarian Network: who we are

The Feminist Humanitarian Network is a global collective of women leaders working together to transform the humanitarian system into one that is guided by feminist principles. We are member based, comprised of grassroots, local, and national women’s rights organisations; national and regional women’s networks; international NGOs and organisations headquartered in the Global North; and individuals.

Our membership is comprised of WROs from the Pacific, Asia, the Middle East, and Africa, that represent women in all their diversity: refugee women, women from host communities, single women, widows, women with disabilities, survivors of conflict, LGBTQIA+ communities, amongst others.



Our approach recognises, critically, that most WROs do not identify primarily as ‘humanitarian organisations’ – that they have different operational focus areas (such as maternal and newborn child health, sexual and reproductive health, the provision of legal assistance, agriculture and livelihoods, and so forth). However, in a crisis, WROs shift their focus to the emergency, ensuring services remain available, and using their relationships with communities and the networks they have established to provide tailored and speedy relief and assistance. Our membership is comprised of WROs with expertise across a wide spectrum of service-provision and campaigning focus areas. Similarly, our INGO members have different thematic specialisations.

We are committed to ensuring the voices of women’s rights organisations working at grassroots, local, and national levels are heard in international advocacy spaces and more publicly, and to supporting these organisations to drive change within the humanitarian system.

The Network facilitates space for women leaders to share the challenges they experience with the humanitarian system and to collectively define solutions to them. We work collectively and use the power that working as a network brings – strength in numbers, broad networks, and diverse skillsets and leadership – to achieve our objectives and in so doing, transform the humanitarian system into one that is accessible to and led by women and their organisations, and leaves nobody behind.

FHN 2020 strategy: Background and overview

This strategy has been developed collectively by the members of the Feminist Humanitarian Network. It is the product of numerous meetings and thought pieces, including a series of strategic workshops facilitated by different members over a six-week period in 2020. Like all FHN meetings, these workshops were safe spaces, wherein members debated, created, and visualised together the change that we want to see in the humanitarian system.

This document builds on an original concept developed by members at a face-to-face members’ meeting at the Commission of the Status of Women in March 2019, and includes work that has been done by the FHN’s strategic and steering committees following on from this meeting - work more clearly defining the FHN’s structure and ways of working.

The FHN’s strategy defines our vision, goal, objectives, and definitions (section 1). It lays out how we work: our feminist modalities and commitments, our structures, top-line decision-making, reflection and planning processes (section 2). The FHN Strategy underpins a suite of additional strategies and documents that define its activity plans and ways of working. These include (but are not limited to):

- FHN Advocacy Strategy
- FHN Communications Strategy



- FHN Fundraising Strategy
- FHN Funding & Fundraising Approach
- FHN Membership Principles
- FHN Membership Policy
- FHN International Member Guidelines

The FHN strategy is reviewed through biennial collective strategic review processes, to ensure that the FHN is responding to shifts in the humanitarian system and in the political spheres beyond it. The next strategic review will be undertaken mid 2022.

2. The feminist change we seek in the humanitarian system

Vision and Goal

Vision

A global humanitarian system that is responsive, accountable and accessible to women and their organisations, in all their diversity; that challenges, rather than perpetuates, structural inequalities.

Goal

To strengthen the agency and amplify the voices of women and their organisations in crises.

Strategic objectives

To achieve our vision of a feminist humanitarian system, our focus is on achieving the following objectives:

1. To support women's rights actors and movements leading humanitarian action in the Global South, to ensure their expertise and efforts are recognised and resourced by the humanitarian system.
2. To convene women and their organisations to collectively build feminist leadership, and share evidence and learning to transform the roles of women in humanitarian spaces.
3. To offer governments and other stakeholders alternative, feminist ways of working, that would achieve our vision of a feminist humanitarian system.
4. To identify and challenge patriarchal practises that are barriers to women's leadership, decision making, and meaningful engagement in humanitarian action and in the humanitarian system.



5. To mobilise collective action at critical moments, to demand that women's leadership is recognised, and to ensure that women's rights organisations are included in decision making spaces that influence the humanitarian system.

Key definitions

How we define the term 'feminist':

- √ Being intersectional, inclusive, holistic, collaborative, and committed.
- √ Putting women (all self-identifying women) at the centre.
- √ Ensuring women's dignity, driving transformation, dismantling patriarchy, and challenging exclusion.
- √ Leaving no-one behind, ensuring safety and safe spaces, and accountability and transparency.
- √ Recognising power dynamics, and taking action to address them, to shift power where necessary, and always using power responsibly.
- √ Being self-reflective, and open to adapting and changing, to ensure feminist principles are consistently upheld.
- √ Working together as a movement for women's rights, for human rights, and justice for all.

Our definition of a feminist humanitarian system is one that:

- Is collectively and unwaveringly **committed to achieving gender equality**, recognising and responding to the systemic drivers of inequality, and using emergencies as catalysts to advance women and girls' rights
- **Acknowledges the patriarchal and colonial dynamics within itself**, that often exclude or downplay the contribution of those identifying as women and minorities, particularly those from the Global South
- **Takes responsibility for identifying unjust formal and informal power relations** within itself by regularly critiquing the extent to which its structures and processes reinforce patriarchal power relations through humanitarian action
- **Actively shifts power to women-led organisations working in humanitarian contexts** in the Global South by ensuring that they are resourced and consistently included, and that their leadership is recognised and made central in shaping the humanitarian system
- **Facilitates safe spaces through its coordination mechanisms**, wherein actors working at all levels can be heard, and the expertise of diverse responders, including those identifying as women, is looked up to.
- **Recognises that there is no one-size-fits-all approach**, thereby ensuring that nobody is left behind.



2. How we work: Achieving change with a feminist approach

The Feminist Humanitarian Network is committed to upholding feminist ways of working amongst its members. Feminist principles define how the FHN is structured, its planning and decision-making processes, and the way that meetings are managed and discussions engaged in. Just as the FHN is committed to transforming power dynamics in the humanitarian system, so too are we committed to recognising and addressing power dynamics within our Network.

Included in the feminist principles that inform the FHN's ways of working are: collective feminist leadership (including using non-competitive approaches); active recognition of and response to power dynamics within the network and beyond it, and pro-active, considered redistribution of power as required; constant and consistent accountability and transparency; ensuring safe spaces (as defined collectively); and regular reflection on approaches and work to ensure accountability to ourselves as a collective body and to each other as members, and the strengthening of our feminist practise.

Members are asked to make the following commitments when they become part of the FHN. They are commitments each member is expected to uphold, and that the FHN must uphold as a collective.

Our Commitments

- To value women's rights, contributions, lived experiences, and solutions as feminist alternatives to disrupt the humanitarian system.
- To create a safe and inclusive environment where the autonomy, identity, and diversity of all members, is respected and acknowledged.
- To work within the Network according to feminist principles, and be conscious of power dynamics, working to transform power relationships, including funding.
- To be accountable to other members and to the women we are supporting through our collective and decisive actions.
- To recognise the collective power of the Feminist Humanitarian Network to provide sustainable solutions for global justice.

Membership

Women's rights organisations from the Global South lead the FHN, and international organisations use their privilege to support this leadership in a variety of ways, including ensuring access for local actors to global decision-making spaces within the humanitarian system.



In line with its commitment to acknowledging and addressing power disparities between its members, the FHN is committed to maintaining a membership with at least 70% representation by women’s rights organisations working at grassroots, local and national levels in the Global South and no more than 30% representation of international organisations and institutions.

All organisational members must align with the FHN’s membership principles, including being women’s organisations, or women-led organisations (wherein Board and management are women).

Network structure and leadership

To uphold its commitment to collective leadership, the FHN’s work is driven by four strategic committees, each of which works to implement its own strategy, which has been developed and agreed in consultation with the wider FHN membership, and seeks to achieve the network’s overarching strategic commitments.

| Committee | Responsibilities |
|--------------------------|---|
| Advocacy Committee | Development and implementation of the FHN advocacy strategy, and leadership of advocacy work with the guidance of the wider membership, and specifically WRO members |
| Membership Committee | Leadership of membership recruitment processes, review of membership applications, and development and implementation of policies on FHN membership and member accountability |
| Communications Committee | Development and implementation of the FHN communications strategy, review and sign off on communications messages and content |
| Fundraising Committee | Development and implementation of the FHN fundraising strategy, fundraising tools, and identification of funding opportunities and leadership of approaches |

The FHN is governed by a Steering Committee, responsible for oversight of the FHN. The Committee reflects the 70/30 ratio that the FHN is committed to, and at its full complement, is comprised of 13 members, with representation across all regions. It is nominated and agreed to by the wider membership.



Each Committee meets regularly throughout the year (every six weeks), and updates and seeks the input of the wider membership at regular member-wide meetings (every two-three months, contingent on the regularity of other collective events, such as learning sessions and external events).

FHN Secretariat

The FHN and its Committees is coordinated by a Secretariat, which is currently hosted by ActionAid and led by the FHN Lead (currently the FHN's single staff member).

The FHN Secretariat drives the FHN's workplans and operations in close consultation with members. It is responsible for ensuring that the FHN implements and revises its strategies, and plays the primary role in implementing activities that are agreed upon by committees and the wider membership in workplans and on a case-by-case basis, across fundraising, advocacy, and communications. The Secretariat is responsible for designing and maintaining the FHN's administrative systems, such as member databases, filing systems, etc. The Secretariat is the key coordination point within the FHN, and represents it as required, and facilitates links between its members and external parties where appropriate.

Decision-making, learning, reflection, and planning

Decision-making

All major FHN decisions are made collectively, and the Network's structures and decision-making processes have been put in place to ensure this approach is upheld on an ongoing basis. Decisions that pertain to the FHN's approaches or work in a strategic area are made by the Committee that is responsible for that area of work. Each Committee is responsible for ensuring it includes the wider membership in decision-making, and for designing processes to ensure this is done meaningfully and effectively.

The FHN Steering Committee is responsible for making decisions pertaining to the FHN's overall strategy and approach. Strategic Committees work alongside the Steering Committee to ensure that all FHN work is aligned with the FHN's feminist principles, and to ensure that all committees are up to date on the work of others.

Learning and reflection

A core element of the FHN's feminist approach is to reflect regularly and consistently, to ensure that the FHN is accountable as a collective, that its Secretariat is accountable to members, and that its members are accountable to each other. Reflection is critical to ensure that the FHN is consistently strengthening its feminist approach. The FHN creates space in as many meetings as possible to



reflect on the processes it uses to make decisions and achieve its objectives, on the safety of the spaces it facilitates, and on the extent to which power dynamics within the Network are acknowledged and addressed. The FHN Secretariat also uses tools (such as surveys) to seek member feedback.

Annual learning, reflection, and planning

The FHN undertakes annual planning processes to determine its yearly priorities and activities, aligned with this strategy and with its Advocacy, Communications, and Fundraising Strategies. Annual planning is undertaken at the same time as yearly reflection processes, to ensure that plans take into account key learnings from the FHN's ongoing work.

Each year, the FHN distributes a survey to its members, seeking their feedback and reflections, as well as their ideas to strengthen the FHN's feminist ways of working, and to define priorities activities. A work plan is then drafted, and then finalised by FHN members collectively at an annual member-wide planning and reflection meeting.

Annual workplans include activities that are aimed at strengthening the feminist approaches of the FHN, as well as achieving our strategic objectives. Once finalised, activities defined in workplans are distributed to the relevant FHN body to achieve (to committees or to the Secretariat).



Our role

The following statement on the role of the Network and on our ways of working was drafted collectively by members during 2020 strategic sessions.

As the Feminist Humanitarian Network, our role is to facilitate space to exchange experiences, to learn from and support each other.

It is to transform the humanitarian system so that we have a place at the decision-making tables where the voices of women working on the frontlines currently go unheard.

It is to dismantle patriarchal practices in humanitarian action, and to critique and challenge the tools that are used by the sector that reinforce patriarchal principles through sharing experiences and learning, and collective advocacy.

It is to claim spaces that we, as women, and as women's rights organisations in the Global South, have never been before.

It is to act as a hive mind – a resource as well as a support mechanism, where members (both organisations and individuals) can seek support from each other, and can act individually and collectively.

It is to continue to push for women's leadership at the global level on humanitarian issues – to ensure women are represented in the humanitarian system.

As the Feminist Humanitarian Network, we are grounded in the experiences of our members working on the frontlines of crises. We work to transform humanitarian interventions at national and at all levels.

Our mandate is to build solidarity and shift power. We are made up of diverse members working together with one voice. Together, we are powerful. Amongst us there is not an individual standing tall – we are a collective, strengthening each other through collective power and action.

We support each other professionally and emotionally. We check in with each other. We have built a unique and safe space, enabled by our feminist principles, and consequently, we have trust – in our space and in each other.