Challenging global power asymmetries:

Insights from feminist organising for decolonisation initiatives

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Abstract

This working paper identifies practices and strategies from feminist organising that provide a structure for decolonisation and anti-racism initiatives. It presents practical case studies that illustrate how feminist civil society movements across India, Zimbabwe, Uganda, and Colombia are organising at grassroots and regional levels to challenge lived experiences of gender inequity. It also considers how feminist organisations working from the Global South have built and sustained action in order to challenge patriarchal norms and gender inequity. Our findings reveal the importance of adopting an intersectional approach, promoting solidarity and empowerment, valuing alternative knowledge systems, and creating accessible spaces for South-South and circular learning and global dialogue led by the Global South.

Key words: feminism, gender inequity, bodily autonomy, decolonisation, anti-racism, intersectionality, women's rights.

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The organisation's anti-racism pledge focuses on **co-creation** and **self-reflection**. It links feminist thinking with decolonisation initiatives in terms of **dismantling power imbalances** and **challenging inequalities**.

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RETHINK my freedoms
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CREA centres women's **leadership development**, **South-South partnerships**, inclusion of marginalised people, and **working at the intersections** of issues.

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IWRAW AP's work has a global agenda; this means that they are not only anti-racist or anti-colonial, but rather they **disrupt all systems of power which generate inequalities**.

GSWF 2020 graphic report

KEY TAKEAWAYS
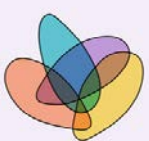
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Executive Summary

This paper identifies strategies and practices from feminist organising across civil society movements, local organisations, and INGOs, which can be integrated as part of decolonisation and anti-racism initiatives. It examines practical case studies of women's rights organising from India, Uganda, Zimbabwe, and Colombia, as well as highlighting the work of global feminist organisations, such as Womankind Worldwide, CREA, and IWRAW Asia Pacific. The paper applies an intersectional lens and seeks to identify key lessons which can be applied to movement-building and organisational change in shifting power, decolonisation and anti-racism in the international development and humanitarian ecosystems.

The paper aims to identify strategies and practices where feminist organising aligns with anti-racist and decolonial objectives. It draws attention to the interlinked layers of structural power which operate to marginalise certain groups in international development priority-setting. Although our featured case studies vary in context and location, we have identified spaces where they intersect thematically and practically. Namely, the feminist organisations we have explored have organised their claims to rights around bodily autonomy, land rights and territorial integrity. These themes are reflected across global feminist movements, civil society movements, and INGOs. As part of a movement which challenges structural oppression, the ways in which feminist movements organise are highly relevant for anti-racist and decolonising movements.

The findings of this paper have significant implications for understanding how power operates in international development and humanitarianism. They suggest alternative pathways to challenge racism, inequity and coloniality, and identify effective models for advocating for power shifts within deeply embedded and inequitable structures of power.

The lessons learned from these case studies provide important implications for anti-racist and decolonising action, such as:

- **Unlearning and untangling the influence of colonial-era norms** on existing laws and policies in the Global South, especially surrounding women's bodily autonomy, sexual and reproductive rights and land appropriations.

- Promoting **global dialogues and spaces for circular learning** where diverse communities (feminist advocates, researchers, human rights activists) can speak freely about their lived experiences, distilling lessons and contributing to global priorities and agenda setting for feminist and development action.

- Employing an **intersectional approach** to understand communities' needs and the drivers of inequity, marginalisation and adverse incorporation.

- **Valuing diverse world views**, knowledges and sources of evidence, raising the place given to indigenous, ancestral, and local knowledge in the design of development strategies.

- **Rights-based approaches** can be applied to articulate the interests of marginalised groups, bringing them into the heart of wider social movements (see Case Study 1 on sex workers in India)

- **Locally rooted social solidarity movements** can be built and linked to region-wide fora to defend rights, with bottom-up and top-down movements providing mutual support (see Case Study 2 on women's land rights in Zimbabwe)

- Local knowledge can power movements to **assert rights and drive a radical agenda** to take back control against corporate and patriarchal interests (see Case Study 3 on fighting the violation of bodily integrity and land expropriation in Colombia)

- Organisational change can be boosted through **accountability**, with progress towards publicly stated commitments being assessed and reported on (see Case Study 4 on Womankind Worldwide's anti-racist pledge)

- Social movements can be activated by **building the capacity** of a cadre of leaders (see Case Study 5 on CREA World)

- **Systems of power - racism, coloniality, patriarchy, capitalism - interlock** and need simultaneous attention (see Case Study 6 on IWRAW-AP)

1. Framing the discussion

Feminist thinking, perspectives, and strategies align with anti-racist and decolonising action in terms of identifying structures and systems which uphold power imbalances and reinforce inequity. In this paper, we seek to explore learnings that can be drawn from feminist organising, through a set of case studies from the Global South.

The aim of this paper is to approach decolonisation initiatives from a practical perspective which moves beyond theoretical understandings and centres feminist local action and strategies from across civil society movements and organisations. By doing so, we aim to highlight the universal nature of issues faced by women, the strategies that can be used to address them, and lessons for wider application to both challenging patriarchy and decolonising development.

We seek to bridge the gap between the local and the global in order to show the multiplicity of micro-disruptions taking place across geographies. Ultimately, we explore how thinking deeply about power and positionality is essential as a basis for identifying and implementing practical steps and actions that support decolonisation. We reflect on the strategies and actions of feminist organising. We do this because we have found people working with feminist movements tend to have thought deeply about structures and power and their own position. This has delivered reflexivity and tools for thinking about power providing them with an advantage in thinking and practice which they have applied to their work on anti-racism, shifting power and decolonisation.

We understand 'feminist organising' as collectives of individuals who are actively organising and enacting change in order to tackle a lived experience of gendered inequity and/or oppression (Frida, 2017). By exploring the role of feminist *organising*, rather than simply feminist *organisations*, we seek to challenge the traditional understandings of organisations as the sole locus of power and change in the international sphere. By doing so, we widen the net to include the wider ecosystem of civil society actors including social movements and grassroots local organising.

We will first frame this discussion by situating our work within an analysis of power – understanding that all organisations, like all individuals, have agency and relational power. This paper acknowledges that there are a multiplicity of organisations and movements which identify as 'feminist', and that power is distributed differently with different types of organisations, based on factors such as the nature of the

organisation (WROs[1] vs NGOs[2], membership organisations, national organisations, thematic organisations, decentralised vs centralised, etc.), location (Global North vs Global South, urban vs rural, etc.), or size. We also acknowledge the influence of colonial power dynamics which are embedded in the complex ecosystem associated with the international development industry, including INGOs[3], and therefore in the work that we do. Even where organisations have shared priorities and objectives, underlying power dynamics remain, driven by factors including location, funding source, and ideological positionality. These determine the organisation's legitimacy and its ability to deliver feminist outcomes. With this in mind, we attempt to both question our own assumptions and centre the voices and ideas of the communities featured in this paper.

We acknowledge that colonial language hierarchies play a part in valuing certain knowledge over others, and we have developed this paper being cognisant of 'politics of translation' (Spivak, 2010). Therefore, we aim to challenge Global North-centrism by highlighting knowledge and strategies of feminist action from across the Global South, while acknowledging that some of the insights discussed here have been previously developed by individuals in the Global South using different terminology. In this way, we seek to centre these insights and trace their origin to the local communities represented in this paper.

We as a collective of three authors have benefitted from Global North-based tertiary education and employment as well as international exposure, and we acknowledge the privilege that stems from that access. We thank the various colleagues across different organisations and geographies who have contributed to this paper both directly and indirectly. While doing so, we claim the space to explore our own experiences, observations and analysis related to the paper's themes.

The paper identifies the approaches that feminist organisations utilise to build, grow, and normalise decoloniality within their work and their wider contributions to decolonising and anti-racist action. We present a series of six case studies. These illustrate how feminist organising can contribute to empowering women and provide lessons and insights for countering patriarchy and enabling anti-racist and decolonising action. Lessons drawn from the case studies will articulate notions on power, how it works, and how to empower the disempowered.

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[1] Women's rights organisation
[2] Non-governmental organisation
[3] International Non-governmental organisations

The first three of our case studies highlight feminist organising in the Global South and specifically civil society and local organising. The following three case studies feature feminist INGOs working across the Global South. These highlight the adoption of decolonisation and anti-racist strategies to deliver practice, both outward facing and internally.

The set of six case studies as a whole illustrate the importance of context specificity when exploring how different feminist actors across the development ecosystem employ diverse approaches.

2. Intersectional feminism & decolonisation in practice

Given the diversity and context-specificity of feminist movements in the Global South, this paper spotlights 3 case studies of feminist organising from across Asia, Africa, and Latin America, reflecting the regional specialisation of our collaborating organisations. Each case study identifies how the organisation or movement adopts intersectional and decolonial tools. Thematically, the case studies focus on bodily autonomy, land rights, and territorial integrity. This common ground has allowed us to identify how women's movements have organised around these claims to rights, identifying approaches with potential for wider application.

These case studies illustrate a diversity of contexts in which colonialism continues to have a direct impact on women's livelihoods and basic rights. We showcase feminist movements challenging these colonial dynamics of power and adopt an intersectional approach towards addressing the circumstances of the communities in question.

CASE STUDIES: AN OVERVIEW

Decriminalising sex work as one approach to decolonisation in India

- The criminalisation of consensual sex work in India is **strongly linked to colonialism and the legacy of British rule**, particularly in morality laws around homosexuality.

- Consensual sex work has been conflated with human trafficking and sexual exploitation, at odds with **women's rights to bodily autonomy**. This means that sex workers are stigmatised and criminalised.

- Decriminalisation helps sex workers organise, take a **rights-based approach**, demand safer and better working conditions and distinguish themselves transparently from girls, women and other people who are trafficked and sexually exploited.

- Unique spaces for dialogues between sex worker-led organisations and women's rights organisations and donors have been created by CREA, an India-headquartered feminist human rights organisation.

Sex Worker's Rights, CREA

CASE STUDIES: AN OVERVIEW

Women's land rights and why they matter in Zimbabwe & Uganda

- Women's access to land delivers positive spill-over effects for **women's economic autonomy**, delivers greater **agency**, and empowers women's greater involvement in **household decision-making** and supports enhanced **dignity** for women and girls.

- **Women's ownership of assets** supports improved outcomes for not just the woman herself but for the household as a whole and even for her community and the wider economy, society and polity.

- Patriarchal land ownership and inheritance systems exacerbate inequalities within households in **access to and control of resources** and impacts on women's enterprise and investment choices and their **engagement in household and community decision-making**.

- Rural women's assembly groups in Zimbabwe promote **women's solidarity and empowerment** and act as a vehicle for campaigning within and across communities of women in rural Zimbabwe, and across the SADC region.

Women and Land in Zimbabwe (a)

CASE STUDIES: AN OVERVIEW
Territorio cuerpo-tierra as a practice of decolonial feminist resistance in Colombia

- Indigenous and rural women in Latin America **link gender-based violence to extractive operations and land appropriation**, as both enact power and control over women's bodies, habitats, access to livelihoods and natural resources, by **restricting their autonomy and sovereignty**.

- Indigenous movements for territorial integrity are constructed around **ancestral knowledge and alternative value systems**, such as Buen Vivir, which contest the hegemony of Western positivism.

- By adopting food sovereignty in Colombia, rural women **enhance household food security** by growing food for home consumption in their own gardens.

- This **shifts power within the household** and between women and market institutions, challenging patriarchal and neoliberal power structures.

Mujeres del Alto Ariari

CASE STUDY 1: DECRIMINALISING SEX WORK AS ONE APPROACH TO DECOLONISATION IN INDIA. WRITTEN BY PIYUMI SAMARAWEERA.

This case study will explore the decriminalisation of sex work in India as an entry point for decolonisation. 80% of sex workers' world-over are female, and they are one of the most marginalised groups within societies. Frequently, sex workers belong to other minoritised and structurally excluded groups, and in the Indian context, there is a big intersection between caste and sex work. India's caste system is complex but in brief, it is a form of social hierarchy that divides its Hindu population into four heritable[4] occupational groups. While caste discrimination has been outlawed in India, and democratisation and capitalist values have frayed some of the rigid caste boundaries[5], it remains deeply rooted in culture and can be a distinct barrier to social progress, particularly for lower caste and Adivasi[6] women. For such women of lower castes, the choices of labour could simply range between cleaning toilets and sex work. And it is particularly within this frame that we would like to locate the argument of decriminalising sex work.

The issue of sex for profit is one that has divided feminists over the years and continues to do so. First and second wave feminists tended to see sex workers as

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[4] Group membership is inherited and people in low caste groups and groups outside the caste system (scheduled tribes and scheduled castes) can experience social stigma, institutionalised discrimination and limited mobility in the job market. Individuals have very limited opportunities to change caste, though caste status can be 'lost', leaving the individual adivasi or 'untouchable'.

[5] With some features of the caste system echoing the structuring of feudal societies in Europe.

[6] The terms Adivasi and Dalit are preferred replacements for the previous pejorative term 'untouchable', although the Government of India tends to use SC/ST or scheduled castes and scheduled tribes to categorise those outside the caste system.

victims of exploitation, while third wave feminists tend to consider sex work as simply "work", or even a form of reclaiming power as women are demanding money for the sex act, which the patriarchy expects to get for free within the conjugal contract. While it still remains a divisive and hotly debated topic, increasingly the consensus view is shifting and States are making efforts to adopt more progressive policies including decriminalising sex work.

How can decriminalisation of sex work help?

By and large, sex work is regarded as exploitative and sex workers as disempowered victims. Mainstream (conforming) society stigmatises sex workers who are seen as morally corrupt and diseased.

> **Advocates argue that decriminalisation will help sex workers organise, take a rights-based approach, demand safer and better working conditions and clearly distinguish themselves from girls, women and other people who are trafficked and sexually exploited.**

The term 'carceral feminism' was coined to describe "a reliance on policing, prosecution, and imprisonment to resolve gendered or sexual violence" (Press, 2018). Justice then becomes synonymous with the state apparatus, the judicial legal system with its law enforcement units, courts, and prisons, and its limitations reflect and reinforce the societal norms around it. With increased global attention and resources to preventing and addressing trafficking in persons, there is a push for increasingly punitive responses. Unfortunately, these discourses have resulted in the conflation of sex work by adults choosing that work, with trafficking involving deceit, coercion or force, at a policy level. This has led to a strong push for further criminalisation of sex work in regional and national debates primarily driven by legislative and policy reform. At the same time, a tremendous mobilisation of sex workers worldwide has garnered visibility for their demands for the recognition of sex work as work and that all aspects of sex work be decriminalised.

Trend of Criminalisation – an extension of coloniality

"Coloniality of power"[7] describes how colonialism remains alive and well in the form of discrimination (Quijano, 2000). The concept provides a frame of reference to understand the racial, political and social hierarchies developed by European colonialism which assigned higher value to certain peoples/societies and lower value to others. In a pre-colonial South Asia and Africa, sex work, non-binary persons,

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[7] This idea is rooted in postcolonial studies, decoloniality, and Latin American subaltern studies, most prominently by Anibal Quijano (2000).

polyamory and people with a fluid sense of their sexuality existed with legitimacy. The imposition of Victorian Christian morality in colonised states largely delegitimised or even erased this inclusive understanding of sex, sexuality and gender presentation, making it possible for national leaders to criminalise and dehumanise whole groups of people by drawing on thinking rooted deeply in colonial morality, while claiming pride in national autonomy.

This is illustrated by homophobic legislation. It is currently illegal to be gay in 69 countries, nearly two-thirds of which were historically under British control (Chavez, 2018). In Uganda, the 2023 anti-homosexuality law is underpinned by rhetoric describing homosexuality as a Western import, when in fact, it was the British colonisers who brought with them their Victorian, Christian, puritanical concept of sex and sexuality.

In Colonial India, there was a deep moral panic about third gender people (commonly known as "hijras") who had existed and been integrated into Indian society for generations. For the colonisers, they evoked images of "filth, disease, contagion and contamination" (Biswas, 2019). In 2014, India's Supreme Court officially recognised a third gender (including eunuchs and hijras in this category), and in 2018 homosexual sex was finally legalised.[8]

> **The contrasting policy trajectories in Uganda and India illustrate the distance still left to travel in uprooting the colonial mindset in the colonised world and reclaiming diverse peoples and practices as normal and legitimate.**

Sex Workers' Rights, CREA

What has CREA done?

Feminist organisations and activists need to understand consent in the context of differentiating trafficking from sex work, and consensual relations between young adults in contrast to forced child marriage, and to advocate for more nuanced solutions. This can start with questioning the premise that the very existence of LGBTQI+ communities and sex workers represent

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[8] Recently, the Indian Supreme Court declined to legalise same-sex marriage in October 2023, though it had seemed like India was on the cusp of making history by allowing same-sex marriages at the start of the hearings in April–May. See https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-65525980.

a Western socio-cultural import without deep historical roots within the Indian subcontinent.

To make this shift, CREA allies, collaborates with, and supports sex worker-led collectives, unions and groups both nationally and globally to demand full decriminalisation of all aspects of consensual sex work and human rights, including labour rights, for all people in sex work.

As part of this work, nearly 15 years ago CREA partnered with SANGRAM's Centre for Advocacy on Stigma and Marginalisation (CASAM) to hold a global dialogue called "Ain't I a Woman". This brought together activists from the women's movement and the sex workers' movement to discuss the violence faced by sex workers, why it is ignored by the women's movement, and how it can be addressed by campaigns working to end violence against women. Later, CREA brought together sex workers with sexual and gender diverse communities, and women with disabilities at a 2011 "Count Me In!" conference. Through conversations with each other the conference surfaced the myriad issues facing trans and lesbian women, women with disabilities, and sex workers in South Asia.

> **These initiatives demonstrate an approach to de-stigmatisation which empowers sex worker communities who are otherwise consistently marginalised in discourse surrounding women's rights.**

They also work to normalise the engagement of sex workers in such collective advocacy spaces where they can speak to their lived experiences and advocate for themselves.

CREA also networks internationally to ensure the incorporation of sex workers and is a member of the Sex Worker Inclusive Feminist Alliance (SWIFA)[9], which works to align rights-affirming positions on sex work across the UN system, support sex worker-led organisations' engagement with UN Treaty Bodies and Special Procedures, and facilitate engagement of sex workers within women's movement spaces.

CREA has also sustained engagement with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UN CSW) regarding recognition of sex workers' rights, the inclusion of sex workers' priorities in mainstream feminist and women's rights agendas,

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[9] SWIFA includes Amnesty International – International Secretariat, FEMNET, Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women (GAATW), Global Network of Sex Work Projects (NSWP), International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific (IWRAW Asia Pacific), Women's Global Network for Reproductive Rights (WGNRR)

de-conflation of voluntary sex work by adults from trafficking in persons, and demanding the decriminalisation of all aspects of sex work.

Through nearly two decades of collaborative work on advancing sex workers' rights, CREA and its partners have created unique spaces for dialogues between sex worker-led organisations, with women's rights organisations and donors. Through its flagship capacity building Institutes[10], on themes ranging from sexuality, gender and rights, feminist leadership and movements, and the intersection of disability and sexual rights, CREA continues to bring sex worker rights issues to the fore and seeks to influence women's rights activists to recognise adult consensual sex work as work.

Insights for decolonial activism and advocacy:

- Sex workers have asserted their right to engage in larger political processes and movements as citizens and workers, breaking out of the narrow mould of sex work as their defining identity.

- Creating spaces for global dialogue allows sex workers and minorities to lay claim to rights and recognition

- Unlearning and untangling the influence of colonial-era norms on existing laws and policies in the Global South is essential, especially surrounding women's bodily autonomy and sexual and reproductive rights

- Capacity building of local activists from a rights-based perspective strengthens collective advocacy networks across the Global South

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[10] See here for further information [CREA](#)

Women and Land in Zimbabwe

CASE STUDY 2: WOMEN'S LAND RIGHTS AND WHY THEY MATTER. WRITTEN BY KATE BIRD.

Land is the primary source of wealth, social status and power in many countries. It provides the basis for shelter, food and economic activities. It makes livelihood diversification possible; provides collateral for formal sector borrowing; enables investment (including in human capital formation), reduces vulnerability, boosts resilience and limits the need to adopt adverse coping strategies. The loss of land can drive economic decline, with individuals and households becoming trapped in long-term and chronic poverty (Bird, 2011).

Landholding is often strongly unequal – both within and between groups. Asset inheritance norms and practices for women and girls are framed by patriarchal structures. This results in less than 20% of landholders being female (Jones et al., 2010) and means that even when women own land, either solely or through shared ownership with a spouse, they commonly have to negotiate with others how it is used and do not always control income or produce from use of the land.

Some argue that this does not matter, as women can still access land through their husbands, fathers or sons and that negotiation is widely experienced as a part of community and family life. However, negotiated access compromises women's agency and autonomy, impacting on power asymmetries within the spousal relationship and household and weakening the woman's backstop position when negotiating and renegotiating the conjugal contract.

Women's land rights can be supported by intrinsic and instrumental arguments. Intrinsic arguments centre on women's dignity, rights and well-being. Women's land rights impact on agency and personhood, income, well-being, and negotiating position in spousal relationships and standing in society.

When women have access to and control of assets, and in particular productive assets, their engagement in household decision-making changes (Meinzen-Dick et al., 1997; Quisumbing et al., 2003, in Deere and Doss, 2006). They have greater agency and are more involved in decision-making, including enterprise decisions.

Instrumental arguments emphasise that when a woman has access to, and control over, productive resources, particularly through clear ownership of land, her children benefit from better nutrition, greater health seeking behaviour, higher levels of investment in human capital, and housing. Where women own land, the conjugal contract tends to be more collaborative, and spousal collaboration is a key driver in sustained escapes from poverty, with chronically poor households more likely to move out and stay out of poverty where spouses collaborate than where they are in conflict. So, women's ownership of assets supports improved outcomes for not just the woman herself but for the household as a whole (Bird et al., 2018; Bird et al., 2020; Diwakar and Shepherd, 2022). Her ability to invest in agriculture and non-farm enterprise also generates bottom-up growth (CPAN, 2019), with benefits for wider society and her enhanced agency and autonomy benefits the local and national polity.

In reality, rural women, in particular, have few choices but to accept the default land access and inheritance option presented by their society. This has significant implications for their freedom of choice, economic independence, development and wider rights.

This matters because the benefits from goods owned by an individual within a household are not necessarily evenly spread to others within the same household, with implications for consumption and well-being as well as for agency, autonomy and decision-making power.

Women's land ownership is a priority issue which Global South feminist movements organise around, with women mobilising to lobby for women's rights (to be delivered by statutory law but also via customary practice) to both inherit land and hold it in their own name.

Where women lack land rights, this can drive long term impacts on well-being (see life history from Uganda in Box 1, Annex 1). For example, women may remain in violent relationships because, in the absence of independent rights to land or a gender equitable divorce settlement, staying may be the only way they can protect the basic consumption needs and inheritance rights of their children. This can negatively impact the woman herself. It can also drive long run negative impacts for her children by

limiting investments in human capital (food, education, health), their asset inheritance on marriage and the household's social standing in the community (see Box 1, Annex 1 for a life history which illustrates each of these points). The impacts can be long term, and even intergenerational.

Opponents of women gaining independent land rights suggest that the *status quo* respects and preserves customary practice and that a change would reflect a rejection of traditional Zimbabwean values, in favour of norms imported from the West. These arguments fail to recognise two important issues: first, Zimbabwean land rights and land ownership arrangements have been fluid and dynamic, with considerable change over the last two centuries in response to British settler colonialism. The current *status quo* represents a hybrid, accommodating traditional systems, racist land arrangements created to favour White settlers, and the penetration of market systems with a shift away from customary clan- and kinship-based use-rights to market-based and individual land titles. Second, this shift has favoured men, as historically, customary systems provided women's use-rights with stronger protection, provided greater access to grazing and common property resources and included equalising systems, including informal transfers between households and communities both in-kind and through labour, moderating inequity.

> **Reasserting women's land rights would respond to locally articulated needs. As such, it would be a locally embedded course correction, rather than a transfer of imported values.**

In Box 2, Annex 1 we present a life history which illustrates the impact of 'property grabbing' from widows.

Women and Land in Zimbabwe (WLZ) is a Zimbabwean local NGO which lobbies for women's land rights. It was founded in response to a cluster of suicides in Gokwe District, Midlands Province in 1988. Fourteen women committed suicide that year by drinking pesticide. It emerged that the women worked year-round to cultivate cotton. Their absentee husbands (migrant workers, working elsewhere in the country[11]) returned once their wives had harvested and baled the cotton. Having sold the cotton at auction, they cashed the cheques and spent the money as they wished. Men saw this as their right ("It's my land!"). Their wives had no control over the returns to their labour and as the area specialised in cotton production, they did not have another

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[11] Colonial land allocation and labour markets organised around migrant labour means that many women in the 'Communal Areas' are de facto women-headed households and single-mothers for much of the year.

livelihood they could rely on. They and their children were left without money to buy food or pay for schooling or other necessities. So, WLZ was born and since has lobbied and raised awareness about women's land rights.

Women and Land in Zimbabwe (c)

Land reform was a hot issue in Zimbabwe in the 1990s and the time was right to raise the issue of women's land rights. More than 60% of the Zimbabwean population relies on agriculture, with 70% of agricultural labour in Zimbabwe being provided by women. Women's rights to access and control of land in Zimbabwe is fragile. Despite their strong role in agricultural production and their reliance on farming for their livelihood, women in Zimbabwe have traditionally accessed land via relationships with men. If a marriage ends through death, separation or divorce, women lose rights to the family's land (even if it was acquired during the marriage), meaning that they lose their source of food and income. If the male spouse dies, the widow can be victim of property grabbing, where the man's extended family evict her and her children from her home and land. Land allocated by customary leaders to single mothers can be withdrawn at any time, and where (arguably corrupt) customary leaders sell land, it is often the land that widows and single mothers have acquired use-rights to that they sell. Women's land is also disproportionately vulnerable to invasion by artisanal miners and mining companies, as women farmers are seen as a 'weak' entry point into a community, as they do not have 'male protection'.

These stories illustrate how the patriarchal land system in Zimbabwe reinforces gender inequity. It exacerbates substantial inequalities within households in access to and control of resources and impacts on women's enterprise and investment choices and their engagement in household and community decision-making.

Women's rights to land was identified by Zimbabwean feminists as a priority feminist issue in Zimbabwe. The agenda is not an international import. WLZ committed to working on women's access to and control of and ownership of land. Since the 1990s they have lobbied consistently for women to hold land in their own right and set the target that women should hold 20% of all land. (They now wish they had held out for 50%, but at the time even 20% sounded radical and hindsight is a wonderful thing!).

Progress has been made and now 18% of A1 and 12% of A2 farms in Zimbabwe are held by women[12]. The WLZ has contributed to this change by engaging with the national and regional women's movement.

Their activities have included:

- awareness raising for women, so that they are aware of their rights

- awareness raising for traditional and customary leaders - to ensure that they are aware of women's rights to land

- supporting women's economic empowerment

- contributing to the drafting of Zimbabwe's 2013 Constitution (which highlights women's rights to own land)

- establishing and supporting "Rural Women's Assembly Groups" across Zimbabwe. The idea for these emerged out of a SADC-level regional meeting of rural women's movements in 2009. They discussed the challenges that women faced and then started mobilising to make change. They identified a network of Rural Women's Assemblies as a way of achieving their aims. The Assemblies seek to enable:

  - solidarity – women's groups at the village level work to protect members' land

  - empowerment – ensuring members know their rights

  - campaigning – illustrating the power of raising your voice, demanding your rights and asking for help

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[12] Under British colonial rule, Zimbabwe's agricultural land was divided into agro-ecological zones, reflecting climate, soil type and productivity. A1 (smallholder) and A2 (medium-scale commercial) sites.

WLZ has observed that when women have land rights, they are included in farming and enterprise investment decisions by their male spouse. As a result they have increased economic power. This has been observed to have a spill-over effect, where women who have land rights and greater economic power also have increased voice and agency. A practical way in which this manifests is by women taking on community leadership roles.

WLZ's work identifies a pragmatic entrypoint to tackling gender inequity.

> **They enhance women's agency and social and political capital by building and supporting locally rooted peer support mechanisms through community-level rural women's assemblies.**

By linking these into national and regional political lobbying and policy engagement, WLZ provides women with greater voice and seeks to change not only *de jure* legal frameworks (national laws) but also *de facto* national and local practice (decision-making within the spousal relationship, within kinship networks and by customary leaders).

The choice of entry point is driven by the priorities of Zimbabwean women and girls, rather than representing an agenda driven externally. By focusing on women's access to and control of land as a productive asset, this work has the potential of partially redressing the racialisation of land allocation in Zimbabwe, which - along with many other harms - damaged women's use-rights.

WLZ's approach identifies entry points for countering colonial dynamics in that it is:

- Rooted in the priorities of Zimbabwean women and girls

- Funded by a feminist organisation hubbed in the Global South

- Builds the agency, social and political capital of Zimbabwean women, enabling them to contribute directly in domestic and regional political and policy debates, rather than via an interlocutor or intermediary

If you want to hear more about the links between land rights, decolonisation and feminism, you can listen to our podcast interviews with Prof Andries du Toit here and Dr Nompilo Ndlovu here.

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This case study highlights the intersections of gender, poverty, and marginalisation, with rurality having a major impact on the well-being and agency of women and their families.

Insights for decolonial activism and advocacy:

Respond to local prioritisation and agenda setting

WLZ has developed an effective lobbying campaign rooted in responding to the concerns and priorities identified by local women. Wider application of this lesson suggests that a decolonised approach to agenda setting and strategy development might be one which de-centres priorities identified in the minority world and instead sets priorities and designs programmes and projects through genuine consultation with communities, street level bureaucrats, national governments and regional organisations (e.g. SADC).

Build social and political capital through group formation and collective action

WLZ's support to women's land rights in Zimbabwe is organised around rural women's assembly groups. These build solidarity networks and engage in rights campaigning.

Build bottom-up institutions and deeply rooted social movements

WLZ links community-level rural women's assemblies with each other across Zimbabwe and enables representatives to meet regionally at SADC level summits other women's groups and women's land rights campaigners. Wider application of this lesson could see the replication of bottom-up institution building and the development of region-wide social and policy efforts.

Recognise the importance of representation

Applying this approach to the current development ecosystem we might see the national and regional strategies of bilateral and multilateral donors and INGOs recognising the importance of voice, representation and 'power with'. This would seek to agglomerate the priorities of communities from the local to national level and then from national to regional, alongside meaningful inputs from local, national and regional representatives.

Candy Sotomayor

CASE STUDY 3: *TERRITORIO CUERPO-TIERRA* AS A PRACTICE OF DECOLONIAL FEMINIST RESISTANCE. WRITTEN BY ALBA MURCIA.

Territorio cuerpo-tierra[13] has emerged as a concept in Latin America, embodying feminist resistance to violence against women and neoliberal land extraction. *Territorio cuerpo-tierra* materialises in the context of feminist engagement with movements against extraction operations and land appropriation[14] in Latin America and is seen in women's movements defending their territory (Colectivo Miradas Críticas del Territorio desde el Feminismo, 2017). These movements confront circumstances including commercial land use and resource extraction, appropriation, and dispossession, driven by neoliberal expansion, armed conflict, and sustainable development strategies[15] (Ulloa, 2016).

In Latin America and the Caribbean, indigenous women face the intersection of discrimination against women and against indigenous peoples, which puts them at further risk of experiencing gender-based violence (CEPAL, 2013). Furthermore, "three out of every four murders of human rights defenders occur in the Americas, of which 41% were opposing extractive projects or defending the right to land and to natural resources of indigenous peoples" (UN Women, 2017).

> **Indigenous and rural women who actively participate in land defence are in a particularly vulnerable position and more likely to experience violence.**

Territorio cuerpo-tierra places emphasis on the women at the centre of these processes, particularly those from indigenous, afro-descendant and *pueblos originarios* communities[16], who exist at the intersection of colonialist, patriarchal, and

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[13] Can be directly translated as 'territory body-land'.

[14] Extractive operations can be defined as acts that exploit or 'extract' raw materials from the Earth, often involving mining, gas, oil, and timber industries, among others (Deborah Lana, 2021).

[15] The implementation of sustainable development strategies following Agenda 2030 (SDGs) has resulted in a weakening of indigenous territorial movements and a loss in their ability to articulate with development discourse (Hope, 2020, p.182).

[16] *Pueblos originarios* is the term used by the Indigenous peoples of Latin America.

capitalist systems of power. This movement enables indigenous and rural women to articulate the link between gender-based violence and land extraction and appropriation, by showing that both enact power and control over women's bodies by restricting their autonomy and sovereignty.

Communitarian feminism and intersectionality

Communitarian feminism has emerged as an "action-based way of thinking", which acknowledges that the patriarchal oppression present in ancestral cultures was reinforced by Western patriarchal oppression imposed through colonialism (Julieta Paredes cited in Sanabria, 2016). It traces its origins to indigenous communities in Latin America, particularly Abya Yala communities[17] in present-day Guatemala and Bolivia. As a result, patriarchy is identified as "the system of all oppression, all exploitation, all violence, and all discrimination experienced by humanity (women, men and intersex people) and nature, as a system historically constructed on the sexed body of women" (Cabnal, 2010, p.16). This is where communitarian feminism acknowledges the intersectionality of feminist, indigenous, and anti-colonial struggles for rights. It links movements for land defence with movements against gender-based violence, placing women's bodies at the centre. This highlights the movement as a feminism centred around "thought-action", and defines itself as a political action rather than a theory (Paredes, 2016, p.108).

Communitarian feminist thought proposes Buen Vivir[18] as an alternative way of life in community, and takes the body as a territory of struggle (Paredes, 2016). Julieta Paredes describes how women's social organisations in Bolivia have been able to mobilise against neoliberal governance following five dynamic categories, which are bodies, space, time, memory, and the women's movements. The 'body' is understood as the place from which women "have time to know and do theories", and to "name things from [themselves], with the sound of [their] own voice" (2011, p.201). In this way, women's bodies become the territory from which to enact resistance from an individual and collective location. Communitarian territorial feminism gives a voice to the ancestral memory of violence against the bodies of indigenous women, and challenges the notion that feminist resistance emerges exclusively in the Global North (Leyva Solano & Icaza, 2019).

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[17] Abya Yala is the name given to the region of Latin America by its Indigenous peoples.
[18] Can be directly translated as 'Good Living'.

Feminist resistance through food sovereignty in Colombia

In Colombia, rural social movements closely embed women's fights for protection of life and territory. The Ruta Pacífica de Las Mujeres (2013) report illustrates how women's bodies are subjected to entrenched forms of violence, and how these bodies then enact resistance in their communities. Significantly, there are disparities in the approaches taken by local Colombian advocacy groups, such as Proceso de Comunidades Negras (PCN), and international development organisations such as Oxfam. While PCN prioritises "territorial experiences and ancestral knowledge" (therefore embodying *territorio cuerpo-tierra*), Oxfam representatives working with rural women's movements in Colombia framed the issues around ending patriarchy (Rodriguez Castro, 2021: 348). This indicates a tension between local knowledge and mainstream development priorities, illustrating how the Colonial Matrix of Power (CMP) operates in rural feminist movements in Latin America when INGOs are involved.

In facing their struggles to own and protect their land, rural women in Colombia have adopted food sovereignty as an entry point for resistance. The deep penetration of markets into Colombia means that most agricultural produce is imported, thus reducing the food security and autonomy of rural producers. By adopting food sovereignty, rural women withdraw from formal markets. This enhances household food security, as they grow food for home consumption in their own gardens. This shifts power within the household and between women and market institutions, challenging patriarchal and neoliberal power structures.

> **Food sovereignty grants rural women greater power over their land and food production and reinforces their claims to territorial sovereignty.**

Rural women are therefore enacting resistance through their bodies in their territories, embodying the principles of *territorio cuerpo-tierra* as a form of resistance to neo-colonial and patriarchal structures of power.

This case study is a prominent example of communities of women enacting decolonial resistance through indigenous knowledge and lived experience. It showcases how indigenous movements for territorial integrity are constructed around ancestral knowledge, such as Buen Vivir, which contests the hegemony of Western positivism and brings forward alternative value systems. It also calls attention to intersectionality, as these forms of knowledge recognise how certain individuals are placed at the

margins of patriarchal, racial, and colonial oppression. It provides a nuanced insight into how land rights and indigenous women's issues are articulated in the Global South and advocated for by local social movements.

To gain further insights into the links between feminism, decolonisation and indigenous knowledge systems in Latin America, listen to our podcast episode with Emilie Tant here.

Insights for decolonial activism and advocacy:

- Rural feminist movements in Latin America frame women's resistance to violence in different terms than traditional development narratives

- Indigenous women face double oppression through patriarchy within their own communities and neoliberal expansion against their communities. As a result, they enact feminist resistance based on an intersectional approach

- Claims to land and territorial integrity are effectively articulated by local feminist movements alongside claims to women's bodily integrity

3. Intersectional feminism in INGOs

The following section spotlights feminist INGOs implementing anti-racism and decolonisation into their work.

CASE STUDY 4: WOMANKIND WORLDWIDE

Womankind Worldwide is an international women's rights organisation and funder, working with women's rights groups and feminist movements across the world to promote gender equity. Womankind Worldwide has sought to integrate decolonisation and anti-racism through its organisational culture, partnership alliances and funding strategies and its commitment to these changes is articulated in the organisation's anti-racism pledge.

Womankind Worldwide

Significantly, Womankind Worldwide made a pledge rather than a statement, because they wanted a dynamic tool that would capture their aspirations and commitments and support accountability in meeting their stated goals in terms of internal transformation and outward facing changes in practice.

Through this pledge, Womankind acknowledges the colonial origins of the international aid sector and recognises their organisation's position within that context. Womankind distinguishes their commitments to anti-racism along 3 streams:

1. **Internal commitments** focused on addressing organisational culture through consciousness raising, positive action in hiring initiatives, and integrating an anti-racism lens to their strategy development process.

2. **Commitments to partners and allies** through shared understanding and flexible funding. This stream is focused on supporting partner organisations in the Global South by shifting power rather than simply 'amplifying voices'.

3. **Commitments in funding, communications and public affairs** in order to promote an open discussion about the colonial dynamics in fundraising practice and create an anti-racist and feminist fundraising and communications strategy.

The pledge makes specific, measurable and time bound commitments that Womankind Worldwide can be held to account for. This ties the pledge into organisational change objectives and incorporates both internally facing and externally oriented goals that seek to change the recruitment and management of human resources and other areas including fundraising; grant making; relationships with partner organisations; external communications and public affairs. It represents an ambitious commitment to progressive change, deeply rooted in internal and external consultations.

What can we learn from this pledge and its implementation? In the box below we outline key lessons for feminist organising and for activism around decolonising and shifting power in development.

Disha Sughand (Womankind Worldwide) also talks us through some of the challenges and successes Womankind Worldwide have experienced in developing and operationalising their pledge on our podcast 'The Power Shift: Decolonising Development', Episode 12:

<u>Insights for decolonial activism and advocacy</u>:

- **Co-creation is key** to ensuring that the aspirations and vision of all staff, partners and trustees are accounted for in the anti-racism pledge.

- Flexible funding mechanisms are key to establishing a **relationship of mutual trust** between funders and partner organisations which **counters implicit issues in traditional contracting.**

- Challenging the prevalent assumption that those working in development are "the good guys", and instead **questioning the power imbalances within the sector** and within and between development organisations.

- Facilitating the **space for co-creation and self-reflection** are essential to feminist change.

- **Changes in organisational culture** need to be backed by commitment from leadership and funding, and need to take place at all levels of an organisation's structure from the personal to the systematic.

- **Transformational change takes time** and requires a lot of **resilience**.

- Feminist thinking and perspective align with anti-racism and decolonisation initiatives in terms of **dismantling power imbalances and challenging inequalities.**

CASE STUDY 5: CREA

[CREA](#) is a feminist international human rights organisation based in the Global South and led by women from the Global South. CREA is active in advocacy and policy engagement around the feminist agenda, human rights, and sexual rights. They do this by feeding the experiences and priorities of people in the Global South into global processes and dialogues.

<u>How does CREA acknowledge and challenge structural inequity?</u>

- Recognises that the political, structural, and societal underpinnings of inequity and oppression reinforce each other. Meaningful and sustainable change can only be driven by engagement that is adaptable, relevant, and radical.

- Works with structurally excluded people, including women and girls, women with disabilities, lesbians and queer women, non-binary, gender non-conforming and trans people. They seek to prevent individual harms by dismantling the structures that construct and sustain those harms, and to create pathways to justice for persons excluded because of their real or perceived genders, sexualities, identities, or chosen forms of labour.

- Applies a structural lens to understand exclusion and marginalisation, seeking to understand certain people as being 'structurally excluded'. This focuses on the ways in which social structures, norms and institutions prevent certain people from benefiting from the full spectrum of rights and from participating in their communities and decision-making spaces meaningfully and effectively.

- Centres these individuals, believing that they are the people best placed to question the norms and challenge the power structures that affect their lives and to demand their rights, and advocate on their own behalf.

CREA's approach focuses on questioning existing structures and norms around gender and sexuality, reframing rights around affirmative choice and consent. Their work applies an intersectional lens in seeking to dismantle the sexist, ableist, heteronormative and homophobic architecture that perpetuates and sustains systemic and pervasive gender-based violence (GBV).
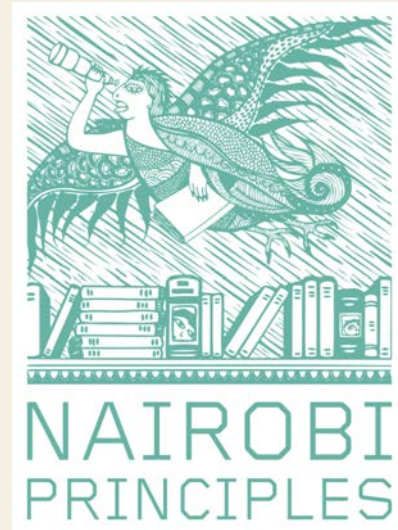

CREA

How does CREA seek to influence global feminist discourse?

Change at the organisational level

CREA creates innovative learning opportunities, builds and supports networks, facilitates mentorship, and creates knowledge resources in multiple Global South languages. A substantial part of their work is focused on influencing broader feminist movements. They convene boundary-breaking discussions on topics that women's movements have too often excluded, ignored, or glossed over[19]. They work with organisations and movements to include women and gender-diverse persons who have been previously excluded and to support them in recognising the gendered and other stereotypes that influence their work. They challenge organisations and movements to find common ground with each other, and support the creation of cross-movement networks. They seek to deepen conversations, understanding and action based on dynamic and evolving rights-based approaches to address inequity.

CREA World

> **CREA's inclusive and critical feminist practice is to build cross-movement conversations, understanding and action. Creating these links has become integral to acknowledging, addressing and perhaps even repairing the fault lines within feminist movements.**

Change at the policy level

Finally, CREA's policy engagement work advocates for more informed and inclusive laws and policies, including non-carceral legal and policy responses.[20] They recognise inequity at all levels of policy-making and work with organisations and movements to include Global South perspectives in legal and policy development. This attempts to

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[19] A few examples: Nairobi Principles - Global Dialogue on Abortion, Pre Natal Testing and Disability and Ain't I a Woman: A Global Dialogue between the Sex Workers' Rights movement and the Stop Violence Against Women movement.

[20] Carceral feminism advocates for increasing prison sentences for people found guilty of, for example, sex work or sexual and gender based violence. A non-carceral approach sees punitive power as anchored in patriarchy and seeks instead the transformative potential of community-based responses, rooted in care (Thuma, 2019).

ensure that policy promotes human rights and incorporates a gender, sexual and disability rights perspective.

CREA has also been at the forefront of several Global South-led alliance-building efforts[21]. The organisation's partnerships with national-level NGOs and community-based organisations enable their partners to co-create work with structurally excluded communities, ensuring that they are directly represented in law and policy change processes.

CREA is consistently focused on partnerships that can involve redistributing knowledge, information and resources, while opening spaces and expanding possibilities for activists to build collective power.

How does CREA interact with local/regional/global feminist movements?

- Shared politics and public stand: enabling trust and the willingness to work with CREA. For example, sex worker/activists have particularly emphasised that CREA took the stand that "sex work is work" at a time when it was neither a popular nor common position adopted by most feminist organisations.

- Genuine interest and respect for the knowledge and the perspective of structurally excluded people and their movements. Their constituencies have reported that they always felt heard, respected and understood by CREA representatives, and treated as equals.

- Proactive, consistent engagement and non-instrumental approach – CREA did not treat their constituent organisations instrumentally, seeking them out to achieve something specific, or in one-time encounters, and then dropping or marginalising them. CREA was perceived by constituent organisations as consistently creating spaces and special events for and with them, and was invested in building a long-term relationship.

- CREA's focus on movement-building, rights, and gender based violence, which no feminist organisation had really addressed before.

- Facilitating CREA's access and voice in new spaces (East Africa) and key policy processes (India) – e.g. anti-trafficking bill.

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[21] For example, the Ibtida program across the Indian states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Jharkhand.

Shifting the narrative to reflect on what CREA, as a Global South-based feminist organisation, can bring to Global North organisations in the framework of feminist learning and local knowledge through circular learning

The progression of CREA's programmes have reaffirmed their belief in the importance of women's leadership development, South-South partnerships, the inclusion of marginalised people, and working at the intersections of issues. They have demonstrated first-hand – and external evaluators of CREA programmes have recorded – the impact that women's leadership building can have on individuals, organisations, communities and social movements, nationally and internationally. By enabling structurally excluded people/women around the Global South to articulate, demand and access their human rights, and to lead others to do the same, CREA have contributed to making women's human rights a reality from the grassroots to the global sphere.

To get a wider insight into CREA's role as an international feminist human rights organisation, you can listen to Episode 13 of our podcast 'The Power Shift: Decolonising Development' with Piyumi Samaraweera here.

The Power Shift: Decolonising Development

Episode # 13: Piyumi Samaraweera

Insights for decolonial activism and advocacy:

- Applying an intersectional approach implies **looking through a structural lens** to understand exclusion and marginalisation of certain individuals and communities.

- A rights-based approach empowers communities to **articulate their claims to rights** and advocate for themselves.

- Developing women's leadership through mentorship and knowledge sharing contributes to **strengthening networks and movement-building** of marginalised communities.

- Cross-movement conversations across the Global South create opportunities for alliance-building and collaboration, strengthening **South-South solidarity across social movements**.

CASE STUDY 6: IWRAW ASIA PACIFIC

<u>A radical agenda</u>

International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific (IWRAW-AP) is a feminist organisation based in Kuala Lumpur, founded and led by women from the Global South, and working towards the protection and fulfilment of the human rights of all women everywhere.

IWRAW AP's work has a global agenda; this means that they are not only anti-racist or anti-colonial, but rather they disrupt all systems of power which they regard as generating inequalities. So, they work not only to challenge patriarchy but also neo-liberal capitalism, racism, classism and caste. As Priyanthi Fernando, outgoing Executive Director of IWRAW-AP, explained on our [podcast](#):

> *"You can't just dismantle racism or colonialism without actually having other disruptions as well. You can't just do it by just being anti-racial, for example. That's not enough. You have to be anti-racial at the same time, you have to smash the patriarchy, you have to dismantle neoliberalism. You have to do all of that together because they feed into each other and I think we haven't really unentangled those links between these very oppressive systems."*

IWRAW-AP applies an intersectional and decolonial approach to their work by acknowledging and critiquing the global system which embeds coloniality, patriarchy and neoliberalism. Within this framework, they are conscious of the multiple structures that need to be dismantled, such as border controls which restrict mobility and the globalised market which prioritises economic growth. Their disruptive approach not only points at race, coloniality, and gender but also at neoliberalism. IWRAW-AP calls on governments to look at the personal growth and wellbeing of all citizens as benchmarks of development rather than exclusively focusing on economic indicators.

IWRAW-AP roots all its work in the human rights system, and their international advocacy focuses largely on human rights treaties, especially the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

Re-centering global dialogues in the Global South

IWRAW-AP focuses on mobilising women to challenge these structures through their programmes and through advocacy at CEDAW and other platforms. They engage in this work alongside allies including Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN), Third World Network (TWN), Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID), and Sexual Rights Initiative (SRI).

Significantly, IWRAW-AP organises the Global South Women's Forum, which centres the voices of women from the Global South and provides an open space for them to talk about their needs. This initiative displaces the traditional location of global forums being hosted in the Global North, and instead generates a space for dialogue which is accessible to participants from the Global South, including marginalised women whose voices rarely contribute to public discourse.

Since the pandemic, these global fora have been held online, which has contributed to increasing their accessibility to women from the Global South, as travel is no longer required. IWRAW-AP makes considerable efforts to facilitate online access for poor and marginalised women.

> **By centring the voices and experiences of women from the Global South, these fora disrupt the status quo where elite Global North individuals and organisations dominate and set the agenda.**

An example from one of these global fora is the Global Tribunal for Women Workers, which brought together 73 women giving personal testimonies of their experiences of rights violations, with delegates from 23 different countries and 12 labour sectors.

One of the most notable things about this event was the presence of online counsellors to support the women who were sharing testimonies about the violation of their human rights. This illustrates the value that IWRAW-AP gives to their participants and the efforts that they place on creating a genuinely safe space for them, as it recognises that sharing personal stories of human rights violations may surface trauma that will need processing.

Another key aspect was the inclusion of online interpretation in 16 languages, meaning that all women could actively listen and participate in their own language. This created solidarity among women from different countries and continents and a safe space for them to come forward, talk about their lived experience, and articulate their demands for their rights.

IWRAW AP's approach is transformative, radical, and disruptive.

<u>Insights for decolonial activism and advocacy</u>:

- **Oppression needs to be addressed structurally at all levels** – it is not enough to be only anti-racist, anti-patriarchal, or anti-colonial.

- **Shifting global dialogues to fora in the Global South** centres the voices and experiences of those who are excluded from Global North-based global fora and **shifts agenda-setting power**.

- **Solidarity across movements** in the Global South strengthens decolonial activism and advocacy.

- International human rights frameworks can be implemented to **challenge discrimination** of marginalised communities.

Conclusion

This paper has considered multiple case studies to illustrate the local strategies and actions that feminist organising, in the form of movements and organisations, have adopted in order to challenge gender inequity and discrimination. Although the case studies are context specific, key lessons can be identified to enrich decolonisation and anti-racism strategies.

Feminist movements have a deep understanding of **power and positionality**, providing an advantage in identifying and applying effective approaches for **challenging structural oppression**

An example is the adoption of an intersectional approach, which acknowledges context and multiple layers of discrimination affecting individuals and groups. Applying an intersectional approach to anti-racist and decolonial action acknowledges how colonial and patriarchal forms of power interact to marginalise certain groups and individuals.

South-South learning can be harnessed and used to **influence the global feminist and development discourse**

Another common element was the importance of South-South and circular learning and creating spaces for global dialogue. This was highlighted in the case study on decriminalising sex work in India and both CREA's and IWRAW-AP's case studies. This approach to communicating and sharing ideas facilitated dialogue between marginalised groups, such as sex workers and women from the Global South, and ensured accessibility and the safety of participants. Similarly, the case study on *territorio cuerpo-tierra* in Colombia points at the importance of valuing alternative knowledge and value systems; this is an inherent part of creating spaces where a range of voices and perspectives are given a platform and centred in global dialogue.

Access to resources generates individual **empowerment** and promotes **local agency**

The case study on women's land rights in Uganda and Zimbabwe and the case study on *territorio cuerpo-tierra* in Colombia draw attention to the importance of access to resources in generating individual empowerment and agency, and shifting power in the private spheres of family and households. In Zimbabwe, women's access to assets enhanced their power in not only the conjugal contract, but also out in their community. Likewise, in Colombia, women's control over food production in their

gardens granted them autonomy over their land and allowed them to continue to feed their families and their community. These cases exemplify the importance of a community's access to resources in challenging power imbalances and ensuring local agency. They highlight the importance of pathways towards shifting power in development funding and humanitarian action so that local actors are in the driving seat.

South-South partnerships are crucial in delivering outcomes

By promoting co-creation among structurally excluded communities, organisations such as CREA World and IWRAW-AP are able to facilitate the sharing of knowledge and generate spaces that foster collective power and activism. Partnerships across the Global South centre the voices and lived experiences of communities which are often marginalised from global dialogues, and thus not considered in the design of development and humanitarian priorities. They also promote local agency by empowering communities to bring about local change through activism and policy-making.

Social movements are driven forwards by **working at the 'ideas frontier' and on the intersections of issues**, rather than crowding together on the mainstream agenda.

As seen with the push for the decriminalisation of sex work in India, supporting marginalised communities allows their members to organise into a collective, become empowered, and advocate for their rights at the community, regional, and global level. By allying with, collaborating with, and supporting communities of individuals who are located at the intersection of multiple levels of oppression, social movements can be driven forward to influence the global agenda and achieve lasting change.

> **Feminist thinking and practice align with anti-racism and decolonisation initiatives. Both seek to dismantle power imbalances and challenge inequalities locally and systemically.**
>
> **Collaboration between feminist and decolonial actions and strategies is possible.**

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Annex 1: Women's land rights: life history evidence.

Box 1: The long term impact of spousal conflict when women have no rights to land[22]

Laurant[23] is 22 and from rural Uganda. Laurant's father is an alcoholic and regularly beats his mother. Laurant has tried to intervene, but feels unable to protect Agatha from his father's drunken rages.

Laurant's father, Moses, is relatively wealthy by village standards. He had five acres of land, a range of productive and household assets[24] and a better quality house than many. The household has two granaries[25], and they used to have a number of cattle and goats. Moses was previously highly respected in the community (social capital), indicated by the fact that he was the elected village head until 18 months ago (political capital).

Despite his father's current or previous high asset levels, Laurant is poor. Why is this the case, and how does it relate to women's land rights?

Moses is polygamous, with two wives. Laurant's mother, Agatha, was the first wife, but the second wife, Alice, is favoured. When Laurant was only a few months old, his father lost his Kampala-based hotel job. In an attempt to maintain consumption levels for Alice, he chased Agatha away and sold off household assets. Agatha left her children behind[26] when she left, but, Alice, her co-wife, refused to feed them.

Moses claimed that Laurant was illegitimate and singled him out for harsh treatment. When Agatha found out, she collected her children and took them to live with her at their grandfather's house. But she had difficulty supporting them as a single mother without access to land, and this resulted in the children being shuttled

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[22] This life story was collected in Uganda by Kate Bird and Isaac Shinyekwa, while working with the Chronic Poverty Research Centre. The research aimed to explore how living in remote rural areas contributed to the chronicity of poverty. However, the mixed methods approaches used (life histories with women and men from different well-being groups, community-based focus group discussions and key informant interviews at local and national levels along with quantitative analysis of panelised household data), uncovered some counterintuitive findings. One was the importance of spousal relationships in poverty outcomes.

[23] Names have been changed.

[24] e.g. 9 hoes, a panga, an axe, 5 saucepans, a bicycle, a radio.

[25] This is a local indicator of wealth, as it indicates that they have enough land to produce a surplus of food to store for home consumption.

[26] This is entirely normal in a Ugandan setting. Men do not pay maintenance for ex-wives and children, so leaving your children with your husband is often the only way of ensuring that they will get fed.

between Moses's house and their grandfather's. She kept Laurant with her, to protect him.

Eventually, when Laurant was 2, Agatha decided to go back to her husband, Moses. This seemed to be the only way to ensure that everyone had enough to eat. She and Moses resumed their marriage and had several more children, but by the time Laurant was six the marriage had broken down again. Agatha left, but returned *again* when Laurant was 14 to ensure that her sons were given some of their father's land when they got married, which is commonly the moment of inheritance, in rural Uganda.

Laurant knew that with his family's history of problems it would be difficult to find a woman prepared to marry him, but 2 years ago he was introduced to a secondary school drop-out who was eight weeks pregnant and facing her own challenges in finding a spouse. He is delighted with his wife, has adopted her daughter, and they have had a son together.

Sadly for Laurent and his five brothers, there is little now left of the family's former wealth to inherit, and Laurant received only $\frac{1}{8}$ acre from his father when he got married. He and his wife depend on brick making and casual work in order to knit together a livelihood providing enough food to eat.

What is clear is that Laurant's poverty is not simply due to the erosion of family assets. It is also the long-term outcome of strife between his parents, the systematically unequal distribution of resources within the household, his mother's exclusion from land ownership and inheritance rights and the damage to his family's reputation made by his father's alcoholism and his parent's erratic relationship.

Box 2: Property grabbing in Zimbabwe.

Grace is a 30 year old widow with 4 children[27]. Until her husband died, she farmed 4 acres with her husband. When her husband died, she was pregnant with their fourth child. Despite this, his family evicted her and her children from their home and land and sent her back to her parents with nothing.

When she arrived back at her parents' compound, they gave her a 0.5 acre portion of her father's land to farm. This was to enable her to feed her children and have control of any profits she generated. She cultivates groundnuts, roundnuts and maize for home consumption, with half the land under sorghum so that she can produce *sudza* (a thick porridge) for the family and brew *Chibuku* (local beer)[28]. She sells this so that she can raise money for school fees. She also rents a small plot to cultivate horticultural crops for home consumption and sale and engages in petty trading and casual labour to ensure an income flow. She also owns 2 chickens and 2 chicks, but owns very little else in the way of assets.

Grace and the children have lived at her parents' compound now for ten years and they are well settled. She contributes to the wider household and they all eat together. They have comfortable reciprocal relationships and if she needs to, she can borrow farming equipment from them. Nevertheless, with an eightfold collapse in the land under her command, a sharp fall in productive assets, and the loss of social status she has experienced as a widow, Grace's standard of living, agency and autonomy has declined sharply since the death of her husband. She must also work hard, running numerous livelihood streams just to maintain food security and keep her children in school. She has not yet found a way to save, invest and accumulate and her children will have almost no land to inherit, leaving their future uncertain.

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[27] This life history was collected by Kate Bird during a mixed methods study in Zimbabwe, exploring livelihoods and poverty dynamics.

[28] Beer brewing is a common livelihood activity amongst widows and single mothers, as it is a form of agro-processing that adds considerable value, has a ready local market and has few barriers to entry. However, it is a drudgery intense activity, involving hauling large quantities of water and walking long distances to collect firewood to heat the water for the brewing process. The brewing process itself, requires both time and labour and the beer, once brewed, must then be decanted from petrol drums into jerry cans for sale.

This illustrates the fragility of women's place within patrilocal marriage systems[29] and where women do not have confirmed and protected rights to land acquired through marriage. It illustrates the impact that eviction has on the agency and dignity of women with fragile land rights and the impacts of eviction on their livelihoods and well-being and the long-term poverty trajectories of them and their children. Grace's story shows that without independent land rights, women can abruptly lose marital assets on widowhood, with no choice but to relocate and access land via another man.

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[29] Grace moved to her husband's village on marriage, leaving behind her parents, friends and extended social network. When her husband died she was vulnerable to expulsion, with weak social capital, she had no defenders when her husband's family evicted her and her children from their home and land.