

Leading for Change

**Case studies from
organisations committed
to gender equality**



About FAIR SHARE of Women Leaders

Our story

FAIR SHARE was founded in late 2018 by a group of women from the sector, devastated by reports of sexual and power abuse in leading NGOs and determined to accelerate gender equity in the global social impact sector.

Our vision

We envision a global social impact sector that walks the talk on gender equity, with organisations embracing principles of Feminist Leadership at all levels.

Our mission

We equip individuals and organisations within the sector with tools and strategies for change; advocate for Feminist Leadership; and hold the sector accountable by monitoring the proportion of women leaders annually.

Learn more at www.fairsharewl.org



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Why Leading for Change?

Three years ago, we started to measure the number of women in leadership positions in the social impact sector. And there does seem to be progress in the numbers: in 2021 we saw 46% women in senior management and Board positions, up 5% from 2020. That being said, we need to make sure that we create the organisational and leadership cultures to turn these initial, promising figures into long-term change. To build truly diverse, inclusive and representative organisations we have to re-think our understanding of leadership, structures and hierarchies. We are convinced that Feminist Leadership is a powerful tool to drive this transformation.

"To build truly diverse, inclusive and representative organisations we have to re-think our understanding of leadership, structures and hierarchies."

what Feminist Leadership would look like on an organisational level? How are others increasing gender equity in their structures? And how can we make sure we drive this transformation together, as a sector?

To start answering some of these questions, we turned to some of the frontrunners we work with closely: organisations who have made the FAIR SHARE Commitment, pledging to achieve gender equity in their leadership by 2030. With this first collection of their experiences and stories, we hope to inspire and encourage others to start or persevere in their journey towards gender equity and Feminist Leadership.

For the first time, we also decided to share some of the practises and processes we are developing at FAIR SHARE. We have the privilege and challenge to build a feminist organisation from scratch.

And don't be fooled: while the insights you are about to read may at first glance appear to be straightforward 'success stories,' all such initiatives are the result of trial and error, the courage to make mistakes, and the willingness to learn from them. Feminist Leadership is not something one does perfectly, but rather with creativity, persistence, and the support of others.

We hope you'll join us on that journey!

The FAIR SHARE Team



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A renewed commitment to gender equality



Amref's mission is to increase sustainable health access to communities in Africa through solutions in human resources for health, health services delivery and investments in health.

**FAIR SHARE speaks with Dona Anyona
of Amref Health Africa, Technical Lead
Gender Equality and Social Inclusion
(GESI) & Regional Policy and Advocacy**

Tell us about your gender policy review.

We are currently reviewing our gender policy in several ways. We are incorporating sexual orientation and gender identity and, as a whole, taking an intersectional approach to the review. We have included the concept of “do no harm,” which the original policy was missing. We also wanted to unpack gender a bit, as gender itself is not homogenous, and there are particularly vulnerable communities within the various identities. Lastly, we’re bringing in gender-transformative and feminist approaches.

How did it come about?

Amref’s commitment to gender equality has been implicit in our operations, including the work of our pioneers, current and past institutional leadership, our human resources policy and in the choice of the beneficiaries of our programmes. The latest commitments are laid out in our programme strategy which, guided by our mission, vision statement and core values, is designed to create a broad-based culture of health promotion, prevention and care in the African health arena. However, we realised that our gender policy needed a review to comprehensively commit to transformed gender equality, not just at a programmatic level but also at an institutional and organisational level. Further, to bring it in line with the Sustainable Development Goals and its Leave No One Behind commitment, it was important to expand the policy to capture social inclusion.

The design of the review, which is ongoing, is led by our Gender, Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) Community of Practice (CoP), which we established just last year.



Tell us about more about this community of practice.

Many departments and initiatives within Amref have activities and programmes with a GESI component, so we thought, “Let’s bring people together and share what we do, give each other advice and exchange practices that can be replicated.” We are one of the “influencer” CoPs that cuts across to the technical areas of other CoPs (e.g. Health Financing, Human Resources for Health, Maternal Neonatal Child Health, SRHR) and brings together colleagues from across the Amref African and Northern offices. Many of our colleagues are also in the group because we are passionate believers in the GESI principles and would like to bring together our energies to lift GESI to a higher level within Amref. For example, we share what is done on GESI with our country office colleagues. The CoP also supports the business development team when they’re applying for grants, and we are currently working with our monitoring and evaluation team to develop institutional gender and social inclusion indicators to guide our interventions. The idea is that the country offices can set up similar groups. In the Netherlands, this process has already started and others are also hoping to kick-start this cascading model soon.



Participants at Amref's Wellness Festival in Feb 2020 in Tatu City, Kenya. (Same as previous page)

What outcomes do you hope this review will have?

This renewed policy will strengthen our programmatic work and our organisational commitment to Gender Equality and Social Inclusion. Amref does not currently have an organisation-wide approach or policy on how we ensure GESI is embedded in all projects and programmes. We would like to develop programme support tools and processes, reviewing how we include all groups in the design, implementation and evaluation of programmes as a standard practice rather than on a case-by-case basis.

At an organisational level we are already in the process of reviewing HR policies, such as ensuring there is a gender balance in staffing at all levels, reviewing how we can have a diverse work force and so on. ("Diverse" referring here to gender, age, disability, ethnicity, etc). It also means reviewing how

we communicate by using empowering words and images when we refer to marginalised groups, such as people with a disability. It is important that we not only look at how we improve services, but also how we genuinely transform communities so that decision-making and access is inclusive.

The revised policy will be a guiding document for our gender integration within Amref operations and in programmatic interventions. These interventions include: gender-based violence prevention and response; maternal, child, adolescent and youth health; youth reproductive health; water, sanitation and hygiene; and the prevention of harmful practices, like female genital mutilation. In all these programmes, gender and social inclusion is integrated following policy guidance. In addition, the policy guides gender mainstreaming within broader organisational processes.

What advice would you give to someone who wants to try something similar in their workplace?

The advice I would give when it comes to mainstreaming gender and social inclusion, a major principle of rights-based approaches, is to:

1. Make sure senior leadership is involved and committed
2. Earmark adequate resources in the budget
3. Recognise that it is a long-term process which takes time, resources and continued commitment

There has to be a deliberate effort to support the development and implementation of policies and manuals, and for this you need financial means and a lot of patience and commitment to see it through. Allocating financial resources shows commitment towards gender equality in the organisation itself and its programmatic interventions. Accountability and responsibility mechanisms also need to be installed. Lastly, don't reinvent the wheel. Other organisations have done it as well, so learn from them and get inspired.

What are your next steps?

We will start the operationalisation of the GESI policy across the organisation, including in organisational policies, structures, practices, programmes and communications. This approach will be widely adopted as a strategy to ensure that GESI perspectives are addressed in all departments and at all levels. All staff will be trained on GESI over time, ranging from basic training for all staff to more in-depth training for programme and project staff. For the operational plan, we will identify different priority areas per department. For example, in programmes we want to consolidate the various gender and social inclusion training curriculums that are used across various countries, as well as the other tools such as programme checklists and GESI barrier analysis tools. In HR, we will review policies to promote diversity and inclusion and equal opportunities for all. In communications, we will look at how we communicate and review the language and images we use. The GESI Community of Practice will also start sending newsletters about our work across the organisation and popularise the policy and the knowledge we are generating within our community of practice. We are at the start of a very exciting journey; a journey through which we hope to contribute to a more just and equitable Africa in all aspects of our work.

“It is a long-term process which takes time, resources and continued commitment.”

An intersectional gender approach



ARTICLE¹⁹

ARTICLE 19 is an international human rights organisation working to defend and promote freedom of expression and freedom of information worldwide. When either of these freedoms is threatened, through the failure of those in power to adequately protect it, ARTICLE 19 speaks with one voice, through the courts, global and regional organisations and civil society.

**FAIR SHARE speaks with Simon Petitjean
of ARTICLE 19, Senior Project Officer
Gender and Sexuality**

Tell us about your Gender and Sexuality programme.

ARTICLE 19 has made a deep commitment to centre an intersectional gender approach at the core of its operations and strategy. Our Gender and Sexuality programme, which we have been implementing for the past five years, functions as a unique set of activities, including initiatives and projects focusing on women and LGBTQI+ people, and cuts across all five of ARTICLE 19's strategic themes or "core pillars".

How did ARTICLE 19 come to this approach?

Like many well-intentioned organisations, ARTICLE 19 started its work with some blind spots. We looked at freedom of expression as if it affects everyone equally and were developing programmes with that assumption. Over time, we realised that not all communities have the same access to participation in the media in the first place, and that matters related to freedom of expression impacted women and LGBTQI+ people in specific ways: women journalists, for example, experience much more online harassment than their male peers.

So, around seven years ago we created a role in the organisation specifically to focus on how gender and sexuality impact freedom of expression. Rather than treating women or LGBTQI+ people as an add-on or afterthought, we now reflect on those questions from the beginning and incorporate them into how we design projects, methodologies and research.

In this process, we aim to be as intersectional as possible. We realised early on that we can't just say 'women' and expect that to do the work of including all women. We needed to take extra steps to make sure trans women and women from indigenous communities and other marginalised groups are represented.



"...we realised that not all communities have the same access to participation in the media."

How did you go about designing and implementing this approach?

The intent to centralise gender and sexuality in the organisation's work was articulated throughout a specific method, which we developed ourselves, called the Mx method. This is an internal paper which was developed by the head of the programme, Judy Taing, with input from regional offices and other parts of the organisation. The paper addresses these issues across all programmatic work, operations and human rights policies, including specific outcomes for each strategic theme, disaggregated at regional levels. These outcomes were integrated in the organisation's current strategic plan, a process designed in parallel to the Mx method. In terms of implementation, the process has been to develop working relationships with all core thematic leads and regional offices in order to raise awareness about issues related to gender and sexuality, and thus be able to integrate them into various programmes.

Describe the outcomes thus far, both intended and unintended.

The Gender and Sexuality programme has greatly expanded in the past five years in a very positive way. It has become increasingly evident for all staff members that these feminist principles need to be incorporated into our programmes. As a result, feminist approaches are increasingly mainstreamed in the various thematic projects of ARTICLE 19, which was one of the main intended effects of the programme's implementation. Many staff members are even asking for further support to integrate this approach in their work. What we have observed throughout the years is that this programme does require specific internal work, in terms of ensuring that feminist principles are incorporated by all—for example, we offer further workshops and trainings for all staff members to define terms and ensure we all speak the same language with the same intentions.

What did you learn from this process?

This work requires significant communication, pedagogy and patience. It is not a short-term process and it requires one to remain persistent as challenges rise. We engage in constant research and expertise development to ensure that the organisation participates actively in the wider feminist debate while growing its capacity and knowledge. We also take sociopolitical contexts into account in the process of mainstreaming these principles across our regional offices to understand and break down the barriers to adopting this approach. And, as always, significant fundraising is necessary to carry out this work with the necessary capacity, support and expertise.

What are your next steps?

In our ongoing strategic planning review, which will result in a new four-year strategic plan starting in 2022, we aim to mainstream feminist principles even further throughout all of our work. We are also aiming at broadening our scope of work and adopting a more intersectional approach to connect matters of gender and sexuality with other aspects of identity including religion, indigeneity, ethnicity and socio-economic backgrounds. We are now fundraising for this, from current and new funders, in order to ensure the sustainability of our programmes and work.

Feminist recruiting in practice



In 2020, I was searching for a job. Like many others I scrolled through various websites on a daily basis to find a job posting that spoke to me. Most postings were very similar: you need to have this much experience, that level of education. Many promises are made in such listings, like a “competitive salary” without stating the actual salary range (which exacerbates pay inequalities), or flexible working hours (in the case of care work during a pandemic, this often means someone can just work at night, right?). As a woman of colour in a white-majority country such as Germany, going to an interview or entering new workspaces is filled with a lot of anxiety. You keep your fingers crossed, hoping inappropriate things won’t be said, like, “Your curly hair isn’t from Germany, is it?” or “People should really stop talking about colonialism, it’s long over.”

“The interview process gave me the impression that my voice would be given space and be listened to within the organisation.”

Then I stumbled upon a job listing that did not focus on the length of my professional experience nor require a certain educational degree. Instead, it felt like there was an actual person (or in this case, three) who were behind this listing. It gave me the impression that this organisation was attempting to be transparent. They were open about not being able to offer a “competitive salary,”

but listed the range they could offer. Furthermore, they shared their attempt to rethink recruitment and other processes, which they had reinvigorated based on feminist values.

I decided to apply to the position and was invited to a first interview with the co-founder. During the interview, we had a very open discussion. In the second step, when an interview was set up to meet the then three-person team, candidates were asked whether they would feel comfortable sharing the space with another candidate. This was a new experience for all of us and in hindsight I believe I went into the interview less nervous. It gave me, the candidate, time to reflect on the questions we were asked, without the pressure of all eyes solely being on me. A joint exercise also encouraged collaboration between us candidates. All in all, the job posting and the interview process gave me the impression that my voice would be given space and be listened to within the organisation. Now that I have been on the team for over a year, I can honestly say this is the first professional space I have been in that does not dispute my experiences as a women of colour.

This is what a feminist recruitment process can look like. For me, it also involves looking for people who consciously bring perspectives to the team that were previously missing and who can potentially challenge the team. It requires the organisation to undergo critical self-reflection about its values and its practices. If we want to build organisations that strive for justice, recruitment can be no exception.



Building a safeguarding policy



**FAIR SHARE speaks with Rima Karim of
BRAC International, Head of Gender and
Safeguarding**

Tell us about BRAC's safeguarding policies.

We have an overarching safeguarding policy and a sub-set of policies in the following areas: sexual harassment elimination and the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse; bullying and violence; children and adolescents; adults with special needs; and whistle-blowing.

Let's focus on the sexual harassment safeguarding policy. How does it work?

BRAC takes a zero-tolerance approach towards sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse. The Sexual Harassment Elimination Policy and the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Policy in place at BRAC International take a three-pronged approach to its implementation:

1. Prevention (build awareness)
2. Protection (put policies and systems in place and continue to strengthen them)
3. Reprisal (take disciplinary and exemplary action for any wrongdoing)



"We believe that justice delayed is justice denied."

To address sexual misconduct cases, we have a clear case management protocol in place to ensure that all incidents are heard and reported. Following any report, perpetrators are punished through a fair disciplinary process and given due investigation without any delay. We believe that justice delayed is justice denied. If people complain and nothing comes of it, they will lose confidence in the system. Unless the survivor expresses a different wish or need, appropriate actions would be taken without delay.

In terms of what the process looks like, we have a dedicated committee in every country office, called the Human Resources Compliance Committee, that receives and reviews all complaints and makes collective decisions on whether a case warrants an investigation or other action. They

recommend disciplinary measures based on investigation findings, which are escalated to a separate inquiry review committee that decides on what actions should be taken.

Lastly, to measure the effectiveness of the safeguarding policies, we have a set of indicators that capture data from BRAC International countries through a quarterly internal audit process. The audit process assesses staff knowledge and awareness of policies and reporting channels (e.g., training received, visibility of safeguarding information and reporting channels across offices), the level of confidence they have to lodge complaints, perception of the working environment and actions taken by staff if they experienced any kind of harassment or abuse, if they are willing to share that information. If the review process reveals a safeguarding incident report, this is escalated to the safeguarding focal point.

How did you go about designing and implementing it?

We started through a consultative process with experts in this field and aligned with international standards and best practices. The policies have been reviewed by our board and adapted for each country of operation based on legal vetting and local laws. We have recruitment practices in place to ensure safeguarding is mainstreamed into the entire process, from safeguarding clauses in job descriptions and job advertisements to safeguarding questions in interviews to background checks. We have safeguarding focal points in place in each country office who champion the policies and play a key role alongside HR departments to ensure safeguarding training is part of the onboarding process. Refresher sessions are also periodically provided.

In terms of how we implement this policy when cases arise, we do this in a survivor-centric

way. This means taking into account the wishes and needs of the survivor and doing no harm in addressing reports. If a survivor feels they are not ready to move forward with making a formal complaint, we would not pressure the individual. We keep channels of communication open to make them feel comfortable to do so when they are ready, while encouraging them to report so that we can address the incident and take action as per our policies.

Describe the outcomes thus far, both intended and unintended.

Staff say they feel more empowered to speak out since we have put this policy in place because they know there are many channels through which they can voice their concerns. We see this in the increase in complaints and reporting since staff learned about the policies and reporting channels through training sessions and official meetings.

What advice would you give to someone who wants to try something similar in their workplace?

Our advice is to get buy-in from top-level management to support Feminist Leadership and commit to safeguarding. We would also recommend you have clear indicators in place to monitor progress, invest in dedicated capacity and budgets for safeguarding, ensure continuous awareness building and strengthen capacity on risk analysis of safeguarding and the investigation of cases.

What are your next steps?

We believe that issues like sexual harassment and bullying have many root causes, one of which is gender inequality. To work towards dismantling inequality in our own structures, we are launching a Women Leadership Programme dedicated to building up women who are ready for leadership positions.



BRAC International creates opportunities for people living in poverty to fulfill basic requirements and more. They support these communities in realising their potential using proven and innovative solutions so they can take control of their own lives.

A network of gender-passionate people



CARE International is one of the largest and oldest international humanitarian confederations, delivering emergency relief and long-term international development projects in over 100 countries with 21 members. CARE's programmes work in broad impact areas: women's economic justice, climate justice, food and water systems, health rights and gender inequality. Within each of these areas, CARE aligns around a gender equality framework that integrates women's voices, gender-based violence and education.

**FAIR SHARE speaks with Kassie McIlvaine
of CARE International, Head of Gender
Equality and Inclusion**

**Tell us about the CARE International
Gender Network.**

The CARE International Gender Network (CIGN) is an informal collective of staff from across the entire confederation with the aim of creating an inclusive space of collective reflection, dialogue, debate and action. It was established over 10 years ago and operates independently, meaning that it is not affiliated with any member, structure, department or team, but is representative of most of them. The CIGN influences formal structures, policies and strategies as well as organisational culture. It does so by bringing staff from diverse teams and structures together in a safe environment with a shared agenda to raise their voices and act at local, national, regional and global levels.

How did the CIGN come to be?

In 2008, a group of colleagues from across the confederation came together to create one policy that addressed gender, both programmatically and internally, and applied it to the 14-member confederation. After approval of the policy, this group—made up of mostly white women from the Global North—continued to work together. In the early 2010s, they recognised the team needed to diversify, and a larger, more inclusive network was created. The network met biannually, elected global co-leaders who shared responsibilities and developed an annual work plan that linked with technical gender teams.

Six years later, the first global gathering of gender-passionate people took place, representing over 32 countries and a wide range of positions and roles. CIGN invited people from around the world and made scholarships available to create a diverse global contingent from the humanitarian, development and organisational teams. The conference now takes place biannually (with exception due to the pandemic). Today the network has an email group of over 600 colleagues, a global leadership team of eight women and men from eight different



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countries, booster groups and regional groups. It has strongly influenced what CARE is today.

Tell us about how it's put together.

The initial design was small and focused on “experts”. Since then, it has adapted and re-defined itself based on shared global leadership. Through its diverse membership and responsiveness to the community’s interests, CIGN has created an environment where members support each other to address common interests and shared agendas. Key thematic areas defined in plans are led by working groups connected to the organisation’s more formal structures. In the past, the biannual in-person meetings helped members come together to review CARE’s progress and define its future direction.

What's been the impact so far?

CIGN has impacted policy, programmes and organisational work culture through the following outcomes and activities:

- Established the Feminist Advisory Board (FAB), an external group of global feminists that advise the Secretary General

- Pushed for two global policies (the Gender Policy and the Prevention of Sexual Harassment, Exploitation and Abuse Policy) and consulted on accountability dashboards
- Interviewed feminists from across the globe about how they view CARE as an organisation promoting gender equality, which influenced CARE's Vision2030 strategy process
- Tested tools such as the Gender Marker, global gender indicators and approaches
- Fostered collective reflection, curiosity and learning
- Maintained a vibrant and inclusive email network used to share, learn and connect in all languages
- Created space for staff to feel supported and connected on all things gender and to legitimise ideas and initiatives
- Facilitated dialogue and important conversations not covered by official departments or teams, such as LGBTQI+ inclusion and dialogues about what motivates our women leaders

What did you learn from this process?

Formal and informal spaces: CIGN is an informal space—some call it our feminist social network—and it is driven by both the individual and the collective energy of the members. Despite being informal, it has such a strong global presence.

Informal authority: Members come together and write policies or develop papers on social movements, feminism or menstruation. Such initiatives give the structure legitimacy and an informal authority despite having no formal role.

Don't try and over-control: Let things flow, be inclusive, learn and adapt.

Staff energy as a key resource: CIGN is led by volunteers. No one is paid. CIGN does not have its own budget, which means we are led by ideas rather than driven by a need to spend a certain amount. For biannual global events, members contribute as well as participants.



What are next steps? That is, how will you continue building off the change you made or ensure it is sustainable?

CIGN just launched a new phase of its existence following a feminist election process. It is now led by eight global leaders who come from various regions in which CARE works and other diverse backgrounds. There are also five thematic “booster groups”: Power & Difference, Women’s Voices, LGBTQI+ Inclusion, Dignity and Our Planet and Power. CIGN also includes regional groups that are linked to their respective regional gender networks. Two members of the Global Leadership Team have permanent places at the Gender Round Table, a formal structure responsible for the implementation of the Gender Equality Impact Area Strategy. CIGN also has a representative on the Vision2030 leadership team and within many other formal structures. We recognise there are still challenges ahead of us due power dynamics around language, as well as the fact that the new leadership are also somewhat new to leading in this way. But CIGN puts CARE into positive spaces where feminist principles reign.

Embracing the unknown



I have been working in the social impact sector for almost 20 years for organisations of different sizes, in different team formats and settings, with different types of leaders and with a growing range of responsibilities. Looking back, I would say that I didn't really reflect on the existing leadership cultures, question them or actively want to change them when something didn't agree with me. Within my own leadership responsibilities, I have mostly acted according to my instincts and have done quite well with it.

In my two years at FAIR SHARE, I have now been part of a process of actively and intensely looking at (Feminist) Leadership and organisational culture and trying out different approaches to find my own feminist way. This is, of course, a constant learning process that can be very challenging and interfere with the daily workload which simply must be done. At the same time, we are beginning to internalise Feminist Leadership, operating according to these values without having to stop and decide to do so.

"The Feminist Leadership process is very personal and intimate, where you are more involved with yourself than you might be used to in your professional life."

In addition to the fact that the Feminist Leadership process is very personal and intimate, where you are more involved with yourself than you might be used to in your professional life, it is also a learning process within a team and is linked to your team members, who no doubt have different personalities than

your own. Besides the justified and needed enthusiasm for Feminist Leadership and the wonderful opportunities it offers for our own work and our organisation, I realised how crucial it is to acknowledge that everyone learns at different paces. My experience shows me that our own feminist expectations must be constantly reflected upon and adapted to all those involved in the process, so that common ground is created.

One of our next "Feminist Leadership challenges" at FAIR SHARE is our CEO's upcoming sabbatical, which will realign the existing team structure, redistribute responsibilities and will certainly have an enormous impact on individual learning processes. I am really looking forward to being part of this challenge, to actively shape and implement a new structure and to take on a new level of responsibility in the organisation. This is an important opportunity for us all at FAIR SHARE to once again explore and embrace the unknown, knowing that at least we're in it together.

Equitable hiring practices



EngenderHealth
for a better life

EngenderHealth is a global health organisation committed to advancing sexual and reproductive health and rights and gender equality. Together with a wide range of partners they support individuals, communities and healthcare systems in delivering high-quality, gender-equitable programmes and services. EngenderHealth currently operates in about a dozen countries.

**FAIR SHARE speaks with Traci L. Baird
and Maxine Somerville of EngenderHealth**

Tell us about the recent changes to your hiring practices.

We have taken steps to make our hiring practices more equitable. So far, this has involved: no longer asking for salary history; posting salary ranges; reducing the years of experience required for many roles; posting benefits and policies on parental leave; using the gender-neutral pronoun “they” in our job descriptions; posting jobs in a range of outlets to reach a diverse candidate pool; building diverse interview panels; using mostly standardised interview questions; and checking ourselves if we ever have a shortlist that is homogenous in terms of gender or race/ethnicity.

What sparked the change?

We realised that our job description for a director-level position required so many years of experience that we were unlikely to see any candidates under 40 years of age. With that came the realisation that we needed to review our practices. This started a positive and productive chain reaction: each thing we reviewed led to another. We stopped asking salary history because it penalises women, people of colour, and anyone who was underpaid in the past. But then it became clear that we also needed to increase transparency by posting our hiring salary range. We subsequently recognised that job candidates are worried that asking about parental leave or sick leave will work against them. However, we know that those are important things to understand when considering a job, so we began posting leave policies and other benefits.

In every case, the fact that we had room to improve was because we were using traditional (and very typical) recruiting and hiring practices and policies. What we want to achieve is full equity and inclusion in our hiring, as well as in our management practices. The only way to do that is to positively disrupt our status quo.



How did you go about designing and implementing this?

We started by committing to the goal: equitable and inclusive practices that lead to a diverse and effective team. We began making changes in our hiring practices while simultaneously developing a global gender, equity, diversity and inclusion (GEDI) policy, which has as its core commitments to build an inclusive workplace, advance women and underrepresented employees in the workforce and strengthen a safe and secure workplace. As we developed this broader policy, we continued to make individual and incremental changes to our recruitment and hiring practices. Cumulatively, and when combined with our pay gap analysis and pay equity reviews, our improved practices support our goal of having a diverse team and being a gender equitable and effective organisation.

Now that we have a global GEDI policy, we are looking further into improvements we can make within each of our global offices, both with regard to hiring as well as in other aspects of our core commitments.

What are the outcomes thus far?

We have received some feedback from current staff, job candidates and others that they notice and appreciate some of the changes outlined above, including our move away from gendered pronouns and our transparency about parental leave policies. A number of the changes that we have made don't prompt any reaction and we are fine with that. Our purpose is not to draw attention to what we have changed, but to use our practices and policies to identify and hire the best possible team.

What did you learn?

We learned that improving the equity of our policies and practices is a journey and not a defined activity that will be complete and then static. Each change we make opens possibilities for others.

What advice would you give to someone who wants to try something similar in their workplace?

Our primary advice is to start. If we had waited until we had assessed every nuance of our recruitment, hiring, management, salary-setting, promotion, leave and other policies so that we could unveil a comprehensive overhaul, we would not have made any changes yet!



Strategic Planning Workshop, 2018

How will you continue to build off of these changes?

We will continue to assess our recruitment and hiring practices. In particular we will be exploring ways to identify a more diverse pipeline of candidates, especially in countries where men outnumber women in our sector. Pausing and reflecting when we have only men on a short list, for example, is helpful, but it doesn't solve the challenge of the shortlist lacking diversity.

We will also continue to learn from the policies and practices of other organisations and share our own experiences to learn from people's feedback.

**“Each change
we make opens
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Julia Naoko Krongelb of FAIR SHARE on

Bringing Feminist Leadership to life

I didn't really know what Feminist Leadership meant until I started working for FAIR SHARE of Women Leaders. I come mainly from a background with hard leadership: strong hierarchy where you have to prove yourself and where there is hardly any recognition for your efforts. The work is based more on results than on a belief of human potential.

My experience over the last few months as an intern with FAIR SHARE has given me hope that there is such a thing as Feminist Leadership, with a manager who shares power and highly skilled colleagues who behave in a caring and respectful manner towards each other.

"There is a climate of trust within the structure and this caring work environment allows me to feel more confident to take risks."

is truly rare at work: a CEO who is aware of her own privilege, and instead of using her power to make others feel powerless or inferior, practises treating everyone as equals. This attitude makes the principle "Feminist Leadership" a reality in the workplace and not just an empty theoretical concept.

Other members of the team also make Feminist Leadership come alive. They care for each other and when I put too much pressure on myself, they are attentive and concerned about my well-being. This compassionate attitude gives me more energy and motivation to give my best at work; I feel part of the team. Despite my position as an intern, my colleagues make sure I feel heard and respected. There is a climate of trust within the structure and this caring work environment allows me to feel more confident to take risks.

Working for FAIR SHARE allows me to contribute concretely to gender equity, to experience collective leadership where I can grow, do my best and share Feminist Leadership ideas around me. I now also know that it is possible to find a workplace where the words "sisterhood" and "empowerment" take on their full meaning because they are put into practice.

I hope that in the future, when FAIR SHARE will continue to grow and will count more and more employees, it will keep the same spirit of putting into practice the principles it stands for and promotes. Feminist Leadership is opening the path to a new era and FAIR SHARE is living proof of that.



Bringing back the political



FRONTLINE AIDS 

Frontline AIDS has been on the forefront of the world's response to HIV and AIDS for 28 years, working with marginalised people who are denied HIV prevention and treatment simply because of who they are and where they live.

**FAIR SHARE speaks with Christine
Stegling of Frontline AIDS, Executive
Director**

**Tell us about the leadership programme
you developed.**

At the beginning of 2020, we launched Project Butterfly with the aim to define the future culture of Frontline AIDS by embedding our values into the way we work. We needed to identify what leadership looks like at Frontline AIDS, what our key principles are and how they support our values and core belief that “action makes a difference”.

So, in late 2020 we created a leadership development programme with and for our senior leaders. We decided that rather than present a single way to approach leadership, we should look at three approaches that spoke to us: adaptive leadership, distributed leadership and Feminist Leadership.

**What was the motivation behind
introducing Feminist Leadership?**

In the non-profit sector, people make the assumption that just because you work in this space, you can't have bias against women or other marginalised genders, or have racist bias. But of course, this isn't the case.

The HIV sector in particular has strong political roots. Historically, this movement has made a lot of demands: treatment, accountability, resources, human rights. But over time it became increasingly technical, and what we're missing now is that political perspective. That's also why we're not making the headway we should be on some issues; people don't recognise the political context in which we're embedded. Approaching our work through a Feminist Leadership lens allows you to discuss those politics.

**How did you go about designing and
implementing it?**

We engaged external leadership consultants to support a process of co-creating the programme with the senior management team. Co-creation was key and gave us the



ownership to drive the programme ourselves. Rather than the external consultants leading this, our senior management team explored and shared their own experiences.

All our managers were encouraged to think about how Feminist Leadership—defined through principles such as accountability, sharing power and dismantling bias—resonated with their own leadership style, how it connected to Frontline AIDS' values and behaviours and how it could help them support their teams and drive culture change.

It's also important to mention that we treated this as an experiment to integrate new ways of thinking into our leadership. It's only the beginning of a journey which we plan to continue.

**Describe the outcomes thus far, both
intended and unintended.**

The programme has encouraged our line managers to reflect on their leadership style and engage in more dialogue and collaboration among the leadership group. As part of the ongoing programme, we planned and participated in coaching trios and also engaged in action learning to enable managers to continue their dialogues and share their experiences at the end of the first part of the programme.

Since running the leadership programme, we have seen line managers drawing on the principles of Feminist Leadership to support their teams and others in the organisation.

Feminist Leadership was also a good entry point to having more of those conversations around unconscious bias. We're also doing quite a bit of work on addressing racism and how to become an anti-racist organisation. Both of these processes require being self-reflective and having honest conversations about what is or isn't happening. These two strands of work will eventually come together.

What did you learn from this process?

Co-creating the programme gave us the opportunity to shape it according to what the participants themselves wanted, while simultaneously drawing on the expertise of the leadership consultants. Although we

had an idea of what we wanted to design and deliver at the outset, we also learnt how important it was to keep the programme fluid. So, as we went through the modules, we gathered feedback from our line managers to ensure maximum impact.

What are your next steps?

We are exploring ways to continue the conversation and encourage our leaders to reflect on their leadership and behaviours through both formal learning as well as continued peer-to-peer coaching and learning sets. We will also be looking at how we continue to translate values into behaviours across the organisation. It's not just about what's right or wrong in general or philosophical terms, but really how we are behaving and engaging with one another so that we can't shy away from those difficult conversations.



Lea Schiewer of FAIR SHARE on

The habit of Feminist Leadership



If only it were so easy to simply label your organisation feminist to make an actual difference in everyday life. As it turns out, practising Feminist Leadership is hard work. Dismantling power structures or applying principles such as accountability and transparency requires a conscious and continuous effort, both individual and collective, to reflect on and deconstruct organisational culture and our very own impact on it.

At FAIR SHARE, we reached the conclusion that Feminist Leadership is at the core of our organisational DNA. We all agree it should not be treated like an agenda point you talk about only when there is time left or that is dragged from meeting to meeting for lack of urgency. You guessed it already: this ideal is far from reality and our small team has fallen prey to being “too busy” to prioritise Feminist Leadership time and time again. Knowing our fast-paced projects, endless to-do lists and our cramped schedules, the day when no one is busy will simply not arrive. It is a classic NGO tale as old as time. However, no change at all will ever come from this attitude, and this is just not how we roll.

“Our small team has fallen prey to being ‘too busy’ to prioritise Feminist Leadership time and time again.”

Our current approach is to plan and dedicate time during working hours and to institutionalise our learning experiences by having regular team days and journaling exercises. Each of us has a notebook specifically for writing down our observations of Feminist Leadership as we experience them within the team. Occasionally, we also invite an external coach who facilitates team discussions to give us dedicated time for reflection. There

is always more we could be doing, but this is our starting point and we are curious to see how this approach plays out. Testing new and unconventional methods for the issues we face as a team, and learning from the mistakes and frustrations that happen along the way, is always better than lingering in doubt and feeling stuck.

Feminist Leadership is not an aspirational goal, it is a process and a learning journey that cannot be sidelined – so our aim is to get into the daily habit of working with a feminist lens. When planning, making decisions, reflecting, Feminist Leadership will always be present, so that it is less of a cherry on top of our work, but rather the foundation for all our doing and thinking. To be continued.

The compass for gender democracy and feminism

FAIR SHARE speaks with Jana Prosinger and Joanna Barelkowska of the Heinrich Böll Foundation

Tell us about your new feminist strategy.

In 2019 the Heinrich Böll Foundation's international department developed and adopted a new feminist strategy called the "Compass for Gender Democracy and Feminism". The compass describes our vision of a gender-equitable world and defines five fields of action:

1. Promoting self-determination
2. Gaining power
3. Fighting for economic justice
4. Sustaining livelihoods and protecting the climate
5. Supporting peace processes and the role of women as peace actors

As the analogy suggests, the compass also helps guide our work within these fields of action, as well as accompanying goals, tasks, accountabilities and responsibilities. It supports our colleagues to consider feminism and gender politics in our context-specific analyses, and to choose suitable strategies and instruments.

How did it come to be?

Our new strategy draws on the Heinrich Böll Foundation's long tradition of feminism and gender policy. The Foundation coined the term "gender democracy," and with it has accelerated the German and international gender policy debate and has set itself the goal of establishing gender policy both as its own policy field and as a cross-cutting approach. In 2018, we commissioned an external cross-sectional evaluation of the gender policy work of our International Cooperation Department (ICD) from 2010



to 2018. The cross-sectional evaluation appreciated what had been achieved so far, but at the same time encouraged the IC Department to align its gender policy work even more strategically in the future in order to strengthen its political efficacy. This recommendation motivated us to embark on a one-year strategy development process in 2019. The process was about learning from previous context-specific experiences on the one hand and reacting to current global gender policy development on the other.

How did you go about designing and implementing it?

The participatory strategy process, steered by the International Gender Politics Unit, lasted one year and was supported by an external consultant and a strategy group. Ultimately, around 15 people reflected on and systematised the interim results extensively. Heads of each office met to discuss the various political contexts of feminist work worldwide, its visions, thematic focuses and most important strategies regionally and across regions. During this meeting, the heads of the department, heads of office and all of the regional divisions defined how the ICD needs to be structured in order to implement its feminist work more effectively. For example, the strategy defines roles and responsibilities of each position, like the Executive Board, head of department, head

"Establishing a strategy on this scale takes time, money and, above all, ownership. Therefore, such a process must be participatory."

of division, head of office, project officer and others. Through self-recorded video statements as well as participation in webinars and online surveys, our global staff were able to contribute their regional perspectives and experiences of feminist work to the strategy process. All those involved in the process up to that point were given the opportunity to read and comment on the first draft of the strategy, which led to further adjustments.

Describe the outcomes thus far.

The biggest achievement is that the Executive Board has decided to establish a Global Unit for Feminism and Gender Democracy. It is based in Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina. From here, we connect feminist work to the individual offices and create synergy with them. It is also significant that we chose to locate such a unit in the Global East and not in the Global North. Within this unit, Feminist Leadership is promoted in the project work, but also lived out in the team. Once a month, for example, we celebrate Feminist Friday, where our team discusses controversial feminist topics and develops political positions, which we might integrate into our work later on. Further, we are in the process of reflecting on our decision-making processes. Who needs to be involved? When and why does a certain person make a decision on their own? Can we share power without losing our pragmatic and quick scope of action?

This also made it possible to talk about organisational culture at a global meeting of the Foundation and to offer a discussion with the women's rights activist Srilatha Batliwala for all our office managers. This discussion is now being used as an opportunity to reflect on our foundation's organisational culture.

What did you learn from this process?

Establishing a strategy on this scale takes time, money and, above all, ownership. Therefore, such a process must be participatory. However, it also needs the support and willingness of the management level to demand the implementation of the strategy again and again. Otherwise, such a strategy runs the risk of being forgotten rather than actually carried out. In our case, we were challenged by the tension between contextual regional diversity of feminist approaches to action on the one hand and the development of common visions and creation of synergies on the other. The strategy is therefore not seen as the end, but rather as another stage of international exchange.

How will you make it sustainable?

The strategy describes six goals. For each goal, activities have been defined that are the responsibility of specific leaders. In addition, milestones will support the achievement of the goals. Finally, a self-evaluation was planned for the middle of the strategy process and an external evaluation for its conclusion. Every few years, the strategy is discussed at internal conferences. Surveys, face-to-face meetings and webinars on the implementation of the strategy are also offered. In addition, a Global Unit for Feminism and Gender Democracy has been established in Sarajevo to manage the implementation of the strategy and provide the necessary staff.



Fostering democracy and upholding human rights, taking action to prevent the destruction of the global ecosystem, advancing equality between women and men, securing peace through conflict prevention in crisis zones, and defending the freedom of individuals against excessive state and economic power – these are the objectives that drive the ideas and actions of the Heinrich Böll Foundation.



Piloting co-leadership

FAIR SHARE speaks with Gemma Graham of Restless Development, Business Director

Tell us about your co-leadership experiment.

When CEO Perry Maddox was going on parental leave in February 2020, we took the opportunity to pilot a co-leadership model for his interim replacement. This was a deliberate learning experience for both the people occupying these roles and for the organisation.

What was the motivation behind this?

Restless Development had never had a woman CEO. When we looked at who applied the last time we recruited for that role, we noticed that more men applied. So we wondered: could co-leadership make a role like this more accessible? Could we create a more inclusive leadership structure



in terms of not only gender, but also age? Although we work with young leaders who are 18 to 25 years old, leading an international organisation is a big job. We also have a duty of care. Co-leadership could make it more feasible to have a young leader in that role in the future.

"Restless Development had never had a woman CEO. So we wondered: could co-leadership make a role like this more accessible?"

How did you design and implement it?

Young leaders themselves were heavily involved in the process. Two young staff members shaped the terms of reference, designed the interview questions and were on the interview panel. They interviewed my colleague Kate Muhwezi and me. They asked about our aims, ambitions and commitments to young leaders. After we were offered and accepted the roles, they held us to account on those commitments in the form of an interview (a staff video and a podcast).

In terms of how the co-leadership initiative worked, trust and transparency were key. Kate and I met three times a week, which kept us unified on big decisions. We also had clear role responsibilities. I focused more on the external as the director of fundraising and she focused more on the internal as director of operations, which helped.

What have been some outcomes thus far?

We saw a ripple effect. When our hub director in Uganda stepped down, their role was replaced by an interim co-leadership role. Now that Perry Maddox has stepped down as CEO, we have another interim co-lead CEO and the board is considering recruiting for the next CEO as a co-leadership role.

What did you learn?

When COVID hit, we doubled down on the Feminist Leadership approach in terms of collaborative decision making, communication, transparency and vulnerability—and people responded incredibly well to that. You might think that in a crisis you should go back to a “command and control” approach, but we didn’t and it has served us well.

Also, we are all aware of the impact of positive role models, but it really became real for me in this role. Kate and I received so many text messages, emails, voice notes—especially from young women—saying, “I never thought I could be a chief executive until I saw you doing this.”

What are your next steps?

We hope to share what we’ve learned through publications like this and the report put out by BOND and WILD, “Exploring women’s leadership in 5 INGOs” to inspire other organisations to consider how co-leadership might be something they could try too.



Restless Development supports the journey of a young person in becoming a leader and helps them multiply that leadership in their communities and around the world. Started in 1985, Restless Development now helps thousands of young leaders every year in solving some of their greatest challenges, from tackling the unemployment crisis to ending child marriage to fighting the spread of COVID-19.

A girls-first policy



By combining skateboarding with creative and artistic education, Skateistan empowers children to become leaders for a better world. It focuses on groups that are often excluded from sports and educational opportunities—particularly girls, children with disabilities and those from low-income backgrounds—and provides safe spaces for children to have fun, develop their skills and confidence and break down social barriers by making new friends.

**FAIR SHARE speaks with Oliver
Percovich of Skateistan, Founder and
Executive Director**

Tell us about your girls-first policy.

From the start, when Skateistan worked on the streets of Kabul, our programmes had a girls-first policy. It began with skateboarding, but eventually grew to incorporate education too. By giving girls and women at least 50 percent of the opportunities available in our programming, as well as prioritising them for professional opportunities within the organisation, we grew an organisation that put women first.

How did it come to be?

The girls-first approach came about from the lack of opportunities for girls in civil society in Afghanistan, a country where women have significantly less rights and freedoms than men. Historically, foreign interventions claiming to want to establish gender equality in the region have failed to do so. We hoped that young people, especially women, could become the change and enact the transformation that they wanted to see. So, our approach was to support a localisation of women's empowerment through strong female Afghan role models.

What was needed to make it a reality?

The important part of implementing this policy is to put adequate resources towards it. A girl might need 50 percent more resources to have the same opportunity as a boy. For example, we provide transport and home visits to increase girls' participation. We do not do that for boys. It might cost 10-15 percent more to employ women long-term in an organisation, which we accepted because without women in the workforce, you lose much more than the extra that you put in. Globally, women face discrimination and to improve their participation in the workplace and other parts of society, it is essential to provide them with extra resources (not only resources equal to those that men receive).



"Having women leaders at all our schools globally created role models for girls attending our programmes."

Describe the outcomes thus far, both intended and unintended.

Having women leaders at all our schools globally was intended to create role models for girls attending our programmes and we really see the effect of this: 80 percent of our educators are former students.

And when done right, from at the start and from the bottom up, inclusion also means more effective programmes. For example, girls started telling us early on that they wanted an indoor skating park, which never would have occurred to me as white man who feels comfortable skating everywhere.

Lastly, filling some of the top positions in the countries where we work with women candidates also made Skateistan a more inclusive workplace for women. When women asked about bringing their babies to work or flexible working hours, we listened and adjusted because we value them and want to keep them in these roles. This became our new normal and it makes our organisation a more attractive place for women to come work.



What did you learn?

It's really hard to earmark half of the opportunities for women because of the way that most societies are set up. Many people, including women, find it hard to "positively discriminate" for women. I needed to repeat the importance of it on at least a weekly basis for 14 years. Never stop drumming the message of girls first. Otherwise the scales will not tip.

What's needed now?

Keep on advocating. Making sure younger voices are also heard will create sustainability. There are many young girls that are ready to lead.

**"Never stop drumming the message of girls first.
Otherwise the scales will not tip."**

Sophia Seawell of FAIR SHARE on

The making of a good solution

When I came across the job advertisement for my current position at FAIR SHARE, a particular combination of words stuck out to me: "feminist start-up." This seemed like a contradiction; I always associated start-ups with for-profit enterprises, hypermasculine culture and lots of material perks paired with the expectation of going above and beyond.

Of course, what was meant was simply that this was a young organisation, founded just over two years ago, and it was therefore in that unpredictable and exciting phase of getting off the ground. In my work contract, I did notice it said that overtime may be required and would not be compensated. I clarified with the executive director—if we worked extra, we could take time off, right? She assured me that this was indeed the case.



At some point, however, the cracks in this informal understanding started to surface. During a particular busy period leading up to the launch of our annual FAIR SHARE Monitor, some colleagues indeed went above and beyond, working at night and on weekends. When the time came to ask for compensation, it became clear that much had been left up to interpretation and we were not quite all on the same page.

When we agreed that we should discuss this open question, I didn't anticipate how intense and emotional the conversation would be. While we all believed in the work and wanted to give it our best, some of us prioritised personal boundaries, while others felt responsible for the sustainability of the organisation. What was a normal and healthy working habit for one person signified a lack of trust for another. At times it seemed like we were on such different wavelengths that the idea of a compromise or solution felt far off.

“A good solution can also mean that everyone feels heard, involved and a part of the team.”

Fortunately, an experienced facilitator in our network volunteered to support us through the process. She introduced us to different decision-making approaches from “executive decision without consultation” to “decision by consensus” and the many variants in between. She also developed our input and ideas into different options for how we

could proceed with our overtime dilemma. Over the course of two meetings, we came to a decision by anonymously measuring our resistance to the different options. A clear winner emerged: rather than overtime based on metrics (I worked X hours overtime, therefore I'll take X hours off), each team member is now allotted two compensation days per quarter, which can be taken at the individual's discretion and be accrued into the next quarter. We plan to debrief the process in an upcoming team meeting and have also set a first evaluation for next summer.

But an equally important moment for me came before the voting itself. We first talked in pairs about what a “good solution” is and concluded that it's not just about everyone getting what they want. A good solution can also mean that everyone feels heard, involved and a part of the team; that the decision leaves the room and is actually implemented, that no one is totally unhappy and even that something new is created.

So yes, we came to a decision about overtime. But we also learned something about how we can make decisions together, what those processes may require in terms of energy and support and what we should actually aim for. And we now have an opportunity to unlearn internalised ideas about meritocracy and who has “earned” or “deserves” what. And that's what it means to me when people say Feminist Leadership is not about quick fixes. Feminist Leadership means taking the time to grasp things by the roots, pull them up and see what we can learn.

Living feminist values

FAIR SHARE speaks with Laura Sullivan of WeMove Europe, *Executive Director*



Tell us about the values laid out in your new strategy.

For our new vision and strategy, we committed to Feminist Leadership within our organisation. The word “leader” is widely defined and not just something that is meant for senior management to implement. In line with that, we agreed on the values we want to live by within the organisation: trust, self-awareness, hope, courage, justice, equality, solidarity, diversity, inclusion, empathy, curiosity, learning, creativity and humility.

What was the motivation behind this approach?

I came from ActionAid International, an organisation that has put a lot of resources into Feminist Leadership for its staff and took some of that inspiration with me to WeMove Europe when I joined in 2018. The staff were very much up for this kind of approach. We started learning about it together in 2019 in team meetings to agree on our vision and strategy, as well as in sessions with fantastic feminists like Srilatha Batliwala.

How did you go about designing and implementing it?

We set up a three-person vision/strategy process team, a five-person political strategy team, and a five-person organisational strategy team to go deep into the tasks at hand. We wanted the thinking to evolve

beyond the management level. Inspired by a process from ActionAid, there were also self-organised staff groups to brainstorm around particularly tricky issues. For example, how do we do offline organising and campaigning? What should that look like? Should we take money from corporations and governments? (We decided not to). We did surveys with the wider WeMove community and brought that knowledge in too. We also consulted our board and, in Brussels in April 2019, we hosted two visioning days with partners.

“...if we want to get real about self-awareness, then the team requires feedback from others to grow and understand how we move through the world.”

Describe the outcomes thus far, both intended and unintended.

Culture is in the small everyday things. Putting those values into practise takes on many different forms. For example, if we want to get real about self-awareness, then the team requires feedback from others to grow and understand how we move through the world. We instituted annual reviews and 360 feedback from colleagues to support that. We also have bimonthly 1:1 sessions between managers and managees to encourage two-way feedback. We've done two sets of training



on how to give and receive feedback for the whole team (because it's hard and a muscle that requires use). We also established an annual, anonymous staff survey to understand how people were feeling at work and in which areas they need more support or resources.

This ties into curiosity and learning: every four months we have a team retrospective that looks at what we did well, what we didn't do so well, what we learned, what we celebrated, and what we should take forward for the next four months. The retrospectives sit alongside our annual plan and strategy.

I can share one last example about how we put the principles of solidarity, care and empathy into action. We offer 15-minute online meditations daily and no one is online after 6pm or on weekends and there are no calls from managers on weekends – because we believe managers should model a healthy work/life balance. During COVID lockdowns, special adjustments were made for parents' working hours, as well as some financial compensation for extra care needs. We have core hours and flexibility around hours (10-4 for full-time and 10-2 for part time, with the rest up to the staffer). We also offer flexible working location. I'm not sure we're exceptional here, but it is part of the practice.

What did you learn in this process?

Don't try to do it on your own! We worked with a professional facilitator who is particularly good at working with movements and NGOs. There are already many people in your network who can provide guidance and will be happy to do so. Also, be very clear from the start about how decisions will be made. We did trainings with a group called The Hum on how to be clear about what type of decision-making process (e.g. by a consent, consensus, mandate or advice) would apply to what kind of decision and who would be involved.

What are your next steps?

We're just now organising a staff retreat where we'll focus on what Feminist Leadership means for how we want to be and work together as a team, and come to an agreement about what it looks like at WeMove in practise. We also just need to keep coming back to the core stuff like decision-making and how it happens, because we always have new people on the team and others simply forget because there is so much information flowing at all times.



WeMove Europe seeks to build people power to transform Europe in the name of our community, future generations and the planet.

Helene Wolf of FAIR SHARE on

Deciding not to decide



As the executive director of FAIR SHARE, my Feminist Leadership journey is a lot about unlearning: unlearning the typical leadership behaviours based on hierarchies, power, privileges and our deeply entrenched concept of a “hero leader” at the top of an organisation.

One of the biggest powers a CEO typically has is making final decisions. And reflecting on this is a key element of Feminist Leadership practise. Who is in the room when decisions are made and who is not? Whose voices and perspectives are considered valuable and whose are dismissed? Do we prioritise speed or impact given the pressure under which we usually work?

Almost on a daily basis, I decide not to decide straight away, but to pause for a moment when someone approaches me with a question. Should I advise, recommend, make a decision myself or leave it up to someone else entirely?

Taking this moment might seem banal, but for me it has become a powerful tool of my unlearning journey. I don't think about whether I have the time to make this decision (which used to be my main challenge in previous leadership positions). Instead, I ask myself what my role should be. It is also powerful because these moments remind me almost on a daily basis of the wisdom, experience and expertise around me—making the CEO role much less lonely than it used to feel.

I use this rethinking process not only with the team but also apply it to our partnerships with other organisations and individuals. One example is the Women Leadership Lab we are currently piloting in Germany. We invited all committed organisations to co-design the objectives, criteria for participation and spirit of a new leadership programme based on feminist principles. The 16 participants now co-design their own year-long learning journey alongside us and an experienced leadership coach.

I've observed that, especially in the beginning, this was irritating to some people I work with. Some might have even thought (or still think) that I am a weak leader by not exercising the typical CEO decision-making power. And yes, sometimes this prolongs the process, challenges me to answer tough questions and sometimes even give up my original idea altogether. But what I also observe is that I like the results that we achieve through truly collective decision-making much better. They seem to stick longer, get more buy-in and support, and create a new level of trust and appreciation among the team.

What this approach does not mean to me is retracting from accountability and the formal responsibility that still rests with me as a CEO. I also don't pretend that we don't have any hierarchies or different levels of power in our small team anymore. There are certain decisions that I still need to make as they might have legal consequences for the organisation. I try to be transparent in these situations and share why and how I came to a specific conclusion.

Redefining decision-making continues to be an intense process as it touches on some many critical points about power and privilege. I don't always feel I get it "right," but I am already much more comfortable in highly collective decision-making processes, where responsibility and power is shared, than I was when I held all that power myself.

"I like the results that we achieve through truly collective decision-making much better. They seem to stick longer, get more buy-in and support, and create a new level of trust."



Thank you for reading.
We hope you stay in touch!

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