

COLLECTIVE CARE AND WELLBEING

Learning & Reflection resource

In November 2023, Akina Mama wa Afrika, FAIR SHARE of Women Leaders and We Are Feminist Leaders held the final session of the learning series "Feminist Leadership Under Construction" on collective care and wellbeing.

This conversation occurred at a moment in which a lot of feminist leaders were experiencing personal or collective grief from world events. Nevertheless, hearing the perspectives of the guests offered hope. During the session, Naro Alonzo from KERI: Caring For Activists, feminist activist Tina Musuya from Social Development Direct, and Inna Michaeli from AWID shared their thoughts on what collective care means and provided some examples of the challenges faced in implementing it.



This short briefing contains insights, thoughts and resources to support your reflection on this topic.

 [Watch the recording](#)

What does organizational care mean to you?



As the session started, we began by asking what organizational care means to participants. These were the participant's thoughts:

Understanding what collective care means in your context.



People have different notions and understandings of care. *Naro Alonzo* from Keri invited us to ask ourselves what care means in our context. For example, there is no consensus on what care means in the Philippines. There is no word for 'care' in the Filipino language, yet many activists use it. Naro emphasized that once we understand what care means to different people, we can also ask them what kind of care they would like to receive.

Naro also encouraged us to see care and feminism as a practice rather than a theoretical discussion or aspiration.

In the organizational context, *Inna Michaeli* highlighted that collective care is an employee's right – and often connected to labour laws. Before considering any new care practices, organizations should start talking about getting the basics right, such as sick policies, adequate leave, manageable workloads, and contracts.



Tina Musuya reminded us that once employers are aware and willing to implement care practices, it is important for organizations to intentionally create spaces to reflect on people's wellness and collective care. Those spaces should be safe and inspiring and allow people to talk about and navigate their feelings and emotions.

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“Collective care should be practiced holistically in everything we do inside and outside our organizations. Otherwise, we risk creating this elitist group of staff who are working for a feminist organization who have access to care, but what about everyone else in the system?”

Leila Biling

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Collective care practices

Collective care is a collective responsibility and can be about practising small actions with consistency and intention within a team. As well as guaranteeing that organizations have adequate policies and comply with labour laws guaranteeing just and equal working conditions for all. Some examples of good practices shared in the discussion were:

Daily practices:

- Checking-in at the start and the end of meetings to understand how people are feeling and their energy level. Creating a collective responsibility to check in with each other, *Tina Musuya*
- Celebrating small achievements within the team, *Tina Musuya*
- Creating spaces to talk about mental and physical health and highlight the importance of resting, *Tina Musuya*
- Having a rest day for people travelling for long periods, *Inna Michaeli*
- Establishing a regular time to meet, for example, a book club as part of personal and organizational development, but also a day to sit, reflect and reimagine the world together, *Akina Mama wa Afrika*
- Provision for staff working remotely to access a set amount for a subscription to yoga, gym or dance class, *Akina Mama wa Afrika*
- Providing psycho-social support, *Akina Mama wa Afrika*
- Creating a team mid-year break, in which nobody is working at that time, *Inna Michaeli*
- Not sending messages after certain hours and applying this rule to partners and actors outside the organization, *Navo Alonzo*

Organisations transform with time and with people's contributions. It is important to remind individuals about their role within an organization and that their contributions will not be forgotten



Structural practices:

- Allowing people to show up in the workplace as humans, in their identities and locations, *Inna Michaeli*.
- Holding each other accountable in terms of professional commitments and timelines, but also holding each other responsible in terms of work planning, including insisting on resting and taking care of your wellbeing, *Inna Michael*.
- Employers being intentional and bolder when observing and upholding labour laws, *Inna Michaeli*
- Guaranteeing job security, *Tina Musuya*
- Within partnership work, establishing an equitable partnership framework which guides the partnership, ways of working and collective care, *Tina Musuya*
- Introducing a four-day working week, *Inna Michaeli*

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We embody collective care as a daily practice, not as an organizational policy but as something we share with people we interact with.

Navro Alonzo
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Many other practices were suggested by our participants in this [Mosaic of Organizational Collective Care Practices](#).

Including an intersectional approach to care

- ♥ Consider people's accessibility and neurodivergence needs. Recognize that those needs can evolve and change, *Inna Michaelli*
- ♥ Understand the challenges and border violence that come along with international travel for people within the organization, *Inna Michaelli*
- ♥ Create an enabling space for everyone, where people feel safe and inspired, *Tina Musuya*
- ♥ Consider people's different and diverse needs and establish policies around working hours, sick leave, parental leave, and menopause leave that reflect this, *Tina Musuya*.

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There is no 'one size fits' all when talking about collective care

Tina Musuya
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Challenges when implementing collective care

- ♥ We know this work isn't always easy, and Tine Musuya helped us reflect on some of the challenges, which include:
- ♥ Pre-existing policies may make it difficult to make the kind of shifts we would like to make.
- ♥ Limited funding and time.
- ♥ Working across different time zones.
- ♥ Zoom fatigue and online engagement mean we lose out on human engagement. We are not virtual people; we are real people. We need to experience each other in real life.
- ♥ People may fear opening up and sharing the kind of support they need.

Further Reflection

1. We invite you to consider your exploration of this topic by considering the following reflective practice questions:
2. What does care mean to you?
3. When did this language or words come to you? Where does this meaning come from?
4. What is your care language? How do you care for others, and how would you like others to care for you?
5. What small step could you take to build a collective care practice in your context?
6. What's one way to gently hold yourself accountable for that?

Resources

Hope Chigudu and Rudo Chigudu, "Strategies for building an organization with a soul", Available [here](#).

Urgent Action Fund "How can we ground ourselves in care and dance our revolution?". Available [here](#).

Akina Mama wa Afrika, "Healing is Our Inheritance: A Guide for Healing Ourselves and Our Communities" [Available here](#)

