



Feminist Humanitarian Network

Strategy 2020 – 2025



Growing a feminist humanitarian ecosystem

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The context



Introduction

Crises disproportionately impact women, girls, and gender-diverse people, aggravating pre-existing gender inequalities and injustices.

Feminist and women's rights organizations (WROs) working at grassroots and national levels across countries throughout the Global South are leading efforts to advance and protect the rights of women, girls', and marginalized groups through organizing, advocacy and campaigns, and essential service delivery, including sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) services and the provision of shelters and safe spaces.

When an emergency strikes, women and their organizations are often the first to respond, playing leadership roles in their communities to ensure ongoing access to basic rights for women, in all of their diversity, and for "marginalized" groups, ensuring nobody is left behind. Yet when the humanitarian machinery kicks in, WROs' roles are undermined and their voices ignored. They are excluded from funding opportunities and from decision-making bodies and processes, and there is little accountability to them.

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

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

Donors and other humanitarian actors have committed to advancing gender equality and supporting women's leadership through the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, the Grand Bargain, under the Call to Action on Protection from GBV in Emergencies, at the Oslo Conference on Ending Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in Humanitarian Crises, and most recently the Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action Compact. Increasingly, donor governments are putting in place feminist foreign policies that commit them to prioritizing gender equality in their international work, including in aid and development. The commitments are there, but sufficient action has not been realized.

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

Intersecting structural inequalities (which are themselves crises), including racism, patriarchy, colonialism, and neoliberalism continue to both drive and aggravate the impacts of emergencies. They also shape the current humanitarian system, rendering the system itself an instrument that serves to deepen inequalities and injustices, particularly those faced by women, girls, gender diverse people, and other marginalized groups.

The humanitarian system must be transformed.

The Feminist Humanitarian Network: Who we are

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

Our membership is made up of WROs and movements from the Pacific, Africa, Asia, the Middle East, Latin America, and the Caribbean, representing women in all their diversity: refugee women, women from host communities, single women, widows, women with disabilities, young women, survivors of conflict, and LGBTQIA+ communities, among others. The FHN is committed to the collective leadership of its members, and has in place structures and processes that ensure this leadership. These are outlined later in this document.

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

Critically, our approach recognises the power of movements. The FHN itself is a part of a greater movement to achieve a feminist humanitarian system, and works alongside and in alliance with other movements that have visions aligned with our own. These include but are not limited to: the feminist climate action movement, movements working for greater action to prevent and respond to gender-based violence, movements for women's land rights, LGBTQIA+ movements, and movements for the rights of women and girls with disabilities. Many FHN members belong to these movements.

We are committed to ensuring the voices of WROs working at grassroots and national levels are heard in international advocacy and decision-making spaces, and to supporting these organizations drive change within the humanitarian system.

The Network facilitates space for feminist leaders to share the challenges they experience with the humanitarian system and to collectively define solutions to them. By working together to campaign, advocate, and learn, the FHN is achieving change in the humanitarian system.

We work collectively and use the power that working as a network brings – strength in numbers, broad connections, and diverse skill sets and leadership – to achieve our objectives and transform the humanitarian system into one that is accessible to and led by women and their organizations, and leaves nobody behind.

Strategy: Background and overview

This strategy has been developed collectively by the members of the FHN. It is the product of numerous meetings and thought pieces, including a series of strategic workshops facilitated by a number of members over a six-week period in 2022. Like all FHN meetings, these workshops were safe spaces, where members debated, created, and visualized together the change we want to see in the humanitarian system.

This document builds on a similar strategy review workshop series carried out in 2020, and on an original concept developed by members at a face-to-face members' meeting at the Commission of the Status of Women in March 2019. It also includes work done by the FHN's Strategic and Steering Committees to continuously reflect on and refine the FHN's structure and ways of working.

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

- FHN Advocacy Strategy
- FHN Communications Strategy
- FHN Fundraising Strategy
- FHN Funding & Fundraising Approach
- FHN Membership Principles
- FHN Membership Policy
- FHN Membership Strategy
- FHN International Member Guidelines
- FHN Annual Work Plan

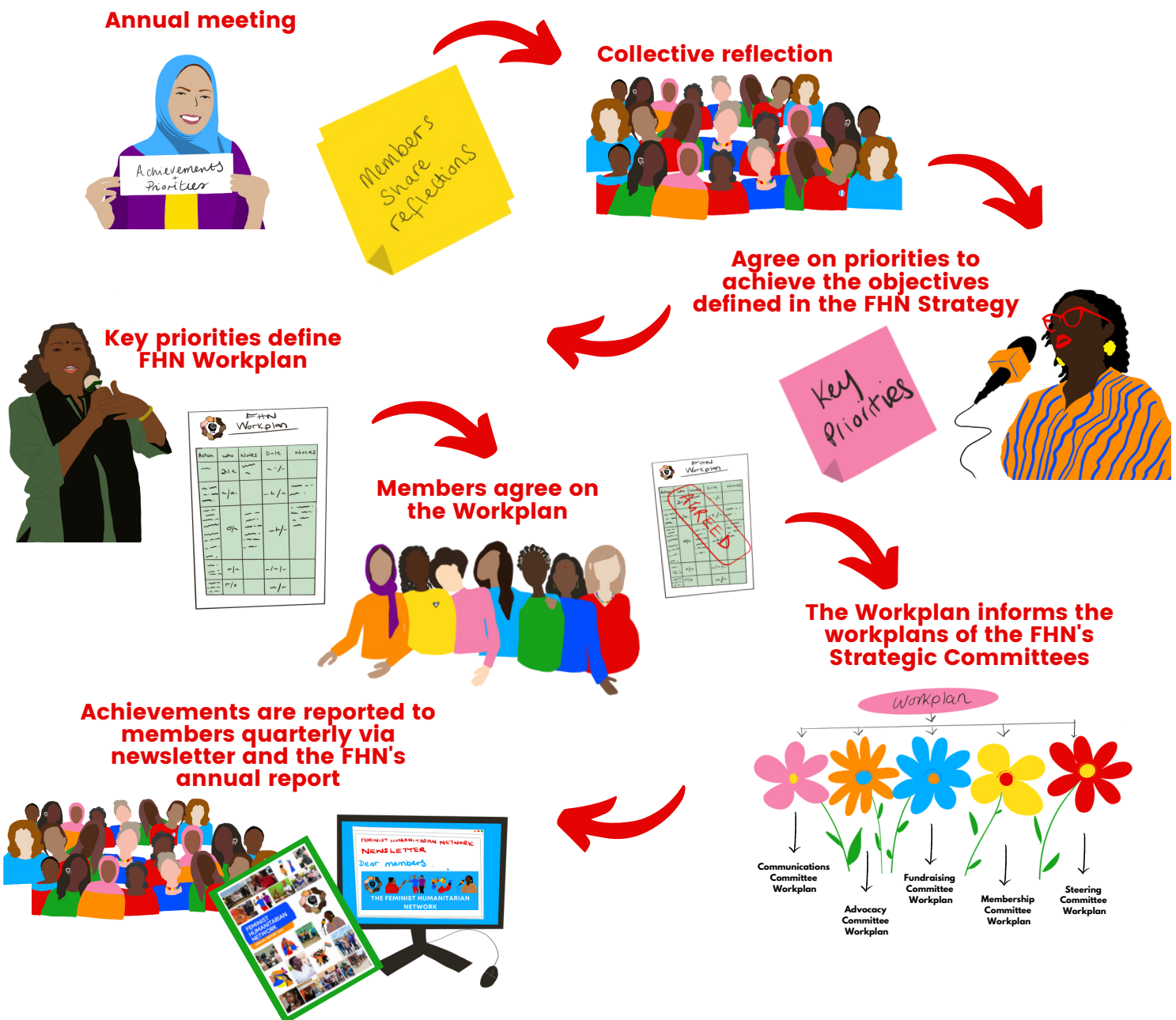
The FHN Strategy is reviewed biennially through collective strategic review processes, to ensure that we respond to shifts in the humanitarian system and in the political spheres beyond it. These review processes also ensure that our collective learnings and reflections, and refinements in ways of working and in feminist practice, inform the strategy, which then informs the FHN's activities and work planning.

A mid-term review of this Strategy is planned for the end of 2023, at which point the barriers to implementing it will be reflected on collectively by the FHN membership, and changes that need to be made to strengthen our approach will be included. A monitoring and evaluation framework will also be developed collectively. A review and reflection process will then be held again in mid-2024.

How the FHN Strategy informs plans and priorities

Each year, FHN members collectively reflect on the FHN's achievements and ways of working, and consider priorities for the year ahead, including, critically, how we will continue to achieve our objectives. Members' reflections define the FHN's priorities, which are revisited and refined on an annual basis (using processes outlined later in this document).

Key priorities define the activities outlined in our annual workplan, which is agreed upon by all members. This overarching workplan informs committee workplans and the workplans of the FHN Secretariat. The FHN's achievements are reported to members in quarterly newsletters, published on the FHN website and shared with stakeholders in the FHN Annual Report.



two

The feminist change we seek in the humanitarian system



Vision

An intersectional feminist ecosystem in which grassroots and national feminist actors have the power to ensure all women, girls and gender-diverse people's fundamental human needs are fulfilled before, during, and after crises.

Goal

To contribute to transforming the current humanitarian system into an intersectional feminist ecosystem, free of the structural inequalities that drive crises, including racism, patriarchy, colonialism and neoliberalism.

Strategic Objectives

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

1. To mobilize and strengthen the collective intersectional leadership and power of our network in order to create change in the humanitarian system.
2. To contribute to transforming the current humanitarian system so that the expertise and efforts of women-led and feminist actors and movements are centered, recognized, and adequately resourced.
3. To create actionable feminist evidence and analysis to shift power to women, girls, and gender-diverse people, including women and girls with disabilities; and marginalized communities in crisis-affected contexts.
4. To identify and challenge colonial, patriarchal and racist practices and demand bilateral donors, affected country governments, UN agencies, and INGOs institute policies and practices that shift power in the humanitarian system to feminist organizations and WROs.
5. To shift power in the humanitarian system to ensure: the authentic and meaningful representation of feminist actors in decision-making; safeguarding and accountability to affected civil society and communities; and financing and equitable partnerships.

How we define the term 'feminist'

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

Our definition of a feminist humanitarian system is one that:

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

three

How we work: Achieving change with a feminist approach



FEMINIST HUMANITARIAN NETWORK
STRATEGY 2020-2025

Our work

The FHN is committed to upholding feminist ways of working amongst its members. Feminist principles define how the FHN is structured, its planning and decision-making processes, and the way that meetings are managed and discussions engaged in. Just as the FHN is committed to transforming power dynamics in the humanitarian system, so too are we committed to recognizing and addressing power dynamics within our network. We seek to create an environment within the FHN that truly reflects the feminist principles we aim to embed in the humanitarian system.

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

The principles underpin our structure, our policies and processes, and ways of working with each other.

To preserve our feminist principles, which underpin our structure, our policies and processes, and ways of working with each other, the Network is bound by a set of commitments that members are expected to uphold individually and that the FHN must uphold as a collective. All new members are asked to agree to align with these commitments when they join.

Our commitments

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

Membership

WROs from the Global South lead the FHN, and international organizations use their privilege (including access to funding and decision-making spaces) to support this leadership in a variety of ways, including opening spaces, providing financial and technical support (recognising the additional staffing capacity they have) to ensure that the advocacy and campaigning priorities defined by WROs are achieved.

In line with our commitment to acknowledge and address power disparities between members, the FHN is committed to maintaining a membership, among its organizational members, of at least 70% representation from women's rights organizations working at grassroots and national levels in the Global South, and no more than 30% representation of international members.

All organizational members must align with the FHN's membership principles, including being women's organizations, or women-led organizations (wherein Board and management are women). All members must commit to upholding the FHN's feminist principles, both in their own ways of working, and in their engagement with the FHN.

Up to date information on the FHN's current membership can be found on the FHN's website. Strategic plans for membership growth are outlined in the FHN Membership Strategy, which has been developed collectively by members, and implemented under the guidance of the FHN Membership Committee.

Network structure and leadership

To uphold our commitment to collective leadership, the FHN’s work is driven by four strategic committees, each of which works to implement its own strategy. These strategies have been developed and agreed in consultation with the wider FHN membership, and seek to achieve the Network’s overarching strategic commitments as defined in this Strategy.

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

The FHN is governed by a Steering Committee, responsible for oversight of the FHN. The Committee reflects the 70/30 ratio that the FHN is committed to, and at its full complement, is comprised of 13 members, with representation across all geographic regions where FHN members are based. The Steering Committee is nominated and agreed to by the wider membership. The profiles of current Steering Committee members can be found on the FHN website.

Each Committee meets regularly throughout the year (every six weeks), and updates and seeks the input of the wider membership at regular member-wide meetings (which are held every quarter).

FHN Secretariat

The FHN and its committees are coordinated by a Secretariat, which is currently hosted by ActionAid and led by the FHN Lead/FHN Co-Leads.

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

The FHN is committed to maintaining a lean Secretariat in order to ensure that the leadership of the FHN remains with its members. At May 2023, the Secretariat is comprised of three staff members: the FHN Lead, the FHN Fundraising Lead, and the FHN Communications Lead.

The role and processes of the FHN Secretariat are defined in the FHN annual workplan and in the FHN Secretariat manual.

Decision-making

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

The FHN Steering Committee is responsible for making decisions pertaining to the FHN's overall strategy and approach. Strategic committees work alongside the Steering Committee to ensure that all FHN work is aligned with our feminist principles, and to ensure that all committees are up to date on the work of others. FHN quarterly members' meetings are the primary spaces for collective decision-making across the wider membership. Additional processes and tools are used as required to ensure that decision-making includes as many members as possible, is as accessible as possible, and allows for meaningful contributions from the whole membership.

These processes and tools include surveys, meetings between Steering Committee members as needed, and meetings between the Secretariat and members as needed.

Learning and reflection

A core element of the FHN's feminist approach is to reflect regularly and consistently, to ensure that the FHN is accountable as a collective, that its Secretariat is accountable to members, and that its members are accountable to each other. Reflection is critical to ensure that we are consistently strengthening our feminist approach.

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

Annual learning, reflection, and planning

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

Each year, the FHN distributes a survey to members, seeking their feedback and reflections, as well as their ideas to strengthen our feminist ways of working, and to define our priority activities. The annual workplan is then drafted, and finalized by FHN members collectively at an annual member-wide planning and reflection meeting.

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

Our role

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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