

Kenya Feminism Report



IDENTIFYING THE BARRIERS &
VITAL INTERSECTIONS FOR CHANGE
TO SUPPORT YOUNG FEMINIST
LEADERS IN KENYA.

SCOPE



SCOPE THANKS

Scheaffer Okore, we feel so lucky to work in partnership with you and thank you for your guidance and commitment to leading this project with us.

Scope would like to thank the brave feminist participants for their openness and collaboration on NextGenFem. We salute you and the work you do every day to help make a better and equal world for women and girls.



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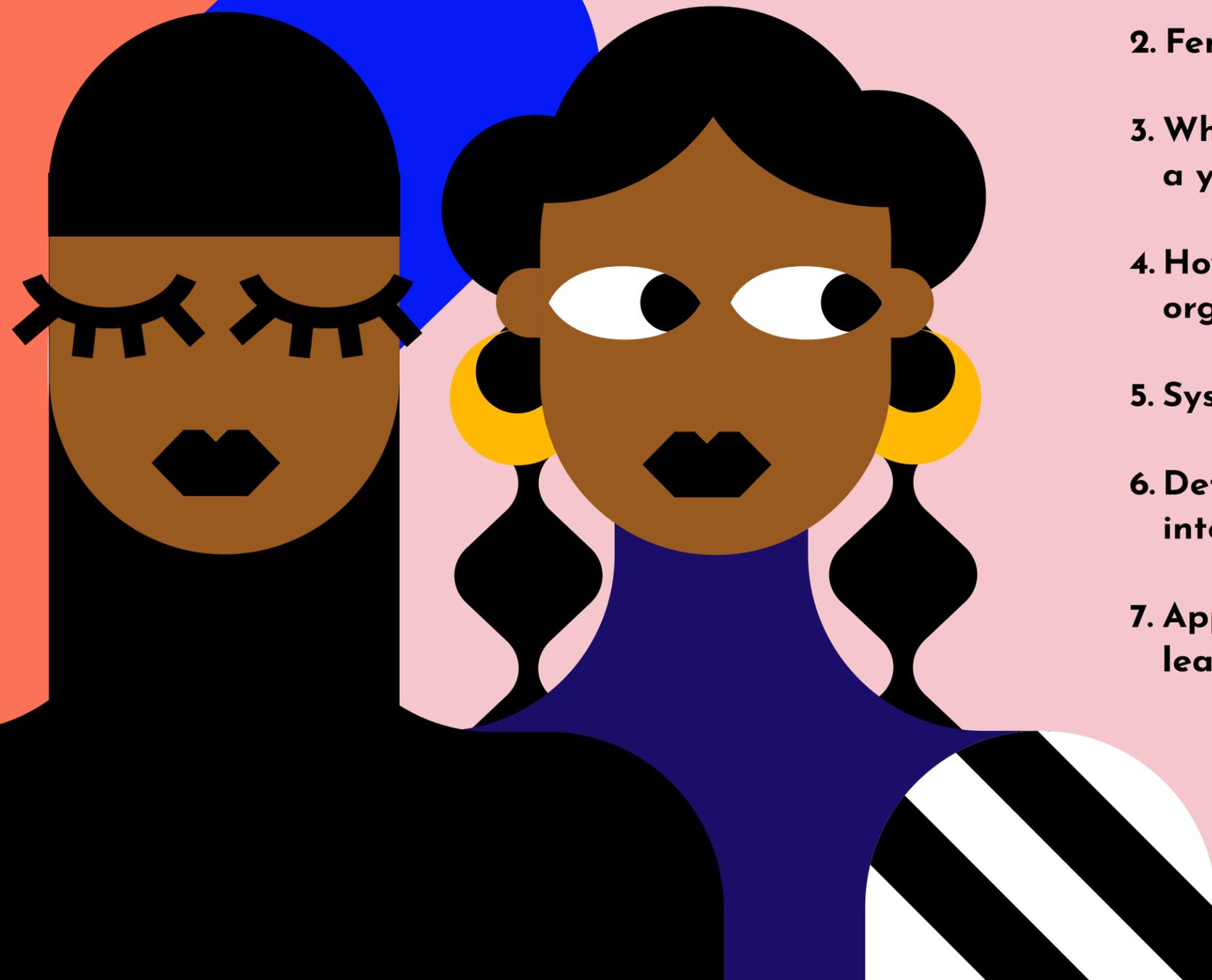


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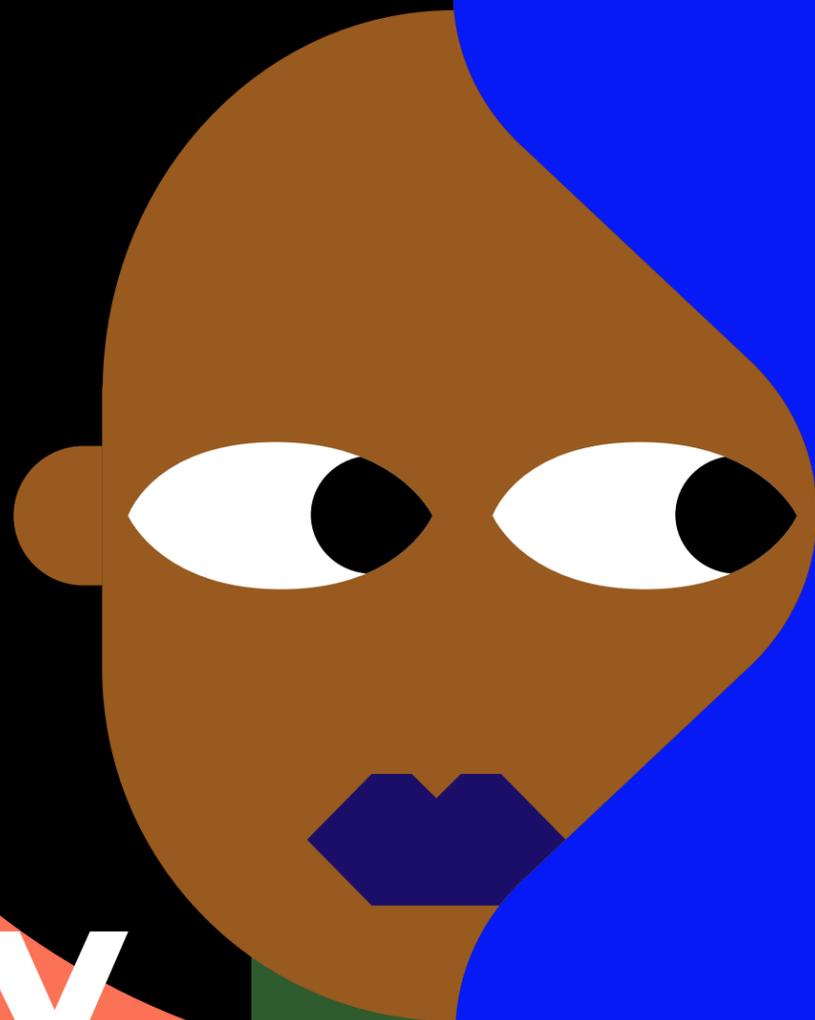
Table of Contents



1. Why NextGenFem?
2. Feminism in Kenya
3. What does it mean to be a young Kenyan feminist?
4. How is Kenyan feminism organised and led?
5. Systemic barriers
6. Defining the spaces & intersections for change
7. Appendix: Kenyan feminist leadership priorities



1. Why NextGen Fem?



NextGenFem is a future-focused platform that supports young feminists toward the achievement of rights for a new generation. NGF works with young feminist leaders to develop and support innovative, intersectional models of feminist activism and social mobilisation through collaborative planning and co-design. It is led by Scope Impact and their network of feminists across East Africa.

Over the last two decades, a girl's chances of receiving an education, enjoying a constitutional right to equality and living a longer and healthier life have increased considerably. Globally, decision-makers and leaders have expressed commitment to and support for gender equality and the realisation of rights for women and girls. However, there has been limited advancement on either.

Progress remains slow as the underlying causes of gender equality are not adequately addressed and political will to make the changes needed on the ground is weak. Hence, our society continues to be structured according to unequal power relations that create deep-seated barriers to equality for women and girls everywhere.

Over the last two years, Scope has worked directly with thousands of women around the world. They have shared their dreams, fears and the challenges they face every day. Across geographies, they all say

the same thing: the awareness, demand, accountability and implementation of their human rights are at risk, are lacking, or don't exist. We've also found that there is a new generation of young feminists who don't feel visible, heard or understood. They've told us that they are finding it difficult to find their place in siloed feminist movements that don't necessarily reflect their realities, needs, language or ways of organising. We have also identified a lack in applying an intersectional approach to defining new models of support for young feminists.

NextGenFem is a platform that focuses on listening, learning, and using creative methods to co-create new pathways toward the achievement of rights for this new generation of young women. NextGenFem establishes an innovative intersectional model of feminist activism through collaborative planning, co-creation and solution design driven by young feminists and creativity.

As a first step, we brought together feminists in Kenya to learn the views of the new generation, identify their drivers, and map both the immediate and potential long-term needs. This report details the learnings, priorities and intersections that are critical to paving a new way forward for feminism in Kenya.

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2. Feminism in Kenya



Kenya is an expansive country with more than 50 different languages and varying cultures. During the colonial period between 1890 and 1963, women reigned as key players in the fight for independence against British imperialism. Women such as Mekatilili wa Menza led the Giriama people in 1913 as their leader and spiritual prophet; Wangũ wa Makeri known as the only female headman - a title that was only accorded to men but was accorded to her due to her leadership role, and Field Marshall Muthoni wa Kirima was a top-ranking female fighter in the Kenya Land and Freedom Army of the Mau Mau Uprising.

Women continued to play these leadership roles after independence with the examples of Chelagat Mutai, Phoebe Asiyó and Wangari Mathaai who demonstrated what can be termed as feminist practices and leadership even before the title feminism became a phenomenon. Pre-colonial and Colonial-era Kenyan feminism can thus be seen as an evolution that has taken the

shape of the specific eras, the colonial and pre-colonial era all had their own kind of feminist women fighters. Just as there were avenues for women organising for their cause and the fight for independence, today the current crop of feminists are fighting for their full humanity and the overall dismantling of patriarchal structures.

Over the years, communities have evolved and taken up new economic practices with urbanisation playing a key part in ensuring more people relocated in search of work, education and a better life. In modern-day Kenya, there's a deliberate and gradually growing fundamental shift happening in the minds of people. People didn't just change where they live and what they do, but most importantly they started changing how they thought about women. The harmful view that patriarchy uses to define women as mere helpers and caregivers at home started to be questioned - in hushed consistent tones within the home, places of work and the broader society.



"In Kenyan public spheres, women are locked out of dominant structures of decision-making, representation and active participation."

The idea that society insidiously treated women unjustly begun to manifest in everyday conversations with women recalling that as far back as they can remember, the women within their families were already living some kind of feminist lives. Feminist issues like pushing for girls education, protecting girls from early marriages and women pursuing financial autonomy already existed within historic contexts. This is why feminism is not a foreign concept in Kenya.

History has several examples of women from diverse backgrounds and ethnicities, although having patriarchal leaning hierarchies of governance, spearheading discourse for their welfare. Feminist historians have revealed that there has always been a women's movement in every era where feminists have complained of the oppression of women in relation to their male contemporaries. Feminist thought has a relatively long history even though the term feminism is of a fairly recent origin.

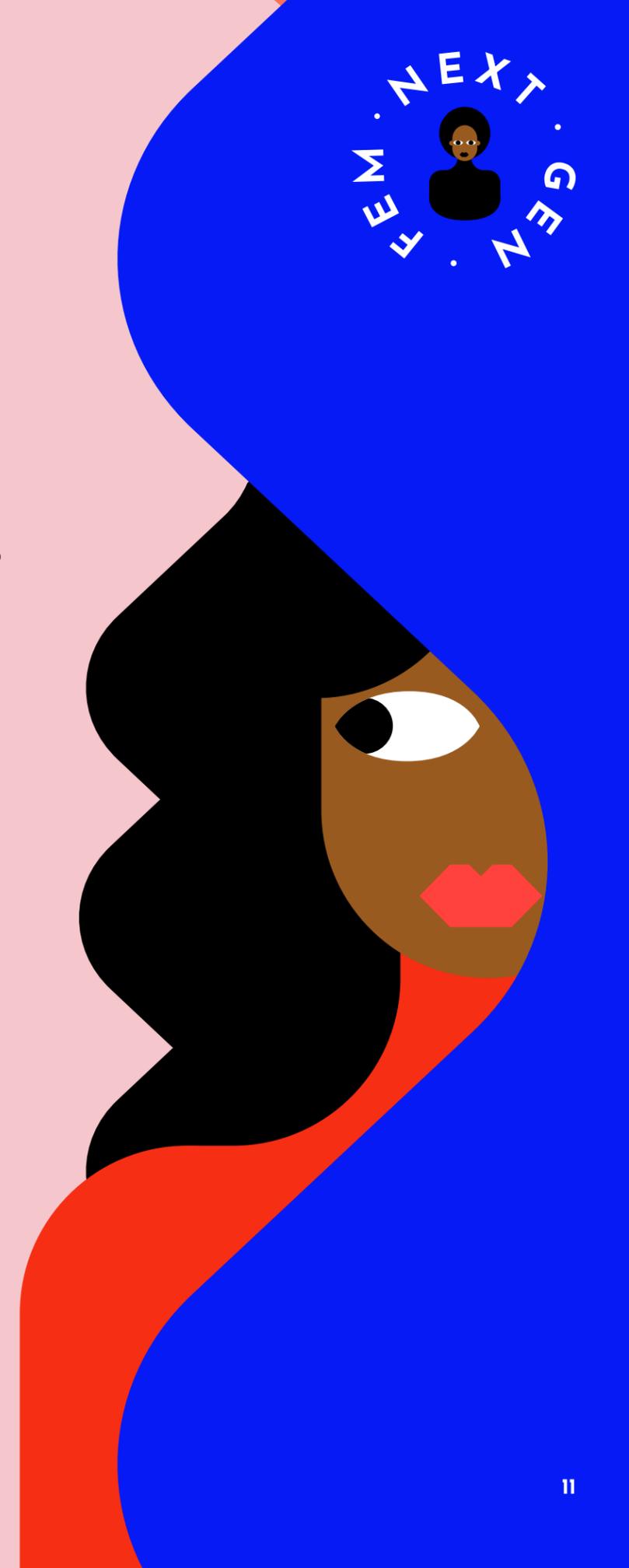
In the 21st century, feminist work is centred on ensuring that transformative structural change for all women comes both in the public and the private spheres of life. The private sphere of women's lives is dominated by stringent gender roles, denial of women's agency and the limitations of women in fully owning themselves. This private structure is the cause of gender-based violence that women continue to face with recent rising cases of femicide. This violence is wrongfully justified by the lack of body autonomy where women's bodies are often seen as possessions of men. Men have a right to women's bodies and if denied this right, they turn to violence.

In Kenyan public spheres, women are locked out of dominant structures of decision-making, representation and active participation. Policies that govern public spheres are male-centric which exacerbate male supremacy. Male supremacy thus becomes the basis of policy frameworks on public safety and security which see

women as culpable victims of violence and exploitation without examining the accountability of men. Male supremacy is what dominates the idea that a man's labour is payable in money while a woman should accept platitudes or less money. The devaluing of women's work or experiences in every sphere is therefore framed within strict masculinity which is deeply harmful to women.

The majority of poor Kenyans are women. The reasons vary from women's prevalence in low-paid occupations to the gender wage gaps. Women's mobility, safety, asset ownership and access to financing are limited. There is still no full realization that women are an essential part of the economy. Societal patriarchy also pervades the way women use their money. For many women, the concept of money is something to be given away, often to their spouses, thus reducing their financial independence and agency even further.

This is the reason why Kenyan feminists are fighting for the dismantling of the entire patriarchal structure because it is this very structure that allows for toxic masculinity and male domination to still be part of every day women's lives. It is what pushes women to continue negotiating their humanity because patriarchy doesn't recognise women as human beings.





3. What does it mean to be a young Kenyan feminist?

Before talking about Kenyan feminists it's important to understand that in Kenya:

- The state is always fighting back against a progressive feminist movement through its retrogressive...which allows for underage girls to be seen as legally consenting to sex, making it difficult to prosecute sexual abusers.
- The state doesn't bother with fixing structural barriers against women or committing to giving women agency but rather it focuses on strategies like gender mainstreaming. Gender mainstreaming only ends up benefiting those women who are already at the table leaving out the majority who are vulnerable.
- Kenyan feminism is divided by classism, intergenerational disconnect and demographics.

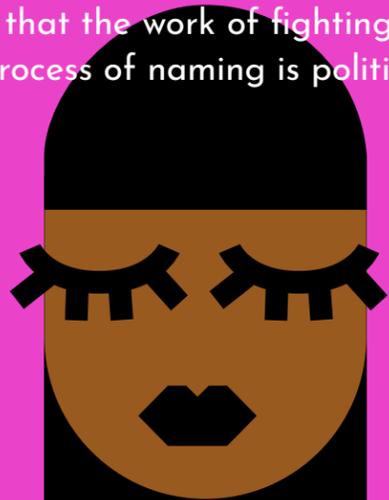
Kenyan feminists strive to break barriers every day in both small and big ways. Feminists have acute experience of the struggle being both broad in terms of areas to tackle and simultaneously deeply personal in the motivations and topical segments. This spans the professional world and focuses on equal opportunity and pay, to supporting women in the myriad of issues in their local communities, and personal concerns about safety and battling ensconced gender roles.

Feminists agree that it's not just about the personal anymore, but dismantling the structures of patriarchy which requires a consistent "chipping away at the issues" alongside a longer-term orientation which has been missing conjoined voices and strategic plans.



Feminist identity and naming

Those who define and name themselves publicly as feminists do so because they celebrate their feminist identities and politics. They recognize that the work of fighting for women's rights is deeply political, and the process of naming is political too.



- Feminism isn't a choice. Understanding this requires one to understand that feminism is the fight against all patriarchal structures that subjugate women to male domination. These structures are in every aspect of women's lives making it mandatory that the fight against it be every woman and man's fight. The assumption that women have a choice of simply not fighting the patriarchy is a fallacy.
- To call yourself a feminist is a radical political act that comes with backlash. The price to pay for calling oneself a feminist is very high, it's probably worse than being seen as a corrupt politician. Feminists lose their privacy and put themselves at grave personal risk just by owning the title feminist. In order for women to safely label themselves feminists, they must have some kind of power to be able to push back on the resistance.
- Feminist identity is shaped by personal, geographical, religious and other varying factors like age, education, social status etc. This is why being in a feminist space should include the existence of various feminisms and identities. It is possible to be many things at once, but this lack of a conjoined definition and battle cry dilutes the strength and unity of the whole in the Kenyan feminism movement.
- To identify as a feminist leader typically happens after a period of learning and unlearning and constantly evolving. This metamorphosis is consistent across leaders, but it takes place in an organic and personal fashion without a structured understanding, process or mentorship. They don't feel there is communal support that is practical and in a sense becoming a feminist leader requires every individual woman to experience the isolated rites of passage.
- The feminist movement should be subject to evolution as different women join the movement at different times, for different reasons etc. So the movement and identity as a feminist shouldn't be restrictive and force them to typically "stick where they land", meaning the immediate context or specific subset of the feminist struggle becomes their feminist identity which perpetuates the division of subsets within feminism. Learning more about other areas of feminism is rare, often women become further ensconced in the space where they begin.



Feminist movement fragmentation

The idea of movements fragmenting is not new even in the feminist movement. Like every ideology, feminism struggles to unify the diversity that exists within it both in terms of identities and audiences. Because of this, most movements that are supposed to enhance the fight against patriarchy get stuck due to:

- The double audience complexity of Kenyan politics and the critical need for funding; feminists are finding themselves playing acceptability politics, trying to speak the donor language and self-censoring their own language and appearance. Over time this weakens both their individual resolve as well as the ability to scale the movement because many inexperienced feminists don't see themselves in the narrative or image. Further fractions and factions result between established and new/young feminists.
- There is a double-edged sword of the feminist rebel identity; many feminist self-identify as being rebels as part of their individual personalities. This in itself is not an issue, but problems arise when this identity becomes the only identity of what a feminist should be - hard, loud and tough. These traits are important because of the need for strength to withstand and survive in the struggle, but it becomes isolating and off-putting for other women who aren't like this.

- Being a feminist should include all the differences in personalities that women possess, or else those who don't fit in this personality type or don't receive the needed support and community leave the movement.
- There is a danger of the buzzword; feminism has now become the new sexy word that almost everyone is using including donors who are only present where there are "feminists". This divides the movement as these alleged feminists are those who use acceptability in terms of language and often lack real association or impact/work behind them. They don't add or aren't part of a tangible progressive feminist movement. Instead, they often block the real feminists working in grassroots communities from receiving the bulk of the funding. These power dynamics and discrimination inhibits the growth of the movement greatly by muting the voices and blurring feminists who aren't close to donors.





Feminism and sexuality

Gender is socially constructed, not biologically determined, and is human-made. The debate on sexuality within the feminist space is a heated one because being a feminist doesn't mean one is not homophobic. This was the assumption that caused so much harm when cracks within the feminist movement began to appear. It required that feminists re-evaluate their principles and shift their fight against patriarchy to include the fight against homophobia. A movement that seeks to humanise women cannot, therefore, ignore the plight of minority groups, marginalised communities and vulnerable folk. In order to effectively serve its purpose, feminism must understand;

- Sex-classes are hierarchical: men are privileged and women are oppressed. Because of their sexual biology, women are expected to be available for male sexual satisfaction, gestate children and raise them.
- Heterosexuality is thus experienced as compulsory even though there are non-binary folk who identify differently or not at all.
- Feminism should encompass the struggles of LGBTQI folk who are constantly vulnerable and at-risk because of the patriarchal identity and acceptability of heteronormativity. Including the voices of marginalised communities is a fundamental feminist practise.



Feminism and religion

The conflict between feminism and religion is a major issue in feminist advocacy and discourse in Kenya. Religion forms a fundamental part of societies and cultures that ordain male domination, while feminism seeks to unearth the parts of societies and cultures that ordain male domination.

RELIGION, THEREFORE:

- Affirms and holds gender roles as roles that are supreme according to the creation of Adam and Eve with no room for questioning. Feminism challenges this thinking by questioning these same gender roles hence the clash between the two.
- Restricts the idea that a woman can belong to a particular religion and still be a feminist is highly doubted when religion tells women to reduce herself while feminism demands that women increases in her existence.
- Limits and banishes the feminist narrative within religious circles that aren't open to being progressive. Many feminists have had to walk away from their religious teachings to find sanity and a sense of clarity in their feminist journeys. They end up feeling isolated because they don't receive the

emotional or spiritual support for anyone who leaves the house of prayer.

- In the Christian faith, feminists are seen as demons because they question things which makes them "non-Christian" and "unholy" which distances us from society. Feminist are categorical that they can't "wait and let god-figure things out"
- Religion is used as a validation and sanctification of patriarchal ideals and the discrimination of women. Religion grants men power to rule, making them revered which is why male politicians believe that if they pray at a church they will be elected. Their sins are wiped clean with zero accountability because religion is about "do not judge and forgive" while feminism constantly revolves around accountability.

4. How is feminism organised and led in Kenya?

When access to funding, media coverage and a mainstream awareness is dictated by patriarchal expectations, it is difficult for the young feminist leader to get her foot in the door or to be heard. Young Kenyan feminist leaders feel they are downplayed, underestimated and disregarded which results in further disengagement and segmentation.

The presence of young feminist leaders in mainstream media spaces, although rare, only happens after pressure from known female leaders and typically follows some

spike in news based on a noteworthy event that results in a shortlived, controversial debate that doesn't place them in the best light.

Rising issues and barriers:

1. No one is supporting the wider Kenyan feminist movement by charting the history, tracking progress, nor using data at levels even closely similar to initiatives in healthcare and other topical areas that are deemed important to the development community.

The result of this is:

- It is complex and difficult to pinpoint who and what is causing progressive shifts. The diversity of feminists and segmentation within the movement means they are everywhere and not in one place because feminist work is not linear. Tracking all the work being done requires focus and resources and the feminist movement is struggling by this lack of intel and knowledge.



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- There is a dire lack of data and documentation and no system to feed into. Because feminist work is qualitative other than quantitative, it's difficult to constantly document especially when the majority of the work is subject to subjectivity and behavioural change.
1. Feminist are forced to individually build their own support systems which are emotional, social and financial in an informal model using friends as a basic unit to help them survive. The effort to put their own support systems in place is tedious and exhausting. These feminist created systems act as anchors when an emergency occurs and occasionally help during mitigating injustices as government safety nets fall through. They enable feminists to pool the little resources they can to provide assistance to women when the system fails which is almost all the time. This is a key area where funding is vital for the basic dignity of women in unfortunate situations. This network is a lifeline and should be strengthened.
 2. There is a lack of mobilising tools and systems that work to support and build community across the entire Kenyan feminist movement. When feminists have tools they are able to mobilise.

For example, Twitter is a powerful mobilisation tool but the people doing the work at the grassroots level neither have access to Twitter nor any social media support, yet they should be the focus. There are women on the ground doing the work who don't have access to social media, yet the "known and established" are the ones defining the space and language while the grassroots programs that do get specific funding are separate from the wider movement.

3. Women's leadership needs to be redefined and supported. Leadership is still defined using men as the benchmark and standard. This means that women are judged based on how similar they are in the mannerisms, dressing, appearance and even tonal voice that is masculine. Most women in political, corporate and academia are expected to wear what is called a "power pantsuit", have an acceptable hairstyle and not wear color as it "distracts". These are based on the fact that men have for a long time occupied leadership spaces and hence made space resemble them alone. We must then re-orient the perception about what leadership should be, how it should appear, speak like and behave outside of the limited frame provided by men.



"Leadership is still defined using men as the benchmark and standard."



5. What are the systemic barriers to Kenyan feminism?

When we talk about systemic barriers, we mean the barriers that exist in the personal, family, societal, professional and political spaces. These barriers are fueled by the conditioning that women's position, role, representation and participation is tied solely to their gender. Which means that as women in our own upbringing and personal view of the world, our lenses are laced with patriarchy. We are conditioned to not see ourselves as more than what patriarchy believes and defines us to be

hence. This is what makes the personal barrier the most important barrier to overcome in the feminist journey.

After overcoming the way we see ourselves and reinforcing our place as full people within the society, women begin contending with the immediate structure of the family. This structure operates minimising women and limiting them to gendered roles which any woman

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who refuses is automatically outcast as wayward, difficult and unruly. Societal interference on the feminist journey is what follows the family as societies tend to discriminate and isolate feminists. They perceive feminists as trouble makers and in most occasions justify the harm that befalls them as a way of setting them straight and serving as an example to any other woman who wants to follow the feminist path.

Lastly, in professional and political spaces, feminism faces institutionalised patriarchy as a key barrier that is reinstated by harmful policies which serve a single purpose of subjugating women. In professional workspaces women are reduced to note-takers, tea serves while their professional labour is unequally paid. These particular spaces are male-centric making it very difficult for women to not just get into but thrive in as they are expected to lose their humanity

to be accepted. Rising and important considerations include:

- How do we teach women so they can learn the politics of the spaces they want to get into?
- How do we restructure these spaces within policy so they can enable an environment for women to be productively engaged?
- How do we ensure that existing harmful policies that deny women equal pay, discriminate working mothers and single women, isolate young women, encourage sexual predation etc are abolished and replaced with better policies?
- How do we facilitate the shift in professional and political culture that's anchored on machoism and toxic masculinity?

"...feminism faces institutionalised patriarchy as a key barrier that is reinstated by harmful policies which serve a single purpose of subjugating women."





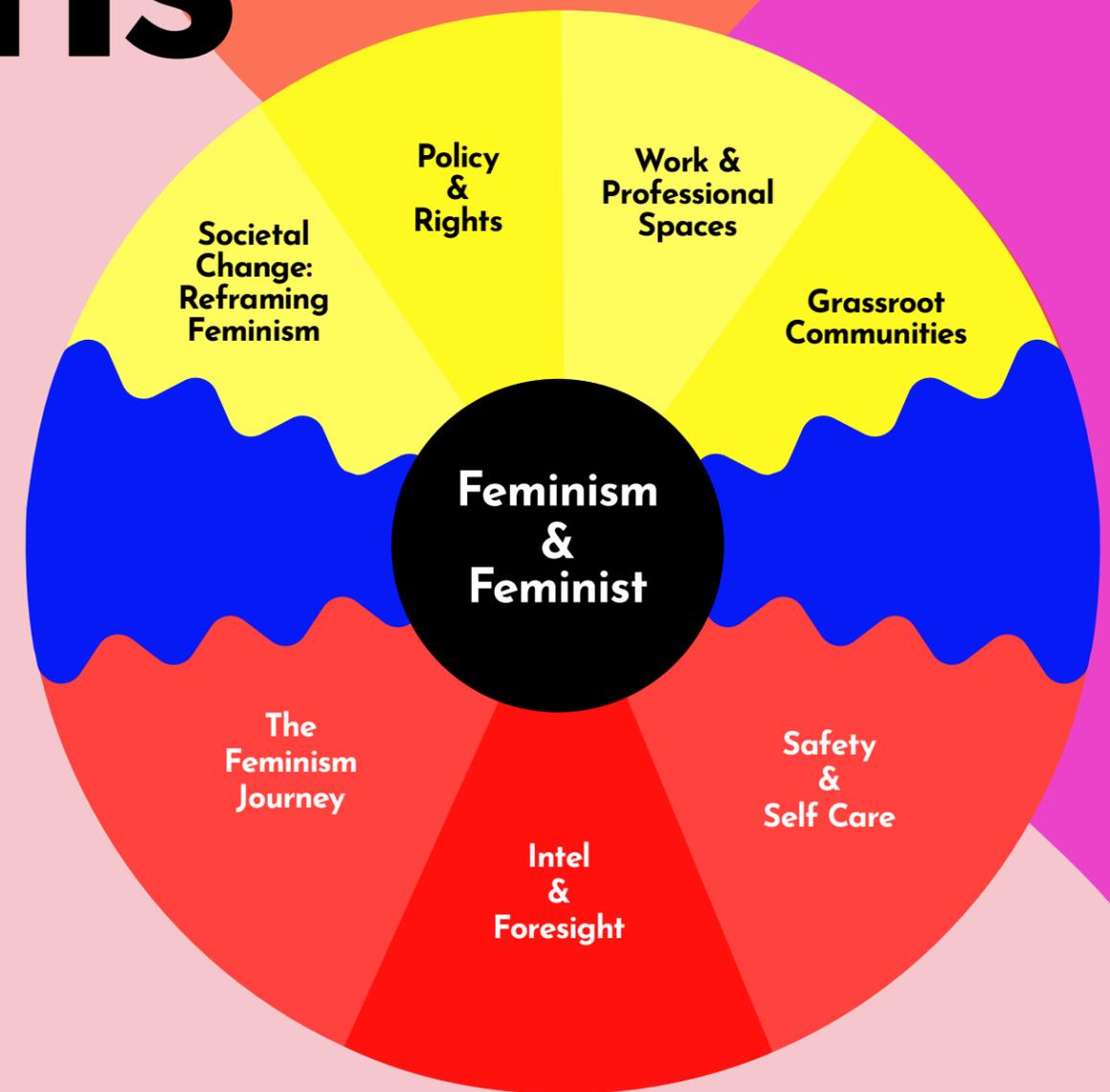
6. Defining the Spaces & Intersections for Change

In order to address and define targeted solutions that will support and benefit the next generation of Kenyan feminists, we must first identify the systems, spaces and map the full interconnected and intersectional environment of change that is required.

This enables the understanding of where the feminist journey should begin and how far it should go. By understanding how

systems intersect and manifest in every aspect of women's lives, we can, therefore, begin to address the key areas needing feminist interventions.

The identified most critical "pieces of the puzzle" require interconnected focus, support and solutions include:





"In order to create progressive change for feminism within the Kenyan society, we must start from the individual as a key part of the broader society."

1. Societal change: creating space for feminism in Kenyan society.

In order to create progressive change for feminism within the Kenyan society, we must start from the individual as a key part of the broader society. This is important because the first person to start unlearning patriarchy and embracing feminism is the individual. Both women and men are raised in a patriarchal world meaning that any change that is meaningful to shift society without it focusing on the individual is in vain. We must then begin by;

- Properly defining feminism, pushing for its acceptance and building wider support.
- (Re)branding modern feminism and debunking the myth of a singular feminist narrative while leveraging the history of Kenyan feminism
- Redefining gender roles (from relationships at home to the community by elaborating how the dysfunction within the home leads to the dysfunction in the broader society)
- Unpacking the role of culture and beliefs in the quest for feminist progress

2. Advancing the fight for fairness, policy and political accountability.

- Identifying legislative gaps and structural barriers against feminist progress
- Strengthening advocacy on women and girl's rights and increasing its awareness
- Holding leaders - political or otherwise - who have the power to ensure implementation of progressive policies, laws and cultures that advance feminist agendas to account.
- Creating and enacting policies that go beyond mere gender mainstreaming and instead address systemic discriminations that women and girls are subjected to.
- Protecting the rights for and of feminists across all spaces, i.e. in social, political and economic.
- Advancing the fight for the expansion of more formal spaces for the next generation of (feminist) political leaders.



3. Making work and professional spaces equitable and fair.

To be able to do this, those who are fighting for women's work must start having conversations about what dignified work means. We must address the dignity within the culture of work that is pegged on toxic male hierarchies and create an alternative culture. This will require:

- Redefining work within the lens of dignity as a right to equal pay, job security, reduced barriers and discriminations.
- Teaching feminist leadership in workspaces and how this is beneficial for not just the staff but for businesses as well.
- Advancing female feminist leadership in the private sector.
- Mentoring, training and supporting the next generation of women in the world of work.
- Establishing a new standard of professional work culture that rejects and shifts gender equality.

4. Doubledown on grassroots community focus.

Communities are where much of feminist work takes place but due to its conservative nature, the work being done rarely gets the visibility or support needed to help its advancement. Because of this, all the efforts are siloed and stagnated. Supporting and raising the visibility of the grassroots feminist communities requires:

- Mapping, reaching and deliberately supporting those who are doing the work at this secondary level.
- Intentionally funding these communities "in their language" and within terms that don't reduce their authenticity or models of operation.
- Directly supporting female service providers who are creating alternative ways of doing business.

"We must address the dignity within the culture of work that is pegged on toxic male hierarchies and create an alternative culture."





"Data is an important tool to measure not just where we are in the feminist journey but also offers a tentative guideline on the possible gains we can attain."

5. Establishing continuity within the feminist journey.

The idea that feminism is something that is recent without the context of what feminism looked like for women who came before us should be addressed. Through this, we can then see linkages between:

- What has been happening
- What was done
- Where we are currently in the trajectory of change
- Why continuing with the fight against patriarchy in a modern world is a necessity

We must then be learning, evolving, organising and leading feminism in ways that can advance women's humanity using modern ways that yield progress such as:

- Capacity building for and within the feminism journey
- Investing in & developing the personal growth of women
- Bridging the intergenerational gap via fostering transformative mentorship among women

- Establishing a common language and tools that are accessible for greater movement building
- Expanding the feminist space for ease of inclusion of the next generation of feminist leaders

6. Equipping the feminism movement with the intel and foresight they need.

Data is an important tool to measure not just where we are in the feminist journey but also offers a tentative guideline on the possible gains we can attain. Data makes it possible to see that feminist work hasn't just been theoretically happening without any action to back it up. Using data & knowledge to inform the struggle and guide future planning helps in:

- Understanding, trends, progress and barriers
- Convening feminists and informing a common strategic agenda and roadmap
- Designing and sharing tools to support feminist solical mobilization
- Making progress visible

7. Providing and ensuring vital, sustainable self-care & safety.

Selfcare is new within the feminist space because women are expected to constantly fight without resting or healing. The perception of feminist work being seen as not physically, emotionally and mentally exhausting needs to be changed so when feminists require selfcare it is seen as a legitimate need. The safety and security of feminists should also be a priority if we want to ensure that those who fight to advance feminism aren't harmed.

Supporting young feminists' ability to have the energy and security is necessary for:

- Establishing and fueling feminist support networks
- Ensuring safe spaces
- Offering mental health services
- Granting feminists emotional and financial support

"The safety and security of feminists should also be a priority if we want to ensure that those who fight to advance feminism aren't harmed."





Appendix

Ensuring feminist leadership across spaces:
A Kenyan feminist priority list.

From within

- Not just being seen as a leader, but also being inclusive and employing others.
- Keeping an eye on self love and preservation-prioritising self-care & mental health.
- Being bold, speaking up & being truthful.
- Building the sisterhood by teaching, empowering others and giving opportunities.
- Consistently engaging in feminism even when it's not convenient.
- Investing in organising in the grassroots and working with the women doing the work every day.

In our relationships and with our families

- Striving for equal and inclusive decision making.
- Practising and showing love, respect and understanding.
- Redefining and dismantling gender roles bit by bit.
- Creating safe spaces for learning and unlearning.
- Prioritising sexual pleasure and openly discussing sexuality.



In our communities

- Always believe women. Support female service providers.
- Practising kindness, empathy and being sensitive to the needs of others.
- Being personally accountable to the community and consistently seeking inclusivity.
- Teaching and showing a new kind of leadership that is not reflective of or centred on men. Then, having the ability to teach leadership to ensure sustainability and growth of the movement.
- Acknowledging the structural barriers.
- Helping connect others to feminism and developing the capacity to grow on the feminism journey.

As professional leaders:

- Championing for equality across equal pay and roles.
- Supporting women to be assertive by first being assertive ourselves.
- Seeking leadership roles and fighting for equal spaces not “junior female roles”.
- Unpacking and communicating structural barriers that hinder women from professional spaces.

In political spaces:

- Changing the status quo and redefining the space of politics for women.
- Fighting for representation and access to spaces.
- Securing resources for women.
- Creating safety around women’s needs.
- Supporting women financially, emotionally and physically.
- Ensure economic empowerment is shifting towards women.

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