

# Building We

For Feminist Democracies: Community-Led  
Resistance and Structural Reimagination



We express immense gratitude to everyone that was part of the dialogues presented in this booklet, for sharing their wisdom, ideas, and experiences, and to Marina Sitrin, whose work has deeply inspired us. We wholeheartedly thank JASS, and in particular our compañera Alma Magaña, for their love, support, and for believing in our work. We would like to thank our beloved Paulina Mimberg for the editing work, and for the art and design of this booklet.

Feminist Democracy is Love in Practice!  
FHC, April 2026

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# Introduction

As territories worldwide face overlapping crises - from ecological collapse, rising authoritarianism and the dismantling of democratic institutions - there is a growing urgency to radically transform dominant models of leadership and governance. We cannot use the very same structures, tools and ways of relating that are at the core of the capitalist patriarchal hegemonic system (see bell hooks' description of imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy and Gramsci's concept of hegemony to describe the dominant social system) that is destroying life. FHC's Building We - for Feminist Democracies (hereinafter Building We) research project explores the idea of feminist democracies as regenerative and transformative practices that defy individualism and separation, which are two essential elements of the hegemonic system.

This booklet is part of Building We, and its realisation was possible thanks to the support from JASS. We have learnt deeply from the experiences, publications and practices of many different organisations, movements, collectives and people across diverse territories, as well as connected struggles and movements that are resisting oppressive power around the world. Building We aims to honour practices, tools and wisdom emerging from social, gender and environmental justice groups, organisations and movements that organise grounded in care, autonomy, collective power, shared decision-making and collective accountability.

## Purpose of this Booklet

We aim for this booklet to be useful for those who are trying not to replicate the dynamics, practices and tools of the hegemonic system, but rather build regenerative practices and ecosystems that dismantle capitalist practices and systems. In other words, to practice internally the politics of systemic change. Through highlighting each of the experiences in this booklet, we aim to foreground practices of non-hegemonic and transformative ways of leading, organising and being that are radically different to that of oppressive and dominant systems of leadership and power. We wish this to be a source of inspiration and to offer moments of reflection on your own leadership practices, decision-making and organising structures. We hope this resource can ground and nurture a flowing and contextual collective understanding of what feminist democracies could look like in practice.

We desire to hope in practice and in the small, in the micro, by creating the desirable futures we fight for, in our present, collectively. Therefore, these dialogues and this project overall have been and are a source of hope in practice for us, and we really hope it can be that for you too.

## Methodology & Authors Relationship to the Research

The research project began in 2021. In 2022, we published a review of literature. In 2024, we published a research methodology grounded in a non-extractive, relational approach that challenges dominant and traditional research methods. Across 2023 and 2024, with the support of a cross-geographical and cross-expertise working

group from Turkey, Ecuador, Spain, Indonesia, Italy and the UK, we looked for and reached out to community-led initiatives, collectives and organisations across diverse geographies who, both internally and externally, connected with feminist praxis, transformative leadership, governance models and organisational structures which challenge traditional hierarchy and leadership models.

We rooted our research in a relational, transformative and contextual praxis. We aimed for the process of having research dialogues to be deeply rooted within contexts and lived realities, and we decided to be physically with the communities in the territories when and where we could. That is why we focused on doing fewer dialogues but engaging deeply within the groups' specific contexts. We believe that dialogue means establishing a genuine connection, in trust, reciprocity and common purpose. The research process aimed to dismantle and transform traditional research methods and the separation between those who are researching and those who are the 'subject' of research. Due to our positionality within Europe, we were only able to do in person dialogues within the region, and we therefore acknowledge that this impacted our elaboration.

In 2025, we built connections with the groups which could be part of this process and held dialogues with them. During some of the dialogues, we facilitated reflective spaces grounded in feminist popular education. Through the dialogues we had, we did not wish to label practices as feminist democracies, but to listen, exchange experiences and reflections, and document insights, as well as connect resonances and challenges. Each of the insights that have emerged is rooted in its own context, ancestry and struggle. The dialogues hold insights on collective decision-making, accountability, healing, organisational structures, and much more, and we felt that learning in this relational way is a deeply transformative process.

This booklet in itself is not a research report or a piece of research in itself. It is a collection of stories, insights, intuitions and embodied reflections that connect to our questions and wonders about feminist democracies, leadership and decision-making as part of Building We.

As we began to document resonances and challenges, we started to understand feminist democracies as flowing, shapeshifting, contextual frameworks, structures and tools. We wish to continue this living documentation of practices that reclaim democracy as true people power grounded in our interconnectedness, collective autonomy and belonging to nature, where our relationships and practices reflect the feminist realities we are fighting for.

## FEMINIST HIKING COLLECTIVE

FHC aims to connect embodiment with feminist popular education, to contribute to transformative systemic change for the common good of all nature. Our experience building FHC shaped our inspiration for the Building We project. Within our different experiences in organisations and organising, we experienced the Tyranny of Structurelessness (Jo Freeman, 1970) as well as traditional hegemonic models of hierarchical leadership and dominant structures. Due to this, we felt a deep need to look at the micro, at the ways we organise in our groups and communities and the way we have practiced decision-making in our relationships at work and within collectives. We also wanted to look at embodied and territorially grounded forms of organising. We saw in our own experiences how hegemonic dominant and competitive, individualistic dynamics of power are internalised and destroy groups and movements, and bring organisations to collapse, because of the recreation of the same dynamics of the system we wished to transform. We wished to connect with

different wisdoms and ways of knowing and learn from ways of living without extracting or decontextualising.

## ABOUT THE CO-AUTHORS

ELENA GHIZZO is an Italian feminist researcher, activist and campaigner that has lived across different regions of Europe. She is a lover of co-creation in writing, politics, music, agroecological farming and other creative worlds. She co-founded FHC in 2020 and has contributed to its vision, politics, publications, feminist popular education methodologies and collaborations development.

RIA RYAN is a feminist activist and researcher. She co-founded FHC in 2020 and has contributed to research projects, feminist hiking retreats, feminist leadership and feminist popular education methodologies and publications. Whilst being part of FHC, she has developed her love for creative illustration and imagination through graphic design. Ria and Elena met as feminist activists in London in 2018 as part of a community organising space dedicated to addressing gender-based violence and building feminist leadership practices. Together, we co-founded FHC with Giulia Bruzzone and Giulia Meneghetti, and have always aimed to ground our leadership of FHC in collective feminist leadership structures, processes and practices. We have reflected on the invisible dynamics that emerge from practicing feminist leadership and horizontality within collectives and organisations, and on the invisible labour and burdens that emerge from such dynamics. At the same time, we have reflected deeply on the need to transform hegemonic dominant hierarchical and top-down structures that claim to do social justice work but are repeating the same capitalist individualistic oppressive power that emerges from destructive systems. We reflected on the importance of transforming internalised systems of oppression, of ego, of the

individualism and competition that is internalised within us due to the permeation of capitalistic dynamics that are so embedded in society. Leading a feminist organisation with this approach has been deeply revolutionary for us, however, we have constantly reflected on the need for concrete tools and practices in order to lead differently, to organise movements that truly depart from individualised oppressive leadership but do not conform to structurelessness. We have felt and experienced a deep need for tools and to surface practices of movements who are exploring different ways of organising, leading and being. We acknowledge that our positionality within a European context both within our own lived experiences, as well as our geographic base as an organisation, impacts our perspectives as well as the dialogues we were able to do. We acknowledge the impact this has on this research project as well as the groups and movements we could engage with. We felt that what we do is just as important as how we do it, and we wished to ground this publication on what we have learnt along the way from our dialogues with each other, with organisations, movements and collectives, as well as our own and our shared interconnected experiences.

## Overview of the Organisations

The overviews and dialogues are in the chronological order in which we had the dialogues in 2025

### DECIDIM

Decidim is an open-source digital platform designed to enable participatory democracy and collective decision-making. It was developed to facilitate democratic processes within organisations, institutions, and communities, allowing them to have a direct influence

on decision-making. The Decidim Free Software Association is a democratic association for the governance of the Decidim community. Decidim wants to contribute to the democratization of society through the construction of technology, methodologies, practices, standards, actions, narratives, and values, in a free, open, collaborative and reflective way. <https://decidim.org/>

### CARACOL OLOL JACKSON

Caracol Olol Jackson is an organisation based in Vicenza, Italy, that primarily focuses on promoting community empowerment and cultural exchange. It plays a key role in creating spaces for activism, art, and collective participation, particularly within marginalised communities. The name Caracol refers to Zapatista caracoles, which are autonomous regions created by the Zapatista communities in the Chiapas region of Mexico. <https://www.caracolol.it/>

### ULEX

The Ulex Project is an initiative born in the Pyrenees in the north of Spain offering residential training for activists and organisations working toward social justice and ecological justice. Ulex works with numerous individuals and organisations to design and deliver training programmes. They establish partnerships with organisations across Europe and internationally. They bring diverse groups and individuals together in learning communities. Ulex supports organisations, groups, and individuals to foster collaborations, build networks, share experiences, and deepen movement resilience through meaningful connection. <https://ulexproject.org/>

## HAWA FEMINIST COALITION

Hawa Feminist Coalition is a non-governmental, non-profit feminist organization founded in 2018. Rooted in feminist principles, Hawa Feminist Coalition is committed to promoting the safety, equality, justice, rights, and dignity of young women and girls across Somalia. Hawa Feminist Coalition is a membership-based organisation grounded in the belief that Somali young women and girls, united in purpose, have the power to transform their lives and communities. Open to all young women and girls under the age of 35, this grassroots, youth-led feminist movement builds collective strength for a just, equitable, and sustainable future in Somalia.

<https://femsom.org/>

## AWID

AWID (the Association for Women's Rights in Development) is a global feminist organisation that works to advance women's rights and gender justice. AWID works at the intersection of women's rights, social justice, and human rights. The organisation advocates for gender justice, promoting policies and frameworks that support women's rights, including economic justice, sexual and reproductive rights, violence against women, and environmental justice. <https://www.awid.org/>

## LILAK -PURPLE ACTION FOR INDIGENOUS WOMEN'S RIGHTS

LILAK - Purple Action for Indigenous Women's Rights is a feminist organisation based in the Philippines that focuses on indigenous women's justice. They work for land rights, and gender justice and social justice in the context of environmental degradation. One of

the main challenges faced by indigenous women in the Philippines is the loss of their ancestral lands due to mining, agriculture, tourism projects, and other forms of corporate development. LILAK advocates for the recognition and protection of indigenous peoples' land rights and works against land dispossession by large corporations. <https://www.lilak.net/>

## FEMINISTS IN KENYA

Feminists in Kenya (FIK) is a Black feminist and Queer-led movement rooted in community, resistance, and joy. They organise to challenge structural violence, build transformative alternatives, and affirm the dignity, agency, and power of women, girls, and LGBTQIA+ people across Kenya - and beyond.

<https://feministsinkenya.org/>



# DECIDIM



## Barcelona

Decidim is an inspiring radical democracy project that was born in Barcelona in 2016. Decidim is a political project, a software, a transnational community, and a tool for radical democracy. Decidim (from the Catalan “we decide”) is a free, open-source digital platform designed to support participatory democracy.

Developed in Ruby on Rails (a coding platform), it allows organisations such as a city council, university, cooperative, or NGO to create and manage an online space for democratic engagement. At its core, Decidim is a modular web framework that lets users set up digital infrastructures for various forms of collective decision-making. This includes participatory budgeting, strategic planning, public consultations, citizen proposals, and referendums. It also supports offline engagement by integrating tools for managing in-person meetings. Administrators can design and customise participatory processes and structure democratic bodies like councils or committees. Decidim is a collaborative infrastructure for building democratic systems offering the digital tools, documentation, and community support to make participation scalable, and sustainable. We had the honour of speaking with Carolina, who is one of the co-founders, from the very beginning of Decidim, as well as Marta, who has been working with Decidim and joined the coordination committee since the beginning of 2025. Marta is the president of the committee, which shares power and is comprised of 9 members.

*In which moment did Decidim form, what was the context in which it emerged and the necessity for its formation, and how did it develop?*

Around 2011, with the indignados movement in Spain, there was a moment where a lot of people were in the streets, reclaiming a real democracy. It was after the big crisis of 2008. In that period, there were a lot of activists in the streets, technopolitical activists let's say, and they were experimenting with innovative democratic practices to organise people in the streets, to carry on the protests. There was an activist for the housing movement, Ada Colau, (that later became the mayor in Barcelona in 2015) who entered the City Council, with the idea of promoting a model of participatory democracy and creating a platform to co-design public policies together with citizens. From the beginning, the vision was clear: it had to be free software, governed by a community - not just a group of democracy experts. These were the origins of Decidim.

So, with the new government leadership, the Decidim project started. There were municipal staff but also from outside institutions – researchers, developers, participation consultants from other organizations – a very transdisciplinary team. Decidim was first implemented in Barcelona, but we then realised it could be 'expanded' anywhere, not just in the public institutions, but with any organisations that wanted to organise their governance in a democratic way.

We started organising offline meetings in Barcelona, because the community was very local at the beginning, and we divided into working groups. We were about 20 people, 10 in the team and an extra 10 people that would just show up, curious and interested in what we were doing. We had a group for communications, a group for technological things, another group for research, and we were working on this kind of axes and trying to develop the different di-

mensions of the project. The community started to grow but it was still very informal. There were already cities in France using Decidim, there were people contacting us saying “hey this is very cool what you are doing, how can we participate also in the decision making?” We needed a more formal structure to be able to organise better because the next elections in Barcelona were approaching and there was a risk that the project would go unfunded if the political party changed. We had our first governance process with people from France, from Barcelona and cities around Barcelona, and we decided to create a non-profit association: the Decidim association, in 2019. After the elections, Barcelona en Comu got re-elected in the government of Barcelona, so we did not lose any support, but that was a key moment to transfer the management and the governance of the project from the City Council to this new association. The association is now the legal actor and is responsible for the maintenance of the code base and taking care of the community. Decidim is now being used in several countries, especially in Europe, but also in Latin America and Japan.

The Decidim non-profit association has three main governance forums: the general assembly - the main body with all members of the association, it is the main decision-making body, and all decisions go through the general assembly. the coordination committee – a smaller group than the assembly, this is the strategic and political direction of Decidim, it is made from members of the association, and are volunteers, not professionally attached to the project. the technical office - those working inside the association, right now six people are hired by the association, and it is responsible for executive decisions on the day-to-day basis and works very closely with the coordination committee.





*What were the biggest challenges in this process in relation to collective and diversified accountability?*

A challenge is the Tyranny of Structurelessness (Jo Freeman, 1970) - no matter how hard we try to specify everything and make it transparent, there are always some channels or informal relationships that escape that effort due to power dynamics. Another challenge is how to balance the difference between those who have been in the project since the beginning and those who joined later, and how to transfer the power that one has naturally acquired and circulate it among different people. We are trying, with the different groups—it is not easy, there is some tension there—but we have many discussions, and we see no other way to decentralise power. It's very important that there is the technical office, and when very important decisions need to be made, they come to the coordination committee. Another very important element is that there are now people from different backgrounds, perspectives, and geographies in the core governance.

We have annual gatherings around October, the Decidim Fest, which until now has been held in Barcelona, and we are now considering decentralising it and holding it in other places. This space is key to renewing relationships, conversations, and connections, with a lot of informal spaces embedded there too.



*How can Decidim support accountability to communities?*

The Decidim software is very helpful in providing accountability. You can see this in the cities that are using Decidim as an infrastructure for holding public policies accountable as they are deployed. Decidim is used as a tool to make all decisions in the most transparent way, so that accountability is documented and sustain-

ned in a continuous cycle. The platform is designed for this - for accountability and for governance.

There is this myth, especially in feminist spaces, that horizontality and collective care emerge just like this, but without tools and structures there is often a replication of the hegemonic dominant hierarchical power dynamics and practices, in a hidden or invisible way sometimes.



*How do you harvest and document the learnings that emerge from using Decidim, within municipalities and organisations, how do you document the reflections from the communities and people that have participated, how their political lives have changed and their perception of their political existence?*

It's not easy to gain these kinds of insights or discover the stories about how Decidim was used and the impact it had. We read a story about a group of girls who were practising cricket in Barcelona, on a football field. During the participatory budgeting process in Barcelona, they proposed the creation of a cricket field - and it happened. The group belongs to a community that typically does not participate in these kinds of participatory processes.

We discovered the story through the software. Decidim provides traceability of processes like the participatory budgeting in Barcelona. We also have a panel featuring stories like this at the Decidim Fest. We should have more mechanisms to encourage the community to share back these kinds of stories.

This is so fascinating and important. A big part of building transformative collective structures is unlearning what some people have internalised more than others, due to layers of discrimination and power dynamics: not participating, not leading. Once people gain experience, through the Decidim software, for example, they

begin to understand how their sense of agency and leadership has shifted. That sense of impact on our political lives is something we've been reflecting on a lot. This connects to how it's important not only to build structures and processes, but also to support the development of agency and power in individuals and communities.

*What are some of the key principles and practices that make it so accessible and impactful?*

We have what we call the social contract of the project. Decidim is a free software, anyone can use it in any way they want, the only thing that our license obliges is that if you do some improvements on the software, you need to share it back and publish the code to make it available to the rest of the community. The social contract is a group of basic democratic principles: principles of traceability, transparency and integrity. We ask that every organisation that uses Decidim commits to comply with all these principles.

 *What has been the response, perception and adoption of Decidim within the territory in Barcelona, which is the context in which the project started?*

Several small towns beyond Barcelona also use Decidim. There are around 380,000 participants in Decidim Barcelona, and participatory budgeting is highly engaged with. This continues even now, under a different party in the Barcelona government. From the beginning, when Barcelona en Comú launched the project, neighbouring cities, governed by different political parties, also adopted Decidim. It has always been a project with broad political consensus; every party sees some benefit. Some view it primarily as a functional tool to justify their political work, while others more fully embrace the participatory democracy model. Decidim ensures anonymity of par-

ticipants, so we do not have qualitative data about who takes part. However, feminist groups have advised Decidim to begin collecting disaggregated data to better understand participation. In terms of connection with the territories, the model of Decidim is completely hybrid. Decidim has the meeting component but then the digital layer opens the possibility for those who cannot attend in person. Working territorially is key; Barcelona has a historic participation fabric, and this helped in the making of the participation policy and practice in the city.



*Thank you for what you do because especially in these times, regaining this understanding of what democracy really is, while creating a tool that sustains it, feels fundamental.*

Thank you. Decidim is quite widespread across the public administration ecosystem, but what about social movements? For example, feminist collectives in Barcelona don't use Decidim—why? That's an important question for us to reflect on. There is a steep learning curve, it's not an easy platform to install or host, so there are clear technological barriers. We also need to consider why social movements or informal collectives aren't adopting these kinds of tools. That's such a key question. From our experience, many organised spaces are asking similar questions about structures, tools, and governance. A tool like Decidim could be incredibly useful and much needed in social movements and feminist spaces, especially because the tyranny of structurelessness is very real sometimes. We want to better understand what the barriers are, and we're working to lower them on the technical side. We're working towards a more straightforward installation process, or possibly self-hosted solutions. The idea is to try and offer this at no cost for collectives.





# CARACOL OLOL JACKSON



## Vicenza, northern Italy

We were honoured to be welcomed by Caracol Olool Jackson and be part of their community for a few days, in May 2025, getting to know the wonderful, inspiring creatures part of their territory, their struggles, their resistance, the land and the forest, sharing food and laughs and deep political connection.

Caracol Olool Jackson is a non-profit association founded in Vicenza in 2018 in memory of Olool Jackson, a trade unionist and human rights activist who suddenly passed away in 2017. 'With Olool, we fought for years for a more just, supportive, and free society, and based on that wealth of shared experiences—such as the No Dal Molin protest - we decided to build something that could continue his commitment in a concrete way', Caracolers say. In 2019, thanks to the support of over 200 members and a long process of self-financing, we were able to purchase a building on the outskirts of Vicenza. That is where Caracol took shape: not just an association, but a lively, open social space, built from the bottom up, where relationships, mutualism, and experimentation can flourish. The name Caracol refers to the 'caracoles' of the Zapatista movement, which are autonomous self-organised territories created by the Zapatista indigenous communities in Chiapas, Mexico. Their mission is to promote a model of equitable social and economic development based on mutualistic practices and grassroots participation. Caracol is a space for well-being, meeting, and sharing, where new social, cultural, and artistic practices can be experimented with. It is a place where we can build a sense of belonging together and stimulate forms of active citizenship, as well as question dominant narratives through their cultural events. It is the dream of an inclusive and welcoming society that we try to realize every day, inside and outside our walls.

**Massimiliano:** I have been part of Caracol since the beginning, because after the death of our friend, syndicalist Olo Jackson, with whom we had been organising to resist for many years to the US Army base in Vicenza (the initiative No Dal Molin<sup>1</sup>), we wished to do something in his memory. The initial idea was to build a football field. And after one year and a half we bought the building that houses Caracol. At Caracol, I fix things, and I function as the president.

**I-Chen:** I met Caracol through a friend, to be part of the events group. When I got to understand what Caracol is, I fell in love. At Caracol, I organise cultural activities and events.

**Alice:** I have been part of Caracol since the beginning, since the idea. I look after the organisation of events, the cultural programming, the bar, and cooking.


**Anna** I have been involved since the beginning. I am most active in the events and in the bar.

**Teo** I was there that evening where the idea of Caracol started. Here, I do the syndicate work, and I am involved in the events.

**Erich** I entered Caracol a few months ago. I moved here and needed to find a place that resonated with me and found Caracol.

**Angela** I have been here since the beginning. I have looked after the popular health clinic for a long time. I now look after what concerns the 'home' - cleanings etc., and I look after external relations and talk externally at events. I love working on recycling.

**Federica** I met Caracol in 2022 during a book presentation on care and revolution, and since then I started being involved in events, the bar, etc. Now I work here and write projects.

 **Paolo** I have been involved since the No Dal Molin struggle, and then at Caracol. Here, I sell fish. I make and sell wooden fishes out of woods I find ashore from the sea or river, giving them a new life. Caracol is my antidepressant.

**Marina:** I have also been involved since the No Dal Molin struggle. I am a volunteer in the popular health clinic. I believe in the struggle, and I try to join the demonstrations.

**CESCO** My love story with Caracol started from the beginning, when we were looking for a place. At Caracol I do a bit of everything.

**Paola:** I have been at Caracol also since the No Dal Molin struggle. I look after the rubbish and recycling and the food bank.

**Flavio** I have been here since the first assembly that launched Caracol, and before in the previous struggle. At Caracol, I am part of the cultural activities group and I join the demonstrations.

**Enrico** I have also been here since the beginning. At Caracol, I participate in the cultural activities group. I am engaged in the initiative to defend the occupied woods that are at risk of being destroyed by the TAV project.

Martina I have been involved since 2020. I look after the welcoming at the popular health clinic.

We needed to physically step out of the yarn web to continue our workshop, but symbolically we remained a collective subject

We invited everyone, individually, to draw on a paper, in any way they wished, how they see themselves at Caracol, and how this connects with the structures of violence, discrimination and oppressions that they are resisting – which led them at a personal level to the struggle, to joining Caracol. We then invited everyone to place their drawings together and to reflect on the collective composition.

## Reflections on composition

At Caracol, in collectiveness, I found myself. This can be seen in the collective composition: love, collectiveness, care.

Caracol means circularity, complexity, a continuous search - whilst what we fight against is the rigidity that tells us 'this is how things are', where we cannot ask ourselves questions. We don't want to square the circle. We want to circle the square and encircle the square! In my drawing, Caracol was the way out of the labyrinth. In all the drawings, there is a common element of feelings and aspects.

What is the vision of Caracol today?

Caracol is not meant to be an enclosed space, a bubble. We want to get out and bring out what we are creating here and join demonstrations and struggles. Sometimes it is difficult to 'bring out' Caracol. We would like that the community external to Caracol could perceive the value of the common good that is created here.

What is the common good for you?

Everything that contributes to making us grow together. Caracol is a common good - we bought it but we do not 'exercise property'. The common good also has to do with the roles at Caracol. Yes, there are formal roles for bureaucratic reasons, but the "president" fixes gutters, there's no hierarchy of power. Another aspect of our idea of the common good is the occupation of the woods against the destruction of the TAV. Common good also means taking care of something.

Reflecting on forms of violence that we live collectively and the struggles of Caracol, what identities do you adopt at Caracol (for example, pacifist, feminist, antiracist, anti-capitalist, antimilitarist etc.), how do you weave all this into the aim of your struggle and in your understanding of the common good? How are all these possibilities of alignment brought into collective reflection?

Angela I feel that both the common good and this collective process of alignment and connection, it is an iterative process., holding within all the struggles and political processes I have been part of, with my own personal experiences as well, and not identifying with one only. This work for the common good, I have always seen it as revolutionary practice also from an individual perspective also. I am part of this collective subjectivity, and this is my legacy. I feel that the care for communication, internally and externally, is so important and difficult - it is a journey of growth. There needs to be new energies joining also, that can experience the moments of 'being in love' with Caracol, whereas after a long time you build a different kind of love.



**Federica** As a collective, there's no need to define ourselves by anything. We know which side we need to be on; we all carry the struggles and alignments within. Everything we do is political, from choosing vegetarian food to cleaning. It connects to care, for each other, for our collective space.

**I-Chen** About feminism - it is a practice that engages the personal, personal liberation, personal as political. I feel that I have internalised patriarchal things which the system grew us up with. Feminism is about this, and I am working on this, in this process of liberation. Doing this together would be powerful, to sustain each other in this journey.

**Enrico** In a moment of social movements in crisis, we are surrounded by ever more difficult contexts. So sometimes we have to 'close off' and protect ourselves to protect us from the 'external'.

**Teo** Caracol, for me, was the attempt to build a Zapatista-inspired caracol in this territory - with autonomous schools, cultural events, bottom-up rules. For me our 'Caracol' (which in English translates to 'snail') represents the possibility of constructing an 'elsewhere' within the city, without having to isolate like elves on a hilltop or go to a deserted island to build an ideal world. We build the 'elsewhere' here. The challenge is not to become secluded elsewhere, enclosed in our little shell. We must remain connected to the occupied woods struggle, and everything else that is 'outside' of Caracol but of which we're a part. We bring the snail outside as well.



**CESCO**: I believe we never needed to define ourselves because we come from different paths. The moment of change within the No Dal Molin struggle was significant. With Olol, in the years during the No Dal Molin, we made a choice - to build a mechanism of community that goes beyond ourselves. So, when we shifted to becoming a 'permanent observatory against the base' and we were in an assembly with other people from other experiences and backgrounds, it was difficult and amazing. We were building, for years, a multiple and diverse identity. We are surrounded by leftists who tell us what to do, they give us recipes: "we must participate in elections so that we can govern." We don't want the recipes. We do not have recipes. For years we didn't even use the word "community". We have some ideas, and we can't express them well. But we know we are multiple and plural; we don't have a single identity. Haraway talks about this when talking about post-human and polymorphous bodies - if you take only one identity, you're not the mirror of nature that rebels against destruction. We come here to Caracol with many different perspectives, experiences and ideas. We have a polymorphous form, more similar to nature than to a human.

**I-Chen**: To me, the fact of being polymorphous makes communication complex. People like simple things, squares. The fact we're so polymorphous, which is so beautiful, gets misunderstood. Complexity gives spaces inside, where we can be many things.

**Flavio**: The communication to the 'external' is an issue. This communication needs to be a continuous effort. When people with other stories join and become part of Caracol, they give a lot, and they become a driving force.

After these powerful reflections, everyone split into groups and drew their interpretations of how Caracol is structured and the key elements of Caracol's organisational structure.

**Group One:**We represented Caracol as the solar system. The planets represent the different projects at Caracol. The assembly is like the sun, but smaller. The blue arrows represent the internal relationships. The orange ones represent the people 'utilising' services, attending events and initiatives etc. The solid arrows indicate deeper and mutual relationships. The dotted lines represent infrequent relationships to the assembly. Some projects have no arrows/lines. Some lines are to the 'outside' world. A significant element is also that some planets are not connected.

**Group Two:**We represented Caracol as a forest, woods. Caracol is the liquidambar (secular tree which is in one of the two occupied woods), its trunk are the activists, and in the different twigs there are different canopies which represent the projects – each canopy is made up of many leaves, each representing different subjectivities, and each representing different themes/areas of work being looked after. We know that the forest trees and plants communicate, both in aerial ways and through underground mycelium connection. We liked the idea that there are connections even if sometimes they are not visible from the outside. We all share one same soil – which represents the territory of the city, and this influences us in one way or another. The roots in the forest interconnect Caracol with other entities, like the Bocciodromo, ADL and other associations.

**Group Three:**We represented Caracol as a protein. There are various areas that communicate with each other – sometimes unidirectionally, sometimes bidirectionally. The purple arrows represent the individual connections – for example, the assembly connecting with the team doing the cleaning and maintenance and the popular health clinic – as there are only specific individuals holding those connections. Then we started at looking at what is more peripheral at Caracol, but no less important, for example the food bank and the library but we know very little about what happens there and rarely we speak about this in the assemblies. We kept the tavern as separate because it is connected to the events area (events as cultural programming), and because there is a team that looks after that and that makes decisions solely concerning the tavern. Something that connects with all the spheres of Caracol is administration, which is looked after by one person. We put the services centre at the corner because it is a Caracol project of Caracol but also a separate project as well. The assembly is not exactly at the centre, because the assembly is made up of the most active members of Caracol, but there are decisions which are also made autonomously by the other spheres. We liked the idea of starting from the assembly as the central point, but we realised it is not like this operationally – it is central but a bit external. The only activity that has a bilateral communication with the assembly is the external activities (demonstrations, occupied woods, etc.) and not elsewhere. A personal reflection within the group that could be added is that within this ecosystem, there are two satellites that represent two people, because they have in practice more decision-making weight.



## Reflection circle on Caracol's strengths and challenges

What are, based on what has been shared, the 'sweet spots', the things that as Caracol you are proud of and feel like that it has worked well and reflects your ideals and your politics, your utopia, things that you should continue doing and strengthen?

Everything works well more or less, and we wish to strengthen what has been represented through the drawings. No one aspect works better than the other in the sense of representing the collective ideal and political thinking of Caracol. It is an ecosystem. So, this structure - protein, forest, solar system - works. Yes, with challenges, but it works. The clinic is a very well-functioning area of our work, very strong.

*And what about the challenges, what needs to be worked on?*

We need to care about and look after the functioning. For me this means communication. The assembly should grow and be lived as a more active and engaging space, where everyone can share and express, and everyone can listen deeply, paying attention, not running and rushing. Each of us should take on more responsibility, we need to all realise that not everything can fall on a few people. The 'isms' against which we work, are many, and with very practical impacts on our lives and territory. It is hard to focus on this, making space and time for communication, attention and sharing, because there seems to be always 'more urgent' things coming up. It is important to give each other space and attention and interest in what everyone does, a focus on giving and asking for support, and collective care.

This makes us reflect on the point that often if we do not have structures, tools and processes that facilitate all this, it becomes deprioritised, because of the system we live in, because of the na-

ture of the work, and so on. We need to intentionally reflect on the tools, meetings, reflection spaces that we need that can be more informal without a fixed agenda. Spaces that are intended to share how we feel - spaces of honesty and communication, and collective care.

## Reflection circle on how decisions are made at Caracol

Every Wednesday we have the assembly, and in theory everyone brings their issues or things to share, ideas, etc., and make decisions. When an external person proposes a project, in theory we are meant to invite them to the assembly, where they can present the idea they have, and then the assembly decides whether they can respond immediately or need time, and then one or two weeks afterwards they give the answer. This is not always done as a process. Sometimes this is done in the WhatsApp chat, sometimes agreement is given by a singular person, sometimes people take decisions autonomously because there is an underlying trust that everyone makes decisions for the common good of Caracol.

In the assembly, decisions are made by consensus, never by majority. The delegation to take decisions is based on trust and sometimes also on specific areas of delegation, or competence. Even here, the practice is to always decide between at least two people, with a discussion, and not individually. Every group of activity also has autonomy of decisions over their areas of work.

*Have there been moments where you could not reach consensus?*

Yes, but after discussion we then eventually reached consensus. We have never had vetoes.

Has the presence of funding ever created complexity or disagreement?

Regarding money, we are atypical. We know which of us should look after funds and those who should not. We agree on this. We have been good at raising funds, we all put our effort into this. The administration of the economy is in capable hands. We care that funds go into our collective project. In regards to who gets paid, at the beginning it was taboo as we came from a history of volunteering. We are living it with a lot of pride and the fact that some of us can be paid. We do not have competitive logic. Every time someone gets paid, it's a milestone.

## Reflection circle on burnout and collective care

*What tools do you have to make work overload visible and avoid burn out?*

**Angela:** I took a lot of workloads for the clinic and other things. For the clinic, I burnt out and quit. I got a lot of solidarity from the assembly. I also used to do cleaning with volunteers. Now I just do behind-the-scenes work to coordinate the cleaning work.

**CESCO** I took on a lot of the political stuff, but other aspects too. This is related to our struggle in 'enlarging'. If we had a less shapeshifting structure, we'd be more attractive, but that is who we are. From keeping the space open, which is physically and emotionally demanding, to running projects, there have been hard times. Each of us takes on a burden. When we first envisioned the space, it was a big leap from the No Dal Molin protest. There, we had lots of people and some 'donkeys' taking charge and then having to make decisions. We all

live with our own burnout, individually. Sometimes we manage to say we're not okay and others show support. However, burnout is a mix of individual and collective dynamics, and often it is hard to work on this.

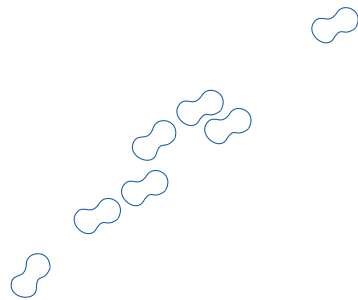
**I-Chen** This 'being a donkey' comes from a sense of personal responsibility. Taking that responsibility this is also the basis of the trust we have in each other and the basis of the collective responsibility. This is only possible if everyone feels that sense of responsibility towards the collective, towards the space, towards the home. Everyone in their own way. Even the unshared burnout comes from this responsibility towards the community, because the unsharing can come from a fear of loading a burden that one feels as an individual burden, to the collective. So, you manage it by yourself, but sharing would be important.

You remind us of the words, practices and wisdom of networks of women defending the land and rights in Mesoamerica. They talk about wanting a joyful struggle based on joy and pleasure, and not on burnout and constant stress. For us this resonates so deeply. In the face of violence, responding with collective joy and pleasure, doing things not in a capitalist logic, in productivist and individualistic ways, is revolutionary. It's important to make spaces and structures not of burnout and destruction, but of regeneration and collective care, and grounded in knowing that doing less is okay.

Thank you for the trust, welcoming, openness and wisdom of everything that you share. It was a true gift. We invite you to share one word as a wish for Caracol's present and future as a closing circle.

Daje, gratitude and reflection, communication, resistance, multitude, engagement, openness, communication, community, elsewhere, love, joy, pleasure.

# ULEX



## Pyrenees, Catalunya

The Ulex Project provides training and capacity-building programmes for activists, changemakers, and organisations working towards social justice and ecological integrity. Based in Catalonia and operating across Europe, Ulex creates activist training for transformative education that strengthens movements.

Ulex takes an integral approach to social transformation, combining personal, interpersonal, and political dimensions. Their training programmes are grounded in inner resilience, collective care, and transformative systems change.

We had the pleasure of being together with members of the Ulex project at their collective living base in Echodharma in June 2025, and having a dialogue with Ilaj and Neus. We had the joy of being in this space for a few days and connecting with everyone and sharing this space and way of living sustainably and off-grid deep in the mountains.



*What were the origins of Ulex?*

Ilaj: The origins of Ulex trace back to Ecodharma, which is a community and co-living space that was created in the Catalonian Pyrenees with the goal of bringing Buddhist perspectives into activism. The people who set it up were involved in both dharma practices and activism, and found that these two things were complimentary. The first retreat that was done in Ecodharma was to address burn-out and emotional disillusionment. This was after COP in Copenhagen which was quite a significant moment for western environmental movements. There was a real sense of losing hope and of failure. After this, the sustaining resistance course was held in Ecodharma, it was the first course, and after this the transformative collaboration course was also developed. A lot of these early materials had elements of the dharma or Buddhist perspectives or philosophy, this is a thread that is feeding what we do quite a lot. In Ecodharma, there were retreats for activists and Buddhists, and the retreats had a political perspective. At some point we decided that these two strands need to be separated, because the Buddhist framework was sometimes off putting and limiting in terms of who we could work with. There was a need for a more secular project, so that's how Ulex was born, and in 2017 we held our first course. Although Ulex is a secular project, many of us who are part of the project embrace dharma practices in our lives. These are not really separate and affect each other and support how we work.

*Thank you for sharing this. De-internalising systems of oppression, power and hierarchy are key to transforming systemic structures. We reflected deeply on this at FHC and also on how we can organise on the collective level to transform dominant systems. This inspired the 'Building We' project. We entered a discussion between us at FHC: "how*

*can we really challenge and transform systems of oppression? How can we truly practice collective feminist leadership?" That is one of the sources of inspiration behind the project. Connected to this, how do you organise at the collective level, how would you describe your organisational structure? Do dharma practices influence the way you organise?*

Neus: Sometimes horizontalism gets idealised as the solution to everything. We are implementing sociocracy as a governance structure. It means there's different circles which have different domains and there's a general circle which is the oversight of everything else, and from that there are child circles which have more specificity and have a more operational nature. There is a hierarchy of domains, but each circle can then operate horizontally and often most do make decisions by consent. One of the things that underpin good decision-making structure is having appropriate influence over decisions according to how much they will actually bear the consequences of those decisions.



Being an organisation that supports social movement education and democracy and horizontality to some degree, often some people can have some expectations for what it's like when working in Ulex and wanting to be part of everything. So, when someone joins, one of the key questions that we ask is: 'how are you doing with our structure? How are you doing about the fact that you don't actually have influence over a lot of things? How is that feeling and how are you navigating that?'

Ilaj: You asked about how dharma practice influences the way we organise. One of the main principles is transformative friendship - in the Buddhist language, we call it spiritual friendship. This is the

commitment to really building friendships with each other, as well as solidarity, comradeship. It's to build these relationships where there is trust so we can support each other in growth, and this helps navigating power dynamics.

*We did a lot of political reflection on how we can practice leadership collectively. We found that within this many invisible dynamics can emerge, especially when it comes to decision making, especially when some are pushing forward more work and decisions than others, due to different energies and capacities. We were wondering if you have any processes or practices to navigate this, especially for conflict resolution?*

Ilaj There are a lot of practices that are embedded along the way that help us attend to tensions. Often people on courses say that 'we need conflict resolution tools', but when I think about the way we work, we actually don't need them. We have set up a team culture and structure that supports people to address the impact of their actions and integrate feedback. There's a lot of mechanisms that mean we don't get to that moment of confrontation. They are on the structural, ethical, principle and relationship level.

On the ethical level, we have a commitment to work on ourselves and a very strong principle of having the responsibility to work through things that we carry with us that prevent us from realising our potential and working with others. There is a strong belief that everyone can grow and really realise their potential and their gifts. It's about creating the right conditions for people to do that. In terms of structure, we've been building on that a lot over the last few years because the organisation has been growing a lot so quickly. It grew from a community that lived up in Echodharma, up

the hill together, from doing a project together, to a project that has spread across geographies and different realities.

Neus We have grown from 4 or 5 people when I came in, to about 18 or 19 in the core team now. We have peer reflection through meetings every month that are relational check-ins in the team. There are different structures that support the connectivity of everyone and gathering at least once a year in person for deeper conversations.

Ilaj Feedback flow is something we have been working a lot on because there was a lot of tension coming from people feeling like that they are not up to date, or some information doesn't reach them.

Neus There are now two of us who are in the team culture circle, we also check-in how everyone is doing and how any tensions and any challenges arise. This helps to understand if we are sensing any discontent or struggles anywhere and what we can do to bring a sense of togetherness and support for people. There are some people tasked with this caretaking of the emotional and relational field.



Ilaj We help each other a lot when navigating relationships. One of our principles is not gossiping and the ethics to really build relationships with each other and we do that a lot. We do sometimes go to each other to rant, and say 'I am so annoyed', but the aim of that conversation is to ask, 'why does that annoy you?', 'what can we do to improve that relationship and work on that relationship.' That's the main difference that I see with other groups, especially when it comes to a lot of gossip culture with ranting and then closing yourself in your position rather than looking for that transformation and growth and solutions.

Ria: That is a very powerful approach to nurturing collective relational wellness.

*You mentioned how you have grown very quickly as Ulex over the last few years. We were wondering how you challenge the context of scarcity of funding and how you organise your economy too?*

llaj I guess what got us here is precisely that lack of scarcity thinking. That very strong practice of generosity and sense of abundance and wellbeing of resources. We can be in that position because we do have a lot of infrastructure at Echodharma. We have a house and a massive base that allows us to operate if we need to at very low costs. If we were not able to access funding, we would still be able to operate precisely because we have that infrastructure. Some of us, not all of us, can then move back to Echodharma and do that. I think it's still a practice. I often fall into scarcity thinking but for me it's very inspiring to see those of us who think: "it's fine, there are resources, and we can help each other, whatever we need, and people can find the financial support they need and we will find the resources to do it". Somehow, magically, for me that approach works – an approach of generosity and of abundance.

We also have a financial strategy and we spend a lot of time looking for money and for grants, but there is something powerful about stepping out of capitalist relationships of providing service. It means we can lean more into generosity because we are looking for funding that's going to make sure that we can do what we do without making it a monetised service. So, that definitely makes a difference in how we operate.

For us, it has also been difficult, especially because of class socialisation. I remember coming in from a Central Eastern European context and quite working class and thinking 'I don't really need money because I have been surviving without money. For me that

was a learning curve. It got me thinking 'what does it mean to live a comfortable life? How is money a part of that? What can I gain from money to be able to freely offer some of my energy and not spend so much energy on basic survival?' So, depending on each person's personal journey, these elements are in there. For some of us who are more middle class or upper middle class, it's easier to say, 'I need more money because I am going to buy a house and I'm going to have a mortgage' and for some of us it is unimaginable to ask that of the project. So, through conversations about what we are asking for and what we are not asking for, we are learning to navigate that. It's a practice and it can be tricky.

Neus As a team we had a 3-hour chat talking about our history with resources, our relationship with resources, if we hold any debt, and how we relate to our needs. We did this to create a shared understanding of what we ask for and why.

llaj Class conditioning really shows up. When living in a community in Echodharma, that of our basic needs being covered makes a whole difference. If you feel safe on the basic needs level, for example having shelter, plenty of food and a sense of community and relationships, that creates a very strong base for generosity. I think it's also interesting that depending on our backgrounds we are ready to make different sacrifices. It is interesting to navigate how to not judge that. For example, if someone wants a mortgage for a house and someone else is okay living in a squat.

*How do you decide on the training that you do, what you offer and how you decide topics for each of the training. How does this evolve?*



Ilaj: Our preferred way of working is to establish partnerships over a long period of time. We have conversations with key people involved in a group or movement we have been working with and what challenges they are facing at the moment and their current socio-political context. Based on that we respond with a program. This contact with activists helps us to understand what's happening in social movements and how the social political situation in Europe is influencing that.

Certain programs are always there as we feel they are really needed; these include the regenerative activism course, the burnout prevention course, the transformative collaboration course, solidarity and anti-oppression work, movement building work and the ecology of social movements course which supports groups to build broad coalitions. These keep on proving to be relevant.

There was also a strategic decision to support training capacity within racial justice organising. With this we know we need more resources and bursary places because fewer of the participants come from our structured partnerships. Our structured partnerships are very determined by the funding we can access and that funding has a lot of structural racism in it because it's European Union money. So, for the racial justice front we ringfence more resources to bring people on bursary places to cover travel etc. We base decisions on what we see as needed and is under-resourced in a broad sense in European movements.

*How do you remain connected to global struggles by being based remotely and living collectively in the mountains?*

Ilaj: I'm trying to step out of that false binary. What we are doing here is deeply embedded and connected because of who's coming. There is a limited amount of people who can afford to come here

for a week and take that break, so this comes with a considerable amount of privilege, for example, to leave behind caring responsibilities and other responsibilities. There are certain conditions that may or may not allow people to come here, for example, access needs and the contexts of their territories.

Neus: There are a lot of accessibility barriers, and some people have no choice but to stay connected. For example, care responsibilities or human rights violations happening which means activists cannot be separated from what might be happening in their communities. How do you find the balance of staying connected and aware of everything and having a moment of stopping also?

Ilaj: That is why these kinds of spaces need to be more accessible for more people. If we don't create spaces for stepping out and having different perspectives and having that change in context, opening space for curiosity and stopping, then no change will happen. That's integral to our theory of change. We think about this when we think about social change and education and how group learning happens. That gap and space in reflection can happen differently for different people. Our training courses are a space for that reflection.

For me being here is about having deeper layers of connection and being more resourced and connected to what's happening in the world globally and being able to engage with it in a deeper more constructive resourcing place.



LILAK :  
Purple Action for  
Indigenous Women's Rights



### Philippines

LILAK is a feminist organisation that works to advance the rights, leadership, and self-determination of Indigenous women. It focuses on strengthening Indigenous women's organising and advocacy, addressing gender-based violence, defending land and environmental rights, and supporting Indigenous feminist perspectives in policy and movement spaces. LILAK combines grassroots organising, research, and alliance-building to support Indigenous women as key actors in social justice and human rights struggles.



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*Could you share how LILAK was formed, the context in which it was formed and how it is structured?*

LILAK was formed in 2011 after a national gathering of Indigenous women who came together and organised for the rights of Indigenous groups and communities. Indigenous women face barriers in defending ancestral land, and due to men being leaders (in the Philippines, leaders of Indigenous groups, Datu, are reserved for men) they face disproportional impacts due to mining projects, as Indigenous women can't farm or process food, and they usually bear the responsibility to produce food. The Philippines has a lot of social movements, but Indigenous women and young women are not well represented within these movements. LILAK has a circular structure and was co-founded by two women. We have different leaders within the different projects, and project leadership is rotational so that everyone gets an opportunity to lead and look after different areas of work within the project. LILAK works closely with Indigenous political structures and the way Indigenous communities lead and organise to strengthen capacity so that Indigenous communities can assert their rights. One of our projects, which reflects our work very strongly, is the IWomen project, which is the Indigenous Women Mentoring Program. This is a non-formal, feminist, and decolonised school for Indigenous women..

*Thank you so much for the work you do; this resonates deeply with our commitment to feminist popular education and transformative ways of learning, by learning from each other in a shared process. The mentoring program you do is deeply inspiring. How do you practice collective care?*

We are in the process of learning and understanding what care means for us and our partners. For the Indigenous women we work with, we document their experiences, but in terms of collective care, this is something we are still trying to institutionalise. What we have found is that Indigenous women can be very quiet in our programmes, and I think this is because they are often not asked questions. We aim to co-create spaces for them to express what they want, to share their opinions and experiences, and this is one of the best parts of this work because you get to see them laugh and express things more. There was one time where I was facilitating a space, and it was very loud and there was a lot of noise and talking going on, and they said, 'Oh, sorry, it's because we are feeling very empowered.'



*That is so amazing what you shared, and so beautiful.*

The issues around mining are prevalent everywhere in the Philippines. There are many Indigenous communities and groups within the Philippines, but since the Philippines is an archipelago, it is challenging for Indigenous communities to come together, which can make it very difficult to organise. One of the Indigenous groups we are working with has received a notice for exploring their land for mining, and that they will be paid for it, which also makes the situation more complex. Also, the learnings about post-colonial discrimination are powerful, and the shared experiences on this. Mainstream knowledge tells us that Indigenous knowledge is

primitive, but after shared learnings about post-colonial discrimination, the women we work with have come to believe that even their farming practices are better for the environment. But there is also a tension when it comes to Indigenous practices, especially those that violate women's rights, for example, the practice of child marriage in some Indigenous communities in the Philippines.

*How do you navigate this tension when it arises?*

Feminism is sometimes seen as a Western tool and a Western product, and seen as not organic within the context of the Philippines, and this is something that you can hear even from progressive groups. In some communities, if you file a case against sexual violence, it is seen as the woman disrupting the community. Sometimes, negotiations are arranged for the woman and the one who did the violence to be married or for them to be paid. I'm of course not generalising and just giving an example of some practices, but arranging a marriage in this context is sometimes seen as cancelling out the violence that happened. There is no escaping this tension. We aim not to enforce any ideas or perspectives but build a space so they can realise their perspectives and opinions and understand feminism in their own way, especially because many Indigenous communities here see it as part of their cultural rights to practice child marriage. We approach this by having dialogues with Indigenous women leaders. Dialogues have been especially substantial, as a national policy was introduced criminalising child marriage.

*Within these programs, what is one of the biggest changes you have seen individually and collectively?*

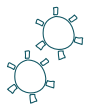
A core element that emerges in the sessions is the belief that their

experiences are not isolated and that many women and Indigenous people are experiencing different forms of violence across the Philippines and across the world. That's why we need to bring it back to the collective, to understand and share experiences, stories and best practices.

*Thank you so much for what you do; this is so deeply resonant for us. The need to bring experiences of dominant power and oppression to the collective. Systemic structures and their ability to impact us can lie in the fact that they are so divisive. Not individualising these experiences and being grounded in collective love and care is key for us.*



# HAWA FEMINIST COALITION



## Somalia

Hawa Feminist Coalition is a youth-led feminist organisation founded in 2018 by young women and girls under 35 to promote the safety, equality, justice, rights and dignity of women and girls in Somalia. It mobilises and organises young women in feminist solidarity, builds leadership and advocacy, runs policy advocacy campaigns against gender-based violence, and seeks stronger legal protections for women and girls in Somalia.

*Could you introduce your organisation? If you are comfortable, could you share any information about when it was formed and how it came together?*

Hawa Feminist Coalition was founded in 2019 by a group of young women, all under 35 years old. We came together as feminist activists and friends. In Somalia, being a feminist can be seen as contrary to Islamic teachings, and there are significant risks involved. Challenging the norms and standing up for women's rights can put you in danger. We felt we had to act, to do something about this. What specific forms of oppression, violence, discrimination, or dominance are you seeking to resist? What are your goals?

We are working to resist the societal norms and structures that oppress women, especially gender-based violence such as female genital mutilation (FGM), early marriage, discrimination, and stigmatisation. Our ultimate goal is to create a society where young women and girls can live safely, free from violence and discrimination. We are fighting for equality, for access to education, and for the dignity and safety of all women and girls in Somalia.

*What challenges does your context and the broader societal structure pose to your work?*

One of the main challenges we face comes from older women, who have internalised the patriarchal social norms of our community. Despite these challenges, we've built a strong community of young women and girls who believe in equality. Being in an Islamic country, many people are not receptive to ideas about feminism and this makes us unsafe. We focus on educating people about Quranic verses that show men and women are equal. We also work to gather support from young, open-minded, and educated people who are more receptive to feminist ideas.

*How do you support the leadership and development of young women and girls in Somalia? What structures and tools do you use to strengthen and support their decision-making processes?*

We provide feminist leadership training, specifically for women and girls in leadership roles. We select around 35 women and girls each year for this. We've developed leadership manuals that serve as tools to support their development. Our members also elect a management team annually. This process ensures power isn't concentrated in one person's hands and allows for the shifting of leadership, which encourages shared decision-making. If someone in a leadership role doesn't meet the expectations of their position, the members can elect someone else.

*Do you face backlash or criticism in your work? How does this inform your work and collective care practices?*

We face significant backlash, especially online, from those who view our work as a challenge to traditional societal norms. This is why we've implemented training on digital safety to protect our members from harassment and attacks. We also offer a holistic approach to safety training, which includes not only digital safety but overall wellbeing. We regularly check in with our members, communicate through WhatsApp, and meet monthly to discuss the issues we face.

*How do you ensure no vicarious trauma occurs in your work and projects?*

We have emotional wellbeing spaces in our office and ensure we have access to therapists when we need it, and we make sure everyone has access to mental health support. We also gather every week on a Friday, where we step outside the pressures of work, sit

together, and talk informally. This weekly gathering is a key part of our care practice – we share jokes, laugh, and relax together. It's a space to recharge and connect, which is essential in a high-stress environment like the one we work in.

AWID



## Global

AWID is a global, feminist, membership-based organisation that works to advance women's rights and gender justice worldwide. It supports feminist and women's rights movements by producing research, influencing global policy, strengthening networks, and advocating for fairer distribution of resources to feminist movements and work. AWID focuses on areas such as feminist economies, resourcing movements, and defending universal human rights, while creating spaces for solidarity, collective strategy, and creative expression across regions and movements.

*Could you please tell us how AWID was formed and how it is structured?*

Since 2017, AWID has had a model of co-leadership within the organisation (Co-Executive Directors) where each one brings their own strengths to the shared role. This model was further adopted in 2025 with having Co-Presidents leading our Board. This model has worked well. Being a registered non-profit organisation means we have to ensure we have organisational policies as well as financial accountability that meet the criteria of internal and external audits. This means we undertake practices to meet our legal and administrative compliance to protect the organisation and ensure its sustainability. This can sometimes feel like it is in tension with our feminist politics. It's a constant thing to navigate and be aware of. At AWID, intersectional feminist leadership is quite embedded, you see it and you can feel it in every layer of the organisation's structure, strategy and daily operations. By and large, staff at AWID feel supported and free to share new ideas. But ultimately, we are an organisation with a hierarchy of roles, responsibilities and accountabilities. Hierarchy has often been looked at as a mechanism that perpetuates inequality, however instead of eliminating the structure completely, we seek to implement structure focused on equitable distribution of power and resources (Eg: by minimizing the layers between the highest decision-makers and staff leading the work, by striving for faster communication, and by seeking more direct input from staff). This ongoing tension and how it sits with our collective feminist politics is something we have to always navigate and evolve our thinking and practices around, especially as a registered NGO.

*How do you navigate this tension when this friction or power dynamics emerge, and how do you balance this with your feminist politics as an organisation?*

To surface any hidden and invisible power dynamics, the Co-EDs have annual reviews conducted by the board, and staff that they work with regularly provide anonymous 360 input. We also have semi-regular 'Ask Anything' sessions where the Co-EDs respond to questions submitted anonymously by staff. We also address these dynamics in partnership work. We have a few partnership projects, for example, the Observatory of Universality of human rights. The working group, for the last ten years, has been a collective space. There was a multi-year process to come up with a clear consensus on our purposes, values and red lines. This ongoing partnership is collectively held, and so is our advocacy work in international spaces. The administrative leadership of this partnership has been rotating over the years to avoid potential imbalances in power. The Feminists for a Binding Treaty coalition is something we played a larger role in coordinating when the group was started several years ago. Part of the reason that AWID was able to do this is because AWID is a relatively well-funded organisation and well-resourced. AWID has also been granted ECOSOC status by the UN, which means we have access to UN spaces where advocacy takes place. However, after a while, we made a point to then step back while continuing to support. We are imperfectly always trying to navigate these sorts of power dynamics. We are a feminist organisation that has relative privilege because of our resources, access, and relationships, etc, so we are really always trying not to hold onto leadership all the time.



We want to address that power and positionality. Hakima Habbas, the former Co-ED of AWID, would say that we want to use our power to stop the train, hold the door open and be the door holder on the platform - to make sure there is space for others to get on. We don't want to be driving the train and we don't necessarily want or need to get on the train either.

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is an inherently exclusionary process, often resource-intensive and limited by its strict requirements, including ECOSOC status with the UN and visa access to the US. Over the past three to four years, we have focused on organising hybrid and virtual events to expand access, to engage in meaningful discussions during CSW sessions. We've also created hubs that connect partners in various locations - not only during CSW but also in spaces like the AWID Forum that not everyone can attend either due to financial constraints, visibility or safety concerns, visa and border regimes, etc.. We also try to assist partners who don't have ECOSOC status to access UN spaces directly, and offer support to accompany partners who are less familiar with these purposefully complex spaces.



*How do you ensure that the co-leadership model doesn't replicate the same dynamics of the hegemonic leadership and hierarchical dominant structures of the INGO-industrial complex?*

We place emphasis on process to challenge internal biases; a lot of self-reflection and peer review during annual performance reviews, an anonymous annual organisational survey on our decision-making processes, leadership, ownership of the work, wellbeing, etc.. Also, diffusing leadership throughout the organisation to the extent that it is possible from our roles. Every staff member is encouraged to take initiative to solve problems and to contribute to the culture

of AWID. There is an ongoing tension and awareness that as an organisation we are sometimes operating within external structures and systems that we also want to dismantle or push against. So, building stronger practices for better communication within the organisation is a big focus, and that has helped. It's easier to trust each other and how we navigate tricky decisions when we share the processes that led to decisions, etc. It's often about building more trust. The challenge lies in determining how much communication is actually useful. Being transparent and communicating frequently has clear benefits, but it can also make it slower to move things forward. So, it's about finding a balance. It's key to have conversations about who needs to be involved and what is useful to communicate. For example, we had a small virtual retreat with all staff to discuss our response to the current global moment, touching on our financial position and considering different scenarios. Leadership asked their teams what would be useful to talk about to understand where we are—this was the initial scoping. The Co-EDs shared openly and transparently about AWID's position in the current financial crunch, and how we might weather it, and by doing so, people knew what was going on. This was powerful.

*How do you practice collective care when tensions emerge? Do you have any conflict resolution strategies or tools for when disagreement arises when you are navigating these processes?*

We have an HR process. If needed, the conflict is escalated to HR, the board, or a line manager. More informally, when there's a sense that conflict is arising, we generally try to stop, listen, and figure out what's going on. We are a virtual organisation, but we aim to have all-staff meetings every year or every year and a half to come together and strategise. We had a lot to get through in our agenda.

However, as we started discussing organisational culture, staff (particularly those in coordinator roles) shared concerns about internal communication, transparency, and autonomy. These concerns were taken very seriously. We transformed the agenda that week to focus on unpacking and addressing these issues as an organisation.

Processes are grounded in our feminist values, where we always try to centre care. With the politics we hold, we want to work in an organisation where everyone feels valued, trusted, and supported, and where their work is appreciated. We recognised that what emerged was critically important, and everything else could wait.

Our co-leadership model also prioritises existing relationships. So far we have had two sets of Co-EDs, where the people who worked in the organisation already, and who had worked together, applied together for the role. The existing working relationships were a key part of that model.

Our approach is power with us instead of power over – especially with AWID members, which especially means creating safe work relations, value all, and build great alliances.

# FEMINISTS IN KENYA



## Kenya

We got to know Vivian, co-founder of Feminists in Kenya (FIK), in Nairobi some years back and we immediately connected with FIK's vision and politics, that 'walking the talk' way that as feminists we long for and try to do. We knew our paths would meet again and we were so honoured to have the chance to be in an online dialogue with Vivian for Building We.

FIK describes themselves as 'a Black feminist and Queer-led movement rooted in community, resistance, and joy. We organize to challenge structural violence, build transformative alternatives, and affirm the dignity, agency, and power of women, girls, and LGBTQIA+ people across Kenya – and beyond.'

Their mission is to 'mobilize, organize, and build power with Black women to dismantle systems of oppression and advance our collective liberation'. They envision 'a world where Black women in all our diversities live free from systemic violence in both public and private life, with full autonomy, safety, and dignity.'

Three pillars of their work are: community, joy and resistance.

Community: 'this is the backbone of our collective action. We unconditionally believe that without community, there is no liberation.' Joy: 'we see joy as an act of resistance and are determined to intentionally reject oppressive structures designed to limit our joyful existence in society.' Resistance: 'our mandate is to disrupt systemic oppressions, speak truth to power, provide feminist political analyses, and make the unconventional conventional.'

'We are many forms of movement ; strategists, storytellers, caretakers, builders. Some of us speak loudly. Some of us hold space. All of us hold power.'

*We have loved the work of Feminists in Kenya since we learnt about it. We would love to know a bit about the origins of it, how it started. When you founded it, how did it start but also how did you start shaping it in a way that it would function and work with each other?*

We started organising as individual feminist activists. So back in 2019, there were a lot of femicides happening in Kenya, and we were individual feminist activists writing feminist content on digital platforms, and we were trying to raise political consciousness, and so when the cases of femicides started raising, we thought of coming together as a collective of friends and just organise a our protest around ending femicide. The protest was successful. And we think of success as, first of all, being able to mobilise digitally and bring people together on the ground, being able to present our memorandum of demands to the government, and after that being able to still continue with the collective of feminist activists and naming it Feminists in Kenya – so that is really how our work started, our organising started. So after the protest, we said we would continue with organising – and back then, we did not yet have a clear understanding of organising, we were just really passionate about ending femicide, we didn't really know of programmes and thematic areas, we didn't have a lot of language for organisational things, even movement things, back then – it was a lot of experimentation, a lot of trial and errors. For instance, we organised predominantly in a WhatsApp group, and in this WhatsApp group we would do check-ins, organise hangouts at the park, and in these park spaces we would talk about feminism and different feminist issues, and with that culture, we were able then to identify what specific areas we wanted to work on, and specifically we decided to

work on feminist technology, because we started organising digitally, and we wanted to help shape how power exists on the internet, we wanted to shape how feminist organisers even exist on the internet, so that is why we chose feminist technologies, and then also we decided to work around ending all forms of violence, including interpersonal and structural violence, so here is where our anti femicide and anti GBV work comes in, but also looking at violence as structural – in a way that we question then the systems that cause violence to happen, we question even how the state creates conditions for GBV to happen and to continue happening. We also thought about organising around reclaiming our sexual and reproductive health and rights, during that time, so basically just believing that our bodies are our own and we deserve bodily autonomy, and getting into policy spaces, conversations, community spaces, just talk about it, as well as raising feminist education, what we originally started to do, what we were doing as individual activists was raising feminist consciousness online, so we made it a bit more concrete, a bit more formalised in a way, where we created spaces for people to learn about feminism, to identify with it as liberatory practice. So in all of this, we had different wins, different challenges, and maybe later I can also talk about how leadership emerged from all of this.



*It's incredible. And in the beginning, how many of you were there? I remember in the first WhatsApp group we were nearly 500 to 600 people. Right now, we are 30 to 40 in the group. When did the need arise to organise internally? To create a structure, a process for decision-making, doing different things and so on?*

This emerged very informally – we saw the necessity of our work

and our voices, and realised that for this to continue, we needed a little coordination. And the coordination was not even strictly for the organizing work, it was even for us to meet up, for us to get to talk, for us to just hang out, that needed coordination - someone had to step in and say, please send in your contributions here, or this is where the venue will be at, or this is the google form for people who want to register and attend – that is coordination. So, in a way, that is how leadership emerged. So people who would volunteer, people who were interested, people who were really passionate about a certain topic and say – I'll be in charge of that, but also we were of the realities of life, people had other things to do, there were challenges in fighting within the movement itself, so over the years the space reduced because of those different realities.

*Can you share more about that – on how leadership emerged and the structure around that?*

Once we started getting funding, part of that process required having an identifiable leader – for accountability of the funding and making sure that there is a team that responds to what you said you want to implement. So funding was a huge factor in how we decided to create our structure, specifically as co-founders and executive directors, as movement leaders and programmes leads and community coordinators. So it was really mostly because of the funding. But how we chose those people was based on who was already showing signs of leadership, responsibility within a certain area, but also there was a lot of consensus, amongst the FIK community – which is like an Assembly, for these roles. That is also how we identified our Advisory Board from the community. Since we cannot always rely on the WhatsApp group consensus on all decisions, sometimes we need urgent responses, sometimes we need to

make decisions very quickly, and we might not always wait on everyone to answer and reach a consensus, we can have this board, that would have in a way some oversight over what decisions we make in an urgent and fast way. And the board comes from the FIK community, and they check that we still retain our original values that we said we were going to have. The FIK community still plays a key role and makes decisions based on consensus.

We saw how having a structure was very necessary and helped us reach even more people. Having a structure is not necessarily a bad thing – it's what you do with the structure, to make it work for the communities that you work with. So structure is good I think, and it helped us centre the community that is in the WhatsApp group, for example sending forms to ask how funding should be allocated, in the activities that we had, in who was funding us if it was ok or not, so that everyone could have a say. So having feedback channels and open communication loops where people can still contribute one way or another to the growth of the organisation, has really helped.

*That is amazing. What other forms of accountability, for example from those who are in paid roles towards the community and the board, and is there a rotation?*

There are three people that work full time, and three people that work part time. And that has been very intentional. First of all, because feminist organising and feminist movements and collectives never get funding. There's just no funding that reaches feminist organisations. So having part time roles was very important, recognising that there might be a need to be doing other works for livelihood. We understand that people might need to do something else, as we fundraise to be able to regeneratively sustain them within the roles.

In terms of rotation, each member of the board has a two-years

mandate. Overall, in the five years at FIK, what I have learnt is that you have to be aware of the realities of organising. You have to be aware that the people that you work with are human beings. And there are human things that happen within movement building that organisations have to be completely aware of. Also, as co-EDs we seek to exit and leave others to take on this role, we really need to make sure that it is people from the community that are interested and who can maintain the validity and legitimacy for the organisation – it is a very complex and nuanced conversation. We keep trying to investigate and solidify, but there are many nuances to this.

*Do you think that if it wasn't for the funding requirements, the structure of FIK would have been the same?*

I remember for the longest time, we resisted registering. We were saying – no, we are a social movement, we want to maintain our informality, our collectivism. But, again, I will fall back on the 'people are human beings', and that's a reality that a lot of movements have to remember. So I feel that one way or another we would still have a structure and a Code of Conduct, some ethical guidelines so that you are not just like, winging it. Otherwise, that doesn't create room for the complexity of humanness. Because what happens if within a group, as within all groups, conflict happens, when someone is harmed and there needs to be processes and accountabilities? You may be practising feminism but a person within your collective is not practising feminism. Or they may want to practice feminism, but they inhabit so much trauma from different aspects of their lives that they may project onto you, or that you may project onto them. So having some written forms of conduct, some accountabilities and structures are extremely important. You know, I started as

someone who liked winging it, being very informal, but with experience, I cannot comfortably advise anyone just let a collective of people wing it.

*I completely agree. I think that's a very romanticised idea, that feminists would just make things in a way that is somehow above oppressive or dominant power dynamics just automatically. And what happens is that often without structures, processes, guidelines, tools, power dynamics happen, and structures emerge anyway just they are invisible, unaccountable. Sometimes feminists mistake structures for replicating the system we seek to dismantle. But that is not really the case, it is quite the opposite, we think. In the FIK community, how are they organised?*

We have sub-groups; this follows the projects. For example, we had a festival group to steer the work on that. We have a sub-group on tech, on political education. A sub-group that is preparing our office space. And for everyone that contributes to the different sub-groups, we compensate them with an honorarium. And that helps to keep the group active and connected with the group. So, even if I critique the philanthropy industrial complex, I like funding because of what it can do for entire communities. Because it gets the work done. I know that even if we did not have the funding, as we did in the beginning, we would get very creative – hangout in our homes, share non-monetary resources. We would still organise. Just not to the scale that we wanted. Funding got us organising on a bigger scale.

*About collective care, how is it at FIK?*

We think of care at different levels. Firstly, we want care to be a living spirit within the organisation. But care looks very differently for different people. For a lot of people, especially in our context,

care predominantly means being financially secure. In a context where there are a lot of economic challenges, people are working in a capitalistic system, so care really means something tangible. We used to have monthly check-ins where we used to give grocery vouchers in the group - and outside the group too - we just donated funds to the Trans and Queer Fund, acknowledging the realities that these groups face different hierarchical powers within the system, we had to discontinue this due to lack of funding. So, for us, care means literal money towards the sustenance of the people within these spaces. And that might not always be possible or sustainable. We saw our role, as FIK, as redistributors of the funding that we get. It's not a lot of funding, but every time we get it, it trickles down to the communities. I don't mean to say that other things are not wellness or do not represent care, I am just saying that in our context, care means giving some form of tangible assistance.

At the organisational level, we try as much as possible to make sure that we have channels of care – this looks like paying salaries, insurance, per diems, and having flexible time. And also how we communicate with and to each other in a way that represents feminist values. Within a working space, there is bound to be different things that come up – so we must have a balance between ensuring that there is assertiveness in making sure there is accountability but also being compassionate and communicating this accountability in a way that is compassionate and affirms the other person, as well as making sure that nobody feels mistrust towards the organisation and uncared for. On accountability: It's crucial to have feedback channels, but their existence alone doesn't guarantee trust or use especially given past traumas or systemic issues. People often need encouragement and reassurance to engage. As co-ED, I've aimed to use informal, accessible communication – avoiding weaponising

language that can feel intimidating – to make feedback and accountability feel safe and approachable. When feedback is given, it must be acted upon to truly embody accountability. Within our organization, we support this through one-on-one mutual feedback sessions and weekly check-ins.



*In your context, have you faced backlash, surveillance, and how did you address it?*

Kenya from June 2024 has been going through a lot of authoritarian repression and activists were and are being targeted. It started with the Reject Finance Bill protest. The first thing we asked is – who is going to the protest. And we asked them to fill in details to support their safety like who was their protest buddy, and other details. For those who were arrested or went to hospital, we covered their expenses. It was a way to show up for our communities and partners in these times. We also supported people who had to relocate for their safety because of being targeted, surveilled and receiving threats, including ourselves as co-EDs. We also realised we did not have enough digital and physical security training. We just came back from training on both, including on how to get a secured office. The protests showed us that you can't just do things and say things, they will come from you. We also want to have specific policies and processes on security for different activities. It needs to be a practice, a living spirit, a culture. What happened really left us scared. At the moment, you really panic. We are continuing to strengthen our security responses. But also, people also see us as frontline rapid respondents – and as frontline rapid responders, you are in danger – so we need to balance these two roles, making sure we strengthen our safety and security of our community through our roles, and our own safety and security that is in line because of

## Pot of insights and reflections

We hope that this booklet has been a source of reflection and imagination for forging and nurturing transformative ecosystems. These stories do not provide recipes, but sparks for contextual reflection and embodied imagination of how we can organise and do our work differently. We live in a world where individualism, capitalism and oppressive power dominate society, where organisational structures and relationalities are driven by competitive dynamics and therefore, we deemed it important to take time, learn and honour the work, resistance and struggles for the common good from different geographies and territories that are organising differently. These stories invite us to reflect on how we can organise grounded in relationships, oneness and collective subjectivity, community, collective power and belonging to nature.

We know from nature, from the way the earth organises, from the smallest of creatures that work together in oneness, and each having their own unique and significant role, that we have the capacity to heal, regenerate and thrive in interdependence. From the dialogues we had, we learnt different and unique ways of honouring our interdependence, and we now want to highlight some insights from the dialogues and reflect on the elements that resonated deeply.

We learnt from Decidim about their multilayered, decentralised go-vernance structure which allows decision-making to be distributed across different levels. This layered approach ensures that leadership is shared, with responsibility spread across smaller working groups, ensuring that decision-making power does not accumulate in one place.

The Decidim software is an incredible tool to practice direct democracy. Transparency and traceability in the software are also foundational to Decidim's approach and they are not only principles that inform their work but are also embedded as structural processes. For example, changes to proposals or budgets on the Decidim platform are visible to all participants, and administrators cannot manipulate proposals without leaving a trace. This shows that transparency should not just be a value in our work but should be structurally embedded to safeguard against hidden hierarchies and dynamics of power.

From Caracol Olol Jackson, we learnt how organising can embody fluid and adaptive forms of governance rather than a rigid structure. Their structure is organic and shapeshifting, it adjusts to shifting needs and political contexts. This approach mirrors how nature evolves and works together, drawing inspiration from ecological processes that adapt and transform over time. We learnt how governance and organising can be alive and interwoven with adapting political situations, activities and relationalities, rather than a rigid process. One of the insights that deeply resonated from the Caracol community's reflections is that leadership and social justice work must remain deeply connected to wider global struggles. Rather than becoming isolated islands, their work seeks to permeate and interconnect with other movements, territories and resistance struggles and not become separate spaces where an ideal world is being created. This points to the significance of our work remaining deeply transformative and connected with collective struggles

across territories and remaining collective in spirit and approach.

From Ulex, we are deeply connected with their recognition that inner work cannot be separated from social justice work, that our work is not only about changing external structures of power but also about how we show up, relate, and transform what has been internalised from systemic structures in society. Ulex's solidarity economy is a challenge to capitalistic norms and hegemonic structures that dominate society. Capitalist logic tells us that we always need more, that we are tools for labour and production, and that we must maximise our work as much as possible to meet metrics of productivity. Their solidarity economy takes a shift away from this perspective; instead of our resources and labour being exchanged in transactional terms, it recognises that we have different, yet interconnected needs. These needs stem from diverse lived experiences, including class conditioning, social location, and historical context. This approach to resource allocation encourages us to think about finances not in market-driven or profit logic but in a way that nurtures community. Ulex's grounding in transformative friendship encouraged us to reflect on how we should show up in relationships in our work, and that relational accountability is not just an important aspect in our work and friendships but also foundational to the way we organise and remain accountable to our communities and to each other.

From the Hawa Feminist Coalition, we learnt that they are structured to prevent the concentration of power and to ensure accountability. Leadership roles are elected annually, giving members the ability to replace those who do not reflect the values and goals of Hawa. This creates a culture of shared responsibility and flexibility,

while also opening space for new leaders to emerge. Feminist leadership training, supported by tailored manuals, provides young women and girls with the tools they need for leadership roles and to participate in collective decision-making.

For Feminists in Kenya (FIK), decision-making within the collective is a balance between community consensus and practical responsiveness. The FIK community plays a key role through feedback loops, working groups, and consultations on issues such as funding allocation and programme priorities. At the same time, the advisory board and co-Executive Directors (EDs) provide oversight and the capacity to act quickly when consensus is not feasible. This indicates that in a world with rapidly changing political contexts, violence and extremely volatile times, we need multiple ways to make decisions that allow both collective decision-making as well as responding to urgent needs. Their leadership selection has remained rooted in the community, based on both responsibility and collective agreement. Term limits, such as two-year mandates for board members, reinforce the principle of rotation and renewal. The co-EDs themselves see their roles as temporary, aiming to eventually step aside so that leadership can be passed to new people from within the community.

From AWID, we learnt the importance of embracing a feminist approach to leadership by intentionally diffusing power across co-Executive Directors, staff, and partnerships. We learnt the important aspect of recognising that not all decisions can or should be made collectively, but that it is the communication and transparency about these decisions that are significant. Annual reviews and anonymous 360-degree feedback act as accountability tools to

nourish responsibility and open feedback loops. AWID's reflections are also grounded in the perspective that leadership is understood as a practice of holding space rather than directing it, rooted in reflection about holding the door open for others to come in, rather than being at the driving seat. From AWID, we also learnt about awareness of positionality in feminist spaces as well as being aware of organisational privilege, particularly in global advocacy spaces. In the feminist ecosystem, power-sharing and supporting access to spaces and taking a step back are important elements of addressing privilege and accountability within movements.

LILAK is grounded in a decolonial feminist framework that centres the lived experiences of the indigenous communities they work with in the Philippines. LILAK departs from traditional forms of leadership by using rotational models in projects and creating open, participatory spaces for Indigenous communities to express ideas. From LILAK we learnt the importance of ensuring that decision-making is contextual and emergent from the perspectives and ideas that are shaped by the communities' realities and their experiences. LILAK is also grounded in the importance of collective care in their work and with the communities they work with. We learnt from them about the importance of centering collective care: because of the dynamics that are experienced in organising and in society, the burnout and trauma that can be experienced are collective experiences – and this shapes the understanding of collective care, which is at the core of LILAK's work.

These insights allow us to reflect on power and positionality intimately. They provide examples of ways in which organisations and groups intentionally stepped away from dominant structures

of power and grounded themselves in collective accountability and interdependence. One of the key things that emerged from the dialogues is that we need intentional ways to decentralise power and not accumulate it in one place. This could mean decentralising power from those who have been in an organisation the longest, or have more presence due to their own vocality, privileges or background, or ensuring that there are multiple and diverse perspectives in the governance and leadership of an organisation. These ideas and perspectives must work in synchrony together, in an organised way, rather than a top-down approach to making decisions which favours those who have accumulated individual power and status, or even wealth.

An important reflection that emerged and that resonated deeply, is that we need structures, processes and tools that support us in our organising, to practice internally the same transformative change and common good we are working for. This does not mean we are forming traditional hierarchies. We have seen the hegemony of dominant structures and dynamics of power in all areas of our lives, and these have been internalised deeply by many at intimate and collective level. Therefore, without strong processes and tools, we risk falling into the default dynamics, into dominant power that has been internalised due to our lived experiences.

In feminist and social justice spaces, we have sometimes seen the rejection of formal structures. Sometimes, it can even feel taboo to talk about organising structures and decision-making processes, and we have experienced this ourselves across different spaces. In these violent and oppressive times, this outright rejection of any form of hierarchy is a response to the system that has shown us

that dominant centralised racist structural power is the most destructive force on earth. It fragments our communities, it destroys nature, it isolates and divides us.

However, emerging from these dialogues and from our own experiences, is the idea that idealising structurelessness, or even horizontalism, without structures and processes, can be very destructive and recreate the same oppressive dynamics of the hegemonic system. It can put an uneven burden of labour on a few, or allow invisible power dynamics to follow default dominant dynamics, and create invisible or hidden power structures. It can create burn out, allow the consequences of everyone's actions and decisions to only fall on a few, and cause unjust dynamics and lack of transparency.

We reflected that having different, transformative structures of governance, leadership, or just indicating how one ecosystem operates, with clear and adaptive, diversified, decision-making processes, as well as tools for collective accountability, care and healing, and conflict transformation, is necessary. At the same time, structures, processes and tools cannot be rigid - rigid hierarchies and structures that do not evolve, that do not adapt to evolving needs and changing political contexts, that do not bring in new ideas and allow new people with fresh perspectives to join and lead, are byproducts of the hegemonic system of power. What we do need is intentional decision-making processes and organisational structures that are clear, adaptive, collective, transparent and accountable.

The insights in this booklet also invite us to reflect on collective care and our commitment to each other. They invite us to think about this not just as values and important principles in our work,

but as foundational to the way we structure ourselves and organise our work and struggle. Collective care and healing should not be an afterthought or a mere principle that guides some of our work, but as central to how we live and organise together; it is not something that can remain informal or invisible, or bottom priority, in comparison to other aspects of our organisational structure; it is something we should formalise within our structures of governance and our decision-making processes. This does not mean turning care into a bureaucratic or tokenistic checklist, but recognising it as central to how we transform the world.

For us, we feel that these learnings encompass one question broadly: how can we build our collective autonomy? These insights on building, embedding and embodying collective care practices, on accountable and transparent decision-making, on structures and processes that decentralise and distribute power, point to a collective goal in figuring out how we can organise and carry out our work in collective autonomy, and not dictated by the hegemonic system and structures of power. By embedding intentional processes and structures that embody equitable and collective decision-making, we are aiming to self-define our political vision, strategy and work. The stories we shared in this booklet are stories of resisting and not being defined and guided by capitalist, competitive neoliberal structures and dynamics, and instead being collectively autonomous in identity and work. The stories express autonomy of people and ideas coming together and forming movements and groups, and defining structures and decision-making processes that are grounded and liberated.

For us, this collective agency and autonomy is how we view feminist democracies. It is a different way of seeing ourselves in society, one that is not defined by the hegemonic systemic structures and social norms of neoliberal capitalistic dominance and oppression. Feminist democracies, for us, are not only about alternative structures or institutional designs. It is a way of living, working, transforming, and relating differently. It is about creating ecosystems that resist the dominance of individualism, separatedness, competition, and extraction. Collective care and relational accountability are central to this. It means being accountable in our relationships to one another, to our communities, to nature, to our aims – to the common good of all nature. Governance, in this sense, becomes a practice of honouring interdependence and of building systems that sustain relationalities, autonomy, communities, nature, and grounding our work and life in collective joy.

Through Building We, we want to reclaim the word democracy. We are taught that democracy means choosing political representatives every few years, exercising our right to vote, and other civil liberties. We are taught that ticking a box is the exercise of our freedom, even as decisions remain concentrated in the hands of a few people, and the power of the people gets as far as that. In practice, the dominant idea of democracy is deeply individualised, polarised, tokenised, and tied to centralised leadership. Representative democracy cannot be enough, as it is neither participatory nor democratic at its core.

Too often, democracy is reduced to individual rights without collective power. It is framed as control and predictability rather than collective autonomy, self-determination and transformation. The

hegemonic system tells us we are free, but that is in the sense of neoliberal individualistic, patriarchal, ableist and racist freedom of choice within the capitalist system: in the hegemonic system, there is no or limited and privileged access to the tools to govern ourselves, to learn critical thinking, to make decisions together, or to imagine alternatives beyond the narrow script of representation.

The praxis of feminist democracies challenges this paradigm. It shapes not just what we fight for, but how we organise and make decisions. It transforms traditional dominant hierarchies and top-down individual leadership models, into structures that are grounded in collective care, collective responsibility, and inner transformation. This is not about creating new islands of feminist practice in a sea of patriarchal capitalist governance; it is about reshaping the very tools, practices, and relationships through which we build power and transform society together. It is about creating 'a world where many worlds fit', as the Zapatistas say, and where our day-to-day relationships and practices reflect the feminist realities we are working towards and fighting for.

We hope the insights and intuitions documented in this booklet will spark imagination, experimentation, collective learning and radical hope.

With boundless love and solidarity  
FHC

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