

“Listen to what I  
have to say”:

Learning from **POWER UP!**  
programme strategies





# Introduction



The Power Up! programme (2021-2025) aims to build, mobilise and transform power around three strategic agendas – bodies, voice and resources – and engages with women, girls and members of the LGBTQI+ community. As part of the Power Up! Consortium, which implements the programme, Gender at Work is supporting Amhi Amchya Arogyasathi (AAAS) in India; Collective for Research & Training for

Development - Action (CRTD-A) in Lebanon and its partners, Kadirat and Doria Feminist Fund, in Tunisia and Palestine; Kaleidoscopio in Mozambique; and Labour Research Service in South Africa to promote a just and equitable world in which all women live lives free of violence, exercise their voices and agency in decisions that affect them and access and control economic resources.



## unpacking transformative change:

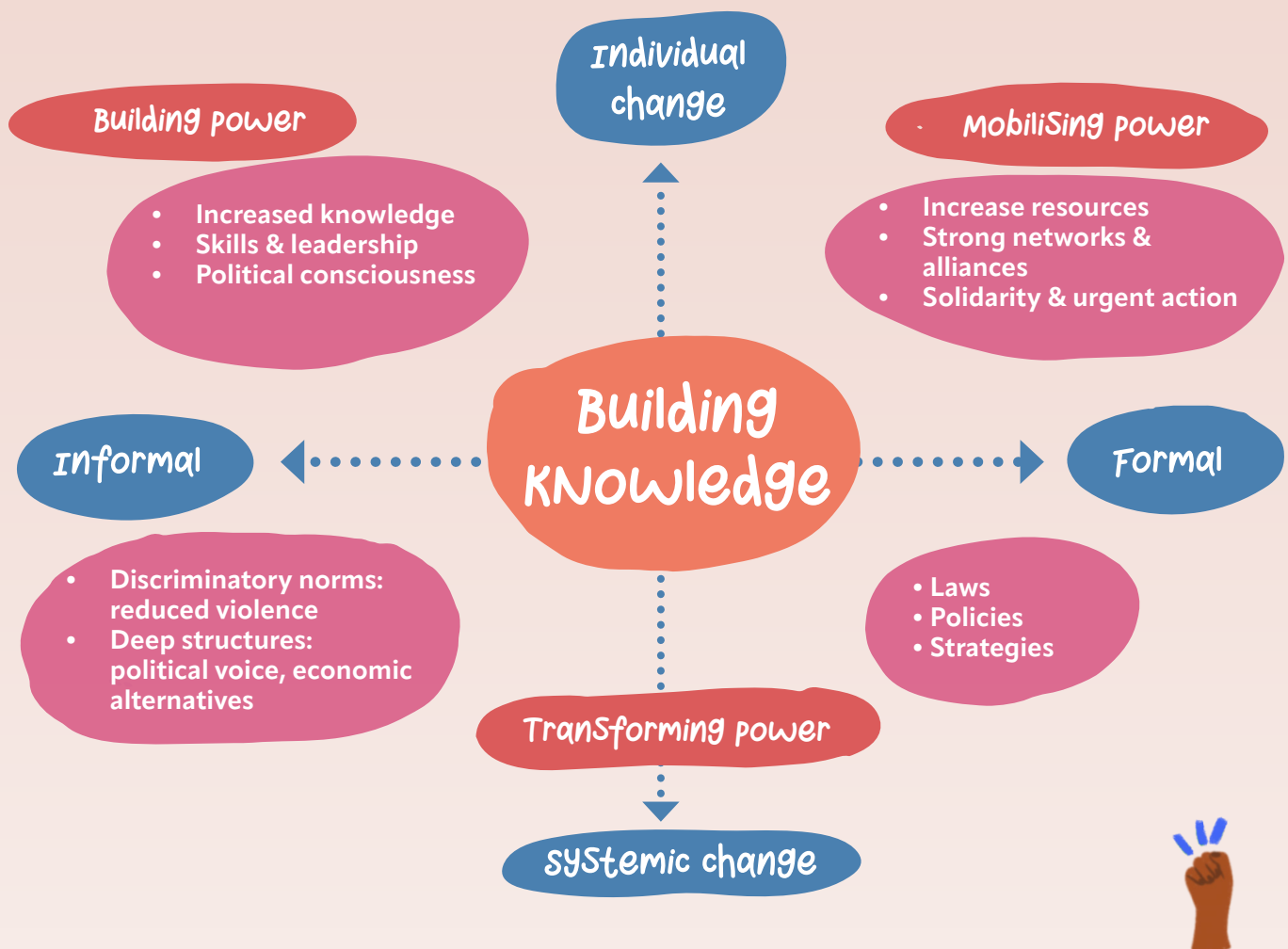


The change pathways and strategies of the Power Up! programme are in harmony with the Gender at Work Framework, underscoring that lasting change for gender equality requires activation in all four domains of change. As a knowledge network, Gender at Work is committed to building knowledge that is deeply contextual. All country-level initiatives supported under Power Up! explore change in some or all four domains and allow Gender at Work and its partners to test different approaches and strategies to understand their effectiveness.

This brief describes the curiosities and hopes shared by advocates, thinkers and activists during a series of virtual learning events held in October 2022. The above organisations, together with Gender at Work, identified themes that will guide our collective exploration, evidence gathering and learning in order to develop and share knowledge on what strategies work best in building, mobilising and transforming power. To learn more about the principles guiding our learning processes, please click on [this link](#).



# The gender at work Framework and the power up! programme pathways



## our curiosities and hopes

The following thematic areas have been identified for sustained exploration and tracking over the programme period through the narratives of the women at the heart of the in-country initiatives. The sharing in these sessions created a web that connected the work across countries, revealing the potential for exciting future collaborations and learning opportunities. Below is a glimpse into common learnings that are emerging within and across the supported projects.

## what works in building movements and feminist Solidarity?

The process of coming together, as organisations working in different contexts but with shared goals, was seen by participants as an opportunity to share movement-building strategies and stories – an extension of their work at the national level. While Power Up! is a specific, donor-funded project, the learning process offers creative opportunities to connect ideas across multiple countries and regions and examine aspects of movement building that are working and can inform practices elsewhere.



*How will women's power and strength increase through collective action?*

*We bring women together and create solidarity networks so that they can find their individual and collective voice and know how to use it to claim their rights. And we are having fun doing this! We now want to share our lessons and be part of global alliances and practice forums.*

*-Shubhada Desmukh, AAAS, India*

*We really need to convince funders to provide flexible funding that embraces unregistered groups. In the contexts we work in, it is hard to work with formal, registered organisations. This is a key role Gender at Work can play – documenting the realities that feminist and women's rights organisations work in.*

*– Zeina Abdel Khalik, CRTD-A, Lebanon*

## **Intergenerational and interSectional Strategies: Feminist praxis in action**

Intergenerational and intersectional approaches are being practiced across all the countries. Together, they act as a crucial strategy in building stronger women's rights movements by honouring the knowledge and practices of experienced women and building on younger women's activism and passion. In Tunisia, strategies to promote intergenerational dialogue are shifting the perspectives of younger women who once subscribed to the notion that they had nothing to learn from older women. Older women, in turn, are embracing the opportunity to become engaged in issues affecting the next generation.

*One thing that amazed me is that more senior women were so curious, astonished at everything and thirsty for knowledge.*

*– Samia Fessi, Kadirat, Tunisia*

*For so many years, no one has listened to what I have to say. Now, someone is listening to what I have to say.*

*– The words of an older woman participating in interventions, as reported by Samia Fessi, Kadirat, Tunisia.*

The participants agreed that the heart of advancing feminist leadership and movement building, developing solidarity networks and understanding feminist negotiation processes is and always will be based on the lived experiences of women and the most marginalised, firmly grounded in their activism and victories. Understanding this, in all its complexity, requires unpacking the theoretical underpinnings and reimagining what works in practice to build safe spaces and solidarity. To read more about how learning processes can be intentional in creating a safe and enquiring space, click [this link](#).

Resourcing movement building is not easy, and many organisations remain outside networks and organised movements. The participants felt that funders can play a key role in building stronger coalitions and networks by easing the participation of marginal organisations into movements.





Similar strategies are being pursued in other countries involved in the Power Up! programme. In India, a listening tool called *Jeevan Dhara* (River of Life) has enabled the sharing of lived experiences and helped build an understanding that issues faced by community members are linked.

*Older women's knowledge and wisdom is being acknowledged by younger women. Older women are appreciating the issues that younger women bring to the meetings. Younger women are able to appreciate what men face when they migrate and the men, in turn, are able to recognise the aspirations of women.*

– Soma Parthasarathy, AAAS, India

Participants underscored the need to be constantly aware of intersectional vulnerability – the importance of shining a lens on how gender, caste, class, age, colour, geographic location, sexuality, disability and other identity markers often result in different experiences and outcomes for people engaged in the same process.

*There are multiple identities within the movements and spaces we are creating, spaces that are designed for the common good. It will be important for us to unpack the power dynamics within that.*

– Nina, LRS, South Africa

*Learners have a power over the voluntary food handlers (as part of the National School Nutrition Programme in schools in South Africa). They belittle them, undermine them. Some of the VFHs might be their own mothers. Because they are preparing food as volunteers, it is seen as an extension of their reproductive role at home and not one worthy of respect. The cleaners, by contrast, are seen as workers with a defined role and get more respect.*

– Nancy, LRS, South Africa

One area of enquiry that emerged during discussions was how to engage men in strengthening women's rights movements without reproducing patriarchy. This issue can potentially become an entry point to unpack and question traditional masculinities in different countries.

*If this issue is coming up in the different regions we are working in, it bears exploring. It is normally left at the theoretical level. Maybe this is an opportunity? What can we learn about how we involve men while maintaining a safe space for women and their agency?*

– Zeina Abdel Khalik, CRTD-A, Lebanon



## Economic alternatives: How do we locate feminism?

The discussion concerning economic alternatives was framed around the following questions: Are feminist economic alternatives (FEA) a reaction to neoliberal economic models but still operating within the rules of neoliberalism, or are they built on an entirely different foundation with a separate set of operating principles? Do FEAs offer different entry points for understanding what makes successful and sustained economies that protect the climate and people?

*Current women's economic empowerment interventions have placed great importance on income generation. When talking about feminist economic alternatives, how do we understand micro and macro strategies that will lead to economic change and disrupt the linear models of income generation?*

– Katia Taela, Kaleidoscopio, Mozambique

The discussion confirmed that creating feminist economic alternatives requires continued work on deep patriarchal structures and social norms change at multiple levels. In South Africa, voluntary food handlers who work in

the unorganised sector are beginning to find their voices by challenging notions of what constitutes work and making labour rights claims for fair wages. The importance of building women's political presence and voices to aid feminist economic alternatives was underscored. The perspectives highlighted the idea that income generation is just part of the struggle and that ensuring women's independent access over income is a persistent and multi-level systemic challenge.

*If we want to produce something from the forest, the Forestry Department does not give us access in the first place. Then, if we manage to produce something, getting our product to the market is a big challenge. Once we manage that, the men in our family take control of the money we earn. So we face barriers from the system as well our families.*

– Heera Rautela, AAAS, India

The importance of care and community as part of an alternative vision for a feminist economy was also emphasised. This might require solutions that prioritise exchange rather than profit alone. The in-country work offers possibilities for exploring these questions in greater depth in the coming years.

## Looking ahead

The learning sessions once again underscored that the three strategic agendas of the Power Up! programme – bodies, voice and resources – are inter-connected and cannot be separated. Women's access to resources is inexorably linked to their experiences of violence in multiple domains and their participation in political processes, including advocacy. The focus needs to remain on building stronger movements and coalitions and enhancing women's leadership skills so they can negotiate in personal, political and economic spheres.





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Gender at Work is supporting partners in India (Amhi Amchya Arogyasathi), Lebanon (Collective for Research & Training for Development - Action CRTD-A, which also covers Palestine and Tunisia), Mozambique (Kaleidoscopio) and South Africa (Labour Research Service) in their work that aims for transformative change leading to gender equality. Gender at Work, as the convenor, holds annual learning and reflection events. The contents of this brief have been developed based on discussions that occurred during a series of learning events held in October 2022.

Learning events: Reflect | Innovate | Inspire (11, 19 and 25 October 2022)

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