

FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY:
A FRAMEWORK

PREAMBLE

As the world marks the 25th Anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, a growing number of feminists inside and outside of government are pioneering new approaches to policy that are tailored to address the issues of the day and advance new ground in the global quest for gender equality¹ and the fulfillment of women's human rights.

Today's most pressing issues, and the solutions that are envisioned, are not radically different from those addressed at Beijing. The context, however, has changed. Despite measurable progress in some areas, such as girls' education, maternal health and, increasingly, the repeal of discriminatory laws, there are new and dynamic challenges that threaten to reverse progress and rollback rights. And no country has achieved gender equality. The world faces an urgent climate crisis; persistent social, economic and political inequalities and consequential trust deficits with respect to globalization and the international institutions seen to support it; reversals of legislative protections of sexual and reproductive rights; attacks on women and LGBTQ+ human rights defenders; anemic progress on political inclusion of marginalized groups; and protracted political crises resulting in the largest forced displacement since WWII, among others. If we want to meet our human rights obligations, we cannot leave anyone behind, much less women and girls, in all their diversity.

At this moment of increased nationalism, populism and misogyny, it is time to call out backlash and call in new allies and champions for gender equality and women's human rights, using all the tools at our disposal. As champions for gender justice from around the world prepare to honor the legacy of Beijing and launch the next generation of commitments to advance gender equality, feminist foreign policy is one tool that shows promise for taking a much-needed, intersectional and often multilateral approach to women's rights, simultaneously addressing urgent issues such as climate change, peace and security, inclusive growth, global health and poverty alleviation. We are convinced that every country can embrace a feminist foreign policy, no matter if it is a low, middle or high-income one. At home and abroad, adopting a feminist approach could help to improve social development and reach social welfare and gender equality. Such an approach promotes inclusion, equality, peace and security, both at the international and national level.

But what is it, precisely? This framework attempts to distill a definition and a few core components of feminist foreign policy, drawing from the few examples that exist today², as well as the insights of feminist thinkers, advocates and experts inside and outside of government. This growing collective will be formalized in the course of the Beijing+25 Generation Equality process, in hopes of informing the fledgling field of feminist foreign policy and expanding the number of countries bold enough to embrace it.



FEMINIST

A WORD ON “FEMINIST”

Invocation of the word “feminist” can be a profound commitment, and not one that is necessarily possible or appropriate for all actors in all contexts. Governments who may be considering developing feminist foreign policies and advocates who are championing them will be helped to focus on the core ingredients, with the flexibility to find their own way to describe their commitment in a language and manner that is most helpful in their unique context.

For those who are ready to use “feminist,” this can be an important signal that a government is ready to pursue a more transformative approach to the advancement of gender equality and inclusion, in a manner that is intersectional and that focuses at its core on transforming power relations, not just lifting up some women.

There are different strands of feminism, so this framework does not seek to define the term so much as assert that it is about equality and non-discrimination, the disruption and transformation of power, and that it is intersectional and can look differently based on different contexts. Feminist foreign policy, therefore, should be similarly rooted in an intersectional approach, informed by the diversity of local knowledge, strategies and language and fully owned by the communities it seeks to support. It is worth noting that feminist foreign policies are living frameworks, designed to engage an ongoing process of learning and adaptation, and, in this regard, these ingredients should not be viewed as an exhaustive list.

Invoking the word “feminist” can make people feel uncomfortable. Yet opposition to the term is not always intended to obstruct; it can begin with a question and initiate a conversation and an opportunity to educate and learn. In this regard, it is not just about whether to use the word, but also how it is used—ideally from a place of empathy and connection, to open conversations rather than build walls or condescend.

It is in this spirit that we offer a framework for feminist foreign policy, in the hopes that it is useful in contexts where government is considering such an approach and what it may mean in practice. This framework is presented as an initial guidepost and tool, alongside an invitation to join a growing Global Task Force for Feminist Foreign Policy that will be launched as part of the Beijing+25 process and the Generation Equality Forum to be held during July of 2020.



KEY INGREDIENTS FOR FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY



1. PURPOSE

Articulate the purpose of adopting a feminist foreign policy for your government's specific context, anchoring the purpose of undertaking a feminist foreign policy in the exercise and embrace of similar principles and priorities in domestic policies to ensure balance and coherence at home and abroad.



2. DEFINITION³

Set out a definition of what feminist foreign policy means for your government: rationale, values, approach. Answer the question: How is this different from "business as usual" foreign policy? Use an intersectional approach that analyses, names and seeks to address intersecting streams of marginalization and power (e.g. gender, race/ethnicity, age, ability, etc.).



3. REACH

Name the scope of the policy: what agencies and efforts are impacted? Include all streams of foreign policy in one document with clear lines of reporting and coordination across agencies and divisions, e.g. defense, diplomacy, trade and foreign assistance (if applicable). Encouraging horizontal (not just vertical) approaches to integrating gender-responsive measures in policy and program efforts is an important element of wider efforts to advance gender equality and inclusion.⁴



4. INTENDED OUTCOMES AND BENCHMARKS TO ACHIEVE OVER TIME

At its core, feminist foreign policy should be about achieving change over time to advance particular outcomes. Clearly state what outcomes your policy seeks to advance and specify the timelines for change. Outcome targets, developed in consultation⁵ with the people they are intended to help, can be impactful on some issues, as can outlining "stretch" goals that challenge governments to increase resources/level of effort, and to prioritize the issues that are perceived as most consequential (e.g. climate, sexual and reproductive health and rights) in a context-specific way.



5. PLAN TO OPERATIONALIZE

It is necessary to define how and when the policy is going to be implemented and provide an action plan with specific activities and the period of implementation. This should include:

Resources: What resources (staffing, financial and research, for instance), will be required to achieve the goals that have been articulated? This should include stretch goals for increased staffing and budgetary support.

Representation and Inclusion: A number of countries point to the numbers of women in leadership in their foreign policy as a measure of feminist foreign policy. This is a necessary component, which should be considered at all levels of staffing, and not be limited to a unique focus on women but also considerations related to diversity relevant for the context such as race, ability, ethnicity, religion, language, sexual orientation,

gender identity and expression, age and other forms of identity. Recommend setting benchmarks here as well, such as gender parity and racial diversity in senior positions, increased numbers of gender advisors, gender equality training for all staff, including managers, and sustained efforts to promote diversity in human resources management and recruitment, mentoring and professional development. Importantly, this component is not just about women in government positions, but representation of feminist civil society throughout the policymaking process—the "how" of how policy is developed, implemented and evaluated, in a feminist process of two-way, meaningful conversation, not just consultation.

Reporting Schedule: According to the principle of transparency, government should report on the implementation of policy to the public at regular (annual) intervals. In addition to self-reporting, adopt systems of external and third-party research and evaluation to validate and interrogate results. Make reports publicly available in many languages to encourage learning within and beyond government. Where principles or goals of the policy are compromised, naming those tensions is good practice as a statement of limitations and lessons learned.

Capacity Building: Feminist approaches and perspectives are generally not part of the usual training of diplomats, security experts and trade negotiators. Operationalization plans should include how new analytical approaches will be strengthened and incorporated into daily operations.

ANNEX: ILLUSTRATIVE MEASURES OF SUCCESS

The following table includes illustrative—but not exhaustive—measures of success that can be utilized across the various core components of feminist foreign policy.

	INTERNAL AND PROCESS MEASURES	EXTERNAL AND OUTCOME MEASURES	ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES
RIGHTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internal policies and protections to advance gender equality (e.g. paid leave, sexual and gender-based violence and discrimination protections) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improvement of LGBTQI+, women's, indigenous/ minority, disability, youth/aging rights standards at global, regional, national and state levels Advancement of rights most under attack (sexual and reproductive health and rights including LGBTQI+ and safe abortion; environmental and climate commitments) Explicit support for women's human rights and LGBTQI+ rights defenders Protection of and support for women peacebuilders 	<p>Gender equality specific:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action UNSCR 1325 Regional agreements (Maputo Protocol, Istanbul Convention, etc.) <p>General:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development/SDGs Universal Declaration on Human Rights Human Rights Council (incl. Special 6 Procedures, Gender Office) Trade dispute mechanisms
RESOURCES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Percent increase investment in domestic and foreign affairs budgets/staffing Flexible funding Gender Budgeting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increasing support for feminist organizations Increasing control of funds by feminist funders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> OECD DAC gender marker – 20/100 principal/significant External validation for all self-reported metrics Training on applying a gender equality approach to international policies and programs
REPRESENTATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of minority ministers, deputies, ambassadors Percent increase in gender advisors Parity at all staff levels Inclusion of feminist civil society in the process of policy-making, implementation, evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Co-creation of feminist policies, programs with civil society Increased numbers of minorities in social, economic and political leadership roles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quotas (at home and abroad) Parity pledges Implementation of the GAPS UK consultation process
RESEARCH & REPORTING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitoring and evaluation for the impact and uptake of internal policies Rigorous and independent impact evaluations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investments and policy decisions are rooted in rigorous evidence across all streams of FFP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound or "SMART" indicators Public, independent and outcomes-based reporting on impact of FFP annually Use of feminist evaluation techniques
REACH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Horizontal integration of gender-responsive measures by applying a gender lens to all policies and programs Coherence across aid, trade, defense, diplomacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mirror priorities in domestic and foreign policies Embrace of intersectionality in focus areas and approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clear definition of FFP Stated SMART goals for the policy Benchmarks over time

This framework was written by Lyric Thompson of the International Center for Research on Women with thanks to and in consultation with the following individuals who participated in a convening to consider what a global gold standard for feminist foreign policy might entail:

Cristopher Ballinas Valdés, United Mexican States

Ann Bernes, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Sweden

Mabel Bianco, Fundación para Estudio e Investigación de la Mujer

Sundaa Bridgett-Jones, The Rockefeller Foundation

Bridget Burns, Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO)

Ellen Friedman, The Compton Foundation

Elissa Golberg, Global Affairs Canada

Erin Hohlfelder, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

Memory Kachambwa, The African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET)

Kristina Lunz, Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy

Geetanjali Misra, CREA

Delphine O, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, France

Megan O'Donnell, Center for Global Development

Blen Sahilu, Women's Rights Advocate and Policy Advisor

Theo Sowa, African Women's Development Fund

Rachel Vogelstein, Council on Foreign Relations

Beth Woroniuk, The Equality Fund

The convening was held anticipating opportunities for action to advance gender equality and women's human rights commitments in line with the 25th anniversary celebrations of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which will occur over the course of 2020. The Framework benefits from more than a year of broader research and global consultations with more than 100 organizations in more than 40 countries around the world, which was conducted to understand what feminist thinkers, advocates and officials think feminist foreign policy should be, absent a standard global definition.

As of the 64th U.N. Commission on the Status of Women in March of 2020, the following organizations have endorsed this framework:



END NOTES

- 1) Equality regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity and expression or sexual characteristics.
- 2) As of this writing: Sweden (2014), Canada (2017), France, Mexico and Luxembourg (2019-2020)
- 3) Thompson, L., and Clement, R. (2019). Defining Feminist Foreign Policy. Washington, DC: International Center for Research on Women. Feminist foreign policy is the policy of a state that defines its interactions with other states, as well as movements and other non-state actors, in a manner that prioritizes peace, gender equality and environmental integrity, enshrines the human rights of all, seeks to disrupt colonial, racist, patriarchal and male-dominated power structures, and allocates significant resources, including research, to achieve that vision. Feminist foreign policy is coherent in its approach across all of its levers of influence (e.g. defense, diplomacy, trade, immigration, aid (if applicable)), anchored by the exercise of those values at home, and is co-created with feminist activists, groups and movements, at home and abroad.
- 4) Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Sweden. (2018) Handbook – Sweden's feminist foreign policy. Retrieved from <https://www.government.se/reports/2018/08/handbook-swedens-feminist-foreign-policy/>
- 5) GAPS UK. (2019). Beyond Consultations – A tool for meaningfully engaging with women in fragile and conflict-affected states. Retrieved from <https://www.beyondconsultations.org/>

Suggested citation:

Thompson, L. (2020). Feminist Foreign Policy: A Framework. Washington, DC: International Center for Research on Women.

