

# THE SEEDS WE PLANT GROW ROOTS



**A booklet of impact stories**



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# IN- TRO- DUC- TION

This booklet presents a collection of creative pieces which emerged as the final outcomes of a participatory storytelling exercise to evaluate the Women2030 program. The purpose of the evaluation was to assess the impact of the Women2030 program and, in the same breath, celebrate all the partners, organizations and communities that took part in it over five years.

The Women2030 program brought together a beautifully diverse network of women's rights groups and feminist organizations connected across the world and willing to support each other to engage in the transformation of their communities.

Coordinated by a coalition of women-led and feminist networks, the program reached out to more than 189 women's rights and feminist partner organizations in 62 countries, building their capacities through training and sub-granting, and engaging them in Agenda2030 and climate-related policy processes. These partners engaged their own partners and communities, from the grassroots to national and international policy spaces. In doing so, they imbued their projects with their unique dreams and ideas of feminism, women's empowerment, transformative change and sustainable development. They also identified and responded to the immediate needs of their communities, creating new partnerships and opportunities to address some of those needs. What emerges is a tapestry of worldviews and localized approaches that come into dialogue with one another, creating a support network from Bolivia to Mongolia.

The seeds planted in this program are rooting, and in the pieces below, we can see how they grow and enrich the dialogue between organizations working towards gender justice across the globe.

We designed the participatory storytelling evaluation to celebrate this growing network; we use storytelling as a method because stories have the power to bring us closer as people. We wanted to showcase the

impact of the program without theorizing about it or generalizing. Instead, we wish to invite the reader to feel more connected to the experiences of the people who the program has touched at the grassroots. We wanted to ensure the partners could shape the narrative through this process while building their capacities to tell their stories. By listening and sharing many stories, we also discerned patterns and invited the participants of this process to make sense of their experiences.

Over three months (January to March 2021), we accompanied 14 partners in the process of exploring and reflecting on the way their organizations and communities engaged with the Women2030 program. We trained them in storytelling and in carrying out semi-structured interviews. The partners received a stipend to participate; they each sat in an interview, took part in a storytelling workshop and learning webinars. After the initial training, they went out to their community to carry out two to three interviews, which they then translated into a story. Finally, they attended a two-day virtual gathering to reflect on the lessons learned and collectively analyze the stories they drafted.

Below you will find the edited version of the stories followed by two collective creations. We aim to create an opportunity to share the experiences and inheritance of a now-over program as profoundly and authentically as possible.

With this booklet, we hope you will be challenged and inspired to expand your imagination of what impact looks and feels like at multiple layers. Through the stories, drawings and poems, you will meet different people and perspectives, expanding your empathy. Hopefully, you will get energized to continue, in whatever form you can, the important work of strengthening the way women thrive as part of healthy communities, cherishing and defending a lively and diverse ecology.

*Gioel Gioacchino and Fiammetta Wegner, Recrear*

# ABOUT WOMEN 2030

The **Women2030** program is funded by the European Commission and implemented by a coalition of four network organizations – Women Engage for a Common Future (WECF), Global Forest Coalition (GFC), Women Environmental Programme Africa (WEP), and Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD) – with many partners worldwide. **Women2030** aims to strengthen capacities of women's rights organizations to advance local, national and regional gender-responsive sustainable development policies, such as Agenda2030 and climate agreements. Participation in policy development, monitoring, mobilizing citizens' support and demonstrating best practices are core activities of this programme.

## THE WOMEN2030 PROGRAM'S RESULTS OVER 4 YEARS:

- **4 co-applicants** with networks of civil society organizations (CSOs) across Africa (WEP Abuja), Asia Pacific (APWLD Bangkok), Latin America (GFC Asunción) and Europe (WECF Utrecht).
- **745 feminists** used their 'civil society seats' at policy tables, engaging with their country's high level representatives.
- **189 expert** organizations received training.
- **123 sub-grants** to document local women's challenges, priorities and prepare good practices to present to policy makers.
- **27 community-based** assessments and 35 **Women2030** shadow reports have been included in the UN policy process on SDGs to push for policy change at local levels.
- **17 countries** have improved gender-responsive national plans, policies, institutionalization.
- **100+ million people** reached on social and mainstream media.

## THE 14 PARTNERS PARTICIPATING IN THE STORYTELLING EVALUATION

- Agnes Mirembe, ARUWE, Uganda
- Aleksandra Mladenovic, Environmental Ambassadors for Sustainable Development (AESD), Serbia
- Anila Onta, The Federation of community Forestry Users Nepal (FECOFUN), Nepal
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- Victoria Norgby, Global Women Development Promoters, Ghana

## HOW TO READ THIS BOOKLET

This booklet presents nine stories and two collective creations. After each piece, you will be invited to reflect on the type of impact that it exemplifies. The three impact areas of the **Women2030** program are: Capacities Built; Policies Improved; and Mindsets Changed.

Reflective questions will help you to link each piece with your own experience and context. To draw connections and encourage your imagination, we complement the booklet with graphics, photos and illustrations, accompanied by short descriptions.

We invite you to read one story at a time, feeling how it moves you and observing what ideas and impulses it sparks.

# THE STORIES

**THE FIRST STORY** Explores how Munkhzul Yanjim learned about the SDGs and how she created a team to track their progress locally and compare it against national data. She used the results to reduce poverty in her community in Mongolia.

**THE SECOND STORY** Recounts how Isnie took steps towards gaining more freedom and independence after participating in a series of women's empowerment workshops in North Macedonia, allowing space for herself and her personal development.

**THE THIRD STORY** Taking place in Cameroon, is about meeting basic needs around menstruation with reusable pads. It tells Belinda's journey towards finding stability and dignity.

**THE FOURTH STORY** Explores economic access and rights from the experience of a group of women in Tunisia. Through their perseverance, they gained rights to sell their products alongside men in the local market.

**THE FIFTH STORY** Shares two reflections from women farmers in Togo who were supported to explore the links between sustainable environmental practices and their ability to sustain themselves financially.

**THE SIXTH STORY** Presents the experience of Mamata and her Community Forest Group's effort to protect a forest in Nepal. It profiles a powerful example of women's role as advocates and protectors of the environment.

**THE SEVENTH STORY** Is about how sub-granting allowed ARUWE to build the capacities of grassroots and women-led CSOs in Uganda. It tells the story of their sub-grantee RUHEPAI and their efforts to improve rural women's economic and health conditions.

**THE EIGHTH STORY** shares a moment of awakening in the life of Liliana, a Colombian farmer who was able to reflect on and challenge internalized gender norms.

**THE NINTH STORY** taking place in Nigeria, recounts how King challenged patriarchal norms. The story, told from a man's perspective, shares how patriarchy affected him and his family.

# 1. WOMEN VOICES SHAPING LOCAL DEVELOPMENT

*This story is about Munkhzul Yanjim becoming the leader of a team monitoring and addressing poverty in her community, inspired by a series of capacity-building workshops organized by the Centre for Human Rights and Development (CHRD), a local NGO partnered with the Women2030 program.*

Munkhzul Yanjim is a Mongolian woman part of the Buriad ethnic group. She lives in Bayandun, a soum (the Mongolian equivalent of a village) in the eastern part of Mongolia, bordering China, 700km from the capital city Ulaanbaatar. She has been running a small family business for the last decade. In 2018, she participated in a series of capacity-building workshops. In the workshops, she learned about the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the importance of citizen participation in local development.

Following the capacity-building workshops organized by the CHRD, she became the leader of a team (formed by community members and Governor's officials) established to monitor the implementation of SDG 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere. Munkhzul and her team chose to work on SDG 1 because poverty is the most pressing issue in their community. As part of this effort, her team conducted a survey to determine the proportion of the population below the international poverty line. They compared their findings with data from the National Statistics Office. They then explored ways to increase employment opportunities and presented ideas to the local authorities. Munkhzul and her team learned how to conduct surveys, structure research in their community, work on computers, draft official letters, give speeches, engage with policy-makers and write project proposals.

For a while, their work was misunderstood and undervalued. For example, due to the little awareness about the SDGs and the lack of integration of global agendas with local development plans, local authorities saw her team's work as a threat. For this reason, the

Written by  
Sarankhukhuu  
Sharavdorj

local Governor's office initially refused to share information and engage with the team. In 2019, Munkhzul finally found the avenue to share the findings and recommendations of

her team's research at the National Dialogue on the "Sustainable Development Goals and Our Participation", held in Ulaanbaatar. Representatives of local authorities and decision-makers attended the National Dialogue and were able to respond to the recommendations made by her team. The work was well-received, and she was invited as a guest speaker on local TV. Encouraged by her team, she decided to accept the invitation.

She was so proud when other community members told her they saw her live: she felt like a whole different person when speaking on TV! Since then, local authorities and community members understood her team's work better and started supporting the initiatives.

The Governor of the Dornod province proposed to her to run as the Citizen's Representative of Khural. She ran for the local election in October

2020 and, although she didn't win a seat, the whole experience was very gratifying for her.

With financial support from the Better World humanitarian organization and the Red Cross, Munkhzul's team has now received land permission from the Governor to build a Community Development Centre. Currently, they're planning to establish two to three workplaces at the center to contribute to decreasing poverty in their soum. During the pandemic they farmed the newly-granted land and provided impoverished people with fresh vegetables.

**The most important thing that I learned participating in the Women2030 program is the power that comes when people can take part in the development of their communities and the importance of expressing people's needs to the local authorities in a strategic way. I also understood that the work isn't only that of demanding from the local authorities. We can also contribute new understandings around the Sustainable Development Goals. We carried out research that can support many different stakeholders, including local government officials and people in neighboring villages".**

Sarankhukhuu Sharavdorj



**Munkhzul's story highlights traditional gender stereotypes as root causes of gender inequality.**

The story stresses how gender stereotypes limit women's visibility and political participation. Global frameworks aimed at advancing women's political participation and programs that strengthen women's leadership and civil society feminist movements can contribute to tackling these root causes.

**Munkhzul's story is an example of how the Women2030 program supported women to develop their leadership.**

The Partners implementing the Women2030 program proposed various activities to develop women's capacities to recognize their aspirations and work towards them. Practically, this took on different forms. You will read a few more examples in this booklet, such as: providing training on women's rights and gender equality; supporting the creation of income-generating activities; enabling the establishment of women-led forest protection groups; delivering awareness-building on global development frameworks such as Agenda2030 and the SDGs.

**When women can channel their own power, they become more comfortable navigating power structures.**

Women2030 Partners placed a strong focus on confidence-building activities. Women channelled this confidence in their unique ways to develop their potential. For example, they became more independent in their own families, set up income-generating activities, or acted as leaders in their communities.

**AREAS OF IMPACT:**

Capacities Built, Policies improved.

*In your context, what barriers are limiting people's active participation in local development?*

*Which strategies are women's groups developing to overcome these barriers and participate actively?*

# 2. THE TRAINING THAT IMPROVED MY SELF-CONFIDENCE AND INDEPENDENCE

Written by  
Natasha Dokovska

*Isnje Kola is a young woman in her thirties. She is of Albanian origin and lives in a Serbian village in North Macedonia called Prespa. This story is about her journey towards self-development. Isnje is one of thirty women who participated in the empowerment training for women from rural areas organized by Journalists for Human Rights (JHR) as part of the Women2030 program.*

When I first met Isnje, she was the shyest, quietest woman in the group. She had a frightened look and a low voice. She introduced herself saying: 'My name is Isnje, I am Albanian, I speak poor Macedonian, and I am a mother of five children'. During that first day, she did not speak anymore.

The next day she came back smiling, in the mood to talk. She said she had been thinking about her rights all night after the first day of training, and she wanted to share her story. She said that she had been married for 13 years, that she lived with her husband, five children, her husband's parents, and the families of her husband's three brothers. She said she had realized that she was a victim of gender inequality. She never went to the nearby city alone, and what bothered her the most was that every time she went to the gynecologist, either her husband or her father-in-law went with her. She wanted to get a job and earn money so she could be economically independent. She promised us that she would talk to her husband and stand up for her rights. We listened and wished her luck.

I met Isnje for an interview three years after our first meeting. We sat down for a chat.

**Natasha:** Hello Isnje, how are you?

**Isnje:** Hello, Natasha. I'm great, even better than I could have wished.

**Natasha:** How was it for you after the training?

**Isnje:** The night I returned home after the training, I talked to myself all night and promised myself that if I could give birth to five children, take care of them, of my husband and his family, then I certainly could – and I had to – do something for myself. I promised myself that I would talk to my husband and tell him what bothered me and what I wanted to change.

**Natasha:** How did you have that conversation? Was it difficult?

**Isnje:** I spoke to my husband a few days after the seminar. It took me a while to convince myself that I needed to take the first step. But after we sat down to talk, I realized that it was a mistake to have waited so long for this conversation.

**Natasha:** And why did you wait?

**Isnje:** Because I was not aware of my rights! During the training I learned how to self-question, self-evaluate and build my own value system. Believe me, the strength and self-confidence I gained inspired me to open the conversation... then everything was easy!

**Natasha:** And what happened during the conversation with your husband?

**Isnje:** First I asked to be able to move around the village alone, to go shopping alone, to go to the Resen market (in the nearest town to my village). My husband looked at me, smiled and said nothing. After a week, he sat with me and told me that if I wanted to move alone, I would have to learn to drive a car. I could not believe it! In six months, I got my driver's license. I started shopping on my own, going to have coffee with my friends from the village and my former

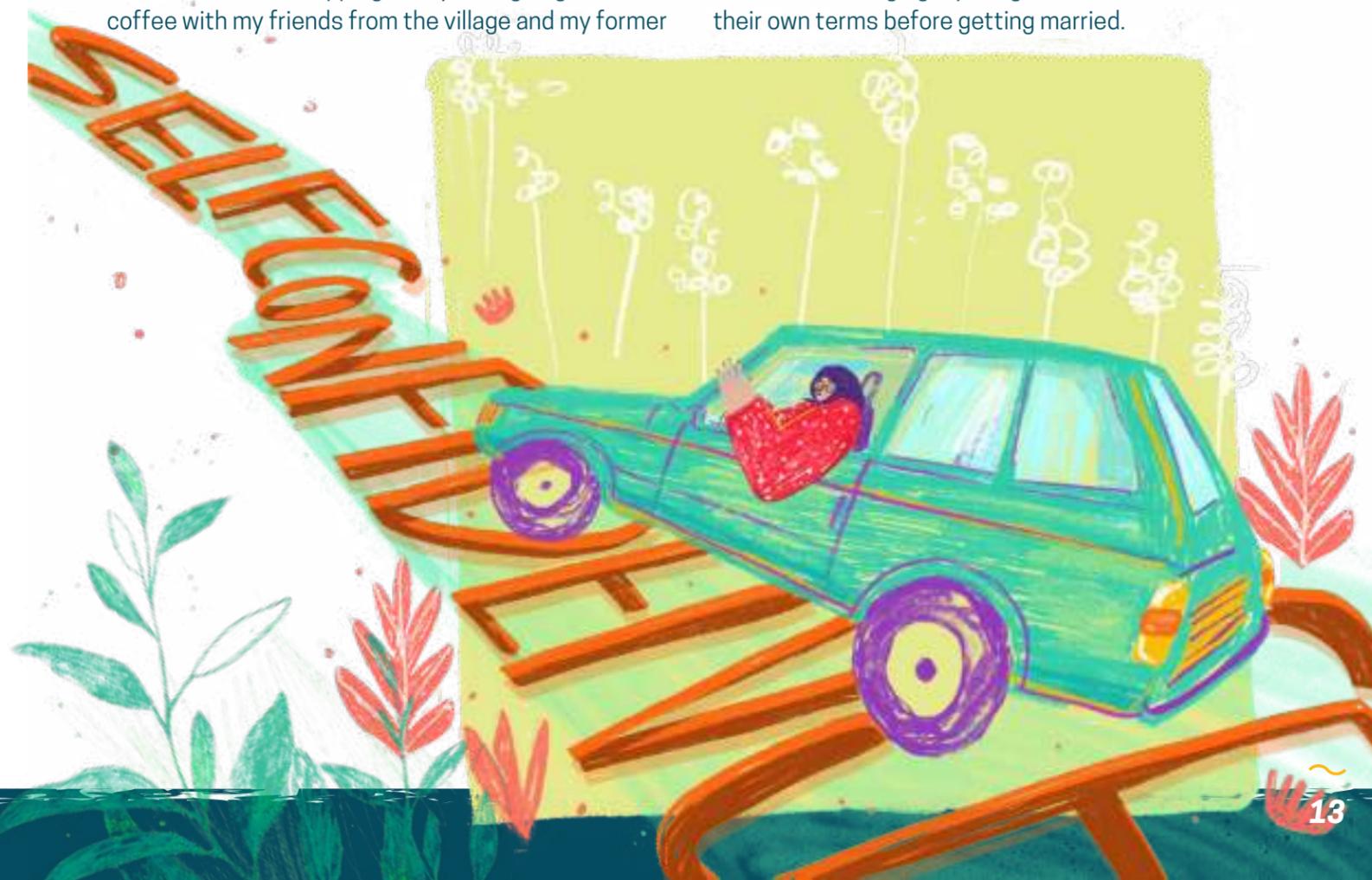
classmates from secondary school. In the meantime, I told my husband that he should not take me to the gynecologist anymore. That was the hardest part of the negotiations, but now I go everywhere alone or with the children, and he jokingly says that if he had known it was like this, he would have bought me a car right away!

**Natasha:** And what happened with the aspiration of self-employment?

**Isnje:** With five other women participating in your training, we created an informal group of women and we prepare and sell traditional food. We prepare a traditional pie called gjomleze. Now, due to the pandemic, we do not have as many orders, but this summer we worked well. Tourists called and asked us to prepare it.

**Natasha:** How did you feel when you first earned your own money?

**Isnje:** There was no one happier than me! Money was not a problem in my family but earning and managing my own money is something I had never done before. Now I'm raising my daughters to strive to become self-aware and economically independent. I got married at 17. I am encouraging my daughters to be confident on their own terms before getting married.



**Isn't's story highlights harmful patriarchal norms, beliefs and practices as root causes of gender inequality.**

Patriarchal norms, beliefs and practices hold women back and exacerbate gender inequality. Isn't was able to recognize her rights and the freedom she had been missing. This realization helped her find a voice and place in her home and society.

**Isn't's story is an example of how women's empowerment can have ripple effects.**

This story makes us reflect on how creating spaces for women to meet, receive training, and reflect together can lead to powerful mindset changes that extend to their families and communities.

**Women value the possibility of supporting each other to become financially independent.**

Income-generating activities are intimately tied to other forms of women's empowerment. When women are engaged in economic activities, they act in public life, step out of the boundaries of their own home, and interact with the laws, values and norms in their communities. In the process, they become more aware of oppressive structures and are more confident to challenge them.

**AREAS OF IMPACT:**

Capacities Built, Mindsets changed.

*Isn't speaks about the ability to self-question, self-evaluate and build her own value system. What does this mean to you?*

*What spaces help you question your current value systems? barriers and participate actively?*

# 3. DIGNITY WITH REUSABLE PADS

**Written by**  
Evelyne Lum

***This is Belinda's story from the moment she fled her village to her participation in a project on menstrual hygiene management for internally displaced adolescent girls and young women by Hope for Vulnerable Children Association (HOVUCA) with the support of Women Environmental Programme (WEP), a partner in the Women2030 program.***

Belinda Meshi fled her village in Cameroon with nothing but the dress she wore. She was a teenage girl when her family house and all her belongings were burnt to ashes, including her family's pineapple farm, which was their livelihood.

Belinda's village, Pinyin, is located in one of the two English speaking regions of Cameroon – Northwest and Southwest (NW/SW) – which have been hit by an armed conflict since October 1, 2017. She is one of the 700,000 people in Cameroon who have been forced to leave their homes. The majority of the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) are women, adolescent girls and children.

When her town was destroyed, Belinda wandered for days with her siblings. She finally settled in Mankon, Bamenda, in the Northwest Region. In her newfound settlement, Belinda and her siblings lived in a crowded room with 12 other people. They could barely eat. They met their daily hunger with the small survival meal provided by their host community.

Belinda shares the description of a day she will never forget. Her period surprised her in the middle of the night and, since she did not have anything to absorb the blood, it soiled her dress and stained the sheet she was sleeping on. When she got up in the morning, the people living with her in the crowded room, including the other women, accused her of being smelly. She was mortified: it was so difficult for Belinda to manage her menstruation because she had no access to any menstrual product.

Belinda was selected to participate in a project on menstrual hygiene management for internally displaced adolescent girls and young women. As part of the project, she acquired knowledge on menstrual

hygiene and received a dignity kit: a bucket, soap, pants and sanitary pads. She also received training on the production of reusable sanitary pads.

Belinda showed such passion for the production of the sanitary pads that, after the training, she was retained by Hope for Vulnerable Children Association (HOVUCA) to continue sewing the pads to sustain herself economically and help other IDP girls coming into the community. Belinda started sewing the pads and selling them to host community members. The

little profit she makes from this transformed her life and that of her siblings. As she puts it:

“I can say that since I received the training and I was retained to work and raise small money for myself, there has been a whole lot of transformation as far as our living condition is concerned. Thanks to HOVUCA and the Women2030 program, my siblings and I have moved away from a crowded accommodation and we are now able to rent one room. We feel freer and we are more comfortable.”



**Belinda’s story highlights how conflict exacerbates gender inequalities.**

The story shows how armed conflicts impact women and children above all. Conflicts lead to a rise in gender-based violence and prevent women from meeting their basic needs, undermining their voices and potential. Belinda’s story is an example of how improving menstrual health can be an essential condition to wellbeing.

**The way Women2030 partners attended to the needs of women and girls in their communities varied from context to context, in line with the identification of local needs.**

Meeting basic needs included providing access to survival and hygiene kits, increasing digital literacy skills, building capacities for women to speak up and participate in community meetings, or engaging with policy-making processes at the local, national and global levels.

**Meeting basic needs can be a pathway to dignity that opens more doors towards self-empowerment.**

Producing reusable pads became Belinda’s pathway to dignity for herself and her siblings. Her story is another powerful example of how economic independence strengthens women and their communities. It also shows how many of the organizations who partnered with the Women2030 program designed initiatives that addressed women’s basic needs while creating economic empowerment opportunities.

**AREAS OF IMPACT:**  
Capacities Built.

*What does attending to your basic needs mean to you? What does it enable you to do?*

*Write a short story about a day you will never forget. What did you learn on that day?*

*Invite your colleagues, partners, program participants or community members to have a sharing circle around these questions.*



# 4. WE HAVE CHANGED MEN'S MENTALITY!

Written by  
Semia Gharbi

*Semia shares the experience of a group of women who live in the agricultural region of Tekelsa in Tunisia. The training they received from Women Environmental Programme (WEP) as part of the Women2030 program empowered them to start selling their products in the local market.*

The Women2030 training was a turning point for us. There are many things that I didn't know before: the meaning of technical words, how to organize our schedules, how to put our notes on paper and so on. Most importantly, after the training, we became responsible for our visions and dreams.

We are still rural women but what has changed is how we dress and wear makeup, our desire to learn and the technology we use. We aren't scared anymore. Before, we were discouraged by our husbands and were regularly subject to psychological abuse.

After the Women2030 training, we started a cooperative as a group of 20 women.

We decided to start selling our products at the market. In Tunisia, only men can sell their products at the market. In the beginning, we had problems introducing ourselves – the men at the market were not too keen. But we insisted and kept showing up. Now we are selling our products side by side with men. Gradually, we realized that men became cooperative and started supporting us – even the retailers came to us!

We were the first women selling poultry in the market of Sidi Thabet.

However, the working conditions are challenging. For example, in the market there are no bathrooms for women. All bathrooms are for men only! In order to resolve the problem, we made proposals to the municipality asking for space with the appropriate infrastructure for women to sell poultry. So far, we have not found a solution, but we won't give up.

After the training, many women are saying 'there is money in my bag'. Others experienced changes at the psychological level. Many women are fighting less with their husbands; others have improved the education level of their children and were able to support them to enroll at university.

Something that makes us all proud is that we have changed men's mentality!

The experience has shown that if women empower themselves and support their husbands with money, men will change because they see positive impacts.

Women around us see our products selling on the internet and would like to do the same thing. We are continually training on communication and on many other skills. We are in contact with other cooperatives and we hope to work together and sell online.

**This story highlights harmful patriarchal norms, beliefs, and practices as root causes of gender inequality.**

This story reflects on how patriarchal norms, beliefs, and practices restrict women from participating in society and becoming financially empowered. By informing and organizing themselves, women farmers in the story set up cooperatives that enable them to strengthen their bargaining power and advocate for legislative change at the local level.

**The Women2030 program provided an opportunity to engage communities at the grassroots and learn from them.**

Grassroots organizations, groups and individuals were offered opportunities to attend training and improve knowledge of their rights. As in Semia's story, training activities organized by partners often led to an increased ability to express needs to local authorities.

The new skills acquired, such as sustainable farming techniques, data gathering, tracking national plans, public speaking or preparing written reports, all stayed in the community, creating a ripple effect. As a result, community members organized better and strengthened their relationships with local leaders and decision-makers. In many cases, the partners' understanding of how gender equality and related issues manifest at the grassroots expanded by engaging with local groups and communities, increasing opportunities to cultivate women's rights and leadership.

**Challenging harmful norms that limit women's possibility to flourish can lead to more systemic change, such as improved policies.**

The women's group profiled in Semia's story entered into dialogue with the other sellers at the traditional 'men-only market'. In the story, challenging the status quo leads directly to mindset changes: now men accept women retailers in the market. Plus, their perseverance could generate improved policies in the future as the group of women advocate with the municipality for better facilities for women.

**AREAS OF IMPACT:**

Capacities Built, Mindset changed, Policies Changed

*Which norms or laws are preventing women's rights and access in your own context? How would you like to change them?*

# 5. REFLECTIONS FROM WOMEN FARMERS IN TOGO

*In this story, Julienne and Essi, women farmers from Togo, reflect on their participation in a training organized by Women Environmental Programme (WEP), as part of the Women2030 program, enhanced their livelihoods.*

Julienne's story: "For years, the Midezon women group has been picking up and selling seasonal wild edible mushrooms. This represented a source of revenue for our members, but our income is not stable throughout the year: after the mushroom harvest season, our revenues fall by 50%. This means that we were unable to provide sufficient income to sustain our families.

In 2019, our group met WEP-Togo. With the financial support of Women2030, they trained us on the production of sustainable mushrooms. Since then, we produce and sell mushrooms in every season of the year. After harvesting mushrooms, the residues are transformed into compost to restore our farmland. Today, thanks to the Women2030 program, our income has gone up by 80%. Each member of the group manages to contribute financially to the living costs of her family. We hope that this program can continue so that we can learn about other income-generating activities associated with agriculture".

Essi's story: "Here in Hévi, the majority of women are farmers. We produce local vegetables, such as adémè (Molokhia jute leaves), tomato, gboma (African eggplant/nightshade), and gombo (okra). It is thanks to the income from these activities that we manage to support our families. In my household, I contribute to more than 70% of the total expenses.

One of our obstacles is water. We draw the water at the source with the basins and irrigate manually. This makes the work painful and places a limit on our capacity to grow food. The Women2030/WEP-Togo program trained us on organic gardening techniques.

Written by  
Acakpo Essivi and  
Maglo Komi

At the end of the training, our group benefited from seed donations and received a motor to irrigate our crops. The irrigation system helped us a lot. I can cultivate more plots than before; the work is less painful, and my market yield has increased by 85%. In this period of COVID-19, we were also trained on the manufacture of liquid soap and received masks to protect ourselves and continue our activities. I am saying a big thank you to WEP-Togo and the Women2030 program. Our wish is that this program continues to support us to strengthen our climate change resilience.”



Ph: Essi Klutse, farmer at Hévi, coordinator of the women group PERSEVERANCE



Ph: Julienne Afelike, farmers in Nyogbogon, Agou

**These stories highlight how prioritizing growth over people and the planet exacerbates gender inequality.**

Excluding women from conversations on environmental preservation and climate-just farming practices denies them opportunities to generate local solutions to global problems and propose their own gender-just sustainable alternatives. This exclusion further exposes them to the threats of climate change.

**The Women2030 program contributed towards supporting farmers to develop sustainable agricultural techniques.**

The Women2030 program drew a strong link between environmental justice, gender justice and women’s rights. As we see in various stories in this booklet, women were supported to become advocates for more sustainable environmental practices. These are examples of a global movement looking to transform human interaction with the environment by dismantling the current economic models and systems that trigger the climate change crisis.

**Women are at the forefront of climate resilience.**

If women are disproportionately affected by climate change, they also lead innovative solutions for our resilience to climate change. WEP-Togo also was able to enter into dialogue with farmers and share practices that improve the soil, such as composting. This is an example of good practices that show how women’s groups reclaim access and control over the resources they rely on, while integrating sustainable solutions that contribute to preserving local ecosystems. This improves communities’ resilience and their capacity to feed and care for themselves.

**AREAS OF IMPACT:**  
Capacities Built.

**Who produces the food you consume?  
How is it produced?**

**Are you aware of the policies  
that support farmers’ rights and  
sustainable practices in your country?  
How might these policies affect you?**

# 6.

## DEFENDING OUR COMMUNITY FOREST

Written by  
Anila Onta

*This is the story of Mamata Tmang, the chairperson of the Kusum Community Forest Group located on the northeast side of the Kathmandu valley in Nepal. She is also a social worker and activist working to protect her community's rights in the forest. She participated in training on community forest conservation and policy awareness organized by the Federation of Community Forestry Users Nepal (FECOFUN) as part of Women2030.*

“The Women2030 program implemented by FECOFUN has empowered me to organize to conserve my community forest. In 2019, I participated in the policy awareness training organized by FECOFUN under the Women2030 Program. Along with 22 other Community Forest Groups (CFGs), we learned about the national and international policies on community rights in the forest, about biodiversity, about the relationship between SDGs and women, and about organizing advocacy strategies for community campaigns.

The forest in my community provides water and other environmental resources for us. Our forest is very appealing for touristic purposes because of its scenic view of the mountain range: hotel companies want to encroach it for their commercial benefits.

Meanwhile, we want to manage our forest as a watershed area to supply water for drinking and irrigation purposes. We have a lot to learn. Plus, this is a tourist area so it is important for us to develop eco-tourism activities. Because of the different interests, there is a conflict between our communities and hotel companies.

When I became aware of policies and legal provisions that empower women's rights around community forestry, I mobilized with my community to protect our forest.

We have developed advocacy strategies to organize community campaigns (such as demonstrations, submitting position papers to the local government and forest patrolling). The main achievement of our campaign was that we were able to stop the forest encroachment from hotel companies, with the support of local government and different civil society organizations (CSOs).

Last year, the community forest encroachers registered a legal case against our CFG. The legal proceedings are still ongoing, and it is one of the main challenges for us. However, FECOFUN is still supporting us as the legal proceedings continue.

Community Forest Group (CFGs), represented by the Federation of Community Forestry Users, Nepal (FECOFUN), could also change the national law. We influenced the creation of new laws to ensure that 50% of the forest's community income is allocated to women empowerment and that forest groups apply the 50-50 rule in their executive committees. We are now using the income of the CFG to develop women empowerment and income-generating activities such as vegetable and goat farming for poor households.

Recently, the members of the Community Forest Group elected me as a chairperson. At the beginning, I was not able to share my feelings, voice and opinions, but now I can easily talk and share my concerns. I also developed my leadership capacity. I got several opportunities to participate in training and capacity development activities and my confidence level is building up. I am aware of the legal rights of community forestry, and I'm able to empower other members of the Community Forest Group. I can lead the community to protect its interests, and I can also work coordinating with the local government to conserve our forest.”



**Mamata's story highlights how prioritizing growth over people and the planet exacerbates gender inequality.**

The experience shared by Mamata highlights how the rights and livelihoods of communities are often violated in the name of profit and economic advancement. When ecosystems and livelihoods are depleted, women are disproportionately affected. In Mamata's story, communities mobilize to stop this extractive model of development undermining women's abilities to access, control and preserve the resources they rely on.

**The Women2030 program strengthened women's ability to advocate for the protection of the environment.**

Many of the program's partners were mindful of reaching women in rural communities utilizing the SDGs as a way to draw a link between their rights and the rights of the planet. Rural communities were supported to build capacities so that community leaders and members could reflect on gender equality and strengthen their advocacy skills to protect the natural resources and their communities' livelihoods.

**Mamata's story is an example of how women coordinate to advocate and defend their environment.**

Across the world there are many examples of community leaders fighting to protect their environment – many of whom are women. Mamata and her CFG were able to make their efforts recognized in establishing that 50% of the income from the forest income-generating activities is dedicated to women empowerment and poverty alleviation programs. Thanks to the collective efforts of FECOFUN, they were able to change national laws to support women's efforts and address their specific needs.

**AREAS OF IMPACT:**

Capacities Built, Policies changed.

*What can we learn from the way Mamata and the other women in this story relate to climate change?*

*Who defends the natural resources in your community? What are the risks they face in order to protect the environment?*

# 7. SOWING AND WATERING FEMINIST SEEDS IN UGANDA

*This is the story of Fredica and her team at RUHEPAI in Uganda: a sub-grant provided by Action for Rural Women's Empowerment (ARUWE) as part of the Women2030 program enabled their work to advance economic rights for rural women.*

Rural Health Promotion and Poverty Alleviation Initiative (RUHEPAI) is one of the CSOs that benefited from the Women2030 program in Uganda. The Women2030 program was carried out by Action for Rural Women's Empowerment (ARUWE), who provided sub-grants and built the capacities of grassroots and women-led CSOs. ARUWE accompanied local partner organizations to empower women and build advocacy synergies for sustainable development policies.

RUHEPAI received funding to implement a project called "Women take the front", which improved the economic and health situation of rural women in the Isingiro District, South Western Uganda.

RUHEPAI fostered economic rights for rural women by increasing their production capacities and improving their access to markets, enabling them to sell their produce for better prices. Among other interventions, RUHEPAI also supported rural women to raise their voices and demand their economic inclusion in policy spaces: they advocated to obtain a market day designated to women in the Kabirebele Town Council.

Fredica, the executive director of RUHEPAI, explains: "Our women teamed up to present a policy paper on their economic inclusion in the Kabirebele market. Although the local government authorities have not yet explicitly provided the final verdict from their council meetings, the feminist allies within the council indicate to us that they are debating how the women's requests for a market day designated to them will be granted. The mentoring, coaching and building of capacities in advocacy skills provided by ARUWE allowed us to engage in this policy advocacy with the local government".

**Written by**  
Agnes Mirembe

**This story highlights how exclusion from decision-making spaces is one of the root causes of gender inequality.**

The lack of (public) funding, support and an enabling environment for women-led organizations contribute to shrinking civic space. The story of RUHEPAI highlights that awareness of policy mechanisms such as the SDGs, access to information, capacities, and resources are all crucial for women's rights groups to coordinate and influence decision-making. By articulating their demands, women can work towards the change they want to see in their lives and communities.

**Some partners chose to sub-grant the funds they received. By doing so, they supported and strengthened the work of feminist CSOs working at the grassroots.**

Many partners acted as focalizers of resources for their network and communities. They used the funding they received from the Women2030 program to support the work of other CSOs – primarily small,

grassroots, women-led organizations. This extended the reach of the program beyond the immediate group of grantee partners. As ARUWE's story exemplifies, sub-granting the funding partners forged new and stronger relationships with other CSOs in their ecosystem. This came along with opportunities to collaborate on advocacy work.

**Partners who decided to sub-grant the funding had the opportunity to practice, experiment, and gain experience with managing resources.**

Allowing grantees to administer sub-grants allows funding to reach deeper into the fabrics of grassroots communities, enhancing the abilities of grantees to provide support to other organizations. This practice also enables smaller organizations, which might otherwise be excluded from receiving international funding, to access resources and strengthen their institutional capacities.

### AREAS OF IMPACT:

Capacities Built, Policies changed.

*What policies and/or practices limit women from exercising their economic power in your context?*

*How do women organize to challenge them?*



# 8. BLUE & PINK? QUESTIONING GENDER NORMS

Written by  
Claudia Gimena Roa

*In Colombia, the women of the Colectivo de Reservas Campesinas y Comunitarias de Santander (hereafter the Farmers Collective) have been discussing the need to resist the patriarchal model for more than 12 years. Through the Women2030 program, the Farmers Collective received funding to hold a few workshops and two fairs. These activities generated spaces for reflection and questioning around gender issues. This is Liliana's story and how new questions sparked in her.*

Liliana is a 33-year-old woman involved with the Association of Rural Women and the Farmers Collective. She lives in Vereda El Centenario, an area where livestock is predominant. Her participation in the group gave her tools to start thinking about food sovereignty. A couple of years ago, she was not even growing bananas. Today, she practices crop diversification and is aware of food sovereignty debates.

Liliana had a sudden moment of recognition when she joined a workshop with the Coalition Fundaexpresión as part of the Women2030 program..

In the workshop, the theme of colors came up in connection to gender: "blue for boys, pink for girls." Liliana asked herself an important question for the very first time: what is the relationship between color and gender?

What she had always considered so obvious suddenly made no more sense.

Acquiring a new perspective on something that had been so natural was important for Liliana because she became aware that, at a symbolic level, as with colors, we can replicate the gap between men and women unconsciously.

She realized that we can use that same curiosity to look at how the gender gap influences the way we conserve forests, take care of nature, and question ourselves. She asked herself questions such as:

- If the land is in my name, why can't I plant on it?
- If this body is mine, why can't I fully make decisions over it?

Liliana tells us that after this:

**“I declared my land a reserve. That piece of land is not sprayed with pesticides, which are very common amongst men farmers. For me, the change begins when we begin to love ourselves, to be strong, to be independent. This was possible thanks to the workshops that made me reflect.”**



**Liliana’s story highlights harmful gender stereotypes as key barriers to change.**

Gender norms assign specific roles and responsibilities to women, relegating them to distinct boundaries that result in fewer opportunities and less power. This is a social and psychological barrier that represents the foundation for many other discriminatory norms against women. Challenging stereotypes enabled Liliana to stand up for her rights and refuse to adopt unsustainable practices.

**Whether through long-term programs or small-scale projects, the Women2030 program created spaces for reflection around gender.**

At the beginning of her story, Claudia reminds us that her organization has been building the capacity of women to be resilient and question patriarchy for years. Behind this story, there is an essential lesson: when Women2030’s partners received small grants for specific activities, they found the opportunity to integrate the activities into their ongoing projects. They used co-financing to sustain their engagement. When limited funding is made available, if there is awareness of the specific contexts, needs, aspirations and ongoing efforts of the communities, the grants can contribute to a more extensive transformative process.

**Liliana’s story illustrates a powerful example of how mindsets do change.**

Change takes time and effort: it is worth it to support the role of local partners with appropriate funding. The Women2030 program, in this case, offered a series of workshops, women circles and collaborations. These spaces allowed Liliana to question gender norms. This story is not so much about colors: it’s about facilitating the possibility to come together, challenge traditional stereotypes and open up the imagination to see beyond gender norms.

**AREAS OF IMPACT:**

Mindset changed.

**What gender norms have you discovered you took for granted?**

**Recall a moment that allowed you to see the gender norms you have internalized with a fresh look. What enabled this change?**

# 9. BUILDING A FEMINIST MOVEMENT

Written by  
Bassey Bassey

**As part of the Women2030 program, the HipCity Innovation Centre in Nigeria trained men on harmful patriarchal practices and women's empowerment. This is the story of a young man named King Ochayu: his participation in the workshops sparked a life-changing process.**

King Ochayu's life took a new direction after seeing an e-flyer in one of the many ceaselessly chattering WhatsApp groups he joined.

The flyer had an arresting theme: "Patriarchy: Its pain on women and girls". He was puzzled by the title and wondered when patriarchy had become painful for women and girls. As a recently married man and father of a beautiful daughter he loves dearly, his concern was discovering how to keep his family safe from any pain whatsoever.

The workshop series he attended were particularly enlightening: he learned about traditional norms and practices, gender laws, women's rights, and gender equality.

He reflected on these topics and, like in a daydream, he remembered how disrespectful and controlling his father was with his mom. His father's behavior seemed acceptable back then: no one reprimanded his dad for it! He recalled how he, as a sensitive child, felt his mother's pain intimately and developed a hate for his father.

For the first time in the workshop, he heard that women had rights, and he wondered if his mother knew about these rights. He was surprised to learn that Nigeria has gender laws like the Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act, and one could be punished if found guilty of abusing women. Once again, he wondered how many more women like his mother knew nothing about these laws.

Soaking in the lessons from this conversation series, King recalled vividly how his father prioritized his education and those of his brothers over his sister's.

Yet, his sister had been providing more care for their father over the years after securing a job with very little education. He was convinced that his sister could do much more for her father (and even her brothers!) if she were better educated and empowered.

It was a strange experience to reflect on all of this. He was sure his friends and brothers would laugh hysterically and make fun of him if he shared all of this with them.

He was grateful for the opportunity he had to unlearn and relearn new ways of thinking. After the series, one of King's resolutions was to call a family meeting with his wife to assure her that she is his partner, asking her never to be afraid to speak up when she feels that her rights have been infringed upon. As a token of his allegiance to her, he said she could decide whether to keep her maiden name or change it to his. He had the courage to support his wife as she set up a business – since then, his wife has been supporting the family financially.

Through the knowledge gained from participating in the Women2030 program facilitated by HipCity Innovation Centre, King has challenged men (especially those close to him) to see their wives as their partners and not just caretakers. He advocates for girls to attend school, insisting it will not be a waste of resources as many still think. Most importantly, he is convincing men to empower their

wives: he explains to them that their wives will love them more this way, and it will be valuable to share responsibilities with their partners.

King now runs a community library which he built using his personal resources and the help from friends and supporters. At the library, he spends time teaching children (especially girls) how to read and write. He considers it his contribution to building a just world where women and girls will break free of the pains of patriarchy.



**King's story highlights how patriarchal norms are one of the root causes of gender inequalities.**

Inviting change from within is critical to questioning patriarchal norms. This story gives an insight into the mechanism of mindset change. The patriarchal system that violates women's rights can result in toxic masculinity and a culture of machismo that incites gender-based violence. In King's story, making harmful patriarchal norms visible is a crucial step towards understanding and tackling the root causes of gender-based violence.

**Women's empowerment requires men to be on board: this is a point that all partners in the Women2030 program stressed.**

King's story shows the way men can support women's empowerment. The story points to a few practical reasons that led King to begin acting differently: he learns about national legislation on gender-based violence and how laws are enforced to protect women; he reflects that supporting women's education would have benefited his own family; plus, he saw the possibility for his wife to support their family economically with her business. These moments can be a starting point to embark on a much deeper journey, allowing men to realize that patriarchal norms reinforcing gender inequality are detrimental for society at large.

**Men are also affected by unjust gender norms and can become allies with women.**

In this story, King recalls the pain he felt as a child witnessing his mother being abused by his father. For King, taking action and doing his part in the women's movement is personal and intimate. It also represents his own healing, which can open opportunities to support others in their journey.

**AREAS OF IMPACT:**

Mindset changed.

*How do the men in your family and your close circles of friends treat women? What, if anything, makes you uncomfortable about it?*

# CO- LLEC- TIVE CREA- TIONS

During the two-day workshop that closed this participatory storytelling evaluation, participants explored their main learnings and takeaways through drawings and creative writing. We collected some creations in the section below.

**THEMES**

- SUPPORTING WOMEN TO DEVELOP LEADERSHIP
- CAPACITIES built
- WOMEN as ADVOCATES + DEFENDERS of ENVIRONMENTAL sustainability
- POLICIES improved
- OVERCOMING MEN'S RESISTANCE
- MINDSETS changed
- WOMEN'S SOLIDARITY
- WOMEN RECOGNISED as DECISION MAKERS
- FEELING empowered by the GLOBAL MOVEMENT
- FEMINIST MOVEMENT building
- CROSS MOVEMENT collaboration
- WOMEN as ADVOCATES + DEFENDERS of ENVIRONMENTAL sustainability
- WOMEN RECOGNISED as DECISION MAKERS
- FEELING empowered by the GLOBAL MOVEMENT
- FEMINIST MOVEMENT building
- CROSS MOVEMENT collaboration

**REFLECTIONS**

- COMMUNITY AWARENESS and ORGANISING
- SHARING KNOWLEDGE
- EXCHANGING ideas + tools
- STRENGTHENED RELATIONSHIPS
- BECOMING LEADERS
- BUILDING SOLIDARITY AMONG WOMEN
- INCLUDING men in the CONVERSATION
- CHOICE to me FEMINISM IS FREEDOM
- OPPORTUNITY
- CONNECTION
- POWER
- LIBERATION
- PHOTOSYNTHESIS
- CHALLENGING NORMS
- A DROP OF GOLD in the ocean
- PERSONAL

**WHAT STAYED WITH YOU?**

- CONVERSATIONS
- IMPORTANCE OF SEEING OURSELVES in MEDIA
- IDENTIFYING WOMEN'S ISSUES in NATURAL resources
- UNDERSTANDING DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES
- NECESSARY to KEEP GOING

REFLECTIONS ON THE IMPACTS OF THE PROGRAMME 'WOMEN 2030'



GRAPHIC RECORDING by SONAKSHA IYENGAR

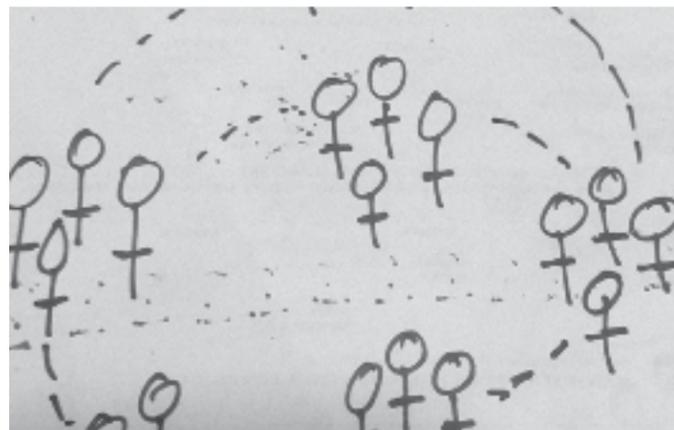
This illustration was developed with the assistance of the European Union.

This is a visual recording of the two-day workshop capturing reflections on the impact of the Women2030 Program

# 1. BUILDING A FEMINIST MOVEMENT

Collective creation

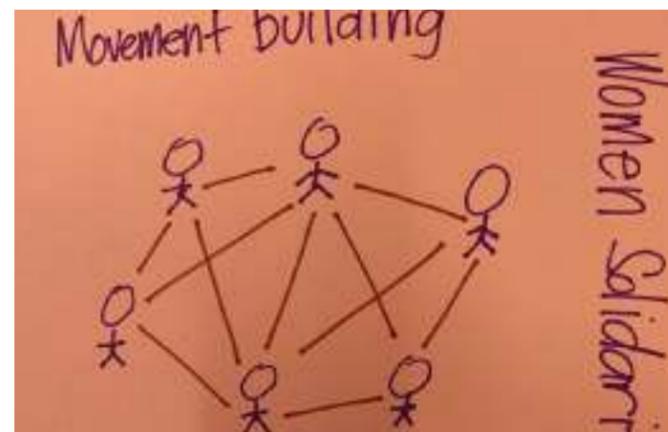
We invited the partners who participated in the storytelling evaluation to draw what will stay with them now that the program has ended. Many illustrated the feeling of solidarity and sisterhood that emerges when gender equality and women's rights movements connect across contexts and countries as they did throughout the Women2030 program. Below are some of the images they drew.



This drawing represents how the feminist movement in Nepal builds solidarity by generating networking opportunities, building capacity and rights' awareness, increasing leadership, and demanding women to be included in the decision-making process.  
Painting by Anila Onta



This painting shows the Women2030 partners sitting together and making each other stronger.  
Painting by Anna Samwel



This drawing is about feminist movement building and solidarity.  
Dessin de Cielito Perez



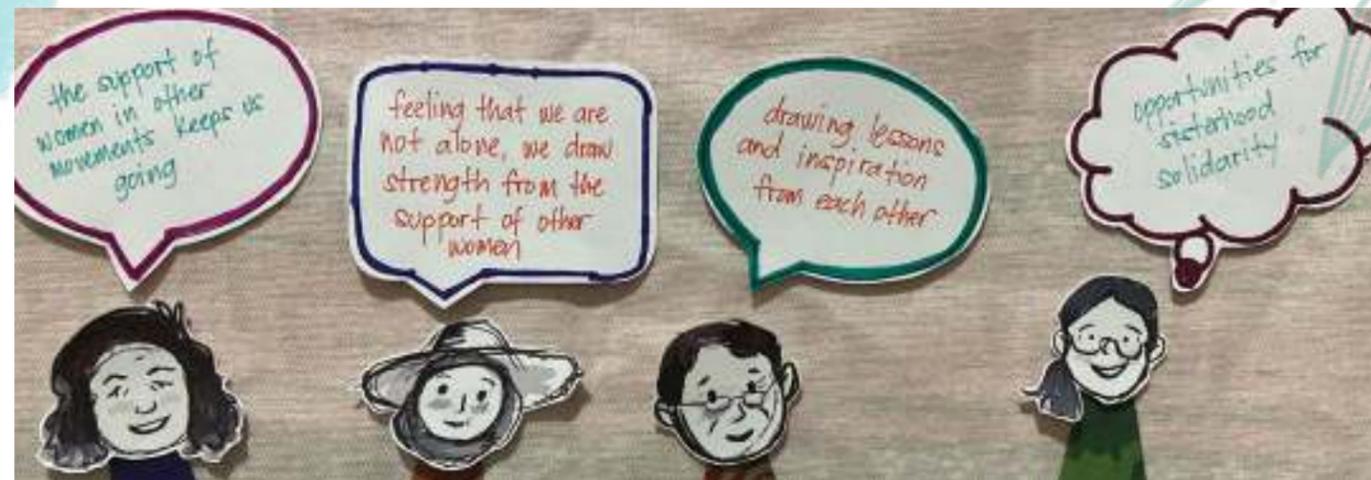
This drawing shows how feminists and women's rights networks can work together and build a movement.  
Drawing by Cielito Perez



This painting shows women who are empowered to support themselves and one another by sharing information, knowledge and skills.  
Painting by Sarankhukhuu Sharavdorj



This drawing represents solidarity among women and how feminists can bring about social change by collaborating.  
Drawing by Sarankhukhuu Sharavdorj



This collage represents the importance of building and strengthening solidarity. Solidarity that comes from learning together, supporting each other, and from taking action together.  
Collage by Cielito Perez

**Movement-building was a strong focus of the Women2030 program.**

Movement-building happened both at the national and global levels. Within national borders, partners weaved together grassroots and national level policies, bringing women's rights and gender equality issues into political and social debates. Partners report that building new networks and alliances allowed them to increase their capacity and develop common advocacy strategies.

**Creating a global network of support allows for cross-pollination and broader support that will carry on beyond the program.**

Some partners mentioned that meeting other women's rights and gender equality organizations working on similar issues allowed them to learn a lot about the situation in different countries and see the commonalities. By sharing their experience, they also felt more supported, creating a sense of solidarity and opening opportunities for collaborations. Partners are still connected across regions and contexts and continue to share experiences, knowledge and support.

**AREAS OF IMPACT:**

Mindset changed, Capacities Built, Policies changed.

*What do you do to build networks and communities of support around you?*

*What might be the benefits of creating a support network around you and your cause?*

2.  
IN MY  
COMMUNITY  
FEMINISM IS...  
TO ME,  
FEMINISM IS...

Collective creation

*As part of the closing workshop, we talked about the diverse experiences and understandings of feminism among partners. This led us to co-create the poem below: it combines reflections around how different communities and individual actors perceive feminism.*

In my community, feminism is seen as a competition for place, power, and authority between men and women. It's seen as a Western ideology that must be fought, else we lose our identity.

To me, feminism is liberation.

**[Nigeria]**

In my community, feminism is a bold, radical, much-needed transformative change and visioning that guides us to an equal, just world.

To me, feminism is the feeling of amazement every time I connect with women from the other side of the world and witness their power.

**[Netherlands]**

In my community, feminism is an exotic, aggressive and unmarried women's movement – Western brainwashing against men.

To me, feminism is a way towards fair and just development. It stands for all, and it helps me to free my mind.

**[Mongolia]**

In my community, feminism is solidarity. Feminism recognizes the power that can make voices invisible. Feminism challenges this power. It acknowledges the experiences and voices of women and other social groups that are oppressed.

To me, feminism is very personal. It helps me make sense of my experiences. It builds my activism. Why do people feel they have the right to control others? Feminism, to me, started with a feeling of anger for witnessing injustices. In the journey, I found hope in solidarity and collective actions.

**[Thailand]**

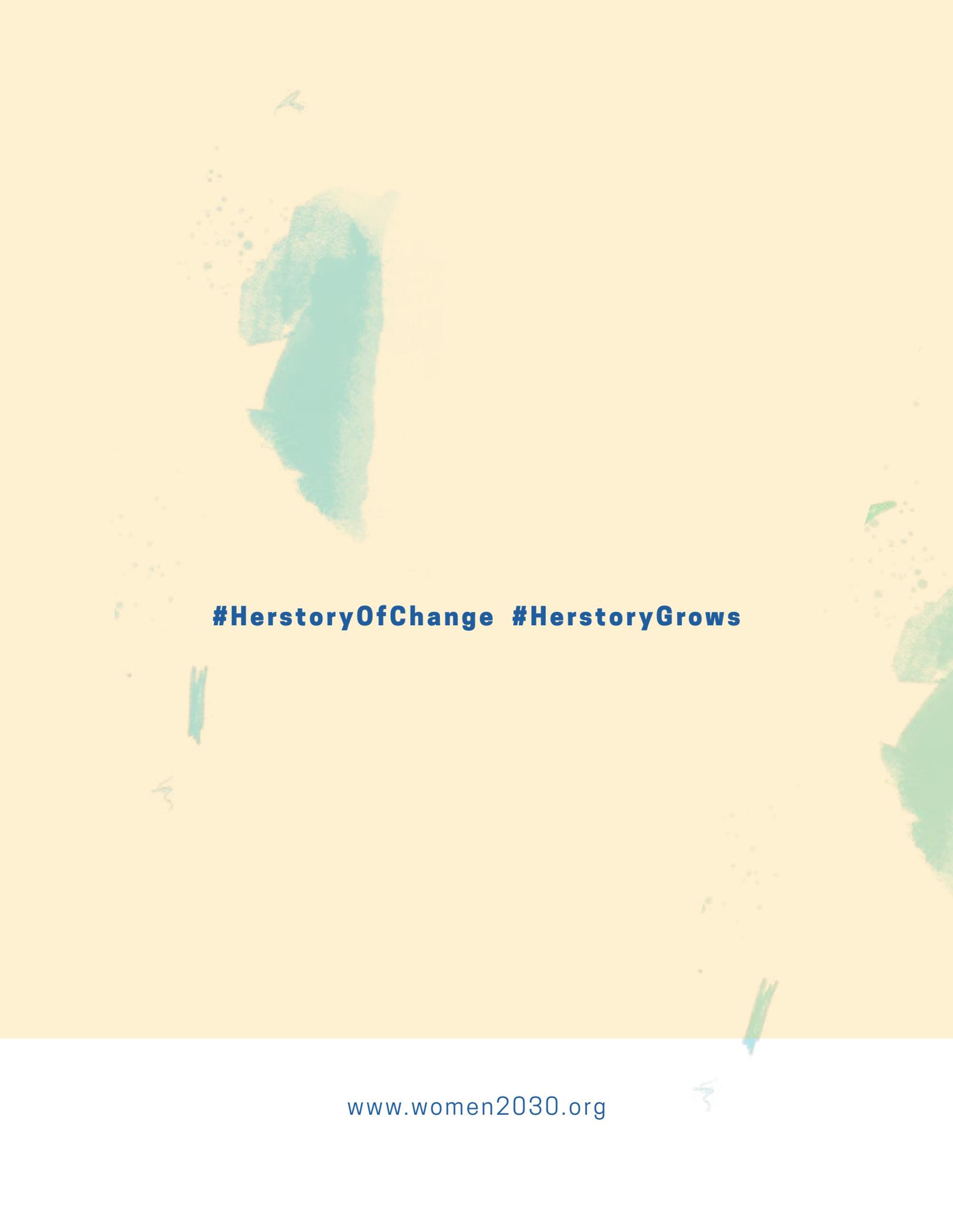
In my community, feminism is our way of changing structures that cause oppression and violation of women and people's rights.

To me, feminism is the way other women's empowerment inspires and liberates me.

Feminism is solidarity.

**[Philippines]**





**#HerstoryOfChange #HerstoryGrows**

[www.women2030.org](http://www.women2030.org)