YOUNG FEMINIST MANIFESTO

A BOLD AND TRANSFORMATIVE VISION FOR CHANGE

Young Feminist Manifesto

GENERATION EQUALITY FORUM

They tried to bury us, but they didn't know we were seeds
- Mexican proverb

WELCOME TO OUR FEMINIST YOUTH MANIFESTO FOR THE GENERATION EQUALITY FORUM!

This manifesto was created through a co-creative process, thanks to the dedication and persistence of the brilliant young people who are a part of the Generation Equality Forum. In the creation of this manifesto, we created participatory spaces that suited our needs as young people. We took the time to have conversations about what we need as young people to be meaningfully engaged. We built spaces for meaningful youth engagement, organised focus groups where we listened intently to each other, and shared our experiences as young activists and organisers. We attended a youth retreat. We shared our resources, our knowledge, and our networks with each other. We self-organised to amplify our voice. We worked across time zones and languages. We served as each others' interpreters so that nobody's voice would remain unheard in the creation of this document, so we dabbled in Spanish, French, English and a little Portuguese. We laughed, and talked, and got to know each other as people. We spent countless hours meeting online, sleeping late, and cheering each other on. We drank a ton of coffee. We decided that we want to be included, in all our diversity, in decision-making spaces. We struggled, and we felt tired and hopeless at times, but we put our hearts into this document.

We want to recognize the work of everyone who participated in the process of creating the manifesto, because this is a collective endeavor. Thank you for daring to conspire together to demand a world where young people, in all our diversity, have a voice and a seat at the table. Special thanks to the people and organizations who pushed this project forward. Among the Action Coalition Youth leaders, we want to thank the Youth Coalition for Sexual and Reproductive Rights and its representatives Charlie Acosta, Marianela Martínez B., Kerigo Odada, Isabel Pérez W., María León, and Eunice Leyva G.; Young Feminist Europe and its representatives, Xenia Kellner, Chandreyi Guharay, Kristy Romain, Moira Pezzetta, Marine Vankerkhoven, Irene Queralt, Eleni Koumoundouros, Jenay Randall; Las Niñas Lideran and its representatives, Ixchel María José Lucas Adolfo & Juany García; La Comisión de Niñez y Juventud Indígena and its representative, Adriana Uex; and Tejiendo Pensamiento and its representative, Nohora Quiguantar. We also want to thank activists from the Youth Task Force: Racha Haffar (Youth Against Slavery Movement), Audrey Fontaine, Caryn Dasah (Cameroon Women's Peace Movement), Pip Gardner (IFM-SEI / The Kite Trust), Majandra Rodriguez Acha (FRIDA | The Young Feminist Fund), Elvira Pablo (Youth and Children Commission ECMIA), Daren Paul Katigbak and Anika Jane Dorothy, as well as Xenia Kellner (Young Feminist Europe) from CSAG Youth and Alina from Mexican CSAG. Finally, we'd like to thank Jeevika and Renata from the National Gender Youth Activists, and all others who provided inputs and contributions for the drafting of this manifesto.

To all who read this, we urge you to please fund the youth and youth-led initiatives. To our allies, our colleagues, and to the young people who support our work, please show your support of the demands we make in this document by signing the petition in this link.

In solidarity,

Action Coalition Youth Leaders
National Gender Youth Activists
Youth Task Force

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Young people should be at the forefront of global change and innovation. Empowered, they can be key agents for development and peace. If, however, they are left on society's margins, all of us will be impoverished. Let us ensure that all young people have every opportunity to participate fully in the lives of their societies.

-Kofi Annan

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Generation Equality Forum (GEF) process has an ambitious vision and objective to accelerate progress towards gender equality and intersectional justice. The GEF clearly acknowledges the crucial role youth plays in achieving its ambitious goals. So far, UN Women has shown a will to support young people's leadership – by establishing the Youth Task Force, by recruiting 300 National Gender Youth Activists to drive youth participation locally, regionally and internationally; and by each of the six Action Coalitions (ACs) having a dedicated spot for youth-led organizations. However, youth activists are frustrated with the implementation falling short of expectations and our own bold vision.

OUR VISION AND PRINCIPLES

Our vision for the Generation Equality Forum and Action Coalitions is:

- To be key drivers and accelerators for the achievement of gender equality and intersectional justice worldwide.
- To be an inspiration for future multilateral, multi-stakeholder and multi-generational processes by setting an example for providing a bold and transformative space that centers co-leadership, co-ownership and co-creation.
- To be an example of best practice for tapping into the transformative power of youth by letting us co-lead and shape every part of the process.

To achieve this we need to center the principles of:

- ***Young Feminist Leadership*** as a means to dismantle entrenched ageist beliefs and practices. As feminist leaders, we are responsible for actively using our power more inclusively, and we demand others who partake in the process to do so as well.
- ***Co-ownership*** between diverse actors should be ensured throughout the Generation Equality process, within the various decision-making bodies.
- ***Substantive Participation*** is essential, we will not accept tokenistic participation. Our roles should include decision-making, leadership, strategizing and co-ownership.
- ***Transformative Design and Leadership*** is leadership for sustainable change and addresses the root causes of inequalities, to challenge and shift power and to dismantle systems of inequality and oppression holistically.
- ***Co-Creation*** helps us to tap into our collective knowledge, it is about giving power away and it undermines top-down thinking and changes the way we approach ownership.
- ***Intersectionality*** sheds light on the multi-dimensionality of lived experiences in which multiple axes of oppression intersect. An intersectional approach recognizes power dynamics and systems of inequality, and meaningfully and intentionally works to counter them.
- ***Accountability.*** We take very seriously our responsibility as youth representatives to be transparent and accountable to our young peers and youth-led organizations. We also seek to hold other actors and leaders accountable to the mission and principles underpinning Generation Equality.

CHALLENGES FACED BY YOUTH

Within the GEF and ACs so far, youth activists frustrations have developed from the many challenges to their participation they have faced, including:

- Unequal power dynamics
- Lack of role clarity for youth
- Top-down methodologies and timelines
- Unclear decision-making processes and disregard of youth opinions
- Lack of resources dedicated to supporting youth activists
- Lack of an intersectional approach
- Inadequate interpretation and translation
- Disconnect between youth constituency bodies
- Burnout and demotivation

As a result of these multiple challenges, young feminists are finding it very difficult to participate in these spaces, not to mention to co-lead and co-own them. This also concerns the engagement of adolescent girls in the GEF, who have been grouped with 'youth' without adequate or careful thought as to their specific needs and concerns, and whose co-leadership and co-ownership has been missing in the process. This poses questions to youth actors as to the purpose to remain engaged in such a process, as we feel tokenized rather than agents of change.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for Shifting, Challenging and Transforming Power Inequalities

One of our key recommendations is to incorporate a power analysis throughout the GEF and AC governance structures and processes, which should be followed by concrete measures that are effective to counter power imbalances and lead to a more equal and fairer distribution and sharing of power.

Recommendations for Co-leadership and Co-ownership

To be transformative and not just diverse we need to move from mere youth participation and youth engagement to youth leadership and co-ownership, which requires that we are given real power: decision making power as well as agenda setting power. It is essential that our views, recommendations, and priorities are seriously considered and incorporated into the GE process. Youth should not be tokenized or used to legitimize processes when we are not meaningfully involved. It is essential to revise and improve the Action Coalitions process and methodological approach in collaboration with AC leaders and especially youth leaders to ensure it is co-creational.

Recommendations for Accountability

A clear procedure should be set up to allow the youth to be able to contest decisions. There should be full disclosure or creation of decision-making procedures for us to ensure that our work is part of the new policies to come. We need a detailed, concise plan or charter that would make the youth participation in decision-making and in the implementation of the Action Coalitions immutable and impermeable.

Recommendations for Substantive and Meaningful Participation

Youth activists should be given transparency and clarity on our role and the role of others in the GEF process, including the role of UN Women as convener. Meetings should focus on generative dialogue and open conversation between all stakeholders where participants can build meaningful relationships and trust. Deadlines, timelines, agendas, communication materials to be set in consultation with youth, not unilaterally. We strongly recommend the establishment of an independent Adolescent Girl Advisory Body directly to the Action Coalitions. It is essential to develop and implement safeguarding

mechanisms to minimize the risk of violence, exploitation, burnout, tokenism or any other negative consequence of our participation and leadership.

Recommendations for Funding and Resourcing

It is essential to allocate enough budget to support the core operating costs of young activists, particularly girls who are under the age of 18, and other youth facing the greatest barriers for engagement. Youth activists must be recognized and compensated for our time, expertise, and overall contributions. Youth activist groups should be supported through core, flexible funding that responds to their own self-defined needs. It is essential that funds that are committed towards strengthening youth movements and youth leadership through Generation Equality and the Action Coalitions be directed primarily to youth-led and youth-run organizations themselves, particularly those working at the local and community level. Youth-leaders in the AC should be adequately funded to be able to engage in the same level as other leaders.

Recommendations for Capacity Strengthening

All actors in the GEF would highly benefit from spaces where we can co-create and co-learn, we believe that capacity strengthening should not be focused only on youth as recipients, youth should be seen as partners and all actors have room to learn. ACs leaders, as well as others who play a key role in the GEF process, should participate in trainings and capacity strengthening workshops on feminist leadership, transformational literacy and systems thinking, intersectionality, power, and decolonizing approaches to our work, relations and interactions within the GEF. The Generation Equality processes should make use of creative tools and methodologies to enable capacity strengthening.

Recommendations for the Action Coalitions

The Action Coalition overall process design and workshops as well as the methodological approach for the blueprints need to be revised and improved. They need to have a transformative design and need and intersectional and feminist leadership approach. A transformative process includes elements for individual, relational, institutional/ organisational and societal transformation. The process so far has been rushed, the thinking behind the design and methodology is not clear and it has not been an inclusive or co-creational space. Exploring new methodology that allows for true co-creation is necessary. Additionally adequate funding to youth leaders needs to be provided and an Adolescent Girl Advisory Body directly to the ACs established.

Recommendations for the Forums in Mexico and France

The importance of creating brave and transformative spaces applies especially for the forums in Mexico and France. That means the programme should include spaces for individual transformation, learning, capacity building, and self reflection, spaces for creativity and imagination, spaces for relational transformation, co-creation, co-learning, building connections to others. The Mexico Forum can be a good opportunity to build the groundwork for co-creation and to strengthen the transformative power of the GEF and ACs.

Call to Action

We invite all actors across the GEF process to join us in allyship and solidarity, and to work to implement the recommendations in this manifesto, so that youth may truly be “in the driving seat” of the Generation Equality process.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Generation Equality Forum (GEF) process has an ambitious vision and objective to accelerate progress towards gender equality and intersectional justice. It aims to fuel powerful and lasting Action Coalitions (ACs) to achieve transformative change for generations to come. And it promises to be a Civil Society-driven process that centers young feminists, placing them in the "driving seat". The GEF clearly acknowledges the crucial role youth plays in achieving its ambitious goals and realising its vision and objectives.

However, the unfolding of the GEF to date has left most of the Youth Task Force (YTF) and youth-led organizations and activists frustrated, as in practice it seems that the GEF is a partner to youth in spirit, but not in actions. The implementation of its ambitious vision is falling behind our expectations, particularly around these areas:

- *Youth leadership and co-ownership*
- *Feminist leadership*
- *Intersectionality / intersectional approach*
- *Transformative design and leadership*

This document was born from the concerns of young people regarding the clarity of our engagement in the GEF, and the need to organize ourselves to discuss what true youth leadership entails and how we envision young feminist leadership in this process. It seeks to offer a young, intersectional feminist vision for the GEF and the ACs, as well as some concrete recommendations to positively impact the GEF/ACs and make it a truly feminist, transformative and intersectional space and process. It has been co-created byyoung feminists from the Action Coalitions leaders, the Generation Equality Youth Task Force (YTF), young feminists from the global Civil Society Advisory Group (CSAG), Mexican CSAG, as well as the National Gender Youth Activists (NGYAs) in February-March 2021.

2. VISION, MISSION, PRINCIPLES AND VALUES

2.1. VISION AND MISSION

Vision

We envision the GEF and ACs to be key drivers and accelerators for the achievement of gender equality and intersectional justice worldwide[1] . We envision the GEF to be an inspiration for future multilateral, multi-stakeholder and multi-generational processes by setting an example for providing a bold and transformative space that centres co-leadership, co-ownership and co-creation. A space that inspires to rethink and redesign international advocacy spaces and practices and that challenges and shifts power distribution and reduces hierarchies. And most importantly we envision the GEF process and structures to be an example and best practice for tapping into the transformative power of youth by letting us co-lead and shape every part of the process; thus, setting an example for moving beyond mere diversifying and towards transforming structures.

Mission

Our mission is to challenge and shift power against ageism and other inequities and systems of oppression – racism, sexism, heterosexism, cissexism, classism, capitalism – to advocate for youth on diverse thematic issues and to integrate an intersectional and feminist leadership approach as well as transformational design in the GEF and ACs.

As described above, we believe that young feminists are instrumental to the success of Generation Equality. Only through addressing uncomfortable truths and challenging current power imbalances can we progress and actualize the full potential of the GEF. Therefore, we are taking a collective stand as young feminists, to advocate for bold and transformative change to challenge the power structures that currently stifle our engagement. Our mission is therefore also to overcome mere participation and engagement of youth, which is often tokenistic and lacks real power to shape and impact processes and structure, and to ensure youth can lead and take co-ownership of the GEF and ACs.

2.2 CORE PRINCIPLES, VALUES, APPROACHES AND CONCEPTS GUIDING OUR WORK, THINKING AND RECOMMENDATIONS

We, as young feminists who are engaged with the GEF process, come together with shared values and principles that underscore our vision and recommendations. These not only reflect the change we want to see, but how we work and collaborate together.

Young Feminist Leadership

All over the world, youth are leading transformative social change. Youth are not only more than half of the world's population – we are unlocking progress against some of the world's most entrenched problems and inequities. We do this while up against significant risks and challenges; one of which is ageism. In an ageist world, young people's experiences, voices, and knowledge are less valued and are often not taken seriously. As a result, youth face exclusion from processes that are

1. Women Deliver. "Meaningful Youth Engagement: Sharing Power, Advancing Progress, Driving Change." https://womendeliver.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/WD_YouthPositionPaper.pdf

essential to our lives and our future. We believe in youth leadership as a means to dismantle entrenched ageist beliefs and practices. When youth are at the table, we shift power dynamics, and spark deep social transformation.

Co-ownership

Youth from the Action Coalition youth organization leaders, the National Gender Youth Activists (NGYAs) and the Generation Equality Youth Task Force (YTF) have come together collectively, embodying principles of co-leadership and co-ownership, to create this manifesto and envision a more equitable future. We strongly believe that the principle of co-ownership between diverse actors should be ensured throughout the Generation Equality process, within the various decision-making bodies – from the Core Group to the Action Coalition leadership. We are in a historic moment, where meaningful multi-stakeholder collaboration for gender equality and intersectional justice can be built.

Substantive Participation

As youth leaders, we have the shared experience of being included in processes because it is seen as the "correct" thing to do – to give a perceived legitimacy to multi-actor processes led by governments and multilateral, global institutions. In the Generation Equality process, we will not accept tokenistic participation, restricted to very limited and either public-facing (declarative) or logistical unpaid roles that others determine for us. Our roles should include decision-making, leadership, strategizing and co-ownership of the development and shaping of GEF, so that we can move from descriptive to substantive representation of youth.

Feminist Leadership

As (young) feminist leaders in the GEF, we are responsible for actively using our power more inclusively, and we demand others who partake in the process to do so as well. Feminist leadership aims at the explicit and intentional redistribution of power and responsibility in a way that is inclusive, participatory, and mindful of issues of gender, age, race, social class, sexual orientation, ability and other intersecting identities. This involves a continuous commitment to keep vigilant about – and challenge – the (re)production of practices and behaviors that deter collaboration, proactive listening and that benefit a few at the expense of others. Although in the discourse the GEF process has been grounded on feminist leadership principles, with its AC6 focusing on Feminist Leadership and Movement Building, youth in these spaces have experienced leadership styles and practices that are far from promoting equality, mutuality and transformation, and do not live up to the GEF's feminist leadership ambitions.

Transformative Design and Leadership

Transformative leadership is leadership for sustainable change and addresses the root causes of inequalities. It is deeply intertwined with feminist leadership and intersectionality, and these combined aim to challenge and shift power to dismantle systems of inequality and oppression holistically. A transformative design is complex, and it considers different dimensions. Societal transformation is built on institutional and organisational transformation, which is built on relational transformation, which is built on individual transformation. A transformative design hence addresses all these different dimensions for change – it is a vital element for the success of the GEF and the ACs but so far it has been completely lacking from the GEF and AC process.

Intersectionality

As intersectional feminists, we incorporate an intersectional lens to our work, shedding light on the multidimensionality of lived experience in which multiple axes of oppression intersect.[2] We believe that whilst there has been a rhetoric of diversity and inclusion within the GEF, this has not resulted in equity within the process – and too often we have observed that intersectionality is used as a synonymous to diversity. Intersectionality examines the intersections of the three most important global systems of domination: racism, colonialism, capitalism, patriarchy, among others. An intersectional approach means recognizing and analysing prevalent power dynamics and systems of inequality, and meaningfully and intentionally working to counter them. Borrowing from Dr. Emilia Roig's[3] perspective, "Intersectionality is not just a theory, it's a political project, it's a tool for analysis, transformation, liberation and visualisation. Visibilizing those who have been left out of feminist movements, exposing the multiple intersections of discrimination, and liberating all of us collectively from systemic oppression." Hence, Intersectionality, viewed as theoretical, methodological and practical tool for liberation invites us to address the various dimensions of discrimination and inequalities – individual, institutional and organisational, systemic and historic dimension.[4] It is therefore important to emphasize the role of race and racism within an intersectional approach and ensure post- and decolonial perspectives and epistemologies are centered in this analysis.

Accountability

As youth leaders and youth representatives within the GE process, selected or nominated through diverse processes, we seek to hold ourselves accountable to the movements and constituencies that we come from and represent. We take very seriously the responsibility to be youth representatives within this process, and also bear the responsibility of transparency and accountability towards our young peers and the many youth-led organizations that were not selected to play a formal role in the GEF. This means advocating for meaningful youth participation and leadership, and bringing forth diverse youth perspectives to strengthen the GE process. We also seek to hold other GE actors and leaders accountable to the mission and principles behind Generation Equality, such as the commitment made to place youth "in the driving seat" of the process.

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2. Crenshaw, K. (1989). "Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics." u. Chi. Legal f., 1: 139-167. https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8/

3. Dr. Emilia Roig is the Founder and Executive Director of the Center for Intersectional Justice.

4. Generation Equality Forum (16 November, 2020). "Shifting power: Multi-layered inclusion and intersectionality." https://forum.generationequality.org/news/shifting-power-multi-layered-inclusion-and-intersectionality-explo re-outcome-report-first-gef

3. BACKGROUND AND CHALLENGES

We note that the GEF has vowed to include young people in all their diversity, and to empower them by placing them in the "driving seat". Concretely, UN Women has shown a will to support young people's leadership – by establishing the Youth Task Force, by recruiting 300 National Gender Youth Activists to drive youth participation locally, regionally and internationally; and adding 12 new members to the already 28 existing members of the Youth Task Force – all from broad youth-led global networks, organizations and civic movements. The six Action Coalitions and the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Action Compact also amplify youth voices, as each of them has a dedicated spot for youth-led organizations.

However, the unfolding of the Generation Equality process to this date has left much of the Youth Task Force and youth-led organizations and activists in GE in disarray, as it seems that the GEF is a partner to youth in spirit, but not in actions. The meaningful inclusion of young feminists in the GE process has been inadequate and, at times, tokenistic.

Young feminists organize and mobilize across movements demanding systemic change and tackling and challenging systems of oppression and inequality holistically, which makes us to the core an intersectional feminist movement. Our organising is innovative, it challenges power and hierarchies, it centres co-creation and co-learning. To unfold this transformative power in the GEF and ACs, we need to be able to co-lead and to take co-ownership over process. We need to move from mere diversifying to transforming structures, meaning we need to move beyond "youth participation" and "meaningful youth engagement" to "youth leadership and co-ownership". To be able to do that, we need to be given real power.

3.1 POWER IN THE GEF AND ACS

Many of the challenges we experience as young feminists are interlinked to an imbalance in power within the GEF and AC structure. Making power and how it operates in the GEF and ACs visible and analysing it is key for us to challenge and shift it. Analysing, shifting and sharing power is important for many reasons and is also the foundation and key pillar of a feminist leadership and intersectional approach.[5] Without it, we are merely diversifying a structure, but are not transforming it. Without it, young feminist engagement will stay tokenistic and will not be impactful, let alone put youth in a position to lead and co-own. And without addressing power imbalances between individuals, between stakeholders and within our institutions, we will not be able to shift power imbalances in society, which is what Generation Equality is all about.

One of our key recommendations therefore is to incorporate a power analysis[6] throughout the GEF and AC governance structures and processes, which should be followed by concrete measures that are effective to counter power imbalances and lead to a more

5. Based on the work and thinking of CREA and Srilatha Batliwala, Gender at Work, Oxfam and UN Women Training Centre.

6. We have based our definition and analysis of power in the GEF on the work "All About Power – Understanding Social Power & Power Structures" by Srilatha Batliwala for CREA's "Feminist Leadership for Social Transformation Series".

equal and fairer distribution and sharing of power.

It is important to understand the different faces of power, because if we want to create permanent change in power structures, we can only succeed by revealing and bringing down the hidden and invisible forces that are holding them up. To understand power distribution in the GEF, we need to take a look at who has the capacity to determine *who gets what, who does what, who decides what, and who sets the agenda.*

We need to take into account the different sources of power – which include material and economic resources, human resources, knowledge and information– as well as intangible sources like ideology. We also need to examine how power imbalances in the GEF sustain themselves through norms and rules, ideology, and fear and violence. And most importantly, we need to uncover how power operates and manifests itself in the GEF in visible, hidden and invisible ways.

Visible or direct power

Visible or direct of power represents the form of power that we are most familiar with and have experienced. It is the capacity to control people's choices, resources, voice in decision-making, and frame the rules for process and engagement. Visible power also determines who participates, and who is excluded from decision-making. Visible power also creates and perpetuates hierarchies.

Hidden or indirect power

Also often called agenda setting power, hidden or indirect power is about who influences decisions or sets the agenda behind the scenes; whose voices are heard and who is consulted. It is about the power to decide what is important and what is not, what can and cannot be discussed, what matters and what does not. It is also the power to control the public communication, including narrative and messaging for the public. It is the capacity to influence people's opportunities, access to resources and rights indirectly, without giving direct orders or having any formal rights to do so and without being visible.

Another example of exercising hidden power are decisions on what the best routes to social change are, or what social change should look like and therefore indirectly control what is being prioritised and being worked on and what not. Hidden power also influences decisions on how budgets are created and allocated.

Agenda-setting power is one of the most important aspects of social power and we see it operate in many ways within the GEF and AC structures and processes. This type of power, the hidden and indirect one, is the one we need to make visible, explicit, call out, and speak truth to it. This is the power that allows GEF partners to call this process a 'collaborative, multi-stakeholder, and based on consensus decision-making', when in fact it is not because all the relevant and substantive decisions are already decided or are not put on the agenda for broader consultation.

Invisible power

Invisible power acts upon us, our ways of thinking and our beliefs about what is normal and natural without us being aware of it at all. Ideology is one of the most universal forms of invisible power – it refers to a set of beliefs, ideas and norms that frame what we believe is right or wrong, normal or unnormal, natural or unnatural. Invisible power is the power through which we are taught to accept, participate in, support, and perpetuate unjust social systems and even be complicit in our own disempowerment. Most of the time we do not see ideology operating in a visible way, which is it's invisible power. This type of power is also very prominent within the GEF process, and can be recognised especially in the lack of an intersectional and decolonial approach in the process and spaces.

3.2 CHALLENGES AND EXAMPLES

Without presenting a full power analysis of youth in GEF, in this section we share some examples of how we have seen and been experiencing power operating in the GEF and AC process and structures and how it has negatively affected our ability to shape anything substantial.

In January 2021, diverse youth participating in the Generation Equality process gathered over shared concerns around the lack of meaningful youth engagement and leadership in GEF. Several meetings in youth led spaces and a 1-day youth retreat followed and resulted in this young feminist manifesto.

The general perceptions of the participants were that there is a lack of understanding of young leaders' roles and responsibilities, as the methodology of the GEF and the AC leave no room for co-leadership; that there is no clarity in the decision-making process of the AC, as many of the actions were decided without incorporating the recommendations and views of youth-led organizations; that there is a disconnect between the YTF, the youth-led organizations leading on the AC and the NGYA group; that the methodology of the ACs does not allow to bring in different points of view to the table, much less the voices of other young people; and finally, that there is no system in place to hold partners accountable for respecting meaningful youth participation and leadership throughout the process.

Some examples of these perceptions are:

Lack of role clarity

- At this point of the process, there are no comprehensive instructions about the working of youth constituencies, the expectations for such, or the grounds on which decisions are made. There is a prevailing feeling among youth actors that there is a lack of clarity and transparency about the roles and responsibilities of youth leaders and youth-led organisations. The absence of a clearly defined role for the YTF and ACs youth leaders has impeded the co-leadership and co-ownership of GEF spaces. Moreover, the incorporation of new youth actors in the ACs after the start of the processes was not coupled with an adequate briefing or induction period that allowed these new youth-led organisations to fully take part of the discussions that are still shaping the process.
- The general perception of the NGYAs is that their roles and responsibilities, as well as how to engage in the process, and the duration of their commitment, are not clear. They were asked to carry out a regional plan, so they organized a consultation in each of their countries with youth-led organizations. However, in 2021, during a meeting with UN Women's ED, they learned about different expectations for their work. The 300 NGYAs should be regarded as experts in youth-related issues, and their expertise used to inform the discussions of the ACs and the GEF more broadly. However, the NGYAs have not yet been engaged in the ACs discussions through the youth-led organizations selected as leaders. Instead, they have been asked to present their work directly to UN Women officials, without clarity on how to move forward. The general perception is that the NGYA is the less "important" body of the GE, and many feel that they have invested much time without any clear outcomes. They feel that they need a clear path and understanding of their goals, to better organize themselves.
- The lack of TORs and a clear definition of each partner and stakeholders' role, tasks and responsibilities, and also what is not falling within their roles, is further enabling hidden power within the GEF and ACs. We see a specific need to define the UNW role as convener and the tasks that

fall under this. As convener UNW should be the entity that provides a space and process that is focused on reducing power imbalances in the multi-stakeholder space, instead UNW is the entity that creates, upholds and perpetuates existing power imbalances.

Top-down methodologies and timelines

- It was highlighted by the majority of the participants that there is no space for co-creation in GEF meetings, contrary to what the essence of GEF and the ACs is supposed to be. In the ACs, the meeting agendas are decided unilaterally by UN Women, and sent with less than 48 hours – sometimes less than 12 hours – before the workshops, which makes it difficult for participants to provide feedback or prepare for meetings in a meaningful way. Often, documents are not translated to either French or Spanish.
- The formats and methodologies of meetings are not youth-friendly nor conducive to co-leadership. Especially in the ACs, meetings are facilitated by UN Women officials, where 1.5 hours are spent listening to a PowerPoint presentation, with a 30-minute round for comments that leaves little room to discuss anything different than what was decided previously by UN Women. The ACs youth leaders have been told that it is our responsibility to represent youth and to bring the voices of diverse youth to the space. However, the format of the discussions does not allow to raise any other concern that has not been selected by UN Women officials. Similarly, there is no wrapping-up moment at the end of the sessions where action points for participants are highlighted, and meeting minutes are not taken, which translates into a lack of transparency and accountability.
- Youth also shared a general discomfort around the rushed and top-down process to schedule meetings and processes. UN Women often unilaterally decides when to schedule meetings and workshops. In the ACs, there is no timeline co-designed by the participants where we can know in advance when we are meeting, what we are discussing nor established days for decision-making. The lack of a clear timeline prevents young leaders from reaching out to the YTF, the NGYAs and other young people interested in providing input to the work of the ACs youth leaders.
- It is not clear to us what the underlying thinking and theory of change behind the process design for the Action Coalition workshops and the Methodological approach to the blueprint is. We are very concerned about a lack of transformative design and intersectional approach. Despite repeated requests to change the process design and methodology, we did not see any substantive changes.

Unclear decision-making processes and disregard of youth opinions

- Youth do not understand the decision-making process and whether the ACs are working based on consensus or not. While the space was announced as a consensus-based process, when YTF representatives expressed that they disagreed with a decision, it was suggested they recuse themselves from the decision, were told that the process would go forward with or without them and were lectured on how consensus-building works. Rather than perceived as an opportunity to improve the structures underlying decision-making processes to build a more equal world, our unease has been categorized as burdensome and responsible for slowing down the process. A concrete example could be seen when the YTF felt deeply concerned regarding the private sector leadership of certain corporations in the upcoming Generation Equality Forum. Stating that we are open to dialogue and negotiation, and recognizing certain

corporations' previous financial contributions to and partnerships with UN Women, their commitment to the United Nations Guiding Principles for Business and Human Rights, Women's Empowerment Principles, and the United Nations Global Compact - yet, voicing clear concerns about their failure to fully address, respond & remedy the following alleged human rights violations that have disproportionately affected women workers in global supply chains, and/or which have had serious implications in terms of gender equality and sustainability. By doing that, the YTF members were regarded as the ones disrupting the process as they voiced these concerns, and were faced with significant pushback from UNW leadership to change their stance.

- Furthermore, there is a lack of accountability mechanisms to monitor and hold partners and stakeholders accountable to agreed-upon ways of working, and to respecting youth engagement in the process. Our comments and suggestions fail to be acknowledged and incorporated into deliverables, especially in the Action Coalitions, and there is no mechanism to monitor this dynamic.
- In terms of decision-making, the general perception of young people is that the decision-making process often consists of a binary vote (yes or no), leaving little space to express why we are voting the way we do. This is connected to concerns around the closed and top-down methodology of meetings.
- Interlinked to the concerns about the decision-making processes on items on the agenda, is the decision-making power on what is put on the agenda. This is a key issue where especially UNW is exercising hidden power that creates immense and very concerning power imbalances. Being part of decision making is also having power to decide what is important and what isn't, what can and cannot be discussed and what matters and what doesn't. We are not given any power to influence and decide items for the agenda.

Agenda Setting

- Agendas are created and items prioritised by UNW, and it has been difficult to have items added to the agenda in Core Group and Sub-Group meetings. In addition, the agendas are planned too tight, which constantly causes important items to fall off the agenda and not be discussed in a timely manner. One of the most relevant examples to name here, is the methodological approach for the blueprints, the process design for the workshops and AC leaders and the Theory of Change. Until today, and even after multiple requests over a long period of time to prioritise these items, they have not been discussed, as they have not been added to the agenda or fell off the agenda.
- Meetings often include long presentations and at times feel more like being informed or briefed instead of being consulted. Instead of developing content together after an exchange of vision, ideas and suggestions, documents and concepts are being presented and the possibility for feedback given. This leaves youth in a constant re-active state, instead of being able to be proactive or co-creative in the process.
- The Sub-Working Group for the Action Coalition spent most of their time discussing and deciding on leaders for the ACs and very little time on more substantive work for the ACs. This shows a clear -superficial- focus on increasing diversity of actors, over transforming structures and processes.

Communication with public, messaging and narratives

- A lot of power within the GEF is exercised by UNW by controlling the communication of information, narratives and messaging to the public and other stakeholders in the process as well as when these will be shared. Timelines for providing feedback to documents that are shared are often extremely short and make it very difficult and often impossible to give feedback at all.
- On several occasions information or documents have been shared without consent or notifying GEF partners. A most concerning example was the sharing of the workshop design for the ACs and methodological approach for the blueprints, which was sent out without it having been discussed and without notification.
- Youth have often felt that information has been shared when it was not ready to be shared, leading to a rushed and confusing process. Especially in regards to the Action Coalitions this has been concerning, as we have not been in agreement about the process, while that exact process has been pushed forward instead of pausing, revising and improving it. It seems that sticking to set deadlines -without clear rationale- is more important than the outcome.
- Communication takes mainly place through UNW, when it would be important that everyone within the GEF structures, the different youth groups and the AC youth leaders have direct access to the other partners and actors. An online platform that enables this direct conversation is very important, to shift power and make communication more transparent.

Lack of resources

- The lack of resources for young feminists and young leaders in the GEF and ACs is a source of significant power imbalance and impedes our ability to proactively and substantially engage or lead within the GEF and AC process. If we are to do impactful work, we need to receive a minimum level of support to do so - otherwise, we are paying to do this work, whether it be internet costs or electricity to connect -, and need to be recognized and compensated for our time and expertise. If this continues to not be the case, it will lead to further youth burnouts, disengagement and demotivation, and to perpetuate inequalities, excluding the most marginalized youth and privileging those with most access to resources.
- Besides the meetings/workshops of the ACs, AC young leaders are expected to attend meetings with UN Women ED, meetings with YTF, meetings with NGYA, and public events, and dedicate time to input to the working documents. This is not only exhausting; it also requires significant more effort and time than for any other type of leader in the process, without the same resources. Youth-led organizations are well-known to be underfunded. Many young people have disengaged from the process as a consequence.
- Young activists are volunteering as individuals for the YTF and the NGYA group. The YTF has not received any kind of economic support for their volunteer work for the past year and a half. Three quarters of YTF members have no institutional support or dedicated resources to be involved in this process, and are not paid members of the organizations they represent on the YTF. Youth-led organizations, especially those conformed by young people from low-income and middle-income countries, do not have enough resources to keep up with rhythms decided without us.
- While an external funding source has awarded the YTF a grant, the YTF still does not have access to these funds, nor can use them for backdated expenses. Young leaders have had to push and advocate to receive information about this process, and to be included in the deci-

sion-making and resource allocation processes around this funding. This shows the need for flexible, trust-based, core funding mechanisms that include youth in the decision-making process - which is not the case for UNW systems and protocols.
- Many young leaders across the GEF do not have adequate and regular access to the internet. Efforts to change this to support youth to be able to participate have not been made, effectively excluding and preventing their full participation.

Lack of an intersectional approach and inadequate interpretation

We are very concerned about the lack of an intersectional approach throughout the GEF and AC process, structures, programming and methodology. We have the impression that there is a clear lack of understanding and knowledge of what an applied intersectional approach means and often observe it to be used synonymous to diversity. **We recognise the lack of an intersectional approach, including a decolonial approach, as part of invisible power that is being exercised.**

- For young people from traditionally marginalized groups or identities, it has been hard to engage in the discussion because there is a low level of diversity in GEF working groups and spaces, which makes us feel uncomfortable, not represented and excluded.
- At the beginning of the work of the YTF, interpretation was not available. Bilingual participants needed to translate to others, which made it difficult for them to really engage in the discussions - and also constituted non-compensated labor. One Spanish-speaking indigenous member left the YTF in 2020 as a result of the lack of interpretation and translation support. The YTF had to request several times for interpretation before it became available. When participants are obliged to engage in English, even though it is not their first language, it discriminates against those less privileged and who have not had the opportunity of receiving English education. Similarly, there is no interpretation available in Portuguese, which for example is reflected in the low percentage of Brazilian youth engaged in the GEF.
- Currently, interpretation support is also not available for youth to work in a flexible way, bearing in mind that young people organize differently and many of the participants are volunteers with full-time jobs and education obligations that make them work at different times of the day (most of them work at night and meet in the evening).
- For some participants, the quality of the interpretation provided by UN Women has made it difficult for them to engage in the discussions. Participants recommend that interpreters are chosen matching their first language with the interpretation in the language that they are providing, to avoid confusion.
- We have seen some changes in this regard, and have received support from UNW to ensure external (paid) interpretation for our youth meetings, which has enabled the creation of this manifesto.

Disconnect between youth bodies

- Youth were never introduced to the different bodies of young leaders in the GE and their specific roles. Likewise, the contact information of all the youth participants was not made available for youth to organize ourselves. After more than a year of work of the YTF and 6 months of the ACs, the different youth-led organisations and activists had not been given the chance to meet and work together yet. This lack of coordination can be evidenced by the fact that it was only in December 2020 when the ACs youth leaders were formally introduced to the NYGA. In this context, we requested that UN Women organize a meeting with all the members of the YTF and youth-led organisations and activists of the ACs, which resulted in

the first cross-youth workshop held on January 15th, 2021.

- There is a clear need for youth-led spaces. UNW is holding up existing power imbalances by not providing youth-led spaces, which are key for youth empowerment and being able to speak freely and create "power with" among the different youth activists and youth groups. All YTF, NGYA and AC youth leaders said they were very uncomfortable with having UNW staff on their Whatsapp groups, and in their meetings and email communications. While these channels are also important to exchange and receive information by UNW, UNW should enable youth to meet without them. This was identified as a key issue for disempowering youth and increasing and especially sustaining power imbalances, as most did not feel safe to speak up out of fear it could impact their careers and future. Youth are vulnerable in this regard and need safe(r) and youth-led spaces.

Burnout and demotivation

- The majority of young people involved in the process have felt tokenized and that their participation has no clear goals established. The YTF will soon have been engaged in this process for two years, and many feel that few real achievements have been made. Many are exhausted and do not want to participate anymore. There is a significant lack of motivation for young people to continue engaged.
- When we have raised our voices to highlight the concerns here described, we have been told that we, the youth, are slowing down the process. The general perception is that we are being treated as a burden instead of peers and leaders. For example, many AC young leaders have commented that the actions and the vision statement in their ACs were defined without the input provided by them, and that they wanted more time to incorporate youth concerns in the blueprint. However, we have been told many times that the timelines will not change. It seems like it is more important to UN Women and partners to broadcast the blueprints of the ACs to the public than reflecting on the methodology of the GEF and adapting it to allow truly meaningful youth participation and leadership on the actions that we will be implementing for the next 5 years. This situation contributes to the demotivation of youth engaged in the process.
- Being tokenized, patronised and not heard, also being lost in UN procedures and its lack of transparency, access to limited and delayed information are reasons why many young people deliberately do not engage with formal UN processes, or drop out of their UN engagement journeys.
- We have also observed that young feminist activists also disengage and have mistrust towards the formal GEF processes due to the controversial and problematic private sector engagement, and the multi-stakeholder approach in GEF at large, where private corporations are provided importance to the level of member states or civil society networks, but without the same democratic accountability or transparency practiced by them or required of them. Many multinational corporations and conventional for-profit actors are known to be complicit with and perpetuate various forms of violence, discrimination, exploitation and other forms of harm; and are above all else accountable to their shareholders for increasing profits, yet not to society at large. Young activists can prefer to not engage in processes seen as "pinkwashing" or "greenwashing" for these companies, especially if private sector engagement is not approached critically within the process.
- As intersectional feminist activists we are not just part of a movement that tackles inequalities and systemic oppression, we also experience these oppressions and

discrimination first hand throughout our lifes. Experience with oppression and discrimination are experiences with being and feeling powerless and often result in trauma. We want to raise awareness and point out that the vast imbalances of power within the GEF structures, leaving young people powerless in situations, can be a dangerous trigger for some of us and we think that the many burnouts that people have experienced are directly related to this feeling of powerlessness and tokenization. We acknowledge that trauma from systemic oppression exists and is to be taken very seriously and therefore recommend creating more trauma-informed spaces and processes.

AS A RESULT OF THESE MULTIPLE CHALLENGES, YOUNG FEMINISTS ARE FINDING IT VERY DIFFICULT TO PARTICIPATE IN THESE SPACES, NOT TO MENTION TO CO-LEAD AND CO-OWN THEM. THIS POSES QUESTIONS TO YOUTH ACTORSASTOTHEPURPOSE TO REMAIN ENGAGED IN SUCH A PROCESS, AS WE FEEL TOKENIZED RATHER THAN AGENTS OF CHANGE.

4. KEY GAINS BY THE YOUTH IN THE GEF STRUCTURE

Recognizing the challenges we face as young feminists working with UN Women and the structures of Generation Equality Forum, as young feminists we have avidly continued to advocate for the inclusion and recognition of young people's leadership. Some of the gains we have made include:

- The expanding and setting up of a diverse Generation Equality Youth Task force of 40 young feminists, a process led by the YTF itself, prioritizing our own criteria - while navigating external pressures to prioritize criteria imposed by other actors.
- Successfully advocating for, despite strong initial pushback, youth representation on the highest decision-making body of the Generation Equality Forum: the Core Group.
- Subsequently, ensuring active and rotational youth representation on all the working groups of the Generation Equality Forum (Action Coalitions and Communications Working Groups, The Multi Stakeholder Leadership and Strategic Group).
- Maintaining weekly and/or biweekly Youth Task Force meetings, and monthly meetings with the National Gender Youth Activists. Successfully advocating for UNW to provide French and Spanish Interpretation for these meetings.
- The Generation Equality Youth Task Force participated actively in the Mexico and Paris initial design sprints for conceptualizing the Action Coalitions.
- Despite the challenges of ensuring youth representation in the first call for applications for Action Coalition leaders, all Action Coalitions now have Youth Leadership, thanks to active youth advocacy and support throughout the process.
- Youth have engaged other youth in all their diversity during the design sprints, and in co-creating the Youth Journey. Youth have also carried out various local, national and regional consultation processes, such as around CSW64, working to ensure that the advocacy messages, priorities and concerns of diverse youth are shared back and reflected in the GEF process.
- Youth members have been part of co-creating and ideating, in developing the content and establishing the editorial team of the YOUth Newsletter.
- Youth have endeavored to ensure adequate youth representation in the GEF Curated conversations.
- Youth have actively, consistently and firmly advocated for resources for youth activities for Generation Equality. This has resulted in an initial seed funding for the Youth Task Force from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.
- Youth have self-mobilized and self-organized to create a network amongst the Generation Equality Youth Task Force, Action Coalition Youth Leaders and Civil Society Advisory Group Youth Leaders to collectively strategize, mobilize and advocate for the youth in the GEF structure.
- The Generation Equality Youth Task Force, the National Gender Youth Activists and the Action Coalition Youth leaders have submitted substantive youth issues to UN Women's Executive Director to center youth leadership in the Generation Equality Forum.

We recognize the space and visibility that has been achieved by youth through our engagement in the Generation Equality Forum, and we stand to ensure that ambitious vision and objectives to accelerate progress towards gender equality and intersectional justice

through the Generation Equality Forum are achieved. Notwithstanding, it is important to note that we have achieved the above gains amidst great constraints that we do not want future generations to experience. It is against this background that we develop this manifesto, to fulfil our mandate of advising UN Women and the entire GEF Structure not just on youth engagement and leadership, but also substantively on the overall process and actions.

"AS YOUNG FEMINISTS WE HAVE AVIDLY CONTINUED TO ADVOCATE FOR THE INCLUSION AND RECOGNITION OF YOUNG PEOPLE'S LEADERSHIP."

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

In this section, we lay out the recommendations that we have collectively developed as youth leaders in the GEF process, to address the challenges described above and to counter power imbalances. As mentioned, we remain committed to advocating for meaningful youth participation, engagement and leadership in Generation Equality, for the benefit of diverse youth globally and the fight for gender equality and intersectional justice.

4.1 CO-LEADERSHIP AND CO-OWNERSHIP

To generate spaces and structures that foster a meaningful co-leadership and co-ownership between youth and other actors in GEF, we propose the following recommendations:

- We would like clarity in understanding the weight of our decision-making and agenda-setting power, and for it to be equal to that of other actors. Currently, it is not clear whether we are working based on consensus or majority, or whether there are decisions solely made at the UN Women level, and to what extent we can influence the agenda. Having clarity on roles and decision-making is essential for youth to meaningfully engage in the process.
- We would like to see that **our views, recommendations, and priorities are seriously considered.** This means making space in agendas for youth to share our views, sharing agendas ahead of time so we can prepare, ensuring interpretation support, and having timelines that allow youth to consult with our constituencies and networks. This also means that we should be adequately supported thoroughly to ensure that we can influence decisions.
- Beyond that, we should be able to **directly shape and really co-create the GE process and spaces proactively.** Good practices include shared leadership, rotation of organising and facilitating meetings, being involved in all relevant programming, outputs, designs, methodologies, approaches.
- **Youth should not be tokenized or used to legitimize processes when we are not meaningfully involved.** We are asked to mobilize youth and consult youth, but when we do this, we then have limited space to share our recommendations. This makes these contributions tokenistic, as there is not a mechanism for the outcomes of these consultations to be meaningfully incorporated into decision-making.
- It is crucial for all of the youth involved in the process to have basic information to be able to work together. For instance, **we would like access to the mailing list of all youth leaders working within the Generation Equality process.** This information would enable us to engage and create synergies with other youth constituencies.

4.2 ACCOUNTABILITY

In an effort to create an environment that is truly representative of the youth's commitment and the vision for the GEF, we share the following accountability guidelines to rectify them:

- **Process of disagreement:** Youth are often left confused by their real influence on decision-making, as there is no clear process of how to manage disagreement. While there have been meetings organized by UN Women during which the different youth constituencies and youth-led organizations expressed their confusion or disagreement regarding choices that were made without consulting us, there has

been no concrete follow-up on this issue. We believe that having an enforceable process of disagreement is the basis of any policymaking, therefore we ask that a clear procedure is set up to allow the youth to be able to contest decisions.

- **Space to hold Member States to account**: It is crucial that as an intergovernmental space, GEF, ACs and all other processes provide a space for direct interaction among youth and representatives of Member States.
- **Decision-making process:** UN Women regularly holds consultations with the YTF, which emits suggestions each session. However, there is no clarity about whether these recommendations have any influence on the decision-making process at all. We ask for the full disclosure or creation of a decision-making procedure for us to ensure that our work is part of the new policies to come. In addition, we demand that the YTF and youth-led organizations in the ACs be formally consulted before any decision is made final.
- **Agenda Setting Power**: As pointed out above, agenda setting power is one of the most important powers and youth has not been given any of the agenda setting power so far. This has to change immediately and measures are to be taken to ensure that. The Core Group and its sub-working groups should commit to shared leadership principles and therefore establish:
  - »Rotation of for organization and facilitation of weekly meetings, with support of UNW if that is wanted.
  - »Collective agenda setting: agendas need to be developed collaboratively, on a provided document accessible to every partner and that everyone can add to over the course of the week and the priorities will be decided on collectively
  - »Encourage youth to add items to the agenda.
  - »Ask more questions instead of trying to provide answers: what do you need?
  - »What is important to you? How can we support you and ensure that you can do your best work?
- **Communications and advocacy around the action themes:** While the 6 ACs cover a wide array of themes, we have felt that some topics were pushed forward more than others in the UN Women's communications and advocacy strategy. We feel that this contributes to the invisibilisation of our work and the people we represent and does not correlate with the GEF's aim to be a champion of inclusivity and intersectionality. We ask to be involved in relevant communications, messaging and created narratives. As well as being asked in advance of sharing information out, if we agree with the messaging and information being shared. Youth should be encouraged to give feedback and inputWe therefore ask that the youth is consulted to organize the advocacy work on themes, so that some of us may make additions to give exposure to marginalized causes.
- **We ask to redesign and improve** the process of the creation of the blueprint to be more co-creative and transformative, to redo and improve the methodological approach so that it includes a transformative, intersectional and feminist leadership approach. We ask to co-develop these two processes, like it should have been from the beginning.
- **We ask for a power analysis of structure and process to be conducted and to take active countermeasures.**

We, the YTF, youth-led organizations, youth activists, ask that you ensure to create and enforce, at every step going forward:

- A safe space for engagement and capacity strengthening, allowing us to express ourselves and be heard. We demand that our concerns be taken with the same gravity that would be given to any other participant of the GEF.
- A detailed, concise plan or charter that would make the youth participation in decision-making and in the implementation

of the Action Coalitions immutable and impermeable.
- A guideline detailing the procedure in case of disagreement between the different youth working groups and UN Women constituencies.
- Appointed UN Women collaborators that would be responsible for handling communications between the youth and UN Women, relay our ideas and concerns to other constituencies if need be, and support us should we ever decide to engage in a process of disagreement.
- TORs that outline concrete commitments and steps that will be taken to counteract the different forms of power imbalances.

4.3 SUBSTANTIVE AND MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION

To enable effective youth participation, we would like transparency and clarity on our role and the role of others in the GEF process, including the role of UN Women. We envision the role of UN Women as convener and primarily as door opener for young feminists and civil society actors, so we may engage in meaningful dialogue and advocacy with member states and other multilateral actors in Generation Equality and beyond.

A core part of this cross-sector dialogue and advocacy currently happens through the various working group and coordination meeting spaces in the Core Group and Action Coalitions, and other UN Women-hosted sessions. To ensure a substantive and meaningful space for youth to participate in these spaces, youth propose a number of concrete recommendations.

In terms of the facilitation and methodology of these spaces, we propose to work with external facilitators to avoid conversations between diverse actors being dominated or directed by one agenda or one actor's point of view over others. These external facilitators should be experienced in working with youth and feminist and diverse groups, and use methodologies that are transformative and generative. Currently, UN Women facilitated-sessions often feel as if youth were only being informed and not consulted or in a co-creative process with our partners. UNW presentations that take up most of the time and do not allow space for meaningful exchanges. Rather, meetings should focus on dialogue and open conversation between all stakeholders where participants can build meaningful relationships and trust, instead of just being information sessions or one-sided discussions.

We also ask for timelines and deadlines to be set in consultation with youth, not unilaterally. Deadlines in this process have so far been extremely short and do not allow us to engage in dialogue, consultation and strategic planning. If this continues to be the case, then we are not leaders but rather participants or observers to the process. We ask for clarity on this regard.

In these settings, young people can find themselves being directed or instructed on what to do by more influential actors, with little room for our own suggestions or decisions. This power imbalance can also lead to young people being manipulated into doing things they are uncomfortable with, or being used for menial tasks that do not reflect their skills, capacity and full potential.
Organizations might also use their power of influence to control or own a young person for their work, and become territorial over their other interactions and partnerships. Hence, developing strong and positive intergenerational partnerships where young people feel safe, valued and can participate fully, is crucial for meaningful and ethical engagement. Therefore, as the GEF's convening body, we would like UN Women to reiterate and call on all stakeholders who are part of the process to engage with youth in a meaningful and respectful manner.

It is also crucial to ensure youth-led spaces and being provided with the relevant support and resources to host these spaces.

Actions to ensure our substantive and meaningful participation:

- Ensuring young people are given space to express opinions and make decisions that are meaningful and to give space for actively contributing and shaping the agenda.. If our input cannot influence change, why are you including us?
- Do not try to control what young people say or do – we are not here to amplify your voice; we are here to use our own.
- Set out mechanisms for addressing and responding to our feedback: Rather than just requesting for our participation and inputs at your convenience, discuss with youth whether our views and ideas are actually being heard in an open and transparent way; and provide clarity about how the contributions we bring to GEF spaces will be incorporated into decisions, processes and activities.
- Do not assume that young people are inexperienced: Assess and recognise the qualifications, skills and experience of young people as you would do with others.
- Safeguard every young person: Moving forward, we think it is essential to develop and implement reasonable safeguarding mechanisms to minimize the risk of violence, exploitation, burnout, tokenism or any other negative consequence of our participation and leadership within the GEF process. These also include accounting for and integrating specific safeguarding needs of girls under the age of 18. We are happy to help devise such mechanisms and provide our contributions to create an enabling environment and space that is empathic, trauma-informed and healing for all youth to feel safe and thrive.
- Support and resource youth-led organising and spaces - this includes taking into account and addressing specific needs and barriers of young girls under the age of 18 who might not be able to meaningfully participate in GEF processes and spaces due to digital accessibility barriers or study commitments.

Actions to ensure the substantive and meaningful participation of adolescent girls:

- Promote and guarantee the involvement of children and adolescents in a real rather than symbolic way. We need to recognize children and adolescents under 18 years as subjects of rights and not only as 'objects of protection'. Therefore, they must be active subjects in the GEF and ACs. This means that communications and calls are addressed directly to the organizations led by girls, adolescents and youths that have an impact at local, regional or international level.
- Youth certainly can act as a linking bridge; however, it is important to underline that we work as co-leaders among children, adolescents and youths, and recognize that each of these groups have their own voice and decisions.
- We demand that children's and adolescents' participation in the GEF and ACs spaces is guided by an intersectional perspective. The process must ensure the engagement of those who historically have been deprived of the right to co-lead in these spaces, so that actions within the GEF can be directed in their favor.

4.4 FUNDING AND RESOURCING[7]

Globally, youth face economic precariousness, unemployment and exploitation, and often balance multiple responsibilities, such as studies and work. Many young people attend meetings in person or online with limited financial support to attend or to access data or equipment to participate. We often use our phone and precious credit to participate in working groups, steering committees and webinars to have the opportunity to engage. In addition, young girls under the age of 18 face specific barriers to access funding and resourcing; for example, many do not have bank accounts, need parental consent to access funding or are not of legal age to register as an organization (in the case this is what they wish to do).

It is crucial not to assume that young activists are able to participate in online processes without financial support – to cover electricity, internet and/or data, functioning computers and/or smartphones, and other core expenses – as doing so perpetuates significant inequalities. To ensure our meaningful participation, it is essential to allocate enough budget to support the core operating costs of young activists, particularly those facing the greatest barriers for engagement.

In addition, young people are often seen as "willing volunteers" and stereotyped for not needing to provide for their family, homes or themselves. It is essential to give recognition and compensation to youth activists, to recognize our time, expertise, and overall contributions. Activists should not be expected to give up their time, knowledge, or labour for free. Support fair compensation, and help young people claim what we are worth.

Young activist groups have very limited access to funding, especially those that are unregistered (by choice or by circumstance), and due to backlash and stigmatization. Still seen as beneficiaries rather than active agents, young feminist leadership is undervalued, unrecognized, and untrusted, leaving youth organizations with inadequate access to funding. Support youth activist groups through core, flexible funding that responds to their own self-defined needs.

It is essential that funds that are committed towards strengthening youth movements and youth leadership through Generation Equality and the Action Coalitions be directed primarily to youth-led and youth-run organizations themselves, particularly those working at the local and community level, and those directly working to build youth power - and not to large, youth-serving institutions that do not have youth in decision-making roles. If you are providing resources and are unable to fund youth organizations directly due to administrative or other barriers, consider working with youth-led and youth-centered intermediaries, such as women's funds and youth-led funds, to do so. Large, Global-North based and multilateral institutions - including UN Women - lack the systems, mechanisms and practices to resource and support youth in a flexible, direct manner.

4.5 CAPACITY STRENGTHENING

We recognize that there is a wish and need for co-learning and collective capacity strengthening, as it is a vital element for the individual transformation that is the base for realizing and achieving the transformational vision of the GEF and the ACs. However, our vision for supporting and helping youth strengthen their capacity goes beyond top-down, one-off skills- or knowledge-transfer.

7. Adapted from FRIDA Fund. "No Straight Lines: Transformations with Young Feminist Organisers - A Resource for NGOs and Funder." http://nostraightlines.youngfeministfund.org/

Youth **and all actors** in the GEF would highly benefit from **spaces where we can co-create and co-learn**. A transformational process is only possible by learning from each other and tapping into the collective knowledge that we bring into the process.

Additionally, **we believe that capacity strengthening should not be focused only on youth.** The assumption that youth is the only group that needs to build their capacities results in greater power imbalances instead of addressing and challenging such inequalities. As young feminists, we bring incredible leadership skills, knowledge, and experiences that we are eager to implement and contribute to the GEF. Yet, we have not been able to do so because other actors involved in the process are not welcoming nor open to work with youth.

Considering above, we provide the following recommendations for capacity strengthening approaches for youth and other leaders in the GEF:

- **Create spaces where co-learning and co-creation can take place**: Consult with us on what our needs are and what methodologies and approaches are helpful not only to us, but also to all actors involved, to connect, build trust and grow to become even better feminist leaders in the GEF process and beyond.
- Initiate the creation of learning and **reflection spaces where different visions and models of multilateralism are discussed, and different perspectives on multi-stakeholder approaches can be presented.** As we move to longer-term Action Coalition work, it would be relevant and helpful to have space for critical thinking and reimagining of processes that would best serve not only youth, but all actors involved.
- **Engage with youth as partners, including around capacity strengthening:** We come to the GEF process with a considerable breath of skills, knowledge and experience, including the facilitation of transformational spaces that we can offer to peers and other leaders. Ensure that youth are fairly compensated for this work.
- **ACs leaders, as well as others who play a key role in the GEF process, should participate in trainings and capacity strengthening workshops on feminist leadership, transformational literacy and systems thinking, intersectionality, power analysis, and decolonizing approaches** to our work, relations and interactions within the GEF. We believe these skills are an essential base for designing the blueprints and recommend to organize them as soon as possible. As young, intersectional feminists we bring a lot of knowledge on these elements and can assist in planning and facilitating these capacity strengthening sessions for leaders.
- **Make use of creative tools and methodologies that are relevant to youth and other actors** – like the 'Open Space Technology' method – to foster co-learning and reduce power imbalances that result from assuming youth is the group that needs capacity strengthening.
- **Expertise in working with adolescent girls, from a diversity of backgrounds, is needed too when convening capacity strengthening spaces.** Methodologies need to be adapted to suit younger adolescents, older adolescents and young people recognising that youth are not a homogenous group.
- Ask what actors and stakeholders need to **unlearn** about international advocacy and diplomacy. What rules and norms are upholding and sustaining existing power imbalances and thus do not serve us anymore? What shouldn't we practice anymore? (Panels? Remarks? Interventions? Unnecessary formalities that create distance? Governments and INGOs speaking first while CSOs and youth go last?).

4.6 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE ACTION COALITIONS

- **There is a need to clarify the roles and responsibilities of leaders, members and UNW as conveners and secretariat:** Currently the selected leaders are participating but unable to lead. The technical leads are not trained and skilled process designers and facilitators, and should not be put in the role of such. UN Women as convener should not overstep the role of the leaders, but should rather enable the leaders to take ownership and lead themselves. We also suggest to revise and open for conversation the question whether UNW alone should function as the AC Secretariat and to explore other possible models.
- **Process design and Methodological Approach**: Currently, the process design and methodological approach is not a co-creational space and lacks many important elements - a transformative design, clarity on the theory of change, a feminist leadership approach and an intersectional approach. We strongly recommend to revise and improve the overall process and methodology in collaboration with AC leaders and empower and encourage youth to actively take more control and ownership over this.
  - »The process design and methodological approach need to have an **intersectional approach:** An intersectional approach needs to address all 4 dimensions of discrimination and inequality - at the individual, institutional/organizational, systemic and historic levels. We also need to explicitly address and name racism. Especially the historic dimension of an intersectional approach requires us to apply a decolonial perspective and epistemology. This is also relevant when collecting and analysing data.
  - »The process, workshops and methodological approach need to have a **transformative design.** Change and transformation does not take place in a siloed process but requires a multi-layered approach. Societal transformation is interconnected and builds on institutional and organisational transformation, which is interconnected to relational transformation, which is connected to the transformation of each individual. We therefore recommend to include methodology and a process that addresses all these different levels.
  - »We recommend spaces for **individual growth**, reflection and capacity strengthening on feminist leadership, power and intersectionality, creating transformational literacy and systems thinking (among other things).
  - »We recommend specific methodology that creates closer **relationships** and trust between the different leaders and stakeholders, and that transform relations. This is also an important foundation and element for co-creational work and to reduce biases and negative assumptions.
  - »We strongly recommend that the commitments that leaders are making are not just abstract actions or measures that are taken “somewhere else”, or “over there”, but that at least one action must be a commitment directed towards their own **organisational or institutional structures.** We cannot do transformative work and perpetuate systems of oppression within our own structures. Each leader’s transformation has to start with themselves. We want to make explicit that this is also very important for CSOs and philanthropies, as we have not forgotten that 2020 was also a year where intersectional feminists called for transformation within some of the more traditional development organizations.
  - »The process for creating and developing the blueprints needs to be truly

co-creative: Co-creation can only take place if the groundwork for it was created (see text above). The process design needs to clearly outline how a space and container for co-creation will be built.

- Youth-leaders in the AC should be **adequately funded** to be able to engage to the same extent as other leaders. Providing compensation and funding will reduce the power imbalance within the ACs.
- **Adolescent Girl Advisory Body**: We strongly recommend the establishment of an independent Adolescent Girl Advisory Body directly to the Action Coalitions. This Advisory Body should not be an advisory body to UNW, as that would increase the risk of becoming a merely tokenistic body. It should also receive sufficient and adequate funding.
- As we move forward with the ACs work and continue to develop the blueprints, we would also like to get clarity on how the voices and demands of young people outside the GEF and those contributing to the process of shaping recommendations for the ACs and the overall GEF via regional consultations will be integrated.
- **Accountability for Private Sector Leaders and Commitment Makers**: We recommend discussing specific accountability principles for the Private Sector to avoid pink and green washing and ask the private sector partners to ensure they will pledge to be an active force for systemic change starting with transformation within their internal processes and structure. We also want to see commitments that ensure that whatever harmful practices the private sector exhibited in their supply chain previous to their GEF engagement, gets disrupted and annulled. The business and human rights framework could be helpful when creating accountability principles.

4.7 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FORUMS IN MEXICO AND FRANCE

The importance of creating brave and transformative spaces applies especially for the forums in Mexico and France. That means the programme design and methodology should include spaces for individual transformation, learning, capacity strengthening, and self-reflection; spaces for creativity and imagination, spaces for relational transformation, co-creation, co-learning, building connections to others. The Mexico Forum can be a good opportunity to build the groundwork for co-creation and to strengthen the transformative power of the GEF and ACs.

Currently youth is asked to participate in panels as speakers or moderators, which is better than not being present, but it is not enough. As youth, we need to be able to take co-ownership over creating the space, programme and methodology – which would probably lead to not having panels at all, because they are not allowing for generative dialogue, for tapping into our collective knowledge, for co-creation or transformation. Putting a few experts on a panel reproduces hierarchies, it is very formal and upholds power imbalances while learning and connection experience becomes very limited.

6. CONCLUSION

Youth from the Action Coalitions leaders, the Generation Equality Youth Task Force (YTF), young feminists from the global Civil Society Advisory Group (CSAG) and Mexican CSAG, as well as the National Gender Youth Activists (NGYAs) remain committed to the core vision of Generation Equality. We also remain accountable to our role as representatives of wider and diverse youth constituencies. As such, we will continue to work to build and advocate for a meaningful and substantive youth participation and leadership across the GEF process, from an intersectional, feminist, accountability and co-creation-centered approach. We invite all actors across the GEF process to join us in allyship and solidarity, and to work to implement the recommendations built collectively by youth, so that youth may truly be "in the driving seat" of the Generation Equality process.

Young Feminist Manifesto

GENERATION EQUALITY FORUM

Action Coalition Youth Leaders
National Gender Youth Activists
Youth Task Force