



**GENDER, PEACE & SECURITY IN BRIEF #7**

## **Feminist Foreign Policy in Practice**

Linking good practices and lessons learned from the Women, Peace and Security Agenda to Feminist Foreign Policy

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## INTRODUCTION

Since Sweden adopted its Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP) in 2014, several countries have enacted similar policies, including Canada (2017), France (2019), Mexico (2020), Germany (2021), Luxembourg (2021), Spain (2021), Chile (2022), Colombia (2022), Liberia (2022) and Scotland (2022).<sup>1</sup> In general, by adopting a FFP, a government pledges to advance gender equality through its foreign relations and policies. This can be done through a variety of measures that range from expanding international cooperation resources that contribute to gender equality, to increasing women's representation amongst foreign service personnel.

While FFP is becoming a trend among countries that see the benefits of applying a gender lens to international relations, this trend may be followed by a counter trend if FFPs do not ensure a strong support base or are not effectively communicated and implemented. This article will lay out basic FFP concepts and discuss what is needed to ensure they remain legitimate and effective. The article will also provide some examples of how good practices and lessons learned from already existing frameworks,

1 UN Women. 2022. "Feminist Foreign Policies: An Introduction." In Brief. New York: UN Women. Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-09/Brief-Feminist-foreign-policies-en.pdf>. See also: Scottish Government. "Scotland's feminist approach to foreign policy: background note." 2 November 2022. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/background-note-scotlands-feminist-approach-foreign-policy/>.

such as the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda, can be used to improve the development and implementation efforts of a Feminist Foreign Policy framework.

Gender Associations had the opportunity to informally talk to 20 diplomats from 15 countries while moderating and participating in events and workshops on FFP organized by Germany's Federal Foreign Office (Auswärtiges Amt), as well as with selected experts from the field. This article is informed by those conversations as well as by decades of experience and lessons learned in the WPS agenda in different countries and contexts.

## WHAT IS A FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY?

While there are no official, defined parameters of what comprises a feminist foreign policy, some of the earliest feminist foreign policies have included a few **common traits**. These traits include the aim to advance gender equality, are conceptually anchored in a human rights framework and are intended to be applied both internally and externally across all areas of foreign policy.<sup>2</sup> The

2 International Women's Development Agency. 2020. "Feminist Foreign Policy in Practice -Comparative Analysis of Country Frameworks." Policy Brief. Available at: <https://iwda.org.au/assets/files/Comparative-analysis-of-feminist-foreign-policies.pdf>.

three R's – rights, representation and resources – to advance gender equality that were the pillars of Sweden's pioneering FFP are also present in these early FFPs.<sup>3</sup>

By adding the word “feminist” to their Foreign Policies, these countries have not only reaffirmed their existing normative commitments to gender equality, but have also indicated their political will to prioritize a feminist perspective. What a feminist perspective actually means, however, could have varied definitions and interpretations. Some view FFP as a feminist quest to disrupt power dynamics and broader systems of oppression. For example, the Center for Feminist Foreign Policy, which is the first civil society organization to focus on this topic, views a feminist foreign policy as a way to “elevate women's and marginalised groups' experiences and agency and scrutinise the destructive forces of patriarchy, colonisation, heteronormativity, capitalism, racism, imperialism, and

<sup>3</sup> The Swedish Government has built its FFP around the three “Rs”, defined as follows:

- **Rights:** (to) promote all women's and girls' full enjoyment of human rights, including by combating all forms of violence and discrimination that restrict their freedom of action.
  - **Representation:** (to) promote women's participation and influence in decision-making processes at all levels and in all areas, and shall seek dialogue with women representatives at all levels, including in civil society.
  - **Resources:** (to) work to ensure that resources are allocated to promote gender equality and equal opportunities for all women and girls to enjoy human rights.
- See:** Ministry of Foreign Affairs. 2018. Handbook Sweden's feminist foreign policy. Stockholm: Government Offices of Sweden. Available at: [https://www.swedenabroad.se/globalassets/ambassador/zimbabwe-harare/documents/handbook\\_swedens-feminist-foreign-policy.pdf](https://www.swedenabroad.se/globalassets/ambassador/zimbabwe-harare/documents/handbook_swedens-feminist-foreign-policy.pdf).

militarism.”<sup>4</sup> Various civil society and academic authors have also proposed definitions that call for FFPs to advance inclusion, intersectionality, cooperation, demilitarization and a strong commitment to peace.<sup>5</sup>

The above mentioned principles proposed by advocates and academics may not be fully incorporated in all feminist foreign policies, but existing policies do show a political commitment to shifting the gender status quo to more equal and just societies through different strategies. One of the strongest expressions of such political will was the announcement by some countries of significant increased financial targets to advance gender equality:

- Canada established a goal of 95 percent of its bilateral international development assistance to target or integrate gender equality;
- France pledged to allocate 50 percent of its Official Development Assistance (ODA) to projects that include an objective to reduce gender equality;
- the United Kingdom vowed to

<sup>4</sup> See Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy website. Available at: <https://centreforfeministforeignpolicy.org/>.

<sup>5</sup> Zilla, C. 2022. “Feminist Foreign Policy: Concepts, core components and controversies.” SWP Comment No. 48. Berlin: Stiftung für Wirtschaft und Politik (SWP). Available at: [https://www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/comments/2022C48\\_FeministForeignPolicy.pdf](https://www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/comments/2022C48_FeministForeignPolicy.pdf). See also: Cheung, J. et al. 2021. “Practicing Feminist Foreign Policy in the Everyday: A Toolkit.” Berlin: WILPF, Heinrich Böll Foundation. Available at: [https://www.boell.de/sites/default/files/2022-02/220201\\_WILPF\\_V2.pdf](https://www.boell.de/sites/default/files/2022-02/220201_WILPF_V2.pdf).

triple its support to grassroots women's rights organizations;<sup>6</sup> and

- Germany aims to deploy 100 percent of its humanitarian assistance in a gender-sensitive or gender-targeted manner.<sup>7</sup>

Mexico has also used their FFPs to establish other concrete ambitious goals, such as committing to reaching full employment parity in its Foreign Service by 2024.<sup>8</sup> While this type of tangible target ensures the prioritization of gender equality, some FFPs have also been innovative in changing how they are implemented. For example, the FFPs of Canada and the UK<sup>9</sup> significantly intensify partnerships with women's organizations, and the Mexico and German FFPs stress the importance of intersectionality.<sup>10</sup>

## FOR A SUCCESSFUL FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY

Feminist foreign policies draw their origins from global activism as well as normative and policy advances forged by gender equality and feminist advocates for over a century. Women's activism for peace, human rights and equality has been at the center of the development of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and other international and regional frameworks that serve as both State commitments and inspiration for the design of foreign and development policies that equally deliver and benefit all members of society. FFPs must thus, first and foremost, rely on and build on existing expertise instead of reinventing the wheel. This experience confirms that **some of the key elements to a successful FFP include:**

- **Clear definitions and a common understanding** of what FFP means in theory and practice among all stakeholders involved;
- **Gender-responsive context analysis** that enables policymakers and policy implementers to understand inequalities, gaps and areas for action in specific contexts of foreign relations as well as in their own foreign service institutions

6 International Women's Development Agency. 2020. "Feminist Foreign Policy in Practice -Comparative Analysis of Country Frameworks." Policy Brief. Available at: <https://iwda.org.au/assets/files/Comparative-analysis-of-feminist-foreign-policies.pdf>.

7 German Federal Foreign Office. 2023. Shaping Feminist Foreign Policy - Federal Foreign Office Guidelines. Available at: <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/blob/2585076/4d2d295dad8fb1c41c6271d2c1a41d75/ffp-leitlinien-data.pdf>.

8 International Women's Development Agency. 2020. "Feminist Foreign Policy in Practice -Comparative Analysis of Country Frameworks." Policy Brief. Available at: <https://iwda.org.au/assets/files/Comparative-analysis-of-feminist-foreign-policies.pdf>.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

(gender audits);

- **Transparent, inclusive and participatory policy processes**

that allow for the integration of the perspectives of women's and human rights advocates and organisations, ensuring that the FFP reflects existing needs and demands as well as expanding the support base for the FFP;

- **Adequate gender expertise and capacities** that go beyond assigning a woman as a gender focal point, but rather ensure that the set policy goals can be met and their success measured;

- **Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning** mechanisms that contribute to effective implementation and an active learning feedback cycle to capture lessons learned and inform any necessary adaptations to the plan;

- **An expanded support base**, including government, technical experts and civil society, to support proper implementation and the sustainability of the FFP should there be a change of government.

### **Clear definitions and a common understanding of FFP**

To have a clear and solid conceptual basis for a successful FFP is to ensure a deep understanding of how gender and intersecting issues influence individual and institutional choices

and power dynamics. The role that gender plays in social and economic power dynamics is often undervalued in the design and implementation of policies, thus hindering their effectiveness.

Whereas the concept of gender is often misunderstood, it is also sometimes intentionally misinterpreted with the aim of opposing gender equality. This is the case with the anti-gender movement and their anti-"gender ideology" discourse, which represent a serious challenge to progress towards gender equality. Terms like 'feminism' have long been seen as something aggressive and threatening by those comfortable with the traditional gender status quo in most societies. The clarification of what feminism means in a foreign policy context and how it contributes to greater equality, justice and peace for all has been made in recent decades by various actors, including foreign ministers such as Annalena Baerbock in the German Parliament in 2022.<sup>11</sup>

Nevertheless, differences in perceptions of what feminism means may also exist within institutions of the same government. It is therefore important for the government to have a clear communications strategy, both internally and for the public, to

<sup>11</sup> German Federal Foreign Office. 2022. Speech by Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock at the Conference on Shaping Feminist Foreign Policy. Berlin. Available at: <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/newsroom/news/feminist-foreign-policy/2551610>.

increase awareness of the FFP, its objectives and how they will be met in order to achieve political coherence and overall success.

### **Gender-responsive context analysis**

Gender analysis methodologies<sup>12</sup> have long been used by governments and political analysts in situations of peace as well as conflict.<sup>13</sup> While conflict analysis<sup>14</sup> has been used by foreign offices and international and regional institutions such as the European Union<sup>15</sup>, an intersectional gender perspective has not yet been coherently applied across the board and has yet to become a priority focus beyond the theoretical narrative.

In the field of Women, Peace and Security, a tool called **Gender-Responsive Conflict Analysis (GRCA)**<sup>16</sup> was developed to provide this type of accurate diagnosis when investigating

12 See for example: March, C., I. Smyth and M. Mukhopadhyay. 1999. *A Guide to Gender-analysis Frameworks*. Oxford: Oxfam. Available at: <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/a-guide-to-gender-analysis-frameworks-115397/>.

13 Myrtilinen, H., N. Popovic and L. Khattab. 2016. "Measuring gender' in peacebuilding: Evaluating peacebuilding efforts from a gender-relational perspective." London: International Alert. Available at: <https://www.international-alert.org/publications/measuring-gender-in-peacebuilding/>.

14 "Conflict analysis is a structured inquiry into the causes and potential direction of a conflict. It seeks to identify opportunities for managing or resolving disputes without recourse to violent action." See: <https://www.usip.org/publications/conflict-analysis-questions-and-answers-author>

15 European Union. *Guidance Note on the Use of Conflict Analysis in Support of EU External Action*. Brussels: European Union. Available at: <https://europa.eu/capacity4dev/public-fragility/wiki/guidance-note-use-conflict-analysis-support-eu-external-action>.

16 See for example: UN Women. 2022. "Guidance Note – Gender-Responsive Conflict Analysis." Available at: <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/03/gender-responsive-conflict-analysis>.

a conflict's dynamics and drivers as well as its peace catalysts. A gender-responsive conflict analysis explores—with a gender lens—systems of power, institutions, stakeholders, root causes, triggers and drivers of conflict and peace. This type of tool helps bring to light, for example, the existence of underestimated conflict drivers and the potential peacemaking role of certain stakeholders, looking not only into the role of women and girls, but also men and boys, as well as gender diverse people. Specific constructions regarding masculinities, for example, often explain certain violent behaviors, which could be addressed as routes for peace.

Another helpful analytical tool that could be useful to inform the design and strategy of a FFP is Gender-based Analysis+ (GBA+), which the Canadian Government has used across its federal government agencies for almost two decades now. This approach "is an analytical process designed to help us ask questions, challenge assumptions and identify potential impacts, taking into account the diversity of Canadians. In addition to sex and gender, GBA Plus considers all identity factors, such as race, ethnicity, religion, age and mental and physical disability."<sup>17</sup> Canada has developed and provided tools, resources and a four-day course for all its government officials, bureaucrats

17 Government of Canada. "What is Gender-based Analysis Plus?" Available at: <https://women-gender-equality.canada.ca/en/gender-based-analysis-plus/what-gender-based-analysis-plus.html>.



and diplomats to enhance capacities around the use of this tool. This could be a helpful approach for other countries looking to develop FFPs.

### **Transparent, inclusive and participatory policy processes**

A key principle of a FFP is inclusivity, regarding those marginalized and affected by the foreign policy but also for those who will implement the policy. In practice, participatory consultations have been done by several countries in the process of developing WPS National Action Plans (NAPs). Other tools and guidance on ensuring inclusivity in these processes have been developed by civil society organizations and experts.<sup>18</sup> This type of inclusive process ensures that a plan or a policy reflects the complexity of each context and generates an engagement of various stakeholders, both within a foreign relations institution as well as beyond it, which may contribute to the FFP's implementation and sustainability.

Self-critical reflection on the effects of one's own foreign policy is a good practice in line with feminist principles. For example, the German Federal Foreign Office contracted Gender Associations in 2020 to conduct a study on perceptions of Germany's commitment and implementation of the Women, Peace

18 Women for Women International. GAPS. Saferworld. Womankind. Amnesty International. 2020. "Beyond Consultations- A tool for meaningfully engaging with women in fragile and conflict-affected states." London.

and Security agenda, including in specific countries of Afghanistan, Colombia, Mali and Ukraine.<sup>19</sup> In general, input provided by members of society who are diverse in age, gender identity, capacities, socio-political status, cultural background and religious beliefs is highly beneficial to find effective policy and practical solutions to complex problems, potential conflicts and existing inequalities.

### **Adequate gender expertise and capacity**

The inclusion and appreciation of diverse expertise, experiences, knowledge and skills, especially from civil society actors from other countries and policymakers, are key to a self-critical and anti-colonial foreign policy. As noted by Achilleos-Sarll et al, "Challenging the epistemic violence of narrating FFP as a Global North product, practice, and export, these feminist objectives go beyond the representation of women and extend, more importantly, to commitments to empathetic and ethical foreign policies in support of gender justice and human rights, often rooted in the struggles of marginalized people."<sup>20</sup>

FFPs would, therefore, need to develop ways to engage human

19 Gender Associations. 2020. The Other Side of the Mirror- Perceptions of Germany's commitment to women, peace and security. Berlin. Available at: <https://www.genderassociations.com/2020/10/23/the-other-side-of-the-mirror>

20 Achilleos-Sarll, C., et al. 2023. "The Past, Present, and Future(s) of Feminist Foreign Policy." *International Studies Review*. 25 (1), p. 5.

rights advocates and gender experts from marginalized groups from the countries that will be most affected by a foreign policy. This would allow that informed decisions, technical input and expertise come directly from the source.

The skills and capacities of foreign diplomats would also need to go beyond the conventional diplomatic education and training and include strategies and tools to find sustainable and peaceful solutions to the multifaceted challenges of our times. Empathetic reflexivity<sup>21</sup>, which allows for a deep understanding of other people's positions and perceptions, could therefore be a key qualification to be developed in diplomatic careers under Feminist Foreign Policies.

### **An expanded support base**

Political will throughout ministries, foreign representatives, embassies and consulates is key to ensuring political coherence and effective implementation of a FFP. At the same time a feminist foreign policy also has to align with domestic policies and strategies. If other branches of the government are not feminist and on board, a FFP is less credible and harder to advocate for and implement.

Beyond government representatives, technical experts and civil society

21 Cheung, J. et al. 2021. "Practicing Feminist Foreign Policy in the Everyday: A Toolkit." Berlin: WILPF, Heinrich Böll Foundation. Available at: [https://www.boell.de/sites/default/files/2022-02/220201\\_WILPF\\_V2.pdf](https://www.boell.de/sites/default/files/2022-02/220201_WILPF_V2.pdf).

organizations with adequate expertise can contribute to a more specific and sustainable implementation and ensure that a FFP would not simply disappear in the event of a change of government. A FFP should also actively engage with social movements that bring emerging issues to the agenda, such as climate change or global pandemics.<sup>22</sup>

Whereas a well-implemented FFP already enhances the support base for FFPs, other measures are also needed, such as developing narratives that show the importance of placing women at the center of public policies, including Foreign Policy.

### **Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning**

Clearly and inclusively formulated theories of change, goals, vision and targets should set the stage for FFP principles and guidelines, just like other policies and national action plans. A FFP should link to other policies that address gender inequality and social injustice also in domestic affairs. Existing WPS NAPs, gender markers and gender policies should all be aligned with a FFP. This also includes the harmonisation of data collection and reporting. Similar to successful WPS NAP practices, continuous learning and feedback loops to gather and discuss best

22 Aamer, F. 2021. "South Asia's Climate Crisis Beckons -A Gender Policy Approach." South Asian Voices. 13 October. Stimson Centre. Available at: <https://southasianvoices.org/south-asias-climate-crisis-beckons-a-gender-balanced-policy-approach/>.



practices in implementation and remaining gaps and challenges can be supported through participatory and interactive annual reporting mechanisms.

## CONCLUSIONS

Feminist foreign policies create unique opportunities to translate political will into practical efforts to advance gender equality and intersectional issues through foreign relations and actions. For the current trend to continue, existing FFPs must show effective implementation results and secure an expanded support base.

To do so, a feminist foreign policy must reflect on who is shaping foreign policy, who is affected by it and how it can contribute to transformative change towards a more equal and just world. This can be achieved through gender parity in decision-making positions; gender and conflict sensitivity, skills and knowledge; gender action plans, tools and increased capacities in diplomacy; development programmes; and project support.

Some of the tools and steps to achieve the above should include an **accurate context diagnosis of the hidden drivers, dynamics and actors holding power positions and access to resources** through a **gender**

**analysis; a planning process** that engages key stakeholders, including civil society and those who will be most affected by foreign policies, and sets concrete and measurable actions; and a **monitoring, evaluation and learning system** that helps to improve implementation and ensure accountability.

For an **expanded support base**, the very **processes** of developing and implementing a FFP should be used to generate strong and wide engagement. In addition, awareness-raising strategies and **narratives** should be developed to explain the positive impacts that advancing gender equality through foreign policy can have on the lives of women, girls and LGBTQI+ people, but also the gains and benefits for society as a whole.

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