

Where next for feminist foreign policy?

Ján Michalko
December 2023



Key messages

Feminism is a term that can be polarising, creating both traction and intense reaction around the world wherever it is applied. This generates both advantages and challenges in the context of advancing and implementing feminist foreign policy (FFP).

This ODI briefing note draws out the current tensions and opportunities for states in the FFP space, sketching the current landscape of debates and providing guidance on how to navigate the ambitions and principles behind the FFP agenda.

FFP states and those inspired by feminist ideas can enhance their policy impact and credibility by: clearly articulating what makes their foreign affairs and policies feminist; recognising the diversity of feminist policies; embracing critical introspection and engaging with domestic policy issues.

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Cover photo: Placard asking 'Where is your feminist foreign policy?' at a rally in solidarity with the protests in Iran. Berlin, Germany on 28 September 2022. Credit: ©Achim Wagner/Shutterstock

How to cite: Michalko, J. (2023) 'Where next for feminist foreign policy?' ODI Briefing note. London: ODI (<https://odi.org/en/publications/where-next-feminist-foreign-policy>).

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Gender Equality and Social Inclusion team colleagues, especially Emilie Tant, Caroline Harper and Ayesha Khan for their numerous rounds of feedback, edits and thoughtful advice. Thank you also to Aatif Somji, Diana Jiménez Thomas Rodriguez, Diana Koester, Natasha Wright and Abdul Shahab for their support of the feminist foreign policy (FFP) convenings and research agenda.

The author would also like to thank peer reviewers Spogmay Ahmed from the Feminist Foreign Policy Collective and Megan Daigle from the Humanitarian Policy Group for their insightful and critical feedback.

Furthermore, the authors are immensely grateful to ALIGN's funders including the Government of Canada (through Global Affairs Canada) and Irish Aid.

Lastly, huge appreciation goes to numerous scholars and practitioners who contributed to the team's thinking about FFP through their writing and discussions, including Toni Haastrup, Annika Bergman Rosamond, and all the participants in ODI's FFP convenings.

About this publication

This briefing note forms part of the ODI series: *Where next for feminist foreign policy?* and was developed from a set of closed-door roundtables with leading experts and feminist actors.

It aims to bridge technical expertise, feminist advocacy and global scholarship, and delves into emerging aspects of feminist foreign policy. This series intends to advance understanding on intersecting agendas to establish potential directions for future research and policy.

About the author

Ján Michalko is a Research Fellow in the Gender Equality and Social Inclusion team at ODI.

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Introduction

About this briefing note

There are various approaches to defining, articulating, and implementing feminist foreign policies (FFPs). This ODI briefing note outlines some of the approaches that have been piloted by several governments and proposed by academics and civil society alike. As debates over the benefits and desirability of FFP continue, governments exploring FFPs may wish to consider these approaches when engaging with feminist principles and goals in their international relations. This is with a view to enhance the desired gender justice outcomes of the policies – and to build accountability for their commitments to feminist principles. In so doing, they may also enhance the acceptance and credibility of FFP as an endeavour, especially among feminists who seek to hold governments accountable to the promise of feminist values and practices.

The approaches discussed in this briefing note emerge from existing literature, together with new insights gathered from ODI's closed-door convening series: *Where next for Feminist Foreign Policy?* hosted online from May to August 2023. Building on the expertise of FFP scholars and global feminist actors participating in these conversations, this paper serves as a background to complement a set of issue-specific ODI policy briefs that outline policy proposals on emerging areas for action and attention in FFP, namely: anti-gender backlash, the climate crisis, and funding feminist movements. Developed from and expanding on the roundtable discussions, these briefings offer timely guidance for establishing governments substantive FFP work.

Feminist foreign policy in a time of polycrisis

'Feminist diplomacy is effective when it calls for shift of mindset.

From confrontation – to dialogue, engagement, cooperation and peace.'

Amina Mohammed, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations
remarks at the FFP+ ministerial meeting, UNGA 2023.

Multiple compounding crises are now a defining feature of the international landscape (World Economic Forum, 2023). These include the accelerating climate crisis and the economic precarity of millions of people, which has been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic and the economic fall-out of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, among other causes (Roy, 2022; Bjerde, 2023). At the same time, there are more than 108 million forcibly displaced people worldwide due to ongoing conflicts and instability in countries like Sudan, Yemen and Myanmar (UNHCR, 2023), as well as renewed violence in Palestine and the broader Middle East region causing an unprecedented scale of humanitarian need.

Volatile geopolitics across multiple countries and regional blocks – all vying to be centres of power – is frustrating the efforts to solve these crises (Debusscher and Manners, 2020). It also provides fertile ground for populist actors who seek to gain and sustain power by exploiting people's fears

and vulnerabilities. By scapegoating minorities for political and economic failures, autocratic leaders can erode the rights of the most marginalised, including women, LGBTQI+ and racialised people, and those with migration experiences, and thus ultimately weakening democratic values and institutions through anti-gender discourses (Khan et al., 2023a).

The resulting global economic and political challenges to equality, sustainable development and peace call for new and innovative foreign policy responses, as the approaches used to date have not succeeded in averting instability and conflict. Feminist foreign policies (FFPs), and policies inspired by feminist principles (albeit not explicitly labelled as such), can provide governments with alternative approaches to conducting international relations with states, civil society organisations and other actors, as a way to respond to the current polycrisis.

Feminist policies differentiate themselves from hegemonic approaches to conducting international relations that tend to be based on self-interest, competition or conflict, perpetuating an unjust and unequal status quo (Guerrina et al., 2023). When carefully designed and implemented in good faith, FFPs promise to lead to the advancement of non-violent, non-exploitative, and equality-driven foreign affairs, and the upholding of a human-rights-based international order.

The current FFP landscape

Over the last five years, governments with feminist and feminist-inspired policies, especially in Latin America, have been growing in numbers (Soto and Papworth, 2023). In 2023, the group has swelled to 15 and includes Chile, Colombia and Scotland (Thompson et al., 2023). Many governments clearly perceive a benefit to conducting foreign relations according to feminist principles and in pursuit of feminist goals.

Feminist principles and goals have influenced foreign policy before the introduction of explicit FFPs in 2014 by the government of Sweden. Even as its then Minister of Foreign Affairs, Margot Wallström kickstarted the era of FFPs, she built on the work of gender equality activists and women's rights advocates around the world (Gill-Atkinson et al., 2021; Thomson, 2022). Also, advancing the legacy of generations of women and feminist bureaucrats who have worked within the diplomatic institutions of their states to promote human rights for all (Aggestam and True, 2023).

Responding to the needs and experiences of women and other oppressed groups, generations of feminists, rights advocates and scholars have made explicit and implicit demands to foreign governments. These included, among others, freedom and justice demands against colonial and occupying powers, or calls for support from allied governments within multilateral forums, such as the United Nations (UN). For example, feminists and women's rights organisations, such as the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, called for peace and lobbied against the use of nuclear weapons around the world since the 1910s (WILPF, n.d.).

Similarly, FFP builds on a long track record of the Women, Peace and Security agenda, as taken forward in UN Security Council Resolution 1325, which mandates women's representation in peace

processes as one of the mechanisms to ensure gendered experiences of conflict are considered (GAPS, 2023). Yet, despite a long and successful global track record of feminist activism for gender equality and other social justice causes, politicians and civil society alike remain uncertain about attaching a feminist descriptor to foreign policy.

On the one hand, some actors perceive feminism as polarising to both domestic and external audiences, which allegedly inhibits the pursuit of an international gender equality agenda. For example, Sweden's government led by Ulf Kristersson withdrew the country's FFP in 2022 (Thompson et al., 2023). While the government committed at the time to continue gender equality work without the 'polarising' feminist label, the ambitions of Swedish foreign policy in development cooperation, for example, have been weakened as a result of the rollback of FFP (see for example Myklebust, 2023). The concern over feminist polarisation has led several scholars and activists to call for a strategic (non)use of the label in service of achieving feminist goals (Abdul Rahman and Bump, 2022).

On the other hand, some feminists are concerned that governments can weaken the transformative values of feminism by calling their policies feminist, while continuing to conduct international relations in non-feminist ways (Scheyer and Kumskova, 2019; Rivera Chávez, 2022; Zhukova et al., 2022). Put differently, some feminists are concerned that FFPs have become acts of co-optation – or so-called 'pink and purple washing' (using the language of LGBTQI+ feminist activists) – to boost the country's image with other governments and their citizens at home (Thomson, 2022; Sowa, 2023). Some claim this can be seen in several examples, such as that of Canada, which pursues feminist international development policy, while its mining companies are causing adverse ecological, social, health and economic impact on women and indigenous communities in many Latin American countries (FFP Working Group, 2021; Jiménez Rodríguez, 2023).

States' unease with adopting a feminist label is also based on past cases of governments exploiting women's rights to pursue foreign policy objectives that are antithetical to feminist principles. This was the case, for example, with the United States' justification of the invasion of Afghanistan (Shepherd, 2006). The current context of anti-gender backlash also exacerbates these fears. Many anti-gender actors – from civil society organisations, through to think tanks and governments – purposefully drive misleading debates about gender and feminisms (Khan et al., 2023a). For example, organisations defending so-called 'natural' or 'traditional' family values falsely portray feminist and LGBTQI+ movements as a threat to a largely non-existent ideal of a nuclear heteronormative family as the cornerstone of civilisation (McEwen and Narayanaswamy, 2023).

The decision to pursue FFPs is thus not straightforward or easy. It divides both feminists and government leaders. However, there are approaches to designing and implementing FFPs that have emerged over the last decade that can improve their quality and, consequently, their acceptance in ways that safeguard feminist principles. When meaningfully considered, these approaches could help governments move closer to the important and urgent ambition of promoting gender equality, transforming unequal, unjust systems and promoting values of peace and collaboration. Three of these approaches are discussed in turn.

1 Clearly articulate what makes foreign affairs and policies feminist

Supporting women and girls and mainstreaming gender-equality goals in all aspects of foreign affairs are commonly agreed elements of FFPs. This is a shared component in FFPs currently in practice and in FFP definitions articulated by scholars (Alwan and Weldon, 2017; Aggestam et al., 2019) and civil society actors (The Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy, 2021; Thompson et al., 2021; Papagiotti, 2023). However, as much as the pursuit of gender equality is an essential component of feminist policies, it does not encompass the depth and breadth of feminist principles and ambitions.

Feminist approaches should influence both **the content of foreign policies** as well as **the process of their design and implementation**. This is embedded in feminists' recognition that power inequalities are at the heart of injustices and are woven into institutions in charge of foreign affairs and international relations. The so-called '3R' framework – rights, representation, resources – was developed by the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs as a practical way of operationalising these feminist principles in foreign policy. The framework represents one of Sweden's lasting legacies, even after the FFP was withdrawn, because many governments continue to use it (George, 2022).

The 3Rs highlight that a feminist approach means increasing women's **representation** in decision-making, promoting their **rights**, and allocating adequate **resources** to achieve this (Government offices of Sweden, 2018). The framework has been expanded to include other Rs, such as 'research' in order to monitor their implementation and impact, or 'reality check' for localisation.

Meaningful participation of women and other oppressed groups is an enhanced and more ambitious form of numerical **representation** and inclusion. It is rooted in feminist ethics of care, which means considering the lived experiences and systemic exclusions of those unfairly discriminated and marginalised by systems of power such as gender, race or class, among others (see Aggestam and Rosamond, 2019, and Robinson, 2021). Meaningful participation has been operationalised in countries like Spain and Colombia through a co-creative drafting process with civil society organisations and the establishment of high-level advisory groups.

Participation is inherently tied to enabling access to and equal enjoyment of human **rights** by all women in their diversity, as enshrined in global frameworks, charters and protocols, as well as national legal systems. For some FFP countries, such as Germany or Canada, this is manifested in their support for women's improved utilisation of the legal systems and judiciary institutions, as well as support of their economic and sexual and reproductive rights.

Meaningful participation and representation also necessitate **resources** in the form of funding to enable feminists to network, strategise and influence decision-making. As a result, providing more flexible, long-term and unrestricted funding and other resources to feminist movements has been a key demand of feminist actors vis-à-vis FFP governments (Mama Cash, 2022).

Adopting feminist principles in foreign policies, through the 3Rs or otherwise, is an ambitious journey, with the ultimate goal of transforming international relations' objectives and practices. This ambition differentiates FFPs from policies of countries such as Norway or Australia that pursue gender equality in foreign affairs, but do not necessarily subscribe to feminist principles in foreign policy (Pradela and Ridge, 2023). However, in practice, the lines between gender-equality focused and feminist policies are often blurred. This may be because many gender-equality practitioners are influenced by feminist and social justice ideas. Conversely, it may also be due to insufficient understanding of the distinction, the lack of political will, or constraints to go beyond merely adopting the feminist label in name.

Due to high levels of feminist ambition to conduct foreign relations differently – with an ethics of care and in pursuit of the transformation of unequal systems – some international relations practitioners have viewed FFPs as unrealistic and unachievable (see, David Duriesmith, 2018, for discussion on whether states can be feminist actors). Others, however, have argued that being inspired by, and striving for, an ambitious feminist vision is a worthwhile endeavour. This can be a meaningful journey if governments explicitly acknowledge their intermediate shortcomings and identify ways and timeframes in which they would seek to address them – preferably in a collaborative way with feminist movements and organisations.

For example, in appreciating that the depth and breadth of feminist principles create a high bar, Germany has recognised that it will not always be able to achieve the ideal feminist values and goals as articulated and envisioned by civil society actors. Therefore, it approaches FFP implementation with a strong degree of pragmatism (Federal Foreign Office, 2023). Moreover, together with Chile (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Chile, 2023), Germany approaches its FFP endeavours as a process of ongoing learning, treating the policies as 'live documents'.

Actions that governments initiating and advancing FFP should consider:

- **Identify and communicate what makes specific foreign policies feminist.** This can be done in the form of setting the objectives and purpose of the policies as suggested by Thompson (2020). For example, by changing internal operations and practices of Ministries of Foreign Affairs to increase women's representation across all levels, but especially in the highest managerial and diplomatic posts. Other examples include mainstreaming power analysis in decision-making, or collaborative ways of working.

FFP governments could also articulate what practices and policies represent 'red lines' incompatible with feminist principles – such as carrying out military occupation of another country's territories – and hold other FFP governments accountable to meet these expectations.

- **Develop learning, implementation and adaption plans.** Approaching FFPs as ‘live documents’ would allow governments to clearly recognise shortcomings in FFP ambitions and ideals, while demonstrating humility and awareness of constraints posed by realpolitik that make the achievement of FFP an ongoing, long-term process.

The implementation plans require articulating milestones and other markers, against which the progress towards FFPs can be measured and developed in collaboration with feminist organisations. These plans can include the adoption of specific policies, such as the inclusion of gender considerations in trade agreements. It also necessitates an allocation of tasks amongst various government and parastatal agencies and staff. This will enable better assessment of whether feminist ideals are being achieved and under which conditions they will be met in the future.

- **Increase collaboration and coalition building for joint learning and action.** This can be done especially among FFP states, countries inspired by feminism and others working towards gender equality. Such collaborations include for example the Feminist Foreign Policy Plus (FFP+) group of countries at the UN, which produced its first joint declaration at the General Assembly in September 2023 (FFP+, 2023).

2 Recognise the diversity of feminist policies

Several civil society actors, such as the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) and the FFP Collaborative, have succeeded in building a cross-country consensus behind a shared, globally informed definition of FFP (see Box 1). However, the overview of countries' FFP documents shows that there continues to be differences in priorities and approaches both on paper and in real-world conduct (Zhukova et al., 2022).

Box 1 FFP definitions

The Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy:

'A Feminist Foreign Policy is a political framework centred around the wellbeing of marginalised people and invokes processes of self-reflection regarding foreign policy's hierarchical global systems. FFP takes a step outside the black box approach of traditional foreign policy thinking and its focus on military force, violence, and domination by offering an alternate and intersectional rethinking of security from the viewpoint of the most vulnerable. It is a multidimensional policy framework that aims to elevate women's and marginalised groups' experiences and agency to scrutinise the destructive forces of patriarchy, colonisation, heteronormativity, capitalism, racism, imperialism, and militarism. CFFP believes a feminist approach to foreign policy provides a powerful lens through which we can interrogate the violent global systems of power that leave millions of people in perpetual states of vulnerability.'

The FFP Collaborative:

'The policy of a state that defines its interactions with other states, as well as movements and other non-state actors, in a manner that prioritizes peace, gender equality and environmental integrity; enshrines, promotes, and protects the human rights of all; seeks to disrupt colonial, racist, patriarchal and male-dominated power structures; and allocates significant resources, including research, to achieve that vision. Feminist foreign policy is coherent in its approach across all of its levers of influence, anchored by the exercise of those values at home and co-created with feminist activists, groups and movements, at home and abroad.'

Sources: CFFP, 2023; Thompson et al., 2023: 1.

These differences stem in part from feminists' diverse understanding of causes and solutions to the oppression of women and other oppressed groups, understandings that are rooted in varied lived experiences and cosmologies. Examples of these diverse approaches include pan-African feminist thought (see Haastrup et al., 2023) or First Nations' approaches to foreign policy based on values of **respect, relationships, reciprocity, and responsibilities** (Blackwell and Ballangarry, 2022). Support for armed resistance is one of such tensions where diverse feminisms lead to different policy preferences and outcomes, where no unified position exists among feminist groups (see Box 2).

Box 2 Armed conflicts: a feminist conundrum

The full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, together with other military conflicts in Ethiopia, Syria or Yemen (to name a few), represent ongoing tangible tests for feminist principles in FFP. While commitment to peace and demilitarisation is a defining component of many conceptualisations of FFPs, so is the respect for and acceptance of the feminist demands of activists and women in partner countries.

In the case of Ukraine, the tension between these two feminist values demonstrated itself in differing views on the provision of arms. Many Ukrainian women see the supply of weapons as crucial for their survival and have, therefore, called on foreign governments to supply them. Other feminists around the world have been lobbying their governments to do the opposite, citing among other things the long-term negative impact that arms and weapons have on women after the end of the active phase of the conflict (for varying feminist views on conflict and militarisation see, for example, Tsybalyuk and Zamuruieva, 2022, and Porobić, 2022).

Appreciating these differences among feminisms, scholars and practitioners has led to the classification of FFPs based on various criteria. For example, Alwan and Weldon (2017) differentiate FFPs as being either:

- **liberal**, focusing on issues of legal reforms and documents, inclusion of women in existing institutions, and representation;
- **anti-militarist and pacifist**, focusing on issues such as military spending;
- **global intersectional feminist**, focusing on multiple types of inequalities that shape women's lived experiences and can be manifested in the allocation of official development aid spending to particular countries or groups of women, or the use of gender-based political persecution as a basis of refugee status claims.

Papagioti (2023) has since elaborated on Alwan and Weldon's definitions, developing an index to assess countries' performances on feminist issues such as migration, labour rights and climate.

These elements, as well as trade and defence, are included in many FFP definitions by civil society organisations and scholars because of their systems-level impact. However, it is these policy remits that often sit outside of the policy scope of Ministries of Foreign Affairs, with some notable exceptions such as Chile, whose FFP affects the type of trade agreements it seeks to sign (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Chile, 2023). Therefore, there has been limited success in adopting a whole-of-government approach.

The separation of policy domains by ministries can produce inconsistencies among government policies. This can ultimately negate ambitious feminist goals to challenge systemic drivers of gender inequalities, or to apply a feminist ethics of care. For example, promoting the sales of weapons and surveillance technology for economic growth through international trade agreements contradicts and undermines policies in support of women's rights, equality and safety, if the recipient countries' government use arms and technology to close civic space, curb women's rights and even exert gender-based violence. This has been the concern, for example, with arms sales to Saudi Arabia be it from Sweden, Spain or Canada (Rosamond et al., 2022; Wezeman et al., 2023).

Similar negative impacts can be seen in promoting private sector investment in foreign territories. For example, while companies from FFP countries may set up manufacturing plants or factories promoting economic growth and targeting women workers with seemingly economic empowerment benefits, this ignores the exploitation of women's low-paid labour in global supply chains. Such policies also overlook the prevalence of harassment and violence that occur in these jobs, and the precarity of working conditions, which therefore mitigates the gender-transformative potential of opportunities for economic empowerment (Hossain, 2019).

Demonstrating that individual governments do not own or have a unique mandate over feminist approaches, while also recognising similarities and differences among various feminist actors can enable important coalition-building with FFP and FFP-inspired governments and civil society. Collaboration and solidarity networks through FFP are necessary to successfully challenge anti-feminist and anti-gender backlash, as well as other forms of patriarchal resistance (Khan et al., 2023b).

Actions that governments initiating and advancing FFP should consider:

- **Acknowledge differences with feminist civil society actors.** While feminist approaches include engagement, collaboration and co-creation with feminist actors, in instances where alignment and shared ownership are not possible across the feminist spectrum, governments may consider acting and communicating with openness and transparency. For example, by providing clear rationale for specific policy choices and their alignment with feminist values and positions.

- **Tailor policy actions to the unique, context-specific demands of feminist countries and institutions, such as the UN.** Appreciating the unique and differentiated set of challenges and demands of feminists across time and locations, feminist policy actions should respond to the feminist organisations and networks located there. For example, policy responses to the oppression of LGBTQI+ people might look different across country contexts.
- **Explicitly name the focus of foreign policies if an all-encompassing, whole-of-government FFP approach is not achievable.** For example, governments could use terminology like ‘feminist international *development* policy’ or ‘international feminist *trade* policy’ rather than feminist foreign policies more broadly to demonstrate the limitations of its approach. This could be considered as a temporary measure during the development of an all-encompassing, whole-of-government feminist foreign policy, and should therefore be accompanied by specific plans to reach across other fields. Such a clear naming approach transparently recognises the extent of feminist ambition in foreign affairs.
- **Design institutional mechanisms to better facilitate collaboration of Ministries of Foreign Affairs with other government departments.** This can be achieved through creating individual posts, and advisory or coordination bodies, with a clear mandate and seniority to ensure greater policy cohesion and offer a clear direction on the implementation of FFP (Towns et al., 2023). These bodies can also have the responsibility to communicate any shortcomings of the integration of feminist principles in other foreign affairs remits to other feminist stakeholders at home and abroad.

3 Embrace critical introspection and engage with domestic policy issues

Feminist principles in foreign policy imply a consideration of power differences among countries, not least those shaped by the historical legacies of colonial exploitation and accompanying macroeconomic systems, which continue to influence global hierarchies and inequalities between global minority and majority countries.

‘We must start from a place of humility, vulnerability. From acknowledgement and self-awareness. Then collectively and boldly we can advance feminist principles and values, like inclusivity, sharing power, collaboration, and active listening.’

Rachel Kagoya, Head of Communications at FEMNET
remarks at the FFP+ ministerial meeting, UNGA 2023.

While governments in the Global South¹ have been at the forefront of the recent growth of FFP countries, many FFPs have been adopted by governments in the Global North, such as Canada, Spain and France (Sepúlveda et al., 2023). As these countries have championed FFP for many years, there remains a perception that the promotion of gender equality and feminist goals is about exporting Western agendas to the global majority world in a neocolonial fashion (Achilleos-Sarll, 2018; Berry et al., 2022).

This perception is strengthened among some global majority countries and feminist constituencies by the lack of overt and explicit action of FFP governments towards more economically powerful nations, such as the US or Hungary, where political, judicial and other actors in these countries are proactively weakening women’s rights, and where women from racial or ethnic minorities, face systemic discrimination (Datta, 2021; Shameem, 2021). FFP countries are therefore appraised as inconsistent when they do not take the same action towards Global North countries as they have towards countries in the Global South, as was the case of Norway for example, which withdrew bilateral development assistance to Uganda over their discrimination and persecution of LGBTQI+ communities (Saltnes and Thiel, 2021).

Ultimately, both perceived and real inconsistencies in engagement with economic and trade allies or partners over women’s rights and gender equality feed the critique of FFP governments that their self-interest trumps feminist commitments, which should be rooted in care for others (see Box 3).

1 The ‘Global North’ and ‘Global South’ are common terms used to categorise many countries around the world. Often, they are employed as substitutes for referring to nations’ historical experiences of colonisation. The author would like to acknowledge current international debates on the usefulness of these terms, which question whether another generalising and binary framework is productive for reconstituting and challenging global power relations. Similar terms like Majority/Minority World also face such critiques and varying degrees of acceptance.

Box 3 Covid-19 vaccine

A study by Gill-Atkinson et al. for International Women’s Development Agency (2021) found that the Covid-19 pandemic represented a global political upheaval that pushed countries to abandon their FFP principles in service of domestic interests first. Similarly, some nations were unwilling to waiver intellectual property rights to enable the mass production of vaccines in the Global South and for the Global South market. It made countries inwardly focused and revealed what David et al. described with reference to the European Union response as ‘hierarchies of privilege, through the global (non)distribution of life-saving technologies such as vaccines, and dissemination of knowledge about the spread of the virus during the peak of the pandemic’ (2023: 4). It damaged the notion of feminist solidarity and reinforced colonial global hierarchies.

Other challenges to states’ credibility in pursuing FFPs stem from countries’ lack of introspection (Cheung et al., 2021). Firstly, many countries do not explicitly acknowledge how their colonial histories are tied to present-day systems of intersecting oppression towards women and girls, and other groups – be it gender, sexual, racial or religious groups – in countries with which they conduct foreign relations. These legacies can include global trade and tax regimes, or the differentiated impact of the climate emergency in part caused by historical emissions of industrialised nations (Brehm-Christensen et al., 2023; see Jiménez Rodríguez, 2023 on implications for FFP).

To date, Germany has been the only country with FFP principles that has recognised its colonial and racist history:

‘Critical reflection on issues of power and the recognition of our own role and German colonial history serve as a basis for an open and honest dialogue about the past and about the future of relations.’ (Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2023: 11).

Secondly, due to the aforementioned separation of foreign affairs from policy remits considered domestic or internal, most FFP adopters do not sufficiently consider intersectional gender-based inequalities at home, and the need to improve gender equality and women’s rights within their own borders (Rosamond et al., 2022). Mexico, with its high levels of femicide and gender-based violence, has often been singled out for the perceived inconsistency between feminist ambitions abroad and domestically (Philipson Garcia, 2023).

However, similar contradictions arise for other countries, not least in the Global North, further undermining their legitimacy with civil society and Global South partners. France, for example, legislates to limit women’s bodily autonomy at home by banning women from dressing according to their religious beliefs, while advocating for girls’ and women’s rights over their bodies abroad.

Canada's policies, laws and social norms continue to discriminate and marginalise indigenous people, as evidenced by their high levels of unemployment and mental health problems (Midzain-Gobin and Dunton, 2021) and high numbers of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls (National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019).

The blurring of lines between domestic and foreign policies, while difficult to implement, is in line with feminist disruption of the traditional way of conceiving of and conducting foreign affairs. As many have argued, feminist approaches challenge binary ways of working and operating, recognising the complexity and intertwined nature of power. Therefore, FFP governments may improve their FFPs by simultaneously working domestically and within their own institutions.

Actions that governments initiating and advancing FFP should consider:

- **Work with feminist actors and relevant ministries to transform patriarchal gender norms and the understanding of feminist foreign policies in their own countries.** Working through their education sector, FFP governments could build greater support amongst their own citizens for feminist principles and gender-equitable norms (Harper et al., 2020). Working long term by conducting curriculum reform or running public awareness campaigns and adult education interventions, governments can increase people's understanding of feminisms and thus citizens' support for FFP.
- **Incorporate decolonial analysis when shaping FFPs,** including funding research and engagements on debates on restitution, reparations and other approaches towards justice and equality.
- **Future-proof commitments to FFP by embedding feminist practices and principles into ministries' operations, budgets and underlying legal frameworks.** This should be accompanied by coalition building across the wider political spectrum and strengthening the buy-in of diplomats and civil servants to be internal champions of feminist principles. These approaches demonstrate the appreciation to critically reflect on domestic contexts and the need to further strengthen support for feminist work domestically. Ultimately, they could help secure FFP's longevity across changes in countries' political leadership.
- **Build the skills, knowledge and confidence of staff across all government ministries to assess and implement policies consistent with key feminist ideas and concepts** such as intersectionality, coloniality and gender identities (knowledge and confidence levels tend to be quite low) (Debusscher, 2011; Towns et al. 2023). Conducting internal audit and analysis and subsequently building civil servants' and diplomats' awareness of feminist values and approaches, not least critical self-reflection, can contribute to improving the quality and consistency of FFP as well as ensure the continuity of policies through government changes and anti-gender backlash.

Conclusion

Feminist foreign policies offer governments a purposeful way of conducting international relations, and therefore the prospect of identifying different potential solutions to deal with the current state of polycrisis. Global challenges – including de-democratisation, backsliding on human rights and lack of political will to act on the climate emergency – require an urgent rethink of foreign policies based on different values and ways of working.

While challenging to implement in the context of rising anti-gender and anti-feminist backlash, feminist and feminist-inspired policies ought to be considered as alternative ways of securing a just future for all based on the ethics of care, and the experiences of women and other oppressed groups.

FFPs may be implemented more effectively and sustainably if FFP governments respond to the common challenges that they have experienced to date. Clearly articulating the types of feminist principles, policies, and scope of transformative ambition is key, as is recognising FFPs' shortcomings alongside plans to improve progress towards feminist ambitions. To ensure coherence, governments will make much progress by considering how these issues manifest domestically as well as internationally, across the various realms of foreign affairs. If governments engage transparently, meaningfully and humbly with feminist stakeholders around the world, they can better safeguard the feminist potential to achieve social justice, address global instability and start on their policy journey towards FFP.

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