



Feminist Foreign Policy: A feminist way forward for SROL development cooperation

Background

In 2014, Sweden adopted the world's first feminist foreign policy¹. Since then, a growing group of countries have adopted feminist foreign policies including Canada, France, Luxembourg, Mexico, Chile, Libya, the Netherlands, Spain.

*A feminist foreign policy (FFP) is a multidimensional policy framework that aims to elevate women's and marginalized groups' experiences and agency to scrutinize the destructive forces of patriarchy, colonization, heteronormativity, capitalism, racism, imperialism and militarism. 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.*²

There have been many attempts to define what is a Feminist Foreign Policy, its complexity and its nuances. While there are many definitions, the following key elements are recurring in almost all attempts to define and conceptualize the policy: *intersectional, rights, representation and resources*³.

While women's rights are a barometer of the state that societies are in, Feminist Foreign Policy is by no means directed only at women. It is grounded in the conviction that all people enjoy the same rights and deserve the same freedoms and opportunities. It aims to address a fundamental fairness issue and rests on the understanding that societies are more peaceful and prosperous if all people are able to participate in political, social and economic life.

While one of the key term that has emerged as an essential ingredient to any definition of feminist foreign policy has been intersectional⁴, recent criticism of Feminist Foreign Policies is that so far, they have only put back on the agenda thematic issues which had already received attention from governments prior to the introduction of the policy (such as: the elevation of gender equality as an issue of concern in international and regional organizations or the continued operationalization of the Women, Peace and

¹ Sweden new conservative-leaning government [announced](#) last fall that its foreign policy will no longer be "feminist."

² Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy, 'What is Feminist Foreign Policy?', 2021.

³ *Rights: Promoting "all women's and girls' full enjoyment of human rights, which includes combating all forms of violence and discrimination that restrict their freedom of action"; Representation: Promoting "women's participation and influence in decision making processes at all levels and in all areas"; Resources: Ensuring "that resources are allocated to promote gender equality and equal opportunities for all women and girls to enjoy human rights". A fourth "R" for the reality of women's and girls' lives was subsequently added to reflect the demands of context sensitivity. See more at https://www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/comments/2022C48_FeministForeignPolicy.pdf*

⁴ <https://www.icrw.org/publications/defining-feminist-foreign-policy/>



Security agenda); or are a mere *extension of a gender perspective to other foreign policy areas such as trade or more traditional security matters* such as, for instance, military spending.⁵

The Dutch government recognize that, while the latter aims to leverage on women's experience and agency, a Feminist foreign policy is certainly not directed only at women; and that developing and adopting a feminist foreign policy means that equal rights and equality become the main focus of all aspects of Dutch foreign policy. Netherlands is committing to protecting human rights, equal rights and opportunities, and promoting meaningful participation in decision-making by men and women and LGBTIQ+ people⁶.

The adoption of an FFP banner provides the opportunity to tackle the said task in a more intentional and coherent way, and over 2023, the Netherlands intends to flesh out in more detail the said Policy, with input from broad-based consultation sessions. The Netherlands will also host an international conference on feminist foreign policy in autumn 2023, in order to help expand knowledge and facilitate discussion.

Concept

Despite their inherent domestic nature, social contracts are, in one way or another, subject to the pressure of external forces, of which interventions aimed at strengthening the said social contracts are a special category. It is undeniable that development cooperation has become a key site of SROL interventions working towards reducing inequalities.

In recent years there has been however, a growing concern over the historically embedded power dynamics that underlie international development cooperation. KPAC22 has also highlighted that many programming interventions are rooted in and framed using Western values, lenses, and knowledge systems which hampers ownership and legitimacy of power in non-Western contexts and undervalue local expertise and agency, and ignores history of colonization and other oppressive interactions among states. The latter resulting in frail and aid dependent social contracts.

Within this context, there is need to explore what an FFP means in practice for SROL programming, what effects it might have on interventions aiming to strengthen social contracts and what backlash supporting from the exterior a feminist perspective in a given country might cause vis a vis of both national governments and communities.

In the framework of this year thematic headline "Towards just social contract's", KPSRL would like to build momentum towards FFP fleshing out process in Netherlands, and practically unpack what an FFP means

⁵ See more at spectator_clingendael: [what-difference-does-feminist-foreign-policy-make](#)

⁶ See more at <https://www.netherlandsandyou.nl/latest-news/news/2023/03/07/international-womens-day-feminist-foreign-policy> and <https://www.government.nl/latest/news/2022/11/18/feminist-foreign-policy-netherlands>



in practice for SROL programming. Unpacking what an FPP means for SROL programming and policy implies necessarily to scrutinize sectorial practices (and their effects), actors and partnerships.

The Knowledge Platform Security & Rule of Law will host a conversation on implications of FFP on development cooperation, with a specific emphasis on SROL programming. The event will discuss what distinguishes Feminist Foreign Policy from previous (similar) policies⁷ and what this policy might look like in practice for SROL programming. It will highlight the voices of practitioners in SROL programming and offer policy recommendations on specific adjustments needed to fully operationalize the policy.

Guiding questions

1. Beyond the political weight and the scope for a shared and coherent narrative the latter can bring, what does an FPP mean for SROL programming and what are key implications for interventions aiming to strengthen national social contracts⁸?
2. How do we ensure that FFP enhances women's rights while also tackling other power relations more broadly, using a rights-based and intersectional understanding (and approach) of feminism?
3. How can an FPP help address pre-existing power dynamics undermining meaningful SROL programming and policy (and the development cooperation ecosystem as a whole)?
4. How can we operationalize an FFP in the SROL sector? What ingredients are necessary and what challenges should we be cognizant of?
5. How can we more meaningfully involve civil society organizations (including community-based organizations, women's groups, youth...) in developing a feminist approach to SROL?

Targeted Audience

- Policy stakeholders
- SROL programming partners
- Researchers
- Civil society organizations

⁷ Such as the Women, Peace and Security broad framework.

⁸ This might include 1. Program design and implementation sectorial practices; 2. funding mechanisms: more assistance to local organizations in developing countries, including women's organizations and movements; 3. Accountability: programs designed to meet a specific donor's agenda Vs programs more independent scope/ It matters whether a program is designed for continuity or to embrace (value-driven) change. This means that accountable action needs to be considered from the perspectives of not only donors but those affected; 4. partnerships.: beyond results-based programming/shifting towards cooperation and the flattening of hierarchies.



Key discussants

1. Dr. Jutta Joachim, Senior Lecturer at Radboud University
2. Fridah Githuku, Executive Director of Groots Kenya
3. Alejandra Vicente, Head of Law at Redress and member of the GQUAL Secretariat

Date

Monday June 26th 2023_5h30-7pm.

Format and Location

One hour and half KPSRL moderated conversation:

- Setting the scene (about FPP)
- short question based pitches(5-8min max)` followed by a Q&A. Pitches should be centered around 2/3 different SROL perspectives: security, land rights, access to justice and participation
- Specific recommendations for future programming will be drawn towards the end of the conversation.

Location: Hybrid: [The Hague Humanity Hub](#) and online