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# Strengthen adolescent girl-led, youth-led and youth-serving movements and organisations

UN WOMEN Asia-Pacific Virtual Regional  
Dialogue: Feminist Movements and  
Leaderships, Thursday 17 June 2021

*Sista*

# What are some of the challenges of Sista, being a young women's organisation, to advance change in Vanuatu?

There are universal challenges that we are all familiar with:

- Limited resources and funding to support adolescent, youth and feminist led organizations
- Lack of capacity building for young activists who are doing important work, but are unable to sustain it or be strategic about it
- Tokenistic participation of young people in decision-making rather than meaningfully engaging with them to co-own decisions and transform power inequalities.



# These challenges can be exacerbated depending on the country you live in

**It's important to have a feminist lens when we unpack these challenges as one size does not fit all.**

*For example:*

*The vision of the Action Coalition is that by 2026, feminist leaders, movements, and organizations, including those led by trans, intersex and nonbinary people, indigenous women, young feminists are supported to become sustainable and can carry out their work without fear of reprisal.*

Even in the most progressive circles in Vanuatu, this vision would not be shared.

Not because we personally don't believe in it but because **Vanuatu is simply not there yet.**



# We don't have the language to unpack these discourses

- In our native tongue, *Bislama*, we don't have the terms for trans, intersex and non-binary people.
- How can we even speak about the spectrum of gender and diversity, let alone call for inclusivity, when our language does not accommodate it?
- An example - our language is so simplistic, less than a decade ago we were calling DEPRESSION = 'sickness blong white man' (sickness of the white man)



# We are a developing nation

- Population of almost 300 000 people that live across 83 islands.
- One of three countries in the world where there is no women in parliament.
- More than 70% of the population lives in rural areas where traditional governance structures thrives.
- There is a chief in every community, and they often resolve conflicts and look after welfare of people
- Everybody has a role to play in their community



# Stepping outside of community structures can be harmful

- Kinship and community is the fabric of society
- Everyone looks after each other
- You would never see a homeless person in the street

## **BUT....**

If an individual challenges the norms because they identify as LGBT or they are a young woman with big aspirations, they face real struggles because they don't 'fit in'. Where is their place in the community when community is king?



# Our biggest challenges:

- **Advancing gender equality means challenging kastom and tradition.** We are up against deep rooted structures and gendered roles that define the society.
- This includes navigating power dynamics
  - Men VS Women
  - Young VS Old
- **The same women head older, established institutions for decades** but it would be seen as ‘disrespectful’ if a younger woman questioned her leadership (even if her leadership is questionable!)
- There is **a lot of gatekeeping and internal conflict** in women’s movement.







**This is cover of a book that Sista did with Balance of Power, a DFAT funded program, with the Vanuatu Public Service Commission to celebrate women in senior positions in government.**

**All the women spoke about the struggle of balancing being a mother, kastom responsibilities and being a professional working woman.**

**How do we advance gender equality while remaining true to Vanuatu's Melanesian values?**



# What have we been doing to overcome these challenges?

- Promote MOVEMENT BUILDING not GATEKEEPING
- Make room at the table – build a new one if we have to – and share knowledge and information
- Identify mentors to support and guide us
- Work with local (CARE in Vanuatu) and regional partners (We Rise Coalition) who share feminist principles and similar vision
  - This is how you build organizational capacity, solidarity and opportunities to share skills and learn from each other
  - This is very important in the Pacific as we are unique in our demographics
- Use social media to generate ongoing dialogue, raise awareness and movement building
- Provide space for young women to mobilise, organize and learn. Mistakes are good! *Failure is not the opposite of success, it's part of it.*
- Be creative – we can progress gender equality while celebrating culture and tradition!



**What are some of the ways that youth-led organisations and movements can be supported?**

**ASK THEM.**

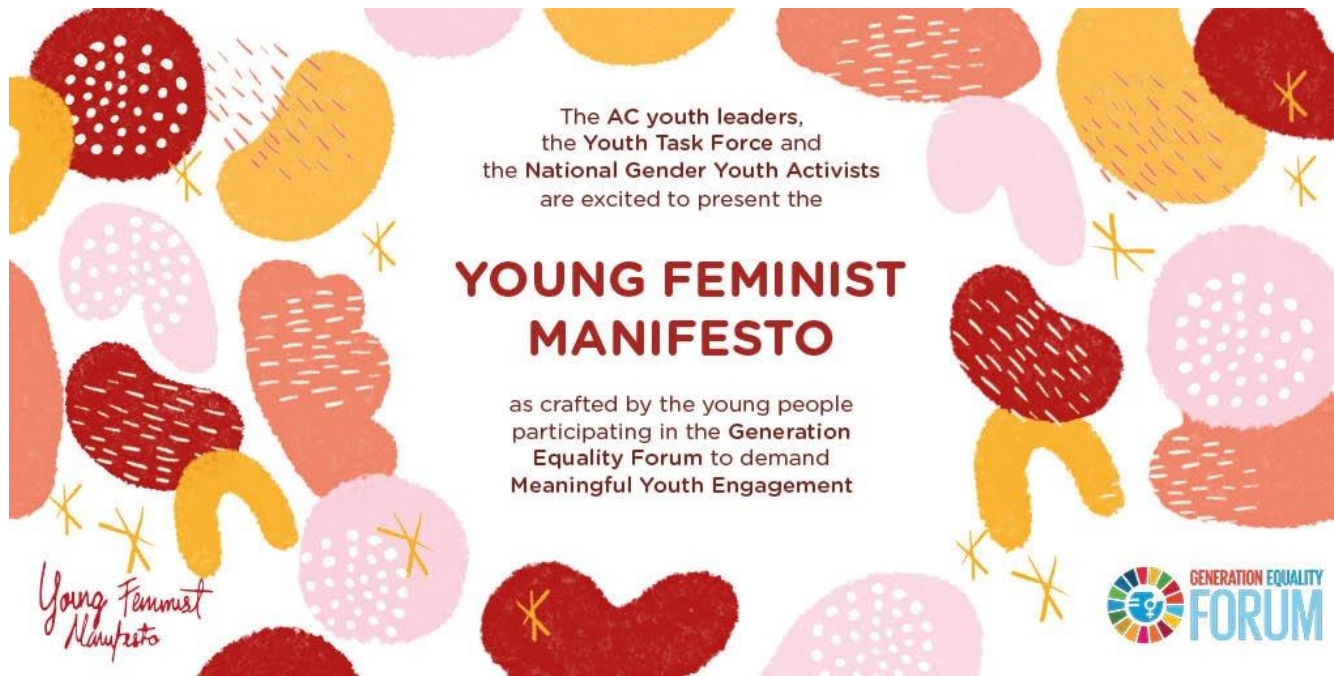
**The youth know what they want and need!**

**One size does not fit all – the approach needs to be targeted and customized to the context of the country that the movement is in.**

**TANK YU TUMAS!**  
**(THANK YOU)**

Satoko Yamaguchi

# The strategies for strengthening and promoting young feminist and girl-led organizations



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1. **Transforming Power Inequalities:** incorporate a power analysis to effectively counter power imbalances and lead to a more equal and fairer distribution of power.
2. **Co-leadership and Co-ownership:** from mere youth engagement to youth leadership and co-ownership with real power- decision making power as well as agenda setting power to seriously consider our views and recommendations.
3. **Accountability:** a clear procedure should be set up to allow the youth to be able to contest decisions.
4. **Substantive and Meaningful Participation:** meetings should focus on generative dialogue and open conversation between all stakeholders. Timelines, agendas, communication materials to be set in consultation with youth, not unilaterally. Develop and implement safeguarding mechanisms to minimize the risk of violence, exploitation, burnout, tokenism of our leadership.

# The strategies for strengthening and promoting young feminist and girl-led organizations

- 5. Funding and Resourcing:** Allocate budget to young activists. Youth must be recognized and compensated for their overall contributions through core, flexible funding that responds to their own self-defined needs.
- 6. Capacity Strengthening:** not focused only on youth as recipients, youth should be seen as partners and all actors have room to learn on feminist leadership, transformational literacy and systems thinking, intersectionality, power, and decolonizing.



# The strategies for strengthening and promoting young feminist and girl-led organizations

**SAVE THE DATE**



Thursday, 18 March  
10:00-11:30 AM (EDT) / 14:00-15:30 (GMT)

## ADOLESCENT GIRLS DIALOGUE ON FEMINIST MOVEMENTS, LEADERSHIP AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN GENERATION EQUALITY

A virtual event in the margins of the 65th Commission on the Status of Women

Join the **Generation Equality Youth Taskforce** and the **Adolescent Girls Investment Plan (AGIP)** for a multigenerational dialogue that applies an accountability lens to adolescent girls' engagement in Generation Equality, and shares good practice examples of youth and adolescent girls co-leadership and co-ownership of Generation Equality.

This will be a closed dialogue, with limited space for observers. To be included in the event invitation list as an observer, please email [unofficeny@plan-international.org](mailto:unofficeny@plan-international.org).



# The strategies for strengthening and promoting young feminist and girl-led organizations

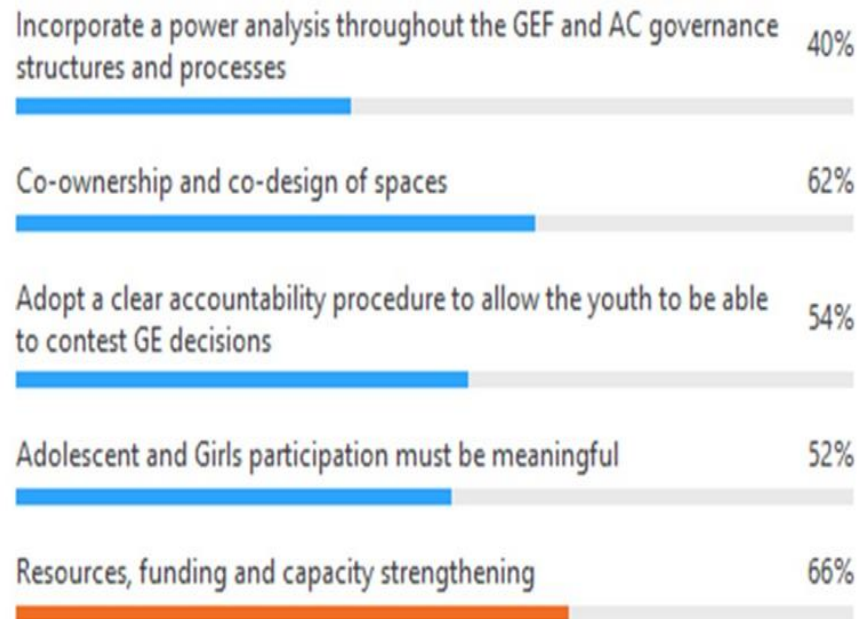
## *Voices of adolescent and youth participants*

- We need to move beyond the narrative of consultation and participation to one of leadership, co-creation, and co-ownership.
- Adequate compensation to youth time, expertise and emotional labour must be addressed.
- Youth and adolescents are experts. We need capacity strengthening for OLDER ACTORS in GEF to understand how to engage with youth and adolescents.
- Youth and adolescents must be given more decision making power. We need to have an accountability framework to see how feedback is being incorporated

# The strategies for strengthening and promoting young feminist and girl-led organizations

Host is sharing poll results

## 1. Top 5 Best Practices to promote in GE (Multiple choice)



# The effective interventions in increasing young people's engagement in accountability mechanisms

- Creating safe and accessible mechanisms and processes
- Not just consult with youth and adolescents, but co-design accountability framework with them
- Recognition and compensation to their works
- Accountability mechanism and capacity building to non-youth for ensuring youth adolescent leadership

