

LOCAFEM Policy Brief

Local feminist perspectives as powerful levers for transformation

'Local Feminist Perspectives as Levers for Transformation in Partner Countries (LOCAFEM)' – a GIZ-funded research project – generates new evidence on how local feminist movements drive gender equality in a transformative way. Between 2023 and 2025, the German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS) collaborated with the Gender Studies and Human Rights Documentation Centre (Ghana), the Goa Institute of Management (India) and Gender in Detail (Ukraine), to analyse how local feminist actors and their strategies function as levers for societal change.

This policy brief synthesises the key findings across the three local studies and outlines implications for policy, programme design and implementation.

The results underscore the relevance of intersectional, gender-transformative and human rights-based approaches, and highlight the central role of feminist civil society as agents of change. They offer concrete entry points **for GIZ and other development actors to address gender-based discrimination, strengthen civil society leadership and advance transformative, post-colonial pathways** that empower marginalised groups.



KEY FINDINGS

- **Diverse feminist landscapes:** Local feminist perspectives vary markedly across contexts,

challenging power structures from household-level patriarchy to institutional governance frameworks.

- **Intersectionality by design:** Although multiple forms of discrimination intersect, this does not automatically result in intersectional feminist movements; competing agendas and approaches can limit collective action.
- **Agency under pressure:** The Ukraine case illustrates how feminist actors develop adaptive strategies that sustain agency and foster resilience in conflict and crisis.
- **Representation gaps persist:** Despite progress on women's rights, LGBTIQ+ perspectives remain insufficiently and unsystematically integrated, constrained by rigid gender norms and entrenched cis- and heteronormativity.
- **Moving beyond service delivery:** Local feminist actors call for coalition-building, structural transformation and the integration of gender justice in policy processes, rather than relying primarily on project-based services.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY, PROGRAMMING AND IMPLEMENTATION

To translate these insights into effective development policy and cooperation, agencies should:

1. **Challenge persistent gender stereotypes and discriminatory social norms**

Deeply rooted gender norms sustain inequalities and perpetuate gender-based violence. Feminist organisations counter these dynamics through education, awareness raising and intergenerational dialogue. In plurilegal contexts such as Ghana, limited knowledge of gender equality and rights requires integrating gender across school curricula and community-level sensitisation. Given the “sticky” nature and reciprocal character of gender and social norms, the India case demonstrates that engaging entire families and communities is essential to challenge deeply rooted

cultural biases and enable behaviour change. In Ukraine, (social) media and cultural initiatives during wartime contributed to shifting public opinion towards more egalitarian views.



2. Strengthen local actors' advocacy for policy and legal reforms

Gender-equitable legal and policy frameworks are critical for feminist advocacy and advancing gender equality. Supporting feminist advocacy and strengthening understanding of the value of adopting and implementing gender equality policies is therefore central. In Ukraine, five gender equality policies were adopted between 2022 and 2024. This illustrates that progress on gender is possible even during conflict. In Ghana, persistent advocacy around key bills – such as the Domestic Violence Bill – proved effective after years of coordinated civil society engagement.

3. Support coalition-building and collaboration between state and civil society

Sustainable gender-transformative change requires alliances across movements, sectors, and governance levels, including non-traditional actors. At the same time, synergies between state institutions and civil society are of key significance. In India, coalitions of women's organisations addressing both sectors, health and climate change, created a bridge between feminist, environmental, and community groups. These alliances amplified women's voices in climate governance and policy dialogue.

4. Invest in the capacity of feminist organisations and local knowledge

Local feminist actors, though often resource-constrained, are best placed to design context-specific solutions. Their expertise should be recognised and integrated throughout all phases of programming. Investments in technical, institutional and financial capacities generate multiplier

effects. The Ukrainian study highlights how wartime humanitarian shifts absorbed resources needed for strategic advocacy work, while persistent advocacy in Ghana was only possible through a certain degree of stable funding.

5. Improve gender data/local knowledge systems

Gender analyses remain essential entry points for addressing gender inequalities. Gender data must go beyond binary frameworks, incorporate intersectionality and reflect local knowledge through dialogue with feminist actors. Without context-specific, gender-disaggregated data, sectoral policies risk overlooking structural inequalities and intersectional discrimination. The Indian study reveals how the invisibility of caste and class in health data led to ineffective health policies and interventions. Participatory, intersectional data collection by local organisations provided a more accurate picture across all case studies.

6. Prioritise gender in fragile and crisis contexts

Conflicts and crises magnify inequalities. Sidelining gender is therefore counterproductive. At the same time, these contexts can create openings for transformation if interventions are gender-responsive. In Ukraine, the war expanded opportunities for women in traditionally male sectors and created new spaces for feminist engagement. However, gender-responsive defence and reconstruction are essential to prevent patriarchal militarisation.

7. Take a clear stance against anti-gender backlash

The rise of anti-gender movements threatens progress globally. While acknowledging diverse feminist perspectives – including power-critical perspectives –, development actors must consistently defend and safeguard gender equality. Backlash appeared across all case studies, through political resistance in Ghana, social stereotypes in India and conservative pushback in Ukraine. Resilience and international solidarity are crucial to counter these pressures.



CONCLUSION

Local feminist perspectives provide substantive counter-narratives to anti-gender discourses and to claims that feminism, gender equality or inclusion are externally imposed Western concepts. The research shows that local feminisms are deeply rooted in historical and cultural movements across partner countries and continually shaped by local actors.

These perspectives constitute powerful levers for transformative change when systematically embedded in development policy and mainstreamed in cooperation throughout programme and project cycles. They underscore not only the resilience and agency of feminist actors, but also the need for context-sensitive, inclusive and intersectional approaches. International development actors can apply these insights through co-creative engagement with local feminist organisations.

Institutionalising feminist quality in development strategies, policies and projects enables a shift from insight to impact. Doing so is not only a matter of rights, but a prerequisite for more effective and sustainable development outcomes.



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IDOS German Institute of Development and Sustainability
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