

Research Update, 2024

BACKGROUND

In 2021, IWDA published *From Seeds to Roots: Trajectories towards feminist foreign policy*, looking at 5 early adopters of FFP (Sweden, France, Canada, Mexico and UK Labour's commitment to a feminist aid policy). Since then, 10 additional countries have made a formal committed to FFP, with nearly half in the [Majority World](#). At the same time geopolitical events are exposing limitations, contradictions, incoherences and lack of accountability for practicing feminist foreign policy. This has led to concerns about the concept's overall credibility, with civil society questioning the extent to which FFP has lived up to its transformative promise.

This research is using a participatory validation approach. Interviewees and others with relevant experience of FFP are invited to provide feedback on these emerging findings via the QR code. The final research will incorporate this feedback, with a plan to publish by the end of 2024.



METHODOLOGY BY NUMBERS

- 24** In-depth interviews between October 2023 and February 2024
- 09** Government representatives
- 15** Civil society and academia
- 12** Covering 12 countries who have at some point made a commitment to feminist foreign policy: Argentina, Canada, Chile, Colombia, France, Germany, Mexico, Netherlands, Scotland, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden

KEY FINDINGS

1. Getting to Declaration: From standing out to fitting in

KEY FACTORS IDENTIFIED IN FROM SEEDS TO ROOTS:

- FFP announcements come as a surprise;
- from a values aligned political leader;
- responding to the need for an “announceable” and/or an opportunity on the world stage;
- supported by an enabling environment for feminist policy making created by feminist civil society.

NEW TRENDS

- Surprise no longer a factor, but the values of the political leader and an enabling environment created by civil society still paramount
- FFP a sharper articulation of existing values and a continuation of longstanding commitments to gender equality in foreign policy
- Motivation for adoption FFP is to signify membership of a group of likeminded countries, with regional groupings emerging in Latin America
- Seen as a way to operate outside the limitations of UN architecture

2. From declaration to development: Emerging good practice leaves early adopters behind

KEY FACTORS IDENTIFIED IN FROM SEEDS TO ROOTS:

- Declaration prior to policy development
- Civil society play a key role in shaping policy and principles of FFP following declaration
- Difference in consultation culture between international development and foreign policy

NEW TRENDS

- Cross-government and civil society advisory groups a key strategy to inform policy development
- Policy processes sometimes offering a hook for civil society to gain access where it wasn't previously available, but tensions arise where international feminist organisations are granted more access than domestic groups
- Difference in consultation culture remains
- Gaps between commitments on paper and real world action undermines confidence in FFP, and in some cases, slows down policy development/publication

3. Institutionalisation: Debates increasing, progress limited

KEY FACTORS IDENTIFIED IN FROM SEEDS TO ROOTS*:

- Political will a key factor to building buy in across government
- Key debates in FFP around militarization with significantly different views between govt and civil society

**From Seeds to Roots looked at policy development and institutionalisation as one theme; this time we have separated them because there is more data available.*

NEW TRENDS

- Political will remains a key factor, with an emerging risk that FFP becomes too closely associated with particular leaders and/or political parties undermining space or incentive for others to act
- Mix of top-down (eg: legislation, frameworks, leadership) and bottom-up (eg: training, contextualization, branding and hype) approaches to institutionalisation
- FFP development often delegated to teams lacking structural power, and implementation/coordination teams under-resourced, meaning those most committed to the approach lack the institutional power to effectively champion it
- Other issues like decolonization emerging (alongside demilitarization) as sites of the expectation-reality gap between civil society and govt implementers
- Where progress has been made, it was supported by independent evaluation and accountability mechanisms, as well as allyship between insiders and outsiders

4. Future trajectories: Has FFP peaked?

KEY FACTORS IDENTIFIED IN FROM SEEDS TO ROOTS:

- Risk of FFP commitments lost with changes of govt on the radar
- Risk that FFP seen as something to do 'when the sun is shining' but abandoned when challenges arise
- Greater adoption of FFP by more govts seen as desirable

NEW TRENDS

- Change of govt affirmed as the key factor in loss of FFP commitments, linked to the rise of anti-rights movements
- Sweden's leadership role in FFP a loss to the movement
- FFP 'when the sun is shining' perception remains, with domestic economic crisis, Ukraine and Israel's war on Gaza key examples
- Collaboration of feminists inside and outside govt seen as critical to drive progress, however limited, while maintaining accountability for govt inaction/hypocrisy
- Ambivalence about whether more FFPs would be a good thing. Some emphasizing the need for a common definition, others concerned about perpetuating the hierarchy of Minority World feminisms over locally-defined approaches.
- Key question: is the political weight of the label 'feminist' worth it, if it's not truly driving transformative action?