

MOVEMENT BUILDING IN A DIGITAL AGE: EVALUATION REPORT

Learnings for donors and funds



APC
ASSOCIATION FOR
PROGRESSIVE
COMMUNICATIONS

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In April 2014, the Association for Progressive Communications' Women's Rights Programme (APC WRP) organised the first global meeting on Gender, Sexuality and the Internet, which produced the Feminist Principles of the Internet (FPI)¹ framework. Since then, APC WRP has organised and collaborated on several global, regional and local meetings to collaboratively reflect on and interrogate shared concerns such as the changing landscape of movement building due to digitally networked technologies, online gender-based violence, digital expression of sexuality and gender identity, and other challenges and opportunities presented by current technologies.

Between November 2019 and April 2020, APC WRP held an evaluation of this work on **movement building in the digital age**. The evaluation sought feedback from feminist internet meeting participants, including around the impact of the convenings on participants' movement work and activism, their evolving relationships with digital technologies, and challenges in taking this work forward. Through a survey and interviews reaching 82 people across regions, the evaluation revealed a circuitry of people engaged, committed and eager to take the work forward in their own contexts, but with limitations connected to resourcing, network building and infrastructure.

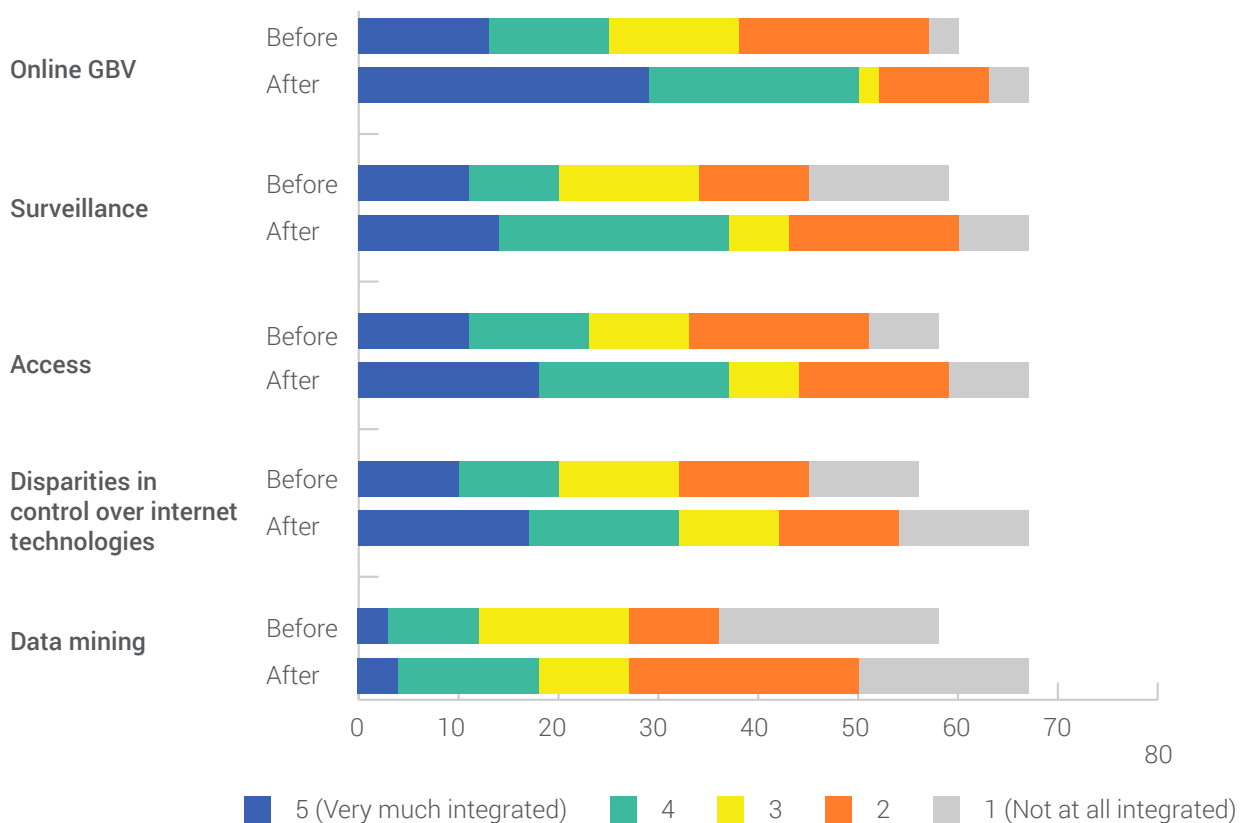
1. <https://feministinternet.net/>

EVALUATION FINDINGS AND APC WRP LEARNINGS

Thinking and practice around feminism, activism and the internet

The evaluation revealed that participants integrate key issues (such as around online gender-based violence, surveillance and data mining) more into their work and activism following the convenings. A full 90% of survey respondents found the meetings shifted their understanding of movement building in a digital age, while 82% changed how they engaged with the internet in their work. Respondents reported evolution in their thinking about the nature of movements and in feminist thinking and practice, as well as increased awareness around online activism and digital practice.

Figure 20. How much issues integrated into respondents' work prior to/since participating in the convening(s)

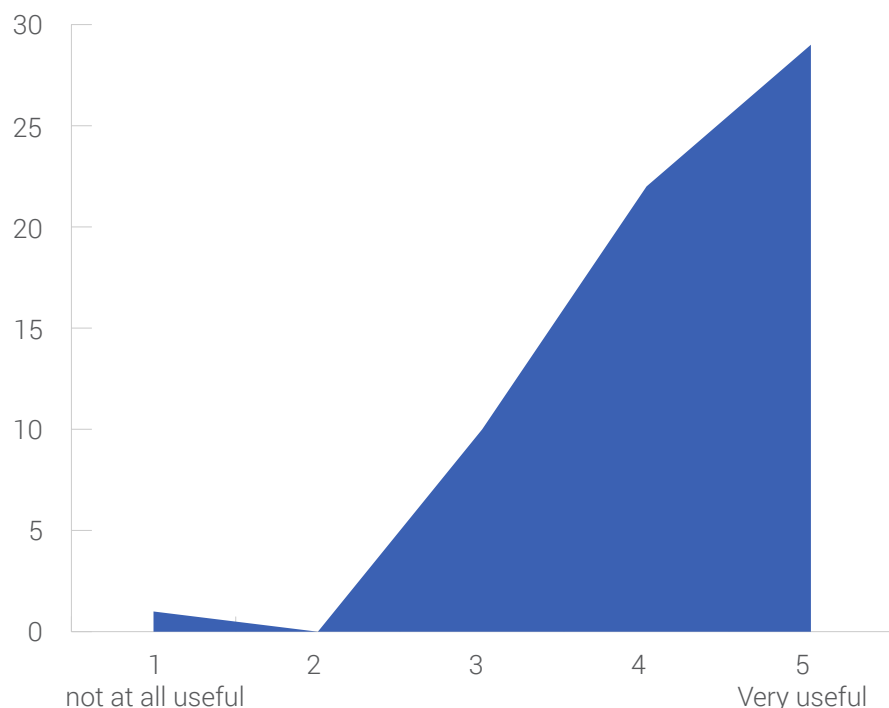


Interviewees were similarly asked whether the convenings changed how they approached organising in their context or organisation. Responses acknowledged impact on political analysis and consciousness and understandings of power dynamics. Interviewees also commented on developing new perspectives on the challenges of movement building in this area. Some changed how they shared information or centred knowledge production. Others were inspired to diversify their facilitation styles and to centre sustainability and self/collective care in their work. Digital consciousness was another theme, with interviewees taking digital activists/activism more seriously, incorporating digital safety measures, and thinking about the digital in their analysis of movement building.

Feminist Principles of the Internet

As the network grows across the global South, meeting participants are sharing feminist internet learnings within their own contexts. The survey showed that 82% of respondents found the Feminist Principles of the Internet “useful” or “very useful” in their work, and they went on to use the FPIs in trainings and workshops, or as conceptual guides and conversation starters. Nearly two thirds of respondents used the FPI website every six months or more often. Based on the feedback from the evaluation, APC WRP will continue to expand its work around the FPIs. In line with APC WRP’s evolving priorities, this will include developing particular themes such as around the environment, care and memory/archiving.

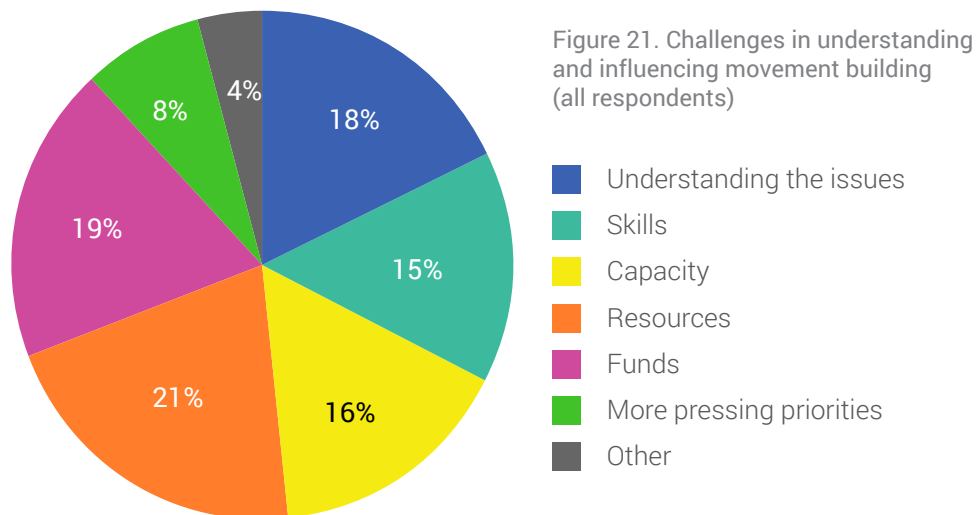
On a scale of 1 to 5, how useful have the FPIs been in your work?



Online resources and spaces

The survey identified access to resources as a key challenge in understanding and influencing movement building in the digital age, while respondents also indicated their will to share research, content, knowledge and other resources. Through interviews, we heard that APC WRP's online resources, content and spaces could be more accessible and user-friendly for diverse audiences. Interviewees also raised the need for stronger resources and toolkits, which were seen as crucial for movement building.

APC WRP intends to produce and publish more user-friendly content, balancing theory and practice, while focusing on documenting and archiving global South experiences, perspectives and knowledge. It aims to make its content useable and accessible to all feminists, techies and other activists and allies who might be curious about the feminist internet and movement building in the digital age. As always, it will seek to showcase materials and tools produced by feminist internet networkers in the global South.

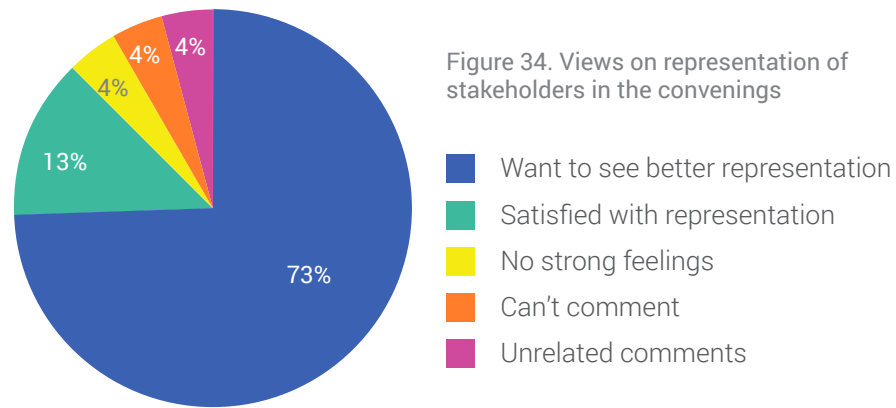


Outreach to different stakeholder groups

In planning the feminist internet convenings, APC WRP aimed to bring together digital, women's and sexual rights activists, as well as donors and other key stakeholders. The survey asked if any key perspectives were missing, and if so, which groups could be better represented. In all, 73% of respondents wanted to see better representation, with just over half particularly mentioning better inclusion of people from LGBTIQ communities.

APC WRP has committed to expanding the base of activists interested and engaged in movement building in a digital age. Based on the evaluation, it intends to strengthen relationships with experts

on certain key issues, including feminist techies and trans activists (and others working on gender, sexual or bodily diversity). It will continue to develop conversations and networks in Africa, and will particularly seek to reach more stakeholders who are based in the Middle East and North Africa.



Bringing people together

The feedback on the convenings was very positive and encouraging, with participants appreciating APC WRP's inclusive feminist and participatory approach and content. A full 97% of respondents to the survey indicated they would like to participate in more APC WRP convenings/initiatives, with the priority of having deeper conversations, contributing to a collective understanding of the issues, and network building.

The team will continue to find ways to hold spaces for people to come together, to share, explore, play and imagine. In the coming years, APC WRP intends to hold more local, regional and issue-based conversations, and build on the recent regional convenings in Africa and elsewhere.

Network building

APC WRP received feedback on needing to strengthen the feminist internet network, with interest in and also some frustration among contributors wanting to better connect and collaborate with others. Some contributors suggested ways that APC WRP could facilitate introductions and collaborations between their contacts, particularly outside of the convenings. The mailing list was appreciated, but was also not seen as fulfilling a need for transparent and open networks.

APC WRP was encouraged by the willingness of partners and allies to develop the network beyond APC WRP-held spaces, while recognising its limited capacity to reach the demand to connect partners

and facilitate collaborations on an ongoing basis. This is an opportunity moment for the nature and shape of the network to evolve and expand. APC WRP will be exploring ways to develop the network's infrastructures, to encourage collective ownership and strengthen lines of communication between networkers. This exploratory and evolving work around feminist infrastructures will build on digital safety, while also encompassing broader movement infrastructures beyond the technical.

Toward collective and distributed ownership

Movements are strongest when energy comes from a multitude of spaces and actors. APC WRP must not be the only driver of this movement. The team would like to support collective ownership, leadership, thinking and imagining around this work. APC WRP's aim is to develop a self-sustaining and self-nurturing network, to build distributed power and shared ownership in how we shape and make our common future.

Within this, APC WRP recognises that it has more access to resources than much of the feminist internet community at present, and that there is a need for intermediary steps to advance distribution. APC WRP will be supporting the development of working groups, coalitions and other formations focusing on collective priorities. It will continue to hold processes and spaces, as well as providing subgrants and developing participatory grant making with this strategy in mind.

Funding and donor advocacy

While four out of five survey respondents formed new collaborations with others in the convenings, "building networks, movements and collaborations" was identified as the main gap/opportunity in relation to movement building in a digital age. Respondents and interviewees expressed desire and willingness to take this work forward, but over half noted that resources and funds were among their top three challenges.

Meanwhile, donors noted in interviews that their participation in APC WRP meetings expanded their understanding of activism, changed the way they see movement building, and helped them to advocate among donors for more attention to the intersections of gender and technology.

Donor advocacy is a priority for realising the network's collective work and vision. APC WRP will continue to work with donors to strengthen understanding of and responses to the changing nature of organising in the digital age. APC WRP seeks to channel much needed resources toward the feminist internet community to address the multiple existing gaps and challenges.

WHERE SUPPORT IS NEEDED

APC WRP is grateful to donors and other grant givers invested in movement building in the digital age – thank you for strengthening this work and being open to learning with the movement! While the team and its allies have made great strides in raising awareness, and building a base of committed and active networkers and donors, ongoing strategic support and resourcing will help this work bear fruit.

For example, support is needed in raising awareness around the intersections of gender, human rights and technology among donors. Support is also needed in building infrastructures to reinforce movement and network building, to avoid investing in the same platforms and technologies that undermine activism. Donors are encouraged to think beyond digital security and online violence against women, to consideration of technological developments, sustainability, and movement building.

Donors have the potential to shape, strengthen and expand the collective work on movement building in the digital age and making a feminist internet. The following suggestions would help to support this work in targeted and strategic ways:

APC WRP'S ASKS

Pooling resources

The questions APC WRP works on cut across multiple issues, including gender, human rights and technology. APC WRP encourages donors to think creatively around funding modalities to support the intersectional and multidisciplinary nature of this work, and to avoid cross-cutting issues becoming siloed. With this in mind, APC WRP encourages donors across sectors to partner and to pool resources to create new funding streams for feminist movement building in the digital age. This would greatly facilitate the process for seeking, applying for and reporting on funding for the growing network, while relieving the pressures of under-resourcing and allowing more space for substantive work.

Donor advocacy

There remains much work to be done in sensitising donors around the intersections of gender, human rights and technology. APC WRP will continue to invest in donor sensitisation, by meeting and sharing resources and research with donors on the changing nature of movement building in the digital age, and the impact of digital technologies on women human rights defenders, including around online violence, safety and security, access, governance, privacy, surveillance and other important and emerging issues. With your support, these educational efforts could be transformative for resourcing movements. By advocating in donor spaces and raising awareness about the critical nature of issues around digital technologies for feminist and human rights movements, you could convince more donors to commit much needed funds to support this work.

Capacity building

APC WRP is working toward a future where activists and techies across sectors are able to confidently and expertly engage with the cross-cutting issues in feminist movement building in the digital age. Donors should exercise their power to strengthen the capacities of their grantees to meaningfully participate in this work. This could include: encouraging grantees to consider integrating issues such as digital security, online violence, privacy and feminist infrastructures in their work; funding feminist internet workshops, convenings and trainings and participation therein; sharing resources, research and relevant materials on feminist movement building in the digital age; including issues around digital technologies in donor-led meetings and trainings, and bringing in experts to facilitate sessions; introducing grantees to the feminist internet network, and so on.

Network building

To strengthen the interdisciplinary nature of this work, it will be necessary to reach out across the different spaces that women human rights defenders, internet rights experts and technologists occupy, and to bring people together. Donors can strengthen networks and movements by investing resources in matching experts and activists across their respective fields. Donors can also fund the development of feminist infrastructures, online spaces and in-person meetings to strengthen collaborations, shared learnings and common priorities.

Alternative technologies

Certain technologies and platforms undermine our collective activism, for example, by contributing to surveillance and data mining, or by failing to respond to online violence and hate groups. APC WRP asks donors to consider the technologies they are purchasing, investing in and promoting, and to support open-source alternatives that enable privacy and promote and protect human rights. Donors can seize opportunities to empower movements in the digital age by directly financing and supporting feminist technological developments and infrastructures.

Funding calls

Feminists, human rights defenders and technologists currently have to fit critical work on movement building in the digital age around funding calls that have limited frameworks. Calls for funding need to explicitly include movement building in the digital age and the issues therein. This would also help to encourage other organisations and activists to engage more systematically in this work. Additionally, due to discriminatory association laws as well as the more fluid nature of online activism, many in our networks do not work in formally structured or registered organisations. As such, funding criteria need more flexibility in reaching activists, technologists and organisations that are otherwise excluded from bureaucratic or overly formalised funding streams.

APC WRP remains committed to working closely with donors to expand the collective understanding of and responses to movement building in the digital age and making a feminist internet.

We look forward to working with you on the next steps of our shared vision!

If you have any questions about the evaluation or outcomes, please feel free to contact us at info@apcwomen.org



