

# FEMINIST MEAL

## STEERING DOCUMENT



**OXFAM**  
Québec

# FEMINIST MEAL

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# GLOSSARY OF TERMS

**AGENCY** at Oxfam is “possessing the power and knowledge to be able to claim one’s rights”<sup>1</sup>.

**CAPACITY EXCHANGE** refers to the reciprocal process through which capacities are shared and strengthened for and by all participants. It differs from *capacity building*, rejecting the hierarchical power relations in which it is based.

**CARE** is all social activities that nurture of all which is required to sustain life (Fisher & Tronto, 1990). Tronto (2013) proposes the differentiation between *care for* (hands on care, including physical aspects), *care about* (emotional investment in and attachment to others) and *care with* (political mobilization towards transformation).

**CARE THEORY** emerges from feminism and it is developed around the recognition that we all need, receive and give care. As such, it explores care in diverse areas (e.g. economy, governance, ethics) and it rallies for care-led politics that recognize we are all interdependent.

**CO-CREATION** refers to collective creation, which is by its very nature, participatory and inclusive. “Co-creation relies on the idea that none of us is as smart as all of us and that problems are best solved by those who experience them”<sup>2</sup>.

**DECOLONIALITY** is a term coined by Quijano and it is mostly grounded in the Latin American context. Unlike post-colonialism, which is a critic of colonialism, decoloniality builds on that and challenges us to detach from the overall colonial structure of knowledge to then imagine possibilities “of ways of thinking and being in the world that the rhetoric of modernity disavowed and the logic of coloniality implement (Mignolo, 2017)”.

**FEMINISMS** acknowledges that there is not only one feminism, but rather it celebrates the wide diversity of understandings and interpretations— liberal, radical, black, intersectional, etc. Oxfam understands the term to mean “historical manifestations across the world [which] seek to ensure that women and men are equal in law and in practice [...] Its [ultimate] objective is to create positive futures that uphold the dignity and rights of all”<sup>3</sup>. A feminist approach is a lens to understanding how multiple systems of oppression interact across social contexts.

**GENDER** is the social construction and signification of sex. For Oxfam gender refers to the characteristics, traits and roles associated with either women or men. Gender is not biologically determined but is rather conferred through context-based socialization processes. “Gender is also a category of analysis that helps to highlight unequal power relations between men and women”<sup>4</sup>.

## **GENDER INTEGRATION CONTINUUM**<sup>5</sup>:

This continuum was developed by the Gender Working Group of the Oxfam Research Network. Although it is meant for research, it applies perfectly to MEAL as it proposes accumulative layers of integration. For Oxfam it means:

**Gender Aware** refers to gender being considered in the research project’s rationale, but not as an operative concept in the design and methodology.

**Gender Sensitive** refers to gender being considered in the research project’s rationale, design and methodology. Data is disaggregated by gender, and gender is considered in the composition of the team and reviewers. However, gender-sensitive research does not extend to analysis and action to address gender inequalities.

<sup>1</sup> See Oxfam (2014), [Transformative Leadership for Women’s Rights \(Guide\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> See Butterfly Works, [Toolbox](#)

<sup>3</sup> See Oxfam (2020), [Global Strategic Framework 2020-2030](#)

<sup>4</sup> See Oxfam-Quebec (2020), [Guide to Preventing and Mitigating Domestic Violence in a Context of Women’s Economic Empowerment](#)

<sup>5</sup> See Oxfam (2019), [Integrating Gender in Research Planning](#)

**Gender Responsive** refers to gender being considered in research project's rationale, design, and methodology and is rigorously analyzed to inform implementation, communication, and influencing strategies. However, gender responsive research does not address the underlying structural factors such as norms and power relations that contribute to gender inequalities.

**Gender Transformative** work at Oxfam examines, analyses, and builds an evidence base to inform long-term practical changes in structural gender power relations, norms, roles and inequalities. Gender-transformative work should lead to sustained change through action (e.g. partnerships, outreach, and interventions, particularly with women's rights organizations).

**GENDER JUSTICE**<sup>6</sup> is the full equality and equity between men and women in all spheres of life. This concept evokes both an outcome and a process. As an outcome, it involves access to and control over resources, allied with the ability to make choices. As a process, it brings in a new, essential element: accountability, that is, the responsibility and answerability of social institutions charged with rendering justice.

**GROUNDING KNOWLEDGE** refers to the acknowledgement that knowledge is contextually produced and situated.

**HIERARCHIES OF ACTUALIZATION** acknowledge the existence of hierarchies but moves away from hierarchies of domination. Under hierarchies of actualization "accountability and respect flow both ways [...] and social [...] structures are set up so that there is an input from all levels. Leaders and managers facilitate, inspire and empower rather than [order], control and disempower"<sup>7</sup>.

**INTERSECTIONALITY** is a term emerging from black feminism and coined by Crenshaw (1989) it refers to "a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects". Oxfam understands the term as "a methodology for studying the relationships among multiple dimensions of social relationships and people's identity. Intersectionality holds that different types of oppression – such as racism, sexism and homophobia – do not act independently of one another, but interrelate, to create the 'intersection' of multiple forms of discrimination"<sup>8</sup>.

**PATRIARCHY OR PATRIARCHAL SYSTEMS** are, for Oxfam, "built around male privilege and dominant masculinities that perpetuate sexist and hierarchical power relationships. They legitimize the discrimination and exclusion of women and gender non-conforming people through harmful social norms, policies and institutions. Challenging patriarchal systems effectively means fighting poverty and injustice by dismantling intersecting systems of oppression and exploitation that further marginalize those who are already vulnerable, such as colonialism, racism, xenophobia, and homo- and transphobia"<sup>9</sup>.

**POSITIONALITY** refers to the practice of situating oneself in relationship to socioeconomic, political, economic and historic structures, understanding the social value and meaning assigned to social identities (see exercise in section 2.2 or resource box)

**POWER-KNOWLEDGE** is a term coined by Foucault (1980) which refers to the intricacies between power and knowledge. Namely that knowledge is an exercise of power in the same measure that power is based on the production and use of knowledge.

**REFLEXIVITY** refers to the practice of identifying and reflecting on one's own social identities, such as language, color of skin, sex, nationality, ableness, etc.

<sup>6</sup> See Oxfam-Quebec (2020), [Guide to Preventing and Mitigating Domestic Violence in a Context of Women's Economic Empowerment](#)

<sup>7</sup> See Eisler (2007):31

<sup>8</sup> See Oxfam (2017), [Transformative Leadership for Women's Rights \(Global Program Framework\)](#)

<sup>9</sup> See Oxfam (2020), [Global Strategic Framework 2020-2030](#)

**SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY** for Oxfam is “the process by which we develop balanced, respectful relationships with diverse stakeholders, enabling them to hold us to account for the commitments we make, the decisions we take and the impact we have. Social accountability refers to our primary relationships, the commitment to the communities and people we seek to benefit (and the partners and allies with whom we work); it forms the foundation of our accountability to all other stakeholders”<sup>10</sup>.

**TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP FOR WOMEN’S RIGHTS (TLWR)** at Oxfam is “an approach and strategy for social justice which challenges and transforms power relations and structures (in all their different manifestations) into an enabling environment for the leadership potential of individuals (purpose). It embodies the principles and values of human rights, gender equality, participation, consultation and respect for the dignity of all people. TLWR directs others to bring about fundamental change and facilitates collective efforts to transform inequitable institutions whether it is in the home, the community or more broadly (practice)”<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> See Oxfam’s [Common Approach to MEL and Social Accountability \(CANS\)](#)

<sup>11</sup> See Oxfam (2017), [Transformative Leadership for Women’s Rights \(Global Program Framework\)](#)

# INTRODUCTION



This steering document provides guidance on the implementation of feminist monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning (MEAL). Crucially, this document is not a methodology or a set of instructions, but rather a guide to inform the process of co-creating and implementing feminist MEAL to benefit gender justice and women's rights.

To fulfil these interconnected purposes, this document builds on a wide range of resources – within and beyond the Oxfam confederation – to explore the feminist MEAL approach and propose guidelines for its implementation.

## PART 1

### THE FEMINIST MEAL ECOSYSTEM

reviews existing standards and previous work on feminist MEAL, to then propose a definition.

## PART 2

### THE IMPLEMENTATION OF FEMINIST MEAL

explores what is needed to apply it in terms of attitudes, knowledges, processes, platforms and spaces in projects and programs.



In addition, [a feminist MEAL resource box](#) accompanies this steering document. It consists of a curated collection of methods and exercises to implement the feminist MEAL approach.

## METHODOLOGY

Both the steering document and the resource box are collaborative documents that were co-created within a collective and highly participatory process. A working group made up of colleagues and volunteers in Latin America (Peru and El Salvador), Africa (Benin, Burkina Faso and Ghana) and the Middle East (Jordan) as well as by Oxfam-Quebec staff and an external consultant developed this document between August 2020 to April 2021. The working group brought together members who spoke different languages (mostly English, French and Spanish), brought diverse personal backgrounds, had different levels of expertise, and represented multiple regional contexts.

## SCOPE

The feminist MEAL steering document and resource box are intended for Oxfam staff and partners working in a wide range of contexts around the world. Feminist MEAL recognizes that colleagues and people we work with have different levels of gender awareness: while some are just beginning their feminist journey, others are already working on transforming gender relations. As such, this document aims at strengthening gender-sensitive and gender-responsive MEAL practices while also furthering participation and inclusion towards gender transformative change<sup>12</sup>.

A feminist approach to MEAL is by its very nature dynamic and co-creative<sup>13</sup>. Accordingly, this is the first iteration of a living document, which will be enriched, evolve and adapt during its implementation.

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<sup>12</sup> See Oxfam Great Britain (2020), [Feminist MEAL Needs Assessment – Report on Findings and Recommendations](#)

<sup>13</sup> See Oxfam – Gender Justice Platform (2019), [Feminist Principles at Oxfam](#)

# PART 1

## THE FEMINIST MEAL ECOSYSTEM

Oxfam has set the goal of putting feminist principles, gender justice and women’s rights at the front and center of all its actions<sup>14</sup>. With a feminist approach, MEAL can contribute to transformative social change by supporting the empowerment and enhancing agency of those involved, especially women. To that end, Oxfam-Québec will be working alongside country offices, regional platforms, partners and allies to support transformative agendas.

### 1.1 FEMINIST MEAL AS A PATH FOR INTEGRATING AND FURTHERING STANDARDS



Feminist MEAL provides guidance on how to strengthen the integration of feminist principles in Oxfam’s [Common Approach to MEL and Social Accountability \(CAMSA\)](#) and the [11 Program Standards](#). Feminist MEAL is also aligned with Oxfam’s [Knowledge and Learning Framework 2030](#) (still in development), which places learning at the center of gender transformative change. Accordingly, feminist MEAL contributes to learning by producing useful evaluations, knowledge products and tools for all stakeholders while also generating inclusive and high-quality data on impact and complex change to further women’s rights.

As stated in the [Global Strategic Framework 2020-2030](#), Oxfam is committed to applying a feminist lens to all its analyses and actions. This means committing to Oxfam’s [11 Feminist Principles](#) both as an outcome – the advancement of women’s rights and gender justice – and as a process – embedded in our ways of working, designing, budgeting, planning, implementing, monitoring, evaluating, learning, etc<sup>15</sup>. Many projects and programs are driven by Oxfam’s [Transformative Leadership for Women’s Rights \(TLWR\)](#) framework, which focuses on supporting partners and communities to further women’s rights by influencing social norms, behaviours, policies and practices. To that end, both TLWR and feminist MEAL seek to produce evidence and useful knowledge products for learning and advocacy to bring personal, collective and structural gender transformative change.

<sup>14</sup> See Oxfam (2020), [Global Strategic Framework 2020-2030](#)

<sup>15</sup> See Oxfam (2021), [Transforming Gender Inequalities, Practical Guidance for Achieving Gender Transformation in Resilient Development](#)

## 1.2 A FEMINIST MEAL DEFINITION

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Feminist MEAL is a call for practitioners to ensure that MEAL processes are as gender transformative as the outcomes they seek to contribute to. Which is why it is grounded in the examination of causes and power dynamics that drive inequalities, rather than in only analyzing their effects. In doing so, it explicitly works with all community members to further gender justice and women's rights.

Intrinsically, feminist MEAL is a flexible, political, intersectional and highly participatory approach that is focused on learning<sup>16</sup> :

- **FLEXIBLE:** it does not prescribe a methodology or specific instructions, rather it is iterative, process-focused and mixed methods oriented.
- **POLITICAL:** without being partisan, it contributes to challenging power structures that sustain inequalities. It recognizes that "the contexts in which evaluations operate are politicized, and evaluators bring a particular combination of experiences, attitudes and characteristics that influence evaluation design, implementation, findings and recommendations"<sup>17</sup>.
- **INTERSECTIONAL:** it acknowledges that inequalities stem from different social identities (e.g. gender, status, ethnicity, class, age). Thus, it generates evidence on differentiated forms of exclusion and oppression.
- **HIGHLY PARTICIPATORY:** it supports collaboration at all stages, while acknowledging the right to decide *if* and *how* to participate. It contributes to the empowerment and agency, particularly of women.
- **FOCUSED ON LEARNING:** it sustains cross-cutting spaces for reflection, it prioritizes capacity exchange and knowledge sharing. It recognizes and promotes knowledge plurality or knowledges.

<sup>16</sup> This definition would not exist without AQOOC's technical sheet [Une approche féministe au suivi, à l'évaluation et à l'apprentissage](#), Oxfam India's training series on [Gender, Power and MEAL](#), Oxfam Canada's [Guidance Note on Feminist MEAL](#) and the tremendous work of colleagues around the world.

<sup>17</sup> See Oxfam (2019), [Guide to Feminist Influencing](#)



## A NOTE ON THE USAGE OF 'POLITICAL'

MEAL is not neutral. Defining it as political is a way of acknowledging that power dynamics exist in the relations between all actors involved (e.g., NGOs, governments, community influencers) and that these often create inequalities. Throughout its work, Oxfam aims at challenging oppressions by amplifying the voices and actions of women, and their allies, who are resisting and fighting for justice.

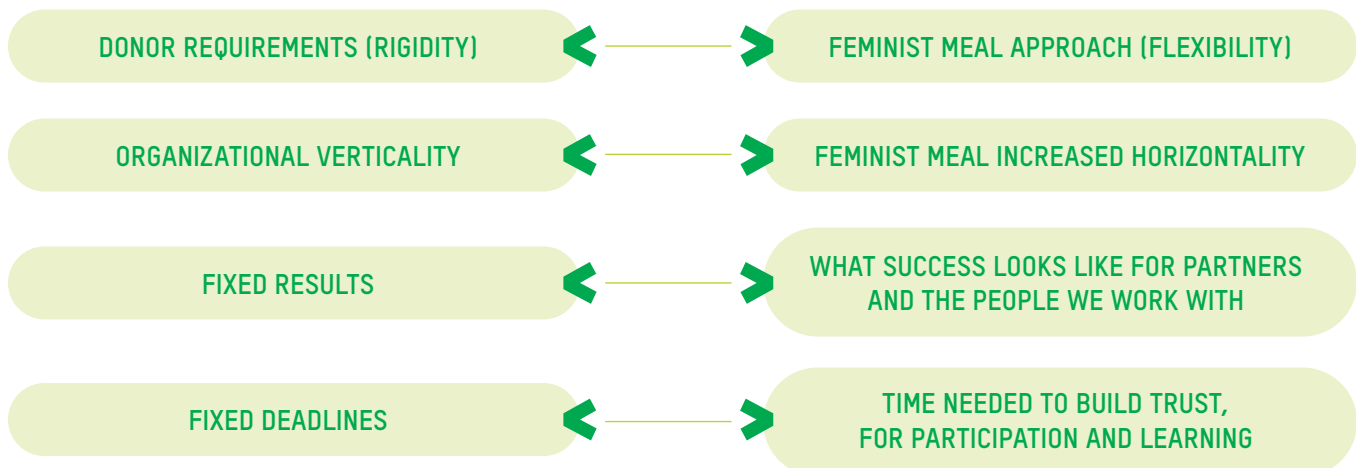
Yet, within the working group that produced this document, it was noted that - in some contexts - the word 'political' is felt to be controversial. Thus, it might pose challenges and limitations in our work with allies, partners and communities.

Given that we could not reach consensus, Oxfam teams are encouraged to adapt and contextualize its usage accordingly. For instance, one could call it 'activism' instead. In the end, the key is that the approach is adopted and implemented, no matter how it is labelled.

### 1.3 TRADE-OFFS AND PROPOSITION FOR ADDRESSING CHALLENGES

Feminist MEAL emerges from the need and interest for evidence-based work, in which data and knowledges are accessible and useful for all stakeholders. It represents a paradigmatic shift, which demands transformations at all scales - from the personal to the collective. It needs reflexivity, creativity and co-creation in proposing concept definitions, in data collection methods and sources, in data analysis and interpretation, in knowledge sharing strategies and learning opportunities and, in accountability channels and audiences.

While upholding its ambition, feminist MEAL acknowledges that *we can't have it all*. In practice, the implementation of feminist MEAL involves balancing different stakeholder expectations and being aware of inevitable trade-offs:



Feminist MEAL is equally concerned with the question of *what to evaluate?* as it is with that of *how to evaluate?* In the spirit of trade-offs, and since we accept that *we can't have it all*, the following is suggested:

### **LET'S BE PRAGMATIC WITH THE WHAT?**

We have less liberty here; we must comply with requirements such as:

- Logic model and performance measurement framework
- Some imposed indicators
- Yearly work plans and targets as well as yearly reports
- Baseline, midline and endline reviews

This can and must change though. Oxfam-Québec is taking every opportunity to raise its donors' awareness on the flexibility, time and resources needed for feminist MEAL success.

### **BUT, LET'S BE CREATIVE IN THE HOW?**

We have greater liberty here; we commit to challenging ourselves and pushing boundaries on:

- Concept definitions
- Choosing un-imposed indicators
- Data collection and analysis (methods and sources)
- Accountability channels and audiences
- Learning strategy and agenda

Since the implementation of feminist MEAL is a collective learning experience, it is foreseen as an incremental and iterative change process. Its implementation will be done step by step while we analyze what worked (and why) and adapt accordingly.

Successfully shifting both organizational and individual behaviours require a continuous commitment to reflexivity and, ongoing technical support and practical guidance. Feminist MEAL requires and must ensure awareness and a common understanding of feminist principles and approaches<sup>18</sup>. Not least, sufficient resources must be allocated to further feminist MEAL, both in programmatic planning (i.e., time and spaces) and in budget allocation. These are all addressed in the following sections.

<sup>18</sup> See OGB (2020), [Feminist MEAL Needs Assessment – Report on Findings and Recommendations](#)

# PART 2

## THE IMPLEMENTATION OF FEMINIST MEAL

### 2.1 FEMINIST MEAL: NOT ONLY AN APPROACH



Feminist MEAL is consistent with the strategies, approaches and cross-cutting themes being implemented within Oxfam projects and programs. Nonetheless, feminist MEAL needs to be conceived as an approach one adopts as well as a posture one embodies and holds. In other words, the approach is a result of how we personally apply the posture with teams and partners through adaptation, co-creation and creativity.

#### WHY FEMINIST MEAL IS ALSO A POSTURE?

Understanding feminist MEAL as a posture raises the fact that we are first and foremost embodied beings. We inhabit a particular body with certain characteristics (e.g., young, black, female), which are understood by society in particular ways. Intersectionality allows us to understand how our characteristics are socially translated into privileges and oppressions. As stakeholders we bring specific experiences, attitudes and characteristics to the MEAL process, which influence evaluation design and implementation as well as the framing of findings and recommendations. Furthermore, feminist MEAL is decolonial in that it challenges structures and ideas that sustain historical inequalities. To that end, feminist MEAL challenges assumptions and beliefs, while visibilizing narratives, practices and behaviours that have been historically undervalued. For example, MEAL practitioners must reflect on multiple actions: the decision to evaluate, evaluation methodology, data interpretation, how and with whom the evaluation knowledge is generated, communicated and used.



## A NOTE ON CARE

Feminisms are concerned with dismantling all systems of oppression, particularly the patriarchy. As such, care departs from systems of domination, where people are either dominated or dominating and rather, it embraces the partnership system, which supports mutually significant and respectful relations<sup>19</sup>. As such, feminist MEAL advocates for care as a guiding principle, which is in turn, is expressed in a multitude of manners— from self-care to both, *care about* (emotional investment in and attachment to others) and *care with* (political mobilization towards transformation)<sup>20</sup>.

**TAKE SELF-CARE SERIOUSLY.** Provide for and encourage teams to self-care. Similarly, the feminist journey might be personally uncomfortable, which is why commitment to critical thinking and compassion in equal measure are necessary for a sustainable transformation.

**CARE ABOUT LIMITS.** Respect others' limits as well as the limitations of a MEAL process in particular contexts. Put others' needs and desires before the collection of data. Participants might not feel comfortable or give their consent to share certain information.

**SHARING IS CARING.** Recognize that hierarchies exist, but they need not to be ones of domination. Leaders are focused on facilitating and empowering others, rather than on controlling and ordering. This concept in care theory is known as hierarchies of actualization. Such hierarchies consider all as knowers and their experiences, observations and positions as valuable.

**CARE DEEPLY.** Feminist MEAL is committed to caring for and with partners. It reaffirms the departure from a logic of charity and philanthropic aspirations. Caring deeply is best summarized by Lila Watson's words: "If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time, but if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together."

**CARE TO SEE.** We measure what we care about and in doing so, we assign or deny value. For instance, social change has often been measured exclusively in civic spaces (e.g., legislation or political participation) and not in domestic or intimate spaces such as the household. One could argue this is because the household has been signified as "feminine"— it has been thought of as a space for reproduction, rather than for production. As such, it has been historically undervalued and underseen. Feminist MEAL challenges what and how we measure. It starts by asking partners and the people we work with what matters and what does success look like *for them*.

<sup>19</sup> See Eisler (2007)

<sup>20</sup> See Tronto (2013)

## 2.2 WHAT IS NEEDED FOR FEMINIST MEAL SUCCESS?

The success of feminist MEAL relies on a transformation at the levels of A) people, B) processes, and C) platforms and spaces. These different layers are not linear, but constantly interacting in learning loops.

### A) People

All stakeholders will play roles as users, contributors, co-creators, brokers or champions of feminist MEAL. Although these roles are diverse, they all require the consolidation of three types of competencies: a) attitudes, b) knowledges, c) skills.

#### a) Attitudes

MEAL skills are not just technical. By its very nature, a feminist approach challenges us to consider our own power, privilege and understanding of the world<sup>21</sup>. Practitioners must be self-aware and embody Oxfam's values of equality, empowerment, solidarity, inclusiveness, accountability and courage. Feminist MEAL encourages care and empathy towards colleagues, partners and the people we work with. It commits to fair and inclusive partnerships, based on mutual trust and respect to create synergies in favor of gender justice.

To know oneself, taking into account multiple social identities (such as age, color of skin, gender, nationality, language, sexuality, etc.), is to recognize where one is situated within the dynamic intersections of systems of privilege and oppression<sup>22</sup>. As such, feminist MEAL encourages to understand one's own positionality and to expose biases, prejudices and assumptions that could impact MEAL practices. This can be through a positionality by reflexivity exercise (also see resource box):

REFLEXIVITY	REPRESENTATION	POSITIONALITY
Who am I? What are my social identities?	What do these mean for me and for others?	How do my social identities impact my life?
Describe yourself in terms of age, nationality, sexual orientation, ethnicity, sex/gender, language, color of skin, religion, class, ability, etc.	Describe the social value and meaning that is assigned to your identities.	Position yourself in terms of privileges and oppressions <sup>23</sup> .
e.g., I have a Canadian nationality.	e.g., Unlike many other nationalities, Canadians can easily travel around the world and we can work in development projects in other countries.	e.g., The people of the country to where I am going mostly do not come to Canada to work on development projects in our country. It is a privilege to choose to work in another country and be able to do so. Respect must always be given to local populations and host communities.
Situating knowledges (e.g., in the Canadian context) I am first and foremost accountable to my host country, colleagues, partners and the people we work with.		

<sup>21</sup> See Oxfam (2021), [Transforming Gender Inequalities. Practical Guidance for Achieving Gender Transformation in Resilient Development](#)

<sup>22</sup> See Jacobson & Mustafa (2019) and Crenshaw (1989)

<sup>23</sup> See Collins (1990)

## b) Knowledges

Starting from the premise that knowledge is an exercise of power (see power-knowledge in glossary) feminist MEAL acknowledges that “there are many ways of knowing [yet] some are privileged over others”<sup>24</sup>. Accordingly, it recognizes that MEAL is situated in a particular context (e.g., north to south development) and is informed by a range of specific elements, such as history, traditions, political ideology or personal experience<sup>25</sup>. Feminist MEAL is committed to sharing power<sup>26</sup>, which also involves challenging the power exercised by MEAL itself<sup>27</sup>.

Feminist MEAL “challenges us to think differently about what is considered evidence, pushes the boundaries of how evidence is captured, questions who gives knowledge meaning and power”<sup>28</sup>. It is also concerned with exploring diverse knowledges (e.g., embodied and experiential knowledges—see resource box) and recognizing various methods for monitoring, evaluation and learning (e.g., storytelling see resource box). Accordingly, it favors data collection methods that enable the expression of feelings, attitudes and behaviours to surface diverse perspectives.

Feminist MEAL values all as co-learners: everyone has knowledge and there is always something to learn from someone else. Understood as the right to learn and the responsibility to contribute to knowledge generation, knowledge citizenship is adopted by all<sup>29</sup>. Feminist MEAL challenges who is producing the knowledge and adapts to whom the knowledge being produced for.

Equally, there can be no feminist liberation while there are other systems of oppression beyond the patriarchy, such as racism and classism. Consequently, feminist MEAL requires an ongoing study of related topics such as intersectional feminism, decoloniality and rights-based frameworks.



<sup>24</sup> See Podems (2010)

<sup>25</sup> See Haraway (1988)

<sup>26</sup> See Oxfam (2019), [Guide to Feminist Influencing](#)

<sup>27</sup> See Foucault (1980)

<sup>28</sup> See Oxfam Canada (2020), [Guidance Note on Feminist MEAL](#)

<sup>29</sup> See [Oxfam's Knowledge and Learning Framework 2030](#)



## A NOTE ON DECOLONIALITY<sup>30</sup>

Decoloniality is a term coined by Quijano and it is mostly grounded in the Latin American context. Post-colonialism and decoloniality emerge as a response to Western colonialism. Decoloniality seeks to deconstruct colonialism in its material and ideological forms to give way to other ways of thinking and being in the world. Decoloniality challenges us to detach from the overall colonial structure of knowledge to then imagine possibilities “of ways of thinking and being in the world that the rhetoric of modernity disavowed and the logic of coloniality implement” (Mignolo, 2017).

The use of knowledges (in plural) throughout this document is a way of recognizing that multiple knowledges co-exist, and they are all valuable.

Why is this relevant to our work?

The development industry, it has been argued by many scholars (see Ferguson, 1994; Beard, 2007; etc.), is a continuation of the civilizing mission, which was the moral basis of the colonial project throughout the world.

Embedded within the development industry, Oxfam is one of many development agencies that mostly operate in the “global south”, mimicking economic flows and power relations that enabled colonialism. Thus, it is imperative to constantly question our work and ourselves to expose biases, assumptions and prejudices. As an organization committed to ensure justice and equality, we must become accountable to our host countries, partners and people we work with.

### c) Skills

Feminist MEAL recognizes that how we work is as important as what we work on. It places value on people as data sources by prioritizing participant observation, active listening and inclusive participation of partners, social groups and community members. Feminist MEAL amplifies voices that are not often heard, especially those of women.

Feminist MEAL does not consider evaluators as experts but rather, as facilitators of collective processes. As such, feminist MEAL is communicated in a clear and accessible way (e.g., the use of translators, without technical jargon). It contributes to capacity building and exchange with partner organizations. Skills like team building, trust building, listening, synergy creation as well as tension de-escalation and conflict management are proactively and mindfully sought after.

<sup>30</sup> See Segato (2010), Chakrabarty (2000), Quijano & Ennis (2000)

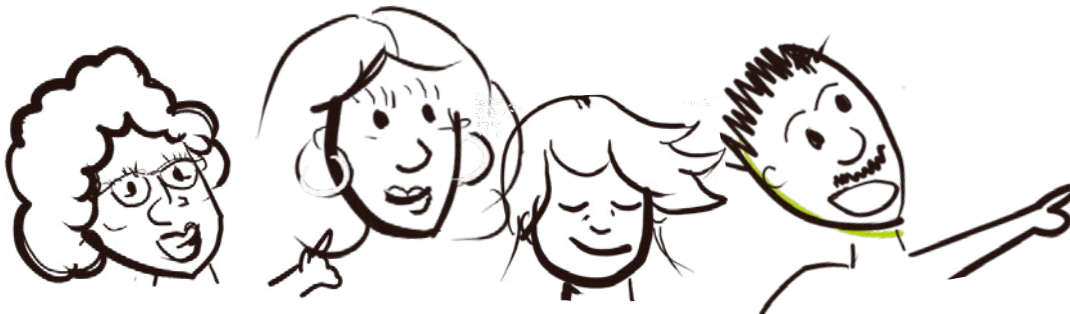


# A NOTE ON INTERSECTIONALITY

Intersectionality a term emerging from black feminism and coined by Crenshaw (1989) it refers to “a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects”. Specifically, Oxfam understands the term as the recognition of “multiple aspects of identity that play out in people’s lives and experiences, such as gender, class, age, ability, religion, sexual orientation or ethnicity. These elements can compound and exacerbate oppression and marginalization. Data gathering and analysis are done through an intersectional lens, recognizing the heterogeneity of communities and groups”<sup>31</sup>.

## B) Processes

Feminist MEAL does not prescribe specific set of tools or instructions. It suggests a language, concepts, guidelines and offers a range of reflections to challenge the user into furthering it. Adopting feminist MEAL involves a series of adaptation and contextualization of processes and methods already in use. This takes commitment, time and spaces. Thus, adequate resources must be allocated to it.



<sup>31</sup> See Oxfam Canada (2020), [Guidance Note on Feminist MEAL](#)

Here are suggested questions for adapting practices and tools to a feminist MEAL approach:

KEY ELEMENTS	QUESTIONS TO ASK OURSELVES
<b>Participants</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the historic and current rights violations faced by the people with whom we work?</li> <li>• How are the people you work with exercising power? How does your work support their struggle?</li> <li>• What power relations, in particular gender relations, take place in the social group and context I will be working with?</li> <li>• Recognize that time is needed to establish trust, and even then, it might not be gained.</li> </ul>
<b>OXFAM and partners</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Position yourself by taking time to do a reflexivity exercise (see resource box).</li> <li>• Ask yourself: what do I represent for the people I am working with? From where I stand, am I contributing or am I occupying too much space?</li> <li>• How do they understand my presence there (as an Oxfam representative and as a person)? What do people you work with expect out of Oxfam? Could my presence upset the participants?</li> <li>• Become engaged by actively listening and conducting participant observation.</li> </ul>
<b>Guarantee safety</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask participants in a safe manner: what is a safe space? How can we ensure a safe space?</li> <li>• Ensure participants have safety and feedback mechanisms at their disposal. Ask: what feedback mechanisms they would want to see implemented? What time and place suit them best for evaluation purposes?</li> </ul>
<b>Share power</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Define concepts (particularly abstract ones) with participants. Ask: what do you understand by...? How can we communicate...?</li> <li>• Expose existing knowledge. Ask: what knowledge and experience do participants bring to the table? How can these knowledges and experiences inform our work?</li> <li>• Participation is guaranteed but optional. Ask: would you like to participate? If so, how would you like to participate?</li> <li>• Recognize and remove barriers for participation. Ask: do you need interpretation? Where do you want to carry out the work?</li> <li>• Be sensitive about gender. For instance, if you are working only with women or men, ask am I the best person to talk to this particular group of people about these subjects?</li> </ul>
<b>Focus on learning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask yourself and the people you work with: what do we consider knowledge? By whom is this knowledge produced? For whom is it produced? Is this useful knowledge for partners and/or people you work with?</li> <li>• Seek different points of view on the same subject and understand how participants are personally and collectively affected. Ask them what knowledge we should all acquire. How do you imagine is the best way to share that knowledge?</li> </ul>

### C) Platforms and Spaces

The creation of knowledge is by nature a collective process, one that relies on exchange and sharing. Platforms and spaces (online or offline) are needed to connect people to enable exchange. Feminist MEAL requires iterative, incremental and experimental learning processes including capacity building and training<sup>32</sup>.

Oxfam already hosts several spaces, such as MEAL communities of practice or the very steering group that produced this document. It is useful to consolidate such spaces as well as parallel feminist spaces at all scales – from the self to the social. A good example of a parallel space is a masculinities group for men working at or with Oxfam who want to analyze, explore and collectively imagine masculinities diverging from patriarchal standards.

Feminist MEAL conversations can involve sensitive topics and vulnerability. As such non-exhaustive recommendations for making a space or platform inclusive are suggested:

- Ensure safety of all participants: no aggressive behavior or practice is allowed.
- Nothing justifies the silencing of voices: anything can be said, if it is done in a respectful manner.
- The principle of care guides: it is based on respect and reciprocity.
- Ask participants: what is a co-creation space, group or work?
- Guarantee the exercise of power to participate, and power to contribute.
- Commit to creating a sense of safety and accompany others in the sharing of experiences and feelings.



<sup>32</sup> See OGB (2020), [Feminist MEAL Needs Assessment – Report on Findings and Recommendations](#)

## 2.3 FEMINIST MEAL GUIDELINES

To integrate the feminist approach explicitly and proactively in all phases of the MEAL cycle, the following guidelines are suggested. They can be used to design, test and adapt existing methods, processes and ways of working to further the approach.

Indications on how to apply these guidelines can be found in the [feminist MEAL resource box](#).

### GUIDELINES FOR PLANNING

- Include and monitor clear objectives and strategies for contributing to gender justice and women's rights.
- Systematically engage in positionality through reflexivity as well as with the analysis of power relations, gender relations, and assumptions (see resource box).
- Support partners to take the lead in MEAL processes: they are active players rather than recipients.
- Create spaces for project stakeholders and communities to decide what success is and how to measure it.
- Adequately resource feminist MEAL: CAMSA guidelines recommend 5% of project budget, feminist MEAL will need at least 7% (it is an investment that will pay off!).
- Allocate as many resources to accountability and learning as to monitoring and evaluation (time, funds, etc.).
- Sharing resources with partners is key to sharing power.



## GUIDELINES FOR MONITORING AND EVALUATION

### ► Feminist MEAL also serves the gender justice agenda

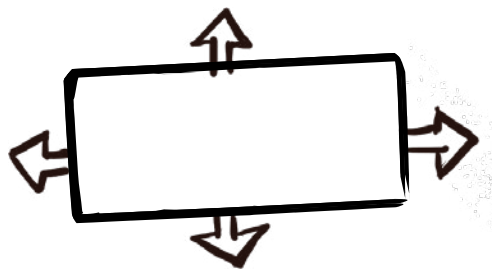
- Encourage teams to observe, listen and learn from partners, identifying knowledges, behaviours and practices aligned with feminist principles.
- Engage in capacity exchange on gender justice with partner organizations and the people we work with as part of the feminist MEAL approach.
- Systematically disaggregate data by gender and/or by social identities to capture various groups' experiences and perceptions.

### ► MEAL processes are inclusive and highly participatory

- Ensure quality participation: project stakeholders are constantly involved in decision-making not just consulted.
- Favor interactive data collection methods that enable the expression of feelings, attitudes and behaviours to surface diverse perspectives and to value different ways of knowing.
- Amplify voices that are not often heard, especially those of women.
- MEAL objectives go beyond reporting: monitoring and evaluation are key ingredients for accountability and learning.

### ► MEAL processes guided by “do no harm”

- The safety of participants and facilitators is a priority and as such, it guides decisions on all MEAL processes<sup>33</sup>.
- High ethical standards are met and tailored to contexts and situations. For example, informed and voluntary consent, optional self-identification of social identities, confidentiality<sup>34</sup>.
- Data collection exercises are moments of interaction with the communities. Equip staff to make referrals to useful resources, organizations and authorities if required. For example, for health services or psychological support services.



<sup>33</sup> See Oxfam (2020), [Making our Programs Safe Guidance](#) and Oxfam [Resources on Safeguarding in MEL](#)

<sup>34</sup> See Oxfam (2020), [Ethical Research Guidelines](#) and Oxfam (2015), [Responsible Program Data Policy](#)

## GUIDELINES FOR ACCOUNTABILITY

### ► Transparency and information sharing

- Every stakeholder is provided with enough information to empower them to participate and make informed decisions.
- Transparency and participation interlink to create a proactive approach to accountability: accountability is not an end-stage activity, it is an ongoing process.
- MEAL mechanisms enable us to recognize resistance to change, identify negative impacts, possible backlash, unexpected outcomes and learn from mistakes.
- Share results and knowledge in accessible and creative ways so that evidence is used locally for advocacy and policy change.

### ► Feedback and complaint mechanisms

- Feedback mechanisms are culturally appropriate, effective, accessible and safe<sup>35</sup>, especially for women and groups in situation of marginalization.
- Consider language and literacy levels and provide both oral and written feedback channels.
- Consider access to communications technologies and provide face-to-face and virtual feedback channels (email, telephone, infodesk, community visits, review meetings, etc.).

### ► Expand accountability

- Three modes for accountability: accountability to donors, social accountability to stakeholders, self-accountability to one's own quality standards and values<sup>36</sup>.
- Investigate the effectiveness of information sharing, participation and feedback mechanisms, and observe any changes in gender and power relations.
- Evaluate the state of partnerships across projects, programs and campaigns.
- Feminist MEAL must be a source of change: it should contribute to changes in practices and processes at Oxfam, as much as anywhere else.



<sup>35</sup> Including the guaranteed protection of personal data

<sup>36</sup> See Oxfam Vietnam and Novib (2020), [Feminist MEAL Learning Session](#)

## GUIDELINES FOR LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE SHARING

### ➤ Learning as a MEAL driver

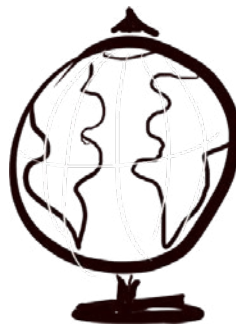
- Use and position knowledge for decision-making.
- Include capacity exchange from consultants to Oxfam staff and partners as part of their mandates.
- Recognize the diversity of learning audiences and ways of learning.
- All stakeholders can contribute to an environment that enables, encourages, and values learning at all levels of our organizations.

### ➤ Respond to the plurality of knowledges and audiences

- Explore methods and push the boundaries of capturing, producing and sharing knowledges.
- Organize and facilitate learning events (formal and informal).
- Adapt accountability and learning products to different audiences.

### ➤ Define learning agendas

- A learning agenda is a set of learning questions directly related to the program that, when answered, enables more effective work.
- Focus learning on 2 to 3 main themes.
- Identify learning questions, especially on gender justice and women's rights, and incorporate them in the MEAL system.



# CONCLUSION

Feminist MEAL should allow us to track transformative change but also to contribute to it. The approach proposed in this document is an iterative and incremental process that starts with self-examination and encourages the generation of behaviours, practices and knowledges. We encourage readers to consult the [feminist MEAL resource box](#) for a curated collection of activities and exercises to implement this approach.

To apply some of the feminist MEAL guidelines we developed, a visual synthesis of our collective learning journey was produced:



# ANNEX 1.

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