

Global Feminist Cooperation Targeting the G7:

Thoughts & Recommendations





Summary

An essential element of dismantling “imperialist, capitalist, white-supremacist patriarchy”¹ is increased feminist cooperation – this also holds true for work influencing the Group of 7 (G7). As a UK-based organisation, the Gender and Development Network (GADN) considers the G7 a key target, given the UK’s disproportionate influence on global decision-making within this forum. To advocate for the adoption of feminist alternatives by the G7, GADN works with others globally, particularly within Women 7 (W7).

Drawing from GADN’s own experience in the space, conversations with allies in the Global South and North and documentation from W7 co-chairs, this learning paper collates lessons learned and reflections from GADN’s G7 engagement in 2022 and 2023.

It suggests further thoughts and recommendations for improving feminist cooperation within W7 across issues such as timeframes; advocacy; feminist representation and movement building.



Introduction

In attempting global feminist cooperation we, as Global North-based organisations, are often faced with our own shortcomings and still have much to (un)learn and unpack. Our advocacy in Northern-dominated ‘international’ processes like the Group of Seven (G7) can be particularly problematic. As part of our work as the Gender and Development Network (GADN), we, like many others, try to learn and constantly challenge ourselves to reflect on our role – and improve our practices.² In this paper, we aim to share some of our learning and reflections on global feminist cooperation targeting the G7, based on our own experiences along with conversations with allies in the Global South and North. We hope that this paper, along with the evaluations and reflections that others have undertaken, will be useful in developing future feminist collaboration in the G7 space.

Global feminist cooperation


One of the central ways to dismantle the patriarchy and advance feminist alternatives is through increased global feminist cooperation; a practice that is rooted in the concept of ‘transnational feminist solidarity’ which can be described as: “A way of thinking about women in similar contexts across the world, in different geographical spaces, rather than as all women across the world; an understanding of a set of unequal relationships among and between peoples and taking a critical antiracist, anticapitalist position that would make feminist solidarity work possible.”³

Therefore, global feminist cooperation is based on a common understanding of how the world works, while also recognising the similarities as well as differences in the way that oppressive systems harm women in different geographical spaces.⁴ This means that working respectfully and collaboratively to advocate for the transformation of global decision-making must be cognisant of these realities, which is the understanding that underpins this learning paper.

Why GADN works on the G7

As a UK-based network, GADN sees it as its responsibility to hold the UK government to account – for its own international development policy as well as in multilateral organisations and fora. As a member of the G7, the UK government has a disproportionate influence on global decision-making. GADN recognises the significant impact the G7 has in shaping global agendas and so has targeted this forum to influence. GADN works with our members and others internationally, particularly within the Women 7 (W7), to influence the G7 Communiques and to propose alternative policies.

The G7’s role is particularly significant in shaping international economic discourse, which is a priority for GADN. Our Feminist Reframing of Macro-level Economics (REFRAME) project seeks to challenge and shift the way economic policy is framed within the international sphere and reframe



economic models so that wellbeing, sustainability and care are recognised as the prime objectives of economic activity. The enduring dominance of “imperialist, capitalist, white-supremacist patriarchy”⁵ continues to perpetuate interlocking and oppressive systems that form the basis of the current neoliberal economic order which disproportionately harms Black, Indigenous, and women of colour. Global economic decision-making, determined by a small elite, perpetuates and normalises structural inequalities and the exploitation of resources and people across the Global South. Yet the significant impact of these economic decisions on women’s rights is rarely recognised. The project therefore promotes feminist economic alternatives, developed and advanced through enhanced global feminist cooperation, to counter historic inequalities and decolonise economic decision-making. To deliver the project’s aims, GADN works with feminist allies – particularly in the Global South – to centre the analyses and expertise from countries that continue to bear the greatest costs of global decision-making.

What this paper will cover

This learning paper is informed by GADN’s experience of advocating for and advancing feminist alternatives within the G7 and offers some lessons and recommendations on global feminist cooperation in this area. The G7 has been a target of GADN’s advocacy since roughly 2015. GADN has been involved in the W7 since its inception in 2018 and co-chaired the group in 2021 under the UK’s G7 presidency. GADN has also been co-chairing the W7’s economic justice working group for the past two years and exchanges regularly with W7 co-chairs in other G7 countries, using the space to push reflection on how to best cooperate with feminists globally.

This paper draws from GADN’s engagements in the G7 in 2022, under the German presidency, as well as in 2023, when Japan held the presidency, to inform its analysis. GADN used the opportunities the W7 process offered to connect further and exchange with Southern feminists whose input has shaped our work and this paper. Additionally, GADN conducted two remunerated interviews in September 2023 with W7 advisors based in the Global South who were involved in W7 in 2023, Sachini Perera of Realizing Sexual and Reproductive Justice (RESURJ) and Esther Mwaura-Muiru of Stand for Her Land Campaign, to capture their reflections on the process and global feminist cooperation. With this paper, GADN intends to document our lessons learned and use it to inform our continued knowledge-building and progress as GADN, whilst working collaboratively with other feminists to enhance our effectiveness in the G7 space.



What is G7?

The G7 is an informal forum composed of seven of the world's largest economies, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the UK and the US as well as the European Union which holds a consultative status. This powerful group serves as a platform for these nations to collaborate on key economic and political matters on a global scale. The G7 takes place annually and the process is hosted on a rotating basis by each member country from January to December (see an illustrative timeline below). In addition to the G7 Leaders' Summit, which is often the event that attracts the most attention, there are G7 Ministerials taking place throughout the year. These are meetings of the respective G7 Ministers covering different issues, such as Finance; Foreign Affairs; Labour; Gender Equality in addition to others, such as Health; Climate; Digital and Development, also resulting in a Communique each, which is intended to then inform the Leaders' Declaration.

The G7 can often be seen as an illegitimate and highly exclusionary club that holds an enormous amount of power with limited accountability as its influence stretches outside of members' geographical borders and has a huge impact, particularly in the Global South, without real accountability and scrutiny.

To ensure that civil society is represented within the G7, there are six official civil society engagement groups – Business 7 (B7), Civil 7 (C7), Labour 7 (L7), Science 7 (S7), Think 7 (T7), Youth 7 (Y7) and W7.

What is W7?

Established in 2018, W7 is one of the G7's official civil society engagement groups, focused on gender equality and women's rights. Its leadership is held by civil society organisations from a member country and changes each year in accordance with the G7 presidency. Its set-up and level of engagement varies from presidency to presidency but usually includes representatives from global civil society working on gender equality and women's rights. Each year, they come together to draft demands to the G7 on a range of gender equality and women's rights concerns that are then published in a W7 Communique which aims to influence G7 leaders.⁶

Depending on the political context of the country that holds the G7 presidency in a respective year, the level of involvement and engagement of W7 in the G7 process varies. In the past couple of years, W7 has made important advances in consultation, managing to be invited to ministerial meetings, such as the one on gender equality as well as welcoming high-level politicians to their own W7 Summit, such as German Chancellor Scholz in 2022.

An illustrative timeline of the G7 and W7 process, exact timings vary from year to year⁷





Lessons Learned:

Reflecting on engagement in G7 and W7 process 2022

Over the years there have been a number of evaluations and continuous reflections which have led to changes and improvements in the way W7 operates during 2022 and 2023, summarised below.

The W7 process in 2022

In 2022, Germany held the G7 presidency and consequently, a German CSO – the National Council of German Women’s Organizations – assumed the role of chairing the W7. Ahead of the kick-off of the process in January 2022, a national group of experts, selected by the National Council of German Women’s Organizations, the W7 Germany Think Tank, already started working together to develop a zero draft of the W7 Communique text. Based on previous focus areas and current priorities, they selected the following six themes for their presidency: Women’s economic empowerment, justice and rights; gender-equitable Covid-19 recovery; climate justice; feminist foreign policy; ending violence against women and girls and gender-based violence; and accountability mechanisms.


A broad call for W7 Advisors led to the selection of 64 global representatives from 24 different countries in the Global South and the Global North, who started working on the identified themes in working groups, each led by at least two co-chairs. According to the National Council of German Women’s Organizations, “W7 Advisors were required to have several years of experience in international multilateral processes and advocacy for gender equality and to be an official member or leader of a civil society organization working on gender equality.”⁸ While the W7 Advisors’ main task up until April 2022 was the completion of the W7 Communique and Implementation Plan, advisors were also approached for input into the different ministerial tracks and started advocacy alongside tweaking their final demands.

The W7 Summit took place in a hybrid manner in May 2022 ahead of the G7 Leaders’ Summit in June 2022.

Lessons from the W7 in 2022

Following the conclusion of the G7 Leaders’ Summit, the National Council of German Women’s Organizations organised an in-person W7 Strategy and Evaluation meeting and W7 Outreach Event to coincide with the G7 Gender Equality Ministerial in October 2022. This was in order to capture learnings and improve the W7’s coordination for 2023 and beyond.

The National Council of German Women’s Organizations emphasised the importance of Global South participation in the W7 process, supporting with visa arrangements, travel costs as well as prioritising the attendance of W7 Advisors from the Global South in official advocacy meetings.



Informed in part by the W7 Strategy and Evaluation Meeting in October 2022, the National Council of German Women's Organizations published a handbook in February 2023⁹, collating lessons learned from their presidency – many of which GADN echoes as they directly impact global feminist cooperation, including influencing on global macro-level economics:

- “Distribute the call for Advisors widely among grassroots organizations and/or networks in regions of the Global South and/or in the Caucasus / Eastern Europe and consider appointing NGOs instead of individual representatives of these NGOs as Advisors”
- “Define the various roles, opportunities, and responsibilities of the W7 Advisors and provide special guidance to W7 Advisors who represent an organization from a non-G7 country on how they might nevertheless pass on W7 messages to their governments and regions”
- “Ensure common ground among Advisors on key concepts and a thorough onboarding and introductory period for the W7 processes, e.g. by establishing a buddy system that connects “new” and “old” W7 Advisors”
- “Make the basis for the drafts of key documents transparent, e.g. by indicating what resources were used”
- “Work collaboratively to ensure inclusion of feminist demands from the Global South as well as of diverse and marginalized women by providing tailored and needs-based support (e.g. translation services)”¹⁰

Applying lessons learned in 2022 to the G7 and W7 process in 2023

Some of the lessons learned in 2022 resulted in recommendations for 2023, based on the handbook the National Council for German Women's Organizations published, that were implemented in this year's process.

Representation

For example, the call for applications for W7 Advisors explicitly stated that applicants ought to be “feminists representing women-led organisations and movements”, aiming to ensure genuine feminist representation grounded in civil society and feminist movements on the group rather than bringing together a collection of successful individual women.

‘Onboarding’ and collective learning

There have also been efforts to provide an opportunity for W7 Advisors new to the space to learn from those with more experience, e.g., via G7 advocacy tips sessions and the dissemination of documents such as the W7 Handbook produced by the German 2022 presidency.



Prioritising the participation of Southern feminists

Again, W7 Advisors based in the Global South were able to get support for travel to in-person meetings and were invited to speak at meetings targeting G7 leaders both in-person and virtually. As Sachini underlined: “I felt that that was a powerful moment, because even if there isn’t really a commitment coming out of it, it’s still a key moment to say, these are the issues in the Global South, and you are also responsible for these. And when we say accountability, we mean you as well”.

Arguably, the nature of the yearly shifting presidencies makes consistency in the process hard. New W7 co-chairs are faced with having to navigate their domestic G7 landscape each year, raise appropriate funding and start the group from scratch. Implementing recommendations from past lessons learned across the years can be difficult and so there is still potential for further improvements which are collated in the next section.



Looking Ahead:

Further suggestions and recommendations

Reflecting on the last two years and looking ahead, further suggestions and recommendations for global feminist cooperation in G7 spaces, based on what GADN has heard and observed, are identified below.


Timeframes

The yearly rotation of the presidency and the G7 Leaders' Summit usually taking place sometime in June also means that the timeframe for getting the group together and finalising the Communique is very limited. In the past, this has meant W7 deadlines often coincided with other engagements such as the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). Both of our interviewees echoed this point, with Esther Mwaura-Muiru pointing out "I think the process was so rushed" and Sachini reflecting that "The Communique was being finalised around the same time [as CSW], which meant I was doing whatever was needed to move that forward without fully getting a sense of this is what this means".

Future W7 presidencies could make sure they start the process earlier, even in the second half of the year before they are chair to ensure enough time to bring everybody up to speed and work on drafting the W7 demands as the start of January essentially means that influencing G7 leaders should commence in order to have an impact. Starting the presidency earlier and having more time seems to work well, e.g. in fora such as the W20, where the G20 Leaders' Summit only takes place towards the end of the year, as Esther observed during her engagement in 2015: "They [W20] gave us a chance to really have a deep dive on those issues as a team (...) but it was a long-term process".

Thematic work and working groups

Selection of thematic focus areas and with that, the determination of potential working groups seems to be where the political decision-making happens inside the W7. Consequently, this choice should not just be up to the W7 co-chairs in a respective year but steps could be taken by the respective W7 co-chairs to make this process more participatory and broad-based. The remit of each working group as well as the brief for the groups more generally could be clearly defined through such a process. The selection of advisors then needs to correspond to these themes to ensure the right expertise in the groups as well as to avoid slightly random combinations of priorities in one working group which makes agreeing on a concise set of demands under a theme difficult.



Within the working groups, demands need to be shaped by Southern feminists' analysis – while recognising that this too is not monolithic – and there is still progress to be made in that regard, as Esther argued: “Within each theme, there is a whole different perspective between Global South and Global North. We are dealing with the same issue but it’s different” and suggests: “It’s also about how do we understand each other’s context?” while emphasising: “Which are really the more weighty Southern issues? Which are really the more weighty Northern issues? What are the issues that we see jointly, the impact on us?”. It could be part of the working group co-chairs’ responsibilities to ensure the meaningful inclusion of the demands from Southern feminists.

‘Onboarding’


As discussed above, people who are new to the G7/W7 process could be offered onboarding support, for instance, in the form of working group co-chairs having one-on-ones with them to explain how the process works and for the new advisor to be able to outline their priorities so that they can be shaped into powerful demands, suitable for G7 influencing.

This is also connected to the timeframe point above – allowing enough time for onboarding and trying to plan the process around other international engagements many of the W7 Advisors might have, such as CSW, seems crucial.

Strategising, advocacy and accountability

All of these points would also support a more strategic focus on advocacy of W7’s work. The shifting presidency and failure to establish a fixed group of advisors that continues to engage in W7 every year means that while demands build on the years before, significant time is still spent on finalising language – time that could be spent more strategically to actually make sure these demands are being heard. As advocacy in these spaces takes time and often, things are slow to change, a suggestion could be to have a more comprehensive consultation and drafting process every couple of years and use the same demands for a number of years, only tweaking them slightly to adjust to current G7 priorities or potentially changed context. This process also needs to include Southern feminist organisations – either by involving Southern feminists directly and paying them for providing strategic policy input, and/or finding and establishing systematic ways in which W7 leaders/working group co-chairs scan and amplify relevant Southern feminist demands to base the text on.

Efforts are already being put into this, as Esther observed: “It surprised me how effective the W7 is in really not reinventing the wheel. People are actively cognisant of the value of not reinventing the wheel and have respect for the next host and the two previous hosts. That was amazing”, while acknowledging that advocacy efforts could still be ramped up more: “You see those alliances and creating alliances, not necessarily just a resource, but it is using the power of who we know and who we are linked to. I feel that in the gender equality spaces, we are not doing a lot of that. We really need to navigate and share who we know inside the system and use more of the system”.



This more strategic direction would then also involve a proper evaluation of the advocacy successes year after year to be able to track progress.¹¹ As Sachini noted, it would be useful to assess “how effective or not effective has that been?” as that would support in making an informed decision about involvement – “Does it make sense to engage around this? What issues should it be?”. Esther echoed those points, emphasising: “G7 is a force to reckon with when we are talking about international development. How do we track what priorities they give vis a vis what we positioned?” and added: “We need to focus on tracking where the resources go, where the policies go, I think that would be amazing”.


A more strategic approach could still hold time for openness and for making sure there is space for more ‘radical’ demands and truly progressive language. Sachini reflected: “People who had been part of the process before had very set ideas ‘this language will work, this might not work’, which is fine in advocacy spaces, you have to be strategic. But this also meant I didn’t feel as if I could ask our [RESURJ] members to give me some really progressive language around these issues. It didn’t really seem that it was a process where we could keep building in that way”. An iterative process that ensures that more progressive demands are embedded will be important, otherwise if they are simply added alongside less transformative demands it is the latter that will be acted upon by decision-makers.

Representation

Representation within the W7 group is crucial from multiple angles. As discussed before, ensuring genuine feminist representation firmly rooted in civil society and feminist movements on the ground is a priority for attendees globally. Working towards this, applying a rigid dichotomy between the Global South and Global North might be counterproductive. As GADN has written before, a more helpful conceptualisation might be ‘Global North power and privilege’ – a term describing the advantages brought by affiliation with the Global North, and the legacies of colonialism.¹² Sachini argued: “The advisory is designed in such a way that it’s the North in the South who can join. You need to have certain privileges, either to be an academic or to be the head of an organisation. The process assumed a lot – that I would have this time to spend on this and also that I would come with a lot of technical know-how, which doesn’t come unless I had been to other spaces as well. It felt as if it was imagining a certain kind of person who could also hold that space. So saying people from the South are there doesn’t always mean politically that the people whose voices are not really being heard are there.” and added: “It would be good for groups like you to intentionally also bring in people who are refugees, or self-led diaspora groups in the North”.

Similarly, points were made around opening up the whole W7 model to wider feminist movements, as Esther put it: “I wish somebody could take the communique that has been done and really use it as a tool to generate interest on those issues that were agreed so that it becomes a way of impacting skills on women human rights leaders on what are the major things that ended up in this communique”.

Additionally, a shift from the individualised nature of the W7 advisor model to engagement in an organisational capacity could be considered to ensure feminist representation and increased capacity to engage.



Generally, work within the W7 tends to place a big focus on how to improve the representation and experience of individual W7 Advisors from the Global South. For those Southern representatives wishing to take part in the W7, this is an important discussion. However, there also needs to be a conversation as to why they are being invited to be involved, what impact this should have and whether there is a better process to ensure meaningful global feminist cooperation within the W7. GADN's experience suggests that the recommendations around the inclusion of individuals as W7 Advisors may not be the most strategic way forward. Our observation is that for strategic reasons, many of the most progressive Southern feminist organisations do not want to prioritise their time directly influencing the G7 or being part of the W7. While they see it as an important space to influence for others, the exclusion of their governments means it is not a strategic priority for themselves. In this regard, GADN notes that one way forward may be to work out how to base the W7's work more profoundly on existing demands from the Global South whilst still holding space for those Southern feminists wishing to be involved directly. This has been echoed by Sachini who reflected on the choice to be involved as a W7 advisor: "We need enough information about the space to be able to make that decision for ourselves (...) It's a decision for Global South organisations to make, while acknowledging that, people are very, very overstretched, and trying to keep track of different processes".

Responsibility of feminists in G7 countries

Another suggestion that emerged from the interviews is for those feminists engaging in the G7 who are based in G7 countries to use their position, influence and capacity to gather intelligence and collate information to share with those in non-G7 countries. As Sachini said: "Organisations who may follow it as a primary space to also tell us, 'This is going to be the upcoming conversation, this is how demands have been so far, how effective or not effective has that been?'".

Joining up spaces

Joining up spaces when addressing similar issues in different fora also goes some way toward improving global feminist cooperation. So far, the advocacy conversations targeted at the G7 seem to have been somewhat siloed. In that regard, especially looking ahead to CSW68 in relation to macroeconomic policy, Sachini recommended: "And I would say, what would be really helpful is for those arguments to then be also heard in the UN because I think the Global South countries also need to hear them need to pick up on them. We need a way for these processes, something like the W7 process, to be closely connected to CSW next year when it's going to be about financial institutions". She noted this might also help in terms of limiting engagement of already overstretched feminists: "It wasn't super clear what connections with those larger process that some of us might be a part of are, like the SDGs or G20. What might those connections be so that we can also figure out how to integrate this [G7 advocacy] rather than it being another thing that we add on top of the other things we do".



Building a movement

The need to build personal relationships to improve the cooperation between feminists globally was also pointed out with regard to the W7 process. “You know a space you go and you feel very disempowered in terms of you don’t know the place, you do not have alliances. You are new to the space, people know each other, you don’t know anyone.”, observed Esther, adding that “W7 was so quick online and those things really, when you don’t know people, it doesn’t work effectively” and Sachini said: “It was a brand new space, it just felt as if these were all pieces that were just floating and you had to figure out how they all fully fit together”. While there were opportunities to meet in person as W7 both in 2022 and under the Japanese presidency in 2023, they might have not always been accessible to all advisors. A suggestion might be to use spaces many are attending already, such as CSW, as an opportunity to organise in-person get-togethers that will help form connections to aid interactions in the process and enable a smoother collaboration built on trust as part of the W7. This would also mean less energy and resources spent on organising separate in-person events for the W7 co-chairs of a respective year.

Consideration might also be given to building a tighter-knit group of the W7 as opposed to a forum that forms anew each year. This could lead to more meaningful collaboration and more time to build this movement with a bigger focus on strategic advocacy while allowing for sufficient space to shape demands together (see points made under timeframe above). Thematic clusters of people with different gender equality expertise areas would help inform W7’s work on an ongoing basis as opposed to the current set-up, which usually involves lots of participants from the respective host country who often won’t engage in the process again in the following year. As Esther suggested: “It has to be a team that backs up this process regardless of which country is hosting. This work cannot be done by the host alone”. This might also comprise factoring G7 engagement, including funding, into work plans for those organisations based in G7 countries wishing to be involved that allows them to engage long-term in a more sustainable way and includes funding to facilitate Southern feminists’ participation, for instance by supporting with travel costs or paying Southern experts for their input.



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Endnotes

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³ Alexander, J. M. and Mohanty, C.T. 1996. 'Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures'. Routledge, New York

⁴ As GADN has written before, "One way to approach this question is to consider what benefits an organisation, or individual derives by its affiliation with the Global North – (...) 'Global North power and privilege'. At the risk of perpetuating a false dichotomy between Global South and Global North, it is important to have a term that highlights the responsibility that those with 'Global North power and privilege' hold. This might include matters such as where an organisation is legally registered, where both visible and invisible power resides within its decision-making structures, where its funding comes from and its impact on public communications and campaigns, salary structures, and the organisation's own history, values and worldview. Our suggestion is that rather than trying to define whether an organisation is from the Global North, organisations should instead consider how they benefit from 'Global North power and privilege', including benefits derived from the legacies of colonialism." from Efange, Ouldali and Woodroffe 2022

⁵ hooks 2010

⁶ See for instance the 2023 W7 Communique: W7 Japan. 2023. 'W7 Communique: Feminist Demands for Building an Equal, Just, and Peaceful Future'. <https://women7.org/news/w7-japan-2023-communicue-is-now-available/>

⁷ Also see a timeline of G7 2022 events here: Focus2030. 2022. '2022 G7 & G20 Summits Timeline'. <https://focus2030.org/2022-G7-G20-Summits-timeline>

⁸ Ausserer, C., L. Gey, V. Otterstein, M. Standke-Erdmann and M. Taymour. 2023. 'W7 Handbook', p. 15. Deutscher Frauenrat. https://www.frauenrat.de/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/W7_Project-Handbook-2022.pdf

⁹ Ausserer et al. 2023

¹⁰ Selected lessons learned from Ausserer et al. 2023

¹¹ This has been done before but the evaluation process has yet to be established as a yearly exercise. For previous evaluations, see for instance: Ruthrauff, J., L. Thompson and M. Cahill. 2019. 'France Called for a Feminist G7, but Did the G7 Deliver?: A Report Card on the 2019 G7 Commitments to Gender Equality'. International Center for Research on Women and Center for Democratic Education. <https://www.icrw.org/report-card-on-2019-g7-commitments-to-gender-equality/>; Women 7. 2022. 'Women 7 Report Card on G7 Outcomes'. Deutscher Frauenrat. <https://www.frauenrat.de/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/W7-Report-Card-1.pdf>

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