

**THOUGHTS AND EXPERIENCES ON THE SUSTAINABLE
STRENGTHENING OF CIVIL SOCIETY - Vienna 2012**

Feminist activism and defending women's rights

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Some of the lessons learnt from over 2 decades of experiences gained while building the women's movement, from reflection to feminist activism, with key elements to reflect about the sustainable strengthening of civil society. Notes from Colectiva Feminista para el Desarrollo Local (Feminist Movement for Local Development).



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The thoughts and experiences I'm sharing with you are based on constructive and active feminism based on the women's movement of El Salvador.

I come from a country in which the peace treaties that put an end to a difficult civil war that has impacted various generations were signed 20 years ago. These treaties allowed for a complex democracy-building process to begin, in which serious authoritarian enclaves have persisted, that defined the spaces and limitations against which we, the civil society organizations, have pushed against in order to achieve social, economic, political and cultural change.

One of the deeply rooted authoritarian enclaves is the system of power relationships and male control and power over women as expressed in politics and discriminatory practices in all areas of social life and that are based on the widespread and common belief and feeling that men are superior to women.

Within this context, our most important experiences, which we will now reflect upon and base our discussion about strengthening civil society on, are the following:

1. The need to critically analyze reality with the women's perspective and interests as a starting point.

Critical analysis of reality



- Gain deep knowledge of key issues and causes of female oppression.
- See ourselves as part of a social women's movement.
- Identify the sources of its diversity and build common ground in order to work together.
- Create an own agenda, based on women's interests and rights.
- Identify public entities who are responsible for and have the competency to deal with issues.
- Partnership strategy following the principle of "working with others", horizontal relationships, less dependence.
- Consolidate demands and specific propositions.
- Strengthen women's personal and collective independence.
- Promote creative awareness-raising strategies.
- Local intervention and global perspective.

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2. The need to provide ourselves with a conceptual framework that allows us to understand the different realities of women, gain deep knowledge of the keys and causes of female oppression and interpret the different contexts in which such oppression occurs.
3. Building upon the previous 2 elements, approach a new analytic framework of social organizations and movements, recognize ourselves as being part of the social women's movement, identifying the sources of its diversity and creating common ground to work together.
4. Create our own agenda based on the analysis and women's interests, identifying recognized rights and the systematic violation of rights.
5. Identifying public authorities that are responsible for and have the competency to solve the problems women face in order to promote specific and concrete advocacy processes that lead to specific results and achievements that motivate women to keep fighting for their rights.
6. As far as possible, to consolidate the claim and demand for women's rights with specific proposals for public policy measures that can be implemented by the institutions.
7. Build partnership strategies in which the principle "working with others" is a key aspect of the organization's actions.
8. Strengthen women's personal and collective independence on individual and organizational level.
9. Contribute to overcome dependency relationships among the various kinds and levels of organizations of society, directing efforts and resources to strengthening the local capacities of women's organizations.
10. Work for a generation of more horizontal relationships within the women's movement, initiating an internal discussion of how to distribute and access resources.
11. Develop awareness-raising strategies with creative methods that can motivate more people and help them understand our proposals and demands.
12. Constantly learn from the experience of others and our own, learning from failures and successes, create an open mindset to revise and evaluate processes.
13. Bet on new processes that are linked to just causes, articulating the implementation of the projects, constantly revising why we do what we do.
14. Articulate our work on various levels with local interventions to build national, regional and global perspectives based on our links to the international feminist movement.



(Kisses without violence)