

Feminist Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning

Principles for a Mindset Shift

A Guide to Support
Learning and Unlearning



ABOUT THE GUIDE

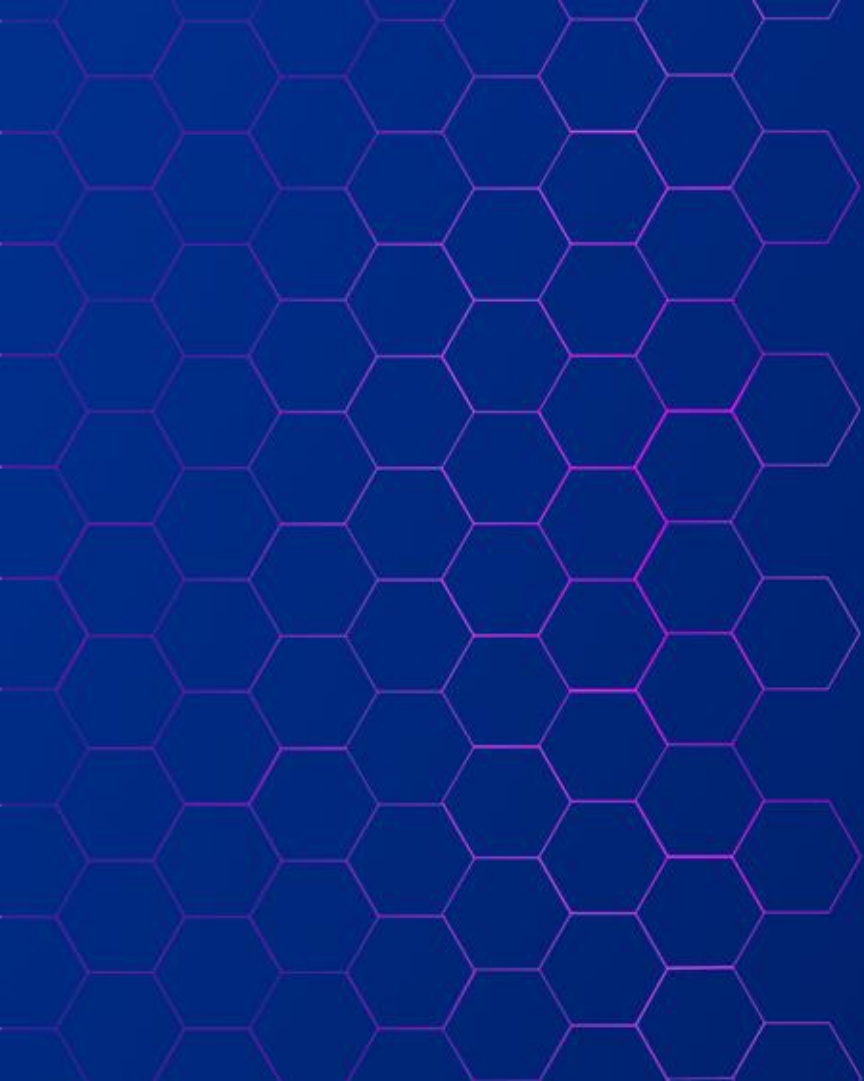


Welcome!

This guide will support you to explore *a mindset shift* towards Feminist Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL).

A mindset shift is not a quick process. And so our guide has been designed as a resource you can come back to over the course of your learning and unlearning journey.

This project was made possible through the funding of Fenomenal Funds and the generous and creative participation of the project partners – who remain anonymous for security reasons.



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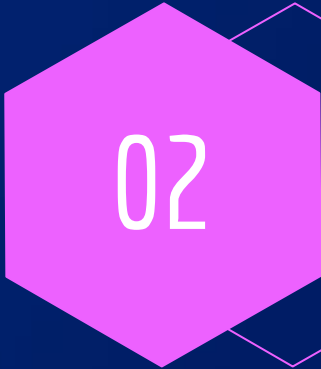
01

THE ORIGIN STORY

ORIGIN STORY

This guide, and the project behind it, have been propelled by curiosity and politics. Over an 18-month period 8 grantee partners and 4 women's funds worked together to change the way they thought about and practiced MEAL. We embraced feminist analysis and processes to support our learning and unlearning. And along the way we transformed our individual and organisational ways of thinking about the power dynamics of data collection and sense making. In our work we were supported by the vision of the Fenomenal Funds and their absolute dedication to collaboration and learning.





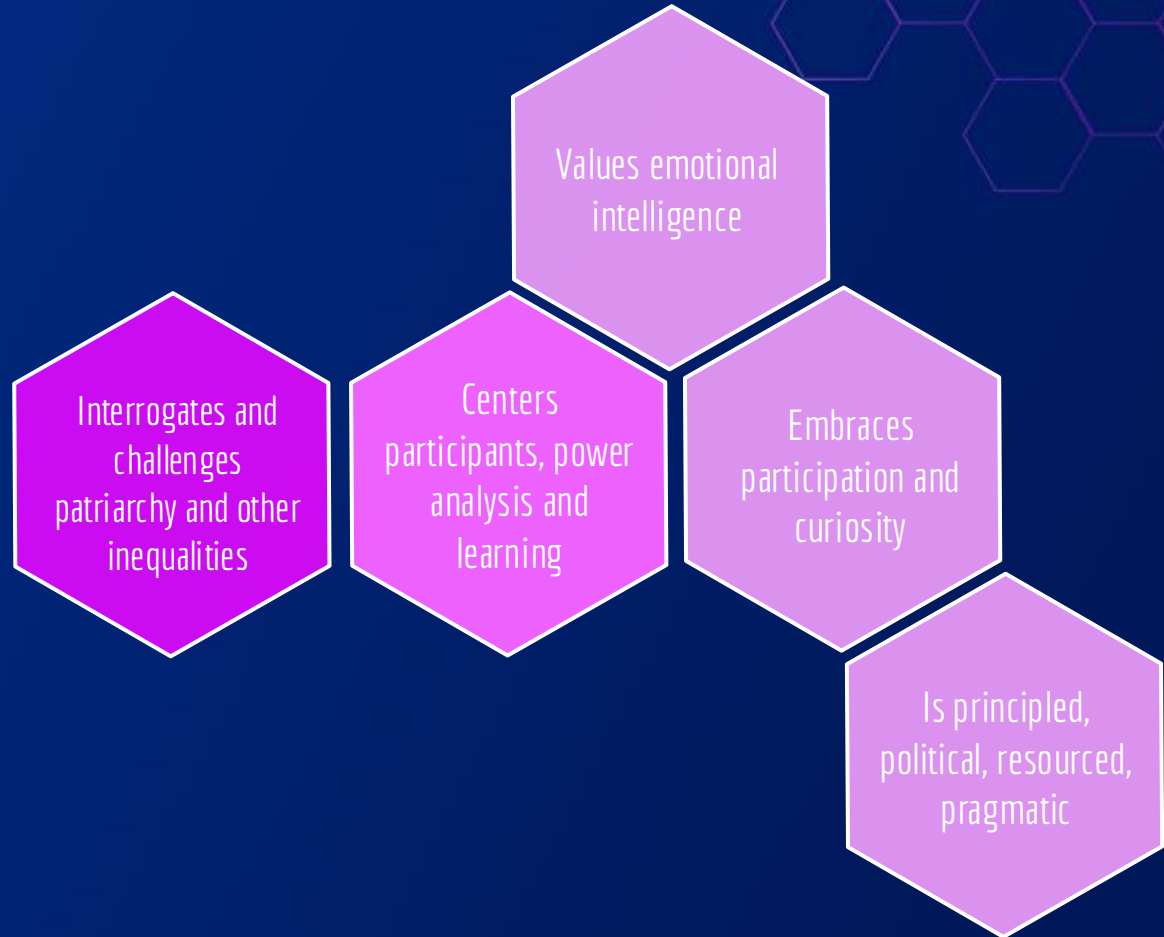
02

THE FEMINIST MEAL HONEYCOMB TOOL

PRINCIPLES OF A FEMINIST MEAL MINDSET SHIFT - Headlines

These Principles of a Feminist MEAL Mindset Shift for the basis of our approach. We have distilled them into two versions - the headlines which articulates five overarching principles, and the Deep Dive which articulates six subsidiary principles for each overarching principle.

This Guide offers an explanation of each Principle, explores some of our experiences with implementation or experimentation, and shares some of the tools and approaches we co-created along the way.



PRINCIPLES OF A FEMINIST MEAL MINDSET SHIFT – Deep Dive



BUSY BEES...

The original format of this tool was a Feminist MEAL Honeycomb, which came from the Urgent Action Funds Sister Funds. As they co-created a MEAL framework that would hold their interdependent and independent work the Sisters explored their common understanding of feminist MEAL practices, which gave rise to the first version of the principles.

In our project, we used the Honeycomb as a starting point to explore our individual and organisational approaches to feminist MEAL. In the final stage we integrated our learnings and converted them into Principles. But we kept the aesthetic of the honeycomb – in addition to being one of the most robust structures in the natural world, it is also women-led (albeit wildly hierarchical, no analogy is perfect!).

...MAKING HONEYCOMB



UNLEARNING

LEARNING

EXPLORING THE PRINCIPLES

FEMINIST MEAL WORKSHOP

Early in the agenda, set aside 90 minutes to explore the Principles, using the following steps:

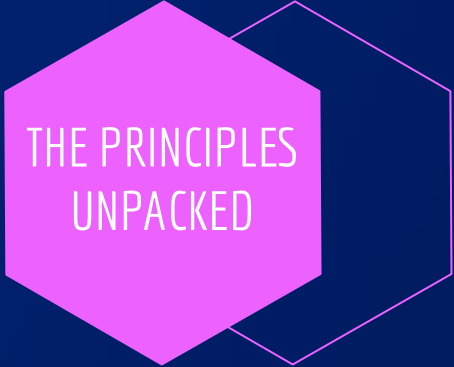
- [20m] Introducing the Principles: workshop facilitator/s introduce the Principles, exploring up to 10 principles in-depth. If you have done a pre-workshop survey to learn more about what individuals want to learn/unlearn you can tailor. Otherwise, use your understanding of internal and external context to frame the deep dive.
- [30m] Invite participants to form small groups and explore the following questions:
 - Individually, identify two principles that feel easy to achieve or you are already doing. Share with the group, including examples of how you incorporate this principle in your work.
 - Individually, identify two principles that feel difficult to achieve and share what you find challenging with the group.
 - Organisationally, identify two principles that are already being implemented and share examples with the group; and identify two principles that feel difficult to achieve and share what you find challenging with the group.
- [40m] Large group sharing - allocate 20m for discussion on individual responses and 20m for organisational response.

FEMINIST MEAL DESIGN

You can use the Principles as a checklist when you are designing a MEAL approach – you can use some or all of the ideas as questions.

OUR EXPERIENCES

The Principles grounded our first explorations of how we individually and collectively approached feminist MEAL. It also helped us to ask interrogate traditional MEAL tools and find more feminist ways.



THE PRINCIPLES
UNPACKED

Centers participants,
power analysis, and
learning

01

Puts the participants at the center as experts and owners of the process.

UNPACKING THE IDEA

This Principle is perhaps the most critical component of a feminist MEAL mindset shift. In a traditional MEAL approach the “MEAL experts” - the evaluation staff or external consultants are at the center - collecting data, analysing data, deciding what the data says.

This principle reframes “expertise” - locating it in the participants and directing us to co-design a process which leverages their insights and manages the power dynamics of a participant-led data collection, analysis and sensemaking process.

In doing this the “MEAL experts” are cast in different roles:

- critical friends who accompany your process and supporting you to manage power dynamics and bring a perspective from outside to complement your internal perspectives,
- technical guide, offering advice on tools and approaches that may be new to you or the organisation.

OUR EXPERIENCES

The four organisations and their partners met together twice - first to co-design our experiment in feminist MEAL and then to explore what happened. This required political and financial commitments from our funder and organisations.

We focused on building trust so that we could share more openly. We embraced the idea that there is no such thing as a failure only an opportunity to learn how to do something differently.

We were responsive to context -individual, organisational and community. We recognised the importance of working at the pace of our own learning and unlearning. Our experimental tools were adapted to meet our local context and to meet our organisations, partners and members “where they are”. Sometimes the tools looked more like traditional research tools, sometimes they didn't.

In between our face-to-face meetings we met with our technical guide to work through ideas and challenges. We met online regularly to share what we were learning and unlearning, particularly our exploration of stepping into our own expertise and negotiating power dynamics that arose.

Centers participants, power and learning

02

Prioritises power-informed, participant-led learning.

Centers participants, power and learning

06

Reframes the “MEAL expert” as a critical friend to accompany participant-led learning.

UNPACKING THE IDEA

In traditional MEAL you often hire an external expert to lead the process, in part because ideas about objectivity say that people inside the project are too caught up in interpersonal dynamics or political objectives to be able to reflect “objectively”.

Becoming power literate and using these insights to explore the power dynamics of the relationships is a critical part of enabling participant-led learning.

OUR EXPERIENCE

In our first co-design workshop we spent a whole session exploring five different forms of power – unpacking the ideas and reflecting on how these ideas of power operated in our own sense of self, in our organisations, in the projects, and in our relationships.

Several of us had profound insights into our own relationship with power – recognising that power isn't just a harmful external or institutional force, it can also be a positive force that we all have inside ourselves. This led to participants “claiming their own power” and feeling more confident in their roles as community leaders (which included this Feminist MEAL project).

Within our project there were power dynamics associated with money – between the partners and the Women's Funds. We reflected that a commitment from the Funds to not withhold funds when partners shared challenges helped to navigate this dynamic.

Deeper Dive: POWER

Our deeper dive into power could not have happened without CREA's *Power Primer* – authored by Srilatha Batliwala. Most helpful was learning about five different types of personal power relationships. How might these different types of power play out in feminist MEAL?



UNLEARNING

LEARNING

POWER UNDER

POWER OVER

POWER TO

POWER WITHIN

POWER WITH

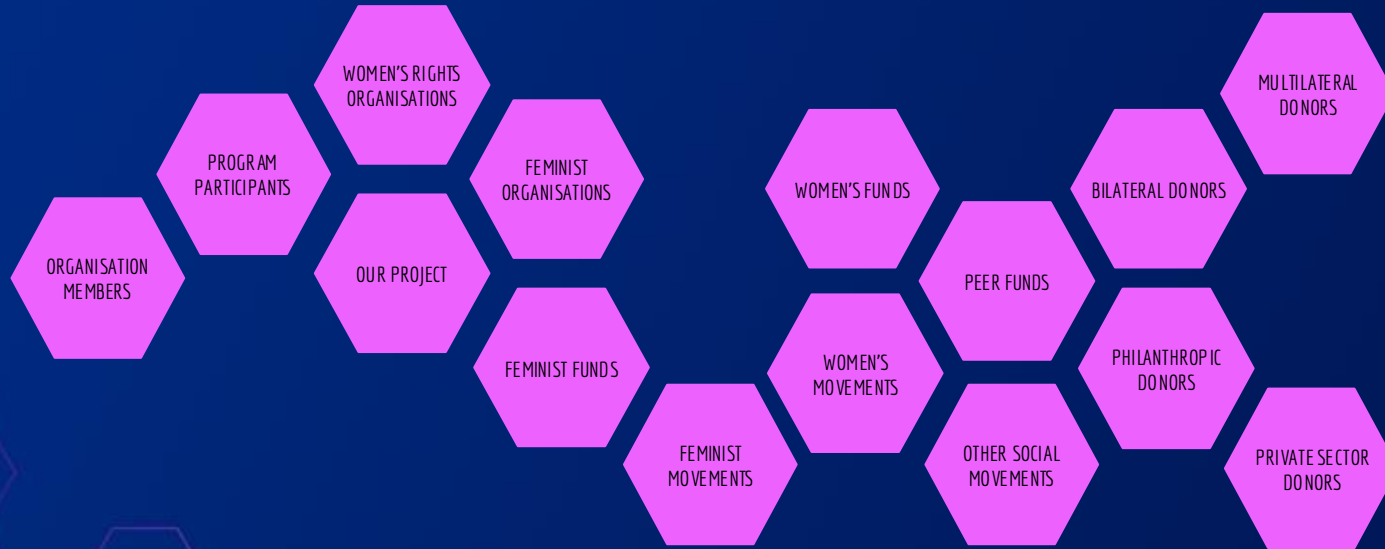
Deeper Dive: POWER

We also had robust discussions about some of the different power dynamics we experienced within the project, and in the broader context of our work. These conversations increased our own power literacy and supported us to contextualise and unpack power dynamics as they arose in the project. **What dynamics might be at play for you?**



UNLEARNING

LEARNING





UNPACKING THE IDEA

Too often participatory MEAL is framed solely at the point of data collection. Participants are seen as too “subjective” to engage in the analysis and framing of findings. Feminist MEAL offers tools and accompaniment to navigate the power dynamics of “subjectivity”. This enables more grounded and robust MEAL analysis and findings to emerge. And ensures that data sets, indicators and learning questions are meaningful to the participants.



UNPACKING THE IDEA

This principle is particularly dependent on context – both at the organisational and donor levels. If the dichotomy of success/failure is the dominant culture within either the partner or donor, and failure is punished, then this principle will be impossible to enact. And it could potentially be harmful to individuals and organisations. (See also Principle 12: Value Context Analysis).

But if both the organisation and donor embrace risk with care in programmatic experimentation and engage in non-judgmental learning, this principle can deliver significant insights. Making this shift also enables you to reframe success to move at the pace of the participants’ transformations – an important centring practice particularly when working with victim-survivors of patriarchal violence.

It is hard work! It demands a level of relational safety and the maturity to set ego to the side. It necessitates a carefully constructed agenda that embeds trust building as a key ingredient and takes the time to fully unpack the learning insights. It requires new language that moves beyond the binary of success and failure to find new ways of framing non-judgemental learning. The Emergent Learning framing of “what did we think would happen, what happened”? was helpful to us.



OUR EXPERIENCE

We struggled to make the transition from the fixation on success. We experiment with three different sets of questions but noted that it took a lot of energy to redirect our thinking.

Expands accountability to include participants, movements and donors.

UNPACKING THE IDEA

Traditionally, donor reporting is the focus of accountability in MEAL. Feminist MEAL expands accountability in three key ways:

1. Accountability is reframed to centre participant, community, and movement learning.
2. In reorienting accountability to focus on community learning the accountability expands beyond resources to recognise non-tangible components, such as reputation, relationships, working methods that have been evolved in community etc.
3. Where the partner-donor relationship is characterised by “power with” it expands accountability to include reciprocity. In this instance the actors are working together to gather data that is meaningful to community learning while also supporting allies within the donor to be able to “make the case” for ongoing funding.

The expansion results in different types of data being collected and alternative markers of progress being identified.

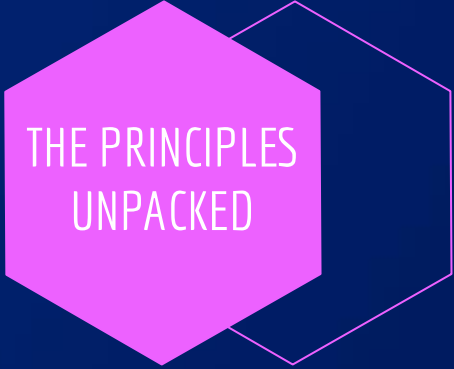


UNLEARNING

LEARNING

OUR EXPERIENCE

A reframing of accountability is not possible with all donors. Our relationship with Fenomenal Funds was predicated on a “power with” dynamic and a reorientation of accountability to prioritise learning with and for the movement, as well as being accountable to movements and donors for funds invested in the work of the Fenomenal Funds.



THE PRINCIPLES
UNPACKED

Interrogates and
challenges patriarchy
and other inequalities

Interrogates patriarchy

07

Interrogates power,
patriarchy and other
inequalities

UNPACKING THE IDEA

Feminist MEAL has a particular interest in unmasking the practices of patriarchy, tracking the operation of power, and of understanding the ways in which other oppressive systems interact with patriarchy.

This is achieved by paying attention to gender, power, and other dynamics of inequality - through the questions asked and the data collected. In doing so, feminist MEAL seeks to shine a spotlight on the social norms and other power dynamics that maintain the inequalities of the status quo. Which in turn provides evidence to create and strengthen programs and campaigns which challenge the harm of patriarchy and other oppressive power structures.

OUR EXPERIENCE

Throughout the project we wrestled with questions of how to adopt a Feminist MEAL Mindset Shift without reinforcing gender essentialism or perpetuating gender binaries. Embracing intersectional feminist politics and practice was our one route through the issue, as was work to articulate the benefits to men and boys of reconstructing patriarchal norms.



UNLEARNING

LEARNING

INTERSECTIONAL FEMINISM

Intersectional feminism “recognises that patriarchal power does not operate alone, it is embedded in and works in cooperation with all the other power structures that create inequality in the world: economic power, social and cultural beliefs and practices, social hierarchies like caste, heteronormativity, and others.”

All About Movements

PRINCIPLES OF A FEMINIST MEAL MINDSET SHIFT

Interrogates patriarchy

07

Mapping intersecting inequalities*



*This slide sets out many different examples of the power structures that can create inequality. But we also want to affirm that these examples can also sites of power, pride and resistance.

Interrogates patriarchy

08

The act of reflection
itself contributes to
gender and social
change.

UNPACKING THE IDEA

The act of pausing to reflect on progress, or lack of progress, can be a powerful part of the pursuit for gender and social change. Whether it is a moment of reflection (for example, responding to a survey) or a deeper moment of introspection (for example, responding verbally or creatively to a set of qualitative questions) the opportunity to track where you have come from and where you are now can also have a profound impact on where you go next. It is for this reason that we position Feminist MEAL as integral across the life of a project, not just the end point of a project.



UNLEARNING

LEARNING

OUR EXPERIENCE

This realisation, that the act of MEAL reflection could also contribute to the act of social change, was a critical turning point in our project. It occurred during our first full face-to-face meeting, when we started to distil the lessons from the five days together, and reflected on the integration of individual story telling (through collage/creative practice), listening to each other's stories and finding commonalities and differences, and then the process of collective reflection with carefully framed questions

09

Interrogates patriarchy

Reflects on the slow, complex, non-linear, and dynamic nature of social change.

10

Interrogates patriarchy

Pays attention to patriarchal backlash and the practices of feminist resistance.

11

Interrogates patriarchy

Pays attention to the nature of risk and care in change making.



UNLEARNING

LEARNING

UNPACKING THE IDEAS

09

Reflects the slow, complex, non-linear, dynamic nature of social change.

10

Pays attention to patriarchal backlash and the practices of feminist resistance.

11

Pays attention to the nature of risk and care in change making.



UNLEARNING

LEARNING

A traditional donor-led approach to social change MEAL often focuses on quantitative indicators. For example, “how many pieces of legislation were adopted?” or “how many people were served?”.

The difficulty of this approach is that it conceals the complex reality of social change work. This is problematic for several reasons.

- One, you get stuck in the “what?” of numbers and don’t move on to the “so what?” and “now what?” of impact.
- Two, the approach fails to consider the dynamic and non-linear pathway of social change work, nor the timeframe. For example, a legislative win can be reversed overnight with a change of political leadership. If the MEAL approach simply focuses on “how many pieces of legislation were adopted?” it obscures the work of relationship building, collaborative campaigning, and narrative reframing.
- Three, the quantitative approach also precludes examination of the strategies of backlash and resistance, and the imperative of reflection to draw out insights to adjust campaign strategy or programmatic practice.
- Four, social change work is inherently risky – and so MEAL reflection needs to generate data and analysis which will support organisations to calibrate risk and care in their work.

In practice, integrating these Principles requires:

- The use of qualitative tools that enable continuous reflection and sensemaking (for example, regular Outcome Harvesting or use of Progress Markers).
- Learning questions that focus on the components of the Principles (for example, “what adjustments are required to counter the patriarchal backlash?”).
- Bringing curiosity with care into the process.

Interrogates patriarchy

12

Values context analysis.

UNPACKING THE IDEA

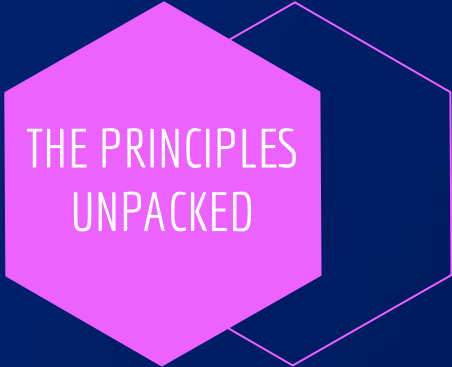
MEAL, from design to findings, that lacks contextual framing will deliver inaccurate results.

But the power to determine what context is considered, when it is considered in the process, and who gets to make the decisions about contextual framing, is one of MEAL's difficult dynamics.

The question of context also raises the capacity to meet participants where they are: to recognise that we are all at different points of the journey towards Feminist MEAL. We need to work together to identify approaches that respect the starting points of participants and use tools that are suited to their individual and organisational context.

OUR EXPERIENCE

In our discussions we were able to unpack the complexity of context and power dynamic through a case study. The discussions drew out the dynamics between organisational staff who primarily worked in communities and those who primarily worked in the management of the organisation. Staff members working in community grounded their understanding of context in the local community. They affirmed the community members' markers of progress, recognising that the actions demonstrated progress in transforming patriarchal practices. Staff members working in the management of the organisation grounded their understanding of context in broader feminist movement politics and understood the progress markers as a reinscription of patriarchal practices. The pragmatics of resourcing meant that collective sensemaking among staff and community members was not possible – which vested the “power of the pen” in the organisation not community. It took careful and sustained discussion by team members to validate the community perspective, and provided a powerful learning opportunity for organisational team members to consider the importance of context.



THE PRINCIPLES
UNPACKED

Values emotional
intelligence

13

Values emotional intelligence

Recognises that individual and organisational mindset shifts are fundamental.

UNPACKING THE IDEA

This idea is at the heart of any Feminist MEAL journey.

A Feminist MEAL journey is different for each individual and organisation, but will usually necessitate learning of new perspectives and practices alongside unlearning some pre-existing approaches.

There are six inter-related steps – set out on the next slide.



UNLEARNING

LEARNING

OUR EXPERIENCE

Our experiment started with four Women's Funds with a shared interest in learning more about feminist MEAL tools. Our initial conversations about power and knowledge were our first mindset shift – we recognised that this project needed to be a co-design experiment with partners. At our first partner and fund face-to-face we observed how our own “ah-ha” moments were critical to the evolution of the experiment. We committed to a ten-month exploration of a new approach to collecting qualitative data AND to noticing individual and organisational mindset shifts. In our Collective Sense Making session it was our unpacking of these mindset shifts that proved most useful to adjusting the Principles to better reflect the multifaceted nature of shifting power in MEAL.



UNLEARNING

LEARNING

Feminist MEAL MINDSET *shifts*

A Process Map for Experimentation

Generate the individual and organizational political will to adopt feminist MEAL approaches.

Generate political will.

Support individual and organizational learning and unlearning to facilitate adoption of the Feminist MEAL Mindset and deepen knowledge of participatory methods.

Integrate insights into programmatic, organizational and societal change work.

Move from learning to strategy.

Support mindset shift for learning and unlearning.

Work out who needs to be engaged and what are best ways to gather the numbers and stories you need to learn about your impact.

Mindfully managing power dynamics, convene a collective sense making session with participants to identify the patterns and contradictions in the "how" and "what" of progress and resistance to social change, and to unpack the issues that don't make sense or seem out of place.

Convene a Collective Sense Making session.

Co-create a context-specific MEAL method.

Adapt the methodology as you go, to ensure that you are responding to insights from participants while enabling a robust data set to be gathered.

Collect the numbers and stories.

PRINCIPLES OF A FEMINIST MEAL MINDSET SHIFT

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Values emotional intelligence

Commits to learning and unlearning.



UNLEARNING

LEARNING

UNPACKING THE IDEA - Learning

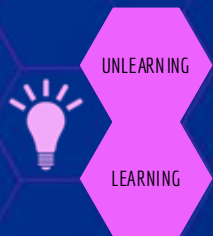
The shift to **learning** and **unlearning** as a central framing for MEAL is of profound importance.

The focus on **learning** – as opposed to donor-oriented reporting – transforms MEAL into a tool for liberation and transformation. It commits to a politicised learning, where communities come together with curiosity to explore the strategies and practices of social change. Critically, this sort of learning exists way beyond a log frame and narrowly defined indicators. Pragmatically, not every donor will embrace this shift. So the shift to learning needs to be multifaceted – working with communities to learn beyond the logframe while reporting to donors within the logframe. Being transparent about the pragmatic political decisions and owning the decisions collectively is critical to the mindset shift.

UNPACKING THE IDEA - Unlearning

Unlearning traditional MEAL approaches is difficult work. It's hard because the broader context continues to be dominated by orthodox MEAL politics and practices. Charting a new path always encounters resistance and it requires energy to take this path – which can be in short supply at this time of increased global uncertainty.

It's also hard because it asks us to set aside our identities as “experts”. It asks us to interrogate tools we have been comfortable to use and to explore instead how they reinforce inequitable power relationships and potentially obscure insights into meaningful change.



Our Experience: A Deep Dive into Learning and Unlearning

As part of our work together we agreed to experiment with a single data collection question: “tell us what you want to tell us.” Using the Process Map on slide 27, participants would co-create a question using the form: “When you think about {insert the social change you are interested in} what do you want to tell us?”

We set out a three-step approach to collecting data, grounded in the Feminist MEAL Principles.

1. *Set the scene:* name the contexts, identify the characters, surface the power dynamics.
2. *Explore what happened:* work with curiosity, articulate the compelling changes, paying attention to the markers of progress and resistance, and valuing the intangible, and embrace the contradictions.
3. *Look to the future:* dwell in the possible, seek out the emergence.

For most partners, the question was too broad and too far removed from the reality of MEAL practices and power dynamics in their communities. For one partner, in only one or two instances could participants engage with the question, but for the most part the team found it more constructive to develop a traditional interview guide. In another instance the context of work – with young people in a time constrained, programmatic environment – made the question impractical. In two instances, the lack of donor appetite for such an approach made it difficult and this was compounded by challenging country contexts which reduced the bandwidth for pushing individual and organisational mindsets. Fundamentally, the question failed to “meet the partners where they were” – their change trajectory was to take preliminary steps into Feminist MEAL, and the co-created approach was too far down the path.

Where it did work was within the context of a long-term partnership where both partners had participated in the co-creation of the tool and the question was framed relationally to explore the power dynamics and practices between the Partner and the Women’s Fund. The tool deepened the reciprocity in the relationship as they explored mutual accompaniment and observation of change in both organisations. They were both clear of the benefit they derived from the process – driving programmatic change with the partner and amending the funding strategy for the women’s fund.

Our Evolving Approach to Gathering Stories: Where We Landed

Set the scene.

Name the contexts.

Identify the characters.

Surface the power and diversity dynamics.

Explore the “how?” as much as the “what?” and “so what?”.

Fully describe the “what?” and “so what?” of the change and your contribution.

Look for evidence of progress and resistance.

Interrogate “how” change happened and your contribution.

Pay attention to anything that seems out of place or doesn't make sense – and keep asking questions until you understand what's going on.

Start your inquiries in the emotions and be curious about what didn't work as expected as much as what did work. Shift your mindset from “fear of failure” to “curiosity with care”.

Take time for the “now what?”

Ask participants about their ideas for “now what?” – what can continue progress or address resistance?

Take the time to explore the “now what” of the things that seemed out of place or didn't make sense.

Rely on the Principles of the Feminist MEAL Mindset to strengthen your story gathering.

Asserts the
transformative
potential of deep
listening.

UNPACKING THE IDEA

So often we are not really listening to other people – we're just listening for a gap that means we can start talking (and sometimes we don't even wait for the gap, we just interrupt). Our conversations often take place in time-poor and competitive contexts: we are judged on the quantity of what we've said, not the quality. And societal, organisational, and interpersonal dynamics affect how we are listened to (or not). Other times our brain distracts us, agreeing or disagreeing, or spiralling off to think about a tangent to what has just been said.

All of this makes it hard to think well. And it robs us of the capacity to build on ideas and learn from each other.

Deep listening asks us bring all of our attention to the person speaking – to be deeply curious about the brilliance they will bring and the way our collective brilliance will unfold in the generative space of deep listening.

OUR EXPERIENCE

This was one of the ideas that started small grew and grew as our project evolved.

In our data collection and collective sensemaking we noticed that when we really tried to *just listen* – particularly if we did so with compassion for self and others and with curiosity – then as speakers we were more prepared to share with vulnerability. This particularly improved our capacity to share about things that hadn't gone as expected. Deep listening also enabled us to be attentive to the pauses and gaps that pointed to issues that needed more unpacking.



UNLEARNING

LEARNING

ACTIVE LISTENING exercise

Ask the group to partner up. Choose who will speak and who will listen.

Take the speakers aside and brief them: ask them to talk to their partners about two topics, a great holiday and a favourite activity. They will have 2 minutes for each sharing session.

Take the listeners aside and brief them: for the first topic, perform listening but be thinking about something else. For the second topic, listen actively but don't perform listening.

Bring the group back together and ask the speakers about the experience – what differences did they notice and when did they feel most listened to? Encourage all the “speakers” to share their observations.

Ask one of the “listeners” to explain what they were doing.

With this new input, take the time to gather more reflections on the nature of listening.

Recognises that trust building is foundational to MEAL, and takes time.

UNPACKING THE IDEA

Building trust between participants is critical to partnered and centred MEAL. Particularly because so much MEAL is implicated in the "power over" dynamic of a funder-grantee partnership. And because so much traditional MEAL work has taken and analysed data in ways that has undermined trust.

The time component reminds us that trust is a verb and needs tending to grow.

OUR EXPERIENCE

We had to actively trust in trust.

At our first face-to-face meeting with the full project team (Women's Funds and Partners) we spent the Day Onemorning learning more about our feminist activist journeys and, by extension, the contexts we worked in. We used a mural-based storytelling activity which also helped us explore the power of creative data collection activities and storytelling in MEAL.

Using magazine images participants shared their answers to: Who are you? Who are your people? What are two moments that changed you?

Working in their country groups, the Partners and Women's Funds shared the full set of responses, and in the large group we shared a moment that changed us story. This exercise profoundly altered the meeting dynamic. With every story told, in some instances sharing deeply painful turning points, the "relational infrastructure" was built up. To be frank, we had not realised the power of the exercise when we set it up. And yet it was foundational to all that came next. It opened up the space for people to be their more authentic selves, better able to put offbeat ideas out there during the co-design process. And, as facilitators, it gave us the strength to be more iterative in our facilitation style. The trust carried through into the relationship building between country group partners over the 10-month implementation period, opening up new types of conversations which extend beyond MEAL into the funding partnership itself.

17

Values emotional intelligence

Values emotions and vulnerability as vital to effective reflection and sensemaking.

UNPACKING THE IDEA

Being able to ground reflection and sensemaking in emotions and vulnerability is critical to telling a comprehensive story of change. Only telling the “brain” story misses the “heart” and “body” dimensions of change or resistance to change. We are increasingly understanding that a “brain” fix alone – for example, formal legislative change – does not drive lasting change if the heart change of individual consciousness and social norm change does not occur alongside.

In contexts where it is counter-cultural to bring emotions and vulnerability into a work context, finding ways to gently build trust (for example, starting calls with a check-in round) can be a good first step. But this must also be done with care to ensure safety of participants.

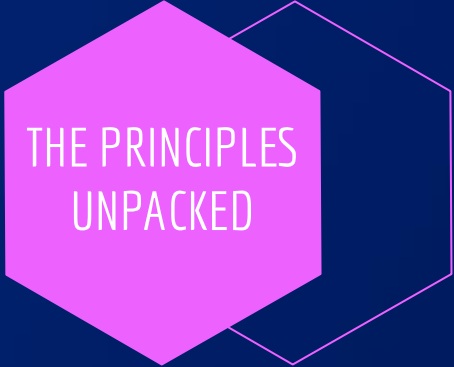
18

Values emotional intelligence

Respects silence as a political act, and seeks to understand its causes.

UNPACKING THE IDEA

In some contexts, silence is a profoundly political act. In some instances, the refusal to share stories and insights is the final act of resistance possible. It is vital in these moments to ensure that Feminist MEAL practitioners respect these decisions and navigate solidarity with colleagues on a case-by-case or collective basis – as determined by context.



THE PRINCIPLES
UNPACKED

Embraces participation
and curiosity

Embraces participation and curiosity

19

Values participatory
quantitative and
qualitative methods.



UNLEARNING

LEARNING

UNPACKING THE IDEA

Many approaches to MEAL value participatory quantitative and qualitative methods. Together, quantitative and qualitative approaches enable you to tell the whole story far more effectively than just simply providing stories or numbers. The challenge is that not all participatory tools align with the principles we've articulated in our work.

As we've discussed, the key component of Feminist MEAL is the mindset shift. And in this context, the invitation is to use the principles to interrogate existing methodologies. In practice we asked ourselves the question: how does methodology X align with feminist approaches and how does it depart? For example, does it use power-informed, participatory data collection process but the analytical and finding process relies on hierarchical decision-making and perpetuates the dichotomy of subjective and objective knowledge?

Deeper Dive: Quantitative Data



UNLEARNING

LEARNING

Quantitative Data is a critical part of effective MEAL, particularly for larger-scale projects. And feminist quantitative data is an important part of the data revolution.

The Feminist MEAL mindset shift values the power of numbers and asks the question: “are we gathering the right quantitative data to enable us to interrogate and challenge patriarchy and other inequalities?” A Feminist MEAL mindset shift also pauses to unpack the stories behind the numbers – moving from the “what” commonly associated with quantitative data, into the “so what” which comes with a deeper dive.

OUR EXPERIENCE

At our first full face-to-face workshop the project evolved into an experiment with a qualitative approach to data collection and collective sensemaking.

In the months that followed, we realised that, in our focus on co-creating a qualitative tool, that partners had walked away thinking that quantitative data and methods were not a part of Feminist MEAL.

We had to hit reset and reaffirm the important role that quantitative data plays in Feminist MEAL.

Deeper Dive: **QUALITATIVE TOOLS**



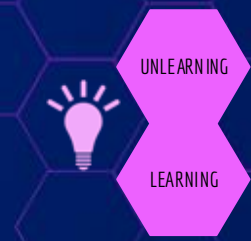
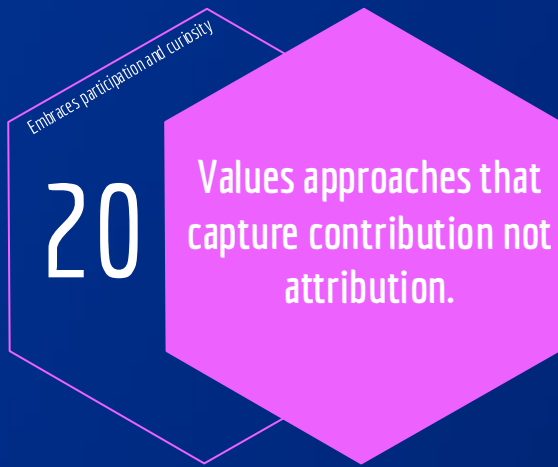
UNLEARNING

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The table below provides an overview of a range of qualitative data collection and analysis tools.

The initial question for Feminist MEAL practitioners is “how does methodology X align with the Principles of a Feminist MEAL mindset, and how does it differ? And the follow-up inquiry is – what changes can I make to bring the Principles to life in this methodology?”

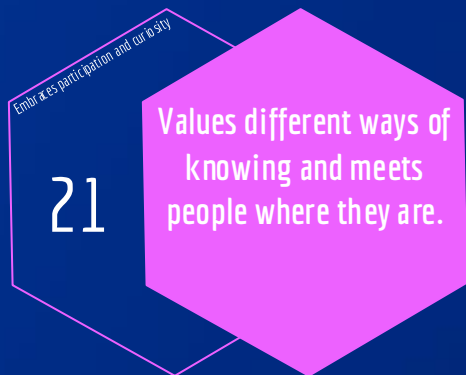
Art and craft projects (drawing, embroidery, collage)	Observational/ reflective diaries	Mobility and concept mapping	Body and confidence mapping
Drama/skits	Surveys	Influence mapping	Focus Group Discussions
Poems	Vignettes	Life histories	Narratives
Photo Journals	Stakeholder dialogues	Inter-generational dialogues	Case Studies
Progress Markers	Self-esteem measures	Community timelines	Outcome Harvesting
Video and voice recordings	Social network mapping	Outlier Case Studies/ Positive Deviance	In-depth and Key Informant Interviews
Emergent Learning – a systemic approach not simply a tool		Significant Change Stories	



UNPACKING THE IDEA

The notion of direct causality is exceptionally difficult to claim in the context of social change where multiple factors can influence an outcome.

For this reason, Feminist MEAL approaches are more likely to explore a contribution analysis. This enables more realistic insights to be generated, which in turn bolsters the focus on learning and strengthens a holistic and coherent story to be shared for the purpose of movement accountability.



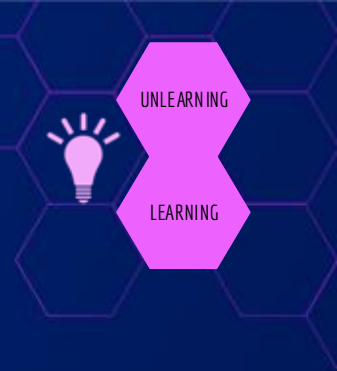
UNPACKING THE IDEA

There are many different ways of knowing, being and doing that operate around the world. Patriarchy, colonialism and racism have narrowed the scope of what is valued as knowledge and part of the Feminist MEAL project is to reclaim all forms of knowing which in turn better enables us to meet people in their strength.



UNPACKING THE IDEA

Given the complexity and non-linearity of social change embracing markers of progress and resistance to change enables Feminist MEAL to get curious about the journey to gender equality, not just the outcome. As such, the practice of exploring markers of incremental change is an essential part of the shift to emphasising the learning and accountability dimensions of Feminist MEAL.



Embraces participation and curiosity

23

Asserts the importance
of collective
sensemaking.



UNLEARNING

LEARNING

UNPACKING THE IDEA

Our project shorthand for this Principle was “what can we learn together?”

This Principle is one of the primary means of transferring power from the “MEAL expert” to the participants. Too often the analysis and findings phases become the province of senior team members of the MEAL experts. But by providing power-savvy accompaniment to participants Feminist MEAL can ensure participants are able to bring their contextual knowledge and insight to the reflection process – deepening the analysis and findings in a way that outsiders would find difficult to achieve.

Interrogates data to find commonalities, contradictions, and outliers.



UNLEARNING

LEARNING

UNPACKING THE IDEA

Evolving the language to frame these questions was tremendously challenging – particularly in our multilingual context. The overarching framing – as set out in our approach – is to speak of “seek out patterns of change” – but this instruction alone was insufficient. After several false starts we landed on our three-part data exploration:

1. Listening for commonalities. This is relatively straightforward and asks participants in the collective sensemaking to identify commonalities across the story. These could be common strategies, practices of resistance or resilience, programmatic interventions, policy analysis etc.
2. Recognising the contradictions. This was more difficult – in focusing on contradictions we were trying to create space for story insights that stood in contradiction to the commonalities. In reality we struggled to distinguish between contradictions and outliers.
3. Seek out the outliers: We codified our thoughts in the approach with the following directive - pay attention to anything that seems out of place or doesn't make sense – and keep asking questions until you understand what's going on.

Deeper Dive: COLLECTIVE SENSEMAKING

In our final face-to-face we convened multiple collective sense making conversations. We had endeavoured to articulate an “approach” to supporting Collective Sensemaking and experimented with several forms of questions (set out in the listening guide and the collective sensemaking guide) and interrogated the components that need to be in place for collective sensemaking to be convened constructively.

These are shared on the following pages and can form the basis of your own experiments.

OUR EXPERIENCE

One of the really transformative conversations in this project occurred in the context of a discussion on Principle 1 (put participants at the centre and as owners of their knowledge), Principle 23 (on collective sensemaking), and Principle 21 (valuing different ways of knowing). As part of this we had been exploring how to collect verbal stories as opposed to relying on written stories, and how to protect the confidentiality of the story tellers and their stories. This conversation also raised the challenge of how then to bring these stories in to a collective sensemaking session, and also how and what would you document from the session.

We had one of those moments of major mindset shift when we realised

1. The stories would not be documented. If we were truly committed to the idea of confidentiality and transferring ownership of data to participants then the stories would need to remain within the group.
2. This was liberating. It resolved the challenge of “story porn” – where donors demand stories of change to personalise the impact of the investment.
3. Instead, the participants would share their stories within the session and then distil the analysis and findings from the stories. This discussion, with its focus on learning, would be the documentation of the collective sensemaking session.

Our Evolving Approach to Collective Sensemaking : Where We Landed

Create a safe enough container.

Trust participant-led learning and evolve robust accompaniment practices.

Hold and actively engage with the power and diversity dynamics.

Co-create trust, vulnerability, and boldness among participants.

Enable active participation by investing in accessibility.

Share the stories.

Create a space that values all the stories.

Respect the confidentiality of all stories – they do not have to be shared beyond the group.

Set the stage for active listening – and use the “Listening Guide for Story Sharing” to track the what and how of each story.

Seek out the patterns of change in the stories.

Unpack the commonalities and contradictions in the evidence of progress.

Unpack the commonalities and contradictions in the evidence of resistance.

Unpack the commonalities and contradictions in the “now what?”.

Pay attention to anything that seems out of place or doesn't make sense – and keep asking questions until you understand what's going on.

Shift your mindset from “fear of failure” to “curiosity with care”.

Use the “Collective Sense Making Guide” to support individual reflection ahead of collective sense making.

Agree what can be shared in different settings.

Some stories are not safe to be shared beyond the initial sharing circle.

For this reason, collective sense making only shares the insights from seeking out the patterns. In being accountable to our movements, care still needs to be taken to ensure that people who oppose our work do not benefit from our learnings.

Rely on the Principles of the Feminist MEAL Mindset to strengthen your collective sense making.

PRINCIPLES OF A FEMINIST MEAL MINDSET SHIFT

Evolving the Approach: The Listening Guide for Story Sharing

How you take notes is up to you. The key is to listen actively to the story and, either as you listen or shortly afterwards, answer the following questions about the “what” and “how” of the story.



UNLEARNING

LEARNING

What changed? So what – what is the impact of the change?

Evidence of progress

Evidence of resistance

How did change happen?

What worked as expected?

What didn't work as expected?

Does anything about the story seem out of place or like it doesn't make sense?

Now what?

Evolving the Approach: The Collective Sensemaking Guide



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When you reflect across all the stories you have heard, what are the commonalities in the evidence of progress?	When you reflect across all the stories you have heard, what are the contradictions in the evidence of progress?
When you reflect across all the stories you have heard, what are the commonalities in the evidence of resistance to change?	When you reflect across all the stories you have heard, what are the commonalities in the resistance to change?
When you reflect across all the stories you have heard, what are the commonalities in the “now what” ideas?	When you reflect across all the stories you have heard, what are the contradictions in the “now what” ideas?
When you reflect across all the stories you have heard does anything seem out of place or like it doesn’t make sense – keep asking questions until you understand what is going on?	
What can be shared outside this group and what measures might need to be put in place to share these insights safely?	

THE PRINCIPLES
UNPACKED

Is principled, political,
resourced, pragmatic

25

Centres care, ethics and
clarity of purpose in
methods.

UNPACKING THE IDEA

This Principle enables an expansive understanding of ethics to be integrated in to Feminist MEAL. Commonly expressed as “do no harm” – bringing care to the heart of ethical approaches at all stages of the MEAL process is critical. A co-design approach is a useful practical step to ensuring ethical MEAL methods, enabling more direct consideration of potential harm by participants themselves.

26

Is flexible, adaptable,
responsive, and inclusive.

UNPACKING THE IDEA

The commitment to centring participants, to honouring context, and to interrogating power dynamics requires that Feminist MEAL be flexible, adaptable, responsive and inclusive.

OUR EXPERIENCE

The commitment to flexibility and adaptability was particularly important in our experiment. It authorised each partnership to adjust the terms of the experiment as they encountered challenges. It also, in the context of a multi-country project, enabled partners to find culturally resonant terms that better supported local contexts.

Is principled, political, resource, pragmatic

27

Recognises that feminist MEAL approaches require a whole-of- organisation commitment.

UNPACKING THE IDEA

In an institutional context, the power of *individual* mindset shifts have nowhere to go if the *organisation* has also not committed to making the Feminist MEAL mindset shift. In our experiment, generating the political will from leadership was a critical step. And needed to then be translated into resource allocations of time (to learn, unlearn, and create collective sensemaking opportunities) and funds (to facilitate all of the above).

Is principled, political, resource, pragmatic

28

Recognises that program and MEAL co-design approaches must be integrated from the outset.

UNPACKING THE IDEA

Too often MEAL is relegated to a standardised paragraph incorporated into a grant proposal and then becomes a cause of pressure at the end of a project as final donor reports fall due. In our experiment, the integration of MEAL from the outset created a feedback cycle of learning to adjustment that strengthened our outcomes, and in some cases led to stronger partner –led processes for program design.

Is principled, political, resourced, pragmatic

29

Embraces progress and pragmatism over perfection

UNPACKING THE IDEA

These Feminist MEAL Principles are A LOT. They offer a roadmap for evolution but are impossible to implement all at once. Building from existing strengths and determining “stretch” goals contextually and collaboratively was useful in our work.

Letting go of the idea of perfection was a powerful tool – and required perpetual practice. Perfection is pernicious and requires perpetual release.

Is principled, political, resourced, pragmatic

30

Commits to generating and sharing knowledge about feminist MEAL approaches.

UNPACKING THE IDEA

The final principle is probably, in practice, one of the more difficult principles to deliver, particularly if it hasn't been integrated into the project at the outset or doesn't form part of the organisation's political commitment.

Nonetheless, it is an important political commitment – to democratise knowledge and ensure that the ideas of Feminist MEAL reach an increasingly broad and diverse audience.

OUR EXPERIENCE

In committing to generating and sharing knowledge about our work we faced three resourcing challenges:

1. Freeing up time to generate the knowledge - collectively. So while two partners were able to attend a MEAL conference the process of finalising the content of the presentation was less collective than other activities.
2. Making the case for financial allocations to support knowledge dissemination. We learnt we had to PLAN and BUDGET for this to succeed.
3. We also needed to budget for translation and interpretation, which in the final stage of producing this kit was not possible.