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REPORT

Feminist Foreign Policy and Development cooperation: concepts and approaches

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INTRODUCTION [1]

An increasing number of governments have committed themselves to defining and implementing a Feminist Foreign Policy (hereafter FFP), either with a comprehensive approach or with specific proposals for development cooperation or diplomacy. However, the theoretical and practical meaning of this policy remains vague and controversial, and requires an analysis of its assumptions, the contexts in which it is applied, and its implications.

This commitment takes place in a context of change and crisis in the international system that opens up opportunities to promote agendas that, like the FFP, propose advances in women's rights and gender equality. However, it is also a context in which, at the national and international levels, certain conservative groups and new far-right forces are attempting to restrict rights, particularly women's rights an those related to sexual and reproductive rights, as well as women's organizations involvement in decision-making processes. These groups, which are often characterised by racist and misogynistic views, seek to renegotiate some of the fundamental principles that articulate the equality agenda at the multilateral, national and local levels. In this context of potential backlash, an increasing number of governments have expressed their intention to pursue a foreign policy that aligns with feminist principles. What, then, is meant by a foreign policy that is defined as feminist? What are the implications of such a policy? How may implement a foreign policy that is feminist? Why focus on foreign policy and not all policies that affect external action? Can this initiative serve as a counterweight to these ultra-conservative tendencies? How to be inclusive regarding to the various feminisms, given that it is a rich and diverse movement with multiple proposals? These are the key questions that will be addressed in this report.

In 2014, Margot Wallström, Sweden's foreign minister, was the first to declare Sweden's foreign policy to be feminist. Since then, numerous other countries have followed suit, despite the Swedish government itself withdrawing its commitment after the 2022 elections, in which the Conservatives arrived to power.

In 2017, the Canadian government adopted a feminist approach to international cooperation and produced a white paper with the main lines of action in this area. Mexico announced its intention to promote a feminist foreign policy at the United Nations General Assembly in 2019, and is one of the countries that supported the "Generating Equality" initiative, along with the French government and the United Nations, to define proposals on the gender equality agenda. Spain declared its foreign policy to be feminist in 2020 during the mandate of the then Minister of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation, Arancha González Laya. This announcement was made during her first appearance before the Congressional Committee on Foreign Affairs, which had special significance as it was the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 20th anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS).

[1] This report is an adapted, updated and expanded review of articles published in the CEIPAZ Yearbook (Mesa, 2023 and 2021a).
[2] SEE: https://forum.generationequality.org/

As a result, an special ambassador for a feminist foreign policy was appointed and an action plan for its implementation was adopted (Mesa, 2021a; Solanas, 2021). Luxembourg joined the FFP in 2019, followed by Chile [3], Germany and the Netherlands [4] in 2021. Argentina was also active in promoting the FFP, but the arrival of Javier Milei in the government put an abrupt end to all initiatives related to feminism. Subsequently, Colombia joined in, declaring its foreign policy feminist, and adopted a National Action Plan on the Women, Peace and Security Agenda. It also participate actively in international fora and networks on FFP [5]. FFP has also been addressed at the regional level and numerous initiatives have emerged, such as the networks of women mediators in Ibero-America, in the Mediterranean region or the International Women's Network of the European Union and Latin America and the Caribbean (EU-LAC WIN).

These initiatives demonstrate the importance of women's agency and feminism in situating gender equality policies in international relations, in the state's foreign policies and in regional and multilateral bodies. This opens up a new space for political confrontation, debate and analysis on public policy priorities, understandings of power and international relations, and the role of feminism as an agent of change. For a government to declare that its foreign policy is feminist has a powerful performative effect, highlighting the significant gender gaps that exist in the international arena and the absence of women in decision-making spaces. It is a way of expressing a government's will to promote gender equality at the international level, alongside the national level, and to assume the need for a change in institutional structures, incorporating new ways of exercising and understanding power and international relations. This raises the need to promote positive affirmation policies aimed at ensuring equal participation of women in the international sphere. This opens up opportunities for change and transformation in foreign policy that go beyond words.

This report addresses these issues and, in particular, analyses how feminist foreign policy has been conceptualised and what its main features and characteristics are. It examines its background and development, taking into account the contributions of feminist international relations theory and the contributions of different feminisms. It also looks at feminist development cooperation and the extent to which the equality agenda and feminism have been mainstreamed in all these areas. The report concludes with some proposals

[3] See : https://politicaexteriorfeminista.minrel.gob.cl/home

[4] See: file:///Users/manuelamesa/Desktop/Letter+to+the+Parliament+on+feminist+foreign+policy.pdf

[5] The list of countries varies from source to source. Some governments have also changed their position. Some sources include a very long list of countries such as Argentina, Libya and Israel, among others, whose position on feminist foreign policy is highly questionable. See: ICWR's Feminist Foreign Policy Index: https://www.ffpindex.org/

CHARACTERISING FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY

FFP has become a distinctive feature of the foreign policies of some countries, which are thus adopting a stronger commitment to gender equality and women's agency. This implies, among other things, a different understanding of women's power, security, participation and voice at home and abroad. This commitment is reflected in the deepening of international commitments to equality and human rights, which all countries had already adopted in 2015 by adhering to the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 on gender equality. However, it goes much further by emphasising women's agency and defining a higher level of ambition than that already undertaken at the United Nations.

This advanced engagement can be interpreted as a new normative entrepreneurship in international relations (Sepúlveda, 2021a). It is also an outcome of the role that the feminist movement has played in pushing for changes and measures to end discrimination against women, as well as a growing awareness of the importance of gender equality in international politics and among the actors who carry it out (Aggestam et al., 2029; Aggestan and True, 2020). At the same time, as noted above, we find ourselves in a convulsive international scenario in which tensions are rising and traditional state-centred and androcentric notions of security are taking hold again. A scenario in which a misogynist and racist far right seek to reassert a traditional social order, challenging what it deliberately and misleadingly calls 'gender ideology' and seeking to curtail women's rights. In this context, the FFP is particularly relevant. Not only does it offer a renewed vision of foreign policy and the changes needed in the understanding of power and institutions themselves, but it stands as a confrontational strategy against these new conservative agendas.

Foreign policy is a field whose institutional, normative and ideational structures are strongly masculinised and therefore privilege and naturalise male perspectives, ideas and experiences as ‘neutral’.

Foreign policy is a field whose institutional, normative and ideational structures are strongly masculinised and therefore privilege and naturalise male perspectives, ideas and experiences as ‘neutral’. A foreign policy that claims to be ‘gender neutral’ reproduces gender inequality, as it does not adequately take into account the different gender-specific perspectives and thus consolidates the *status quo*. Therefore, FFP poses, firstly, an epistemological challenge by pointing to the need to deconstruct the key concepts of International Relations (power, state, security, defence, etc.) from a critical perspective, analysing and questioning the constructions of masculinity and femininity in relation to power, leadership, norms and social practices used in politics (Mesa, 2021a: 138-139).

This makes it possible to denaturalise and question traditional categories such as security or national interest, as well as the use of force to defend national interests. It implies redefining the concept of security, putting the focus on human security, centred on people's needs, attending to their different situations according to gender inequalities and the intersectionality that defines their different expressions, also considering groups excluded by ethnicity, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, disability or age. It advocates demilitarisation and prioritizes peace over militarised, androcentric and statocentric conceptions of security; inclusion over exclusion; mediation and negotiation over coercion, for example through round tables ; solidarity over competition; and cooperation over domination. This approach also advocates relying on local actors to provide security, based on the identification of challenges in territories and borders (Foster and Markham 2024: 42). This creates a normative, thinking and action framework in which a continuous process of (re)negotiation of concrete positions and problem-solving strategies takes place (Zilla 2022: 4).

Feminist Foreign Policy poses an epistemological challenge by pointing to the need to deconstruct key concepts in international relations, such as power, the state, security and peace, from a critical perspective.

At the same time, it places gender justice and the recognition of women's human rights in all their diversity at the centre of a transformative development model. A model that includes the voices, demands and rights of those groups that have been excluded, and that prioritises interventions that respond to feminist agendas in their interaction with other agendas for social, economic and environmental justice (Oxfam, 2022: 48-49).

It also proposes leadership and equal participation in political spaces, aligning with the policies of the 2030 Agenda and its gender goals, and with the fulfilment of international commitments on women's human rights, taking into account their diversity. This opens up spaces to promote much broader measures in the diplomatic and trade arenas to achieve respect for women's rights. A Feminist Foreign Policy must therefore be disruptive and transformative, but how to bring about this 'transformation' and incorporate feminist principles into foreign policy?

DEFINING FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY

FFP is defined according to the context, the national and international actors, the development of feminist and solidarity movements, and the role that international cooperation and diplomacy have played in the human rights and equality agenda. When a government declares its foreign policy to be feminist, it expresses its will to make progress towards equality between men and women and assumes the need for changes in the internal functioning of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and in its political-diplomatic action. It also expresses the will to promote changes in the State's external action through other ministries and administrative bodies and non-governmental actors involved in it [6]. But, as mentioned above, the FFP goes beyond this, as it implies a real commitment to a significant transformation of institutions in the way they manage power and decision-making, as well as in their relations and conception of security, diplomacy and conflict resolution, among other issues. It is an evolving process based on continuous learning and adaptation.

There is no single definition of FFP, as contexts differ and the evolution of feminisms itself has particular expressions in each country. Therefore, many authors and institutions have tried to conceptualise FFP (Thompson and Clement, 2020; Sepúlveda, 2021b; Aggestam, Bergman, Rosamond and Kronsell, 2019; Cheung, J. et al., 2021; Zilla, 2022).

The Swedish government defines it in its Feminist Foreign Policy Handbook as follows:

> "Sweden's feminist foreign policy is a transformative agenda that aims to change structures and increase the visibility of women and girls as actors. It also aims to end gender discrimination and inequality in all stages and contexts of life. The policy is based on intersectionality, which means taking into account the fact that people have different living conditions, levels of influence and needs' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019: 10-11).

It is a policy based on rights, representation and resources, the so-called '3Rs' . In terms of rights, it refers to a policy that promotes the full enjoyment of human rights for all women and girls, and addresses all forms of violence and discrimination that limit their freedom of action. In terms of representation, it is a policy that promotes women's participation in decision-making processes at all levels and in all areas. In terms of resources, it aims to ensure that the necessary resources are allocated to promote the equality agenda and the feminist agenda. Subsequently, a fourth R (Reality) was added, which refers to taking into account the demands of the context.

[6] A distinction is made here between foreign policy, which includes intergovernmental relations carried out by the State through the usual channels of political-diplomatic interaction, and broader foreign action, which includes interaction and policies developed abroad in the economic, social and labour, environmental and climate, scientific and technological, cultural, security and defence or development cooperation and humanitarian fields, among others, carried out by other government ministries and agencies and non-central governments in the exercise of their respective competences. On this distinction, for the Spanish case, see Law 2/2014 of 25 March on Foreign State Action and Service.

The International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), a Washington-based centre, defines FFP more broadly - but also less precisely - as the policy of a state that prioritises peace, gender equality, environmental protection and respect for human rights in its relations and interactions with other states, social movements and other non-state actors; challenges militarism and the arms trade; and advocates conflict prevention. It seeks to transform colonial, racist, patriarchal and male-dominated power structures and is underpinned by values of equality and justice. The FFP seeks coherence in this approach at all levels and in areas such as defence, diplomacy, trade, migration, aid, etc. (Thompson and Clement, 2020).

The Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy in Berlin (CFFP) [7], in collaboration with the governments of Canada, Sweden and Mexico, and civil society organisations such as the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), CREA [8] and the Open Society Foundation, organised a Feminist Foreign Policy Summit in April 2022. The summit brought together a wide range of participants to share knowledge and experiences to advance a feminist agenda. The Centre has developed a glossary of some key concepts related to FFP, which it defines as a policy framework that promotes gender equality policies in specific areas of foreign policy:

> "It is the external action of a state that defines its interactions with other states, supranational organisations, multilateral fora, civil society and movements in a way that prioritises the equality of all people, enshrines the human rights of women and other politically marginalised groups, and unconditionally pursues human security and feminist peace" (CFFP, 2021: 2).

As defined by the Centre, FFP is an alternative and intersectional rethinking of security from the perspective of excluded people, a framework that foregrounds the everyday experiences of marginalised communities and focuses their needs on political processes and public policies. FFP addresses patriarchy, capitalism, racism and militarism and their links to the climate crisis, migration and trade, and explores how politics, diplomacy or development aid can promote a more just world order (CFFP 2021: 2). Feminist foreign policy therefore requires governments to make gender equality a core commitment of their actions at home and abroad (Foster and Markham 2024: 39-40).

FFP offers a perspective that makes it possible to identify the hierarchical power systems that exclude women. It is a policy with transformative ambitions because it involves new practices, actors and ethical frameworks. On the one hand, it challenges patriarchal structures and entrenched gender biases at national and international levels. On the other hand, it aims to place gender equality, discrimination and violence, as well as the lack of inclusion and representation of women, at the centre of the analysis of political action and discourse.

[7] Ver: https://centreforfeministforeignpolicy.org/
[8] CREA, an international feminist organization from the Global South. See: https://creaworld.org/who-we-are/

In her definition of FFP, Chile's Daniela Sepúlveda (2020, 2021a and 2021b) puts the emphasis on normative entrepreneurship i.e. the generation of international standards and norms that promote women as active agents of change. As this author points out, this means promoting affirmative action in all areas and agencies related to foreign policy to achieve women's participation in decision-making. FFP is a policy that assesses the gender impact of any international action or agreement, paying particular attention to the most vulnerable communities. It is also a policy that involves civil society organisations in its design, implementation and monitoring. It prioritises gender equality within the structure of foreign ministries and among foreign policy decision-makers, using a rights-based approach. This requires the removal of institutional barriers that have limited women's participation and development, and contributes to the diversification and professionalisation of the foreign service (Sepúlveda 2021b:93).

Cheung et al. (2021) consider FFP as an ethical policy that aims to improve decisions and bring about incremental change. They identify five core values:

- 1) intersectionality;
- 2) empathic reflexivity (self-critical awareness of one's own position and the needs of others);
- 3) substantive representation and participation;
- 4) accountability;
- 5) active engagement with peace.

Foster and Markham (2024) point out that FFP goes beyond the inclusion of women in institutions and involves transforming the way institutions operate, incorporating a gender perspective and ensuring a diversity of feminist voices in decision-making processes. According to these authors, the key principles that guide FFP are: gender equality as a goal and strategy, a broad definition of security, the inclusion of diverse voices, and the desire to address historical power imbalances. It is also crucial to recognise the key institutions and individuals that drive policy development: governments, political leaders, NGOs and civil society, activists and academics. Each of these principles plays a key role in the formulation and development of FFPs (Foster and Markham 2024: 48).

The Canadian Centre for Global Affairs defines the characteristics of such a foreign policy as follows:

- Policy coherence to achieve sustainable and meaningful change. A feminist approach must be a priority in all areas of foreign policy, from trade and investment to diplomacy, defence, consular services, and migration and refugee policy. It also requires policy coherence at the national and international levels.

- An approach based on the promotion of human rights, so that human rights are at the centre of foreign policy. The government must be accountable for the impact of its human rights policies, both nationally and globally. It must also guarantee the right of individuals to control and decide freely on all matters relating to gender, sexuality and reproduction, free from coercion, violence and discrimination.

- Integrating intersectionality, diversity and inclusion. An intersectional approach within feminist foreign policy considers the ways in which power structures and systems of oppression intersect, interact and shape individual and collective experiences, particularly for women, girls, LGBTQ+, indigenous, Afro-Caribbean, migrant and disabled people. A feminist approach recognises diverse knowledge and lived experiences and values collaboration as an essential tool for promoting equality, justice and human rights. This includes ensuring gender parity in the leadership and representation of government actors involved in the design and implementation of external action, as well as a commitment to other meaningful forms of diversity, equity and inclusion based on ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, gender identity and disability, among others.

- Dismantling colonial legacies and promoting anti-racism. A feminist foreign policy seeks to eliminate the economic, socio-cultural and political systems that perpetuate colonial violence and the imperial ideologies that underpin international relations, such as current patterns of debt repayment, aid, trade negotiations and approaches to peace and security. Feminist politics must act to end institutionalised racism and repair the damage caused by racial violence in foreign relations.

- Promotes demilitarisation and peaceful conflict resolution. Feminist approaches challenge narrow definitions of 'national interest' and outdated notions of 'security' based on militarism and coercion.

- A feminist policy prioritises not only outcomes, but also the process by which they are achieved (ways of working, programme design and implementation, decision-making, and the values and norms that underpin them). Key aspects of feminist processes are integrity, contextualisation, learning, collaboration, transparency, participation, inclusion and responsiveness.

- Consultation, dialogue and participation of diverse civil society actors are also key components of a feminist approach. Regular evaluations with an independent mandate are essential to ensure openness, transparency and accountability in external action. Feminist monitoring and evaluation must be flexible, participatory and inclusive, taking into account gender and other power relations.

In 2021, the Spanish government approved the Feminist Foreign Policy Guide, which offers a practical perspective for action in the foreign service and the incorporation of the gender approach in all phases of foreign policy and its actions (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021: 7). The guide sets out five basic principles that should guide foreign policy action in all its phases: 1) a transformative approach that seeks a deep and structural change in institutional culture in order to incorporate the gender approach in a transversal and systematic way; 2) a leadership committed to the principle of equality, manifested in the availability of human and financial resources; 3) the appropriation of the FFP in the Foreign Service; 4) inclusive participation and the promotion of alliances that strengthen channels of participation with other actors; and 5) the application of intersectionality and diversity (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2021: 7-8).

All these conceptualisations show the great ambition that characterises the FSP, as it goes beyond the promotion of women's human rights or a gender equality agenda in an inclusive development cooperation policy, which many other countries have already adopted in the framework of the 2030 Agenda or their national gender equality policies. However, these are very general conceptualisations that, by encompassing very broad agendas, do not allow us to clearly identify what is specific and unique about a feminist foreign policy. The first difference is the transformative nature of FFP, which means challenging the social, political, economic and ideological structures that underpin a still patriarchal international order and relations, and addressing the causes and roots of structural gender inequalities and linking them to other factors of discrimination in order to transform this situation and move towards effective gender equality at the international level.

When the adjective 'feminist' is added to foreign policy, it underlines the intention to go beyond gender equality and is therefore a structurally disruptive and transformative policy.

The second defining element of the FFP is based on the term 'feminist', taken from the women's movement as a social and political movement. This alludes to another differentiating element from established gender equality policies: the emphasis on the transformative capacity of women as subjects of change in social relations and power structures, in the material, institutional and ideational spheres. FFP therefore implies promoting the empowerment of women and girls and their organisations, and ensuring their participation in the design and implementation of foreign and development policy instruments, as well as in the generation of international standards and norms. It also means promoting alliances and platforms to advance the rights agenda of women and girls in their diversity.

This means emphasising the transformation of material realities, norms, institutions and ideas, and patterns of relationships, actions and policies, both nationally and internationally, from a feminist approach (Sawer et al., 2023; García Morales, 2021: 84), and recognising women's organisations as subjects of change. This is done, for example, in the FFP Action Plan adopted by the Spanish government in 2023 (Plan de Acción 2023: 8). This is an innovative approach that recognises women and girls, rather than as passive objects of discrimination, as agents of change contributing to more just and equitable international relations, and poses new opportunities and challenges as the agenda continues to develop (Thompson, 2020: 3). When the adjective 'feminist' is added to foreign policy, it underlines the intention to go beyond gender equality, making it a structurally disruptive and transformative policy. However, there is no consensus on the conditions necessary for such transformative change, its scope and implications (Zilla, 2022).

The different understanding and elements included in the FFP have allowed for the inclusion of multiple actors and novel initiatives, including feminist movements in all their diversity. The steps taken to implement a feminist foreign policy would not have been possible without taking into account the enormous transformative potential of the feminist movement in all its plurality, both globally and locally, and its demands to transform the patriarchal and discriminatory structures that underpin a state that is still fundamentally androcentric and patriarchal in its nature, structures and policies.

At the same time, this broad approach allows for approaches as diverse as those of Sweden, Canada, Mexico, Spain, Chile, Libya or Mongolia to be part of the policy. The fact that such diversity is accommodated within a broad concept of FFP that reflects different understandings of feminism and international relations - for example, those emerging from the global South - is undoubtedly positive, but it can also lead to conflicting, incoherent or questionable approaches. Is it credible that Libya, a key player in the externalisation of EU migration control, is implementing an FFP? Can the German government define its foreign policy as feminist and fail to condemn the Israeli government's attacks on the United Nations, its Secretary-General (who has been declared *non grato*) and UN agencies, as well as the crimes against humanity - or the more than plausible genocide - that Israel is committing in Gaza? (Berger, 2024). Can the German government adopt a resolution such as "Never Again Is Now: Protection, Preservation and Strengthening of Jewish Life", which legitimises genocide?[9] Can therefore Israel join the UN Feminist Foreign Policy Group co-chaired by Spain and Mexico in 2024? [10].

What role could FFP play in supporting Afghan women suffering from 'gender apartheid' ? [11]? Are women human rights defenders or territorial defenders effectively protected by FFP countries? What measures are being taken to defend democracy and prevent the criminalisation of the women's movement in countries with which FFPs are established? Is it coherent to promote gender equality in one area while at the same time supporting commercial activities that exploit populations, undermine their rights and promote injustice?.

All these issues should be part of the political agenda and translated into concrete actions, with minimum requirements for policy coherence. In this sense, the FFP cannot be approached as a sectoral policy and/or considered in isolation from foreign policy as a whole. It is not a question of adding a feminist dimension or a "women's" or "gender equality" agenda to a conventional foreign policy, which is continuing its course without significant changes from a previous stage. On the contrary, it should be seen as an exercise in redefining foreign policy in a feminist key. FFP is only possible within a universalist framework of respect for and compliance with international law, in particular human rights, refugee, and international humanitarian law. Although the FFP is still under construction, this universalist perspective and coherence with international law should be the framework or precondition for building alliances with those governments that are committed to its implementation.

[9] See the condemnation made by various Jewish groups around the world that support the Palestinian cause: (https://juedische-stimme.de/jüdische-organisationen-weltweit-verurteilen-die-bundestagsresolution-zu-antisemitismus)

[10] This Feminist Foreign Policy Group was created in 2021 at the initiative of Spain and Sweden.

[11] https://endgenderapartheid.today/

Researcher Liric Thompson has identified a series of actions that should be taken to promote a feminist foreign policy. This set is partly the result of an international consultation process with individuals and institutions interested in FFP (Thompson, 2021: 4-7). These are:

- To articulate the adoption of this policy, taking into account the specificity of each government, i.e. to combine the principles and priorities of national and foreign policies in order to ensure balance and coherence.

- Define the meaning of feminist foreign policy, its rationale, values and approach. It should seek to answer the question of what is the added value of this policy compared to a conventional foreign policy. It also proposes the use of an intersectional approach that analyses, identifies and challenges exclusion on the basis of gender, ethnicity, age and ability, among others.

- Define the scope of initiatives to be taken and promote horizontal approaches to mainstream gender in policies and programmes.

- Develop an action plan that includes a timetable for implementation, resources to be used, capacity building, and monitoring and evaluation procedures.

- Involve various stakeholders such as social organisations, feminist groups and movements, trade unions, journalism professionals, academia, etc.

FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY BACKGROUND

To a large extent, FFP has its origins in decades of international work in three areas: first, in gender equality and anti-discrimination work at the multilateral level and in the United Nations, particularly in the framework of CEDAW. Second, in international development cooperation, which has succeeded in positioning gender equality as an essential building block of global sustainable development, as envisaged in the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which were adopted by acclamation by the entire international community at the United Nations. Third, there is the long history of the women's peace movement and the multilateral work around Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, adopted in 2000 (Foster and Markham, 2024; O'Shanasy, 2023: 14-23).

These normative developments refer, to the impact of women on the international agenda, an influence that has not always been acknowledged in the conventional accounts of world politics and multilateralism. Despite being excluded from the decision-making and implementation processes of foreign policy, there are numerous instances that demonstrate women's capacity for influence and agency in world politics. These instances can be regarded as antecedents of feminist foreign policy. Some of the most relevant examples date back to the beginning of the First World War, with the founding of the pioneering feminist

pacifist organisation, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF). This organisation has its roots in the activism of the suffragette movement for women's vote.

In 1915, women who had organised to win their right to universal suffrage in Europe and the United States collectively decided to mobilise in an attempt to halt the war. To this end, an International Women's Congress was convened in The Hague. Chaired by Jane Addams, the Congress brought together 1,136 women voting delegates, in addition to over 300 visitors and observers representing 150 organisations from 12 countries, both belligerent and neutral. The purpose of the Congress was twofold: firstly, to develop a peace strategy and secondly, to call for an end to violence and to promote mediation. This congress was a historic milestone as it laid the foundations for an international women's peace movement (Magallón, 2006). The Hague Congress produced two women's delegations that travelled to thirteen European capitals and Washington to convince the authorities of neutral and belligerent countries to accept mediation.

In the end, the war could not be stopped, but the Congress left as its legacy the founding of WILPF, which was influential in the drafting of President Woodrow Wilson's 14 Points and guided the peace negotiations that ended World War I after the armistice in November 1918. It also contributed to the creation of the League of Nations, the first collective security organisation in modern history and the predecessor of the United Nations (Busey and Tims, 1980: 168). Subsequently, WILPF also played a key role in the creation of the United Nations and continues to be influential in the advocacy of multilateralism and international relations.

The peaceful resolution of conflicts, disarmament, human rights and women's participation in peace processes and decision-making are some of WILPF's priority areas of action.

The peaceful resolution of conflicts, disarmament, human rights and women's participation in peace processes and decision-making are some of WILPF's priority areas of action (Confortini, 2012; Magallón and Blasco, 2015; Busey and Tims, 1980). The organisation operates internationally, with offices in Geneva and New York, from where it carries out intensive advocacy work for peacebuilding. It also develops initiatives at national and local levels through its more than 40 national sections around the world.

A further significant precedent for the involvement of women in the establishment of international standards can be identified in the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 [12]. In addition to Eleanor Roosevelt's prominent role as chair of the drafting committee, numerous other women made significant contributions to the process, yet remain largely unacknowledged in contemporary discourse. Hansa Mehta (India) is credited with amending the phrase 'All men are born free and equal' to 'All human beings are born free and equal' in article 1. Minerva Bernardino, a diplomat and prominent feminist leader from the Dominican Republic, played a pivotal role in advocating for the inclusion of the principle of "equality between men and women" in the preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Additionally, she collaborated with other Latin American women, namely Bertha Lutz of Brazil, Isabel de Vidal of Uruguay and Amalia de Castillo Ledón of Mexico, in advocating for the incorporation of women's rights and non-discrimination on the basis of sex in the Charter of the United Nations. As a result, the Charter became the inaugural international agreement to recognise equal rights between men and women (Marino, 2022). Again in the 1948 Declaration, Begum Shaista Ikramullah from Pakistan advanced the argument for the inclusion of Article 16, which concerns equal marriage rights, as a means of addressing the issue of forced and child marriages. Bodil Begtrup (Denmark) proposed the inclusion of minority rights in Article 26 on the right to education. Marie-Hélène Lefaucheux (France), Chair of the Commission on the Status of Women, who advocated including a reference to non-discrimination on the basis of sex in Article 2. Evdokia Uralova (Belarus), argued for equal pay for women; and Lakshmi Menon (India) argued strongly for the 'universality' of human rights and against the concept of 'colonial relativism' (UN, SF; Adami and Plesch, 2022).

Since then, various initiatives have been progressively adopted, promoting the integration of the gender perspective into the multilateral agenda in areas such as human rights, global development and peacebuilding. All this has created a normative framework on which the FFP is based (Mesa, 2012). Some of the key milestones are as follows: The adoption of the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which includes General Recommendation 30 on women and conflict prevention; the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action; and the establishment of ad hoc tribunals to address sexual violence as a war crime. The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention); the Millennium Development Goals (2000), with specific goals and targets on gender equality; and its successor, the 2030 Agenda, adopted in 2015, with Sustainable Development Goal 5 on gender equality, which is important because of its cross-cutting nature and its integration in of other SDGs.

As mentioned above, Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS), adopted by the UN Security Council in 2000, is a particularly relevant precursor to the FFP. Although adopted by an international body, this resolution was also the result of the efforts of civil society organisations, and women's organisations in particular, who had worked for years to integrate a gender perspective and gender equality goals into the international peace and security agenda.

[12] See https://www.es.amnesty.org/en-que-estamos/blog/historia/articulo/conoce-a-las-mujeres-que-hicieron-universales-los-derechos-humanos-1/

As is well known, Resolution 1325 recognises the role and agency of women as peacebuilders, notes the differential impact and enormous burdens of armed conflict on women, identifies and condemns sexual violence and its use as a weapon of war in most armed conflicts, and urges the international community to take measures to prevent these forms of violence.

The resolution has four pillars: 1) the role of women in conflict prevention; 2) women's participation in peace-building; 3) protection of the rights of women and girls during and after conflict; and 4) relief and recovery. Over the years, additional resolutions (10 in total) have been adopted, addressing different dimensions such as participation, funding, accountability, sexual violence and greater presence of women in peace talks, but progress has been limited.

For women's organisations, the resolution has been a valuable international instrument for advocacy, the definition of strategies and specific initiatives for the integration of the gender perspective in the field of peace and security, and also for demanding spaces for participation in peace negotiations in different places worldwide.

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Around this resolution and its national action plans, a global movement has been created with its respective national expressions that has actively participated in different international fora and has given voice and political support to women in conflict zones. There have been significant obstacles along the way. These include difficulties in achieving gender mainstreaming in peace talks and a greater presence of women in these spaces; and limited resources to meaningfully support local women's peace organisations and their presence in international fora. It should also be noted that there has been an increase in women's participation in UN or NATO peacekeeping forces, but this does not mean that there is real gender mainstreaming in these missions. Furthermore, there are frequent attempts to co-opt this agenda through militarised approaches, focused above all on increasing the number of women in the armed forces or legitimising security or anti-terrorist agendas, while the preventive approaches that should underpin international cooperation and national peacebuilding policies are left in a secondary position (Mesa, 2021b; Villellas, 2020; Villellas, Urrutia and Villellas, 2024).

During the celebration of the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Plan of Action (2021), the Global Network of Partners for FFP was launched with civil society organisations at the Generating Equality Forum. The aim of this network is to promote learning and the adoption of a common framework for FFP, define action plans and share resources to achieve them. The Forum adopted a 'Global Acceleration Plan for Gender Equality', which addresses six critical issues that underpin gender equality:

- 1. The need to address gender-based violence.
- 2. Ensuring economic justice and rights.
- 3. Ensuring bodily autonomy and sexual and reproductive health and rights.
- 4. Advancing feminist action for climate justice.
- 5. Using technology and innovation to advance gender equality.
- 6. Fostering feminist movements and leadership.

In addition, governments and public institutions have pledged $21 billion in investments for gender equality, the private sector has pledged $13 billion and philanthropic organisations have pledged $4.5 billion (UN Women, 2022) [13].

More than 100 governments, UN entities, civil society organisations, academic institutions and private sector entities signed the Compact on Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action (UN Women, 2022b). These signatories committed to concrete actions on existing commitments, including increased attention and funding for actions related to the women, peace and security agenda, gender equality in humanitarian programming, economic security and the protection of women's rights in conflict and crisis situations. To this end, the International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW) [14] has created a Feminist Foreign Policy Index to measure each country's performance and track these commitments and their impact.

This background shows how the FFP is being consolidated and explains why, in the different forms it is taking within its comprehensive approach, specific dimensions are emerging that reflect these previous trajectories of work, such as feminist development cooperation and/or feminist diplomacy, without ceasing to call for structural changes in foreign policy and international relations as a whole, through medium and long-term strategies for the implementation and institutionalisation of the FFP.

[13] See: https://forum.generationequality.org/news/generation-equality-forum-concludes-paris-announcement-revolutionary-commitments-and-global. Disponible en: https://forum.generationequality.org/news/generation-equality-forum-concludes-paris-announcement-revolutionary-commitments-and-global

[14] See ICRW: https://www.icrw.org/press-releases/more-than-30-governments-and-organizations-now-working-to-advance-feminist-foreign-policy-around-the-world/

THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF FEMINIST INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS THEORY

The emergence of feminist foreign policy, as we have seen, has important precedents in the reflection and practice of the international women's movement and in its important participation in international cooperation for gender equality in development, public policy or peace-building. But an important role has also been played by the emergence of feminist International Relations theory, which represents an important epistemological and theoretical challenge to the dominant currents in the discipline - in particular realism and its power politics, or liberal internationalism and its emphasis on rules and institution-building - and the traditional political-diplomatic practices based on both of them.

In fact, women have been either absent, excluded and silenced from international relations, both in their political-diplomatic practice and in their theory. The dominant theories of International Relations have ignored the gender perspective and the extent to which their key epistemologies and ontologies, which are assumed to be gender-neutral, are rooted in a patriarchal social order. Mainstream theories have considered concepts such as power, the state, security, sovereignty and identities as neutral ontologies, and have claimed that knowledge derived from such theories was universal, objective, impartial, rigorous and truthful. The international has been constructed as a sphere separate from the social and political ones. It has also been built as a result of the gender bias that has also excluded women from the public sphere, and on the basis of claims to rationality and universality that in reality reproduce the division of gender roles in which rationality has been considered the masculine domain. They have been portrayed as opposed to the feminine realm of emotion, affection or altruistic cooperation, supposedly irrational and alien to the imperatives of anarchy, power or rational interest that dominate the international. As José Antonio Sanahuja (2019) points out, the dominant theories and the very construction of the discipline and the socio-political space of the international imply, on the one hand, androcentric ontologies, discourses and practices centred on the sovereign state, the politics of fear, competition and conflict over power and resources, and, on the other, ignorance and subordination of the social norms and institutions that enable social reproduction and situations of exclusion and structural violence, which are perceived as secondary issues (Sanahuja, 2019: 148).

Feminist international relations theory emerged at the end of the 1980s within the broader framework of the reflexive and post-positivist turn that affected the social sciences as a whole. As a result of this shift, various theoretical currents emerged that recognised the importance of gender in international relations. All of them (critical theory, poststructuralism, feminist international relations and decolonial thought) share a critical analysis of the inequalities in the world order, questioning the hierarchies of power and the privileges that derive from them, although only feminist international relations argues that these inequalities have their origin in an epistemology that has not taken into account the fundamental nature of patriarchy in the social order. These theories therefore offer a radical critique of the globalised and militarised international system, understanding it as an expression of an androcentric and patriarchal social order. Foreign policy and diplomacy, security and defence, and the ways in which these worlds are constructed, are expressions of this patriarchal order, which generates and reproduces gender inequalities and systemic violence and discrimination against women.

The public sphere of state institutions has largely been associated with men and masculinity, which in turn has traditionally defined the international as the domain of the 'statesman' and his rationality, based on national interests and power calculations, and thus as a space in which women and what has been socially constructed as the feminine have no place. Feminist IR theory, in its various manifestations, therefore challenges traditional state-centred theories and the way they make invisible the existing power hierarchies and privileges at the institutional level that determine the outcomes of external action and challenge security and peace.

Feminist international relations theory considers that the key categories that underpin international knowledge and social practices are socially constructed and framed by gendered practices and power relations that need to be critically deconstructed. The first generation of feminist writers focused their agenda on the deconstruction of key dichotomies such as the domestic and the international, order and anarchy, war and peace, the civilised and the barbaric or uncivilised, because of their direct relationship to the patriarchal order. It also addressed the deconstruction of the ontologies or classical categories of the discipline: state, power, sovereignty, diplomacy, security or national interest. This was done by highlighting the close connection of such dichotomies and concepts to gender categories and global structures (Kelly-Thompson et al. 2023: 25-37).

The diverse feminist perspectives within International Relations have demonstrated that the ongoing subordination of gender significantly contributes to the emergence of various forms of violence—whether physical, sexual, symbolic, or economic—experienced by women.

The category of man was constituted as 'sovereign man', 'rational actor', 'statesman', and, in short, as the dominant model of agency in the public sphere, based on the strength and power of the warrior, the productive power of homo faber, and the supposed universal rationality of the ruler or scientist. These archetypes are taken as a general paradigm and universal norm of human behaviour and extrapolated to the behaviour of the state, from which both the dominant theories (political realism, rationalism, liberal internationalism, etc.) and the practice of foreign policy expect a sovereign, autonomous, rational agency based on the national interest and linked to the male gender. The category of women is rendered invisible and/or placed in a subordinate position, without agency and in a situation of dependence, in the sphere of the private, of life support, social reproduction, care and the common interest, which it serves with renunciation and abnegation, and of a behaviour based on emotion and feeling, which is assumed to be contrary to the logic of conflict, power and interest, which, as an imperative for survival, is supposed to govern international politics (Sanahuja, 2018).

The various feminist approaches to international relations have shown how the persistence of gender subordination plays a crucial role in the generation of multiple forms of violence - physical, sexual, symbolic, economic, etc. This phenomenon is referred to as the 'continuum of violence' (Cookburn, 2004) and shows that violence against women and girls does not occur only in situations of armed conflict as something exceptional, but is part of women's everyday lives as part of the dynamics of discrimination. War only exacerbates these forms of violence. This means recognising the different impact of violence on men and women, and the need to implement policies that address women's different needs. It also means overcoming traditional notions of security, such as national security, in which the state is both the object and the guarantor of security. This implies a restrictive understanding of security as the mere absence of external violence based on the use of military force. However, the nature and dynamics of most contemporary armed conflicts, legitimised in the name of identity, religion, sovereignty, national security and other expressions of 'state reasons', belie the myth of protection: it is often safer to be a soldier than a woman. In the violence unleashed by Israel in Gaza, for example, the UN found that around 70 per cent of those killed were women and children (United Nations, 2024). In today's conflicts, a higher proportion of victims, refugees and displaced persons suffer sexual violence, and women's bodies and dignity are used as weapons of war, with physical and symbolic violence used for ethnic cleansing and to humiliate the enemy. A feminist redefinition of security is needed, within the framework of human security, which is people-centred rather than *raison d'état*-centred; multidimensional in nature, going beyond direct violence to recognise the different forms of insecurity and violence experienced by women in particular; in short, recognising the economic, social and environmental dimensions of security and promoting resilience. In other words, a feminist vision of human security (Hudson, 2005; Miralles, 2020; Shepherd, 2012; Wiben, 2010) that focuses on women and their agency as defenders of territory, community and their demands and needs.

There are, of course, important differences within feminist IR theory. At least as many as there are within feminist thought and practice itself. Based on Robert Cox's (1981) theorisation, a distinction is made between problem-solving feminist approaches to IR, which focus their research on the international gender agenda and how it has been incorporated into development cooperation, peace-building, human rights or security, without questioning the foundations of these agendas or the social order and power relations in which they are inscribed; on the other hand, critical feminist approaches which, drawing on critical theory, seek to 'denaturalise' this social order, expose the underlying power relations and challenge the legitimacy of the international structures in which these agendas are embedded, questioning their capacity to subvert them and thus to achieve genuine gender equality. This approach offers a broader perspective that seeks to explain how processes of change occur on the one hand and on the other. It also emphasises that knowledge always comes from somewhere and that there is good reason to believe that 'the view from below is better than from the shining platforms of power' (Haraway, 1991: 191).

The question is what kind of feminism is being incorporated into foreign policy. Feminism is a diverse and pluralistic movement in constant change. On the one hand, standpoint feminism radically challenges the patriarchal system and defends the need to address hegemonic male culture as the cause of women's unequal access to the public sphere, especially in the international arena (Hartsock, 1985). In theorising the international system, this approach advocates a feminisation of international politics based on a revaluation of the 'ethics of care' and the values associated with sustaining life and cooperation. As Cynthia Enloe points out, there is a need to include women's experience in international relations and to analyse why they are absent from academia, security forces, embassies and all other areas where international policy is developed (Enloe, 1989). This will lead to a broader understanding of the international system beyond the gaze of the 'warrior' and the 'statesman', foreign policy and the 'national interest'. As Jacqui True points out, 'the knowledge that emerges from women's experiences 'on the margins' of world politics is more neutral and critical in that it is not so complicit with, or blind to, existing institutions and power relations' (True, 2005: 215).

It is essential to incorporate the experience of women in international relations, and to analyse the reasons why they are absent from academia, security forces, embassies and all areas where international policy is developed.

However, the implementation of a feminist foreign policy, as it has been defined so far by official bodies, is often framed within a liberal feminism that defends human rights and the gender equality agenda in national and regional global spaces and seeks to improve efficiency and effectiveness in order to promote gender equality. It focuses in particular on increasing women's representation in institutions and decision-making processes, and especially on the presence of women in foreign ministries and in staff and management positions of career diplomats and foreign service personnel, as well as in international organisations.

The case in Sweden, which has based its feminist foreign policy on the so-called three R's (Rights, Representation and Resources). It can be argued that these approaches and their conceptual underpinnings are translated, negotiated and renegotiated in the process of state-led engagement and, by extension, in foreign policy. It is a feminism that is willing to take power and build alliances across a diversity of voices; which claims the right to participate in existing power structures in order to address the factors that generate inequality, subordination and the exclusion of women from state institutions; but does not necessarily confront the dominant ideas about international relations or international political economy, national interests, their logics of power, or the use of force, as well as their axiological relationship to a patriarchal social order.

In contrast to this liberal vision, there is also a feminism that has warned of the dangers and limits of FFP and feminist access to power if the patriarchal and colonial nature of international relations is not challenged, where traditional actors may end up instrumentalising the concerns and demands of feminism and FFP. The omnipresence of liberal feminism does not contribute to transforming politics as usual, as it offers an integrative rather than transformative approach to foreign policy (Achilleos-Sarll, 2018). This has also been pointed out by some feminist scholars who question the (limited) transformative potential of state-generated feminism, particularly because of the constraints imposed by the institutionalised patriarchal order to support and sustain feminist values and practices within and across borders (MacKinnnon, 1989).

Postcolonial feminism has sought to go beyond liberal feminism by offering a transformative approach to foreign policy. Its analysis addresses discrimination and human rights abuses, as well as other forms of discrimination and violence, from an intersectional perspective that includes the colonial legacies that are often still present. It questions the rationality and universal norms associated with the idea of progress and dominant notions of development, and rejects the idea that the concept of a free, autonomous, Western woman is a universal norm. Thus, certain forms of Western liberal feminism promoted through foreign policy would also be a form of 'Eurocentric imperialism' that questions the agency of non-Western women and ultimately denies difference and diversity, as Columba Achilleos-Sarll (2018) argues.

The same author addresses the relationship between foreign policy and gender, sexuality and race from the perspective of postcolonial feminism, pointing out how foreign policy has left these aspects on the sidelines, both in discourse and in practice. It also shows how the category of gender has been prioritised over those of race or sex, and how different and interrelated forms of discrimination have been ignored and naturalised. Gender operates through a series of complex relationships with other social categories, and these relationships are context-specific, hierarchical and based on and reproduce specific structures of domination and oppression. A postcolonial feminist approach to foreign policy involves putting intersectionality at the centre, reconfiguring normative orders and reconnecting different histories, colonial and postcolonial, in a logic of non-Eurocentric or non-Western global history, drawing on the experiences and agency of women from non-Western realities. It argues, therefore, that for a foreign policy to be truly feminist, it must embrace diversity and intersectionality and advocate a non-Western universalism capable of recognising diversity, based on the dialogue of knowledge and the agency of women from the Global South and their particular experiences and historicity.

Despite these limitations, and the accuracy of many of these criticisms, the very definition and implementation of a feminist foreign policy is an important step: it opens up spaces and opportunities previously closed to the advancement of feminist principles in international relations. It opens up the possibility of contesting the meaning of traditional categories such as national security or national interest, or the use of force to defend national sovereignty, and it opens up spaces to promote much broader measures in the diplomatic or commercial sphere to achieve respect for women's rights.

This is without prejudice to a more established agenda to address the significant gender gaps in the international arena, where women are absent from decision-making spaces, and to promote positive affirmation policies aimed at ensuring equal participation in the international relations.

Hudson (2017) has pointed out that a feminist foreign policy would assume that the state becomes the primary promoter of human rights, and would embrace the idea that human rights and national security are not contradictory goals of state policy. A feminist foreign policy would propose that women's empowerment, security and leadership provide a bridge between the two aspirations of respect for human rights and peace and security. It would define the latter category in terms of human security and address women's specific security issues with the necessary intersectional perspective. In short, it is a matter of rethinking power and security.

As such, FFP represents a conceptual, normative and practical commitment to move beyond the traditional discourses and practices of foreign policy and international relations to a foreign policy committed to women's agency and transformative potential, and to the principles that underpin gender equality. This entails an intersectional perspective, based on the universalist framework of human rights, which is able to grasp the diversity and complexity of women's experiences and lives in each specific context as a key element in overcoming patriarchal power relations and practices rooted across borders and in promoting equality across gender, sex, class and ethnicity.

> Women do not possess uniform, homogeneous, or standardized agendas, interests, and goals. Their needs and contexts vary significantly, and this diversity must be acknowledged if we are to attain universal rights.

Women do not have uniform, homogeneous and standardised agendas, interests and goals; their demands are very different, their contexts are very different, and this diversity must be taken into account if we are to achieve universal rights. Thus, as Aggestam and Bergman-Rosamond (2016) note, 'a distinct feminist foreign policy statement requires a move away from traditional elite-oriented foreign policy practices and discourses in favour of a policy framework guided by normative and ethical principles. Moreover, by broadening and deepening their foreign policy, states that adopt a feminist foreign policy can include broader commitments that take into account the different narratives and distinct needs of women and other marginalised groups in international society' (Aggestam and Bergman-Rosamond 2016: 327). As community and decolonial feminisms have pointed out, structures of oppression are embedded in North-South relations, and therefore a FFP cannot be indifferent to the colonial past and its present effects, and the suffering it continues to cause people today.

In short, it can be argued that feminist foreign policy faces the three major challenges identified by feminist IR theory, which have implications for theorising international relations as a whole (Sanahuja, 2018):

1. An epistemological challenge that assumes and gives relevance to the knowledge that emerges from specific and differentiated situations and problems of exclusion, disadvantage and invisibilisation of women for gender reasons, and that defines a feminist epistemology that redefines the contours of the 'international'. It includes the experiences and lives of women 'from the margins' as a source of knowledge and critical reflection on international relations. It analyses how the processes and forces at work in the 'international' reconstitute gender identities and roles, and thus social relations as a whole. It addresses the interrelationships between gender, power and knowledge in the reproduction and maintenance of gender inequalities and the violation of women's and girls' rights. A feminist foreign policy therefore requires a critical deconstruction of the key concepts of international relations (power, state, national interest, security, defence, etc.), analysing and questioning the constructions of masculinity and femininity in relation to power and leadership that are used in politics. There is also a need to develop new approaches, such as a commitment to feminist security that puts people's needs at the centre (Hudson, 2005; Miralles, 2020; Sheperd, 2012; Wiben, 2010).

2. A praxeological and transformative challenge, exploring the possibility and desirability of changing the international system and promoting an emancipatory project based on a feminist foreign policy. This implies a redefinition of roles, norms, institutions, etc. in order to achieve greater presence, leadership and participation in the international sphere. It is about overcoming the gender gap that excludes women from decision-making spaces, security spheres or peace talks. It is also about putting an end to the various forms of discrimination, taking an intersectional approach, and achieving concrete improvements in women's lives. And finally, it means promoting gender equality across a range of policy agendas related to global development, sustainability and the environment, peace and security, and citizenship and human rights. This can happen when there is internal and external pressure to conform to norms, forcing state institutions to push for gender equality policies. But state institutions also generate pressure at the international level to mainstream gender in regional and global institutions.

3. A universalist and cosmopolitan feminist challenge that seeks a balance between diversity and universality, seeking to articulate global justice and equality, with recognition of differences and diversity, and acknowledging the political agency of women in their diversity (Reverter-Bañón, 2017: 307). This cosmopolitan feminism proposes an open process oriented towards dialogue between and within women's movements, across identity divides, using the concept of intersectionality. The assumption is that women are not a monolithic group with a common agenda based on historicity and Western experience, and therefore it will be necessary to promote the recognition of women's experience with its multiple identities, of which gender is one variable. A feminist cosmopolitanism must be sensitive to diversity in order to understand how dialogue can negotiate universal principles that can govern cosmopolitanism (Reilly, 2007) and promote a post-Western universalism. It is a matter of redefining the 'international' from the aforementioned feminist and Global South epistemologies, thus recovering non-Western historicity in a more plural and diverse way that brings out actors, agendas and resistances that have been pushed to the margins or subalternity (Sanahuja, 2018).

Feminist Development Cooperation

Both the gender approach and the human rights approach have been constitutive elements and distinctive features of development cooperation in many countries, contributing to a transformative, rights-based rather than a assistencialist or technocratic approach. The gender approach to development has a long history, reflected in its contributions to the struggle for gender equality and justice, and to the defence and promotion of women's rights. This approach is based on international recommendations on women's rights and development and has been incorporated into international development goals, such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which were in force from 2000 to 20165 , and the 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals, which cover the period 2015-2030. Based on this acquis and these international goals, some governments have decided to redefine their development cooperation policies as feminist. In some cases, as part of their foreign policy, as in the case of Canada and its "Feminist Assistance Policy"; in others, as a policy in its own right, with its own identity, as in the case of Spanish development cooperation policy, based on its long tradition of promoting gender equality.

International development cooperation practices are diverse and can sometimes reproduce structural gender inequalities. To be transformative, they need to address gender inequalities by considering their differential impact on men and women and by analysing the root causes of inequalities. These are structural and systemic phenomena in which, in addition to gender, other axes of discrimination and oppression are intertwined, such as ethnic origin, affective-sexual orientation, social class, age or functional diversity, among others (Espinosa 2024:7). This has important implications and poses enormous challenges for development cooperation to be defined as feminist. Some of these challenges concern organisational change and strengthening, expanding spaces for participation, alliances and networking, and defining agendas and strategies (Oxfam, 2022).

In order to meet these challenges of feminist development cooperation, development cooperation agencies, whether they are part of public administrations or NGOs, need to promote organisational change, which requires new legal or regulatory frameworks, political will and sufficient economic and human resources. It is a matter of reviewing organisational culture, internal structure, procedures, human resource management and reviewing cooperation plans and instruments to incorporate a feminist approach.

There is a need to ensure the consultation and participation of women's organisations and local feminist organisations - which is a good practice to be followed in any development cooperation action - and to strengthen their leadership, voice, capacities and long-term agency as a differentiating element of cooperation that wants to be feminist, in order to promote processes of structural change in favour of gender equality and women's rights, respecting their own social and cultural contexts, their heterogeneity and their plurality of voices and views.

It is a matter of including their proposals in all phases of the project or public policy cycle, from conception to planning, monitoring and final evaluation. The importance of accessible funding for feminist organisations and collectives is emphasised, establishing flexible, medium- and long-term procedures that allow for the sustainability of actions and the creation of spaces and mechanisms for care and protection (Generalitat, 2024). One example is the positive experience of the Women's Funds. It is also about building alliances that empower feminist movements and strengthen their alliances and capacity for local, regional and global advocacy.

These organisational changes are medium- and long-term processes that face enormous resistance and require political will to implement. They are also extremely complex, as they require a critical analysis of power relations in development cooperation processes and an understanding of their potential and limitations.

It is essential to ensure the involvement and consultation of women's organizations and local feminist groups, as a key aspect of feminist cooperation. This approach aims to enhance their leadership, amplify their voices, build their capacities, and foster long-term agency to drive structural changes that promote gender equality and uphold women's rights.

Actions to promote participation and networking will target civil society organisations in general and women's organisations and the feminist movement in particular, supporting alliances and broad networks to enhance mobilisation and advocacy capacities, innovation and common learning. It also facilitates the exchange of good practices and incorporating effective contributions and experiences. The aim is to create or consolidate spaces for the coordination of existing actors (coordinators, platforms) to generate more feminist knowledge and feminist proposals, promote access to decision-making spaces in the field of international cooperation and prioritise women's agency.

The definition of feminist agendas and strategies that transversally guide the whole of development cooperation involves, first of all, dialogue between different feminisms and other actors and critical epistemologies, opening up to the contributions of ecofeminism, the decolonial approach, an intersectional perspective and feminist pacifism. On the one hand, ecofeminism proposes the articulation of proposals for action and cooperation in different territories, based on respect for nature and taking into account the interrelationship between women's lives and the territories they occupy.

On the other hand, the decolonial approach contributes to changing the focus on the representations of migrant women, indigenous or Afro-descendant women, or those who belong to racialised and excluded minorities, who are constructed as "the other" and who question that the only path to emancipation is the one that starts from the Western experience and perspective, establishing a relationship of subordination and imbalance. Finally, the intersectional approach calls for recognition of the complexity of women's lives and experiences and the ways in which racism, patriarchy, class oppression, labour relations and other forms of discrimination create inequalities that structure women's relative positions. It takes into account historical, social and political contexts and also recognises the unique individual experiences that result from the combination and intersection of different kinds of situations and identities.

In this perspective of mainstreaming, empowerment and strengthening women's agency, other issues on the gender equality agenda remain relevant, such as the elimination of all forms and expressions of male violence recognised in international, regional and local legal frameworks (Barbé and Martin, 2024). The persistence of femicide, or gender-based violence against women, is a cause for concern and a sign of the persistence of structures of inequality and a patriarchal culture that legitimise such violence (ECLAC, 2024).

There are interesting initiatives such as Spotlight, promoted by the European Union and the United Nations with the aim of eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls. It is an example of governance that seeks multi-level cooperation between international and local actors and develops violence prevention work. It has helped 1.6 million women and girls gain access to services against gender-based violence; increased national budgets to address gender-based violence and fund civil society organisations; and provided tools to alleviate poverty, discrimination and lack of opportunity. However, it has not been without its difficulties and contradictions, as Bargués and Martin Almagro (2024) explain. On the one hand, women and women's organisations still lack the capacity to act and are seen as mere 'implementers', reinforcing the tendency to portray gender and women in an instrumental way. This logic limits women's empowerment. The spotlight presupposes a profound vulnerability of women and women's organisations, rendering them incapable, depoliticising them and turning them into mere 'implementers' of global emancipatory norms; offering resistance or alternatives is inconceivable' (Bargués and Martin Almagro 2024: 318).

It is also very important in the feminist agenda to move towards economic justice and equal opportunities, promoting women's economic autonomy, facilitating access to land and strengthening their capacities, and promoting entrepreneurship, social and popular economy and networking, among others. Taking steps towards a feminist economy that highlights the importance of care in sustaining life and makes visible the invisible care work, mainly carried out by women, which is not considered or counted as part of economic activity; guaranteeing the right to care throughout the life cycle and that it is provided in accordance with criteria of social and gender justice and as an exercise of co-responsibility of society and the State in guaranteeing it (Güemes and Cos Montiel, 2023; Caracciolo di Torella, 2024).

The feminist cooperation policy, like the PEF as a whole, also has the task of promoting the participation of women's and feminist movements in peace processes and supporting their role as peace-builders, particularly in the post-conflict reconstruction and sustainable development agenda. It is also very important to give visibility to the demands of women human rights defenders, who are persecuted, harassed, threatened and murdered when they defend their rights at the local level, to support their presence in international fora and to offer protection mechanisms. Finally, as part of this feminist cooperation, global citizenship education must include a feminist gender approach that promotes the analysis and understanding of gender inequalities, the rights of women and the most vulnerable groups, and defines strategies for action.

At the European level, CONCORD, the European NGO platform that brings together more than 2,600 NGOs and is the main interlocutor with the European institutions on development policy and international cooperation, has developed a set of principles and proposals to promote feminist and intersectional policies in the EU's external action (CONCORD 2024). It proposes ten principles: 1) pursue gender transformative and systemic change; 2) redress power imbalances; 3) counter colonial continuities; 4) embrace intersectionality; 5) effective participation: 'nothing about us without us'; 6) promote cooperation and inclusiveness in international relations; 7) ensure mainstreaming and policy coherence; 8) protect, promote and respect human rights and civic space; 9) promote sustainable development; and 10) allocate necessary resources.

The Spanish government adopted in 2023, the Law on Cooperation for Sustainable Development and Global Solidarity (Law 1/2023), which in various sections expresses its commitment to an equality and feminist agenda as a fundamental part of development policy and humanitarian action. The law states:

> "'Gender equality, promoted from a feminist approach, as an essential, transversal and distinctive element of Spanish cooperation to reduce inequalities between women and men, intensify efforts to reduce gender gaps, combat all forms of violence and discrimination and promote the empowerment of women, girls and adolescents, as well as strengthening their sexual and reproductive rights, from the perspective of human rights and universal public health' (Law 1/2023: 14).

Likewise, the law proposes to integrate the gender perspective in all management, monitoring and evaluation tools in order to move towards a feminist agenda. In the field of decentralised cooperation, feminist development cooperation has been included in the master plans of some of the regional governments, and they are defining strategic documents or promoting initiatives to move from a gender equality agenda to a feminist agenda, together with NGOs and other actors (Cooperation Council (2022; Oxfam, 2022; Pajarín, 2021).

All these proposals involve reconstructing the development cooperation agenda from the transformative perspective of gender equality. This means supporting the design and implementation of public policies aimed at transforming systemic and structural inequalities from the pluralist perspectives of feminisms, addressing the multiple inequalities that arise.

It means dismantling the discourses and practices that seek to legitimise discrimination and focusing on transforming the situation from an intersectional perspective. In short, it is about recognising and prioritising the agency of women in all their diversity, not only as agents of change for sustainable development, but also as political subjects and rights holders who actively participate in decisions that affect planning, social dialogue and sustainable development processes and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. It is a commitment to new leadership and transformative policies in the decision-making bodies of international cooperation in each country.

Funding

One of the big issues on the table is the funding of gender equality in feminist development cooperation. It is a question of analysing how this commitment translates into Official Development Assistance (ODA) and the resources used to promote gender equality and women's rights. One of the problems in assessing the financial resources allocated to gender equality is the weakness of existing monitoring systems, which makes it difficult to have an overall view of the situation. However, some analysis has been carried out which provides some information.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) collects data from the Gender Equality Scoreboard and focuses on bilateral Official Development Assistance (ODA), but excludes ODA from other multilateral institutions such as the European Union. According to data from the Development Assistance Committee (DAC), six of the seven countries with a feminist foreign policy or development cooperation policy are among the top ten donors in projects whose main objective is to contribute to gender equality and the rights of women, adolescents and girls in all their diversity (OECD, 20-23). In the case of Canada and Sweden, ODA for gender equality has increased steadily since 2009. In Spain, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, ODA for gender equality has increased less than in the previous two countries. Spain shows a negative trend in ODA to women's rights between 2010 and 2015, coinciding with a conservative goverment, the country's economic and financial crisis and a general reduction in ODA levels. However, ODA will increase by almost 50% between 2015 and 2021. France shows a positive trend in this type of ODA from 2013 onwards and an acceleration of its growth in 2018 and 2019. At the same time, the level of Germany's gross disbursements with significant and important gender objectives has systematically increased, and the country has reaffirmed its commitment to significantly increase this aid with its recent feminist foreign cooperation policy. On the other hand, some countries that are committed to gender equality in ODA, both in absolute and relative terms, have not adopted the term 'feminist' to qualify their international cooperation policies. This is the case of Japan, the United States, the United Kingdom and Iceland (Güemez and Romero Castelán, 2024: 27-35).

Gender-targeted ODA has been mainly allocated in sectors related to governance, infrastructure and basic social, economic and financial services. However, investment in civil society and productive sectors that promote women's economic integration has been relatively low and should be increased and sustained over time.

Some donors have established specific funds and grant mechanisms to support CSOs. Examples include the Women's Voice and Leadership Programme (Canada), the SDG 5 Fund and related funding mechanisms such as the Leading from the South programme (Kingdom of the Netherlands) and the Support Fund for Feminist Organisations (France). However, the overall share of aid with gender objectives is low and stagnant, highlighting the need to engage new donors and increase support for gender equality and women's organisations (Secretary-General's report S/2024/671).

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At the multilateral level, in 2019 the UN Secretary-General established a commitment to allocate 15% of UN programme resources to gender equality and women's empowerment (United Nations, 2019).This proposal was reiterated in 2004 with the New Agenda for Peace. One of the instruments that have been established are pooled funds to finance the gender equality agenda. Trust funds related to gender equality include: (i) the Women, Peace and Humanitarian Action Fund, which finances leadership and empowerment initiatives in situations of armed conflict; (ii) the Conflict-Related Sexual Violence Prevention Multi-Partner Trust Fund (CRSV-MPTF); and (iii) the Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations, which aims to increase the substantive participation of women in peace operations.

Donor country contributions to these funds are significant in countries with feminist foreign policies and cooperation. Germany has contributed more than $60 million to these funds and Canada has earmarked some $22.7 million for the same purpose, followed by the Netherlands, Sweden, Spain and Luxembourg with some $6.2 million, $5.6 million, $2.5 million and $33,000 respectively. It is worth noting that France does not appear on the list of contributors to the three trust funds mentioned above. And the European Union is the largest contributor to the Spotlight Initiative, a joint initiative with UN Women to eliminate all forms of violence against women, with contributions of more than $520 million until April 2021 (OFFAM, 2023b by Güemez and Romero Castelán, 2024: 35-36).

However, according to the UN Secretary-General's report on women, peace and security (S/2024/671) of September 20/24, bilateral ODA with gender equality objectives has decreased from 45% to 44%, after having increased in the previous decade.

Bilateral ODA to conflict-affected contexts shows a similar decline. The latest data show that in 2021-2022, bilateral aid to conflict-affected contexts averaged $47.7 billion per year. Of this amount, $20.5 billion included gender equality objectives. However, only $2.5 billion (5 per cent) was allocated to gender equality as a primary objective, down from an average of $2.8 billion per year in 2019-2020, despite the UN's call for this goal.

This is because sometimes promises to increase funding for gender equality do not always mean an increase in funding, but rather a reallocation of funds already committed. This is the finding of the UN Women's report (2024). *Lost in Translation: Unravelling the Gap between Global Commitments and Funding for Women's Organisations in Conflict-Affected Contexts* (2024). The report finds that funding is also concentrated among a small number of donors, with a significant proportion going to international NGOs in donor countries rather than directly to local organisations in conflict-affected countries. This means that the 1% target for women's organisations, first proposed by the Secretary-General on the twentieth anniversary of resolution 1325 (2000) and reiterated in the New Agenda for Peace, is not being met.

Operationalising Feminist Development Cooperation

Another question is how to operationalise a transformative development cooperation policy that takes into account these principles and approaches and is committed to effectively mainstreaming the gender perspective and women's empowerment and agency in each and every one of the cooperation interventions with a strategic, medium and long-term perspective. It cannot be ignored that political and social resistance is enormous and that in many contexts there is a so-called 'implementation gap', which refers to the difficulties in introducing far-reaching changes in development cooperation. This different focus of the FFP and feminist development cooperation, centred on women's agency and its transformative potential in their respective contexts, requires strategic work on the ground with local stakeholders and resources, taking into account existing realities and facilitating greater articulation and exchange with civil society organisations. However, there is also an urgent need to incorporate more flexible working approaches and a change in the way projects are designed and implemented (Roll, 2023), and to 're-politicise' cooperation with these objectives, as opposed to the technocratic approaches that are currently widespread and the disproportionate concern of donors for administrative aspects related to expenditure control.

One of the most interesting approaches that has been proposed along these lines is 'adaptive development assistance', which is characterised by taking account of contextual specificities, adapting to change and building on local potential, so-called 'pockets of effectiveness' (Roll, 2023). This approach takes into account local social and political dynamics and is locally owned. It focuses on working closely with local actors over the long term and promoting their leadership. It is more flexible than traditional collaborative planning systems, such as the logical framework approach, and adapts to changing contexts and emerging opportunities, while maintaining a long-term strategic horizon for transformation. Finally, this approach is oriented towards continuous and systematic learning from both failures and successes. This is done through reflection and analysis within the project and through complementary research (Roll 2023, 2).

Another interesting approach is the Localising Women, Peace and Security Agenda (WPS), which has been used to implement this agenda at the local level (Mesa, 2021b). Its starting point is a participatory diagnosis in local communities of their main peacebuilding needs. This process involves key local actors such as mayors, community leaders, religious leaders, youth associations, or women's organisations in the process. It involves identifying the actions needed to build sustainable peace and gender equality in each territory, and with a local action plan, which can be complementary to other local or national plans. This approach aims to strengthen cooperation between local and national actors. It is a participatory approach that seeks to exchange experiences at the local level and to design public policies aimed at achieving greater equality in peacebuilding processes (Cabrera, 2013). In 2017, the UN Secretary-General's annual report to the Security Council on Women, Peace and Security (S/2017/861) [15] highlighted the importance of these agenda localisation programmes as they translate international, regional and national commitments into local action based on the needs of communities. Localisation objectives include:

- Help identify and respond to local priorities and concerns about the WPS agenda.
- Promote local leadership, ownership and commitment to the implementation of the WPS agenda.
- Strengthen the capacity of civil society organisations to monitor local implementation of the WPS agenda and demand accountability from local authorities.
- Develop concrete legal and policy instruments to strengthen the implementation of the WPS agenda at the local level.
- Promote systematic coordination and cooperation between local authorities, CSOs, local leaders, the UN, regional organisations and donors (GWNP 2018: 19).

These proposals imply a significant change in the conditions under which development cooperation is usually conducted. They require, on the one hand, more agile decision-making processes, more flexible administrative and financial management, and greater participation by non-state actors and in particular feminist organisations, given the political and non-technical nature of these processes; and, on the other hand, more systematic monitoring and follow-up of the processes, contributing to the establishment of a constructive culture of error and learning within and between organisations.

Feminist development cooperation requires measures to promote its institutionalisation and to ensure coherence with the various national policies, in accordance with the commitments ratified at international level. At the same time, accountability is essential in order to know the progress made and the results achieved. To this end, it is necessary to establish a measurement system with indicators and disaggregated data that facilitate the analysis of progress or setbacks in gender equality policies, from an intersectional perspective, within the framework of those already established in the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, which will generate learning and knowledge to advance the gender equality agenda.

[15] See: Report of the Secretary-General on women and peace and security. S/2017/861. 16 de octubre de 2017. Disponible en https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/N1733043.pdf.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this report, we have conceptualised FFP, brought together the different approaches and analysed its background and key milestones on the international scene. We have examined the contributions of the feminist movement and feminist international relations theory to FFP. It has also placed feminist development policy within the framework of FFP, which needs to move from a gender equality agenda to a feminist agenda that emphasises the empowerment and agency of women and their organisations and alliances, with the social and political challenges and opportunities that this entails.

The meaning and scope of feminist foreign policy remains contested and somewhat undefined. Feminist foreign policy is sometimes presented as an ideological or discursive marker of established or assumed gender equality policies. While gender equality work has a normative and programmatic justification and is linked to values such as respect for human rights and the construction of a more just and egalitarian society, FFP goes beyond this. This policy encompasses international relations, diplomacy, development cooperation, trade and defence and, by empowering women and their organisations as agents of change, seeks a relevant transformation of institutions and ways of understanding key issues in the international system such as power and security. The promotion of gender equality through intergovernmental relations and the action of international organisations is a fundamental component of the FFP, but it is not sufficient to challenge the androcentric and patriarchal nature of international relations, political-diplomatic practice or the external action of states, including cooperation for global sustainable development, and to achieve a relevant transformation of institutions and ways of understanding power in the international and global sphere.

The commitment of some governments to promote a feminist foreign policy is undoubtedly a positive step towards promoting equality and women's rights. Moreover, as has been pointed out, it has a performative effect, because the very fact of defining foreign policy as feminist contributes to the visualisation of foreign policy as a highly masculinised sphere that excludes women and reproduces hierarchies and patterns of discrimination in the international and national spheres. It could be perceived as an unattainable ideal. However, the fact that official policy refers to feminism challenges traditional ways of thinking and established policy patterns, encourages a reassessment of policy priorities and their coherence, redefines the relationship between government, state and social organisations, and can be an important factor in social and political transformation.

The FFP also provides an opportunity to review priorities and resources and to work seriously on policy coherence. As noted above, this is not about creating a sectoral dimension or a feminist add-on to an unchanged foreign policy. It is about transforming foreign policy as a whole so that it contributes to gender equality and recognises the role and agency of women in all spheres.

This must also be done within the framework of a foreign policy guided by the moral and political universalism of human rights, international humanitarian law and refugee law. At a time when international law is being called into question by the resurgence of wars of conquest, impunity for crimes against humanity, flagrant non-compliance with the resolutions of international courts, and the return of geopolitics and realpolitik, protecting or ignoring violations of these universal principles and norms is manifestly incompatible with a feminist foreign policy. The FFP thus also becomes a dike against attempts to dismantle international and national norms of gender equality, to curtail rights and to situate international politics in the realm of realpolitik and the old 'reason of state' of the starkest and most cynical political realism. In contrast, the FFP stands as a new normative endeavour and agenda for human progress, introducing new perspectives and raising the normative bar for political decisions and their justification. And because of its disruptive character, it can promote alternative perspectives and inspire the deconstruction and rethinking of political institutions. Herein lies the potential for a feminist vision of foreign policy (Zilla 2022: 7). The challenge is to maintain the momentum of the FFP in the medium and long term and to make progress in its implementation.

For all of the above reasons, the FFP must bring about significant changes in the government's foreign and domestic policies. It is not just a legitimising discourse to promote a balanced representation of women in the foreign service, which is an important objective of the FFP. Otherwise, there is a risk of falling into so-called pinkwashing. This is the use of feminist rhetoric to put a feminist spin on foreign policy without the will to change, or worse, to legitimise actions or policies that run counter to gender equality. It is essential that governments' commitments and actions are consistent with feminist principles and goals, from a universalist rights perspective, and that effective measures are taken to address gender inequalities at the national and international levels. In order to achieve a truly feminist foreign policy, it is essential that coherent and consistent measures are adopted in foreign policy as a whole, as well as in external action, covering all areas of government action, including economic and trade, environment, defence and security.

Civil society organisations have warned of the risk of co-optation of the agenda when a government declares its foreign policy to be feminist and no significant changes are observed in either domestic or international policy. Sometimes a rhetorical discourse can be observed in which certain concepts are interchangeable without being based on principles of justice and rights, leaving aside a real attempt to transform the logics of power and patriarchal structures that legitimise the exclusion and discrimination of women.

Governments wishing to promote a feminist foreign policy must be aware that, beyond declarations, it is necessary to initiate a medium-term process that allows for a paradigm shift towards new ways of conceiving and approaching foreign policy and new ways of relating to the international system that prioritise dialogue and negotiation. This process also implies the transformation of political structures that are highly masculinised and exclude women from decision-making. This requires gender mainstreaming in analysis, debate and consensus building on key issues such as security, diplomacy and leadership, in order to transform structures and facilitate women's participation in these areas.

As a result, the implementation of feminist foreign policy faces significant obstacles and resistance, and is often conditioned by a set of policy choices and commitments that are often inconsistent with ethical ideals and principles of gender justice, and which have not been made explicit. Some analyses argue that a truly transformative feminist foreign policy is not possible within the current patriarchal structures.

Governments that have adopted the FFP are responsible for implementing feminist values in their policies, which go beyond increasing the number of women in decision-making positions. They must promote transformative processes that challenge the patriarchal, neo-colonial, militaristic and authoritarian structures still present in institutions and norms, discourses, ideas and practices that provoke and reproduce patterns of inequality. This requires, on the one hand, defining those principles that are inalienable and, on the other, being aware of existing contradictions and exploring how to address them. It also requires the participation of civil society organisations, academia, the private sector and the media in a bottom-up and top-down process, formulating proposals and building alliances. The FFP is a policy for everyone, not just women, and an opportunity to move towards an emancipatory and project for progress of the whole of humanity.

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