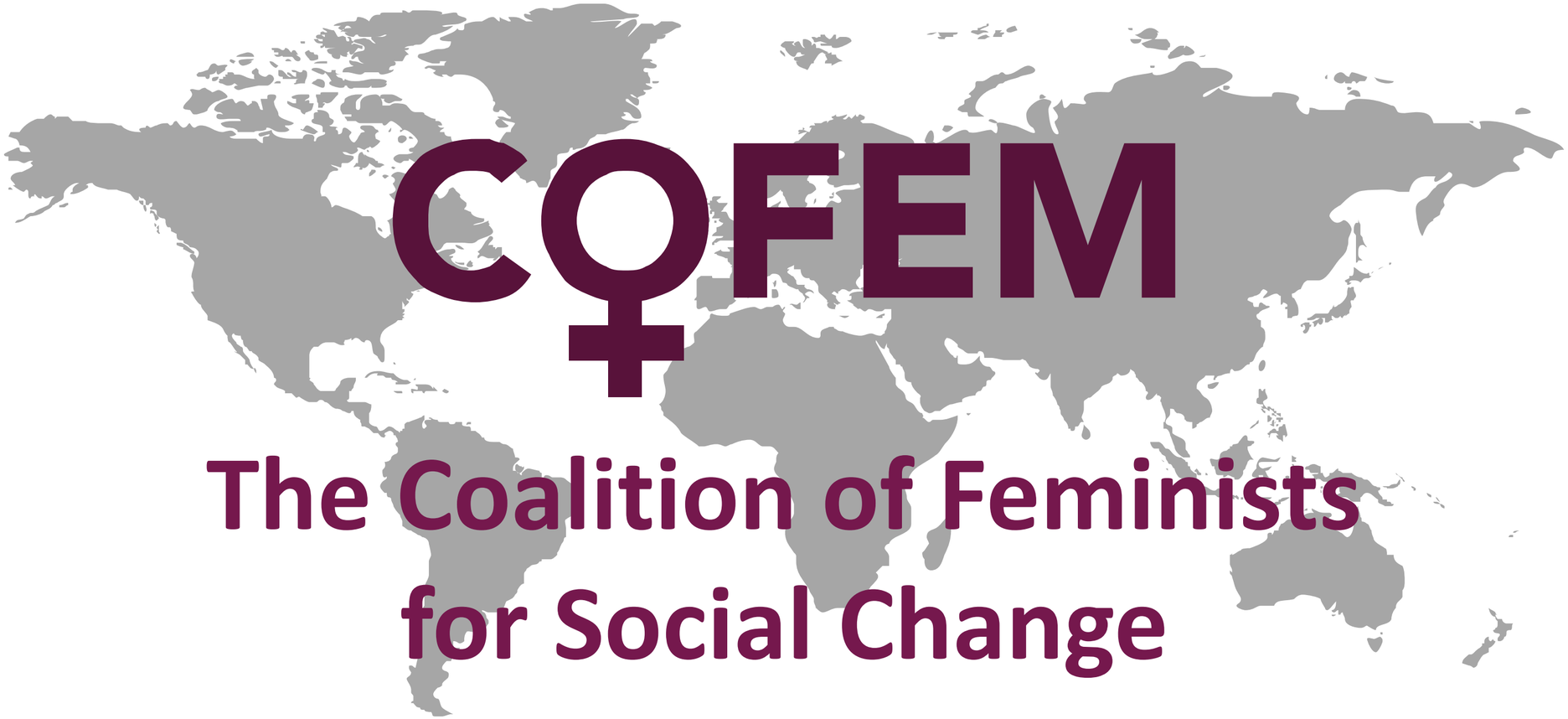
Introduction to



COFEM

The Coalition of Feminists for Social Change

We are COFEM…

The Coalition of Feminists for Social Change (**COFEM**) is a collective of activists, academics, and practitioners working globally to end violence against women and girls (*VAWG*, also referred to as *GBV*).

Made up of 78 members representing every part of the world, **COFEM** members work in both humanitarian and development contexts.

Why we came together…

Hosted by *Raising Voices* and *NoVo Foundation*, a group of academics, activists, and practitioners held a 2-day convening in New York in 2016 to analyze the declining feminist perspective in humanitarian and development *VAWG* efforts. It was decided that we should formalize a network in order to begin to address shared concerns.

COFEM was created in 2016 to reassert a feminist perspective in *VAWG* work.

Why is COFEM needed?

Thanks to critical work by women's movements, significant progress has been made over the last three decades to address *VAWG*

yet…

Over the last decade space is shrinking for feminist-informed *VAWG* work. We are in danger of losing hard won gains.

What Is A Feminist Perspective To *VAWG?*

Photo credit: Solome Nakaweesi-Kimbugwe

Feminist perspectives to end *VAWG*

- *VAWG* is about the effects of the gender hierarchy, not just the gender binary.
- All violence may be said to be *'gendered'*, but not all violence is based on gender-based discrimination.
- Patriarchy drives *VAWG*, this must be addressed.

COFEM Works To Infuse A Feminist Perspective

- Strengthen and spread a feminist analysis of **how to better include men and boys** in *VAWG* efforts so they remain accountable to women and girls.
- **Reclaim space** for women-centred, women-led and rights-driven work on *VAWG* in humanitarian & development settings
- Promote **gendered language and programming** linking gender inequality and *VAWG (GBV)*
- Work with other specialists to ensure initiatives addressing the needs of other *GBV* groups don't create **victimhood competition**

Unpacking A Few Ideas...

1 The Rise of Gender-Neutrality

Gender-neutral language that interprets ‘gender’ as way to talk about roles and identity of all people rather than the gender hierarchy between males and females contributes to the de-politicization of the problem of *VAWG*, particularly when using the its sister term, *GBV*.

Rather than remedy the power imbalances between men and women, gender-neutral arguments for addressing equally the needs of males and females in gender and *GBV* programming can risk reinforcing it by eclipsing women and girls’ differentiated experiences.

A feminist perspective focuses on gender inequality not gender inclusivity.

Unpacking A Few Ideas...

2 Competing Victimhoods

Arguments insisting that *GBV* programming which doesn't address the needs of men and boys and/or *LGBTI* groups broadly is ***"discriminatory"*** not only misses the point of why ***"GBV"*** work is targeted to women and girls, it also sets up a competition in victimhood that is counter-productive.

GBV actors are ready to work with other specialists as they develop an evidence base and programming to meet the needs of males and *LGBTI* groups broadly, but not at the expense of emptying *GBV* theory and practice of its feminist-informed, woman-centered essence.

Unpacking A Few Ideas...

3 Shrinking Space for Women-led Movements

An emphasis on technocratic approaches to *VAWG*—that is, approaches that focus on technical issues in programming without attention to *VAWG* as a social problem—often lack a political analysis essential for long-term social change and *VAWG* prevention. They also don't always center women and girls in designing and leading responses.

Funding paradigms, an apolitical perspective and increasing global fundamentalisms are undermining feminist movement-building.

Unpacking A Few Ideas...

4 Accountability in Male Engagement

Without a feminist analysis ***'male engagement'*** to address *VAWG* risks reinforcing and reproducing patriarchy.

Leadership from women is essential to ensure that men and male-led initiatives remain accountable to women's movements.

The Year Ahead

- Launch five brief **‘thought pieces’** on the state of feminist *VAW* efforts
- Develop and disseminate a Feminist Pocketbook
- Create an online **COFEM** Learning Platform and **“Knowledge Summit”**
- Build collaborations and opportunities to highlight a feminist perspective to *VAWG/GBV* in humanitarian and development settings

How You Can Get Involved

Join COFEM!

Talk to an existing **COFEM** member about how to get involved.

Activists:
Reach out to COFEM members to learn more about feminist perspectives and programming on *VAWG/GBV.*

Programmers:
Keep women and girls centered in *VAWG/GBV* efforts.

Funders and policy makers:
Recognize the importance of supporting female-centered *VAWG/GBV.*

Male allies working on VAWG:
Speak out against the marginalization of women & girls in policy & programs.

Thank you