TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS THEORY OF CHANGE

LEADERSHIP FOR SUSTAINABLE CHANGE

Women's rights organization (WRO) leaders in Pakistan gathered for a co-creation workshop to develop their projects for the Women's Voice and Leadership program.

Photo: Megan Lowthers/ Oxfam Canada, 2020.

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This resource outlines Oxfam Canada's Theory of Change for its Transformative Leadership for Women's Rights programming. A theory of change shows how we expect outcomes to occur over the short, medium, and longer term as a result of our work. In this document we outline how we understand TLWR; why we focus on TLWR; the ultimate aim of our TLWR programming; our Theory of Change for our TLWR programming; and highlights and best practices stemming from our TLWR programs.

WHAT IS TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS (TLWR)?

Pakistani WRO partner Society for Human Advancement and Disadvantaged Empowerment (SHADE) conducts their CAT4GJO process. Photo: Himat Consulting Private Ltd, 2020.

Women's rights and feminist organizations and movements have been recognized as vital catalysts for progressive change towards gender equality. However, only 1% of gender equality funding currently goes to WROs.[1] In a context of shrinking civil society space in many countries and global spaces, Women's Human Rights Defenders' (WHRD) work and personal safety is often under attack, putting them at risk of burnout, physical violence, and sometimes death. In the wake of growing conservatisms and rising rightwing populisms, we are also seeing backlashes against gains made for gender equality, illustrating the need to support WROs and WHRDs, to hold the line, and defend previously hard-fought gains. This must be done while continuing the work to fully realize women's rights and gender justice and ensuring the safety of WHRDs who do this work, including women-centered programs and projects.

Transformative Leadership for Women's Rights is an approach and strategy for social justice which challenges and transforms power relations and structures (in all their different manifestations) into an enabling environment in which gender justice and women's rights can be achieved. It embodies the principles and values of human rights, gender equality, participation, collaboration, and respect for the dignity of all people. Oxfam Canada's TLWR programming works with WHRDs, WROs and CSOs, and feminist movements to bring about fundamental change, and facilitates collective efforts to transform inequitable institutions whether it is in the home, the community, or beyond.

Understanding Power

Transformative change requires fundamental shifts in power relationships. Power can be expressed in many different forms. The most commonly recognized expression of power is 'power over'. This is a way of exercising influence over people, often negatively

Women's rights are human rights and are universal—meaning that the same rights that are extended to men must be extended to women, without exception.

Despite the global adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women in 1979, discrimination and ingrained social biases against women and girls continue to limit their participation and advancement in the economic, social and political spheres. Women often face additional intersectional discrimination, including on the basis of their race, ethnicity, religion, language, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, ability, or migrant or refugee status, among other aspects of personal identity.

Global Affairs Canada, *Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy*

associated with force, oppression, repression, coercion, discrimination, abuse, or corruption. Those who have control over resources and decision-making have power over those without. When people are denied access to important resources like land, healthcare, education, or jobs, 'power over' perpetuates inequality, injustice, and poverty. This expression of power is often associated with the way people interpret leadership: as a hierarchical process where someone (the visible leader) uses their authority to make people act and think the way they want.

If Oxfam is to achieve its aim of transformational change and leadership, power must be used and exercised in more collaborative ways. 'Power with' builds collective strength and finds common ground among different interest groups. Power with is based on mutual support, solidarity, and collaboration. It brings together the capacities, resources, talents and knowledge of individuals to build bridges across different interests in a way that transforms or reduces conflict and promotes equitable relations. 'Power to' refers to a person's capacity to decide and carry out desired actions. It refers to the unique potential of every person to shape their life and

world. It opens up the possibility of joint action, or power with. 'Power within' refers to a person's sense of self-worth, self-knowledge, self-confidence, and their conviction of what is legitimate. It includes an ability to recognize individual differences while respecting others, and refers to the capacity to imagine and have hope.[2]

Women's Political Participation vs. Transformative Leadership for Women's Rights

The advancement of women's leadership has traditionally been focused on increasing women's political participation. This is an important strategy because there is evidence to suggest that increasing the participation of women in politics and public life makes a significant difference for women and society. The visibility of women in public office encourages greater political engagement and mobilization of a broad spectrum of women. It helps to shift people's perceptions of what a leader is, and challenges the idea that only men can be/are leaders. It can also give women the confidence to apply for positions of public leadership.[3]

1   Staszewka, Kasia et al (2019), "Only 1% of Gender Equality Funding is Going to Women's Organisations – Why?" The Guardian, https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2019/jul/02/gender-equality-support-1bn-boost-how-to-spend-it

2   Oxfam International, *Transformative Leadership for Women's Rights: An Oxfam Guide,* Oxfam 2014, pp. 8 – 10.
3   UNICEF 2006, p.52 and P. Norris et al. 2007.

However, working to promote women's political and public leadership may be ineffective if we ignore the broader context in which this is taking place, and the relevant informal sources of power and decision-making that are active in that context. This is because conventional leadership is often situated within existing power structures. Usually, these are founded in hierarchical and exclusionary patterns of 'power over'. Globally, decision-making spaces are still male-dominated. This includes the approach to 'how' decisions are made. Leaders who become part of these structures are encouraged to model prevailing power behaviors, and are rewarded for doing so. Merely ensuring that women hold formal traditional positions of power is therefore not enough.[4]

Transformative Leadership for Women's Rights requires an analysis of the inequitable power structures (formal and informal) that undermine women's dignity, development, and leadership. TLWR supports processes of transforming power over into power to, amongst individuals and communities, in both formal institutions and informal spheres.

TLWR strives for social, cultural, economic, and political transformation for equity and the realization of human rights for all, regardless of gender, sexuality, or other forms of identity. Transformative leadership mobilizes and respects all people, and facilitates the space to support alternative and inclusive leaders and leadership models.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF OXFAM'S WOMEN'S TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP PROGRAMMING:

- We need men to be leaders – not just partners – for women's rights too;

- We need to be explicit about the women's rights purpose of our leadership – promoting intersectional feminist agendas in all we do – and in how we do it;

- A TLWR approach emphasises collective – not just individual – activisms and leadership, where other mainstream leadership models focus on individualistic, potentially atomising, approaches;

- It is most impactful when we combine the smartest of our governance, technical and influencing skills with the best of our feminist analysis;

- TLWR work must be explicit about supporting the safety of the 'disruptors' we work with;

- We need to integrate and practice TLWR across diverse sectors – within mainstream development and human rights organisations – not just in women's rights organisations and movements;

- A TLWR approach requires deep attention to, and work on, our own politics and intersectional understandings and practices of power – as individuals and in our organisations, networks etc.;

- It requires an intersectional approach to our analysis and practice: in the knowledge that ethnicity, race, class, disability, religion, age and sexuality etc. shape experiences as much as sex and gender;

- Finally, in order to embed these deep changes in leadership practice, the systems, structures and institutions in which transformative leaders work also need to be transformed.

(Brown, Ekoue, and Goodban, 2019, Transformative leadership for women's rights in Africa: Learning from Oxfam's work, Agenda, 33:1, 21-37, pp 21 – 37),
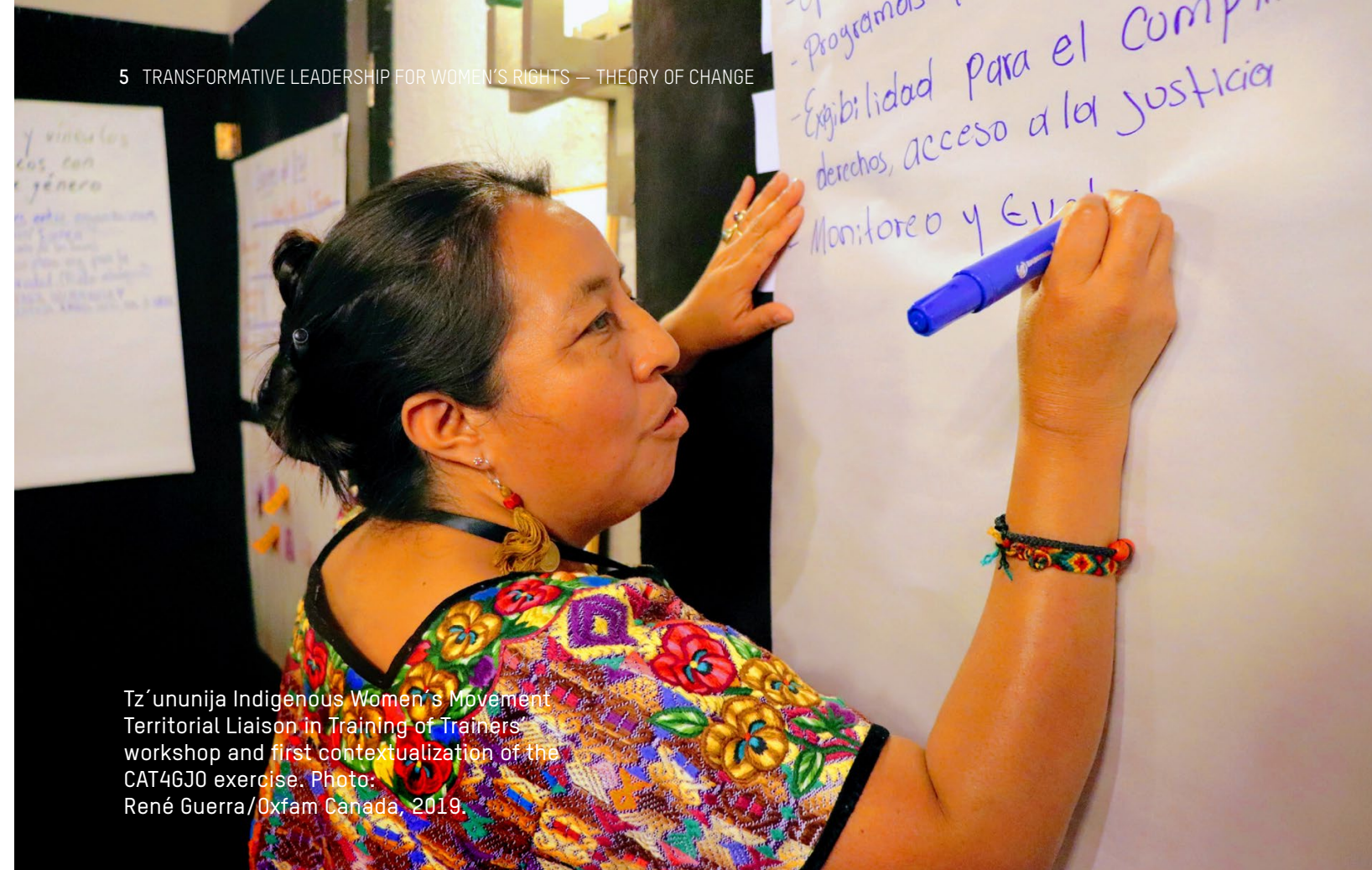

Tz'ununija Indigenous Women's Movement Territorial Liaison in Training of Trainers' workshop and first contextualization of the CAT4GJO exercise. Photo: René Guerra/Oxfam Canada, 2019.

WHY DOES OXFAM CANADA FOCUS ON TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS?

Transformative Leadership for Women's Rights challenges structures and ideologies that justify and perpetuate gender inequality and power imbalances. Oxfam has been championing this approach for many years as it seeks to ensure that leadership actions contribute to equity, human rights, justice, and peace.[5] Oxfam Canada's Strategic Framework 2021- 2025 aims to support women and their organisations to have more power to defend their rights. To do this Oxfam Canada has prioritized investing in strengthening the skills, experience, and confidence of women's movements, WROs and CSOs, their leaders, and those with whom they work. While Oxfam Canada funds projects which focus specifically on TLWR, Oxfam Canada also integrates support for transformative leadership for women's rights throughout all of its programming. One of the foundations of this work is Oxfam Canada's Feminist Principles which shape and guide our approach to our work across the organization – with partnership, in our long-term development work, in our humanitarian programming, in our policy advocacy and campaigns, and in our organizational culture and behaviour. The Oxfam Canada Feminist Principles are available online at: https://www.oxfam.ca/publication/oxfam-canadas-feminist-principles/. The Oxfam Canada Strategic Framework 2021-2025: Collective Action for Women's Rights is available online at: https://www.oxfam.ca/publication/oxfam-canada-strategic-framework-2021-2025/
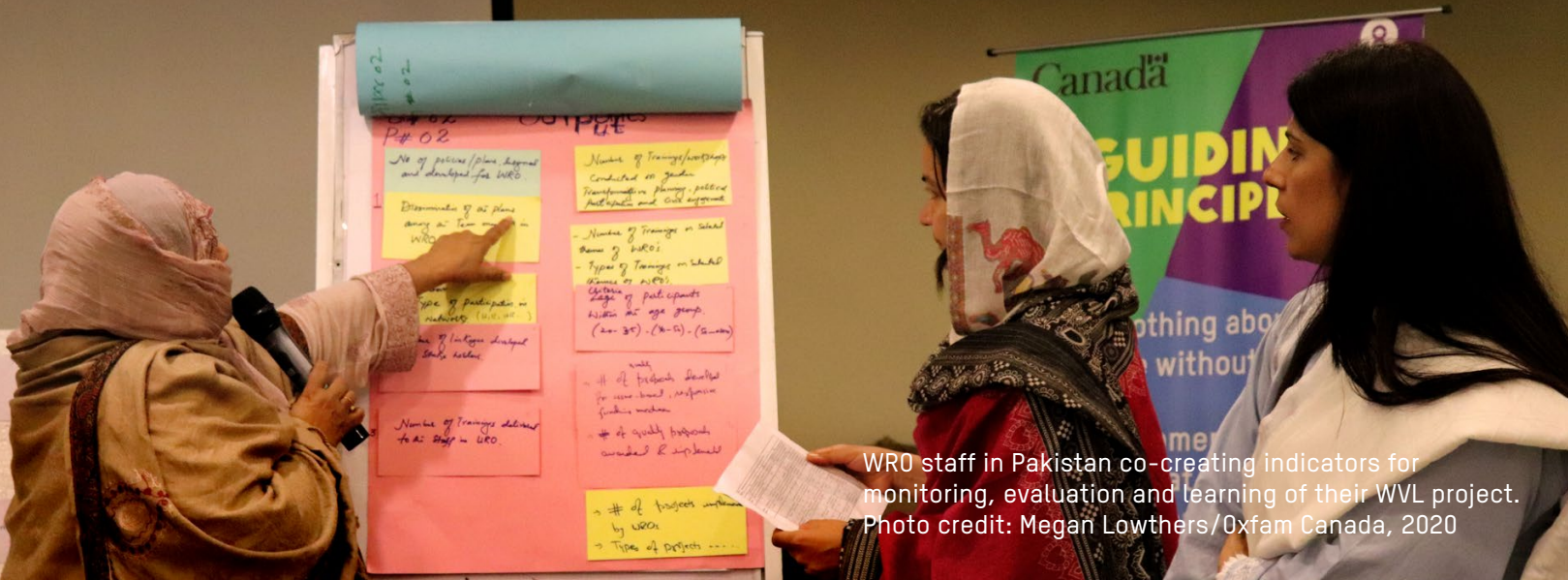
WRO staff in Pakistan co-creating indicators for monitoring, evaluation and learning of their WVL project. Photo credit: Megan Lowthers/Oxfam Canada, 2020

CAPACITY ASSESSMENT TOOL FOR GENDER- JUST ORGANIZATIONAL STRENGTHENING

The CAT4GJO is a participatory self-assessment tool used in TLWR programming to assess an organization's capacity in a specific area of work. It is a tool for self-reflection and learning that can be used for feminist MEAL, though it is not an evaluation. Dozens of Oxfam partner organizations have used the CAT over the last decade.

The CAT4GJO uses a self-assessment methodology combined with external facilitators acting as 'critical friends.' The CAT4GJO is designed for any organization or group interested in strengthening its gender-just organizational capacity and to "walk the talk" on women's rights and gender justice. Oxfam Canada partners have found the capacity needs assessment templates and the monitoring and learning tools very useful in supporting their internal organizational capacity strengthening efforts. Some have picked up and used these tools for their own purposes beyond the Oxfam Canada partnership. For Oxfam Canada, the tools have helped us tremendously in strengthening our ability to design more coherent organizational capacity strengthening strategies, which are relevant to partners' needs, as well as to monitor and learn from those strategies.

The CAT4GJO is available online at: https://www.oxfam.ca/publication/oxfam-canadas-capacity-assessment-tool-for-gender-just-organizational-strengthening/

Global Affairs Canada's Women's Voice & Leadership Program

We created this program to meet the needs of local women's organizations in developing countries. Our support helps them advance gender equality and empower women in developing countries. It promotes and protects their human rights.

As part of the program, Canada will work with partners to:

- **IMPROVE** the management and sustainability of local and regional women's rights organizations

- **STRENGTHEN** the capacity of women's rights organizations to program and advocate to advance gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls

- **INCREASE** the effectiveness of local and national women's rights platforms, networks and alliances to affect policy, legal and social change.

Global Affairs Canada, WVL Program Details, available online at: https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues_development-enjeux_developpement/gender_equality-egalite_des_genres/wvl_projects-projets_vlf.aspx?lang=eng

Oxfam Canada implements WVL projects in Pakistan and Guatemala.

WHAT IS THE ULTIMATE AIM OF OUR TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS PROGRAMMING?

Transformative Leadership for Women's Rights is important for Oxfam to be able to put 'women's rights at the heart of all we do', one of our key aims. An organization which has transformative leadership for women's rights strongly embedded in its internal practice will be better equipped to do programming that fosters gender justice.

At the heart of Oxfam Canada's work on TLWR is the recognition that local WROs, feminist movements, and activists are best placed to effect transformative change that advances gender justice. A key component of Oxfam Canada's work on TLWR is shifting power to WROs to co-design and co-implement projects in order to contribute to sustainable changes to women's rights and gender equality. It is critical to emphasize that the process of project implementation is just as important as the project's content and/or strategies to advance gender equality. This approach enables WROs, feminist movements, and activists to play a leadership role in changing their own circumstances and societies. For this reason, all of our partners use Oxfam Canada's Capacity Assessment Tools, including the CAT for Gender-Just Organizational Strengthening which was developed for TLWR projects, to identify their organizational strengths and challenges and subsequently develop CAT Action Plans which articulate how they will go about strengthening their own organizational capacity to advance gender justice throughout the course of the project.

WHAT IS OXFAM CANADA'S THEORY OF CHANGE FOR ITS TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS PROGRAMMING?

Oxfam Canada supports WROs and CSOs, feminist movements, their leaders, and those with whom they work to develop and strengthen Transformative Leadership for Women's Rights as a means to achieving gender justice and women's rights. To achieve the sustainable, transformative change needed to reach our ultimate aim, our TLWR programming is informed by the overarching Theory of Change Diagram, comprised of three interconnected, mutually reinforcing pillars of work:

PILLARS OF WORK

PILLAR 1 — **SUPPORTING** strong and autonomous WROs and women leaders to drive feminist change.

PILLAR 2 — **ENHANCING** feminist programming and advocacy of WROs.

PILLAR 3 — **FOSTERING** opportunities for feminist movement building, evidence-based influencing, and collective action.
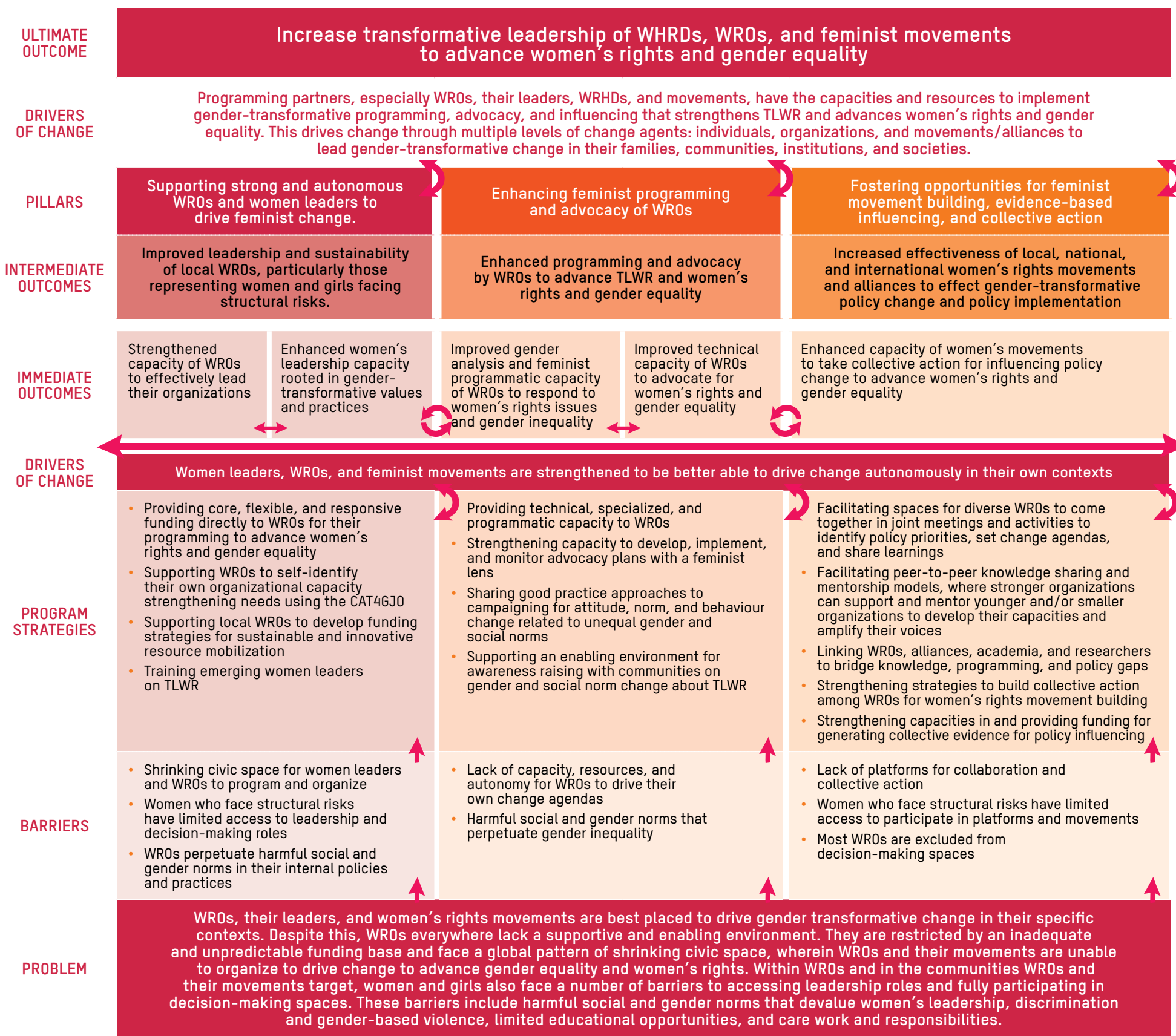
OXFAM CANADA'S TLWR THEORY OF CHANGE

ULTIMATE OUTCOME

Increase transformative leadership of WHRDs, WROs, and feminist movements to advance women's rights and gender equality

DRIVERS OF CHANGE

Programming partners, especially WROs, their leaders, WRHDs, and movements, have the capacities and resources to implement gender-transformative programming, advocacy, and influencing that strengthens TLWR and advances women's rights and gender equality. This drives change through multiple levels of change agents: individuals, organizations, and movements/alliances to lead gender-transformative change in their families, communities, institutions, and societies.

PILLARS

Supporting strong and autonomous WROs and women leaders to drive feminist change.	Enhancing feminist programming and advocacy of WROs	Fostering opportunities for feminist movement building, evidence-based influencing, and collective action

INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES

Improved leadership and sustainability of local WROs, particularly those representing women and girls facing structural risks.	Enhanced programming and advocacy by WROs to advance TLWR and women's rights and gender equality	Increased effectiveness of local, national, and international women's rights movements and alliances to effect gender-transformative policy change and policy implementation

IMMEDIATE OUTCOMES

Strengthened capacity of WROs to effectively lead their organizations	Enhanced women's leadership capacity rooted in gender-transformative values and practices	Improved gender analysis and feminist programmatic capacity of WROs to respond to women's rights issues and gender inequality	Improved technical capacity of WROs to advocate for women's rights and gender equality	Enhanced capacity of women's movements to take collective action for influencing policy change to advance women's rights and gender equality

DRIVERS OF CHANGE

Women leaders, WROs, and feminist movements are strengthened to be better able to drive change autonomously in their own contexts

PROGRAM STRATEGIES

• Providing core, flexible, and responsive funding directly to WROs for their programming to advance women's rights and gender equality • Supporting WROs to self-identify their own organizational capacity strengthening needs using the CAT4GJO • Supporting local WROs to develop funding strategies for sustainable and innovative resource mobilization • Training emerging women leaders on TLWR	• Providing technical, specialized, and programmatic capacity to WROs • Strengthening capacity to develop, implement, and monitor advocacy plans with a feminist lens • Sharing good practice approaches to campaigning for attitude, norm, and behaviour change related to unequal gender and social norms • Supporting an enabling environment for awareness raising with communities on gender and social norm change about TLWR	• Facilitating spaces for diverse WROs to come together in joint meetings and activities to identify policy priorities, set change agendas, and share learnings • Facilitating peer-to-peer knowledge sharing and mentorship models, where stronger organizations can support and mentor younger and/or smaller organizations to develop their capacities and amplify their voices • Linking WROs, alliances, academia, and researchers to bridge knowledge, programming, and policy gaps • Strengthening strategies to build collective action among WROs for women's rights movement building • Strengthening capacities in and providing funding for generating collective evidence for policy influencing

BARRIERS

• Shrinking civic space for women leaders and WROs to program and organize • Women who face structural risks have limited access to leadership and decision-making roles • WROs perpetuate harmful social and gender norms in their internal policies and practices	• Lack of capacity, resources, and autonomy for WROs to drive their own change agendas • Harmful social and gender norms that perpetuate gender inequality	• Lack of platforms for collaboration and collective action • Women who face structural risks have limited access to participate in platforms and movements • Most WROs are excluded from decision-making spaces

PROBLEM

WROs, their leaders, and women's rights movements are best placed to drive gender transformative change in their specific contexts. Despite this, WROs everywhere lack a supportive and enabling environment. They are restricted by an inadequate and unpredictable funding base and face a global pattern of shrinking civic space, wherein WROs and their movements are unable to organize to drive change to advance gender equality and women's rights. Within WROs and in the communities WROs and their movements target, women and girls also face a number of barriers to accessing leadership roles and fully participating in decision-making spaces. These barriers include harmful social and gender norms that devalue women's leadership, discrimination and gender-based violence, limited educational opportunities, and care work and responsibilities.

HOW DOES OXFAM CANADA IMPLEMENT ITS TLWR THEORY OF CHANGE?

Our Transformative Leadership for Women's Rights Theory of Change takes an integrated and multi-faceted approach, acting on multiple levels (individual, community, institutional and societal) with diverse actors. We strive to achieve our ultimate goal through program strategies undertaken with key actors and influencers, also known as drivers of change, informed by the following assumptions:

PILLAR 1	PROGRAM STRATEGIES	ASSUMPTIONS
Supporting strong and autonomous WROs and women leaders to drive feminist change	• Providing core, flexible, and responsive funding directly to WROs for their programming to advance women's rights and gender equality • Supporting WROs to self-identify their own organizational capacity strengthening needs using the CAT4GJO • Supporting local WROs to develop funding strategies for sustainable and innovative resource mobilization • Training women leaders on TLWR	• WROs and women and girls are key change agents, best placed to advance women's rights and gender equality, and should be the leaders in implementing gender-transformative programming • Strengthening the self-identified capacities of WROs will result in increased autonomy, agency, and sustainability of their organizations, as well as increased effectiveness of their gender-transformative programming. • Innovative funding strategies and resource mobilization will enhance the sustainability of WROs and their gender-transformative programming. • Training in TLWR, including inclusive governance and nurturing young female leaders, will support the resilience and sustainability of WROs and their gender-transformative programming.

PILLAR 1 IN ACTION:

From 2019 to 2020, Oxfam Canada's WRO partners in Pakistan and in Guatemala took part in workshops to self-assess their organizational capacity using the CAT4GJO. Based on these assessments, the WROs have identified areas in which they wish to strengthen their organizational capacity to better serve the needs of the women with whom they work. Oxfam Canada's Women's Voice and Leadership projects have been co-designed around these self-identified areas, ensuring that decision-making power is shared between partners, country teams, and WROs.

PILLAR 2	PROGRAM STRATEGIES	ASSUMPTIONS
Enhancing feminist programming and advocacy of WROs	• Providing resources, and technical, specialized, and programmatic capacity to WROs and WHRDs • Strengthening capacity to develop, implement, and monitor advocacy plans with a feminist lens • Sharing good practice approaches to campaigning for attitude, norm, and behaviour change related to unequal gender and social norms • Awareness raising with communities on gender and social norm change about TLWR	• When properly resourced, WROs deliver effective programming and advocacy that advances women's rights and gender equality. • WROs should be the leaders in designing innovative, context-specific approaches to gender-transformative programming and campaigns. • Strengthening WROs' capacities related to gender-transformative programming and advocacy will improve their abilities to advocate for women's rights and gender equality. • Peer-to-peer learning and sharing across WROs will build awareness of good practice approaches and innovations in gender-transformative programming and campaigns. • Campaigning and advocacy on gender and social norm change around TLWR will increase women and girls' opportunities to hold leadership and decision-making roles in their families, communities, organizations, and societies.

PILLAR 2 IN ACTION:

As part of Oxfam Canada's Camino Verde project in Guatemala, local partner ASOMTEVI runs a Women's Rights and Political Influencing School. The School has one main goal: to offer a space where Indigenous women and youth can develop their leadership skills and learn how to organize around their economic and political rights. Candelaria, who recently participated in the School, explains, "It taught me about women's empowerment. Men are not the only ones who can work, women can too. I understand that women have the same rights as men." Inspired by the dialogues brought on by Camino Verde, Candelaria joined her village's Community Development Council, where she voices the unique needs of women and youth. "Before, I thought that women were only valued for raising children. Now, I have a new way of living.".

PILLAR 3	PROGRAM STRATEGIES	ASSUMPTIONS
Fostering opportunities for feminist movement building, evidence-based influencing, and collective action	• Facilitating spaces for diverse WROs and women to come together in joint meetings and activities to identify policy priorities, set change agendas, and share learnings • Facilitating peer-to-peer knowledge sharing and mentorship models, where stronger organizations can support and mentor younger and/or smaller organizations to develop their capacities and amplify their voices • Linking WROs, alliances, academia, and researchers to bridge knowledge, programming, and policy gaps • Strengthening strategies to build collective action among WROs for women's rights movement building • Strengthening capacities in generating collective evidence for policy influencing	• Creating safe and enabling spaces for WROs to identify collective change agendas is critical for gender-transformative movement building, especially in the global context of shrinking civic space. • Peer-to-peer learning processes are effective ways to support WROs in gender-transformative knowledge exchange and organizational mentoring that reflect TLWR. • Strengthening skills in knowledge translation and broadening networks will result in more effective policy influencing, while also bridging gaps across sectors. • Strengthening feminist research capacity will support WROs and their movements to set their own research agendas, while also filling global gender knowledge gaps.

PILLAR 3 IN ACTION:

Oxfam Canada's Power Up project in Lombok Island, Indonesia supported women in 52 villages to use Internet and Communication Technologies to participate in village development planning and budgeting and to hold village governments accountable, resulting in public institutions that better respond to the needs of women in the community. The project enabled women to establish an organized women's caucus in each target village and develop its capacity so that women were confident about their strength as a group to participate in a commonly male-dominated development planning and budgeting processes.

Members of the San Luis Women's Group, one of the twenty Tz'ununija' member WROs during the inception phase of WVL-Guatemala. Photo: René Guerra/Oxfam Canada, 2019.

Oxfam Canada works collaboratively with Southern-based, grassroots CSOs, WROs and Youth Led Organizations – to plan, implement, monitor, and evaluate projects. These partner organizations are key agents of change in realizing visions of gender justice in their contexts. As such, Oxfam Canada works with them to strengthen their capacities to manage and sustain themselves, and effectively promote TLWR, in order to ensure long-term sustainability. We will measure our success in achieving our ultimate aim, by assessing whether there is an expansion of:

- Strong and resilient organizations that build on feminist values, practices and principles.

- Transformative programming and advocacy of WROs.

- Greater opportunities for knowledge generation, innovation, linking, and learning among WROs.

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Oxfam Canada
1 800 466 9326   info@oxfam.ca
www.oxfam.ca   Oxfam

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