The Women Engaged Against Violence Everywhere (WEAVE) Collective is forged out of a shared commitment to feminist movements that are addressing violence against women and girls (VAWG) and to uplift and weave together the crucial stories emerging from the margins.

Researchers and activists from Australia, India, South Africa and Nicaragua have joined to explore how feminist movements contribute to ending violence against women and girls (VAWG) and to uplift and weave together the crucial stories emerging from the margins.

Each country has its own path, story, and journey to share. Using feminist and participatory methods, the research teams are documenting historical trends and political milestones, hard-won achievements through political campaigns and landmark court cases, intersections with other social movements, as well as political backlash.

Appreciating and recognizing the patterns emerging from each of their countries, the WEAVE Collective members seek to learn from each other and co-create knowledge through papers, new theories, documentaries, and art.

EMERGING CHALLENGES

WEAVE narratives and data show how women’s movements contribute to progressive policies to end violence against women and girls (VAWG) and highlight current challenges they face.

Many countries have witnessed authoritarian backsliding and backlash against feminist movements. The shrinking of democratic spaces and the criminalization of activism have revealed that progress is not linear and that gains are often fragile.

Women in the margins, particularly indigenous women, are frequently excluded from policy processes on VAWG. The women’s movement that should and previously did lead the fight for policies and reforms have been increasingly squeezed out by other “experts” shaping policies with minimal grassroots consultation.

As national action plans based on global instruments become more generalized, the practices to develop and implement such plans have often further widened the gap between the excluded and included.

The WEAVE Collective strives to ensure that the voices and experiences of marginalized women are heard and included in the policies that affect their lives.
The women’s movement in Nicaragua has a rich and diverse history with roots in the Sandinista Revolution of the 1980s. During the 1990s, the Nicaraguan Network of Women against Violence emerged as one of the most important social movements in the country. The network carried out massive public awareness campaigns and lobbied for legal reforms and services for survivors of violence.

In 1995, a landmark prevalence study found that over half of Nicaraguan women had experienced physical violence by an intimate partner. These findings were instrumental in the passage of the country’s first domestic violence law. Two decades later, a new study discovered that physical intimate partner violence was reduced by 70% between 1995–2015. Feminist organizing played an important role in the enormous decrease in violence by increasing women’s access to services and justice, as well as awareness of their right to live without violence.

Sadly, these gains have been jeopardized by the political and social crisis in Nicaragua that erupted in 2018, with the Ortega government’s violent repression of opposition groups, including women’s rights organizations. This has resulted in the dissolution of community networks and support services for survivors and has threatened the lives of women human rights defenders. The government has closed more than 1,000 NGOs over the last two years, including 130 women’s rights organizations. The Nicaraguan women’s movement has been catalyzed the civic uprising in 2018 and its aftermath, particularly the young women who led the student protests that played an important role in the enormous decrease in violence by increasing women’s access to services and justice, as well as awareness of their right to live without violence.

Nicaragua

Women’s movements played a vital role in shaping a democratic South Africa, but the struggles for gender equality and women’s experiences of gendered violence during apartheid are strikingly absent from the historiography of South Africa. Women’s experiences of gender-based violence during the apartheid struggle were deliberately silenced for the bigger cause – to dismantle apartheid.

Building intersectional feminisms and solidarities across differences is increasingly significant to mitigate racial tension and mistrust in South Africa and the region. Younger generations of black feminists have questioned the commitment of older, middle-class feminists to radical change and have raised questions about whose interests are protected through human rights policies, legislation, discourses, and practice.

In this context, intersectional feminisms and collaboration across differences are increasingly necessary to achieve impact. During the HIV movement, for example, the large-scale mobilization of poor, black women was an influential achievement.

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South Africa

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Shanaaz Matthews, Benita Moolman and Thelma Oppelt from the University of Cape Town are leading the South Africa case study.