SUMMARY

USING RESEARCH FOR GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE: PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE
BACKGROUND
The new Sustainable Development Goals underscore the critical objective to “leave no one behind”—but important gaps in data prevent the global community from fully seeing, counting and valuing women, girls and other marginalized populations. The challenges affecting these individuals are not always known or well understood, which makes it impossible to effectively meet the Sustainable Development Goals.

IDRC and AJWS designed a study to unpack actionable feminist research practices that can be used to increase the impact of research on gender-transformative change (GTC). The researchers conducted a comprehensive literature review and interviews with 19 GTC leaders from 17 academic and advocacy organizations worldwide. Questions revolved around how organizations conceptualize GTC, the role of research in reducing gender inequalities and the best practices for research leading to GTC.

WHAT RESEARCH PRINCIPLES DRIVE GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE?
Interviewees—along with other experts surveyed via the literature review—indicated that several core principles (see graphic below) are crucial to building a research practice with the potential to transform the lives of women and girls. Most of these principles are closely related to well-established feminist and critical theory approaches to research. The common agreement about these principles suggests that they are critical to achieving gender-transformative change.

What Is Feminist Research?
Feminist research refers to a range of methodologies or approaches to conducting and using research that challenge patriarchy, promote gender equality and work...
for social change. Feminist research seeks to remove power imbalances inherent in research processes and correct for biases that shape what we know. Feminist approaches surface the discrimination women and girls confront based on gender, age, caste, class and other factors, along with the deeply ingrained nature of gender inequality at social, structural and political levels.

**WHAT ARE BEST PRACTICES FOR FEMINIST RESEARCH?**
Translating core feminist research principles into practice can be challenging, and there is no single approach that works for all research projects. However, a variety of best practices (see graphic below) can guide application of these principles at each stage of the research, from planning to implementation to dissemination and utilization.

**HOW HAVE ORGANIZATIONS PUT THESE BEST PRACTICES TO WORK?**

**Research Planning**
The Indian NGO Abhivyakti Media for Development is engaging local young women leaders to conduct an action research project in 10 rural communities on the issues of young women’s education, livelihoods and rights. During the planning stage, they partnered with other local organizations to host a workshop for the youth. The workshop included a gender analysis, in which adolescents identified the factors that nurture and hinder the growth of young girls in their communities, then explored links between patriarchy, poverty and powerlessness. The adolescents developed a theory of change for analyzing what keeps young women from participating in literacy and basic skills programs and how to use findings to advocate for new services and policy changes.

**Research Implementation**
The international media and human rights NGO Video Volunteers challenges ideas about who gets to create knowledge by training community members to use cameras for community storytelling. The participatory methods allow people to speak directly about their lived experiences on video, rather than being spoken for. Video Volunteers then empowers participants to create change in their communities by incorporating the videos into formats that can be used to pressure government officials to act.
Research Dissemination and Utilization
An organization* in Egypt crowdsources reports of sexual harassment and assault to promote change. The tool creates a platform for women to anonymously report incidents. This allows women to share narratives that broaden the community’s understanding of the forms sexual harassment can take. By disseminating map results through TV and social media, the project staff built alliances and provided evidence that helped spur activism among 20 anti-harassment groups and agencies. As a result, the government set up dozens of safe zones with increased police presence and Cairo University implemented a new sexual harassment policy.

EXPANDING THE USE OF FEMINIST RESEARCH: NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITIES
To more effectively use feminist research as a social change tool, donors, governments, organizations and researchers will have to address the following needs.

Need 1: Guidance and support for organizations on how to adopt feminist principles and engage in feminist research
Opportunities:
- Develop a curriculum for staff trainings on feminist research.
- Facilitate cross-organizational dialogue on internal policies and grantmaking practices that best support GTC.

Need 2: Greater collaboration dedicated to increasing and improving feminist research practices
Opportunities:
- Build evidence on how gender empowerment can contribute to reducing poverty and other societal ills.
- Develop monitoring and evaluation frameworks that reflect what increased gender equality would look like in a project.
- Create feminist measurement tools for the Sustainable Development Goals that make inequalities visible and that aim to direct resources to the most effective interventions that help those typically left behind.

THE TAKE-AWAY
The community of researchers, practitioners and advocates dedicated to feminist research is growing rapidly. Now is the time to seize the opportunity to better organize the field, increase expertise through collaborative networks and ensure that funding for this critical work is sustained.

Visit ajws.org/GTCresearch for a copy of the full report.

This publication highlights findings from a research report created by Margo Mullinax, Jacqueline Hart and Alejandra Vargas Garcia in November 2018. International Development Research Center (IDRC) and American Jewish World Service (AJWS) collaborated on this project.

Learn more: www.ajws.org/GenderEquality | www.idrc.ca

*Name of organization withheld due to security concerns