



Feminist Approach to Women in Sport: A Tool Kit



FEMINIST APPROACH TO WOMEN IN SPORT: A TOOL KIT

It is our belief that a feminist approach to sport is more than just a possibility. It is a tangible reality achievable through a series of efforts focused on creating opportunities as well as a conducive environment for women to engage and thrive in sport. Some of these efforts already exist whilst others still need to be imagined and put into practice. A feminist approach takes us beyond including more women in the sports industry, it opens up space for the exercise of agency and self-determination by women in sport and this toolkit offers guidance towards that goal.

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ISBN:

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Femme Forte is a movement building organization. We love women and believe in their advancement in the economic, social and political sphere. We exist to strengthen pathways between young and older women who aspire to meaningfully contribute to the greater women's movement in Uganda.

FOREWORD

Dear Friend,

We are extremely delighted to bring you this Feminist leadership toolkit, that is a labour of love and a seed of hope towards the women and girls in the sports industry of Uganda.

It is our belief that a feminist approach to sport is more than just a possibility. It is a tangible reality achievable through a series of efforts focused on creating opportunities as well as a conducive environment for women to engage and thrive in sport. Some of these efforts already exist whilst others still need to be imagined and put into practice. A feminist approach takes us beyond including more women in the sports industry, it opens up space for the exercise of agency and self-determination by women in sport and this toolkit offers guidance towards that goal.

Sport has the power to change lives. It has the power to break barriers and reach new heights for women. In providing opportunities for women to thrive in different spheres, Femme Forte's dream is to build fires and keep adding fuel until they can spread across the nation with transformation. By teaching women and girls feminist leadership, teamwork, self-reliance, resilience and confidence, sport can be one of the great drivers of gender equality.

For ages, sport has been categorised for the male domain. This wave is slowly shifting amid various obstacles. Even though we have in the past witnessed a rise in women's participation in sports, a large disparity in participation rates between women and men remains. These disparities are prevalent both locally and globally and continue to hinder equality in sports. Many institutions and programs remain conservative and do not contribute to gender equity in sports.

The brave women in sport defy gender stereotypes and social norms, making inspiring role models, and showing men and women as equals. Femme forte Uganda therefore seeks to support the transformation of sport for the benefit of every woman and girl in Uganda. It is our hope and desire that with this tool kit, we shall move a step closer to shaping a different and positive narrative for women in sport as well as equip them with the leadership skills they need to achieve their goals. We know that with every effort we can achieve a balanced society where men and women are accorded equal opportunities.

Cheers to this beautiful addition of feminist Leadership flavour to the women and girls in the sports industry in Uganda

Sincerely

Femme Forte Team

PART I - INTRODUCTION

Understanding the Feminist Imperative

The growth of the sports industry in the recent years has seen a wave of more young women engaging in various sport in Uganda. These women are faced with negative social stereotypes and cultural attitudes, which are posing a barrier to their participation in the social, economic, and political development of their communities and country. Sport is a male dominated field. This implies that women, who find themselves in this field are met with a number of challenges that are not usually talked about. These include inadequate funding compared to the males, lack of safe and brave spaces/ platforms to voice their concerns, limited media marketing or attention and negative societal stereotypes. Many women join the sports industry when they are young. The absence of a foundation to build and capitalize on their talent not only frustrates them, but also affects their performance, livelihood and might lead them to drop out altogether which may partly explain poor sporting performance at country level.

The values in sport are very similar to those of Leadership. The kind of discipline and commitment required of a sports woman is not different from that required of a leader, such as time keeping, healthy eating, constant training, rituals, goal setting, ability to motivate and affirm self, strategy, presence, among others. All these are leadership traits that if sharpened can set our young sports women to lead and to take charge of their environments. Also, Sports is a good mobilizer and an available tool for organizing. We believe we can use Sports to build confidence, bring people together to learn and provide a healing channel for anger and pain.

As a feminist movement building organization, we believe feminist leadership is crucial in building individual capacity to analyze power relations and question injustices and the sporting industry remains territory needing such analysis. Femme Forte intends to set precedence by integrating feminism in the sports industry through the development of a feminist leadership curriculum and women in sports mentorship programme/ initiative that inspires and mentors young sports women. It is also to promote transparency and accountability of sports institutions, associations and clubs through the engagements proposed in order to provide an interface between these institutions and the sports women.

The tool kit is to be used by sports coaches training young women in different sports. It can also be used by different federations and the National sports council in their leadership trainings. The objectives are to enhance individual knowledge and skills for personal growth and self-confidence and enhance collective knowledge to challenge systems and institutions to respond to needs of young women in sports.

Exploratory questions used in developing this tool kit;

- What is feminism and what has it got to do with sports?
- Why feminism and not another approach?
- What are the roles, functions, and characteristics of a feminist organisation in its internal and external interactions?
- What organisational practices guided by feminist values should be engaged in when working with sports women?
- What behaviours and practices do individuals within the organisation need to engage in as a means to take responsibility for building a feminist institutional culture?

The Guiding Theory

In invoking a feminist approach it is essential to understand what we mean by feminism. There are different strands of feminism as described below.

Liberal Feminism: This kind of feminism works within the structure of mainstream society to integrate women into it and make it more responsive to individual women's rights, but does not directly challenge the system itself or the ideology behind women's oppression. The suffragist movement is an example.

Radical Feminism: Radical feminism views patriarchy and sexism as the most elemental factor in women's oppression – cutting across all others from race and age to culture, caste and class. It questions the very system and ideology behind women's subjugation. The term often refers to the women's movements emerging from the civil rights, peace and other liberation movements at a time when people increasingly were questioning different forms of oppression and power. Radical feminists, seeking to understand the roots of women's subordination, have provided the major theoretical understanding that has served as the basis for the inspiration and analysis guiding women's movements around the world.

Black Feminism: School of thought which argues that sexism, class oppression, gender identity and racism are inextricably bound together. The way these concepts relate to each other is called intersectionality. The term intersectionality theory was first coined by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989. In her work, Crenshaw discussed Black feminism, which argues that the experience of being a black woman cannot be understood in terms of being black or of being a woman. Each concept is considered independently, but must include the interactions, which frequently reinforce each other. The Combahee River Collective argued in 1974 that the liberation of black women entails freedom for all people, since it would require the end of racism, sexism, and class oppression.

Marxist and Socialist Feminism: Feminists, grounded in Marxist and socialist analysis, attribute women's oppression principally to the capitalist economic system where global corporate power prevails. Many other feminists believe that this form of power seen in the class system is a crucial factor in women's subordination but see patriarchy as the major force behind women's subjugation.

We Rise tool kit: JASS¹

As highlighted above there are differences as well as similarities among the strands of feminism. This tool kit however utilises African feminism as its theoretical pillar which encompasses the liberatory political philosophies, theories, writings, research and cultural production, as well as the organizing work of the transnational community of feminists from Africa. This approach responds to objective conditions of global systemic inequality that have led African women to resume their struggle for freedom and liberation and it is this struggle that underpins African feminism.²

African feminism pays close attention to context and how it affects the experiences or compounds the struggles of women. For instance, it is cognisant of issues of class, rural and urban divisions and culture on the experiences of African women. It is therefore through this African feminist lens that this tool kit engages the subject of women in sport. Put simply **feminism refers to a way of living that challenges systems of oppressive power and inequality**. It is however essential that those interested in a feminist way of life further develop an understanding of feminism that is meaningful within their context.

1. <https://werise-toolkit.org/en/system/tdf/pdf/tools/Different-KindsofFeminism.pdf?file=1&force=>

2. A Mama 'African feminist thought' (2019) <https://oxfordre.com/africanhistory/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.001.0001/acrefore-9780190277734-e-504?rskey=vBlgX6>

Unearthing Key Issues

Based on their status as women, their engagement in sport and their location within a specific cultural context, there are multiple issues that impact the lives and experiences of women in sport. Despite sport being viewed as an avenue for fostering social change, curing various social ills, and uniting citizens across the divides of race, class, gender and geography by bridging relationships within society, it is no less true that sport both shapes and is shaped by inequitable gender relations and exclusionary practices. The discrepancy between men and women's sport is not confined to Africa, but here, more than anywhere, it seems an abundance of talent and enthusiasm for sport among our female population is being hampered by age-old prejudice and cultural restraint.

1. Negative Stereotypes

While sport normalises and epitomises masculinity, it serves to raise questions and concerns about the 'femininity' (and sexual orientation) of women athletes (Messner 1996; Mean and Kassing 2008). Helen Lenskyj (2003) argues that for women, sports participation disrupts hegemonic expectations regarding gender and (hetero)sexuality, and frequently leads to questions being raised about their gender identities and sexual behaviours. Popular beliefs about the 'nature of woman' have served to justify inequality and have limited women's participation in sport and physical activity through the assertion that women's physical bodies were 'too weak' to withstand participating in sport (Hargreaves 1994).

Recommendations for not reinforcing negative stereotypes

- Understand negative stereotypes. Be intentional about the ways one can collude with negative stereotypes and work to avoid this.

2. Abuse and Exploitation

Many women have, at some time, been the subject of sexual harassment or abuse in their working lives. Sexual harassment and abuse occur frequently in the sports industry due to the opportunities for exploitation of power and authority which the sports culture affords coaches. Psychological harassment and abuse can impair long-term physical and psychological health that affects personal and social development. There may be a number of related problems such as self-harm, suicide, somatic diseases, harmful disorders, poor body image, anxiety and loss of self-esteem.

Recommendations for minimising the risk of sexual exploitation in sport

- Understand policies related to sports internationally and nationally. Adopt harassment-free policies and procedures that are in line with international ethical and human rights statutes and that are inclusive;
- Encourage open conversation about sexual harassment, homophobia and exploitation of women and men in sport;
- Embed both an equitable balance of males and females in all roles and democratic leadership styles to mitigate against abuses of power.
- Act as advocates of harassment-free sport through education and training programs for every member of the sport.
- Actively monitor the effectiveness of all anti-harassment initiatives.

- Initiate research into men's, women's and children's experiences of abuse and bullying within their sport.
- Give active representation to athletes in decision-making at every level of the sport.

3. Sex and Sexuality

What happens when the bodies of athletic women, the women we look to as symbols of our progress and achievement as nations, disrupt our understandings of what a woman is or how she behaves? Within sports, heteronormativity is policed, and thus also made evident in two key ways: first through the historical and ongoing practice of gender verification, and secondly through homophobia and the myth of the sportswoman as lesbian. Homophobia not only serves to keep many women away from sport, it also puts women who are labelled as 'deviant' (read: not heterosexual) at risk of homophobic prejudice and violence. As such, heteronormativity and homophobia create a situation in which many sporting women are policing their own bodies and appearances to fit with conventional femininity. Other related

Recommendations for supporting healthy sex and sexuality

- Understand issues of sexual diversity and sexual orientation
- Centralise the athletes by allowing their needs to inform all processes
- Provide information and knowledge about women's bodies and create space for open conversation

4. Support systems

Sports which involve early peaking, that is; where elite level performance is reached in the lower teenage years, at or around puberty, are thought to present more risk of sexual exploitation to athletes than those sports with higher peaking ages, since this time coincides with the transition from child to adult during which sexual identity and maturity are achieved. At the club level, female athletes may fall prey to their 'sporting idols', senior male or female athletes or coaches, in whom they may place unqualified trust. At the elite level, girl athletes are often expected to accept 'adult' responsibilities such as arranging travel. Their athletic development or 'sport age' is thus well in advance of their social and physical development, which can create tensions and sexual uncertainty. The absence of a support system during this phase can have deeply negative consequences for the athletes.

Recommendations for building better support systems for women in sport

- Gather information from the women and girls to get a sense of the kinds of support they need and the ways they feel this kind of support could be achieved
- The very creation of a women in sport initiative is already a step in the right direction.
- Create linkages to the bigger women's movement in Uganda.
- Create more brave spaces to talk about and address issues affecting women in this sphere.

5. Unequal Renumeration

Female athletes are often paid less than what is given to their male counterparts across different sports. There are gross discrepancies between the incomes of male and female athletes which is both a symptom and a reinforcer of the undervaluing of women's sport at both amateur and elite levels.

Recommendations for minimising the risk of sexual exploitation in sport.

- Advocate for the popularisation of women's sport through better media profiling
- Engage in sustained advocacy for equal remuneration of men and women within the different sporting disciplines

Our feminist value system for working with women in sport;

- Is collaborative, transparent and recognises that the sports women are the experts in their lives
- Focuses on listening respectfully to women even when we might not agree with their choices
- Uses practice frameworks that are sport women-centred and situates women's experiences within a broader context of gender and power (rather than a problem with the individual)
- Avoids colluding with gender stereotypes and assists women to identify how gender norms negatively impact on their performance, health and wellbeing
- Increases women's safety, builds knowledge and options, and supports women to make informed choices about their bodies and their futures
- Secures rights and equal opportunities for sports women to enable them to have greater control over their lives .
- Ensures sports women have a voice in the development and implementation of programmes and services that involve them such as their training, and this must be done in ways that encourage their active participation.
- Shares power, knowledge, and expertise to build the capacity of the sports women and their communities to advocate on their own behalf
- Catalyses linkages and sisterhood across different movements for growth

PART II – BUILDING THE PRACTICE

In part 2, we explored the prevailing conditions for women in sport, we engaged the importance of a feminist approach as well as developed an understanding of different the strands of feminism and outlined some values for working with women in sport. This section looks at the practices or tools that can be employed to operationalise a feminist approach to women in sport. Feminist sports organisations are run by women, for women and work according to feminist or woman centred principles of practice. Defining exactly what makes an organisation 'feminist' is difficult as there is no consensus within the women's movement. However, this tool kit offers some suggestions.

Feminist sports organisations have distinct features that make them unique from mainstream ones, such as a feminist ideology, feminist values, feminist goals, feminist outcomes and feminist beginnings.

If we work from the assumption that sports organisations are supposed to work as collectives then the following principles of feminist collectives become particularly helpful;

- Decision-making is participatory, preferably consensual
- Information, resources and rewards are shared equally, in this case with no bias against women
- Power is conceptualised as empowerment rather than domination
- The processes of the group or organisation are made as valuable as the outcomes
- Relationships are based on personal, communal and holistic ideals of mutual respect, integrity and human dignity
- Accountability to self and to community is vital and esteemed

Femme Forte Internal Undertakings

- Activism and advocacy that challenges the social, political, economic, and legal structures that oppress women in sport
- Influences policy, law reform and service provision to improve the status of women in sport
- Works to redress fundamental differences in power – or structural inequities – that exist on the basis of gender works to create change for women as individuals and as a collective group
- Supports the women to take to the streets for political and industrial action to advance their rights to increase the representation of women in leadership and decision-making positions in sport management organisation.
- Works with other feminist organisations to advance feminist goals, such as the prevention of violence against women, women's economic independence
- Is committed to building the capacity of other feminist organisations to address issues related to women in sport through networking and collaboration
- Requires women in sport to articulate their understanding of, and commitment to feminist principles of practice – e.g. equity and social justice for women
- Clearly defines its position about circumstances where it is appropriate to work with men and boys in order to advance the rights of women and girls in sport.

Femme Forte External Undertakings

We (Femme Forte) train the managers and coaches to do the following;

- Challenge systems and structures that oppress their constituency, and build their capacity to make the links between broader theories of feminism and program and service delivery
- Work in ways that are women-focused, democratic and are committed to 'power for' women (as opposed to 'power over')
- Set and maintain boundaries of respectful working relationship, facilitate decision-making processes that are transparent, inclusive and work to share power among women in sports
- Provide clear formal avenues for the discussion of power and the appropriate use of authority and influence – e.g. their own and others within other teams
- Provide the sports women wherever possible with fair terms of employment security and opportunities for meaningful engagement in different sports workplace, assist them to identify and take up career and personal development opportunities
- Mentor and support many other sports women to develop feminist leadership skills
- and to become the next generation of feminist leaders in sports development

In addition to its health and fitness benefits, sport has long been promoted as a medium for the development of self-confidence and assertiveness. Physical fitness can help one to develop self-confidence however this is contingent on the space for such development being non-violent or non-exploitative.

Having explored the ideals for the women in sport initiative and what is needed towards achieving the feminist goals set out by Femme Forte, the final section focuses on how to bring along people in this journey, the sports women, the Femme Forte team and other individuals and organisations that work with women in sport using a workshop format.

PART III – THE TOOLS (Workshop Format)

Facilitator Guide

In preparation for the workshop/training it is necessary to fully prepare yourself for the facilitation process. Here are a few ideas that you might want to reflect on.

- Ensure that you familiarize yourself with the concepts of feminist leadership and strands of feminism by reading through this guide and other relevant material.
- Reflect on your own biases and ideas about women in sport by reflecting on the stereotypes you may have internalized. For instance, what has framed your own opinions about women's bodies, leadership, sport, LGBTQ etc. (It may also be useful to do this exercise with the entire Femme Forte staff where each participant is given a chance to reflect on their ideas and biases about women and sport and engage in collective conversation.
- Be prepared to have honest conversations about the different sources of prejudice individuals hold.
- Be aware that the workshop space is collectively created with colleagues or participants being trained however as a convener/facilitator you have a significant responsibility in setting the tone to help create ease and demonstrate adaptability and flexibility during the process.
- During the workshop or training pay close attention to the mood in the room, have breaks and encourage free movement by participants in the room, sitting, standing, laying down as they feel necessary or leaving the room for air or to decompress. While an agenda provides direction, it is pointless if it does not also allow for flexibility.

Objectives

- Co-develop an understanding of feminist leadership for women in sport using the values outlined in part I.
- Build or strengthen relationships with those with whom you are building and creating (i.e. the sports women, coaches, mentors, sports club owners etc.)
- Create spaces in which sports women are supported, protected, respected and in which they play a lead role in their lives and fully self-determine.
- Explore obstacles to and identify opportunities for creating healthy and transformative space within the sporting industry.

Proposed Workshop Guide

Exercise	Methodology	Materials	Time allocation
Introductions and welcome	In plenary welcome the group, participants introduce themselves and facilitator provides agenda overview.	As creative as the mind can get White board or flipchart and markers Sticky tape Coloured paper, post-it notes, crayons	Depending on whether these are long or short trainings allocate time accordingly
Grounding and presence in the room	Allow time for individuals to land in the room through a guided collective and physical exercise to relax the mind and awaken the body.		
Objectives, expectations and co-creating the space	Share the meeting objectives and collate participant expectations, also agree on the values you collectively want to guide the workshop/training space.		
Prevailing realities and understandings of the lives of women in sport	To get a sense of the understandings of feminist leadership and the realities of women in sport among participants, ask them to split into small groups and share about the kinds of leadership they are familiar with within the sport industry through their practice or from observation. Each group can identify one prevailing reality of women in sport and create a short role play to display that reality. In plenary discuss the kinds or realities portrayed whether positive or negative.		
Imagining and co-creating models of feminist practice in sport	Allow time for individual reflection and then have a group discussion on what practices of leadership participants would like to see in women in sports initiative. At this point discuss the types of feminism and settle on an understanding of what feminism is.		
Challenges and opportunities of a feminist approach in sport	In plenary, discuss what challenges may arise in trying to practice the imagined feminist approach to leadership within the women in sports initiative as well as the opportunities it creates		
Body image and autonomy	In small groups discuss the tensions and stereotypes surrounding the bodies of women in sport. Discuss how these affect women in sport. Each group must come up with a creative way of sharing its feedback with the rest of the group (e.g. a song, a skit, a mime, a still image) After all the groups have presented have a plenary discussion to engage solutions for building positive body image and encouraging autonomy. After this do a collective physical exercise.		

Conclusion	Consolidate the information gathered during the workshop/training and commit to an intentional and thoughtful women in sports initiative		
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Introductions and Welcome

In plenary welcome the group

Facilitator/facilitation team introduces themselves to participants. Allow time for each participant to introduce themselves, for example they could say their preferred name and favourite sport

Provide agenda overview

Facilitator shares the agenda with participants and agreement can be made on changes where necessary.

Grounding and presence in the room

Presence

Allow time for individuals to land in the room through a guided collective physical exercise to relax the mind and awaken the body. This could be gentle stretches, a simple sports drill or whatever feels appropriate in the context.

Grounding

Give each participant a piece of paper on which to write a reality experienced by women in sport. Place them in the middle of the room and have participants pick pieces of paper at random and read them out. Stick these pieces up on a wall in a visible space in the room.

Meeting objectives, expectations and co-creating the space

Objectives

Share the meeting objectives, collate participant expectations and allow participants to ask questions to clarify the objectives.

Values of the meeting space

Guide participants in naming the values they want to govern the workshop space. Write these values on a sheet of flipchart and stick it up on a wall as a reminder of the ways the group has collectively chosen to protect the space and guide the process.

Prevailing realities and understandings of leadership

Acknowledging prevailing realities

In small groups allow participants time to talk about their understandings of feminist leadership and the realities of women in sport. This process is integral to understanding what feminist leadership might lend to the sports industry given the realities of women in sport, it allows us to acknowledge what already exists as well as identify opportunities to create meaningful change for women in sport.

Imagining and co-creating models of feminist leadership

Imagining

Allow time for individual reflection and then group discussion on what practices participants would like to see in their organisations/collectives to improve the lives of women within the sports industry

Co-creating

Share the imagined realities in plenary and combine them with feminist values shared in part I which they feel have resonance, in order to develop your own feminist practice tool. At this point the group must explore understandings of feminism and settle on a simple working definition that represents the approach of *Femme Forte*.

Challenges and opportunities of a feminist approach in sport

Challenges and opportunities

In plenary, discuss what challenges may arise in trying to practice the feminist values as well as what opportunities they create.

Body image and autonomy

Reflecting on and building positive body images

In small groups discuss the tensions and stereotypes surrounding the bodies of women in sport and how these affect women. This enables the surfacing of existing realities.

Co-creating

After sharing representations of these in plenary, the entire group must work collectively to identify possible ways of building positive body image among women in sport. At the end of this activity the group can engage in a collective physical exercise as part of the body affirmation process and illustration of gratitude to the body for what it enables the sports women to do.

Feminist economy and financial inclusion

Reflecting on financial inclusion and the feminist economy.

In small groups discuss the challenges to financial inclusion for women in sports and how these affect women and the general economy. This will contribute to building a strong feminist economy.

Co-creating

After presenting to plenary, the entire group must work to identify what can be done both individually and collectively to build a strong feminist economy and push back on the shortcomings in financial inclusion. This process is important in linking financial well being to decision making and power and will set the women off to their financial awareness and independence journeys.

Conclusion

Wrap the meeting up with a gentle mind, body, and spirit cool down. You may conduct an exercise that facilitates recentring and bringing everyone back into the room.

Consolidate

Combining the identified feminist values, the imagined leadership practices, and any other helpful resource, consolidate a co-created guide for the intentional application of a feminist approach to the women in sport initiative. A key part of this process is the integration of feminist values into all other aspects of an organisation and not just to the women in sport initiative. This will be a tailored guide for your constituency.

We wish you all the best as you apply this toolkit and send you feminist energies as you build a movement of feminist women in sport!

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