



COLLABORATION ON FEMINIST LEADERSHIP

“Why document? The art of cultivating, documenting, sustaining.”
(Participant in the Feminist Leadership Collaborative project)

INDEX

1 The story of collaboration between two funds | 4

2 Each fund, its own unique path | 6

3 The meeting, the collaboration | 10

4 Bases on which we build the idea and practice of feminist leadership | 12

5 The imaginary of feminist leadership | 16

6 Closing the process and keeping the flame of collaboration alight | 20

Reciprocal Learnings: What We Take Away from This Process | 21

Igniting and Sustaining the Conversation: The Flame Still Burns | 22

Questions to Guide Our Ongoing Reflection | 23

THE STORY OF **COLLABORATION** BETWEEN TWO FUNDS



In 2022, Calala Fondo de Mujeres and the Mediterranean Women's Fund joined the Fenomenal Funds Collaboration Labs project, a feminist funding space to facilitate collaborations between women's funds that are part of the Prospera network.

Our conversations and collaborative work toward resilience and sustainability in our organizations catalyzed reflections on the relationship between the feminist principles that guide us and our actual practice in daily work. We put these principles into practice both in our internal organizing, and also when collaborating with other organizations and accompanying other groups. And we ask ourselves: how can we improve the exchange of experiences and knowledge, and thus better support the people we engage with along our journey?

Based on these reflections, we decided to collaborate around Feminist Organizational Development. We recognized a shared interest in focusing our work on feminist leadership, as both funds were undergoing leadership transitions and organizational restructuring. Our conversations expanded from organizational development to include feminist co-leadership, horizontal structures, conflict resolution, and feminist approaches to managing growth and human resources. This deepened our mutual learning and enriched the exchange of experiences with other women's funds.

"A unique and transgressive space is built when powerful women come together and can reflect deeply. It impacts their lives and the work they do."

“The collaboration has enabled an unprecedented level of detail about understanding another fund’s organizational culture.”

Like all funding—from donor to organization—this collaboration offered both an opportunity for resourcing and an added layer of work, landing on top of already saturated operational and administrative workloads. It came in the midst of each fund’s own leadership transitions and structural changes. Still, despite the inherent power dynamics in any donor–grantee relationship, we approached the obligations of this collaborative project from a place of genuine curiosity and commitment—as activists and team members grounded in our work. Because the initiative came from a flexible femi-

nist funding space focused on resilience and sustainability, we were able to adapt to the shifting needs of each fund. Expectations around obligations, workload, and accountability evolved to respond to the organizations themselves, rather than primarily to the donor’s requirements.

We were able to remain flexible and adapt the project thanks to the space of intimacy, trust, and sincerity built between the teams of both funds—even with the challenges of distance and time. We coordinated virtually: drafting the proposal, organizing calls to prepare for in-person meetings, adjusting budgets, and planning the closure and systematization of the collaboration.

“It is an effort to travel, but the project can be a space for learning and strengthening the two funds.”

Our meetings were intensive working days where we could share, debate, and reflect on power and leadership through our own lived experiences. We brought our emotions, successes, and celebrations—as well as our mistakes, revisions, and lessons—into both structured sessions and spontaneous exchanges. There was no fear in making our leadership transitions and organizational development processes transparent.

“I feel honored to have this space of trust and to break with a maxim that is the one that sustains violence: that dirty laundry is washed at home. We are doing something important, and it deserves joy, that we do it well and with depth.”

At the beginning of the collaboration, during the **discovery** stage, we were motivated to create a project that would go beyond bilateral learning between our two funds. We began with shared dreams and aligned expectations, aiming to reach the broader Prospera network community, as well as other organizations and feminist movements.

When **defining** our collaboration proposal, we were aware of the project’s demands—added to our ongoing operational work and the simultaneous leadership transitions and organizational restructuring each fund was navigating. We realized the most strategic adjustment would be to focus the funding and efforts on supporting each fund’s executive leadership transition. The collaboration would serve as a space to drive discussion and learning around feminist leadership—specifically around power distribution, coordination, communication, decision-making, and accountability.

In the **refine** stage, we integrated 1. what we had envisioned at the beginning around feminist leadership, 2. the learnings drawn from our first-hand experience of organizational restructuring through leadership transitions, and 3. the funding needs of each fund to support those transitions and share the experience and insights that emerged from them.

From the beginning, we set out to create a publication that would capture the lessons learned from working among and with feminist funds—to surface reflections and useful questions, and to leave behind a collective legacy as a foundation for deeper reflection.

This document brings together the content of the discussions, reflections, questions, and learnings from the collaborative project between Calala Fondo de Mujeres and the Mediterranean Women’s Fund, with the intention to:

- **Document the collaboration process**, gathering reflections, dilemmas and key learnings that emerged along the way.
- **Analyze the dynamics of power, democracy and feminist leadership** based on the shared experience of both funds.
- **Share learnings** with the Prospera women’s fund community, highlighting practices and lessons on feminist leadership.
- **Capture the essence of the process**, honoring the effort, connection and joint construction between Calala and the Mediterranean Women’s Funds.

Throughout the collaborative project, we were supported by people who facilitated, documented, and interpreted our conversations. Amanda and Majo led the facilitation of our final virtual meetings and the project’s closing session, and were responsible for systematizing the content of the entire process in this document, using the objectives outlined above as a guide for their work.





Calala and MedWF share the particularity of being funds based in the Global North that work with the Global South. We also have in common that both organizations have grown significantly—and rapidly—in recent years. Amid this growth, and the accompanying reflections, challenges, and lessons, both funds went through executive leadership transitions and the resulting organizational restructuring: redefining roles, responsibilities, and strategies for decision-making and conflict resolution. These processes were preceded by internal discussions, trainings, and a critical examination of narratives around concepts such as power, horizontality, and (co)responsibility. In this context, conversations about feminist leadership emerged organically for each fund—through different paths and in different ways—before the collaboration began.

“There are people doing something similar to what I do, with other dynamics that question power, that invest in creating other leaderships, and I find that very hopeful and positive.”

We met at the crossroads of our organizational journeys. The unique characteristics of each fund’s background emerged as inspiring distinctions—sparking questions, reflections, challenges, strategies, and tools to deepen our discussions on feminist leadership.

In 2023, Calala received news that its Executive Director of 12 years—who had been actively involved at the start of the collaborative funding project—would be stepping down. We used this leadership change as an opportunity to rethink our organizational structure and leadership, as part of a transition toward the co-leadership model we had already been exploring. This work led to the formation of a transition team, an internal assessment of perceptions around shared leadership, and the engagement of external support to help restructure roles and responsibilities within the team. It also included rethinking our models for direction, coordination, communication, decision-making, and accountability—all unfolding in parallel with the collaboration process with MedWF.

We worked to define and explore the relationship between trust, shared responsibility, and autonomy before bringing these concepts into the conversations within the collaboration. These terms were central to the collective work Calala carried out in developing its anti-racist protocol—which formalized our decolonial approach—its care policy, and the restructuring of the organization toward shared leadership, as a way of putting our values into practice: courage, joyful rebellion, community, care, decoloniality, and flexibility.

These three processes of formalizing Calala’s internal mechanisms also made it possible to name and surface power dynamics both within and beyond the organization, and opened space for deeper reflection on workloads and horizontality.

For the fund, care policies are an integral and cross-cutting part of the organization’s work. The anti-racist violence protocol, for example, sits at the intersection of our care policy and our anti-racist and decolonial commitments, and is continually adapted to meet the diverse needs of our team members.

At Calala, we practice program and area autonomy, along with transparency in budgeting and planning, as strategies to support both individual and collective empowerment within the team. For example, we developed an analytical code for the organization’s finances—a document that clearly shows where resources come from and how expenses are covered.

For us, the Theory of Change is a tool for ongoing reflection and monitoring, used both internally and in our work with the groups we fund and accompany. The departure of the Director created a unique opportunity to apply the Theory of Change more deeply and broadly, with a renewed focus on shared leadership, increased participation in decision-making, and a more equitable distribution of power.

While these reflections and the restructuring work that arose from them were taking place, we were able to implement moments for collective decision-making and co-creation.

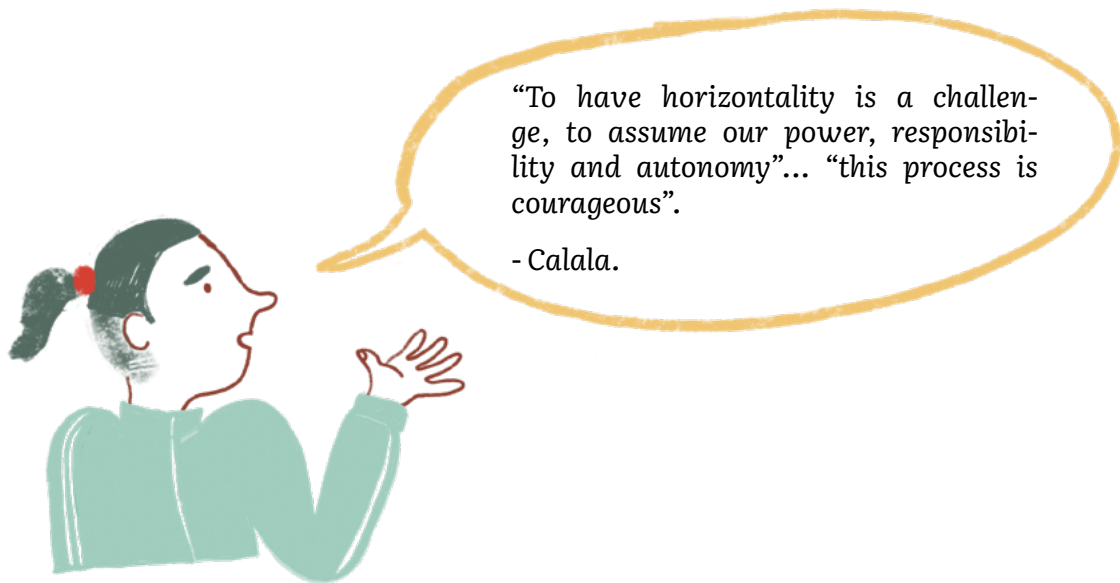
As a further exercise in transparency, we conducted a survey to understand where the organization stood, and to support the team in embracing the new way of working proposed by the transition to shared leadership.

In our collaboration conversations, we shared the richness of co-creating the relational charter—a living communication tool to guide how we work and coexist



with one another day to day.

During the leadership transition, we faced the challenges of making decisions collectively—given the time and patience required to build and implement these processes amid an already heavy operational workload. The transition team had envisioned that everything would be decided horizontally, but in practice, information had to be compartmentalized to meet the needs of the process, and not



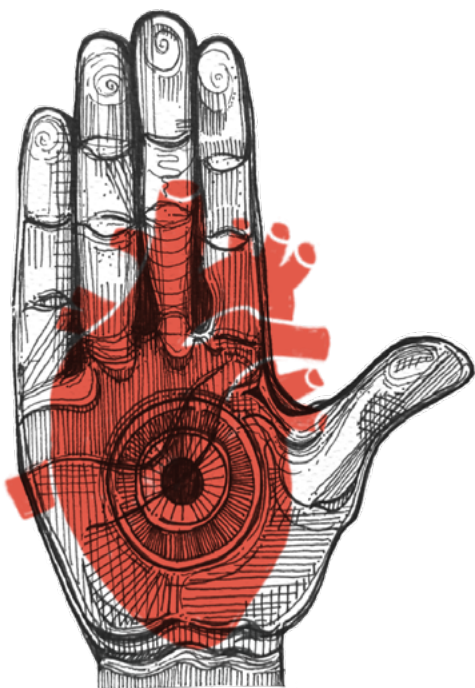
everyone in the organization was fully up to date on the transition.

Through the collaboration, Calala brought a vision of change rooted in rupture and creativity—a commitment to building the world we dream of from the inside out.

At the Mediterranean Women's Fund, we began the Collaborative Lab project with a Chief Executive Officer in place, under a 15-year leadership model, and in the midst of a transition to co-direction by two deputy co-directors—one from the northern and one from the southern Mediterranean. Both had been in training since early 2024, one having joined the team at that moment and the other in 2018, working closely with Calala.

We began working on feminist leadership before the collaboration. Our reflections focused on defining feminist management as a model of governance, and on how power, money, resource distribution, and decision-making are understood in the daily work of an intergenerational team of staff and activists—within a context of organizational growth and the ongoing crises affecting the region.

Throughout the MedWF team's discussions, questions emerged about flexibility



and how this principle relates to the need to formalize roles, responsibilities, and processes.

We also discussed the need to develop an anti-racist policy in a collective space within the organization, drawing from our experience with decolonial and anti-racist work—both with communities in France and the Global North, and with populations in formerly colonized countries of the Global South.

Throughout the collaboration, we consistently emphasized the political vision that underpins our work together, to ensure we remained clear on the direction we're heading.

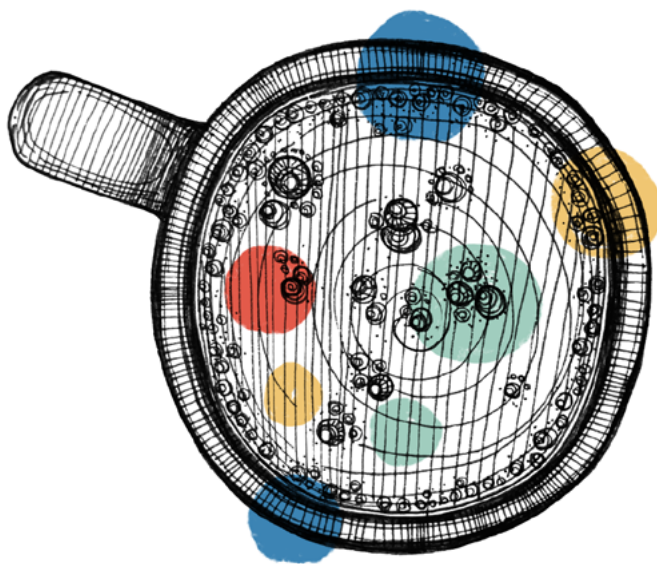
For us, defining how to practice feminist leadership in a growing organization—made up of an intergenerational team with vary-

ing levels of experience—meant grappling with time management and setting boundaries between personal and work life.

While we recognize care as a fundamental part of our organizational culture and structure, we also face challenges in putting care-focused initiatives into practice. These include legal restrictions in France, tax penalties, and the departure of the team member previously responsible for care. Although we do not have a formal care policy, we have formalized and implemented care-related actions as an integral part of our work.

For MedWF, the co-creation of our Strategic Plan—and the ongoing reflection on what it means to be a feminist fund and which values guide our work—has been fundamental.

We developed a tool that allows everyone on the team to see the available budget and incorporate it into their respective projects. Communication flows easily, and everyone stays informed about one another's activities.





Like two rivers converging in the Mediterranean after traveling their own paths, we consciously came together in this collaboration—with the intention of deepening and expanding the work of defining and practicing feminist leadership as the foundation for (re)structuring feminist management in coordination, operations, and decision-making within our organizations.

In this sea, nourished by the particularities and visions of each fund, we discovered common ground in our questions and reflections on power, the challenges we face, the contradictions within our transition processes, and the practice of shared leadership through diverse strategies and tools.

Amid the development of the project—carried out largely through virtual platforms we had learned to integrate into daily life since the pandemic, with all the complications that remote connection entails—the face-to-face meetings and final workshop became revealing spaces. They allowed for a kind of intimate coexistence with another organization, where trust could be built and vulnerability welcomed. In those moments, we came to know each other—our teams, our ways of working—in ways we had never before experienced with another fund.

“This meeting has done me good, it gave me the impression of familiarity, warmth and human warmth, especially when I had left my country behind, this space has allowed me to patch myself up.”



We write from a deep place of recognition, gratitude and complicity. This space we share is not just a meeting: it is a refuge where we reflect without limits and dream together with feminist leadership that transforms our realities.

In this space of trust, something more than the sum of our knowledge and experience has been generated. In community, with love and with a sincerity that allows us to speak without reservation, we have woven bonds that transcend this space, our differences, and even our own borders. This fabric—made of complicity, tenderness, and active listening—strengthens us and gives us the energy to keep dreaming and acting with courage.

Each meeting has been a mirror where we have seen our struggles and, above all, our capacity to connect through our shared humanity as a radical act. We have stripped ourselves bare, leaving behind the limits imposed by systems that do not represent us, and we have found a safe place to question, reflect, and dream without fear.

Thank you for your commitment, for the openness and curiosity with which you entered this space. Thank you for showing that we can speak of the uncomfortable with transparency—because that, too, is part of the change we seek. This exercise in honesty not only transforms us as organizations, but also breaks with old maxims that perpetuate silence and violence. Today, we know that opening up allows us to see more clearly and act more deeply.

You inspire us to keep building a feminist utopia where shared leadership, horizontality, and co-responsibility guide us. This bond we've created embraced language barriers and professional differences, because it is grounded in trust and in mutual recognition of our collective strength.

We are honored to walk beside you, weaving together a future that deserves the joy of being transformative, profound, and full of possibility. May these spaces remain beacons of action, always reminding us that we are not alone—and that what we do matters, and matters deeply.

With love, admiration and solidarity



BASES ON WHICH WE BUILD THE **IDEA** AND **PRACTICE** OF FEMINIST LEADERSHIP



Before we can define what feminist leadership is and how it functions, we ask ourselves: What does an ideal feminist organization look like? What elements shape it, sustain it, and are put into practice within it?

We know that context, needs, and both individual and collective circumstances play an important role in defining what a feminist organization is. As a result, the collective development of the concept of leadership from a feminist perspective is, to some extent, shaped by these and other factors. However, there is a set of core ideas about power that we share—rooted in our political visions, principles, and values:

“We start from feminist leadership, we start from a feminist utopia, it is our strength, to be able to collaborate together, it goes beyond professional relationships. We have created bonds beyond language barriers.”

- **Care at the center**

An organization with a realistic and viable care policy, fully integrated into its operations

“Honestly, what’s the point of helping others when you can’t take care of yourself? In the end, we can’t do it all, we can’t save the world, and we help less when we’re exhausted.”

- **Transparency in resource management**

Everyone who works in or is part of the organization is informed about how resources are managed, how they are spent, and why.

- **Practice of autonomy and co-responsibility**

There is trust in the team and its members—a strong team capable of taking on responsibilities and managing itself, with diverse and shared leadership.

- **The vision, mission and well-being of organization take precedence over the requirements of funders**

As funds, we risk compromising our vision—and, by extension, the groups we support—when donor-imposed conditions conflict with our principles. We therefore commit to not accepting conditional funding and to saying no when funding poses a risk to our integrity.

- **Changing the world starts with changing ourselves**

Our principles and values are lived both individually and collectively, within the organization and in our relationships with the groups and organizations we collaborate with, support, and fund.

When talking about the foundations and practice of leadership in a feminist organization, we talk first of all about:



"Why do we feel rejection towards power and reject it because we believe it is negative? On the other hand, we also ask ourselves: why don't we recognize those moments when we do have power?"

Power for what?

Power is not a "bad" thing. How we understand power has changed a lot over these years. Before, it was conceived of as something bad, now it is understood as something intrinsic to the life of organizations.

And we agreed that in the practice of feminist leadership we require dynamic power with dynamic leadership.

"The notion of power is interesting, we can control it but not exercise it over others, as a collective we have tools to control power collectively. There is an important responsibility with power."

We understood that this conversation about power necessarily opens up discussions and questions about:



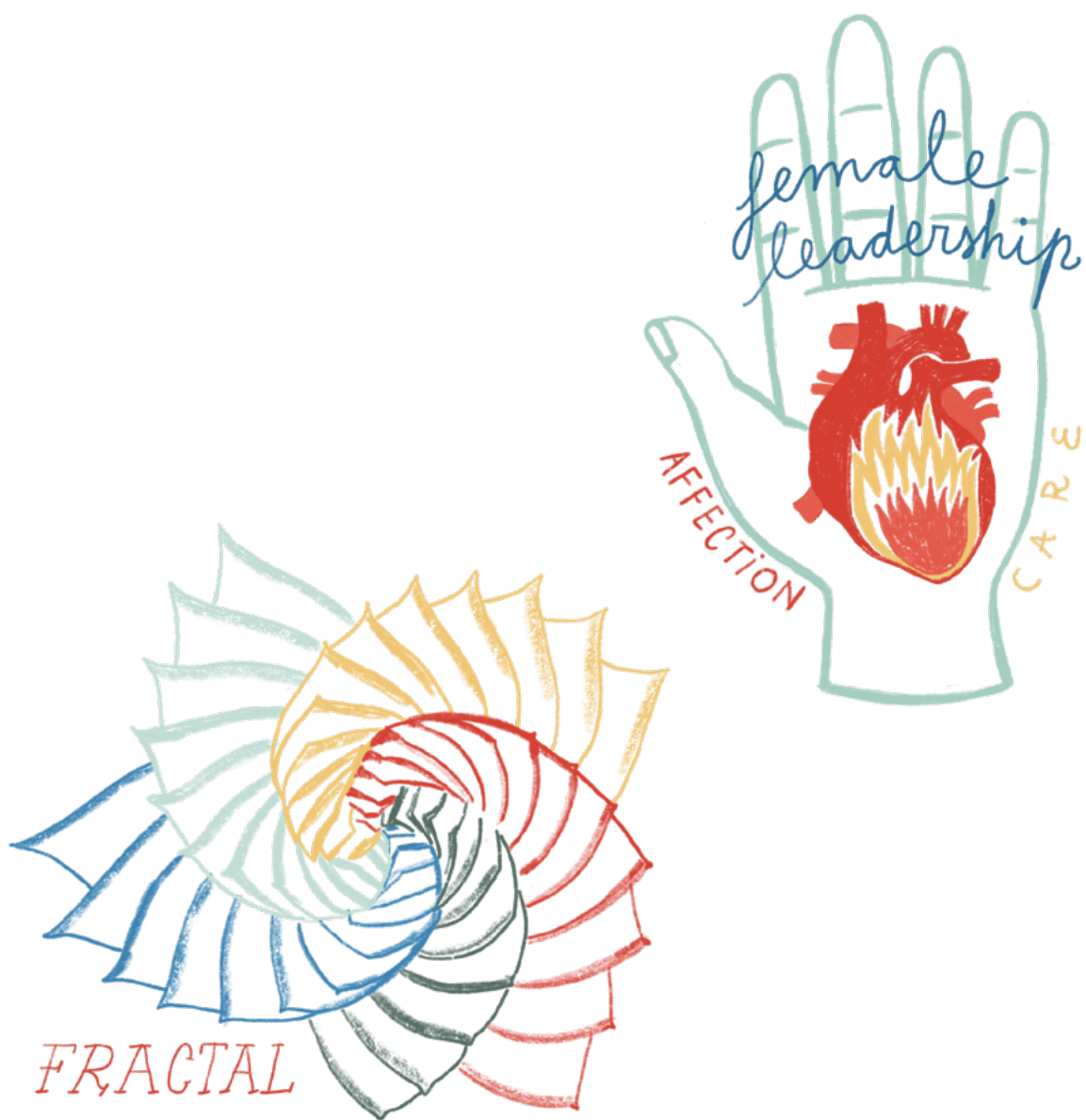
Throughout our process, and based on both individual and collective experiences — within each fund and in this collaboration — we also connected the transformation and transition of leadership with:



BASES ON WHICH WE BUILD THE **IDEA** AND **PRACTICE** OF **FEMINIST LEADERSHIP**









By confidence &
FE CONSTRUCTION





The closing of this process is not an endpoint, but another step along a **shared path**. **Reflections and learnings** on feminist leadership do not end here; on the contrary, they continue to evolve—nourished by unanswered questions, ongoing contradictions, and the constant search for more just and sustainable ways of organizing. **Resilience** and **adaptability** have emerged as essential elements in this journey, reminding us that building feminist spaces also requires learning to navigate uncertainty and sustain ourselves amid complexity

One of the most prominent challenges that emerged in this process is the **tension between principles and operational realities**. Feminist organizations strive for leadership models that redistribute power, foster horizontality, and prioritize care. Yet the day-to-day demands of running an organization often pull in other directions: the pressure to secure funding, the weight of administrative tasks, and the need to make rapid decisions in critical moments. These pressures can create contradictions between ideals and practice—and, at times, lead to a kind of self-imposed pressure that results in stress and overwork.

“I loved it the first time, and I loved it this time too. I feel like we are very similar and it’s great to be able to share it with others who do very similar things, although at the same time we are very different. It’s very inspiring to listen to each other. I don’t know, I really enjoy listening to you and seeing how you work, the challenges you have. We always take away things to reflect on and learn. I wish we had more moments like this to be able to reflect like this, because I always marvel at how great it is.”

Throughout this collaboration, it became clear that **setting boundaries** is essential to prevent passion and commitment from turning into exhaustion. Care, understood as an organizational commitment, requires sustained collective processes and spaces for reflection—to identify needs and assess the team’s capacity to respond. However, this approach often clashes with organizational structures and funding logics that don’t allow for the time and patience it demands. In this context, **learning to say “no”** becomes a necessary **political practice**—one that protects the team’s well-being and helps ensure the sustainability of the work.

This collaboration has also been a space for **deep questioning of power** and the structures that uphold it. In both organizations, the effort to build shared leadership is recognized—alongside the understanding that, at times, functional hierarchies are inevitable. The question, then, is not whether such hierarchies should exist, but how to make them dynamic and accountable, without replicating the authoritarian logics of patriarchy. Similarly, it was acknowledged that working in feminist organizations and receiving a salary is not incompatible with militancy and activism—but it does raise new questions about how to navigate both spaces without losing autonomy or diluting political principles within the logic of the market.

The leadership transition process at both funds revealed that organizational change often brings discomfort—especially for those who took on roles within the transition teams. The additional workload, uncertainty, and need to rethink internal structures required not only time and dedication, but also patience and generosity. This experience reaffirmed the importance of ensuring that, in times of change, **care** is not pushed to the margins but integrated as a **central part of organizational reconfiguration**.

Reciprocal learning: what we take away from this process

Beyond the challenges, this shared path brought meaningful learnings for both organizations. MedWF emphasized the importance of **agreements as the foundation** for any work or coexistence process, highlighting the need for clear communication and compassion in the workplace. For Calala, it was inspiring to see how MedWF had been able to say “no” to certain funding opportunities when they threatened the organization’s principles. The ability to refuse funding—even in contexts of economic pressure—offered a powerful lesson in political coherence.

For its part, Calala placed **anti-racist work** at the center of the discussion, framing it as a **cross-cutting** theme in the conversations on feminist leadership. This reflection led both organizations to rethink not only their internal structures but also the vision and mission of their work—reaffirming their commitment to a **de-colonial feminist philanthropy**.

One of the most powerful lessons from this experience was the realization that **organizational transitions** are not only structural—they also involve **personal transformation**. Each team member’s experience of the process left its mark on how they understand leadership, power, and co-responsibility. We learned that **patience is essential** in any transition, that there are no definitive formulas, and that building feminist leadership is, above all, an ongoing exercise in **questioning and evolution**.

Igniting and sustaining the conversation: the flame lives on

At the end of this process, it became clear that **feminist leadership is a constantly shifting horizon**. There are no definitive answers or single models. What we do share is a commitment to keep exploring—to keep the **conversation open about power**, the distribution of responsibilities, and the organizational structures we want to build.

This process leaves us with the certainty that questioning is not a sign of weakness, but a necessary practice for progress. Feminist leadership, far from being a fixed destination, is a journey that reinvents itself again and again.

“Feminist leadership is something that is ever-changing and always in question.”

Those who participated in this collaboration emphasized the need to ignite—and keep alive—the conversation about feminist leadership, about power, and about power relations within the movement ecosystem:

“Something important to remember is that the very principle of feminist organizing and management is constant questioning in order to improve. That’s why this project can’t really have an end—because the goal is to keep working collectively, even within our own organizations, to do better. I think that’s what each of us is doing. So it’s also about figuring out how we’ll create a publication that’s truly meaningful—knowing that it’s not just about leadership or feminist organization as isolated topics, but about offering a space for people to reflect and question. The hope is to create something that acts like a navigational map—a systemic view of the feminist experience. I think our thinking, our work, and our path toward that are not only about leadership or management, but also about how we navigate all of this—how each of us, from our own backgrounds, arrives at what we believe really matters.”

What we have built together during this time is not just a set of technical learnings or organizational strategies. Above all, it is a **way of navigating change with greater awareness, more confidence, and stronger tools** to sustain us along the way. It’s not only about leadership and management, but about how we learn to walk together—with all that entails: doubts, certainties, contradictions, and hopes.

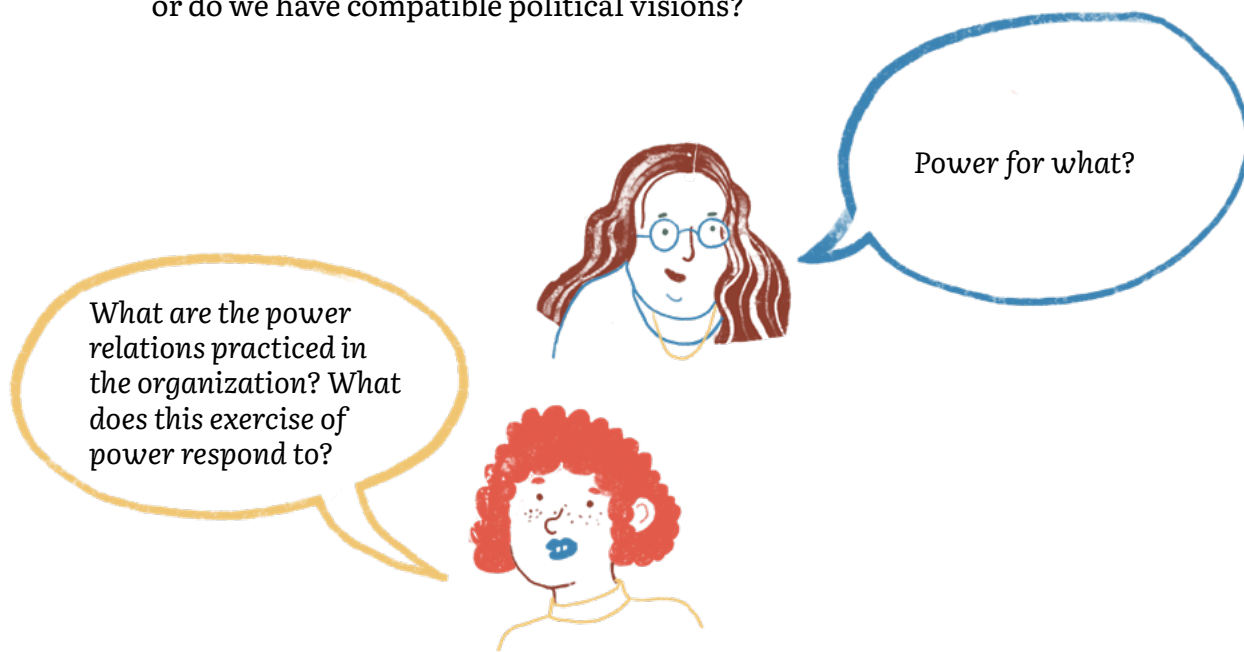
The collaboration between Calala and MedWF has been an **exercise in listening**, sharing, and building together. And although this process is coming to an end, the **conversation remains open**. We know there will be other meetings, other questions, and other ways to continue weaving together. Because if this process has taught us anything, it is that feminist leadership is not about fixed answers, but about **creating spaces of possibility**.

“Questioning ourselves allows us to move forward and practice better feminist management.”

Questions to guide our ongoing reflection:

Learnings, such as reflections and questions that were asked or shared throughout the collaboration:

- What defines an organization as a feminist organization? What is feminist leadership and how is it practiced?
- In a feminist organization, are we all activists with the same political vision—or do we have compatible political visions?



- What role does the intergenerational aspect play in the organization's power relations?
- How do relationships with funders and money impact relationships and the exercise of power in the organization?
- On what basis is leadership—and the exercise of power—legitimized? Is it rooted in values such as horizontality, autonomy, co-responsibility, and flexibility? What other values and principles come into play, and why?
- Does every leadership transition involve organizational restructuring?
- How does the change in leadership come about or is it decided?
- How do we define the roadmap for leadership change, transitions and organizational restructuring?
- Who do we involve in leadership transition and/or restructuring processes, considering workloads and organizational development? When do we involve them—maintaining the same team over time, integrating more colleagues, rotating roles, or democratizing processes? Who makes the final decisions?

