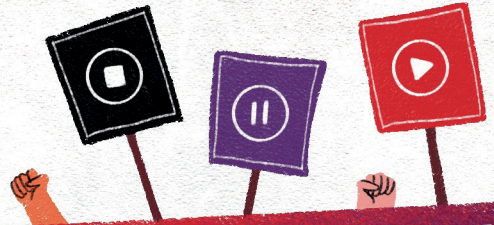


**COUNTERING  
BACKLASH**  
RECLAIMING  
GENDER JUSTICE

# CARDS AGAINST BACKLASH:

## FORWARDS TO A FEMINIST FUTURE - STRATEGIES FOR SURVIVING AND COUNTERING GENDER BACKLASH



# ABOUT THIS TOOLKIT

This toolkit is produced by the [Countering Backlash programme](#). We carry out engaged research, generate new debates, and build capacity across networks and strategic partnerships with women's, LGBTQ+ and other human rights organisations, activists, academics and policymakers, regionally and globally.

Institutions and activists are constantly trying new and creative ways to counter the backlash. This toolkit draws on real-life tactics from our programme but individuals and organisations have been anonymised to keep them safe. These inspiring strategies are based on our struggles.

We have **three categories** of strategy:

## WHAT CAN YOU DO WITH IT?

These cards are not a 'how to' guide; they are a provocation. We want you to connect these ideas to your own work, so we have created a blank card for your own strategies and each of the existing cards has a space to add to it.



## II SURVIVING

# SURVIVING AND CENTRING CARE

### WHAT ARE ITS AIMS?

Survival is a valid form of resistance. Sometimes, we need to keep our heads below the parapet and invest in intra-movement care and self-care, to build our strength.

### WHY DO WE NEED IT?

Anti-gender politics are misogynist, and homo- and transphobic. They exclude and marginalise women and LGBTQI+ people, and, at their worst, they can be deadly. Surviving is an act of resistance when systems of domination seek to destroy and diminish. At the same time, working in hostile contexts is often dangerous and always exhausting. People and institutions get tired and need to recharge.

### HOW DO WE DO IT?

Feminists in South Asia talk about the importance of sharing and consulting; of 'facing together'. They have been organising workshops on wellbeing and prevention strategies around burnout. Collectives are thinking about what 'a break' looks like for them. They have also undertaken leadership training to be able to better support each other. Others celebrate what they have in common; they collect stories and make short films on harmony across different religions to build a sense of belonging.

### HOW DO YOU DO IT?:



## II SURVIVING

# AGILE ACTIVISM

### WHAT ARE ITS AIMS?

Moving offline or into smaller private groups to avoid backlash actors and protect ourselves.

### WHY DO WE NEED IT?

Online spaces for organising and mobilising are shrinking and can be intimidating for feminists.



### HOW DO WE DO IT?

Activists in East Africa have been holding small in-person meetings in their offices for feminist groups to provide comfort and safety when they don't feel safe organising in public or in digital spaces. This is in the face of a hostile media environment for conversations about gender equality where women have to self-censor. They are also bringing people together in smaller groups online such as WhatsApp chats or private Zoom calls to provide safe spaces to listen, share and build solidarity.

In South Asia, some gender activists have retreated from online arguments to stay safe and are focussing on increasing community awareness and support through offline activities.

In the Middle East, women's rights activists are using international online spaces to lobby as national spaces for activism have become restrictive.

### HOW DO YOU DO IT?:

## ▶ CREATING FEMINIST FUTURES

# CREATING COALITIONS

### WHAT ARE ITS AIMS?

Creating coalitions with allies based on shared agendas – proactively building alliances on multiple fronts.

### WHY DO WE NEED IT?

Creating ties, building coalitions and sharing resources with diverse communities across social divides helps us to look forward, and not just work in a reactive mode putting out fires.



### HOW DO WE DO IT?

By building a politics that unites those who do not benefit from entrenched inequalities that benefit only existing elites; this can mean working on cross-cutting issues that transcend social divides, hierarchies and siloed movements.

In South America, there are feminists working with other activists from the broader reproductive rights movement. In South Asia, there are some in the autonomous women's movement who are taking party positions. Others are working with groups mobilising on issues such as climate change or working with unions and domestic workers to collectively advocate for their rights. Crowdfunding for small pots of money has been an effective way to support these coalitions.

Feminists in East Africa convened dialogues and workshops with civil society actors to explore opportunities to counter the regressive and homophobic legislation.

### HOW DO YOU DO IT?:



## RESISTING

# LANGUAGE & STORIES

### WHAT ARE ITS AIMS?

The language we use matters, as do the stories we tell – both to ourselves and others.

### WHY DO WE NEED IT?

In challenging environments, we need to find ways to reclaim and reframe the negative language used about feminists and the stories about women's rights that people are exposed to, and to tell stories that strengthen our movements.

### HOW DO WE DO IT?

In East Africa activists face stigma for using the word 'feminist' so some use terms like 'women's rights' instead. In the Middle East, there are activists turning to alternative media and nontraditional networks to create counter narratives against the harmful effects of dominant the media stories on traditional TV channels.

There are feminists in the Middle East that are producing podcasts, which explore the experiences of feminist activists, academics and journalists working to counter backlash.

### HOW DO YOU DO IT?:



## RESISTING

# CAREFUL DIGITAL PRACTICE

### WHAT ARE ITS AIMS?

Digital spaces are vital for organising, but we need to be careful and strategic about the information we are sharing and protect ourselves in digital spaces. We also need to act with care for ourselves and others in digital spaces and organise and communicate safely.

### WHY DO WE NEED IT?

When activists face backlash online, they rarely receive support from law enforcement agencies, police or from the platforms. When they do take complaints forward this is time consuming and difficult.

### HOW DO WE DO IT?

In South Asia activists don't share information online about beneficiaries, or information about upcoming or ongoing work online. They make sure there is no data on shared drives. When faced with bullying and trolling online some groups will filter or delete comments or shift platforms but others will mobilise and respond aggressively to these comments. Others are protecting themselves online with digital skills and security training, and are using encrypted communication platforms like Signal.

### HOW DO YOU DO IT?:



## ▶ CREATING FEMINIST FUTURES

# CAPACITY BUILDING

### WHAT ARE ITS AIMS?

To build capacity is to empower ourselves and others to advance our skills, resources, and networks to better counter and resist backlash.

### WHY DO WE NEED IT?

Capacity building is a mutual process – we have much to learn from each other. By sharing skills, resources and knowledge across our different positions, movements and spaces, we can equip ourselves and others with the tools and knowledge to better advocate, resist and change the oppressive power structures we seek to counter.

### HOW DO WE DO IT?

In South America there are women's rights organisations working on domestic violence that are training enforcement officers and service providers to better respond to it. In East Africa, there are feminist organisations that are working with allies in the Police. In South Asia organisations hold workshops with the transgender community to work together to improve implementation and awareness of their legal rights.

Other feminists in South Asia have held capacity building and reflection events on Muslim women's rights, bringing together Muslim women, activist and allies. They have also been working with domestic workers to help them advocate for their rights through individual and collective bargaining with their employers.

**HOW DO YOU DO IT?:**





# HOW DO YOU DO IT?

**STRATEGY TITLE:**

**WHY DO YOU NEED IT?:**

**WHICH CATEGORY DOES THIS FALL UNDER?:**

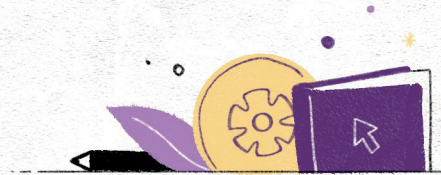
- || SURVIVING**
- RESISTING**
- ▶ CREATING FEMINIST FUTURES**

**WHAT ARE ITS AIMS?:**

**HOW DO YOU DO IT?:**

# RESOURCES

Here are some more useful resources that you can use to counter backlash!



## **COUNTERING BACKLASH: OUR RESEARCH, RESOURCES, AND LEARNING**

Access all of our programme outputs, including toolkits, resource guides, storybooks, working papers, journals, and much more.

## **WHAT IS DIGITAL SELF-CARE?**

Seven digital self-care tips “for establishing and nurturing your digital self-care” from ‘Glitch’ – a charity aiming to end online abuse and champion digital citizenship.

## **FEMINIST HELPLINES**

A global community of initiatives from ‘Digital Defenders Partnership’ that provide support to women and LGBTQIA+ people facing digital gender-based violence.

## **SELF-CARE RESOURCES FOR FEMINISTS**

This guide from global non-profit ‘Chayn’ offers tips and guidance for ‘mental healing after abuse and trauma’.

## **DIGITAL SUPPORT FOR CIVIL SOCIETY**

This ‘tech-care’ guide shares steps on how to set up a digital security helpdesk for civil society, ‘with a holistic and intersectional approach.’



## **RESOURCE PACK: ONLINE SAFETY FOR ACTIVISTS**

From Countering Backlash partner organisation ‘BIGD’, this pack provides a comprehensive list of strategies and existing protection mechanisms to create safety for online activists and others.




## **CARDS AGAINST BACKLASH:**

**Forwards to a feminist future - Strategies for  
surviving and countering gender backlash**

 [counteringbacklash.org](https://counteringbacklash.org)  CounterBacklash

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