



Crear, Résister, Transform

**A SUPER SHORT GUIDE TO
ORGANISING GLOBAL FEMINIST
FESTIVALS AND ONLINE EVENTS**

By: Nana Darkoa Sekyiamah

awid

The Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) is a global, feminist, membership, movement-support organization. We support feminist, women's rights and gender justice movements to thrive, to be a driving force in challenging systems of oppression, and to co-create feminist realities.

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WHY ORGANISE A VIRTUAL GLOBAL FEMINIST FESTIVAL?

Since 1983, AWID has organised International Forums all over the globe, from places like Brazil to South Africa and Thailand. Each Forum has been unique because it's been shaped by the vibrant feminist movements and cultures of the host country. In 2021, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, AWID had to take the difficult decision of cancelling the 14th International AWID Forum.

Instead, we decided to experiment with a different way of bringing feminists and social justice activists together in a month-long online event that we named *Crear, Résister, Transform: A Festival for Feminist Movements*. We were clear that this was no replacement for the forum - nothing can replace the magic that happens when you have over 2,000 activists in a physical space. Instead, it was an opportunity to gather virtually, share our resistance stories, and be inspired by the realities that feminists are forging across the globe.

The choice of holding a festival, not a conference or a forum, was a deliberate one. When you think of festivals, you think of music, art, and dance, and so, as we developed our festival programme, we were conscious about spotlighting creativity throughout every aspect of it. We wanted our event to go beyond 'talk' and create moments of lightness, brevity, and fun in what proved to be an extremely difficult year.

A FESTIVAL BY FEMINISTS, FOR FEMINISTS

AWID's secret power is in how we work with feminist movements. There is nothing we do on our own. All our projects are deeply collaborative, and this festival was no different. One advantage we had was that over 820 individuals, networks, and organisations had proposed activities for the 14th International AWID Forum, and before the event was cancelled, we had identified 40 activities that would have been part of it. We still wanted to give some of those organisers the chance to hold their events and so we asked if they could adapt their activities to a virtual format. About half of the organisations that we approached accepted our invitation, and their content became the core of our festival's programme.

AWID is a global feminist movement support organisation, and so it was important that our festival reflect that identity. This meant having events in a range of time zones, and across an entire month, so that people all over the world could plug into at least a couple of sessions on days and times that suited them. Our speakers also reflected our diversity. One hundred and thirty people from 43 countries led activities in a range of languages including Portuguese, Mandarin, Russian, and Arabic - although AWID officially only works in English, French, and Spanish. To facilitate access, the vast majority of these events were simultaneously translated into our official languages, with live captions provided in English.

Another advantage in organising this kind of virtual event was that it was a huge opportunity to archive the work that is being done by feminist movements all over the world. Most of our activities were livestreamed to social media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram, and are now available to a wider audience.

We saw the festival as a chance to try something new. Yes, AWID has a lot of experience in bringing feminist movements together, and yes, we run a decentralised global organisation, so we are very much au fait with the virtual world, yet co-creating

a global virtual festival was not something we had any prior experience with. In many ways, this was also a learning opportunity for us.

As part of the process, we spoke to many feminist and social justice organisations who had recently held online conferences, festivals, and forums and we benefited enormously from the advice they so generously shared with us. It is in that same spirit of learning and sharing that we decided to create this resource. We hope you the reader can take from it what is useful and relevant for your organising work in your own contexts.



TLDR? Why organise a virtual global feminist festival?

- Be clear on why you want to organise a virtual festival. That clarity should influence all your subsequent decisions
- Festivals should engage all the senses. Make art and creativity an integral part of your programming
- Global virtual festivals are an opportunity to bring people together for a shared purpose across time zones, language, and diversities.

SO, YOU WANT TO ORGANISE A FESTIVAL? WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

Deciding to organise a festival is the easy part, and like all events - no matter how well planned - there is always some work that is unanticipated, or bigger than initially imagined. When organising Crear, Résister, Transform, we were very much aware that many people were already experiencing Zoom fatigue, yet we knew that if we planned our events well, they could be a source of nourishment for the activists who chose to participate. It could help re-energize them, even if only for a moment.

We started our process by speaking to a range of organisations to find out what had and hadn't worked when they had organised events in the past - and the information we got was pure gold. These conversations directly influenced many of the choices we subsequently made (such as the decision not to have an event app).

A summary of key learnings generously shared with us by other activist organisations can be found below:

10 THINGS ACTIVIST ORGANISATIONS SAID WORKED FOR THEM

Practice sessions for speakers	It's important to create space and time for your speakers to meet beforehand. This gives them a chance to get to know one another and familiarize themselves with the tech they will be using for the event.
Have clear principles of engagement	Let participants know the rules of engagement ahead of time. This can be done when they register, or at the start of events. On our side, for instance, we were clear that we had a zero-tolerance approach to racism, sexism, and transphobia and that anyone who made any such comments would be instantly blocked.
Have online 'bouncers' and moderators for the chat	Online security is a real concern so minimise your chances of being harassed by having people register for each event ahead of time - since trolls are unlikely to do extra work to access an event. Also, depending on the size of your audience, have a moderator (or two or three) monitoring the chats.

<p>Keep the tech simple and have tech support on standby</p>	<p>Tech will...tech, and sometimes technology fails. Plus, digital inequality is real and not everyone will have the connectivity required to engage in your activity. So, have someone on standby who can help resolve any technological challenges.</p>
<p>Pre-record</p>	<p>A lot of 'live' events nowadays are pre-recorded and live streamed. It's a great way to ensure a high-quality production and to avoid some of the challenges described above.</p>
<p>Develop a 'flow of show' ahead of each event</p>	<p>It's important to plan each individual activity. How much time will each speaker have? Who will be introducing them? Will any videos be shown and who will present them? Will there be breakout groups? Thinking through each aspect of your event will ensure a smoother, more enjoyable activity.</p>
<p>Offering honorariums or payments to under employed activists</p>	<p>Some people/collectives/organisations may be able to lead and organise sessions as part of their day-to-day work and in their regular working hours. But others may be freelancers or under-employed. While many such activists may choose to contribute their labour to the larger movement, if you can offer some compensation, do so. It's important to extend some form of payment, honorarium, or compensation to under-resourced activists to show appreciation for their time, labour and skills. If on the other hand you are asking for activists to join you in co-organising as part of their own contributions to movement work, be explicit about this, and make that clear from the start.</p>

Give session organisers autonomy over their sessions and provide tech/communications support

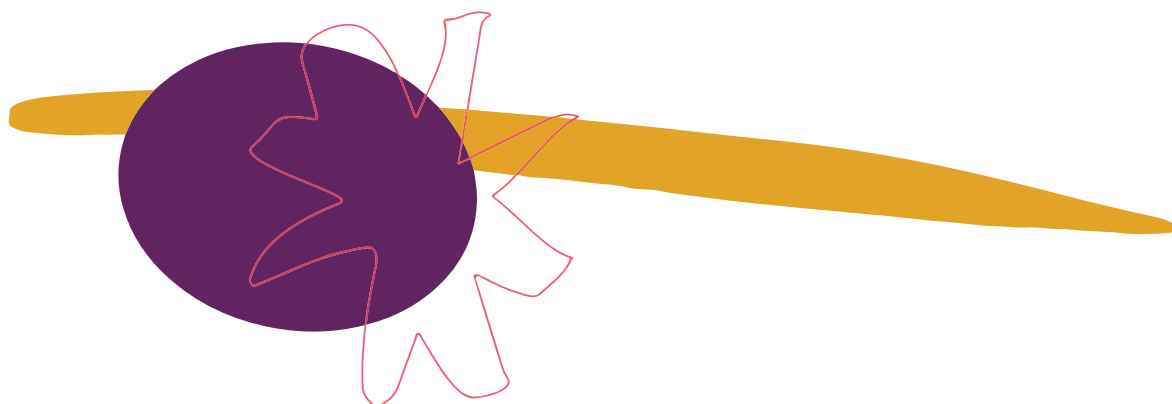
Many organisations that planned online events did so in partnership with others and in such cases, the lead organiser usually handled elements like tech, communication, and registration. This would leave partners free to focus on their actual activities.

Let partners determine if they want events live streamed or not

Not everything has to be televised! Some events are powerful because they are small and intimate. The knowledge that their conversation is not being recorded for posterity can allow some participants to feel more comfortable in sharing their stories. Let activity leads make that decision.

Make your session as accessible as possible

Consider all the ways in which your events can be made more accessible to wider audiences. For example, you can offer simultaneous translations and live captioning of sessions. If working with translators, make sure to prep them ahead of time by sharing any prepared PowerPoints or notes and have them join sessions at least 30 minutes in advance to troubleshoot any issues that may arise. Many participants will want to attend multiple activities, so space your events so that they can get a break between sessions. This will also give your team enough time to prepare for their next events.



8 THINGS THAT ACTIVISTS WISHED THEY HAD DONE (EVEN) BETTER

Ensure all staff feel ownership over the event	<p>Most of the organisations we spoke to had one dedicated person or a small team leading the organising of an event. This was often a pragmatic decision in terms of keeping the planning team small and agile on one hand, or was a recognition of the already heavy workload that others already had. A challenge however was figuring out the right time to bring other staff members on board, and building a collective sense of ownership and responsibility for the success of the event.</p>
Have enough staff available to work on the event	<p>Everyone we spoke to felt that they needed more human resources for their event. This perhaps speaks to the already heavy workloads many feminist organisations have, and a desire to have more staff to manage their various projects.</p>
Accessibility and technology	<p>In pre-recorded sessions, build in more time than you might expect to ensure that all accessibility needs are met. Some organisations invested in event-specific platforms and found that most of their participants did not make full use of them. Or they were confused and unwilling to learn new technology.</p>
Give yourselves even more time for planning	<p>Everybody we spoke to admitted that they wanted more time to plan and promote their event than they gave themselves.</p>

Work with speakers to get needed information well in advance

For many organisations, this was the first time they had organised virtual events on this scale, and they were learning on the go. One of the many insights gained is that the kind of briefing you need to give someone to participate in an event online is very different from what one would do for an in-person event. For instance, briefings for virtual events need to include advice about audio and sound settings, proper lightning, ensuring strong internet connectivity, and appropriate device use during presentations.

Be realistic about audience participation

Most event organisers experienced a huge gap between the numbers at registration versus in attendance. Often only about 20% of the people who registered showed up. However, as a lot of activities were livestreamed, viewing numbers would often increase over time, and were sometimes 10 times over what folks would have had at a more typical face-to-face event.

FIGURING OUT OUR THEME

Arguably, one of the hardest things to figure out for your festival is its theme. This is super-important because it needs to both encapsulate what your event will be about and be exciting enough to attract the attention of your desired audience. In order to arrive at our festival theme, we had an in-house working group do some creative thinking sessions. This is an activity you can also try out to help you work through any situation where you may need to name an event, publication, or product.

In order to come up with imaginative ideas, it's important to be relaxed and in a positive state of mind. You can achieve this in a number of ways: By doing light movements like stretching, or, conversely, by sitting in silence and allowing your brain to drift as you doodle or meditate.

HERE ARE SOME EXERCISES WE DID TO INSPIRE OUR CREATIVITY AND CONCEPTUALISE A TITLE FOR OUR FESTIVAL:

Getting Visual...

- What images come to mind when you think of your festival? Spend 20 minutes doing an online search of these images and save them all to one folder.
.....
- If you do this activity in a group, give five to ten minutes for everyone to look at the collated images, and allow time for people to speak to which images resonate most strongly with them and why.
.....
- Keep the images that most resonate with your group and save them to inspire the visual look and feel for the festival.
.....

Word Associations

- Pick a couple of words that have a strong resonance for your event or organisation. In our case we picked: Thrive, Feminist, Realities, Liberation, Freedom, Collective, Movements.
.....
- Create a title using any of the words below and include:
an adjective, noun, and verb.
.....

Other fun exercises we did to unlock our thinking included:

- What would your favourite cool feminist name your festival?
.....
- If the festival was a Beyonce song, what would it be called?
.....
- If the festival was a Maya Angelou poem, what would it be?
.....
- If the festival was a title of an Angela Davis book, what would it be?
.....

As you can imagine, these exercises resulted in some fun ideas, some terrible ones, and others that were really great.

Through further discussion and wordsmithing, and the recognition that we wanted to signal our commitment to language diversity from the start, we landed on Crear, Résister, Transform: A Festival for Feminist Movements as both the theme and title of our festival. This perfectly captured the kind of content we wanted to showcase in our event.

We wanted the festival itself to be a process of co-creation with other feminist movements, highlighting feminist creativity. We also wanted to celebrate feminist resistance and the fact that we are here, in spite of all the violence we face every day. Most importantly, we wanted to show examples of feminist transformation, to demonstrate that alternatives exist, and that feminist proposals for a more just world are already being practiced across the globe in big and small ways.

COLLABORATING WITH FEMINIST ARTISTS AND CREATIVES

In 2019, AWID started to deepen its work with feminist artists through an activist working group. Three participating artists, Wana Udobang (a writer and poet), Ika Vantiani (a crafter and curator), as well as Rula Khoury (an art curator and historian), co-created different aspects of the festival.

Wana co-curated The Pleasure Garden, an exploration of sex, sexualities, and pleasure - in collaboration with HOLAA Africa, and Adventures from the Bedrooms of African

Women. Rula curated a digital feminist art walk which featured work from: Colectivo Moriviví, an all-women artistic collective from Puerto Rico; Upasana Agarwal, a nonbinary illustrator and artist based out of Kolkata, India; and Siphumeze Khundayi, an art-maker, photographer, and facilitator from South Africa.

Alejandra Laprea, a filmmaker, curated the Central America stream of AWID's Feminist Film Club specifically for the festival. Working with artists in this way enabled us to explore a range of issues in more creative formats. For example, our screening of *Yo, Impossible* a Venezuelan drama about an intersex character. The subsequent discussion with the filmmaker Patricia Ortega allowed participants to delve deeper into the issues that the film introduced. We also provided a watch guide which included biographical details of the filmmaker, questions, and issues that people could consider during and after the screening, and suggestions on how they could watch the film in community with others.

PLACING OUR AUDIENCE FRONT AND CENTRE

AWID prioritises working with feminist and social justice movements in the Global South and this was reflected in our choice of speakers, as well as in the breadth of time zones where our events were held. We wanted to ensure that our sessions were engaging, so we featured activities in a range of formats led by people from a variety of identities and backgrounds. We had panel conversations on land rights led by activists from Brazil, South Africa, and Senegal, for instance, and an Instagram live conversation on pleasure led by a disabled, sex-positive activist from South Africa. Creating space and time for feminists to dance - literally - was also important to us, and we held a special member-only event which included DJs from Kenya, Brazil, and Canada.

CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

We made the choice to livestream most of our events. But we left out those sessions that would not translate well when watched later without context, such as workshops. For instance, a workshop leader may choose to divide people into breakout rooms during the festival to discuss a topic in greater depth, but that action would not be able to accommodate someone who was watching that recording later.

The other limitation of the livestreams was language and translation. During the festival, some sessions, such as panels, had people speaking in multiple languages and we were able to use interpretation to ensure that both speakers and participants understood one another. However, live streams could only capture the language of the speaker, and so very often, the interpretation was lost. Unfortunately, captioning the events afterwards proved a time-consuming and expensive process, so we were only able to do this for selected panels.

Another limitation was that not all speakers and participants had strong Internet connectivity, and so it's important to consider virtual events as one component of a broader strategy of engagement and solidarity.

WHAT YOU NEED TO SUCCESSFULLY ORGANISE A (GLOBAL) FESTIVAL

Organising a great festival can be like baking a cake. There are some key ingredients you just cannot do without. Get the mix right for those and your cake will rise perfectly and taste delicious. Get the proportions wrong and your light sponge cake may taste more like a rock cake (though I personally enjoy both).

SO HERE ARE SOME INGREDIENTS FOR A SUCCESSFUL GLOBAL FESTIVAL:

- ***A Solid Team of Organisers***

Can one person organise a virtual global festival? Definitely not. You need a team that represents the breadth of the speakers and participants that you hope to attract to your event. Your team members should have distinct and complementary skills. In organising festivals I've found it useful to have team members with great communication skills, strong organisational skills, and a strong sense of content - as well as deep relationships and wide networks. It's also really useful to have people with strong IT skills.

- ***Budget, Budget, Budget***

It's important to be clear on what your budget for the festival will be and make decisions really early on about what you are prepared to pay for. For instance, will you hold your event on a free platform or pay for a customised event-specific app? And how do you ensure you're getting value for your money? Many event apps do not have interpretation capabilities, which is important if your festival or event is to be truly global. And providing live interpretation and translation, especially in multiple languages, will require significant budget lines.

It is also important to figure out if all speakers at your event will be paid, or if payment will only go to those who are self-employed or working in their personal capacity? Money is political, and so all these decisions must be clarified well in advance then communicated to all stakeholders.

- ***Introduce Feminist Logistics***

There are many roles required to pull off any successful event, and these will vary depending on the organisers. For AWID, the role of logistics is a key one. Our logistics had to be done in a feminist way, and that meant ensuring accessibility, treating our speakers and participants with respect, and being responsive to our audience's needs.

So, we hired a women-led company to manage all our logistics needs and oversee this area of work for us. This was a considerable expense, however - one that we recognise others may not be able to afford. We also worked with independent graphic designers and an audio-visual company to create a bold identity manual for the festival and create promotional videos within a short period of time.

BUILDING BUZZ AROUND YOUR FESTIVAL

It's important to begin your communications strategy by identifying your desired audiences in as much detail as possible (for example, queer feminists between 25 to 30 years old resident in x, y, and z countries). The more specific you are about your audience, the easier it will be to figure out how to reach them. Are there media platforms that they tend to consume? Are there feminist influencers they tend to follow? Could you get those influencers to post about your event?

It's also crucial to identify how you will assess the impact of your communications. Knowing this from the beginning will help you figure out whether the tactics you have chosen are realistic. It's better to identify a few communication tactics that you can implement well, than to be overly ambitious and produce poor products that fail to get your message across.

In AWID's case we decided to make emails a central part of our communications campaign. We have a huge email database and so we understood that letting people know ahead of time, and sending them timely reminders, would be the key to having a well-attended festival. We also used timely live conversations, including sessions we were excited about and speakers (like Vandana Shiva!) that we knew many of our audience would be keen to hear from to share more about the details of the festival.

Once the festival was underway, we would create short, promotional videos of the earliest content to help promote upcoming events. We were deliberate to not have too much on-the-spot documentation because we knew that we could create a wealth of content from the rest of the event, gaining fresh views in the weeks, months, and years to come. We also recognised that the real value of recording these conversations would be to have them easily accessible in the future via platforms such as YouTube.

PREPARE TO PIVOT TO NEW CONTEXTS, IF NECESSARY

It's important to have a plan of action, it's even more important to adapt your plan to changing contexts. A few days before we planned to launch our big, splashy promotion of the festival, the United States unceremoniously withdrew its military presence from Afghanistan. Like many around the world, we watched in horror as thousands of Afghans attempted to flee their country as the Taliban gained control of the government. In that moment, what we wanted more than anything was to be in solidarity with the Afghan people, particularly the feminists, women's rights defenders, and human rights activists who we knew would be most at risk.

This was more important than announcing the start of our festival in the timeline we had set. While it can be disappointing to have to change dates when everything has been perfectly planned, it is far better to change internal timings when the rest of the world is rightly focused on other priorities. That moment is also an opportunity to take another look at your plans and consider the context of your event. Are there any gaps in your existing programme that have been highlighted by these changes? Is there an issue that should now be centred more prominently? Is this an opportunity to amplify a particular set of underrepresented voices? A change in the external context is an opportunity to make your event even more relevant to your audiences.

KEEP THE EXCITEMENT GOING

Organising events can be a lot of fun. It can also be tiring, especially for core team members who may have a lot of organising responsibilities. This is why it's important to keep everyone working on the event inspired and motivated. You can do this by first ensuring that workloads are spread evenly, and people get enough time to rest and recuperate. Creating a schedule of tasks and assigning them fairly is one way to do this. Ensuring that people also have space to enjoy the event they're planning is another way to do this. This is where you will appreciate a well-spaced programme which allows people time to recover between events.

HITTING THE LIVE BUTTON

You have been planning for ages and now it's the big day, and your event goes live. Now what? Celebrate! You've worked hard to get here and now you need to enjoy the moment. Ensure there is someone or a small team assigned and ready to deal with any issues that may crop up. For online events, this always needs to include someone who can deal with security issues (kicking out trolls, for example), someone to make sure the interpretation channels are working well, and someone on hand to support a speaker who may be experiencing connection challenges.

Although you would have pre-empted most technical challenges by pre-recording as much as possible, conducting test runs with the speakers ahead of time, and helping participants to boost their internet connectivity. Depending on your communication plans you may even have someone on hand to live share highlights from your event, or to write articles and op-eds inspired by your event. If your event is running over several days or weeks, it is always a good idea to use the successes of earlier events to promote the upcoming ones.

YOUR FESTIVAL IS OVER, NOW WHAT?

If your event was virtual, then it's not all over yet. Now is the time to ensure your content is appropriately packaged, or re-packaged, and disseminated. Are there particular nuggets of a conversation that you want to snip and make a standalone video? Are there standout quotes from your speakers that you can turn into graphics and share on your social media? Are the quality audio files of your event of a that can be reused as content for a podcast?

In this day and age, there is so much one can do with good content. So, once you've had a moment to pause, rest and recover from your event, take the time to consider how you can reuse the valuable knowledge that you have created. As part of your communication strategy, it is important to determine what type of documentation you want to do. If you want to turn sessions into audio content, for instance, you need to plan for higher quality recordings ahead of time.

EVALUATING YOUR FESTIVAL

Learning from events is an ongoing process. Once your festival has ended, it's important to debrief within a few days to capture what worked well, and what could have worked even better while it's still fresh on everyone's mind.

Evaluating your event can help you assess whether you achieved your set goals. And this can happen on an ongoing basis. You can do this by using polls during selected events, and discussions with the various stakeholders. Keep any surveys short and only ask the questions that you really need answers to. People tend to respond more to multiple choice questions, so provide relevant options as well as space for people to share additional thoughts with you.

After *Crear, Résister, Transform: A Festival for Feminist Movements*, we decided to invite speakers, and participants to join AWID staff in focus groups to debrief the festival. We held sessions in multiple languages across different time zones and got really useful insights as a result. For instance, people spoke of how they missed the informal interactions and networking opportunities that happen in physical events and suggested we explore ways to recreate those in virtual environments.

Another suggestion was to create a guide to organising festivals virtually, so here you have it. We hope the insights and learnings we have shared have been useful to you, your communities, and your movements.

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