

Contributions of Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) to German Feminist Development Policy

Feminist development policy seeks to “assist marginalised groups in claiming their rights and living self-determined lives [and to] advocate for the transformation of society as Agents of Change.”¹

Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) assists people in finding the courage to claim their rights and to raise their voice for social change. It bundles a wealth of different approaches that have a longstanding history in addressing power structures (i.e., feminist psychotherapy, masculinity and liberation psychology).

✓ If feminist development measures take mental health and psychosocial conditions into account, then rights, resources, and representation (3 Rs) will become accessible even for the members of society who are most marginalized.

✗ If MHPSS is **not** mainstreamed into feminist development cooperation, the 3 Rs will be used mostly by those members of marginalised groups who are comparably better off, less psychosocially affected and therefore experience less obstacles to participation.

Fact is:

The more marginalised a community is, the more wide-spread are mental health problems. Members in all their diversity are psychosocially impacted by experiences of discrimination, violence and oppression shown for example in trauma, intense self-doubt, anxiety or depression.

Feminist development cooperation improves access to the three Rs, but **whether the opportunities provided are made use of depends on the psychosocial makeup** of those they are meant to serve.

MHPSS services support communities in coping with the psychosocial impact of marginalisation, improving their mental health. **Persons in good mental health are more likely to explore the opportunities provided by feminist development measures.**

Case example from GIZ Lebanon:

Nadia Mladao came to Lebanon as a foreign worker under the Kafala system, a form of privatised labour regulation, which leaves migrant workers at the mercy of private employers. She participated in MHPSS trainings informed by a feminist approach with GIZ Lebanon that improved her understanding of structural injustice and increased her wellbeing and self-esteem. She felt confident to lead a feminist psychosocial support group in her community. Using tools such as power analysis, social action and drama



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therapy, the women experienced a strong solidarity. The photo shows a theatre piece that the group has developed. Members of the support group felt a greater capacity to cope with their life difficulties and to get involved in the social movement for the abolishment of Kafala. Their ideas were taken up in the campaigns organized by the CSO “Anti-Racism Movement”.

¹ <https://www.bmz.de/resource/blob/153806/bmz-strategy-feminist-development-policy.pdf>, p.15