



CHALLENGING A GATHERING STORM WITH OUR POWER

A Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights Backlash Advocacy Strategy

SECTION 1: Understanding Backlash: An overview of the nature and scope of the backlash

I. Background

Advocates for sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), like the Development Agenda for Girls and Women in Africa Network (DAWA), have long faced significant opposition to their efforts. It comes as no surprise that those advocating for the necessary and often fundamental changes to improve SRHR encounter dissenting voices. This opposition is especially prevalent when it pertains to topics such as providing comprehensive sexuality education to young people, ensuring access to safe and legal abortion, and guaranteeing equal rights for all.

One area of contention for SRHR advocates is the implementation of comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) for young people. CSE aims to equip young individuals with the knowledge and skills needed to make informed decisions about their sexual and reproductive health. However, opponents argue that such education may promote promiscuity or deviate from cultural or religious values. Despite these objections, advocates emphasise that CSE is essential to empowering young people to make responsible choices and protect their well-being.

Another contentious issue is access to safe and legal abortion. Advocates argue that restricting access to abortion services puts the lives and health of women and girls at risk. They assert that safe and legal abortion is a fundamental aspect of reproductive rights, allowing individuals to exercise autonomy over their bodies. However, opponents often oppose abortion on moral or religious grounds, asserting that it infringes upon the rights of the unborn. This ongoing debate highlights the deep divisions surrounding reproductive rights and the challenges faced by SRHR advocates.

Additionally, advocates like DAWA strive for the realisation of equal rights for all individuals, irrespective of gender, sexual orientation, or identity. They argue that discrimination and marginalisation based on these factors hinder access to essential SRHR services. By advocating for equality, SRHR advocates seek to eliminate disparities in healthcare, education, and legal protections. Their work faces resistance from those who hold traditional or conservative views, leading to debates and legal battles to secure equal rights for all. Advocates for sexual and reproductive health and rights encounter opposition in their pursuit of necessary changes. Whether it is advocating for comprehensive sexuality education, access to safe and legal abortion, or equal rights, their work is met with dissenting voices. Despite this opposition, these advocates remain committed to their cause, striving to ensure that everyone has the ability to make informed decisions about their sexual and reproductive health and to access the necessary services and rights to support their well-being.

1.1 Critical examples of legal policies in three Southern African Countries for noting

Country	Legal framework
Zimbabwe	<p>Domestic Violence Act (2007): Provides protection and remedies for survivors of domestic violence, including provisions for protection orders and access to support services.</p> <p>Education Act (2004): Promotes equal access to education for all, regardless of gender, and prohibits discrimination in education settings.</p> <p>Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act (2004): Criminalizes various forms of sexual violence, including rape, indecent assault, and child sexual abuse.</p>

<p>Malawi</p>	<p>Gender Equality Act (2013): Prohibits discrimination based on gender and promotes gender equality in various areas, including employment, education, and access to resources.</p> <p>Prevention of Domestic Violence Act (2006): Provides protection and remedies for survivors of domestic violence, including provisions for restraining orders and legal assistance.</p> <p>Gender Equality Commission Act (2013): Establishes the Gender Equality Commission to promote and monitor gender equality in Malawi.</p>
<p>Zambia</p>	<p>Anti-Gender-Based Violence Act (2011): Criminalizes various forms of gender-based violence, including domestic violence, sexual assault, and child marriage.</p> <p>Employment Act (2019): Prohibits gender discrimination in the workplace and promotes equal pay for equal work.</p> <p>Marriage Act (2020): Raises the minimum age of marriage to 18 for both girls and boys, aiming to combat child marriage.</p>

2. Introduction

The backlash against sexual reproductive health and rights (SRHR) around the world is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. Across the world, anti-gender and anti-rights actors and movements are part of antidemocratic, nationalist, neo-colonial, fundamentalist, and fascist agendas. A range of actors, including state actors and non-state actors (e.g., nongovernmental organisations, religious organisations, private foundations, and corporations), are engaged in anti-gender and anti-rights activism. It is an ongoing, heavily funded, and supported agenda that every person working in the sexual reproductive health and rights sector should be aware of.

In general, it is characterised by a pushback against progressive policies and programmes that advance SRHR, including sexual and reproductive health services, comprehensive sexuality education, and gender equality. This backlash often takes the form of religious and moral opposition, as well as the denial of SRHR as a human right. It can also be motivated by political agendas, such as the rise of conservative populism and authoritarianism. There is also a trend of backlash against women's rights organisations and movements, including threats and attacks on activists.

2.1 Understanding the Backlash

The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (DEVAW), adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1993, defines violence against women as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life." Backlash against the DEVAW has taken the form of attempts to redefine violence against women to exclude certain forms of violence, such as domestic violence, marital rape, or female genital mutilation.

The opposition to SRHR policies and programs can be attributed to a variety of factors. One significant aspect is the clash between conservative religious and moral beliefs and the principles promoted by SRHR initiatives. Many religious groups view issues related to sexuality and reproductive health through a traditional lens, which often leads to resistance against progressive approaches. These groups argue against the provision of comprehensive sexuality education, advocating for abstinence-only programs instead.

Additionally, gender equality remains a contentious topic in many societies. The advancement of SRHR often challenges existing gender norms and power dynamics, leading to resistance from those who perceive it as a threat to traditional gender roles.

This opposition can be seen in attempts to restrict women's access to reproductive healthcare services or limit their reproductive choices.

2.2 Forms of Backlash

The backlash against SRHR manifests in various ways across different regions. In some cases, it takes the form of legal and policy changes that roll back previously established rights and protections. For example, some countries have implemented restrictive legislation, limiting access to contraception, safe abortion services, and comprehensive sexuality education. In terms of specific examples of the backlash against SRHR in Southern Africa, one notable case is that of Malawi, where a bill to legalize abortion was rejected by parliament in 2018 after facing intense opposition from religious groups. Another example is Zambia, where the government has been accused of using COVID-19 restrictions to limit access to reproductive health services and restrict the activities of civil society organizations. In Zimbabwe, the government has been accused of using the COVID-19 pandemic as an excuse to crack down on the activities of activists and civil society organizations.

Religious and moral opposition play a significant role in fueling the backlash. Religious leaders and conservative groups often campaign against SRHR initiatives, framing them as immoral or against religious teachings. This opposition can lead to public debates and protests, ultimately influencing policy decisions.

Moreover, the denial of SRHR is another tactic employed in the backlash. Denial often involves denying the existence of certain sexual and reproductive health issues, such as denying the need for comprehensive sexuality education or dismissing the importance of access to contraception and safe abortion services. By denying the significance of SRHR, opponents seek to undermine efforts to promote sexual and reproductive health and rights.

The backlash against SRHR around the world is a complex phenomenon driven by diverse factors. It encompasses resistance to progressive policies and programs that aim to advance SRHR, including sexual and reproductive health services, comprehensive sexuality education, and gender equality. Religious and moral opposition, as well as the denial of SRHR, are key components of this backlash. Understanding the various forms and drivers of this opposition is crucial in addressing the challenges faced by SRHR advocates and ensuring the realization of sexual and reproductive health and rights for all.

3. Understanding the architecture of backlash

The architecture of the SRHR backlash is the systematic and coordinated effort of conservative and religious groups to reverse advances in SRHR. Access to contraception, abortion, comprehensive sexuality education, and other SRHR services is limited. To understand this notion further, a good example of the architecture of SRHR backlash is that from Hungary and Poland. Hungarian and Polish SRHR backlash is the result of systematic and coordinated efforts by the government to undermine sexual and reproductive health and rights, including access to contraception and abortion services as well as comprehensive sexuality education.

In understanding the architecture of backlash, it is critical to understand that there are several types of SRHR backlash, including:

1. Legal backlash: This refers to the introduction or enforcement of laws that restrict access to SRHR services or criminalize certain behaviours related to SRHR.
2. Social backlash: This refers to the negative attitudes and beliefs held by individuals or groups towards SRHR, which can lead to stigmatization, discrimination, and violence.
3. Political backlash: This refers to the opposition from political leaders or parties to policies or programs that promote SRHR, often due to religious or cultural beliefs.
4. Economic backlash: This refers to the reduction or elimination of funding for SRHR programs or services, which can limit access for those in need.

This example of Hungary and Poland below is applicable to any context in terms of unpacking the architecture of SRHR backlash where their mobilization tactics are concerned. As mentioned in the introduction of this strategic plan, the narrative of SRHR is often complex and well-funded. Below are some of the key ways in which backlash has occurred in Hungary and Poland, a phenomenon which is evident across African context too. The example of Hungary and Poland gives awareness of how anti-gender narratives are organised and how they operate.

Anti-gender and anti-LGBTQI mobilisation in Hungary and Poland

Social context
 Unreligious & individualistic society vs. Religious society where Catholic Church has a huge influence

Political context
 Demolition of the rule of law + restriction of civil liberties and rights + building an authoritarian system + creating enemies + maintaining a sense of threat

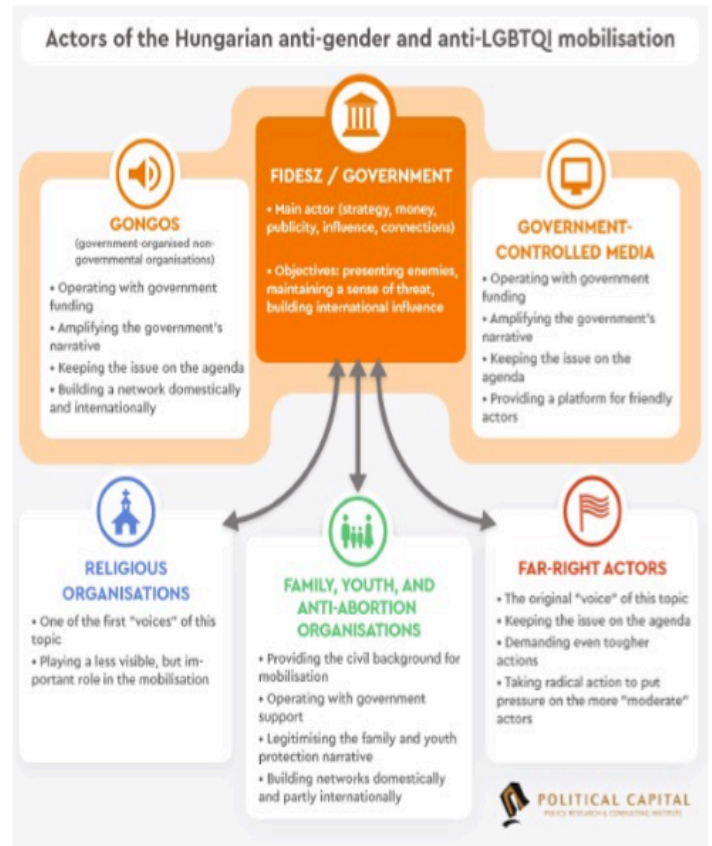
Legislative context
 Restrictive regarding the limitation of same-sex adoption and the legal recognition of gender change
 Restrictive regarding LGBTQI-related content + education
 Restrictive regarding civil same-sex union and 'LGBT-free zones'

Actors of the mobilisation
 Main actor: the government
 The government supports and influences all other actors
 The government is influenced by independent actors (such as the Catholic Church and Ordo Iuris)

Relations with international actors
 Tight, they play an important role in legitimising the government's policies domestically
 Not that important, Polish actors have built their own networks in the region

Narratives
 Built on the same framework: „the 'gender and LGBTQI ideology/propaganda' threatens 'normality' (conservative values, children, traditional families, survival)“
 Responsible: the left/communists, liberals, the West, Brussels/EU

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3.1 Types of backlash

The following are more types of backlash antagonists to the gender agenda utilise:

Types of backlash - by attitudes to gender progress, aims for change, likely protagonists and examples from the literature

Type of BL	Aims/ change	Likely protagonists	Writers (examples)
Defensive reactions	Restorative/reversal	Aggrieved Men's Rights groups, illiberal CSOs, online manosphere	Faludi 1991, 2020; Mansbridge and Shames 2008
Apprehensive p/reactions	Pre-emptive/delay-cancel	Elites with broader interests in status quo and/or growing profits	Ranchod-Nilssen 2008; Rowley 2019; Townsend-Bell 2019; etc.
Proactive strategies	Revolutionary/new future	Fundamentalist/con religious Ethno-nationalist/fascist right	Davies 2009; Fekete 2019; Beinart 2019;
Opportunistic mobilisation/allying	Instrumental/utilise crises	Populist politicians/movements and authoritarian leaders	Kuhar and Paternotte 2017; Kovats 2018; Denkovski, Datta 2021; Bernarding and Lunz 2021; etc.

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3.2 African examples of resilience in understanding the architecture of backlash in their respective countries:

Uganda	Ghana	Senegal	Tanzania
<p>Research Study on Backlash to Women's Rights: The Uganda Women's Network (UWONET) conducted a research study to analyze the architecture of backlash against women's rights in Uganda. The study examined various factors contributing to backlash, including cultural norms, religious beliefs, and political ideologies. It aimed to understand the strategies used by anti-gender equality groups and identify effective counter-strategies.</p>	<p>National Dialogue on Backlash: The Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection in Ghana organized a national dialogue on backlash against women's rights. The dialogue brought together government officials, civil society organizations, activists, and researchers to discuss the underlying causes and manifestations of backlash in the Ghanaian context. The aim was to develop a comprehensive understanding of the architecture of backlash and formulate strategies for addressing it.</p>	<p>Research Consortium on Backlash: A consortium of research institutions in Senegal, including the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), conducted a multi-year research project on backlash against women's rights. The project investigated the social, cultural, and political dynamics that fuel backlash in Senegal, with a focus on understanding the roles of religious institutions, traditional leaders, and media in perpetuating backlash.</p>	<p>Gender Analysis of Backlash: The Tanzania Gender Networking Program (TGNP) conducted a gender analysis of backlash against women's rights in Tanzania. The analysis examined the structural and systemic factors that contribute to backlash, such as patriarchal norms, discriminatory laws, and limited women's political participation. The findings informed advocacy efforts and policy recommendations to address the architecture of backlash.</p>

SECTION 2: Addressing SRHR Backlash: Places, strategies and tools

In order to effectively address the SRHR backlash, it is important to understand the specific context and nature of the backlash in each place. For example, in some countries, backlash may be driven by religious groups, while in others, it may be driven by the government or cultural beliefs. This will determine the best strategy for addressing the backlash. Feminist mobilisation plays a vital role in addressing the backlash against sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) across various levels. In order for stakeholders in the gender sector to effectively mobilise around anti-gender narratives and challenge the obstacles faced in relation to SRHR, focusing on multiple dimensions, including the body, family, community, nation, and region, is critical. By examining these perspectives, we can gain a comprehensive understanding of the diverse strategies employed in advocating for SRHR.

Feminist mobilisation in addressing SRHR backlash recognises the interconnectedness of various levels, from the individual body to the regional context. By mobilising in these different dimensions, feminists can make significant strides in challenging discriminatory norms, promoting equality, and ensuring that SRHR is recognized as a fundamental human right. It is through continued collective action and intersectional approaches that,

collectively, we can achieve lasting change for women and marginalized communities worldwide.

2. Strategies for addressing SRHR backlash

2. 1. Mobilizing at the Body Level:

Feminist mobilization at the individual body level aims to challenge patriarchal and discriminatory norms that perpetuate gender inequality and restrict women's autonomy over their bodies. Activists and organizations work towards promoting bodily autonomy, comprehensive sexuality education, access to contraceptives, safe and legal abortion, and overall reproductive health rights.

2.1.1 The how to do it

Collective care involves recognizing that individual well-being is intertwined with the well-being of the community. This approach emphasizes the importance of building supportive networks and creating spaces for mutual aid and care. At the body level, collective care can involve advocating for policies that prioritize access to healthcare for marginalized communities, supporting individuals in accessing healthcare services, and promoting self-care practices that prioritize mental and emotional health. Overall, mobilizing at the body level involves both individual and collective efforts to challenge systemic inequalities and promote well-being for all.

2.2.2 Specific examples:

1. South Africa:

- The #MyBodyMyChoice Campaign: Activists and organizations in South Africa have launched the #MyBodyMyChoice campaign to advocate for women's bodily autonomy and reproductive rights. The campaign aims to challenge societal norms and fight against restrictive laws by promoting comprehensive sexuality education, access to contraceptives, safe and legal abortion, and the right to make decisions about one's own body.

2. Nigeria:

- Stand to End Rape (STER) Initiative: STER Initiative is a Nigerian organization that mobilizes at the body level to address sexual violence and promote women's bodily autonomy. They provide counseling and support services to survivors of sexual violence, raise awareness about consent and sexual rights through educational campaigns, and

advocate for stronger laws and policies to protect survivors and ensure justice.

3. Kenya:

- Reproductive Health Network Kenya (RHNK): RHNK is a network of organisations in Kenya that work towards promoting reproductive health and rights, including mobilisation at the body level. They advocate for comprehensive sexuality education in schools, access to contraceptives and family planning services, and safe and legal abortion services. RHNK also conducts awareness campaigns to challenge stigma and discrimination related to reproductive health.

4. Ghana:

- Coalition of NGOs in Health (CONGHA): CONGHA is a coalition of NGOs in Ghana that focuses on mobilising at the body level to promote reproductive health rights. They advocate for comprehensive sexuality education, access to contraceptives, and safe and legal abortion services. CONGHA also works towards eliminating harmful practises such as female genital mutilation and child marriage, which restrict women's bodily autonomy.

2. Mobilising within Families:

Feminist mobilisation within families recognises that gender norms and power dynamics within households can significantly impact women's SRHR. Activists strive to challenge traditional gender roles, promote consent and communication, and address issues such as gender-based violence, child marriage, and female genital mutilation. They encourage inclusive and supportive family environments **that prioritise women's rights to make informed decisions about their bodies and reproductive choices.**

2.2.1 How to do it

The management of SRHR backlash within families can be challenging, but there are several practical strategies that feminist mobilisation can use to address these issues.

- o Firstly, it is important to promote comprehensive sexuality education within families. This can involve providing accurate information about sexual health and reproductive rights, as well as promoting communication and consent between family members.
- o Secondly, feminist mobilisation can work towards challenging traditional gender roles and power dynamics within households. This can involve

- promoting gender equality and challenging harmful practices such as child marriage and female genital mutilation.
- o Thirdly, creating supportive and inclusive family environments is crucial in managing SRHR backlash. This can involve providing emotional and practical support to family members who may be experiencing discrimination or violence, as well as promoting open communication and respect for each other's choices.
 - o Overall, feminist mobilization within families can play a critical role in promoting SRHR and challenging discriminatory norms and practices. By promoting education, communication, and support, activists can help create safer and more inclusive environments for all family members.

2.2.3 Specific examples

1. Rwanda:

- Rwanda Women's Network (RWN): RWN works towards mobilizing within families to promote women's SRHR. They engage with families and communities to challenge gender norms, raise awareness about reproductive health rights, and address issues such as gender-based violence and child marriage. RWN conducts workshops, trainings, and advocacy campaigns to promote inclusive and supportive family environments.

2. Burkina Faso:

- Association pour le Bien-Etre Familial - Naissance Désirée (ABEF-ND): ABEF-ND is a Burkina Faso-based organization that focuses on mobilizing within families to promote women's SRHR. They provide comprehensive sexuality education to parents and caregivers, emphasizing the importance of consent, communication, and gender equality within families. ABEF-ND also raises awareness about the harmful consequences of child marriage and advocates for its prevention.

3. Tanzania:

- TANZANIA Women Lawyers Association (TAWLA): TAWLA works towards mobilizing within families to address gender-based violence and promote women's SRHR in Tanzania. They conduct legal literacy programs and community dialogues to challenge traditional gender

roles, promote gender equality within families, and provide support to survivors of violence. TAWLA also advocates for legal reforms and policies that protect women's rights within the family.

4. Liberia:

- Foundation for Community Initiatives (FCI): FCI is a Liberian organization that focuses on mobilizing within families to address gender inequality and promote women's SRHR. They implement programs that engage men and boys as allies in challenging harmful gender norms and promoting respectful relationships within families. FCI also provides support to survivors of gender-based violence and conducts advocacy campaigns to eliminate harmful practices.

2. 3. Mobilizing in Communities:

Feminist mobilization at the community level involves raising awareness, challenging cultural and religious norms, and working towards transforming community attitudes towards SRHR. Activists engage in grassroots organizing, education, and advocacy to combat harmful practices, reduce stigma, and promote access to quality healthcare services. They collaborate with community leaders, religious institutions, and local organizations to ensure that SRHR is prioritized within the community's development agenda.

2.3.1 The how to do it

SRHR backlash at the community level requires a collaborative effort between feminist mobilization and various stakeholders in the community. Here are some practical examples of how activists can manage SRHR backlash:

- o Engage community leaders: Activists can engage with community leaders to promote SRHR and challenge harmful practices. This can involve organizing meetings and workshops to educate leaders about the importance of SRHR and how it can benefit the community.
- o Promote education: Activists can work towards promoting comprehensive sexuality education in schools and communities. This can involve organizing workshops, training sessions, and awareness campaigns to educate community members about sexual and reproductive health.
- o Challenge cultural norms: Activists can challenge cultural norms and practices that perpetuate gender inequality and restrict women's autonomy over their

bodies. This can involve organizing cultural events that promote gender equality and challenge harmful practices such as female genital mutilation.

- o Provide access to healthcare services: Activists can collaborate with healthcare providers to ensure that quality healthcare services are available to all community members. This can involve organizing mobile clinics and providing information about healthcare services to community members.
- o Managing SRHR backlash at the community level requires a multi-faceted approach that involves education, advocacy, and collaboration with various stakeholders in the community.

2.3.2 Specific examples:

1. Malawi:

- Centre for Solutions Journalism (CSJ): CSJ is a Malawian organization that focuses on mobilizing in communities to promote SRHR. They engage with community leaders, religious institutions, and local organizations to challenge harmful practises, reduce stigma, and raise awareness about SRHR issues. CSJ conducts community dialogues, workshops, and advocacy campaigns to ensure that SRHR is prioritized within the community's development agenda.

2. Sierra Leone:

- Family Planning Association of Sierra Leone (FPASL): FPASL works towards mobilizing in communities to promote SRHR in Sierra Leone. They collaborate with community leaders and traditional birth attendants to provide comprehensive sexuality education, family planning services, and reproductive health information. FPASL conducts community outreach programs, mobile clinics, and awareness campaigns to address cultural and religious barriers and increase access to quality healthcare services.

3. Zimbabwe:

- Women's Action Group (WAG): WAG is a Zimbabwean organization that mobilizes in communities to address gender-based violence and promote SRHR. They work with community leaders, local organizations, and youth groups to challenge harmful cultural norms, raise awareness about SRHR rights, and provide support to survivors of violence. WAG conducts community workshops, theater

performances, and advocacy campaigns to promote gender equality and access to SRHR services.

4. Uganda:

- Reproductive Health Uganda (RHU): RHU focuses on mobilizing in communities to promote SRHR in Uganda. They collaborate with community leaders, religious institutions, and local organizations to provide comprehensive sexuality education, family planning services, and reproductive health information. RHU conducts community outreach programs, youth clubs, and advocacy activities to challenge stigma, improve access to healthcare services, and empower individuals to make informed decisions about their SRHR.

2. 4. Mobilizing at the National Level:

At the national level, feminist mobilization, encompasses policy advocacy, legal reform, and holding governments accountable for ensuring SRHR. Feminist organizations work towards strengthening laws and policies that protect and promote SRHR, advocating for comprehensive sexuality education in schools, and demanding accessible and affordable healthcare services. They also engage in public awareness campaigns, lobbying, and strategic litigation to address systemic inequalities and discriminatory practices.

2.4.1 The how to do it

SRHR backlash at the national level requires a coordinated effort between feminist mobilization and various stakeholders such as governments, policymakers, and civil society organizations. Managing SRHR backlash at the national level requires a multi-pronged approach that involves policy advocacy, legal reform, public awareness campaigns, and collaboration with various stakeholders.

- o Policy advocacy: Feminist organizations can engage in policy advocacy to strengthen laws and policies that protect and promote SRHR. This can involve lobbying policymakers to ensure that SRHR is prioritized in national development plans and budgets.
- o Legal reform: Activists can work towards legal reform to address systemic inequalities and discriminatory practices. This can involve strategic litigation to challenge laws and policies that restrict access to SRHR services.

- o Public awareness campaigns: Activists can engage in public awareness campaigns to reduce stigma and promote access to SRHR services. This can involve organizing rallies, marches, and social media campaigns to raise awareness about SRHR issues.
- o Collaboration with healthcare providers: Activists can collaborate with healthcare providers to ensure that quality healthcare services are available and accessible to all. This can involve advocating for policies that prioritize access to healthcare for marginalized communities.

2.4.2 Specific examples

1. Ghana

The Women's Manifesto for Ghana is a coalition of women's organizations that have been actively advocating for women's rights, including comprehensive sexuality education, reproductive healthcare, and the elimination of harmful traditional practices.

2. Tanzania

The Tanzania Women Lawyers Association (TAWLA) is a prominent women's organization that has been working towards legal reform, advocating for women's rights to reproductive healthcare, and providing legal aid to women facing gender-based violence.

3. Rwanda

The Rwanda Women's Network (RWN) is a leading women's organization that has been promoting gender equality, advocating for women's reproductive health and rights, and working towards the elimination of gender-based violence in Rwanda.

4. Burkina Faso

The Association of Women Jurists of Burkina Faso (AJFB) is a women's organization that has been actively involved in legal reform, advocating for women's rights to reproductive healthcare, and fighting against gender-based violence.

5. Ivory Coast

The Women's Network for Sustainable Development (REFADD) is a women's organization in Ivory Coast that has been engaged in policy advocacy, promoting women's rights to reproductive healthcare, and working towards gender equality and sustainable development.

2.5. Mobilizing at the Regional Level:

The regional level feminist mobilization involves intentional, robust, effective and efficient movement building including alliances across borders to address common challenges and share best practices in advancing SRHR. Activists collaborate through regional networks and organizations, sharing resources, knowledge, and expertise to advocate for gender-responsive policies, exchange experiences, and support each other's efforts. Regional mobilization helps amplify feminist voices, strengthen solidarity, and influence regional frameworks to prioritize SRHR.

2.5.1 The how to do it

- o Cross-border alliances: Feminist organizations can form cross-border alliances to address common challenges and share best practices in advancing SRHR. This can involve organizing regional conferences, workshops, and training sessions to exchange experiences and support each other's efforts.
- o Advocacy for gender-responsive policies: Activists can advocate for gender-responsive policies at the regional level to ensure that SRHR is prioritized within regional frameworks. This can involve lobbying regional organizations such as the African Union or the European Union to prioritize SRHR in their development agendas.
- o Sharing of resources and expertise: Regional mobilization provides an opportunity for activists to share resources, knowledge, and expertise. This can involve sharing research findings, best practices, and advocacy strategies to strengthen feminist mobilization efforts.
- o Strengthening regional solidarity: Regional mobilization helps amplify feminist voices and strengthen regional solidarity. This can involve organizing regional campaigns and public awareness events to raise awareness about SRHR issues and mobilize support for feminist causes.

2.5.2 Specific examples

1. African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET)

FEMNET is a pan-African women's organization that has been working towards advancing women's rights and gender equality across the continent. They have been involved in regional mobilization efforts, bringing together women's organizations from

different African countries to advocate for gender-responsive policies and share best practices in advancing SRHR.

2. Women in Law and Development in Africa (WiLDAF)

WiLDAF is a regional women's organization that has been working towards promoting women's rights and gender equality in Africa. They have been involved in regional mobilization efforts, advocating for gender-responsive policies, exchanging experiences, and supporting women's organizations across the continent.

3. Southern African AIDS Trust (SAT)

SAT is a regional organization that has been working towards advancing HIV and AIDS prevention, treatment, care, and support in Southern Africa. They have been involved in regional mobilization efforts, advocating for comprehensive sexuality education, promoting women's rights to reproductive healthcare, and supporting women's organizations working towards SRHR in the region.

4. Women's Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative (WRAPA)

WRAPA is a regional women's organization that has been working towards advancing women's rights and gender equality in West Africa. They have been involved in regional mobilization efforts, advocating for gender-responsive policies, exchanging experiences, and supporting women's organizations across the region.

5. Women's Health and Equal Rights Initiative (WHER)

WHER is a regional women's organization that has been working towards promoting women's rights to reproductive healthcare and advancing gender equality in Nigeria and West Africa. They have been involved in regional mobilization efforts, advocating for comprehensive sexuality education, promoting access to affordable healthcare services, and supporting women's organizations working towards SRHR in the region.

6. Urgent Action Fund-Africa

UAF has been involved in feminist mobilization at the regional level. They provide rapid response grants and support to women's rights activists and organizations across Africa, enabling them to address urgent and emerging issues related to SRHR and gender equality. The Urgent Action Fund-Africa works collaboratively with grassroots activists, providing financial resources, capacity-building, and advocacy support to amplify feminist voices and catalyze social change. Their work at the regional level helps to strengthen solidarity, promote women's rights, and advance SRHR across the African continent.

SECTION 3: Tools for combating SRHR backlash

4. Tools

Feminist tools and approaches are crucial in addressing SRHR backlash. This is because they center the experiences and perspectives of women and girls, and challenge patriarchal norms and structures that perpetuate the backlash. Feminist are unique in that they acknowledge the root causes of the backlash and understanding how gender inequality and discrimination contribute to it. This includes exploring intersectionality; recognizing the multiple identities and experiences of individuals and communities, and how these intersect to impact SRHR.

Feminist movements and organizations have been at the forefront of addressing SRHR backlash, through their advocacy and activism. The tools often emphasize the importance of creating safe spaces for women and girls to express their experiences and needs, as well as to develop solutions that are responsive to their realities. Feminist approaches emphasize the importance of power-sharing and creating a level playing field for all voices to be heard, including those of marginalized groups.

The following are some tools one can utilise in order to ensure effective countering of SRHR backlash:

- i. Digital Platforms - Digital platforms, including social media, websites, and online campaigns, provide a powerful tool for raising awareness and mobilizing support for SRHR. These platforms allow activists to reach a broader audience, share information, and engage in advocacy efforts at both local and global levels.
- ii. Countering misinformation: Disseminating accurate information to counter misinformation and propaganda that is used to fuel the backlash.
- iii. Research and Data - Understanding the extent and nature of the backlash through research and documentation can help in developing an effective response. Research and data play a crucial role in addressing SRHR backlash. Collecting and analyzing data on SRHR issues can provide evidence to support advocacy efforts, debunk myths, and highlight the importance of comprehensive SRHR policies and services.
- iv. Capacity building: Building the capacity of SRHR advocates and organizations to effectively respond to the backlash.

- v. Legal Frameworks - Strong legal frameworks that protect SRHR are essential. Advocates can utilize these frameworks to challenge discriminatory practices, push for legal reforms, and hold governments accountable for fulfilling their obligations to ensure SRHR for all.

5. Risks and mitigation

In order to develop a comprehensive strategy to counter promote sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) backlash, it is crucial to understand the potential risks and challenges that may arise. SRHR is a complex and multi-faceted issue, and there are a variety of risks that could come with mobilizing against backlash. This includes risks such as backlash from conservative groups, legal and policy barriers, and limited funding and resources. However, there are also mitigation strategies that can be employed to overcome these challenges and achieve progress in the SRHR field. The following are the possible risks and mitigation strategies:

Risks	Mitigation strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Stigmatisation and discrimination of vulnerable groups ● Lack of political will to prioritize SRHR ● Limited resources to implement the strategy ● Lack of buy-in from key stakeholders ● Lack of public support ● Lack of data and evidence to inform policy and programming ● Ineffective policies and laws ● Religious and political groups will oppose the cause based on their doctrine beliefs. ● Due to cultural beliefs some communities will not be in support of the messages and activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Establish a multi-stakeholder coalition to promote a common SRHR agenda ● Engage local and national government officials to increase political will ● Build partnerships with local and international organizations to strengthen SRHR efforts ● Create public awareness and advocacy campaigns to promote SRHR ● Sensitization and awareness campaigns for political and religious leaders. ● Dialogue with law enforcement bodies. ● Support from policy makers and other allies.

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6. Conclusion

In conclusion, managing SRHR backlash requires a multi-faceted approach that involves feminist mobilization at various levels - individual body level, family level, community level, national level, and regional level. At each level, activists and organizations work towards promoting bodily autonomy, comprehensive sexuality education, access to contraceptives, safe and legal abortion, and overall reproductive health rights. To manage SRHR backlash effectively, feminist mobilization efforts need to be collaborative and involve various stakeholders such as governments, policymakers, healthcare providers, and civil society organizations. Activists can use practical strategies such as policy advocacy, legal reform, public awareness campaigns, cross-border alliances, sharing resources and expertise, and strengthening regional solidarity to advance feminist causes and promote SRHR. SRHR backlash is a complex and ongoing process that requires sustained efforts at various levels. By working together and using practical strategies, feminist mobilisation can challenge discriminatory norms and practises, promote SRHR, and create a more equitable and just society for all.

As DAWA, it is our hope that this feminist strategy for addressing SRHR backlash is helpful to you. Our collective work must be grounded in the lived experiences and realities of women and girls and centre their voices and perspectives in whatever context we find ourselves in. This strategy must also build on existing feminist movements and organizations and create safe spaces for dialogue and action. Ultimately, the goal is to create a world where all people can enjoy their sexual and reproductive rights without fear of discrimination or violence.

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