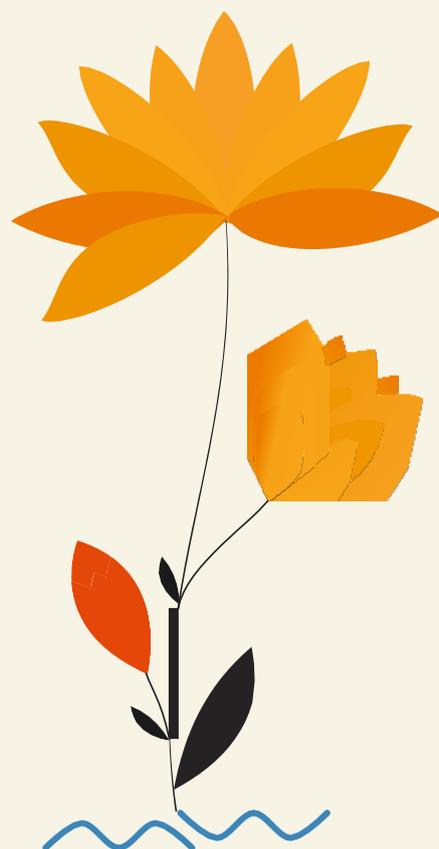
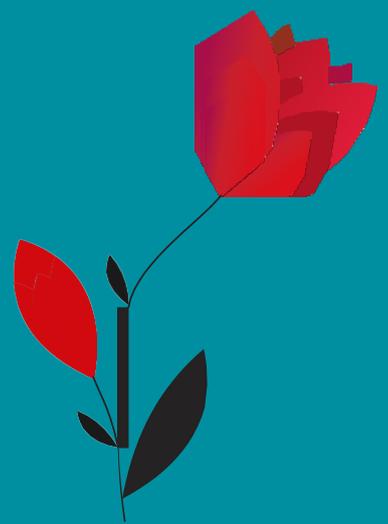
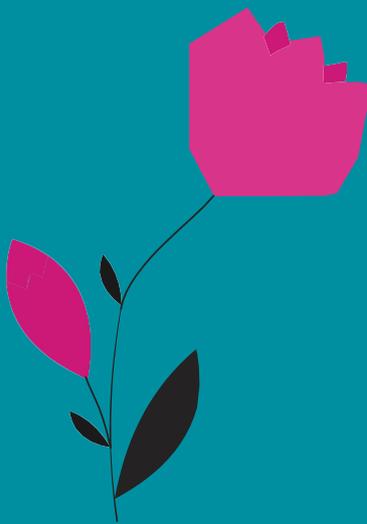
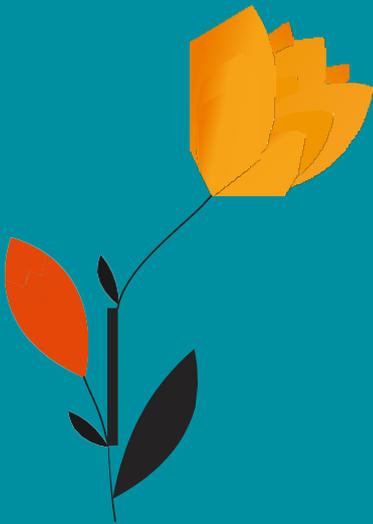
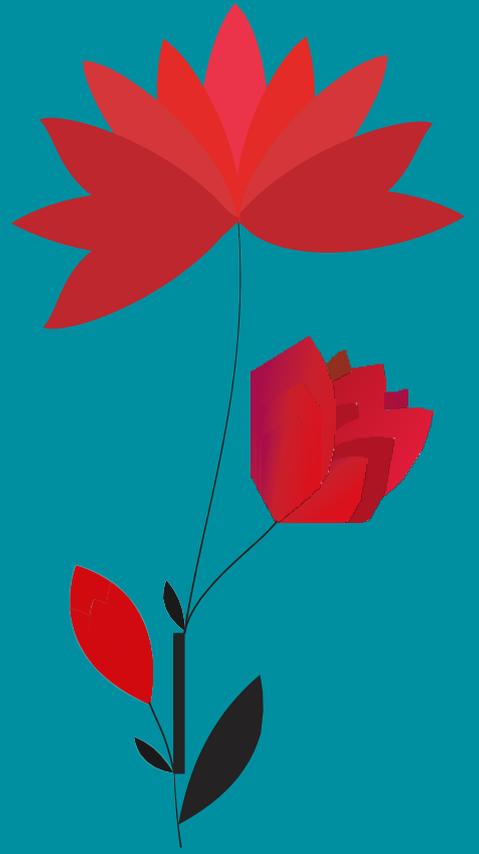
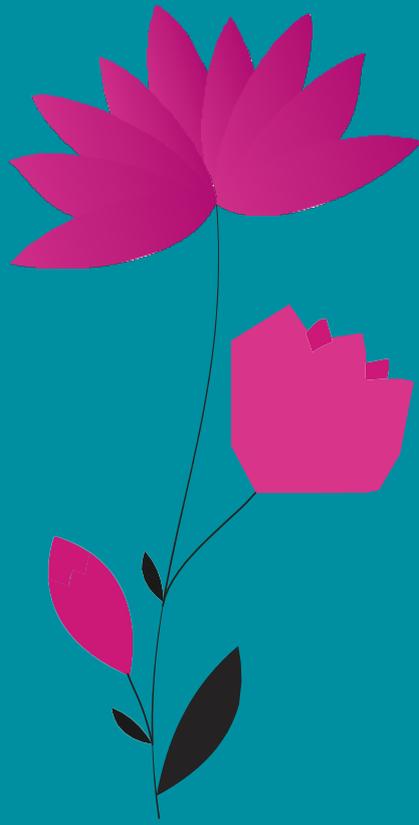
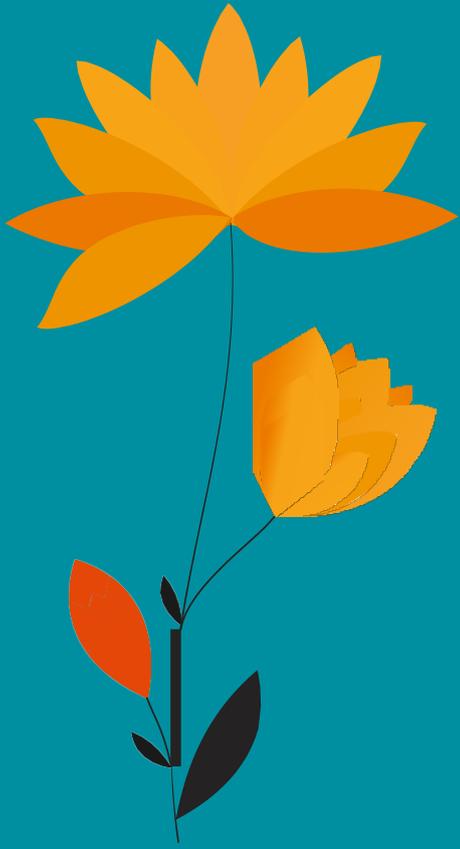


# Presentation of the FEMINIST TRAINING IN COLLECTIVE INTELLIGENCE (FTCI)









# Aim

Since it was founded in January 2008, the Mediterranean Women's Fund (MWF) has been committed to strengthening the women's movement in all of the countries of the Mediterranean basin.

It aims to contribute in a concrete and ambitious manner to improving the status of women and promoting gender equality.

MWF tackles this challenge from three angles: financial, strategic and educational.



## 1. Financial support

- MWF provides financial support, or helps to find financial or material resources, for actions decided upon by associations, organizations and/or individuals working for equality between men and women in the Mediterranean region.

Since 2009, the Fund has supported 227 projects implemented by associations in 19 Mediterranean countries, for an amount of nearly one million euros.



## 2. Strategic support

- MWF invites associations working in the same country to put aside their differences and come together to develop a common strategy.

Disunity between various women's associations from the same country often dilutes the impact of the battles which they wage.

Using a method tested in diverse and difficult contexts (Egypt, in the aftermath of the revolution; Tunisia, following the Arab Spring; Algeria, heir to the black decade; Libya, post-Gaddafi ...), MWF organizes two-day workshops enabling discussions and strategic planning for the women's movement.

Through these workshops (which we organize, coordinate and facilitate), we help to re-establish dialogue that has been undermined by political and/or societal events and assist associations to refocus on their shared goal: to defend the rights of women, first and foremost.

### 3. Educational support and feminist training programs

- With a focus on the younger generation of women from across the Mediterranean, MWF organizes training programs in collective intelligence. The aim is to awaken and strengthen their self-confidence, develop their existing and potential abilities, and equip these young women with tools to work collectively by managing areas of disagreement.

Our explicit goal is for participants to clear their conscience with regard to the situation of women, dare to defend this right and also dare to define oneself as a feminist without fear of being judged. Needless to say, we make sure that each participant knows how to adapt the expression of her commitment to the context in which she lives in order to best protect herself.





# Context

Although women share many goals in their battle for equality, their movement clearly lacks unity. While consensus remains regarding certain battles (such as the fight for abortion rights, equal pay, against domestic violence, rape and sexual abuse, etc.), associations cannot agree on a number of issues. In France, there are open disputes -- indeed divisions -- over two subjects: wearing the veil (a symbol of oppression or individual freedom?) and prostitution (a similar debate).

In 2011, the Mediterranean witnessed the blossoming of the Arab Spring, an exciting period full of a promise of democracy. Women participated extensively in this movement, occupying public spaces as they rarely had before. They were fully aware of the danger posed by fundamentalism because the region has suffered violently from it – and women are the first victims. In the region, where rising religious extremism has spared neither countries of the North nor South, women have been aware of the real danger of seeing their rights erode for the past ten years.

With its feet on the ground, MWF has been very alert and responsive to this situation. Indeed, its founding members are all from the Mediterranean basin - Algeria, Spain, Morocco, France - and have been fighting for women's rights for over twenty years. Their involvement in local associations and membership in many regional networks legitimize their concrete knowledge of the field. They thus are well able to measure the daily challenges faced by women, ranging from fundamentalism to the banalization of the violence against them.

MWF has observed with profound regret that across the Mediterranean region, in both the North and South, women's issues are always put on the backburner with regard to political priorities and policies, as if the question was insignificant (as, for example, during the disheartening days following the Arab revolutions).

Within this difficult context, the women's movement itself is struggling (or is feeling guilty?) to consider its cause as essential and urgent as any other issue. Although it is pursuing an immense goal of profound social change, the movement does not succeed in giving itself the stature that this entails.

Two major factors aggravate this situation:

- a division between associations in many countries
- a failure on the part of older activists to transmit their experience to the younger generation

A desire to strengthen the women's movement in the Mediterranean basin was thus born within MWF. And this desire is buoyed by an unwavering conviction: only a strong women's movement can and will bring about the change needed for greater equality and justice and for the elimination of violence and discrimination against women.

MWF has therefore chosen to concentrate its work on generational renewal and give young women the space, time and means to best equip themselves to become engaged as feminists.

**Spanning 15 days in all, the Feminist Training in Collective Intelligence (FTCI) is the concrete expression of this choice.**

**Over the course of three years, this training was conducted in the form of action-research in four Mediterranean countries (Algeria, France, Morocco, Tunisia).**



While the initial idea and guiding vision behind the FTCI program belong to **Caroline Sakina Brac de la Perrière**, MWF is particularly and deeply grateful to **Véronique Guérin**, **Cathy Lumalé** and **Souâd Belhaddad**, three key contributors. Their competence and creative and innovative contributions throughout this work have enabled a continuous co-construction, like the women's movement itself. In motion, always...

# Interview with Caroline Sakina Brac de la Perrière

Founder of MWF

Initiator of FTCI – Feminist Training in Collective Intelligence,  
Architect of the program

In 2008, Caroline Sakina Brac de la Perrière, with four other partners, founded the Mediterranean Women's Fund (MWF).

Four years later, she conceived and then launched the feminist training in collective intelligence (FTCI) program to equip the younger generation to know how to minimize differences in order to better work together for women's rights.

Did the idea of a feminist training in collective intelligence for the younger generation emerge at the same time as the establishment of the MWF nearly a decade ago?

Well before! In 1996, I attended my first feminist training, given by the Global Center in the USA. It brought together about thirty young women from all over the world for three weeks as a kind of grassroots school combining theory, practical tools for associative work, meeting with feminist leaders, role playing and self-reflection. Even though it was long (three weeks without my daughters, then 5 and 7), and in English, I learned a lot. Then in Algeria, over ten years later, just before the creation of the Mediterranean Women's Fund in 2008, I thought of taking up the idea and adapting it to the Algerian context in order to train the next generation of the women's movement, which was at the time very weakened by a period of terrorism. It was a success, but in assessing the program with the participants, I realized that I should have given more time to certain modules, less time to others, such as those on rights, and eliminate all together some that were

covered in other training programs (for example, setting up projects). The young women trained at the time

all insisted that more time be devoted to work on self-esteem, sexuality, transmission from the older generation, using tools like theater, games ...

I learned some lessons from that experience and eventually concocted this tailor-made training, FTCl, in 2012, which is totally shaped by our personal experiences within the women's movement, including both failures and successes. In that respect, it mirrors the long journey of a committed woman.

I was born and raised in Algeria; I was very young when I first became aware of women's issues, first due to my family history, and then the situation around me. When I was 16, I went to study in France and there I joined the Women's Liberation Movement (MLF); it was an era teaming with creativity and iconoclasm. On my return home to Algiers, I sought to contact women's groups that were at the time semi-clandestine; the country was still under the rule of a single party which had absolute control over society.

After the riots of October 1988, there was a push for democracy, with freedom of expression and association; dozens of associations then emerged in the public landscape. The association I had joined two years earlier, the Association for Equality before the Law between Women and Men, was finally legal; the Algerian women's movement began to take form. There were landmark moments with, for example, 10,000 protesters in the streets on 8 March 1990 to mark International Women's Rights Day! It was both an exhilarating and hard time. Everything was difficult, but everything seemed possible.

In the Algerian women's movement, as in France and so many other countries, I was constantly meeting women who were very courageous, very dynamic, with incredible energies and skills, and who dared to should very negative images of themselves in their societies, like that of "the woman who takes up a lot of space", to advance the cause. Through their actions on the ground, their gathering together, they dared to question the system of patriarchal domination established in their countries, and to

consider that they had “their own place” to fill! Thanks to them and, I repeat, to their ability to team up, the demand for women's rights has changed the condition of women around the world.

Yet despite all these strengths, organizations do not function today as well as they should. Why? With so much energy, talent, and courage, why do they suffer from such a loss of energy, from both a psychological and organizational point of view?

### So, why precisely?

The answer to this question, which has obsessed my commitment and work for years, I first found in myself, and in my female and feminist entourage. The cause of women, yes, but what about me first, as an individual? Do I know what my own emotions are? I am aware that I can feel anger, sadness, a sense of injustice, but do I know how to differentiate these emotions and, above all, can I identify them within myself? Do I clearly identify situations where I feel in danger, can I find my safeguards, develop defenses and effective strategies? In other words, before I find myself in a group, or in a collective movement, do I know how to situate myself individually? When one is a woman, one does not know oneself well, and often, consciously or unconsciously, it is difficult to have self-esteem or self-confidence. Similarly, we legitimately claim a right over our bodies, but are we familiar and physically comfortable with these bodies of ours, a factor which is crucial to dealing with complex situations?

In groups, these shortcomings emerge in similar ways: a lack of attention or listening, for example, during an internal or public debate; a difficulty in hearing different or divergent views; a difficulty for leaders to let go or for team members to position themselves in front of an authority figure; a difficulty and often incapacity to manage conflicts in a non-violent way and, above all, a enormous lack of transmission of past experience ... As if young women were not running up against the same patriarchal system and as if their elders had nothing to share!

## You talk about it with sadness...

Of course... The first thing that this analysis revealed was my own reality, and that of many other activists. So much has been wasted... I was an actor and witness of moments when there were so many opportunities to move forward and where our personal, psychological disabilities led us to miss opportunities... There was a lack of trust and goodwill between us, first of all... and suddenly, though these internal rivalries, by mistaking each other as the adversary, we rendered service to the ruling powers who have long rejoiced and are still rejoicing that the women's movement cannot stand firm.

In Algeria, we felt the full impact; we had an immense need to fight for our rights, and little idea of how to set up a project, little knowledge of how the media, communications worked...

The sadness, then, comes from measuring what women are capable of - I know so well their energy, their courage, especially in environments as difficult as those of Algeria, the Maghreb – only to see opportunities missed. Yes, these failures have sometimes made us feel sick. Today, I truly believe that these basic individual building blocks - self-esteem, self-confidence and caring for oneself and others - are essential to organize collectively.

The idea of a feminist training in collective intelligence program was born from both this personal and political experience... Of the desire to do things differently while remaining deeply faithful to our shared ideal: the emancipation of women and equality. Especially as some experiments in this direction proved to me that it was possible.

## So there were some successes too?

We have learned from our failures, but from our successes too. I was a member of Collectif 95 Maghreb-Egalité, a collective that brought together activists from Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco to prepare a proposal for a gender equality law to be presented at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. For months, we found ourselves in one country or another, working on

draft gender equality legislation for the Maghreb. We set aside our differences (and there were many!), constantly seeking consensus and focusing on what drew us together. One day, there was a dispute over the issue of polygamy: Algeria and Tunisia wanted to attack the question head first, in Morocco, it was more delicate. We talked, pounded fists, slammed doors, then resumed the discussion, listened, maintained the dialogue open, explained, fueled by an intense desire to achieve the same goal, even if we all did not agree on how to do it. This required aside setting egos and power relations in order to arrive in Beijing with shared, coherent material - and we succeeded. Because we knew we needed each other and that together we would be stronger to continue the fight. It was the precise word, at the time: fight. Because, as a reminder, these were the dark years when fundamentalism and then terrorism targeted women first.

### In concrete terms, how did you imagine this FTCl program?

Starting precisely from this actual experience! First of all, the fundamental need, in my opinion, for women to connect with their own being, to know how to assess their needs, their knowledge, their capacities ... I am thinking of one of our exercises, which seems very simple: everyone stands in a circle, and then a young girl walks towards another and must give her first name, followed by a special skill that characterizes her. In other words, something she knows how to do well. What this exercise can trigger is incredible! Fear, discomfort, emotion, and often tears... First, in the instructions, we quickly excluded everything to do with the kitchen, because what women admit to knowing how to do very well always relates to the role attributed to them: the participant who says that she knows how "to make chocolate cake very well" has become a classic! It is only after scraping the surface that this same participant admits that she can speak well (the "very well" remains difficult) three languages, or even four, or play the piano, or decipher and explain a diagram for a large audience ... None of us, or in any case very few, across generations, have been educated or trained to value ourselves or assert our own skills and strengths. By the end of the exercise, participants are frequently

## Context

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thrilled but disturbed: *"Isn't it a bit pretentious, the girl who is believes in herself?"* And is precisely what I wanted the FTCL program to do: lead young women to "believe", both in themselves, and in the group.

### It is like an inner journey...

For me, being a feminist is first of all a work on oneself that takes place through the body, emotions as well as thought, expression and above all caring. This is why I have insisted that our work be built with tools inspired by various influences: the feminist movement, the black American civil rights movement, the non-violence movement, and personal development. With one objective: to learn to communicate one's ideas, but also to know how to receive the ideas of others, to know how to perceive difference as a source of wealth rather than risk. One can fully integrate the needs of the other, even if they are not the same as ours, without losing sight of the issues and challenges of social power and without losing sight of the collective's need to change the situation.

This training program therefore moves the participant from the individual to the collective, is that the idea?

Exactly. There cannot be collective success without this individual comfort, and if success exists, it is often at the price of frustration, suffering, self-denial, power relations... This is everything that MWF no longer wants, having suffered ourselves within the women's movement.

## What do you mean by “individual comfort”?

It involves setting up what I call a liberated space, that is to say a place where women who are committed to their rights and who pay the price can feel safe (in English, it is called a "safe space"). Who has never heard, whether an activist or not, the classic type of comment, in the form of jokes or implicit reproaches: *"No matter what, you defend the rights of women!", "You want the end of men or what?", "But you have lots of rights, especially compared to other countries..."*, *"Aren't you going a bit far? Don't you think you are exaggerating a little?"*. So I wanted a place where women, engaged in the movement or at least sensitized to their own situation, could take some time for themselves, as an individual, while forming a group. Time to get to know themselves and to meet one another, to strengthen themselves individually and to reinforce each other. And, in addition, to create ties that will help them in their activism. All this in a beautiful setting, one both pleasant and comfortable, suited to games and the management of the group far from other distractions. The choice of such good conditions is to emphasize that our cause, and therefore the cost, is worth it.

Once a participant has reinforced her own self, supported by the group - because benevolence is an essential principle of our training program - she can then better consider her best place in a collective.

## In fact, the word "training" is not really appropriate...

That's true... even if it is named a training program, the FTCl project involves first and foremost providing this space "to be together", inspired by the feminist groups of the 1970s, in which it was essential that everyone felt safe and confident.

It is truly a very intense experience, very human and full of hope too. The theatre forum tool contributes a lot. I wanted a training program that did not just rely on thinking, but had instead lots of games and role playing. As I did not know how to do this, I went to seek the help of people who did. This is how I met Véronique

Guerrin and Cathy Lumaire, from Euficelle, an association working on relational development, who have contributed, among many other things, the wonderful theater forum tool. Inspired by Augusto Boal's theater of the oppressed, this technique seeks to re-stage seemingly irreconcilable conflict situations, drawing from the experiences of the participants, and interacting with the audience present. Together, the participants search for alternatives and solutions.

In the Mediterranean region, where some cannot directly attack their society or traditions, realizing that there is a field of possibilities, with different approaches to the same problem, is very powerful. And then we laugh a lot, and some, when they are playing a given role, let themselves feel anger for the first time in their lives and discover that they love it! It must be remembered that the FTCl experience brings together students, farmers, women who are unemployed and university graduates, coming from both capital cities and villages deep in the countryside. The theater forum, but also the entire program, gives each one the opportunity to take the floor.

Moreover, in the framework of our work, every person, organizer, presenter, guest, and participant shares the same space, the same status, and can express him/herself on what is happening, without exclusion or particular hierarchy. And believe me, this human fabric with which the FTCl program works, this experience of loneliness, suffering, doubt, and the struggle of women to realize themselves, leaves none of us, young or old, in-house team or outside players, insensitive or free from emotion. It is a very strong experience of solidarity: the history of each individual resonates in the others, even when they are from different cultural, social and geographical environments. Each of us has lived or experienced this process of self-learning.

### Why does the FTCl project only focus on young women?

Because its primary objective is to build the next generation of the women's movement. But our work completely recognizes the importance of mixing generations: our practitioners as well as our experts, invited to share their experience, are all older than the group, and rich with a long experience of activism. Their role during the training program is crucial for the atmosphere of serenity and gaiety; they must regularly check that the group formed is getting along well. And above all, they must regularly remind the group that they are counting on them, these young women who, in our eyes, are the next generation and embody hope, for today and tomorrow. Without investing in them too great a responsibility, nor "putting pressure on them," as they sometimes say!

## Will there ever be a FFIC project for all ages?

If we can find the resources, that is what we dream of doing! For concretely speaking, what does a feminist training in collective intelligence really mean? Working together, focusing on our points in common to defend the cause of women, which is, even if in different ways, so important to us all. Moreover, in our team, the experience of the FTCI program has given us a way to measure our own skills, which sometimes have been undervalued until then: Fawzia Baba Aissa, in charge of fundraising at MWF and a geneticist, is an excellent teacher and runs the module on sexuality; Samia Allalou films everything to form a documentary collection on contemporary feminism; Christine Buttin, a great computer scientist, provides brilliant alerts on social network security; Nadia Aissaoui, a sociologist and coach, is also a remarkable translator (our sessions are sometimes translated simultaneously into French, Arabic and Berber); Souad Belhaddad, a journalist and author, directs with much humor and panache the communication and self-esteem modules; and I myself, besides overseeing the entire program and often taking charge of the transmission of historical/ theoretical feminism, sometimes has to, as a psychologist, manage the emotions that can run strong.

Is being smart together for greater effectiveness a question of age? I sincerely believe that at any age, the women's cause always makes us smarter when we are together.

