

Sixty-eighth session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW68)

‘Accelerating the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls by addressing poverty and strengthening institutions and financing with a gender perspective’

Expert Group Meeting

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**Feminist approaches to resource mobilization to address
intersectional gender disparities**

* The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations.

Feminist approaches to resource mobilization to address intersectional gender disparities

Background and Context

The world is changing in ways that profoundly impact life as we know it, especially in the advancement of principles of social justice, equity, and equality. Across the globe, we are witnessing the rise of authoritarian regimes, restrictions on civic space and democratic organizing, the deep impact of economic and climate vulnerabilities and entrenched crises that are deeply gendered. While considerable amounts of money have been moved to support the Sustainable Development Goals, progress is slow at best and back-sliding in some critical indicators. Data shows that efforts to eradicate poverty need to be 26 times faster to reach the goal by 2030 and at the current rate of progress and it will take close to 300 years to remove discriminatory laws and close prevailing gaps in legal protections for women and girls.¹ Moreover, gender-based violence continues to be one of the most widespread and entrenched human rights violations. Both its prevalence and that of people living in poverty increased during Covid. This is particularly shocking as at the same time, the richest 1% dramatically increased their wealth and profits while underpaying both their taxes and their workers.² And none of this profit is going to the additional \$360 billion USD in annual investments that is needed to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment by 2030.³

The focus of the 2024 Commission on the Status of Women on Gender Financing is a key opportunity to assess where we are as a global community, to bring in new paradigms and frameworks to think about gender and poverty, reengage governments and funders to ensure that the global community builds on previous gains, recognize entrenched challenges and support those who are supporting gender equality and poverty alleviation at the local level. This paper discusses the importance of moving resources to women's organizations and funds that are key actors in holding governments accountable to their SDG commitments while also supporting communities most impacted by economic injustice, poverty and gender inequality. Women's funds leaders are trusted in the communities they serve and are key movers of resources – in strategic, flexible and sustainable ways - to local women's organizations. These groups are often the first respondents in moments of crises, are addressing the most deep-seeded root causes of gender equality, are developing alternative systems to support gender equality and poverty alleviation and are advocating with their governments to change the systems – such as unfair trade, taxes and finance systems – that lead to systemic poverty.

Feminist approaches to government accountability and alternative economic realities

Feminist leaders are demanding that governments do more to recognize their role as duty bearers for their citizens and those responsible for alleviating poverty, advancing gender equality and fulfilling the SDGs. They are also building new visions, frameworks and paradigms for a more sustainable and equitable future. Feminist leaders and organizations are creating alternative economic frameworks that center equity, wellness, sustainability and care as core and life sustaining. This includes building and demystifying knowledge on the gendered impact of poverty through research, anthologies,⁴ community organizing and popular economics,⁵ advancing alternative agendas to counter corporate power and extractivism,⁶ and

¹ UN Women. Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: the gender snapshot 2022. Accessible at <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/09/progress-on-the-sustainable-development-goals-the-gender-snapshot-2022>

² Oxfam. *Survival of the Richest: How we must tax the super-rich to fight inequality*. January 23, 2020 Access at <https://oxfamlibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/621477/bp-survival-of-the-richest-160123-en.pdf>

³Ibid, footnote 2

⁴ *Prayers for a Cruel Blessed World*. 2023. A Nawi Anthology. Access at <https://www.nawi.africa/prayers-for-a-cruel-blessed-world/>

⁵ Association for Women's Human Rights in Development. *Feminist Economies We Love*. Access at <https://www.awid.org/feminist-economies-we-love>

⁶ Feminist Africa. *Extractivism, Resistance, Alternatives*. Vol 2, Issue 1, 2021. Access at https://feministafrica.net/wpcontent/uploads/2021/04/fa_v2_issue1_full_issue_Extractivism_Resistance_Alternatives.pdf

proposing alternatives to taxation, debt relief and trade.⁷ Feminist researchers and activists are demanding global and state accountability through legally binding treaties on corporate power,⁸ advocacy with national governments to recognize and value care as well as the human rights of domestic and informal workers.⁹ They are creating alternatives such as feminist collectives, mutual solidarity networks, horizontal philanthropies and giving circles.¹⁰

Where is feminist funding for these issues?

While there is a lot of talk about the importance of decolonizing, shifting power, prioritizing local agendas in the philanthropic and development spaces, feminist leaders, researchers and activists that are advancing new economic models and working with the care economy, domestic and informal workers and activists are often some of the least well-paid workers in our world today. In the early 2000s, the Association for Women's Human Rights in Development (AWID) launched path-breaking research analyzing the funding landscape for women leaders and rights organizations. Their analysis, which covered the ten-year period following Beijing (1995–2005), revealed the inadequate funding of the women's rights movement. AWID's research, surveying close to 1,000 women's organizations across 94 countries globally, showed that two-thirds had budgets of less than \$50,000.¹¹ Moreover, there were significant decreases in the number of larger women's groups and networks with budgets over \$500,000, as many had been forced to close due to funding shortages and shifts to funding linked to gender mainstreaming and funding of inter-national NGOs after the Beijing Conference. In 2005, the collective income of women's rights organizations worldwide was \$79 million—as a comparison, this represents less than 4 per cent of the international NGO World Vision International's budget of almost \$2 billion that same year.¹²

The numbers represent a bleak picture and have not changed much since AWID's landmark research. Last year in 2022, organizations that work to advance women's rights receive only 0.13% of the total Official Development Assistance (ODA) and 0.4% of all gender-related aid.¹³ Even progressive private foundations in the U.S only allocated 0.42% of foundation grants to women's rights.¹⁴ Black, brown and indigenous-led organizations, LGBTQI and sex-worker-led groups receive even less.¹⁵ The Black Feminist Fund's research on funding for Black feminist groups showed that showed that a only 0.1% – 0.35% of foundation giving globally went to Black women, girls, and trans people, nearly 60% of Black feminist organizations have never received core funding and 81% of Black feminist organizations do not have enough money to meet their goals.

Moreover, of the funding that does exist most is projectized meaning that the entirety of the work is not funded; in most cases salaries are under resourced and it's not unusual for funders to explicit or implicitly expect free labor for this type of work. Their funding is critical as despite the growing attention to the importance of care in any economy, and to feminist economic alternatives, the voices and demands of

⁷ Global Tax Justice. *Framing Feminist Taxation*. Access at <https://globaltaxjustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/2021-06-02-Download-the-guide-in-English-EN-PDF.pdf>

⁸ Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. October 2021. *Feminists Demand an end to Corporate Impunity*. Access at <https://www.wilpf.org/feminists-demand-an-end-to-corporate-impunity/>

⁹ Association for Women's Human Rights in Development. 2023. *No Care Economies without Domestic Workers*. Accessed at https://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/2023-10/awid_care-economies-manifesto.pdf

¹⁰ Ibid, ft 5

¹¹ Association for Women's Human Rights in Development. *The State of Women's Organizing*. Fact Sheet One. Accessed at https://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/witm_-_factsheet_1.pdf

¹² Ibid, 20

¹³ OECD. 2019. *Aid to gender equality donor charts*. Access at <https://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-topics/Aid-to-gender-equality-donor-charts-2019.pdf>

¹⁴ Association for Women's Human Rights in Development. 2022. *Where is the Money for Feminist Organizing?* Access at https://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/2022-01/AWID_Research_WITM_Brief_ENG.pdf

¹⁵ Inside Philanthropy. *Black Feminists are Organizing with Little to No Funding*. 2023. Access at <https://www.insidephilanthropy.com/home/2023/10/5/black-feminists-are-organizing-with-little-to-no-funding-here-are-three-ways-to-change-that>

feminist economists, care and domestic workers are often absent from mainstream discourses on care work. The paradox is that even while women's and LBT leaders and organizations are drastically under-funded, they are advancing some of the most progressive strategies for envisioning and implementing a world that is equitable and fair. Multi-country research demonstrates that vibrant civil society women's movements are key to advancing feminist and social justice policies.¹⁶ Currently, there are very few countries where public funding sources exist to advance feminist agendas, and the alternative sources of funding are woefully insufficient.

What is needed to fund local organizations offering economic alternatives and holding governments' accountable?

In order for governments to achieve the SDGS, the philanthropic and international aid communities need to better fund local feminist organizations that are building a future that is based on feminist principles, and framed in equality, human rights, and social justice. Such a feminist agenda necessitates a shift from neo-liberal models of development to caring and just economies, where we uplift universal social policies around employment, health care and education, and where we strive collectively to end all forms of oppression, marginalization and discrimination. Funders must focus on ensuring that women and all marginalized communities have access to basic needs including food security, clear water, appropriate housing, living wages, and comprehensive health care, including services for sexual and reproductive health and rights. Care work must be revalued as essential work that is disproportionately undertaken by women, girls, trans, intersex, and gender diverse people. Care providers, especially those who face intersecting forms of discrimination and violence, need collective and holistic care as well as robust integrated protection measures.

Achieving this shift to a new world requires an honest assessment of how systems of colonialism, racism, and extraction have contributed to current inequalities in who has access to and power over resources. It entails systemic changes in how resources are redistributed,, requires that existing actors shift their policies and practices, and that new funders come to the table to create a more transparent, interconnected, and intersectional global feminist funding ecosystem.¹⁷ The value of a systems approach is that it enables feminist movements and funders to understand better how funding actors, sectors, and resources interact, and offers new and more responsive frameworks for resourcing and action for change. Many shifts need to take place in the funding landscape. This includes acknowledging funder privilege and power dynamics that can disrupt women's rights' organizations ability to pursue their own agendas. A starting point is for funders to embrace efforts to shift power in philanthropy, so that the funding relationships forged adhere to feminist organizational and funding principles. The paucity of funding—in particular, for radical and political movement-building work—is symptomatic of larger trends in funding that are risk-adverse and privilege larger organizations.¹⁸ Governments, aid organizations and private philanthropy should also support women's funds who work across the globe and have the capacity to move resources in flexible, sustainable and principled ways to local leaders and organizations.¹⁹

¹⁶ Htun, Mala and Laurel Weldon, July 2012. *The Civil Origins of Progressive Policy Change: Combatting Violence against Women in Global Perspective, 1975-2005*. The Cambridge University Press. Access at

<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/american-political-science-review/article/abs/civic-origins-of-progressive-policy-change-combating-violence-against-women-in-global-perspective-19752005/810036AC92E6A7E245A083E3EEE4EFA0>

¹⁷ AWID, Mama Cash and Count me In! Partnership. Nov 2020. *Moving More Money to the Drivers of Change: How bilateral and multilateral funders can resource feminist movements*. Access at https://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/MovingMoreMoney_FINALFINAL.pdf

¹⁹ Hessini, Leila. *The Impact of MacKenzie Scott's Resourcing of Women's Funds*, *The Alliance Magazine*. September 19, 2023. Accessed at <https://www.alliancemagazine.org/blog/the-impact-of-mackenzie-scotts-resourcing-of-womens-funds/>

Recommendations:

Women's organizations and civil society actors are essential to meeting the SDGs as they are engaged in holding governments, global actors and transnational organizations accountable while also creating different feminist economies, and responding to the needs of those most impacted by structural inequality and gender injustice. In order to better resource local women's groups, I propose the following key policy recommendations:

- Recognize that resourcing and supporting locally-led feminist movements and women's rights organizations is critical to addressing poverty, stopping the rollback, retrieving previous gains, and renewing progress.
- Recognize that women's and feminist groups are woefully underfunded and contributing essential unpaid and unrecognized labor to addressing poverty and global challenges.
- Support feminist and indigenous funds who can move money efficiently and effectively in crises and to support systemic intersectional change.
- Remove all policy and practical barriers to resourcing directly feminist movements and women's rights organizations.
- In the face of the current and expected cuts to ODA, governments should increase direct funding and seek new partnerships to move money directly to locally-led feminist movements and funds.
- Allocate 10% of OECD gender-equality principal funding directly to women's organizations and women's funds over the next five years that reaches local activists and groups working on gender and poverty.
- Require that all government and UN projects and initiatives have gender equality and equity as principal or significant objectives.
- Recognize that the participation (and resourcing to do so) of local feminist movements and organizations in the development and review of policy making, including ODA strategies and feminist foreign policies, is necessary for effective policy outcomes.
- Recognize that risk management systems that exclude women's rights organizations from consideration for funding need to be amended and take into account the risk - on rights and the entrenchment of intergenerational gendered poverty - that comes when women's groups cannot do their critical work.
- Provide core, multi-year, flexible funding and other types of support.
- Ensure that funds that are accessible in all languages and to those who most experience marginalization.
- Advocate that governments provide an enabling policy and legal environment for civil society organizing, and moving of resources.