
CSSF Women, Peace and Security Helpdesk

Funding for Women's Rights Organisations in Humanitarian Crises

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The Women Peace and Security Helpdesk, managed by Saferworld in partnership with Conciliation Resources, GAPS UK, University of Durham and Women International Peace Centre (WIPC), was established in December 2021 to increase capability across the UK Government on WPS policy and programming in order to make its work on conflict and instability more effective. If you work for the UK government and you would like to send a task request, please email us at wpshelpdesk@saferworld.org.uk. If you do not work for the UK government but have an enquiry about the helpdesk or this report, please email us at enquiries.wpshelpdesk@saferworld.org.uk

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Executive summary

Globally, humanitarian crises are intensifying in complexity and severity, with over a third of all countries requiring humanitarian assistance.¹ Women's rights organisations (WROs), women-led organisations (WLOs), along with LGBTQIA+ organisations, feminist youth-led organisations (YLOs), refugee-led organisations (RLOs) and organisations led by people with disabilities (OPDs) are frontline responders. Their connections with communities, built on trust and care, position them well to address immediate humanitarian needs, as well as to confront the structural and systemic inequalities that feed into crisis conditions. This places them as experts within their communities.

Despite this expertise, significant barriers to direct funding for these organisations persist. This report, drawing from key interviews with such organisations and from desk-based research, outlines four of these barriers:

1. Short-term, inadequate and inflexible funding: 'projectised' funding streams are often top-down and entrusted to international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), United Nations (UN) agencies and others.
2. Due diligence and risk: real or perceived risks connected with local organisations themselves or the environments in which they operate can make funders hesitant.
3. Administrative and reporting burdens: WROs/WLOs with limited capacity, time constraints and limited access to specific skills face onerous administrative burdens and multiple reporting requirements.
4. Absence from coordination and decision-making fora: local organisations are often not involved in developing funding streams, projects or allocations, meaning that their expertise and priorities are likely missed.

Ensuring an enabling environment for WROs, WLOs and local civil society organisations (CSOs) is a multi-stakeholder responsibility.² This report outlines numerous best practice examples from humanitarian funds, feminist funds and feminist networks/coalitions. Feminist funds have emerged from and are embedded in women's rights movements, often functioning as crucial intermediaries between larger funders and WROs/WLOs, particularly those working in the Global South, by offering new partnerships and funding modalities.³ Feminist networks

¹ European Commission (2020), Humanitarian crises around the world are becoming longer and more complex, https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/jrc-news-and-updates/humanitarian-crises-around-world-are-becoming-longer-and-more-complex-2020-11-20_en#:~:text=The%20INFORM%20Severity%20Index%20shows,going%20on%20in%2073%20countries

² UN Women (2020), How to Promote Gender Responsiveness in Humanitarian Action, Interagency Standing Committee, <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/sites/default/files/migrated/2020-05/UN%20Women%20-%20How%20to%20promote%20gender-responsive%20localisation%20in%20humanitarian%20action%20-%20Guidance%20Note.pdf>

³ International Rescue Committee (2023), Why Wait? How the Humanitarian System Can Better Fund Women-Led and Women's Rights Organisations, <https://www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/Why%20Wait%20-%20Full%20Report%20-%20English.pdf>

provide a feminist ecosystem to facilitate the work of grassroots and national feminist actors, which is often achieved through specific feminist funding streams to these actors. These funding modalities have demonstrated good practices of localised, feminist funding in crises, including the following:

- A.** Long-term, adequate and flexible funding: Feminist funds represent a transformative approach to the challenge of short-term, inadequate and inflexible funding in humanitarian contexts. Equality Fund, for example, has worked to provide financial support to the Ukrainian Women's Fund and FemFund Poland through their 'Prepare, Respond and Care' stream, with an extended grant period. Similarly, UNFPA/UNWOMEN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) had relative flexibility in the design of activities, allowed for a change of locations and adaptations of activities in contexts affected by ongoing conflict or political crises, where the situation was changing swiftly. This ensured that funds were used to address the needs in the most efficient and responsive way.⁴
- B.** Building feminist networks: Resourcing Change,⁵ a coalition of INGOs funded by the UK Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF), has supported 23 WROs in Nigeria, South Sudan and Yemen with an average of £35,000 each in flexible core funding, facilitating locally owned responses to crisis.
- C.** Considering and managing risk: In Afghanistan, the feminist coalition, Feminist Alchemy, has adapted creatively to the post-Taliban take-over, conducting consultations to understand alternative ways to move money and ease restrictions to support groups composed of as few as two or three women.
- D.** Reducing or sharing administrative and reporting burdens: The feminist fund MADRE has, with the input of their partners, developed easy-to-use monitoring, evaluation and learning templates to capture impact. It has also extended its reporting deadlines to lessen the burden on WROs/WLOs.
- E.** Inclusive coordination and decision-making: the Resourcing Refugee Leadership Initiative (RRLI) exemplifies how to resource and enable local organisations to be part of decision-making about funding. RRLI is a coalition of six refugee-led organisations, acts as an RLO-to-RLO pooled fund, and provides other programmatic support, including an RLOs' partnership programme which fosters peer-to-peer support and leadership development.

Small Grant Partnership Schemes: Innovative and accessible funding streams are being adopted for WLOs, including refugee-led WLOs (RWLOs) in crisis. For example, UNHCR has a threshold of USD\$12,000 per year, a less competitive funding stream with an easier vetting and screening process which allows diverse groups and partners that struggle to access funds to benefit. Funding practices and partnership principles have been adapted based on feedback from RWLOs. A UN Portal exists to track funding to WLOs to deliver on the Grand Bargain and to understand who is not receiving any. The following strategic questions have been identified specifically for the diverse stakeholders present at Wilton Park to discuss, based on the barriers and the examples of innovative practices summarised in this report:

⁴ Evaluation of UNFPA / UN Women GBV 2-year Emergency Response Fund (CERF) Block Grant, August 2023

⁵ Saferworld (2022), Resourcing change: supporting women's rights organisations in fragile and conflict-affected states. <https://www.saferworld-global.org/resources/publications/1406-resourcing-change-supporting-womenas-rights-organisations-in-fragile-and-conflict-affected-states>

- Given the vital role feminist networks and coalitions play during crises, including providing quality funding to WROs, what interest and scope is there for partnerships between feminist funds, and different humanitarian actors and funds?
- How do we learn from existing good practice of partnerships with WROs, and how do we scale these up?
- How can funding streams from philanthropy and government bilateral donors actively complement each other?
- How can risks of funding local WROs/WLOs be re-evaluated in relation to the greater risk of not impactfully funding these organisations?
- What are the main barriers that donor governments, such as the UK, continue to face with funding youth-led feminist movements, considering that these are key frontline voices in crisis-affected communities and hold considerable agency within these contexts? How can the UK Government more widely promote some of the good practices it has adopted?

Introduction

This report is intended to support discussions during the Wilton Park event on 'WROs in Crises: Pathways to Progress' in February 2024. It identifies actionable short- and medium-term pathways to progress effective funding for key civil society actors composed of and led by marginalised communities. Women's funds, private foundations, international organisations, the UN, governments, INGOs and other funders or donors can enact these pathways.

The report lays out the experiences of WROs/WLOs, and other organisations representing the most marginalised, in accessing humanitarian funding and decision-making to meet their context-specific needs in humanitarian crises. The report highlights four key barriers: short-term, inadequate and inflexible funding; due diligence and risk; onerous administrative and multiple reporting burdens; and absence from coordination and decision-making fora. The report goes on to highlight innovative examples of responding to crises (across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus or 'triple nexus') that aim to mitigate or overcome these barriers, looking particularly at different funding modalities – bilateral and multilateral funding, feminist funds and funding related to feminist networks/coalitions. Finally, the report closes by providing a list of recommendations and core strategic questions for discussion.

Methodology

The report is based on extensive secondary research in the form of a literature review, as well as drawing on 11 key informant interviews (KIIs)⁶ conducted across various geographic locations with individuals from WROs, larger NGOs, INGOs, bilateral government funding bodies and women's funds/feminist funds. Three of the interviews were conducted with organisations that are members of the Alliance for Feminist Movements Learning and Solutions Hub on 'Supporting feminist movements in crises'.⁷

Defining crisis

This report adopts a feminist approach to understanding crisis. A feminist perspective on crisis recognises gender-specific challenges and impacts, highlighting how patriarchal structures and gender dynamics can drive and contribute to ongoing crises, conflicts and the global climate crisis.⁸ A feminist approach to crises acknowledges that societal structures and power dynamics

⁶ Banks, S. et al (2013), *Everyday Ethics in Community-based Participatory Research*, Contemporary Social Science

⁷ This report aims to address the following questions:

Q 1: What are the innovative examples from feminist funding [philanthropy, women's funds, and bilateral government funding] of responding to crises, including across the triple development-humanitarian-peace nexus? What can we learn from feminist funding and grant-making in response to crises?

Q2: What are the key barriers to accessing humanitarian funding, coordination and decision-making that organisations representing the most marginalised face? This should include WLOs/WROs, OPDs, and LGBT+ organisations and groups. What are the examples of good practice of inclusive approaches to humanitarian localisation which specifically support and address different types of barriers, and learning from this?

⁸ Global Resilience Fund (2022), *The Feminist Humanitarian Response: a new approach to dismantle the humanitarian-industrial complex*, Alliance Magazine, <https://www.alliancemagazine.org/blog/feminist-humanitarian-response/>. There is no single definition of a feminist perspective on, or approach to, crises, but this paper gives a strong introduction to feminist humanitarian response; feminist approaches to crisis also encompass the global climate change crisis or human rights crises. See also Global Campus on Human Rights (2023), 'From crisis to social transformation: Embracing a feminist human rights-based approach to

intersect with gender, creating unique challenges and vulnerabilities for women, girls and gender-diverse individuals, as well as other marginalised groups such as refugees and people living with disabilities. This approach therefore addresses not just immediate threats but also the root causes and ongoing impacts of crises beyond the traditional humanitarian notion of crisis. As noted in one KII: “When a crisis is understood as a time-bound event, it can elicit a response that falls short in addressing the complex web of factors that enabled the crisis to have a differential impact on marginalised groups.” This approach reflects the key principles and purpose of the triple nexus.

Context

Three hundred million people are in humanitarian need today,⁹ driven by conflict and climate change, which has resulted in multiple and intersecting crises. There is an increasing duration of crisis;¹⁰ the average number of years of displacement for refugees is 20 years.¹¹ In these crisis contexts, CSOs – including WROs/WLOs, LGBTQIA+ organisations, OPDs and feminist YLOs – play an essential role in advocating for and safeguarding the rights of women, girls, LGBTQIA+ people, people with disabilities and other marginalised groups. CSOs often operate under constrained resources and face significant challenges in accessing humanitarian funding. Only 1.2 per cent of humanitarian funding goes directly to local organisations;¹² the proportion of this that is sent direct to local WLOs cannot yet be disaggregated. For development aid, the picture is similar: 99 per cent of development aid and foundation grants do not directly reach women's rights and feminist organisations.¹³ Those with intersecting marginalised identities receive even less funding; only \$26.4 million of humanitarian and development funding reached refugee WLOs in 2022.¹⁴ These challenges in funding are exacerbated by the lack of systematic tracking of funding earmarked for gender-related projects in crisis-affected settings; tracking funding is ‘critical to inform coordination, targeting and accountability’.¹⁵

preparedness’, <https://gchumanrights.org/gc-preparedness/preparedness-gender/article-detail/from-crisis-to-social-transformation-embracing-a-feminist-human-rights-based-approach-to-preparedness.html>; or Akina Mama wa Afrika, (2021), Global South perspectives on “Why the climate crisis is a feminist issue”, https://www.akinamamawaafrika.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/AKINA_Technical-brief-2021-Global-South-perspectives-on-Why-the-climate-crisis-is-a-feminist-issue.pdf

⁹ Humanitarian Action (2023), Global Humanitarian Overview 2024,

<https://humanitarianaction.info/document/global-humanitarian-overview-2024>

¹⁰ Development Initiatives (2023) ‘Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2023, Chapter Two: Characteristics of Crisis Need and Funding’ <https://devinit.org/resources/global-humanitarian-assistance-report-2023/>

¹¹ European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (2023), Forced displacement. Refugees, asylum-seekers, and internally displaced persons (IDPs), https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/what/humanitarian-aid/forced-displacement_en#:~:text=Forced%20displacement%20is%20no%20longer,10%20years%20for%20most%20IDPs accessed February 2024

¹² Development Initiatives (2023) ‘Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2023, Chapter Two: Characteristics of Crisis Need and Funding’, <https://devinit.org/resources/global-humanitarian-assistance-report-2023/>

¹³ CARE International (2023), Latest research shows aid cuts disproportionately affected spending on gender equality and support for women's rights organisations, <https://www.careinternational.org.uk/news-stories/latest-research-shows-aid-cuts-disproportionately-affected-spending-on-gender-equality-and-support-for-womens-rights-organisations/#:~:text=New%20research%20by%20CARE%20International,compared%20to%20a%20previous%20peak>; GNWP (2021), Fund us like you want us to win: Feminist Solutions for more Impactful Financing for Peacebuilding,

https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/fund_us_like_you_want_us_to_win.gnwp_gppac_ican_wilpf_kvinnamadre_211122.pdf

¹⁴ Caitlin Sturridge, Fran Girling-Morris, Alexandra Spencer, Anshira Kara and Carina Chicet (2023), The Failure to fund Refugee-led Organisations, ODI, https://odi.cdn.ngo/media/documents/HPG_report_funding_to_RLOs_final.pdf

¹⁵ Development Initiatives (undated), Tracking humanitarian funding to local actors: what we've learnt, <https://devinit.org/blog/tracking-humanitarian-funding-local-actors/?nav=more-about> ,

Commitments to address inequalities in funding are an integral part of the localisation agenda.¹⁶ The Grand Bargain urges international actors to allocate 25 per cent of all their humanitarian funding to local and national actors, including women-led CSOs, yet most signatories have not met these targets.¹⁷ The low reporting levels on funding proportions for WROs and WLOs specifically reflect the reality that, although a common definition of WLOs was agreed at the end of 2023,¹⁸ many stakeholders do not yet have systems in place to track funding to those organisations. At the global level, questions remain regarding the effectiveness of the existing monitoring mechanisms – including the financial tracking system of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) – to account for how much funding is directly reaching WROs/WLOs and other relevant organisations. Specific organisational tracking systems are not required by donors or the Financial Tracking Service (FTS), and most relevant organisations do not have them. At the national level, there are similar questions around how far guidance on preparing Humanitarian Needs Overviews (HNOs) and Humanitarian Response Plans (HRPs) take into account the existence and needs of WROs/WLOs.¹⁹

¹⁶ OECD, Report on women's rights organisations, <https://www.oecd.org/dac/gender-development/OECD-report-on-womens-rights-organisations.pdf>

¹⁷ IASC (2023), Grand Bargain Annual Independent Report 2023, <https://devinit.org/blog/tracking-humanitarian-funding-local-actors/?nav=more-about%20%20>

¹⁸ IASC Gender Reference Group (2023), Guidance Note on Funding Women-Led Organizations in Humanitarian Action, <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-reference-group-gender-and-humanitarian-action/iasc-gender-reference-group-guidance-note-funding-women-led-organizations-humanitarian-action>

Main findings: barriers to accessing humanitarian funding, coordination and decision-making

This section identifies four forms of barriers inherent in different modalities of financing – bilateral and multilateral government funding, funding from international agencies (INGOs and the UN), feminist funds, and feminist networks/coalitions) that impact WROs/WLOs/local CSOs. The complexity and interconnectedness of the barriers below might explain the viewpoint of one interviewee that “*large-scale institutional humanitarian responses often miss how they may exacerbate existing inequalities on the ground and are not set up to respond to the interconnection of crises globally*”.

Short-term, inadequate and inflexible funding

WLOs and WROs face significant challenges in accessing humanitarian aid as much funding remains short-term despite the increasingly protracted nature of crises, and as such is not well-matched to a feminist approach to crisis that seeks to address both deeper roots and longer-lasting impacts (see ‘Defining Crisis’ above). The total funding available is inadequate for the needs of the people these organisations represent, and often is available not for core funds,²⁰ but for projects with set targets, restricted logical frameworks, or other limitations. As a result, funding is inflexible and cannot be easily adjusted based on crisis developments and community needs. This is largely due to a significant portion of international humanitarian financing being channelled through governments and international agencies before reaching WROs/WLOs and other local CSOs.²¹ A lack of direct funding remains one of the main challenges in addressing these barriers, with little upward trajectory in the proportion of humanitarian funding going direct to local organisations.²²

Multi-donor pooled funds (MDFs), intended for coordinated donor approaches, frequently result in projects determined at a high level between the funding actors involved, often responding to

²⁰ Women for Women, Saferworld, WILPF (2022), Resourcing change: supporting women’s rights organisations in fragile and conflict-affected states, <https://www.saferworld-global.org/resources/publications/1406-resourcing-change-supporting-womenas-rights-organisations-in-fragile-and-conflict-affected-states>. This paper contains useful definitions of ‘core’ and flexible funding, to wit: “Core can be used to cover a broad range of activities or costs based on the WRO’s strategic priorities and on commonly identified gaps, such as core costs (for example, staffing and administration costs), core functions (monitoring, evaluation and learning and financial systems), capacity strengthening initiatives and/or programming costs; Flexible means that expenditure is based on the WRO’s independent strategic assessment of its needs, can be adjusted based on new learning, community requests/needs or emerging crises or context changes, supports WROs in their institutional/organisational capacity to thrive as part of a dynamic, mobilised and independent civil society space that is sustainably resourced and equipped to provide meaningful and long-term support for gender equality and Women, Peace, and Security’.

²¹ OXFAM (2020), Women Leading Locally: Exploring women’s leadership in humanitarian action in Bangladesh and South Sudan, <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/women-leading-locally-exploring-womens-leadership-in-humanitarian-action-in-ban-620937/>

²² Development Initiatives (2023) ‘Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2023, notes that the 1.2% share is unchanged in 2022 from 2021, jointly the lowest proportions since 2018.

HRPs that are themselves devised at a high level. As a consequence of such indirect funding and the sectorisation of humanitarian assistance and HRP, ²³ frontline organisations are frequently unable to determine what funding is available to them, which restricts community-driven initiatives, locally owned solutions and adaptability to rapidly shifting contexts. ²⁴ In addition, the selection of partners in such projects can appear to prioritise civil society actors fitting pre-determined humanitarian priorities rather than the less traditional and marginalised civil society actors doing impactful work within communities. ²⁵ According to one interviewee these funding types “look for and fund the parts of civil society that [funders] recognise: professionalised development and advocacy CSOs”. While pooled funds are seen as a way to meeting some Grand Bargain commitments, and the tracking of funds reaching location organisations from pooled funds is clearer than from other funding routes, ²⁶ OCHA reported that it allocated only \$35.8 million from its CBPFs to WROs/WLOs specifically in 2021, which is 3.5 per cent of the total sum. ²⁷

Engrained notions may inform prejudiced approaches to local organisations. For example, an interviewee noted that refugee WLOs are often considered less responsible and capable, because of the misconception of refugees as vulnerable people and because of the ‘unstable’ conditions in which they operate. There are also structural barriers to accessing financial services or legally registering as an organisation that mean such refugee WLOs cannot carry out financial audits or receive money transfers to access certain funding. These are explored further in the section below. At their root, however, these structural barriers may also be tied to an issue of trust – as one interviewee said, “How can they convince risk-averse donors that they are capable of managing funds when they are not given funding to manage in the first place?” ²⁸

Due diligence and risk

Heightened real and perceived risks surrounding local organisations, especially in restrictive crisis environments, feed into longer and more complicated processes of due diligence and reporting. An interviewee from a multilateral donor organisation explained how this risk (perception) gets embedded in funding structures: “We can only give 5,000 US dollars to an organisation without it being a competitive process.” ²⁹ As soon as the fund exceeds \$5,000 then the organisation is required to compete against others through a commercial process, which advantages larger organisations. As they are predominantly able to receive only small amounts of funding, these less-resourced WROs/WLOs are restricted from building their internal capacity, credibility and sustainability, whilst also carrying out their basic activities safely in crisis contexts. Donors’ preference for well-resourced and well-established organisations fosters an environment where WROs/WLOs are forced to compete for smaller, inflexible and top-down funds rather than seeking

²³ Norwegian Refugee Council (2022), Pooled funds: the new humanitarian silver bullet?, https://www.nrc.no/globalassets/pdf/reports/pooled-funds/nrc_pooled-funds_the-new-humanitarian-silver-bullet_report.pdf;

²⁴ Norwegian Refugee Council (2022), Pooled funds: the new humanitarian silver bullet?, https://www.nrc.no/globalassets/pdf/reports/pooled-funds/nrc_pooled-funds_the-new-humanitarian-silver-bullet_report.pdf; see also ICVA (2023), Pooled Funding at a Crossroads: A Comprehensive Review And Analysis <https://www.icvanetwork.org/uploads/2023/06/Pooled-Funding-at-a-Crossroads-A-Comprehensive-Review-and-Analysis.pdf>

²⁵ Intrac (2015), Multi-donor funds for civil society: choices and dilemmas, <https://www.intrac.org/resources/multi-donor-funds-civil-society-choices-dilemmas/>

²⁶ Norwegian Refugee Council (2022), Pooled funds: the new humanitarian silver bullet?, https://www.nrc.no/globalassets/pdf/reports/pooled-funds/nrc_pooled-funds_the-new-humanitarian-silver-bullet_report.pdf

²⁷ International Rescue Committee (2023), Why Wait? How the Humanitarian System Can Better Fund Women-Led and Women’s Rights Organisations, <https://www.rescue.org/eu/report/why-wait-how-humanitarian-system-can-better-fund-women-led-and-womens-rights-organisations>

²⁸ Key Informant Interview, December 2023

²⁹ Key Informant Interview, December 2023.

assistance for ambitious and long-term plans aimed at structural changes in gender power relations. Many of the interviewees for this research indicated this vicious cycle: greater perceived risk results in less effective and available funding for WROs/WLOs in crisis settings, which prevents their developing effective risk management, excluding them from funding.

Bilateral government funding, bound by legislative and legal requirements, faces numerous challenges in dealing with risk management, in part due to an increasing amount of anti-terrorist legislation in place for donor states. Local CSOs working on conflict mediation with armed groups may be excluded from accessing such funds, as their work could include providing services to those considered as ‘terrorists’ on international lists. Ninety per cent of surveyed WROs/WLOs across 61 countries reported that counter-terrorism measures impede their work for women’s rights and gender equality.³⁰

Gender-based programming is more ‘sensitive’ – or entails heightened risk surrounding the safety and security of organisations and their staff – when WROs/WLOs or LGBTQIA+ organisations are under the scrutiny of repressive governments. Such governments can block transfers of funds or suspend or deny granting of legal registration. For example, UNHCR observed that reporting work for an RWLO who could be political refugees presents challenges as their work remains invisible and may pose an increased risk to the funder and the organisation.³¹ The other form of risk perceived by donors is associated with many WROs/WLOs, LGBTQIA+ organisations and others being unregistered by choice to avoid associated security risks. Sanction regimes can further hinder direct funding.³² As one interviewee explained, “*We see it more and more that donors are also States and that they are also driven by politics and women’s rights and (therefore) women’s bodies become very political in certain crises.*” This politicisation can further curtail already limited WRO/WLO funding for reasons unrelated to the efficacy and urgency of programming. A recent example is the German Government temporarily suspending aid to Palestine after the beginning of the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.³³ Furthermore, an interview with a feminist fund highlighted how funding young girls and activists is considered another layer of risk for donors due to working with minors; this youth-focused funder key informant proposed considering “*...the risk of not funding these groups with such important access to respond, which is deeply lifesaving and important to sustain social justice and feminism*”.³⁴

Feminist funds and networks, as intermediary bodies, still encounter difficulties in transferring funds, especially in high-risk environments, despite their closer ties with those working on the ground. One key informant gave the example of Afghanistan: “*We cannot send money due to audits to Afghanistan directly. Because of where our office is based, we cannot contract with money service providers, we have to have a separate contract who [understands] the way the organisation works.*”³⁵

Administrative and reporting burdens

While INGOs and larger established organisations are often assumed to be able to absorb the bureaucratic workload that comes with funding, frontline organisations like WROs/WLOs often do not have the capacity or access to training to comply with increasingly demanding administrative

³⁰ International Human Rights Clinic (2017), Tightening the purse strings: What countering terrorism financing costs gender equality and security, Duke University

<https://law.duke.edu/sites/default/files/humanrights/tighteningpursestrings.pdf>

³¹ Key Informant Interview, December 2023

³² Key Informant Interview, December 2023

³³ SEEK Development (2023), Germany suspends funding to Palestine,

https://donortracker.org/policy_updates?policy=germany-suspends-funding-to-palestine-2023

³⁴ Key Informant Interview, December 2023

³⁵ Key Informant Interview, December 2023

and reporting requirements from donors and intermediaries. In instances where funds have ‘capacity-building’ opportunities, these are said to be often focused on building the technical skills required to complete the rigorous reporting and administrative expectations of the fund. Practitioners suggest a ‘shift towards support for capacity-sharing, rather than the top-down model of capacity-building’.³⁶

Certain requirements are impossible to meet: ‘Women-led organisations and women’s rights organisations are required by key international donors to have 10–30% of their own funds’³⁷ (in the common practice of ‘match funding’). Yet the absence of accessible funding can add to the vicious cycle for many WROs/WLOs. A local Iraqi organisation, interviewed for this report, received funding from a UN agency which the interviewee said enhanced

the recognition of their work internationally. However, following a capacity assessment, the UN advised the organisation to enhance its financial department to meet high-level audits, focusing on compliance rather than addressing the needs of either the organisation or the community that the organisation works with. A high turnover of staff among funders of all types exacerbates the difficulty in establishing trusted, long-term relationships permitting easier administration and reporting duties.

Coordination and decision-making

Barriers to the inclusion of local WROs and WLOs in humanitarian coordination and decision-making fora include: international actors not recognising them as experts and first responders;³⁸ an absence of mapping and knowledge of who the local relevant actors are; limited and less effective dedicated spaces to ensure gender inclusion in humanitarian response; the lack of women, particularly national and local women in coordinating structures and consultations;³⁹ cultural and language biases; and patriarchal (as well as heteronormative, ableist and other exclusionary) structures and practices.⁴⁰

At the country level, there have been endeavours to involve WLOs in CBPF and HCT advisory boards, alongside the creation of women-exclusive advisory boards. However, most of the time WLOs remain absent from these leadership and decision-making roles, which are imperative to defining strategies and funding distribution mechanisms for countries. Often these positions fulfil tokenistic representation, rather than shifting whose voices are listened to.

There have been efforts to include more WLOs/WROs in gender-based violence coordination structures, such as the Gender-Based Violence Area of Responsibility (GBV AoR), coordinated by the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), which provides a strategic platform to improve international coordination processes around humanitarian GBV prevention and response. However,

³⁶ CAFOD, CARE and ActionAid (2020), Perspectives from local women-led organisations and women’s rights organisations, <https://actionaid.org/sites/default/files/publications/WLO-Covid19-Joint%20Policy%20Brief.pdf>

³⁷ Bela Kapur and Ola Saleh (2020), A right not a gift, Kvinna till Kvinna, <https://kvinnatillkvinna.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/A-Right-Not-A-Gift.pdf>

³⁸ UN Women (2020), How to promote gender-responsive localization in humanitarian action, <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/sites/default/files/migrated/2020-05/UN%20Women%20-%20How%20to%20promote%20gender-responsive%20localisation%20in%20humanitarian%20action%20-%20Guidance%20Note.pdf>

³⁹ International Rescue Committee (2023), Why Wait? How the Humanitarian System Can Better Fund Women-Led and Women’s Rights Organisations, <https://www.rescue.org/eu/report/why-wait-how-humanitarian-system-can-better-fund-women-led-and-womens-rights-organisations>

⁴⁰ Bela Kapur and Ola Saleh (2020), A right not a gift, Kvinna till Kvinna, <https://kvinnatillkvinna.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/A-Right-Not-A-Gift.pdf>

respondents reported limited opportunities for leading decisions on humanitarian response priorities and activities within the Country GBV Sub-Clusters.⁴¹

Another consequence of the absence of WROs/WLOs and organisations of other marginalised groups is that, as conversations on the slow implementation of the triple nexus in country-level fora have not included them, the humanitarian system is failing to learn from their robust experiences in overcoming divisions and fragmentation.⁴²

⁴¹ International Rescue Committee (2023), Why Wait? How the Humanitarian System Can Better Fund Women-Led and Women's Rights Organisations, <https://www.rescue.org/eu/report/why-wait-how-humanitarian-system-can-better-fund-women-led-and-womens-rights-organisations>

⁴² Action Aid (2022), Leading the Way: The Nexus through a Feminist Lens, <https://www.actionaid.org.uk/publications/leading-way-nexus-through-feminist-lens>

Main findings: best practices and innovative examples of feminist funding responding to crises

Pooled funds, feminist funds and feminist networks have developed practices that not only navigate but also aim to counter the barriers WROs/WLOs face in accessing humanitarian funding. Some partnerships with intermediaries offer examples of non-direct yet positive practice for examples, INGOs who have worked on the triple nexus and gender are moving into the space of feminist funding. This section highlights how these entities have adopted approaches that enhance flexibility, responsiveness and partnerships to support WROs and WLOs in crisis settings and mitigate the barriers outlined above.

Long-term, adequate and flexible funding

Feminist funds represent a transformative approach to the challenge of short-term and inflexible funding in humanitarian contexts. Feminist funds have emerged from and are embedded in women's rights movements, operating at global, regional and national levels to provide grassroots movements with sustainable financing and other resources to support their visions of social justice.⁴³ They often serve as crucial intermediaries between larger funders and WROs/WLOs, particularly those working in the Global South, by offering new partnerships and funding modalities. These funds are critical in renegotiating power dynamics, taking on the administrative burden of donor coordination, and allowing local organisations to focus time and resources on their work. Often, crisis approaches through feminist funds include rapid response grants, which have been prioritised since COVID-19, and medium- and long-term grants to ensure sustained core funding for WROs/WLOs. They can facilitate rapid, adaptable financial support and foster deeper connections between large donors and local WROs/WLOs, ensuring more responsive and sustainable funding strategies.

For example, Equality Fund worked rapidly to provide financial support to the Ukrainian Women's Fund and FemFund Poland, which facilitates the crisis-response of WLOs/WROs in the region. Their 'Prepare, Respond and Care' grant-making stream provides support in crisis situations, having distributed \$3.5 million in grants in 2023, more than 20 times the previous year's amount, to crises including floods in Pakistan and earthquakes in Turkey and Syria.⁴⁴ This grant was built through consultations with 25 partners, peer funders and activists working within crisis settings. By providing grants to regional women's funds, the Equality Fund to has been able to extend the length of the grants to individual WROs/WLOs.

⁴³ Prospera, [Women's and Feminist Funds](#), Accessed February 2024

⁴⁴ Equality Fund (2023), Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy is key to addressing our biggest global challenges, <https://equalityfund.ca/policy/canadas-feminist-international-assistance-policy-is-key-to-addressing-our-biggest-global-challenges/#:~:text=In%20the%20wake%20of%20Russia's,LGBTQI%2B%20activists%20in%20the%20region>

Additionally, these can include the pooling of funding together with other feminist funds, such as the Urgent Action Sister Funds (UAF), who worked together during the Taliban takeover to facilitate donor connections and coordinated contacts for asylum applications and visas.⁴⁵ Other support models include participatory grant-making that places the voices of local WROs/WLOs at the centre of grant-making decisions through means such as establishing a panel of representatives to decide allocations and defining the grant-making criteria with affected communities.⁴⁶ Finally, support can extend beyond financial assistance; for example, psychosocial support and network-building. These funds offer a more transparent and trust-based relationship between partners and donors, one that can respond to crises and inform funders about impending crises, strengthening the ability to fund gender-transformative early warning systems and sustainable prevention, again reflecting the spirit of a nexus approach.⁴⁷ This fosters flexibility, allowing WROs/WLOs to self-determine their work, respond to changing environments and secure funding for core operating costs.

An example of grouped feminist funds is the UAF Sister Funds, a global consortium of four feminist funds: UAF for Feminist Activism, UAF Asia & Pacific, UAF Latin America & the Caribbean, and UAF Africa. UAF Africa has responded to the Sudan crisis through 44 grants offering movement-informed support, including over \$100,000 in rapid response grants for relocation, medical supplies and psychosocial support, among other forms of backing, all grounded in the principles of intersectional feminism.⁴⁸ MADRE is another example of a feminist fund adapting its grant making to be more aligned to local needs. It offers rapid response grants to defenders in high-risk contexts, addressing digital and physical security, as well as providing medical, legal and relational support. This approach helps donors address risks – rather than avoiding funding all together. During the COVID-19 pandemic, MADRE's flexible funding approach supported food security in Yemen, Syria, the Philippines, Sudan and Colombia, empowering women peacebuilders in these countries. They permitted significant flexibility in budget and project adjustments, with up to 20 per cent allowance for budgetary changes and changes in project outputs without prior approval.⁴⁹

Building feminist networks

Feminist networks and coalitions play a key role in advancing gender equality and directly providing support to local organisations by offering sub-granting. One example is Resourcing Change,⁵⁰ a coalition of INGOs funded by the UK Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF). The coalition has supported 23 WROs in Nigeria, South Sudan and Yemen with an average of £35,000 in flexible core funding. These funds enable WROs to undertake independent and strategic work aligned with their own priorities; exchange lessons learned and facilitate South–

⁴⁵ Urgent Fund Asia and Pacific (2022), Collective Power: Responding to the Afghanistan Crisis, <https://uafanp.medium.com/collective-power-responding-to-the-afghanistan-crisis-d9f8f30285b9>

⁴⁶ Coalition of Feminists for Social Change (COFEM), (2021), Applying a Feminist Lens to Grantmaking for Addressing Violence Against Women and Girls: Funding for Transformative Change, https://cofemsocialchange.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Guide-to-Grantmaking_19.10.21.pdf; for a specific example of a participatory grant-maker, see Mama Cash and their description of such grant-making: <https://www.mamacash.org/resources/sharing-power/#:~:text=Participatory%20grantmaking%2C%20on%20the%20other,the%20feminist%20movements%20more%20broadly>. Accessed February 2024

⁴⁷ UN Women (2012), Gender-Responsive Early Warning: Overview and How-to Guide, <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2012/10/WPSSourcebook-04E-GenderResponsiveEarlyWarning-en.pdf>

⁴⁸ Hakima Abbas (2023), The Black feminists that broke philanthropy's inaction in Sudan, Alliance <https://www.alliancemagazine.org/blog/the-black-feminists-that-broke-philanthropys-inaction-in-sudan/>

⁴⁹ See MADRE website for further details: <https://www.madre.org/campaign/rapid-response-rapid-action/>

⁵⁰ WILPF, Women for Women International and Saferworld (2022), Resourcing change: supporting women's rights organisations in fragile and conflict-affected states, <https://www.saferworld-global.org/resources/publications/1406-resourcing-change-supporting-womenas-rights-organisations-in-fragile-and-conflict-affected-states>

South learning; and foster local, regional and international networks of civil society actors. A member of one Yemeni WRO said, *"the flexibility of the grant was an important feature in easing the transition between projects, and in allowing lessons learnt during implementation to change and shape the project while it was still being implemented"*. The Resourcing Change consortium increased financial security and sustainability and strengthened the capacity of partners to understand and address risk.⁵¹

ICAN's Innovative Peace Fund (IPF) is another example, offering bridge funding in crises to cover operational costs, therefore enabling WROs/WLOs to adapt to crisis settings while ensuring their core needs remain funded. The IPF includes both a rapid response fund for urgent crises and bridge funding, which provides temporary support to existing partners to sustain their organisations during times when their long-term projects are suspended.⁵² Feminist networks/coalitions like ICAN's IPF prioritise organisational strength and sustainability over particular project success, which allows funders to consider context, early warnings and structural support.

Considering and managing risk

Pooling funding between feminist funds brings together financial streams and knowledge across different funding stakeholders, which distributes risks associated with local partner selection in high-risk environments and mitigates consequences. This approach, often involving larger agencies contracting national NGOs to distribute funds to smaller CSOs, is considered less risky and more impactful.

Feminist Alchemy – a collective of 14 feminist funds from around the world supported by Prospera – describes pooled funding as a way to demonstrate the effectiveness of funding WROs/WLOs without full financial commitment and risk absorption from donors. In Afghanistan, Feminist Alchemy has adapted creatively to the post-Taliban take-over, conducting consultations to understand alternative ways to move money and ease restrictions to support groups composed of as few as two or three women. *"We changed systems, became more flexible and this included support from the finance team, leadership and everyone."*⁵³ To overcome the financial transfer restrictions to WLOs/WROs, feminist funds prefer the Hawala system over banks (which are easily monitored). This includes the involvement of rigorously vetted individuals outside the country to facilitate safe money transfers. One interviewee explained that *"this took longer but was safer. There are a number of organisations being prosecuted for working on women's rights or women so mindful not to put anyone at risk. Additionally, continuous consultations and staff members worked together with finance and operation teams to address digital and personal security concerns"*.⁵⁴

Other pooled funds offer greater flexibility, like the START fund, which implements a tiered due diligence model. By demonstrating risk management in other ways specific to their set-up and operating context, this model is more inclusive for members that cannot evidence risk management through the traditional compliance expected of established INGOs. The Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF) is notable for responding to contexts where WROs/WLOs may not be registered, such as in Myanmar and Afghanistan, often negotiating exceptions with

⁵¹ WILPF, Women for Women International and Saferworld (2022), Resourcing change: supporting women's rights organisations in fragile and conflict-affected states, <https://www.saferworld-global.org/resources/publications/1406-resourcing-change-supporting-womenas-rights-organisations-in-fragile-and-conflict-affected-states>

⁵² ICAN, [Innovative Peace Fund](#), Accessed February 2024

⁵³ Key Informant Interview, December 2023

⁵⁴ Key Informant Interview, December 2023

UN agencies. Unregistered WROs/WLOs are encouraged to apply in consortia with registered organisations, which enables them to overcome the restrictions on funding unregistered organisations; WPHF are, therefore, able to “access other women’s organisations who are not registered because of the work they are doing, which puts them at risk or because they don’t have capacity to be registered”.⁵⁵ This can be seen through the CBPFs Simplified Capacity Assessment Pilot in Ukraine, which implemented adaptations to enable immediate response to the full-scale invasion. For example, a time-bound waiver was approved to facilitate funding for organisations, without the need for a full capacity assessment; instead, proxies were used.⁵⁶

WPHF have effectively adapted their approaches according to the environment of the WROs/WLOs by considering what language will be counter-productive and put partners at further risk if they do get funding. For example, in Uganda – where it is difficult to work on LGBTQIA+ issues and doing so can risk the safety of LGBTQIA+ people themselves – WPHF does not put explicit language in the proposals but continues to support projects working on LGBTQIA+ issues. In Myanmar, the call for proposals was disseminated through trusted partners and women’s networks, rather than made public. The WPHF Rapid Response Window is a grant model that works through a conflict prevention perspective, channelling funds via an INGO partner who assumes risk on behalf of the WROs/WLOs/local CSOs.

The Global Resilience Fund,⁵⁷ hosted by Purposeful,⁵⁸ addresses the limited access to funding for young, often unregistered feminist groups by offering long-term core funding. During a crisis, they proactively reach out to their existing youth partners to see if they require financial support. Their participatory grant-making approach allows young activists to make significant decisions, responding to their diverse needs. Women’s Fund Asia specifically funds groups where women, trans and intersex individuals constitute 60–70 per cent of leadership and staff. However, in response to repressive environments, many WROs/WLOs have appointed men as directors and staff leads. WFA are continuing to support such groups whilst ensuring that gender power dynamics are challenged.

Edge Effect specialises in LGBTQIA+ inclusion, providing consulting work to UN agencies to better include people of all gender identities in their programme designs and monitoring and evaluation, as well as providing granting to LGBTQIA+ organisations. Edge Effect has raised awareness on the fact that digitalisation of social protection and cash-based assistance raises specific access and protection issues for people with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics, such as risks around collecting and managing data, and has adapted their funding mechanisms to protect the identities and rights of those that require their services.

It is important to reflect on risk management practices for WLOs beyond the traditional lens: *“When we speak about risk related to funding local organisations and groups, it’s important to unpack who is actually at risk in crisis. Whose body and life are being threatened during the crisis? How are donors and funding allowing the organization to take care of themselves when funding local organizations, local groups and protesters? What is the true extent of risk? Defining risk should not only be conceptualized from a financial view: for people and activists fleeing, what security do they have? We should weave in care as part of risk management in crisis.”*⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Key Informant Interview, December 2023

⁵⁶ Ukraine Humanitarian Fund (2024), Ukraine Simplified Capacity Assessment-Background Note.

⁵⁷ See website at <https://www.theglobalresiliencefund.org/>

⁵⁸ See website at <https://wearepurposeful.org/>

⁵⁹ Key Informant Interview, December 2023

Reduced or shared administrative and reporting burdens

To reduce administrative and reporting burdens, the WPHF fund mentioned above has simplified application forms for funding and adapted this based on feedback from WROs/WLOs. *"We've held information sessions where people can join online and ask questions and we can guide them through the application template. This has been recognised as a good practice and provided fairness to everyone. Tutorials are recorded and put on our website for others who were not able to attend to access and for anyone else who prefers to watch it again to do so".*⁶⁰ WPHF has also refined its reporting processes. Initially, the fund's impact indicators for each of the six areas were inadequate to capture the work of local women's organisations, especially within the short time-frames during crises. Now, WPHF applies a 'nested model' with specifically tailored indicators aligned to the work of WROs/WLOs on the ground.⁶¹

Feminist funds like MADRE have worked to develop easy-to-use monitoring, evaluation and learning templates with the input of the WROs/WLOs they partner with. MADRE have also extended reporting deadlines, especially in crises. As noted by a Yemeni organisation interviewee, *"MADRE has given us less reporting and changed their templates, which has been amazing, to help with clear and easy reporting procedures, whilst extending the deadline by eight months".*⁶²

Global Fund for Women, as part of Feminist Alchemy, work closely with grantees to co-design success metrics that resonate with grassroots leaders. They explained how their *"M&E mechanisms have continued to evolve beyond proposal [theories of change] and cumbersome reporting processes to sometimes holding conversations and documenting those stories. The rich reports are collected when the organisations feel safe and able to provide a narrative and do so to narrate what happened, how they worked on it, etc."*⁶³

ICAN's IPF moves away from traditional narrative reporting, allowing organisations to use a format that helps them evaluate their own strengths. This approach not only provides a more accurate reflection of impact but also empowers organisations to identify areas for further development.

Other innovative methods of adaptive reporting included using WhatsApp voice notes or online discussion meetings to demonstrate best practices. One interviewee noted, *"We must have different understandings of what impact is and having more of a transformative approach to this."*⁶⁴ Adaptive monitoring and evaluation provide the space for community-led determination of impact and encourages clearer and more realistic goals. Despite these evolving mechanisms, donors continue to have strict standards that feminist funds are required to negotiate with on behalf of their partners to protect the potential and impact of their innovations.

Inclusive coordination and decision-making

It is important to ensure the inclusion and representation of marginalised groups in leadership, coordination and decision-making. Resourcing Refugee Leadership Initiative (RRLI) is a coalition of six refugee-led organisations, which acts as an RLO-to-RLO pooled fund, which in 2022 was the third largest funder of RLOs. RRLI provides funding alongside other programmatic support, including an RLOs partnership programme. This fosters peer-to-peer support, leadership

⁶⁰ Key Informant Interview, December 2023.

⁶¹ Key Informant Interview, December 2023

⁶² Key Informant Interview, December 2023

⁶³ Key Informant Interview, December 2023

⁶⁴ Key Informant Interview, December 2023

development, and assists in overcoming location- and context-specific barriers to funding, while connecting RLOs to donor networks. This initiative offers seed funding of up to \$35,000 to smaller organisations and scaling funding of \$100,000 to \$200,000 for organisations with the capability to increase impact. They work actively to embed refugee inclusion and leadership throughout the process.⁶⁵

Including WROs/WLOs in advisory boards for humanitarian aid delivery funds is both a driver and a result of increased funding to WROs/WLOs.⁶⁶ The Aid Fund for Northern Syria (AFNS) – a humanitarian multi-donor pooled fund – works to cover gaps in the response to humanitarian needs in the northwest of Syria. The AFNS is the only pooled fund available to Syrian-led NGOs as there has been no renewal of the resolution that permits UN cross-border aid since July 2023.⁶⁷ Furthermore, the Fund is committed to localisation with an emphasis on women-led organisations and grassroots organisations working closely with affected populations.⁶⁸ This fund has a Syrian Women’s Advisory Group (WAG) connected to its Steering Board, to enhance synergy, inclusivity and gender responsiveness.⁶⁹ The inclusion of the WAG is an opportunity to advance the leadership, coordination and decision-making of women activists through their advisory position over grant-making and humanitarian activities. The WAG is designed to directly inform senior leadership and be part of strategic planning in their humanitarian response.⁷⁰ A limitation is that the role is voluntary, which may act as a barrier to many women, especially those with multiple marginalised identities. There may also be grounds for caution on how much the Board manages to influence decisions.

Ensuring inclusive processes involves identifying WLOs working on specific thematic issues, mapping their needs and capacities, and developing implementation plans in partnership. Trocaire and the GBV AoR, with funding from USAID, partnered with WLOs Active in Development Aid, based in Somalia, and Women for Change, based in South Sudan, to pilot support to them through coaching and mentorship, which fostered joint and inclusive agenda setting and decision-making in local GBV working groups. A Call to Action Roadmap for the increase in the number of WLOs coordinating the GBV AoR at country level has been made and implemented in Yemen.⁷¹ The research re-affirmed the need to have experts from their own communities and those most affected be in the driving seat to enable tailored, contextualised programming. It also found that close collaboration helps funders identify the capacity of local organisations in collaboration, which is crucial to co-develop a support plan based on the needs identified by the WLOs themselves. This counters biases from funders regarding assumed capacity and capability of local organisations.⁷²

The Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation (IAHE) on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls – the first system wide exercise of this type – works to assess the inclusion of

⁶⁵ [Resourcing Refugee Leadership Initiative](#), Accessed February 2024

⁶⁶ International Rescue Committee (2023), Why Wait? How the Humanitarian System Can Better Fund Women-Led and Women’s Rights Organisations, <https://www.rescue.org/eu/report/why-wait-how-humanitarian-system-can-better-fund-women-led-and-womens-rights-organisations>

⁶⁷ Islamic Relief (2023), Syria: Failure to renew UN cross-border resolution puts many lives at risk, <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/syria-failure-renew-un-cross-border-resolution-puts-many-lives-risk>

⁶⁸ [Aid Fund for Northern Syria](#), Accessed February 2024

⁶⁹ Aid Fund for Northern Syria (AFNS) (2023), Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Strategy, <https://afns.org/volumes/doc/AFNS-Gender-Equality-and-Social-Inclusion-GESI-Strategy.pdf?v=1694506281>

⁷⁰ Aid Fund for Northern Syria (2023), [Call for Applications](#), March

⁷¹ Trocaire (2023), Women Led Organisations. Leadership in GBV coalitions Resource Package, <https://www.trocaire.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/WLO-Leadership-in-GBV-Coordination-Resource-Package-1.pdf?type=policy>

⁷² Trocaire (2023), Women Led Organisations. Leadership in GBV coalitions Resource Package, <https://www.trocaire.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/WLO-Leadership-in-GBV-Coordination-Resource-Package-1.pdf?type=policy>

women in humanitarian decision-making processes within Humanitarian Country Teams. This has resulted in the increased engagement of WLOs and their meaningful participation in the coordination of humanitarian responses, particularly in Ethiopia, Iraq, Yemen, Myanmar and Syria.⁷³

Small Grant Partnership Schemes

As global crisis increases, the demand for resources is growing. Innovative and accessible funding streams are being adopted for WLOs in crisis with attention towards supporting organisations at the frontlines of the conflict; this could include marginalised communities and organisations that do not often receive funding, rather than larger organisations. *"In Afghanistan, having different small grant partnership schemes has translated into increased funding for more informal organisations, protesters, and activists. The use of offline proposals submissions rather than going through the online system has guaranteed security and safety."*⁷⁴ In Colombia, UNFPA successfully supported 13 community-based women-led organisations through its small grant modality using a participatory process led by trusted partners.

The UN has improved its financing streams to get funds into difficult contexts. In Myanmar, following the government ban on WLOs operating across several locations, UNFPA transferred small grants through intermediaries because of accessibility and safety concerns. A WLO vetted through the UN Portal is now able to receive a one-time grant of \$30,000 without being an Implementing partner (IP) and going through a competitive and bureaucratic process.

Additionally, UNHCR is piloting transfers of funds to unregistered RWLOs, individuals and partners who have to operate while keeping a low profile, and to registered groups in a country where they are not registered. This pilot is collaborating with WPHF and only allows for small amounts of money (small grants) to be transferred as trust is built with RWLOs in crisis

Global Fund for Women's Rights, as part of the Feminist Alchemy, offers a range of funding options to enable organisations on the ground to access different types of funding opportunities (emergency grants, core sustainability grants, rapid response grants, care and wellbeing grants, etc.). These funding streams have enabled recipients and partners – including informal, unregistered, low-profile groups – to determine their own priorities and needs.⁷⁵

Strategic questions

In response to barriers local organisations face, these organisations, as well as diverse funding stakeholders, have developed innovative approaches. The following strategic questions have been identified specifically for the diverse stakeholders present at Wilton Park to discuss, based on the challenges and best practices summarised in this report:

- Given the vital role feminist networks and coalitions play during crises, including providing quality funding to WROs, what interest and scope is there for partnerships between feminist funds, and different humanitarian actors and funds?
- How do we learn from existing good practice of partnerships with WROs, and how do we scale these up?

⁷³ Global Humanitarian Overview (2022), Delivering Better, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Global%20Humanitarian%20Overview%202022%20Part%20Three%29.pdf?_gl=1*56uu3b*_ga*MTA5NjQ0MDAyMS4xNjkzNDYyNDE5*_ga_E60ZNX2F68*MTcwNjUzMjgwNy42LjEuMTcwNjUzMzcxNC4zOC4wLjA.

⁷⁴ Key Informant Interview, December 2023

⁷⁵ Key Informant Interview, December 2023

- How can funding streams from philanthropy and government bilateral donors actively complement each other?
- How can risks of funding local WROs/WLOs be re-evaluated in relation to the greater risk of not impactfully funding these organisations?
- What are the main barriers that donor governments, such as the UK, continue to face with funding youth-led feminist movements, considering that these are key frontline voices in crisis-affected communities and hold considerable agency within these contexts? How can the UK Government more widely promote some of the good practices it has adopted?