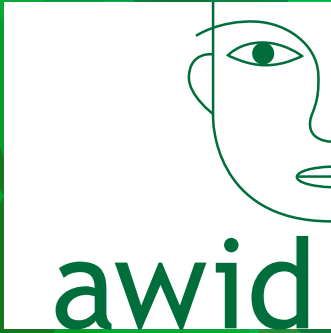


Where is the money for women's rights?

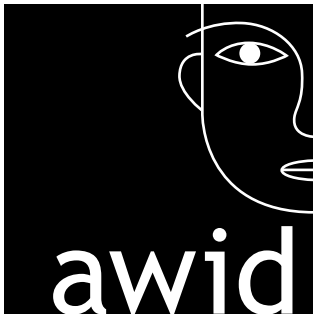


Assessing resources and the role of donors in the promotion of women's rights and the support of women's organizations

An Action-Research Project of
The Association for Women's Rights in Development
February 2006

By Cindy Clark, Ellen Sprenger and Lisa VeneKlasen of Just Associates
in collaboration with Lydia Alpízar Durán and Joanna Kerr of AWID

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Executive Summary

What would you do with 100 million dollars?

While there may be some women's rights advocates who have pondered that question in the context of winning the lottery, few have actually had the opportunity to plan their work with such a large sum in mind. Instead, the dominant sense is one of scarcity—too few interested funders, with too little money to support existing women's rights organizations and initiatives. Is it that women's rights groups are not bold enough in their fundraising strategies? Is it that donors simply don't get the urgency and importance of this work? What has really been happening in terms of funding for women's rights organizations in the last ten years and what have been the driving forces behind those trends?

This report is the result of an ongoing action research initiative launched by the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) to explore these questions and to draw insights into possible strategies for changing the existing funding landscape so that more resources are made available to women's rights organizations.

Yes, women's rights organizations. In the last few years, many human rights, development, and other justice-oriented organizations have taken on issues of women's rights and gender equality to varying degrees. The fact that so many organizations are now talking about women's rights reflects the success of women's rights activists and organizations over the last decades in reaching out to mixed organizations and movements. But the intent of this research was not to focus on just any organization that says it 'does' women's rights. Instead, our aim was to understand better the limitations and levers for strengthening financial support for women's rights organizations and movements in and of themselves. This is because we believe that the health of these organizations is crucial for making women's rights a lived reality around the world. Allies are essential, but we want to be sure that the heart and soul of women's rights movements are getting the funding needed to flourish.

What do we see in the funding landscape?

Challenges of the current moment are numerous; including what seems to be decreasing support for women's rights organizations among almost all sectors of funders.

As anyone who has tried to raise funds for women's rights knows, it is a complex terrain with limited available information, shifting priorities and interests, and often requires a significant upfront investment of time and resources to cultivate relationships. Challenges of the current moment are numerous; including what seems to be decreasing support for women's rights organizations among almost all sectors of funders. Mainstreaming, initially promoted by women's rights groups as key to

integrating gender equality throughout organizations and programs, has not had the desired consequence of strengthening action in respect of women's rights—we see instead cases where mainstreaming has led to cutting of gender equality specialists and women-specific programs. Donor institutions and policies are often strongly influenced by private sector thinking with a push to efficiency, results-based management, and a belief in technical fixes to social problems with often a lack of insight into the political nature of change processes.

The most prominent supporters of women's rights groups have traditionally been development aid agencies, large independent foundations and public foundations (also known as international non-governmental organizations (INGOS)). Bilateral and multilateral aid agencies that were once strong supporters of women's rights organizations are cutting back their levels of funding for women's organizations and are directing more funds through national governments rather than to NGOs. Many funding agencies that have strong policies around their support for gender equality and women's rights have shown few successes on the ground. Gender mainstreaming is perceived by these institutions as largely unsuccessful. And with growing conservatism within many donor countries, gender equality advocates within these agencies say they face an uphill battle to continue making the case for gender equality. Among large independent foundations, changes in leadership have led a handful of major foundations to move away from a women's rights agenda. At the same time, external scrutiny of foundation operations and growing frustration with limited impact have led many foundations to narrow their focus, providing larger grants to fewer, larger organizations. Furthermore, public foundations/INGOs often struggle with their dual identities as donors and NGOs with their own advocacy agendas. Some position themselves as strong supporters of women's rights and yet there can be considerable tensions between some of these organizations and existing women's rights groups as they can appear more as competitors than supporters and collaborators with the existing groups.

In what it is easy to cast as a bleak landscape, there are important opportunities. Many long-time supporters of women's rights and gender equality – especially development assistance agencies and public foundations – are revisiting their strategies and realizing that they need stronger connections and better partnerships with women's movements and organizations. New players are also coming onto the funding scene that, with some investment and collaboration, could become important supporters of women's rights groups. Similarly, corporate foundations, family foundations and individual donors are growing in both size and number, and are an important potential source of funding for women's rights groups to tap. Meanwhile, over the last ten years, women's funds have also been blossoming. Started by feminists in the Global South,

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Central and Eastern European well as the Global North, these funds are raising money from a variety of sources to financially support women's groups in their countries, regions and internationally.

Are women's organizations thriving globally?

One participant of this project described the current state of women's rights organizations as one of "survival and resistance". That description seems to resonate with many activists. While there are nuances to the situation across different regions, the commonalities are striking. In general, over half of the women's organizations that participated in the AWID online survey for this research are receiving less funding now than they were five years ago. Among them, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East/North Africa and Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States are the regions where cutbacks are most frequently reported. Amazingly, women's funds, which disbursed just USD 15 million in the previous year, were the most often cited source of support in 2004, indicating that while grants are small, women's funds are an important source of support for a large number of organizations.

The research shows that women's rights organizations spend more time on fundraising now than in past years, with unclear results. Some express frustration with presenting proposals for activities that 'fit' with the agenda of the funder yet deviate from a more political agenda for justice, accountability and transformation. Many complain they end up fulfilling a service delivery role rather than following their own agenda. Across regions, women's rights groups say they are increasingly forced to look to their governments for funding, which presents obvious challenges if they wish to take a critical stance on official positions or policies. Related to this is the sense that funding is primarily available for country-based work, with less support for regional or international work or for linking among different levels. Similarly, core organizational support is enormously difficult to secure, with most funding being for specific projects.

Strategy ideas for mobilizing more money

A key part of this research involved exploring ideas of possible strategies for mobilizing greater resources for women's rights organizations. We asked: Where are the levers for influence and change within funding institutions? What do women's rights organizations need to be doing differently to be more successful in securing resources?

As with all good political strategies, effective fundraising requires a keen analysis of the context and moment and an ability to manoeuvre the

intricate power dynamics at play. We recognize, too, that realities vary tremendously for different kinds of organizations in different contexts; therefore, few of the recommendations and ideas can be used universally. Nonetheless, some key messages came through from this research for further action.

With ***bilateral and multilateral agencies***, women's rights organizations inside donor countries need to lobby their governments to increase their financial support of women's rights agendas and organizations. At the same time, given the strong rhetoric of many of these agencies on gender equality, stronger accountability mechanisms are needed, such as a watch-dog process to monitor implementation of commitments.

For ***large independent foundations***, one or two can be very influential in taking the lead and encouraging others to support women's rights organizations. Securing a strong champion will require careful strategizing as to the appropriate message as well as the messenger who can connect with foundation leadership with the aim of expanding support for all women's rights organizations. Engaging foundation program officers and leaders where possible, in deeper dialogues around the substance of the work done by women's rights organizations, will also help to clarify possibilities for a more comprehensive funding approach.

Similarly, ***public foundations*** must be engaged in critical dialogue around their roles in promoting women's rights by encouraging them to increase their support for women's rights organizations. As there are increasing opportunities to collaborate with public foundations on shared issues of interest, it is also crucial to establish clear terms of engagement in respect of decision-making and agenda-setting powers, issues of ownership and attribution, and other fundamental elements of such collaborations or so-called partnerships.

Given the significance of support from **women's funds** for so many women's rights organizations, they should be encouraged to grow by tapping into new sources of funding (and thereby not competing with the organizations they hope to support), to continue supporting transformative work, and to clarify the larger agenda behind the funding they provide.

Finally, sources of **private philanthropy, individual donors and small family foundations** are often neglected in the fundraising strategies of women's groups yet their potential for underwriting much of the political feminist work exists. Women's organizations, including the women's funds, who already have access to these donors, as well as tried and true methods for raising funds from them, should help make connections and

leverage resources for others.

To effectively expand their resource base, participants in this research also had several recommendations for women's rights organizations themselves:

Build the skills, and especially the attitude: Many said they wanted to improve their skills for fundraising and making their case to donors. Even more important is the need to change the way they think about money (for instance, how to be bold and ask big) and come to terms with the role (both positive and negative) funding plays in women's rights movement-building.

Expand new sources: As a result of lean financial times, many women's rights organizations have had some experience with alternative sources of support. There are lessons to be drawn from both inside and outside the women's movement as well as deeper research to be done to clarify pros and cons of raising funds from sources such as family foundations, individuals and corporations.

Consolidate donor allies: There are many allies of women's rights organizations within donor institutions. Connecting with these allies, learning about the challenges they face, exploring ways to work with them to encourage their own organizations to increase funding for women's rights and act to influence other donors to increase their support are all key methods. These feminists within donor organizations are seeking answers from women's rights activists on how much of a donor's budget should go to women-specific work and how much should be integrated across other funding areas. Clarifying the level of resources needed and how best they should be focused is an important task for more effective fundraising.

Explore potential for greater solidarity in fundraising: Realistically speaking, making inroads to leaders and key points of influence within donor agencies will have to be done initially by a relatively small number of well-connected and already influential women's rights advocates and organizations. These groups need to build solidarity and transparency in fundraising, and acknowledge and use their privilege, while finding ways of influencing donors to increase support for a broad array of women's rights organizations. More groups will then have to develop an ethical political 'pact' so that those with access to donors can and do act to leverage money for a larger group of organizations. At the core, women's groups need to get beyond a culture of scarcity that breeds concerns about 'competing over the existing pie', and move to notions of 'expanding the pie' by accessing resources that were previously untapped.

Women's rights organizations need to broaden their constituency of public support by getting accurate media coverage.

Sharpen strategies: There was much analysis about the need for stronger, sharper and more effective strategies that would make supporting the work of women's rights organizations more compelling to donors. Women's rights groups admitted the need for building greater consistent presence in public debate and opinion, strengthening constituency-building and connecting the work at different levels, and opening space for deeper joint reflection among women's rights organizations regarding perspectives on effective leadership and organizational strengthening models.

Look at movement structure: Related to the questions of strategy, participants in the research were raising questions about women's rights organizations themselves—how to counter the trend toward “NGO-ization” and technification, reflecting on necessary structure for stronger movements with a more independent funding base, and whether there is a role for women's rights ‘giants’ that build credibility of the movement as a whole, such as Amnesty International does in respect of human rights.

Taking on the evaluation challenge: Evaluating the kind of change and transformation that women's rights organizations are working toward is very important. It is vital for making the case to donors, not to mention informing future work and learning. There must be an investment in developing and sharing approaches for measuring social change that both help women's rights groups monitor their progress and strengthen programs as well as aid (potential) donors' understanding of why they are worth the investment.

Leverage public support by showing the impact: Since all funding sectors are influenced by public opinion, women's rights organizations need to broaden their constituency of public support by getting accurate media coverage and projecting a powerful, compelling vision of women's rights.

Re-shape the mainstreaming debate: In the short term it is difficult to ignore the fact that mainstreaming has become an integral part of the practice of many donor agencies (particularly bilateral, multilateral and public foundations). Many commented on the need to avoid mainstreaming pitfalls by shifting from training and tool development to accountability mechanisms, bringing back concepts of power and discrimination and generating greater support for women's human rights and strong organizations advocating for women's rights. Over the longer term, donor representatives and women's rights organizations believe that gender mainstreaming has to be replaced by a concept that doesn't obscure but instead promotes a transformative social justice and women's rights agenda.