

Financing gender equality

A brief report of the breakfast meeting held on 22nd March 2016

In the margin of the UN-CSW60 in New York, and using the presence of many international gender-justice and women's rights activists, experts and funders from around the world, a 'Breakfast Meeting' was organised to discuss 'financing gender equality'.¹ The meeting was hosted by the Permanent Mission of the Kingdom of the Netherlands at the United Nations and jointly organised by Rutgers, AWID and the MenEngage Alliance.

Purpose: Have a dialogue with a broad range of stakeholders² committed to gender justice and women's rights about the different roles they play in this field and how they can complement each other to optimize modalities of financing and supporting work towards the gender equality objectives of Agenda 2030, including the SDGs.

Background: The funding landscape for international development is continuously changing. The recently accepted global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) require considerable funding commitments from different actors around the world at different levels. Gender equality is accepted as a priority in the SDGs, with a standalone goal and gender targets across other goals, and hence requires to be addressed with sufficient funding and adequate funding modalities to reach the stated objectives.

Funding for and working on women's rights and gender justice is complex, among other reasons, because of the increasing diversity of actors, each with their own skills, priorities and agendas. There is increasing recognition that gender equality needs to involve women and men in all their diversities, roles and scopes of influence to reach the SDG objectives. In addition, the challenges to address the needs of women and girls worldwide shows the need and interest to involve the diverse array of funding sector actors in financing gender equality and women's rights.

The breakfast meeting was moderated by Joanne Sandler, who brings with her many years of experience and concrete knowledge of the changes over time in funding modalities and volumes for women's rights and gender justice, based on her positions as Deputy Executive Director of UNIFEM for 10 years, board membership of Breakthrough and Women Win and as member of the Global Civil Society Advisory Group for UN Women, as well as her current position with Gender@Work.

Getting started: there are more funds than ever for gender equality, but experience (and research?) indicate that these funds are increasingly less accessible for grassroots and mid-sized women's rights and gender justice organisations.

For many years' women's rights organisations have campaigned to be 'boss in our own bellies', but that also requires to be 'boss in our own wallets'. *Are the present funding trends and modalities feeding or starving the roots of the women's movements?*

¹ "Gender justice and women's rights" is used as the preferred term of our ultimate aim and for our movement. In UN context, the term gender equality is used and therefore in the context of CSW, we used that term in the title of this breakfast meeting.

² The list of participants of the breakfast meeting (on invitation) is provided in the appendix.

The current landscape for financing

After a round of introductions, the participants³ shared their knowledge of and experiences with the current funding landscape for gender justice and women's rights, focussing on challenges and opportunities. This report reflects their knowledge and experiences, and brings together some of the concrete ideas for ways forward that were suggested by participants at the meeting.

- ◆ The traditional ODA era seems to be coming to an end; at least it is redefined, bringing in new actors of funding like the private sector. Under these circumstances, how do we hold donor countries accountable to their commitments and responsibilities to achieve the SDGs?
- ◆ Mechanisms and sources of development financing and philanthropy are becoming increasingly diversified, often with an economic growth and return on investment approach embedded; and human rights as the core purpose taking a backseat. These actors represent a range of agendas and experiences, with powerful groups coming from both traditional donor countries and emerging economies. This trend presents both challenges and diverse opportunities in terms of leveraging support for gender justice and women's rights.
- ◆ It is often claimed that less money is available with donors, but research shows that this is not correct. For example, ODA volumes are increasing⁴, but focus is shifting towards crises responses and domestic response to refugees, hence there are not less resources but there are changed priorities.
- ◆ Increased bureaucracies, new funding rules and setting new conditions, such as a heavy focus on reporting mechanisms, block the access to funding for many women human rights defenders and activists.
- ◆ One of the effects of the changed approach and modalities of funding is that many women's rights and gender justice organisations are too small to be funded by the big (bilateral) donor agencies but too big to be funded by the INGOs operating as re-granters.
- ◆ Who are in charge of the political/funding agenda setting? When INGOs are used as intermediaries between donors and grassroots organisations, the risk is that the last become implementers of others' agendas. The question is whether donors are aware of this impact of their new rules?
- ◆ There seems to be less space to use donor funding to critique and lobby the funding governments; it is more focussed on technical program-implementation.
- ◆ Little money is made available for long term gender-transformative work and multi-year funding.
- ◆ Core funding is hardly provided. Most funding is project targeted and the donor is setting the agenda, expected to result in 'quick wins' that can be claimed and shown at home or to back donors. This means that women's rights and gender justice organizations are severely restricted to implement their own strategies and priorities.
- ◆ Mainly projects are funded to address violence against women, or women's economic empowerment, which gives little space to women's rights and gender justice organisations working on other related topics or for important pioneering work on the ground.
- ◆ The rather 'technical structure' of the SDGs brings significant risk that funding is moved away from the more political approach to women's rights and gender justice work. In addition, the funding of the SDG's can have the risk of funding in silo's while work on these issues is relevant across the SDG's. The changed priorities and modalities of funders in their new tender processes require more technical expertise on for example

³ In the appendix of this report, you can find the full list of attendees of the meeting

⁴ See: <http://www.oecd.org/dac/development-aid-rises-again-in-2015-spending-on-refugees-doubles.htm>.

financial management, monitoring and evaluation, mostly not available at local implementing level.

- ◆ Even though also middle-income countries face major gender inequalities, gender based violence and discrimination, they are mostly excluded from international funding on the ground of being middle income countries. But their own governments mostly do not prioritise funding women's rights and gender justice civil society organisations, as gender is not seen as priority in their budgeting. Many states are stepping back (often under pressure of International Financial Institutions) from providing social services as part of their obligations.

Strategies that are working

Participants identified the following good practices and other strategies that are working in favour of financing gender justice in impactful and just ways:

- ♥ There is ample commitment for support to women's rights and gender justice work on paper: this is a first step in the right direction, and needs to be supported with sufficient budgets.
- ♥ Women's rights and gender justice organisations are strong and we should support each other. We are all working towards the same goals and it would be good if we set an advocacy agenda together for financing gender justice and women's rights.
- ♥ The general public and even parts of the private sector are willing to fund. This can be an opportunity, however only if these funds are supportive towards the needs that are identified, including long-term funding, core-funding, and pioneering work.
- ♥ (Some) Women's Funds also allow funding to unregistered women's rights/gender justice organisations.
- ♥ The European Commission has windows for 5-year frame work contracts for CSOs, which is longer term than other funds.
- ♥ For the SDG agenda for 2030 to reach its goals, there are opportunities and clear requirements to work on women's rights and empowerment and gender equality;
- ♥ There is already an increase of local philanthropy and we need to build and support further on that trend, even it may be difficult to use that funding to address the gender inequalities of the very funder.
- ♥ In line with the principles of feminist funding and being 'boss in your own wallet', Open Society Foundation uses the approach that the fund receivers know better what is required locally than the funding agencies or re-granters.
- ♥ Migrants and their remittances for 'development at home' can also play an important role in creating self-controlled funds.
- ♥ Even though women's rights and gender justice organisations are not businesses, it does not mean that part of their work and services cannot be used as sources of income e.g. in the field of training, manuals' production, running hostels, etc. These efforts to (re)cover costs, is useful for the organisations themselves and may also convince donor agencies that these organisations are maximising their contributions towards sustainability.

Analysis and problematization of the landscape, and recommendations / ways forward / needed action:

In the general discussion the issue of the shrinking space for CSOs was raised, as one of the effects of the rise of global terrorism and subsequent increased security threats. Women's rights frontline organisations doing their work locally, on the ground, are often considered 'vulnerable' (to terrorist control) and hence face severe restrictions to register and to open and operate bank accounts. As a result of strict US-imposed anti-terrorist and money laundering prevention rules, many small and mid-sized women's rights and gender justice organisations

are often barred from actually receiving international donor funding through regular banking channels. Therefore participants at this meeting made a **demand to funders to ensure that CSOs in fragile contexts are not left alone and will have access to funding.**

Is it really the end of ODA and hence no more money for women's rights and gender justice? Participants agreed that the **"post ODA" narrative shouldn't be accepted** and thus that those working on women's rights and gender justice should not simply have to abide by the new funding regimes. Rather there is a need to continue to advocate for OECD countries to fulfil their responsibilities and commitments. Furthermore, worldwide there is growing attention and debate about the need for redistribution of wealth and for addressing global tax evasion. Recently, this is shown again with the Panama Papers. It can be concluded that there is money.

Because of new tender requirements, INGOS are put in the position to be lead agency. This funding system gives them a more privileged position vis-a-vis smaller, Southern-based organisations. To avoid this, INGO's can in principle leave the leadership of the programme design, implementation and control to women's rights and gender justice organisations. This requires better coordination and cooperation between organisations and different modalities of donors. It requires more investment in partnership building in advance of and as part of joint programming.

The quality of that money, the conditions and the best ways to access to it, have to be critically assessed. This applies to ODA funding, but also other current funding sources, such as private funds and investments by the private sector. Hence there is a need to jointly focus on new and innovative models of funding.

In the discussion with funding agencies it must be clear that women's rights and gender justice work is not self-sustainable in itself and will always require external funding, whatever the source. For such external funding to be effective, donor agencies need to cooperate and coordinate more and stop funding in silos.

It is important to arrange funding and re-granting for women's rights and gender justice in flexible ways, rather than promoting 'subcontracting' or mere instrumentalisation of those organisations who are actually doing the work. A gender responsive marker system in funding rules and procedures will help to increase mutual accountability.

UN agencies need to show their policy/political mandates more clearly, to prevent being seen as 'NGOs' by the general public. This will also enhance mutual accountability with the women's and gender justice movements.

One idea that came out of the discussion is to advocate for a **high level commission on financing for gender equality at the next and every following CSW.** That would be a critical space for governments to present their contributions to women's rights and gender justice, as well as, funding and re-granting feminist and women rights organisations' initiatives. In addition to this accountability mechanism for governments, there was a proposal to organise a **roundtable for other donors and stakeholders to concretely report on their funding to gender justice and women's rights** as part of the SDGs, including to those organizations who have women's rights and/or gender justice as their core mandates.

Furthermore, feminist and women's rights movements have their own mechanisms for resource redistribution – such as women's funds. For many years women organised their own funds (e.g. Mama Cash, Global Fund, Urgent Action Fund, African Women's Fund, etc.). This should continue, because vital informal initiatives and pioneering work on the ground can be supported through such funds.

The women's rights and gender justice movements also need to work with each other and guarantee inter-generational inclusion. This means that older generation feminists should give space for new thinking, action and leadership. Only by involving the younger generation into this important dialogue on financing gender justice and women's rights, we can develop a collective approach across ages.

Follow-up

The breakfast meeting offered a contribution to bringing together stakeholders in women's rights and gender justice. The mapping of the landscape and lessons on what works for funding provided suggestions for follow-up and concrete action. There is a need for further dialogue, spaces to build alliances, and to identify joint priorities for action, to get better funding mechanism for gender justice and women's rights. There are several opportunities to further build on this report and other activities on resource mobilization and financing women's rights and gender justice including:

- ⇒ The upcoming AWID Forum from 8 to 11 September 2016, in Salvador de Bahia, Brazil – the AWID Forum will count with a physical space, the Feminist Resource Mobilization (FRM) Hub, which will offer a space to continue with these reflections and conversations about resource mobilization for women's rights and gender justice. For further info, please contact: fundher@awid.org.
- ⇒ If interested in receiving regular updates related with resource mobilization for gender justice and women's rights we invite you to join the following facebook page facilitated by AWID: [Feminist Resource Mobilization at AWID](#).
- ⇒ The MenEngage Alliance organizes an e-dialogue on the roles and places of engaging men and boys in women's rights and gender justice (19-21 May 2016). Accountability, solidarity and partnerships were discussed with a broad range of civil society actors. Matters of resources, including funding, emerged as key discussion points, trends and recommendations. The report will be shared broadly, and can be used as an input for further conversations - including at the AWID Forum and in the run-up for CSW. For further info and to receive the report, please contact: info@menengage.org
- ⇒ For further ideas on how to strengthen the advocacy on financing modalities and especially the quality of funding from donor governments, please reach out to Ilze Smit at Rutgers: i.smit@rutgers.nl

Appendix 1:**List of attendees of the Breakfast meeting “Financing Gender Equality”**

First name	Last name	Mission / Organization
Leonoor	van Munster	Netherlands mission
Nerea	Craviotto	AWID
Ilze	Smit	Rutgers
Joanne	Sandler	Moderator
Joni	van de Sand	MenEngage Global Alliance
Maria	Butler	WILPF
Dean	Peacock	Sonke Gender Justice
Colleen	Morna	Gender Links
Ruby	Johnson	FRIDA The Young Feminist Fund
Jessica	Horn	African Women's Development Fund
Musimbi	Kanyoro	Global Fund for Women
Maria Antonieta	Alcalde	IPPF – WHR's
Cynthia	Eyakuze	Open Society Foundations
Laura	Carter	Amnesty International
Jan	Reijnders	MenEngage/Rutgers
James	Lang	UNDP
Simone	Filippini	Cordaid
Tesmerelna	Atsbeha	wellspring advisors
Karen	Plafker	PAWHR (Philanthropy Advancing Women's Human Rights)
Sascha	Gabizon	WECF International
Kate	Kroeger	Urgent action fund
Leyla	Sharafi	UNFPA
Sarah	Simba	Org. Moremi Initiative
Gail	Davis	Listen Give Institute