

NO STRAIGHT LINES

TRANSFORMATIONS WITH YOUNG FEMINIST ORGANISERS

A resource for INGOs and Funders



CONTENTS

Background

2

Methodologies

4

Contextual analysis

7

Snapshot of the findings: what these conversations are telling us

14

✓ What young feminist activists are saying?

15

✓ What international NGOs are saying?

23

✓ What funders are saying?

26

Reflecting on FRIDA's experience in the last 5 years

28

Recommendations

34

Annexes

53

About this resource

Based on its work over nearly a decade, this resource is a consolidation of knowledge and experience on engaging and being in dialogue with international non-government organizations (INGOS), funders and other philanthropic actors on how they can work with and better support young feminist organisers for transformation. We hope it is useful in sparking new work or deepening existing efforts.

For more information about this resource, please email: info@youngfeministfund.org

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A note on terms used

We have chosen the term Young Feminist Organisers (YFOs) to refer to the diversity of collectives, groups, and organizations led by young feminists engaged in this process. We recognise that no specific term that captures covers the diversity of ways that young feminist activists are currently organising - from informal to formal - with an array of decision making models and structures, however using one term enables us to reference their work with consistent terminology in this report toolkit. It is important to note that we are using this term to refer to the collective work of young feminists, rather than their individual leadership, wishing to lift up their important work in groups, collectives and organisations.

FRIDA uses the term "the Global South" in this research since it is commonly used terminology within philanthropy to refer to contexts outside of "the Global North" and former colonial powers, the US/Canada/ Western Europe/Australia and New Zealand. However, in FRIDA's approach, the Global South refers to the following regions: Latin America & the Caribbean; Africa; the Middle East (Western Asia); South, South East, East Asia and the Pacific; Central Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central and North Asia.



BACKGROUND

As the year 2019 comes to a close, people-led resistance is at the forefront of the public's minds. In addition to the prominent protests in Hong Kong, Lebanon, and Chile, mass direct actions are swelling across the globe. In the lead up to, implementation of, and in the outcomes of these events, young feminist organizers are capturing our imagination of what is possible for the future. Greta Thunberg is currently the most iconic - taking her strike to the streets and to state assemblies. But many other young women, girls, and trans*youth activists are creating ripples and waves.

FRIDA | The Young Feminist Fund is the only youth-led fund focused exclusively on supporting young feminist activism to advance social justice movements and agendas across the globe. FRIDA's staff, advisors, grantee partners, Board and community members have sat on a variety

of advisory and steering committees for INGOs and funders, providing input on programmatic initiatives, design of decision-making structures, organisational set-up and more. In particular, they have contributed expertise and guidance for International Non Government Organizations (INGOS) and funders who seek to begin or strengthen their work with young women, girls trans* and intersex youth.

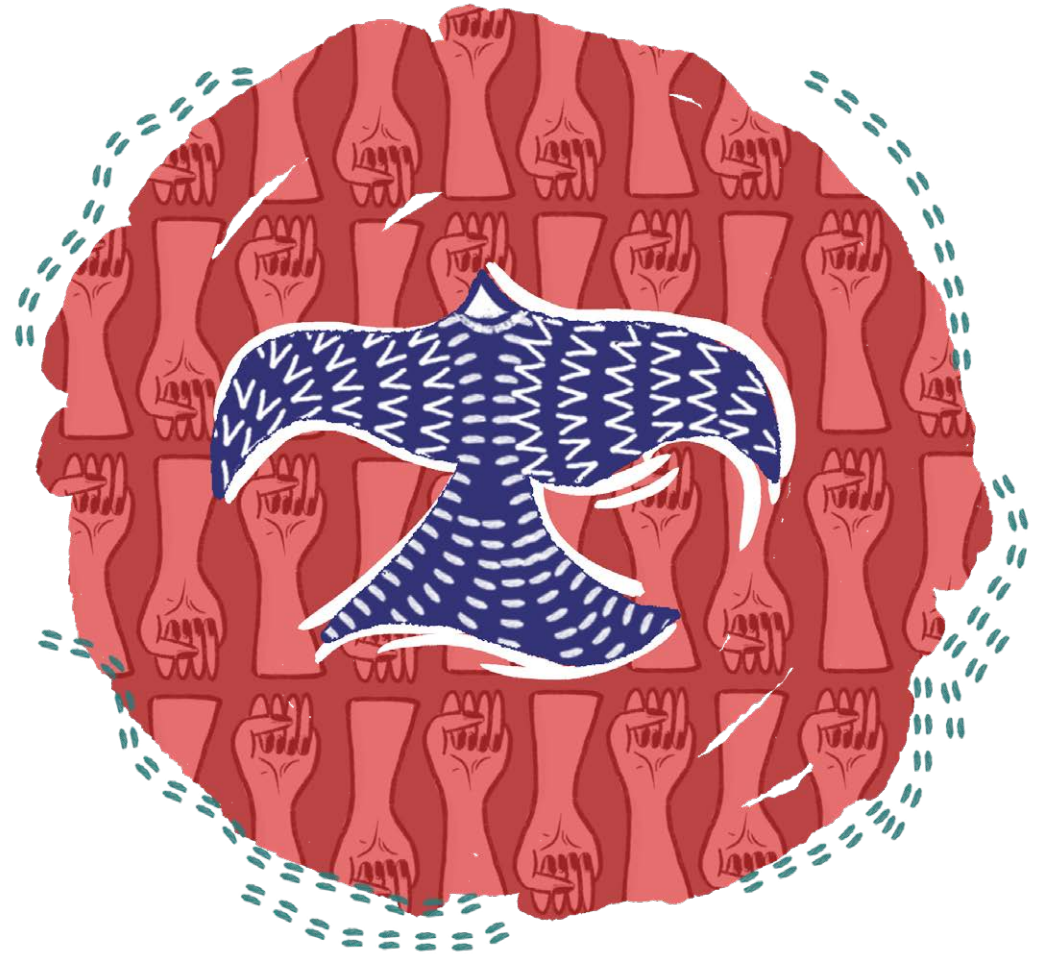
Based on its work over nearly a decade, FRIDA is consolidating collective knowledge and expertise aimed at engaging INGOS, funders and other philanthropic actors in dialogue on how they can work with young feminist organisers for transformation.. We present to you this publication, designed to be a guide and practical resource for INGOS and funders that have a genuine interest and commitment to support young feminist organising and movements.

Since embarking on this research, a number of important publications have emerged - Oxfams new Report '[A Leap of Faith: Conversations with funders of women's organizations](#)', AWIDs Report '[Toward a feminist funding ecosystem: A framework and practical guide](#)', AWID and FEMnet Policy Brief on engaging NGOs and the CIVICUS research on youth led organisations. We offer this complementary analysis and recommendations as a way to deepen your understanding of the opportunities and challenges of working with and for young feminist organisers (YFOs). We do not have all the answers, nor is this report complete, but rather we feel an important addition to the growing body of knowledge of this topic.

INGOs and funders are partnering with young feminist organisers in many different ways, with some directly funding groups, others funding womens funds or local

organisations to directly support groups, and others including young feminist activists in their campaigns, local programs and staff teams. There are varying degrees of willingness and interest as well as institutional and organisational capacities to embark on this work. Needless to say, a one size fits all approach will not work for these support institutions nor will it suit the diversity of organizing within young feminist movements.

We invite you to use this report as a reference for reflection on how your organisation can better support emerging collectives and organisations led by young women, girls and trans* and intersex youth. We hope it is useful in deepening existing work, challenging practices constructively or in navigating a new field if you are thinking of resourcing this work for the first time. Happy reading! 😊



METHODOLOGIES

This report was designed based on three key inquiries conducted by and on behalf of FRIDA between 2016 and 2019. These include firstly a funding scan, whereby staff members of fourteen donor organisations were interviewed on their experiences and perspectives working with young feminist-led organisations. Secondly, interviews undertaken to assess how FRIDA collaborates with other INGOs and funders. And finally, members of twelve different grantee partners of FRIDA were interviewed to share their experiences and desires working with INGOs and funders. Brief descriptions of each of the consultations are detailed below.

In addition to these three lines of inquiry, we have drawn on the knowledge and experience of FRIDA over the years, as well as the recent in depth thinking of the Strategic Planning Process, consultations with our community, feminist sister organisations and fellow funders, and a light design review of current literature.

A. Funding Scan: Donor Perspectives on Young Feminist Organizing

In 2015, inspired by AWID's 2013 "[Where is the Money for Women's Rights](#)" [action-research methodology](#), AWID's Young Feminist Activism Program and the FRIDA team partnered to launch a research effort to learn more about the current 'state' of young feminist organizing globally. Brave, Creative, Resilient: The Global State of Young Feminist Organizing shows that despite the fact that young feminist organisers are using innovative strategies to tackle some of the most pressing issues of time, with some of the most vulnerable populations, they are strikingly under-resourced and their long-term sustainability is in jeopardy.

Motivated by these findings, FRIDA undertook a second targeted explorative study to gain greater insight to the overall picture of funding for youth led feminist organizing. While it was broadly known that there was, and still is, not



enough funding, FRIDA was interested in learning more about those who are involved in making decisions about funding for YFO: What are the opportunities and challenges they face within their institutions? What are the attitudes and narratives shaping their decisions and therefore influencing the overall landscape?

Research for FRIDA's Funding Scan was conducted by independent consultants **Ani Hao** and **Martin Redfern**, with the support of an advisory group between July and November 2016. This research included in-depth interviews with 14 funders, including six women's funds, three private foundations, three international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), two consortium organizations and one multilateral agency. The participants were interviewed by telephone with the exception of two who submitted their responses in writing. While this study was conducted in 2016, many of the findings have informed FRIDA's subsequent interactions and analysis of the field. Though some time has passed since this study, subsequent desk research, ongoing observations, and lived experiences provide updated data and analysis.

B. Moving towards deeper collaboration: FRIDA's Relationship with International NGOs

In November and December 2018, research was conducted by an independent consultant, **Katrina Anderson**, on behalf of FRIDA. This research was based primarily on a series of interviews to map some of the work

that INGOs are currently doing with young feminists and seek to understand the extent to which this work is institutionalized, as well as challenges and opportunities INGOs face when working with young feminists. The research also aims to identify FRIDA's unique added value in collaborating with INGOs, with a view towards recommending how FRIDA can more strategically influence the field to direct more resources towards young feminists and increase their participation in programmatic decision-making.

The collected data was based on 13 qualitative interviews (four internal one-on-one interviews with two FRIDA staff, one advisor and one board member plus nine external qualitative interviews with 13 representatives of six major international development organisations). The research mapped the work that a select group of large INGOs are currently doing with young feminists and assessed the challenges and opportunities they perceive for expanding and strengthening this work. The research generated recommendations for how FRIDA can strategically engage the international development field to direct more resources towards young feminists and increase their participation in programmatic decision-making.

C. Interviews with FRIDA grantee partners

Interviews with FRIDA's grantee partners were conducted by **Christy Selica Zinn** an independent consultant and **Mayra Zamaniego** a current FRIDA staff member

in March and April 2019. These interviews spotlighted different types of collectives and organisations, including groups with varied leadership and organisational structures, and working on a variety of themes. Grantee partners who were invited to be interviewed ranged in global representation, and included grantees from Asia Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, Sub-Saharan Africa, Middle East and North Africa, and Central Eastern Europe, Caucasus, Central and North Asia regions.

Three **key ethical considerations** were taken into account in conducting these interviews. We highlight them as an important exercise in practicing the principles this toolkit espouses. First, the inherent power dynamic that would be present in the reality that a representative of FRIDA was interviewing grantee partners about their relationship with donors was spoken about upfront. Grantees to be interviewed were selected in a way that minimised any perceived risk, including in determining which countries were selected, and ensuring that grantee partners currently undergoing grant renewal selection processes were excluded from this research. Grantees were given the option to remain anonymous or request confidentiality around what was discussed, and were not specifically requested to speak about their relationship with FRIDA, unless a conversation about FRIDA was initiated by the grantee member themselves.

Second, FRIDA's intention was made explicit to those grantees who were invited



to be interviewed. Those who were interviewed were allowed to withdraw their consent from being included in the research at any point, and were presented with the unpublished document for review before publication.

Third, the representation of young feminist voices was critical to the legitimacy of this publication. The research rested in the reality that young feminists are underrepresented in knowledge projects; likewise, the research assumed the expertise of young feminists on their experiences, needs and ideals for their partnerships with INGOs and funders.

Those interviewed were given the opportunity to speak about their experiences working with different funders and INGOs, as well as reflect on both their challenges and ideals in building relationships. The objective of each interview was to really identify what it is that young feminist organisers want from their relationships with INGOs and funders, drawing on learnings and stories, of successes and challenges. Accounts of different moments in grantee members' relationships with INGO staff were captured to animate the nature of the relationship. The expertise of those interviewed also informed the recommendations on how INGOs and funders can better support young feminist organising.



CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

A. Global Context for young feminist organising

Closing Civil Society Space and increased backlash

A scan of the current context for young feminists organising reveals an increasingly repressive and conservative environment in many parts of the world. CIVICUS's latest State of Civil Society Report 2018¹ reveals this to be true for activists of any age working on a range of issues. The sustained influence of religious fundamentalism and increased support for conservative and populist governments are reinforcing and enabling patriarchal and cultural expressions across the world and rolling back hard fought rights and efforts won by the previous generation.² This backlash, particularly anti ngo "foreign agent bills" adopted in several countries makes it even harder for groups to operate without state

control of their funding, as outlined in Mama Cash and Urgent Action Fund report 'Standing Firm - Women- and Trans-Led Organisations Respond to Closing Space for Civil Society.'³ Formal and informal state interventions to control civil society have a disproportionate impact on the political voice of women and trans people. This phenomenon extends to girl activists and girl-led groups and organisations, adding age as yet another cross-cutting axis of oppression for girls, a phenomena explored in Mama Cash and FRIDA report 'Girls to the Front'.⁴

In response to the new and revived challenges, young feminist organisers are often forced into operating in a clandestine and concealed manner. Groups regularly work on issues that are criminalised in their countries, such as LGBTQI+ or abortion rights, abstain from describing their work publicly or omit certain aspects of their activities. This inability to communicate openly and showcase their work

NOTES

1. State of Civil Society Report 2018 by CIVICUS
2. J. Bob Alotta (2019) '[The Right-Wing Is Weaponizing Gender Panic](#)'
3. [Standing Firm \(2017\)](#)
4. [Girls to the Front, a snapshot of young feminist organising \(2018\)](#)

publicly often further hinders already limited opportunities to secure stable funding from international partners. This funding is key to a sustained impact and social transformation by elevating the issues that YFOs are working on and ensuring that their work does not put the activists in danger.

In the last few years a number of important publications have been written canvassing the realities of young feminist organising in different regions and movements, rather than repeat this analysis here we encourage people to explore these texts. In particular the recent Gender and Development Journal on Young Feminisms⁵ is a great source of such work. Young feminists are increasingly finding ways to tell their own stories and own their narratives.⁶

How young feminists organise

Young feminist collective leadership models are unapologetic in questioning patriarchy and confronting power within feminism and broader movements. Young feminists on the frontlines of change, use a variety of tactics and strategies in challenging social norms in the external - in communities and society and

the internal.⁷ From our experience, young feminist organisers see structure and decision making models as another direct way to challenge oppressive power structures and transform society, starting from within. The way they are organised and the way they share power is very political and defines how much they practice their values.

As outlined in FRIDA and AWID report, 'Brave, Creative, Resilient, The State of young feminist organising' young feminist organisers predominantly draw on consensus and participatory decision making models.⁸ Co-Leadership models are also particularly common, with a strong focus on modelling trust, sharing power and decision making. One example is the Radical Queer Affinity Collective (RQAC), founded in 2011 in Budapest, Hungary - a transnational queer and trans feminist collective committed to building a network of young queer and trans activists in Hungary and the Central and Eastern European region. One of their founders, Marianna Szczygielska explains: "From the start, we wanted to avoid having leaders. This was key in our model because a lot of us were already part of other movements. We decided on consensus based

NOTES

5. [Young Feminisms](#)

6. [Young Feminists' creative strategies to challenge the status quo: A view from FRIDA](#). Authors: Bashi, Gopika Martelotte, Lucia Modungwa, Boikanyo Olmos, Maria Eugenia (2018)

7. [Young feminists' creative strategies to challenge the status quo: a view from FRIDA](#)

8. [AWID & FRIDA, \(2018\) 'Brave, Creative, Resilient, The State of young feminist organising](#).

decision-making, and all decision-making had to be made by all members... It was time consuming so later on we developed some faster ways when decisions needed to be made more urgently. But financial decisions stayed with consensus.”

Many YFOs are not **legally registered** - either by choice or necessity - posing an additional challenge in accessing resources and ensuring security, particularly in more volatile and dangerous contexts. Some of the reasons why YFOs decide not to register their organizations include the high cost of the process, as well as a series of legal, fiscal and administrative burdens that make the registration process unviable.⁹ In addition, many forgo registration in favor of informal or collective structures, sometimes using host organizations or umbrella structures to receive financial or capacity development support. In many ways this informality and conscious effort to construct alternative ways of organising themselves is a way to disrupt hierarchy and institutions that focus primarily on the individual, concentrating power. This cuts to the core of the politics of many young feminist organisers.

B. Trends in the funding ecosystem + development sector

Grassroots feminist movements have been making the case for greater recognition and support for girls and young women (and eventually trans*youth) for many years, setting the scene for other funders and actors to continue building narratives on the vital need to support womens rights organisations and feminist movements. The impact of powerful narratives on investing in women and girls such as the Girl Effect campaign and others, have also been highly influential in shaping the landscape of new actors and framing of women’s rights in more corporate spaces or those focused on social investment. Consequently, support for and interest in resourcing women and girls has been on the rise for the last ten years. However, funding tends to flow mostly to traditionally-structured, long-standing women’s rights organisations rather than into the hands of young feminist organisers. The strict registration requirements of international funders and INGOs continues to inhibit YFOs from receiving support necessary to continue their much needed work.

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9. [Brave, Creative, Resilient: The Global State of Young Feminist Organizing](#) by FRIDA | The Young Feminist Fund & Association for Women’s Rights in Development’s Young Feminist Activism Program

Limited resources for feminist movement building

Young women, girls, trans* and intersex youth continue to be seen as important 'beneficiaries' of international development projects, rather than leaders in their own right spearheading change. While it is true that increasingly donors and INGOs recognize the value of developing young women and girls as individual or potential leaders and activists, seeing them as outspoken, courageous, and creative movement-builders, pushing transformative change around the world, **this is not necessarily paired with a willness to resource autonomous groups, collectives and organisations led by young women.** Young feminist organisers are strikingly under-resourced and their long-term sustainability is in jeopardy. The FRIDA and Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) research report *Brave, Creative, Resilient: The Global State of Young Feminist Organizing* showed that half of FRIDA's survey respondents have annual incomes under \$5,000 and 25% incomes of under \$500.¹⁰

Many INGOs and donors continue to under-appreciate the value of movement building as an approach and mechanism for viable change. Instead, youth orientated interventions that are more focused on individual voices and investment are seen as more valuable or impactful. This can become instrumentalist, or merely a means to an economic end, and/or invisibilizing the collective power of groups, organisations and movements. Consequently, the young feminists who receive visibility and resources are often those seeking opportunities for individual leadership development rather than those who form part of social movements.

Those funders and INGOs that are supportive of movement building as a strategy towards transformative social change recognize the importance of intergenerational approaches. As such, they support and recognise young feminist organisers as crucial to movement-building in their capacities as critical leaders and constituencies of social justice movements. **However this recognition does not necessarily translate to meaningful engagement in decisions about strategy, or direct or even indirect funding.**

NOTES

10. [Brave, Creative, Resilient: The Global State of Young Feminist Organizing](#) by FRIDA | The Young Feminist Fund & Association for Women's Rights in Development's Young Feminist Activism Program



Analysis of funding flows have been monitored during this period by 'AWID's Where is the Money for Women's Rights' series and also by other important actors such as Human Rights Funders Network, OECD. The need for a 'feminist funding ecosystem' is outlined by Angelika Arutyunova: "Despite some progress, after years of monitoring, researching, and advocating for more and better money, the current funding landscape is far from adequate to respond to the needs and demands of the movements to advance rights and justice. With the exception of some public funds, women's funds, and self-generated income, the majority of these pillars and their decision-making processes do not sit with the movements directly."¹¹

Rigid funding flows

Another challenge is thematic funding priorities not aligning to young feminist realities. Young feminists do not live one issue lives, but rather engage in fluid and intersectional approaches. [Haus of Khameleon](#) is one example, a group from Fiji in the Pacific, working on trans rights, as well as climate justice. Many funding programs are specifically designed to improve the economic, social and political position, for example of young women

in their societies. However, their interests and needs are often grouped by development agencies and funders with those of either women or young people in general, rather than the varied challenges that young women face in their communities. This approach risks ignoring the specific challenges facing young women in areas such as access to land, sexual reproductive health and rights or political participation. As such, it not only hinders successful implementation of programs, but also fails to galvanize the incredible energy, expertise and transformational leadership of young feminist organising for social justice.

Rigid funding architecture, limited flows of flexible resources, as well as a lack of alignment in funding priorities with grassroots communities, including young feminist organisers continue to drive competition and hinders partnerships. With limited funding available, the thematic buckets of funding offered by funders have dramatic influence on what work can be resourced, and how movements and organisations prioritise their time, leading to funder driven agendas.

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11. [Why we need a feminist funding ecosystem](#) by Angelika Arutyunova, AWID

Trends in the INGO and Development Sector

A look at the current state of INGOS reveals that they are very different from one another in terms of mission, programming, approach, challenges and opportunities. Due to this diversity within and across INGOs, it is difficult to generalize about their commitment to working with young feminists and their capacity to realize these commitments. Nevertheless, some trends that emerged from the research are outlined below.

The ecosystem in which INGOs are operating is rapidly shifting, and INGOs are experiencing changes in their very make up. While INGOs continue to play an important role in international and community development and human rights, the model of moving resources from the North to the South and power dynamics of international organisations driving development is being questioned. For example, a number INGOs are moving their headquarters to the global South¹² with intentions of staying relevant and being grounded in the communities they serve.¹³

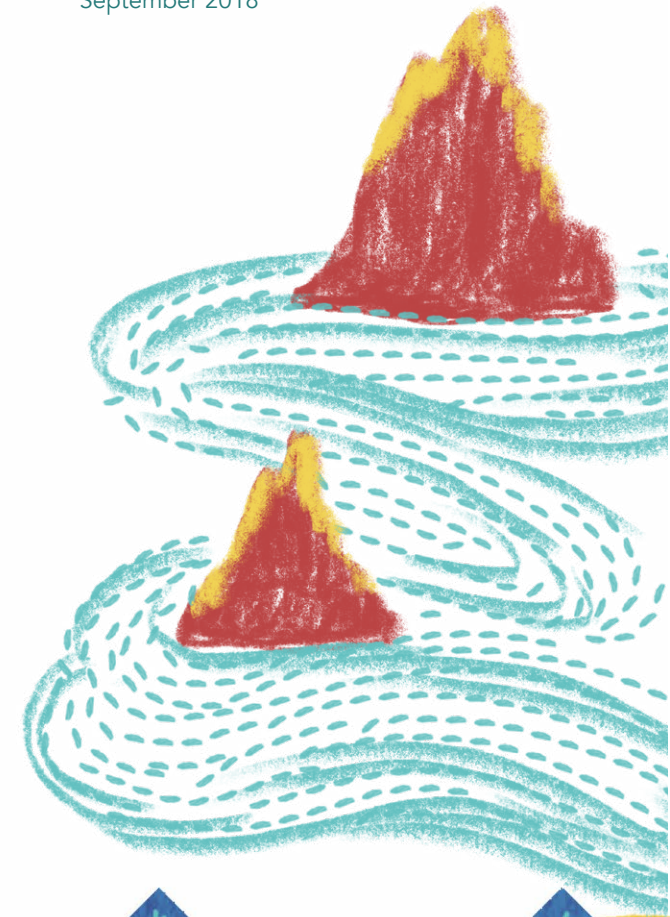
While rigid structures, bureaucracy and operational systems of INGOs and funders

serve as hindrances to supporting young feminist organising, in many ways, the organisational model of INGOs and funders is only half the problem. The unequal power dynamic that inherently characterises the relationships between INGOs or funders and young feminists organisers serves equally in burdening, diminishing, and in some cases, extinguishing the valuable work that YFOs are doing at the local and regional levels. The work of YFOs continues to be drastically underfunded and undervalued in global social justice and humanitarian movements. However, INGOs and donors working with YFOs are well positioned to leverage their resources and access to bring young feminists to the decision-making tables that determine donor and INGO agendas. There exists a real opportunity to solidify collaboration large between YFOs, INGOs and funders in order to deepen transformative change across the world.

NOTES

12. Brehm, V., (2004). 'Autonomy or Dependence? North-South NGO Partnerships'. INTRAC Briefing Paper No. 6.

13. 'INGOs relocating to the Global South' Kirsten C. Williams Recreer International 10 September 2018



Shifts in philanthropy and chances for change

Despite these challenges, there are ample opportunities for deepening relationships and creative collaborations. This is a moment where the importance of supporting young women girls, trans* and intersex youth is increasingly on the radar of many funders and INGOs. The leadership and contributions of young feminist organisers is more and more visible.

Alternative philanthropic models are challenging the North to South INGO model, upending decades of power dynamics that have shaped programmatic priorities. Examples of more progressive movement centered approaches to funding too have gained strength in the last 10 years can be seen in participatory funders such as the Red Umbrella, Disability Rights Fund, UHAI, Wikimedia Foundation and so many more, as well as in the rise of co-leadership models seen in the last 5 years from funders and organisations alike, at AWID, Third Wave, Edge Funders Alliance and more.



SNAPSHOT OF THE FINDINGS

what conversations are telling us

We wish we could give an account of a thriving relationship trend between INGOs and funders, and young feminist-led organisations, but the reality is that the international ecosystem within which funders and INGOs operate is not designed to effectively support young feminist organising. Flickers of hope exist in the work of a handful of INGOs and donors truly being reflexive about their values and how they apply to their partnerships with grassroots organisations. However, the reality remains that large amounts of funding, according to the experiences of the majority of those interviewed, are not reaching young feminist organisers, and they continue to feel undervalued by INGOs and funders.

At the same time, a number of INGOs are recognizing the need to shift their organisational models in response to changing political realities. However, strict donor requirements, project-based operational systems and organisational bureaucracy frustrate much of the efforts on the part of these INGOs to enact change towards more equitable and sustainable relationships with their local

partners. This is especially because young women, trans and intersex youth and girls are still widely considered 'beneficiaries' of aid, rather than leaders equipped to work with those funds and scale change. On the part of donors, the same bureaucratic structures can hinder their ability to support the power of young feminist organising, even when staff have clear vision and commitment. The narrowly defined thematic areas of funding also hinder their capacity to reach YFOs directly. The long-term, slowly-changing thematic priorities of funders often does not align with the priorities of YFOs whose contexts are rapidly changing.

While there are many challenges that need to be tackled before equitable relationships between YFOs and INGOs and donors become common practice, there are numerous examples of reflexive partnerships between YFOs and INGOs or donors that have proven to be mutually beneficial. Some examples include, [Oxfam](#), [Colectivo Rebeldía](#) and [Coordinadora de la Mujer](#)'s anti-violence campaign in Bolivia, [Let's Stop Thinking It's Normal](#) from Oxfam's Enough Campaign, [the With and](#)



For Girls' Award Process, and more. These examples hold truth to the undeniable fact that the challenges stipulated below can - and must - be overcome in order for YFOs, INGOs and donors to make sustainable, justice-driven impact in their spaces of work.

A. What young feminist organisers are saying

The young feminist-led organisations that were interviewed commented on the **unequal power dynamic between INGOs and themselves**, which is not only in many ways inherent, but is in numerous cases something protected, defended or even denied by INGO members of staff. Despite these challenges, there are several accounts of relationships between INGOs or donors and young feminist-led organisations that really did work well. In essence, the success of these collaborations can be credited to the **trust shared between the two organisations working together, as well as the in-depth understanding that INGOs demonstrated of the political, social and funding contexts** in which their young feminist-led partner organisations work. Mutual trust and the willingness to act on their understanding of organizing contexts are key prompts that led funders and INGOs that worked successfully with young feminist-led collectives to have flexibility in their funding structures, provide diverse forms of support in alignment with their partners' needs, and make their partners feel valued.

A total of twelve interviews were conducted with FRIDA grantee partners based in the regions where FRIDA works. These young feminist-led organisations, while working in geographically and politically diverse contexts, also worked in diverse focus areas, ranging from sexual and reproductive health, LGBTIQ justice, theatre and public art, economic equality, advocacy against gender-based violence and leadership development.

Diverse and changing needs require adaptable funding programmes

Because young feminist organisers are working at the frontlines against social and political injustices in diverse contexts, they are also hit hardest by social or political volatility in their contexts. This requires them to be adaptable and responsive to change in order to effectively continue their work. Their needs are therefore not only different from one another, but change. The relationships that have worked best between YFOs and INGOs have been where INGOs and donors were able - and willing - to adapt and be responsive to their local partners' needs.

It is no surprise, that funding programmes reserved for very specific themes, with **restrictive funding policies** that stipulate how money is transferred, how funds are distributed within the organisation, and the **structural criteria for eligible applicants, compromise young feminist organisers access to resources.**

Need for core support and multi-year funding


Acquiring funding is only half the struggle. Once funding is granted, YFOs endure **tedious, and often excessive reporting requirements.** YFOs have small core teams, often working without pay and or low wages due to limited resources. These core teams' time is heavily invested in community engagement and advocacy work - and needs to be in order to be responsive to their communities' needs. As one member of a young feminist-led organisation in Egypt explained, her team was aware that their workshop facilitators were "working with complicated communities, so we might face burnout, but we didn't even think that the admin team would also face burnout." The same member continued to explain that with multiple donors, her organisation reports on various templates for the same activity. In one particular case, they had to re-submit their reports "more than three or four times" to a donor organisation who had staff turnover without proper handover processes.

This challenge is coupled with donors' **tendencies to micro-manage** the funds given to YFOs. Most donors do not want to provide core funds, or only allow a small percentage of funds to go towards administrative expenses. In order for organisations to do the amount of reporting work required by INGOs, teams need to be expanded and staff need to be hired. A co-founder of a young feminist-led organisation based in Zambia shared her

concerns: “we are a two-person organisation, we can’t achieve what a fifty-man organisation can do.” Furthermore, she continued, since most engagements with INGOs are short-term, “even when you hire staff you can only give them a contract for one year... as opposed to [a large NGO that the same donor funds] that would get funded for five years where its staff will have contracts for five years.”

Lack of trust between YFOs and INGOs


The lack of trust experienced by YFOs from INGOs and donors entrenches the unequal power dynamic that jeopardises the effectiveness of these collaborations. Ninka Khaindrava explains, “when organisations see that you are freshly registered, and all of the leadership are people who are under twenty-five... nobody trusts you.” Many grantees interviewed felt that being young is assumed to mean that you are unskilled. Hayat Mirshad spoke about this in the context of the very small amount of funds that trickle down to the bottom of the funding ecosystem to grassroots organisations. “They say we are partners and they want to deal with you as partners,” but do not adequately fund young feminist-led organisations for the administrative work required. “Afterwards they come and tell you, you don’t have the capacities... and for me this is humiliating. We are the people implementing the work on the ground, we have the capacities, but the due diligence and the requirements you are asking for as donors has nothing to do with the experience on the ground.”



Hayat Mirshad, a member of Fe-Male describes the wave of “big funds” being made available in Lebanon for humanitarian projects providing services to Syrian refugees, for example, and a recent trend among donors to fund engagements with men, religious leaders and government. Fe-Male does not work on ‘service provision,’ and funding trends are “really banning us from engaging our work... working with religious leaders – in other words – working with oppressors, is something that we are not ready to do yet.”

This lack of trust leads to a break down in communication between YFOs and INGO partners, hinders approachability, and protects the authority that INGOs and donors have. "You have to always be this really respectful person... when they are sending emails, you have to always respond in two hours or something, and their time[line] is like three months," said one young feminist interviewed. One member of a YFO in Poland spoke about how 'check-in calls' from the donor feel more like surveillance than actually caring about how the project is going: "there is power in hearing what other people are doing." It also makes things difficult when there are misunderstandings or disagreements.

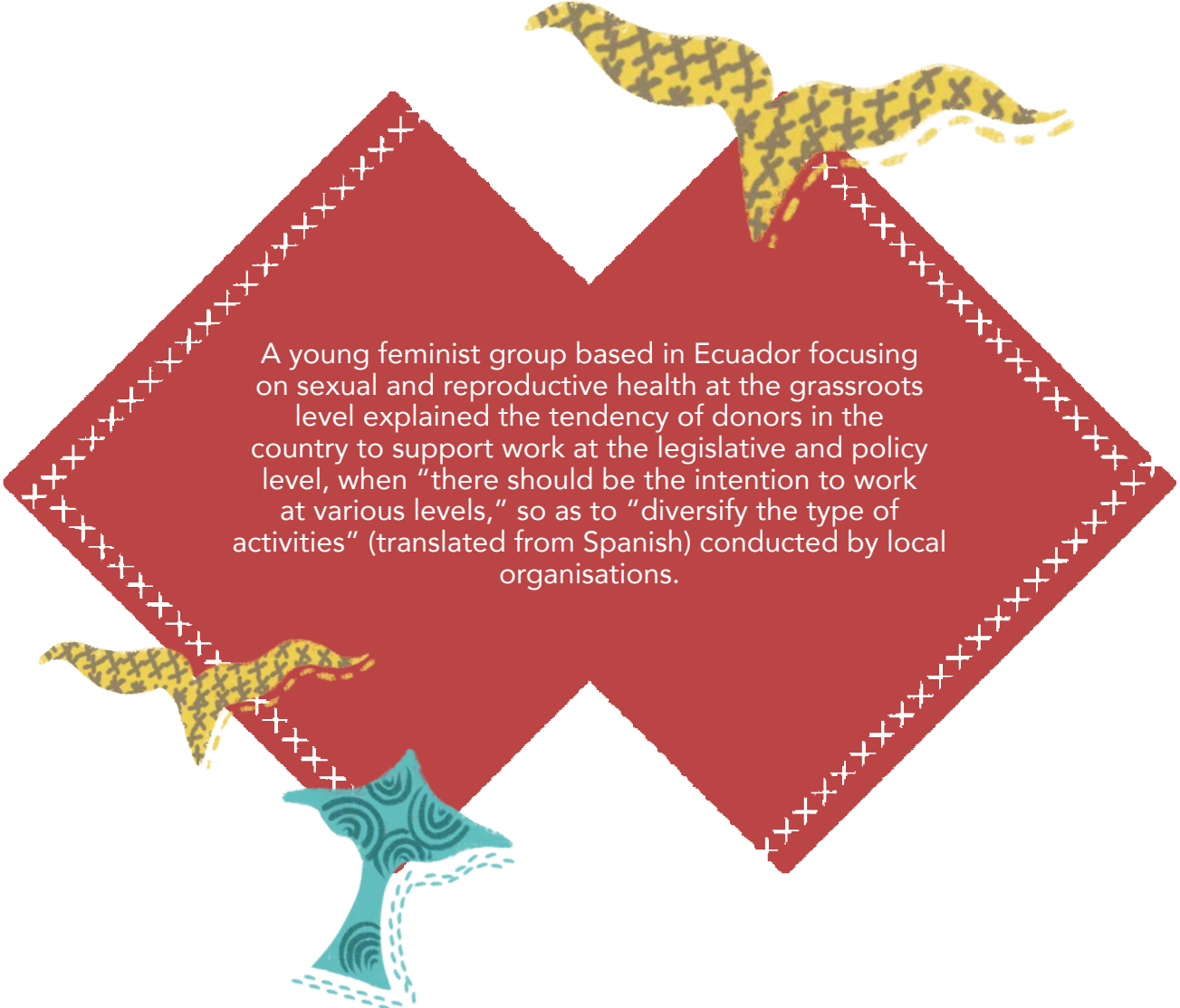
Six out of the twelve organisations interviewed told stories of extreme challenges they faced due to there not being any policies or reporting mechanisms in place when a particular donor or INGO partner breached their side of the contract or abused their power. Sylwia Wodzinska, co-founder of MamyGlos, emphasized the stress experienced by the organisation's members in reporting power abuses "to someone who is powerful or to whom your organisation's life depends on."



Ninka Khaindrava, a member of Women's Gaze, works in Georgia – a country saturated with large, long-standing NGOs that emerged with the fall of the USSR. She states, "[donors] ask of you this really perfect English and this perfect organisation that has everything in terms of finances and law and reports... because of this, many younger organisations just close down."

Communication matters

Key to any sustainable and thriving relationship is open, honest communication. Young feminist organisers want to learn from their international partners, and want to feel that their needs are heard. Often, impersonal communication mechanisms make feminist organisers feel surveilled, rather than supported. Young feminist organisers expressed wanting to be able to approach their international partners with challenges that they are facing without threat of the discontinuation of funding. **Having approachable points of contact helps to dismantle the unequal power dynamic** that so often characterises communication. One YFO based in Ecuador emphasised their desire to have a **horizontal relationship**, where “empathy” is shown: “it would be great if they were interested in knowing us” (*translated from Spanish*). They felt that once the grant is received, communication is “missed... until the report is needed” (*translated from Spanish*).



A young feminist group based in Ecuador focusing on sexual and reproductive health at the grassroots level explained the tendency of donors in the country to support work at the legislative and policy level, when “there should be the intention to work at various levels,” so as to “diversify the type of activities” (*translated from Spanish*) conducted by local organisations.



An ideal relationship would be “where there are people in place we can communicate issues to - it shouldn’t be a one-way relationship where we’re only the ones contacting you.”

Member of a young feminist-led organisation, St Lucia

“We feel like we cannot actively participate alongside [INGOs in the country], because we’re too small, or we may not be taken seriously... We feel like outsiders.”

Anne-Marie Lilih, Gerehu Waikele Women’s Sewing Group, Papua New Guinea

Genuine care makes young feminists feel valued

While the anger and frustration felt by many young feminist organisers about the lack of voice they have in shaping the funding ecosystem is unquestionable, there are many accounts of relationships had with INGOs and donors that were positive, productive, and inspiring. True partnership came down to a sense that grantees felt of being valued, listened to, and understood by their international partners. This sense was cultivated, firstly, by **experiences of genuine care by the INGOs and donors**, not only for the wellbeing of the projects run, but for the wellbeing of the members of the grantee organisation themselves. Akosua Hanson, a member of the Drama Queens in Ghana, said that what fortified their relationship with OSIWA was their “genuine interest in the project.”

Members of a YFO in Zambia spoke about their relationship with one particular funder that, even after the funding period was over, “continue[s] to think about us in the work they are doing” by directing them to other opportunities, and inviting them to speaking events. Two grantees spoke about the acts of care the FRIDA takes to support the wellbeing of their members. “FRIDA blew our minds away, they dedicated a part of the grant to self-care... that was amazing,” said Sylwia Wodzinska, co-founder of MamyGlos. FRIDA’s support of self-care “makes us feel that we are also priority working on the ground,” said Hayat Mirshad, member of Fe-Male.



It’s nice to be an activist and be involved in social justice, but do you know what’s also awesome? To be able to pay rent. And have health insurance. So it is in all of our interest that our activists are as competitive [in the job market] as possible.”

Sylwia Wodzinska, MamyGlos, Poland

“Put yourself in our shoes... How much of [a funder’s] budget is going towards their staff? And how much of the money they are giving us do they want us to give towards our staff? How much of their budget are going towards their expenses to run their office and everything? And how much do they want us to use for that?”

Member of a young feminist-led organisation, Zambia

“Invest in building the capacity of your funded organisation, to let them actually do the same work after you stop giving them the funds. This is something that not many donors invest in – the capacity building of the staff, of the team, of the projects that [they] are supporting.”

Member of a young feminist-led organisation, Egypt



More often than not, all YFOs want is for their international partners to care: to be genuinely interested in their projects and invested in their members' well-being. Impersonal, formal correspondence, micro-management of funds, lack of transparency and mistrust make YFOs feel under-valued.

Willingness to be flexible and in-depth understanding of context foster a sense of partnership

Thriving relationships between YFOs and INGOs or donors were also cultivated by expressions of willingness to be flexible regarding the nature of support given to, and nature of relationship had with young feminist-led organisations. This was often the case with regards to YFOs applying for first-time funding, unregistered organisations, and grantees requesting core funding. "FRIDA saw us when nobody saw us," said a grantee member from Zambia, recounting the struggle of acquiring funding for the first time. It was this first-time fund that Susan Mueni and Siama Yusuf of MAD Sisters in Kenya believe is what "enabled us to start growing." One YFO member based in Egypt described the collaborative way in which their partnership with one particular funder was designed. According to the young feminist interviewed, the funding partner approached them and said, "We want to continue supporting you, but you don't want to be incubated and you don't want to register as an NGO, so how can we still support you while not being forced to



do anything that you don't like to do?"

Lastly, in-depth understanding of the organizing context and needs of their local partners engendered an approachability that strengthened communication between YFOs and their international partners. One YFO whose political context frequently poses threat to their work reflected on a recent conversation one of her colleagues had had with one of their funders. "She was quite surprised with the level of understanding they've shown... she felt that they're living here and sharing with us the same context. They're very aware of the situation and the security threats." This understanding also yielded diverse forms of support, including capacity building opportunities, expanding a grantee's visibility, connecting the grantee to key contacts within their network, and supporting travel to regional and international convenings. Susan Mueni, a member of MAD Sisters in Kenya, explained how a capacity development grant enabled their organisation to put the structures in place they believe they need in order to be eligible for more funding opportunities: "I remember we were given a capacity grant last year, and we used that money to attend a capacity development workshop where we came up with a strategic plan... We've now opened an account and we've registered our organisation."

Not only are the contexts in which young feminists work constantly changing, politically and socially, but many face threats to their security and safety as a result. Because contexts change, the needs of their community often change, and so funds need to be

"Be understanding and flexible. For example, our local transport, they don't have receipts yet."

Susan Mueni, MAD Sisters, Kenya

"Understand the context, first of all, because someone who's throwing money in a country they don't know anything about, this is the worst thing they can do. It affects the whole ecosystem. It affects the sustainability and wellbeing of those working on the projects. Not being aware of where we are working is a very big issue, and it's very common, unfortunately."

Member of a young feminist-led organisation, Egypt

used differently to how it was originally programmed. Many young feminists also work in extremely under-serviced areas, where it is difficult to give hard proof of money spent.

Forging community

Many YFOs working in under-serviced areas or geographically remote countries **feel alone in their work**. Other organisations – even based locally – feel inaccessible. Furthermore, in cases where the members of a feminist organisation are particularly young, many do not know where to start in initiating international collaboration, and if anything, find meeting members of international organisations **stressful and intimidating**. At the same time, YFOs who have been able to travel and network at international and regional convenings have acquired funding, shared learnings, catapulted their visibility, and importantly, engaged in a felt solidarity, through their participation in these gatherings. This variance of connectivity points to the value of supporting young feminists to travel and be in key movement or funding spaces. Opportunities for engagement between YFOs and INGOs and funders need to be made available.

The **unequal power dynamics** between YFOs and INGOs can undermine the feminist movement globally by mirroring the very patriarchy feminist organisations are trying to dismantle. However, INGOs and donors working with young

feminist organisers directly have the remarkable opportunity to mobilise and distribute resources in ways that make long-lasting impact where it matters. Their vast network of international and local organisations and explicit investment in the thriving of young, feminist-led organisations position them to leverage their power to bring the young feminist organisers they work with to the decision-making tables that determine global partnership trends and direct global movements.

B. What INGOs are saying

The international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) also expressed facing a range of challenges that arise when working with young feminist groups.

Differing levels of institutional commitment to young feminist work

From the interviews conducted and relationships which FRIDA has built, it seems INGOs differ widely in their comfort level in using movement building or feminist language/framing, however a large number are committed in priorities and resources to working with “young women”, “adolescent girls,” or youth. INGOs can easily become caught in the nexus of upward donor accountability, focused on implementing programs with set deliverables within a designated timeframe that will satisfy donor requirements.

While few INGOs take the movement building approach to their work, some are beginning to lean towards this direction, recognizing the need to shift their organisational models in response to changing political realities. Too often however, the **theory of change** of large INGOs is based on meeting targets within specific, and often very short, timeframes. Thus, considering the fact that truly effective youth and women’s empowerment requires extensive time to address the root causes of discrimination and patriarchy, even when working on longer-term projects, the INGOs are often unable to meaningfully engage with YFOs and bring about durable and lasting change.

Reliance on individual relationships

It appears that often, the success of projects involving partnerships with young feminists are often dependent on the **personalities and relationships between individuals involved rather than institutional mechanisms to facilitate such partnerships**. In addition, there are varied approaches to working with young feminists within a single organization, perhaps guided by differing priorities or agendas between the headquarters and local offices. This can mean it is up to a small group of committed individuals within those organisations to explore avenues for collaboration with young feminists. This work can range from revising organisational policies and grant agreements, to creating new avenues for programming, to

challenging power imbalances that frequently create misunderstandings and thwart positive outcomes. Indeed, partnerships between young feminists and INGOs often thrive thanks to individuals and their commitment to creating equal and durable partnerships, which energize and strengthen young feminist movements.

Impact of funding restrictions

One fundamental issue is the funding structure for international development aid organisations. Strict donor requirements and project-based systems through which funding is allocated can frustrate efforts to establish more equitable and sustainable relationships with young feminist groups. Because of donor compliance requirements, INGOs seek implementing partners that will be able to deliver on specific programmatic outcomes on time and on budget. Such large-scale projects also require reporting that can be highly technical and burdensome, especially for smaller organizations that lack administrative capacity. Finally, most donors require that all implementing partners be registered organisations, which often prevents INGOs from partnering with young feminist groups that opt out from formalizing their organisations for a variety of reasons.

Organisational bureaucracy

Assuming that these structures can be addressed, a second barrier to working with young feminist organizations is organisational bureaucracy of the large INGOs. INGOs




"Have long-term partnerships... so that we stop working in isolation... [that way] we can have a stronger voice."

Member of a young feminist-led organisation, Zambia

"Regionally it's extremely difficult and expensive to travel in the Caribbean. So young activists absolutely cannot work regionally and collaborate themselves."

Member of a young feminist-led organisation, St Lucia



This project has required us to rewrite the rules at every stage of the pilot for the past two years: sub-granting agreements, a new grantmaking model, new MOUs, new ways of underwriting work. It's time consuming and frustrating. We've done acrobatics to work for this project. If you're passionate and keep pushing, you can do it, but it's incredibly stressful on us to fight all the time.

Representative of an INGO on working on a project with a YFO

The system we have is so projectized, so dependent on restricted funds and the way donors are functioning. We have to conform.

INGO representative

We're not good at supporting young feminists to take actions later on. We have some support systems for young people, but we don't have enough supports to help them.

INGO Representative

have fairly rigid systems for implementing partners that are designed to meet a variety of legal and financial requirements across contexts. Often, these systems are not suited to partnering with small, grassroots organizations that require flexible approaches to meet the specific needs of their constituencies. These system barriers require feminist allies working within INGOs to invest significant time and effort to navigate the bureaucracy, challenge internal practices or policies, or shift organisational norms and culture. Such allies often play a role of bridge or translator for informal groups working within a large system.

Limited funding available

Although INGOs have access to much stronger and durable financial resource base, compared to women’s rights groups, internally, program areas focusing on young feminists within these structures are relatively underfunded. Often, this area of work has to rely on the commitment and passion of a few members of staff who are often part-time or temporary, or their workload does not permit getting involved in more challenging, or less traditional projects involving young feminist organisations. In addition, the INGOs are struggling to secure sustainable funding to meaningfully engage with YFOs. With the priorities of bilateral governments shifting, and mid-size funders increasingly wanting to prioritize grassroots work, INGOs are becoming more cautious about spending money on things that do not necessarily

align clearly with bilateral or private funder priorities or are perceived as risky due to their informal status or unpredictable nature. This suggests that there is a need to work collaboratively with INGOs on advocacy at an ecosystem level, making the case for supporting young feminist organising and inter-generational work as critical to meeting broader sustainable development goals.

C. What funders are saying

Among the donors interviewed, there are similar positive trends and persisting challenges as found among INGOs.

Issue-based programming rather than identity-based and a focus on individuals not organizations

Funders see young women and girls as important beneficiaries of international development projects and many donors also recognize the value of developing individual young women as potential leaders and activists. However, *young women-led organizations* are not currently a priority for many donors. Such groups are welcomed as applicants but not prioritized for funding, except in the cases of a few women’s funds.¹⁴ YFOs compete with other groups based on the work they propose to do rather than their perspective or composition. Few if any donors place an emphasis on funding organizations who explicitly profess to be *feminist or be led by feminists*. Many do

however, place an emphasis on funding projects which have clearly feminist goals.

Most donors interviewed identify their priorities in terms of issue areas. These are often categorized under different themes, but include issues such as sexual and reproductive health and rights, violence against women, land rights and the environment, poverty and economic justice, HIV and AIDS, governance and institutions, social infrastructure, gender equality, leadership development, and humanitarian assistance.

Very few donors interviewed at the time had an explicit focus on organizations led by young women or led by young feminists. Almost none of them tracked the degree to which they support these types of groups, but this has changed over recent years. Many have examples of young women-led organizations who they have funded, but these groups were not chosen because they are young women-led organizations or because they have an explicitly feminist perspective, but rather because of the work they were proposing to do. In other words, there was an alignment between the goals of the grantee and the goals of the donor.

The degree to which young feminist organisations are successful in obtaining funds from largely depends on whether their programmatic work aligns with the thematic priorities of the particular funder.

The work of YFOs in ever-changing and volatile contexts often remains unfunded because it might not fit in the long-term, and slowly changing, thematic priorities of the donor organisations.

Slow but steady institutional and operational shifts

Young women were perceived by a significant number of donors as effective activists due to their energy, dynamism, flexibility and innovation. They are often intersectional and may form coalitions more easily with other groups of young people rather than with older and more established women's rights groups. These groups are, however, also perceived by some donors as small and somewhat disorganized compared to more established groups.

They are less likely to be registered or have the capacity to manage and report on external grants. As such, funders are still learning how to adjust their funding mechanisms and operations to be able to satisfy certain requirements and traditional models.

Donors acknowledge that they lack experience with young women-led and feminist-led groups and that, as donors, they face a challenge in either incorporating them into the established funding approach, or modifying that approach to better serve them. Furthermore, for donors operating in certain contexts, funding social justice

movements can be challenging in itself, as these areas of focus can be perceived as controversial by local governments, communities, or donors. While more traditionally supported projects, focused on issues such as access to clean water or medical supplies, appear to be more likely to generate popular support, funding young feminist groups can be more controversial and could require certain degree of political maneuvering. Moreover, the shift from funding charitable work to funding social movements requires a different theory of social change

Like most organizations, donors have to comply with strict objectives and short deadlines, which hinders their ability to explore new and less traditional partnerships. Instead they are encouraged to do what they have done in the past and try to replicate past successes. **While individual allies within donor organisations with experience working with YFOs can be critical to ensuring more equitable partnerships in the future, they can be frustrated by existing organisational structures, priorities and time pressures.**

Providing the evidence

Fundamentally, young women-led and young feminist-led organizations still do not receive dedicated funding because donors have yet to be convinced that these groups bring a truly specialized benefit by virtue of their composition. The unique value added of being led by young women is not creating

significant amounts of dedicated funding even if it is supported or admired.

Project and core funding for groups seeking social change presents donors with a challenge related to outcomes. Both applications and monitoring/evaluation presuppose a measurable impact from the work to be done. In traditional projects, this might be measured by the number of wells completed, for example, or the number of patients treated. Social change, however, is notoriously gradual and difficult to measure. This makes it more difficult for funders and regrating organizations to assess the impact of their grants.

Several funders noted that funding directed toward social change requires a higher level of trust, even faith, in the grantee because hard evidence of results is unlikely to be forthcoming. As noted earlier, this lack of evidence may be especially acute with regard to the work of smaller informal organizations such as those led by young women and young feminists.

NOTES

14. Semillas is an exception in this regard.



REFLECTION ON FRIDA'S EXPERIENCE :

key learnings + principles for engagement

Our experience working alongside young feminist organisers in a grantee-donor relationship has been one of constant learning and reflection. Supporting emerging groups that have varied politics and needs is no easy task. Through this learning since FRIDA was set up and also through speaking with grantee partners in this study, we have come up with some **key learnings and principles for engagement** that, when implemented in our experience **fortify and deepen the relationship with young feminist organisers.**

We feel it is important to share these in the spirit to support other organisations on their journey and to keep reflecting on how FRIDA can improve. We know that not every INGO and Funder is well placed to integrate these into their work, but we feel is important for

us to share, both the **challenges and the good practices.** As young feminist groups and organisations are not static, there is absolutely a need for ongoing reflection and learning.

Young feminists are diverse and our approach must reflect that

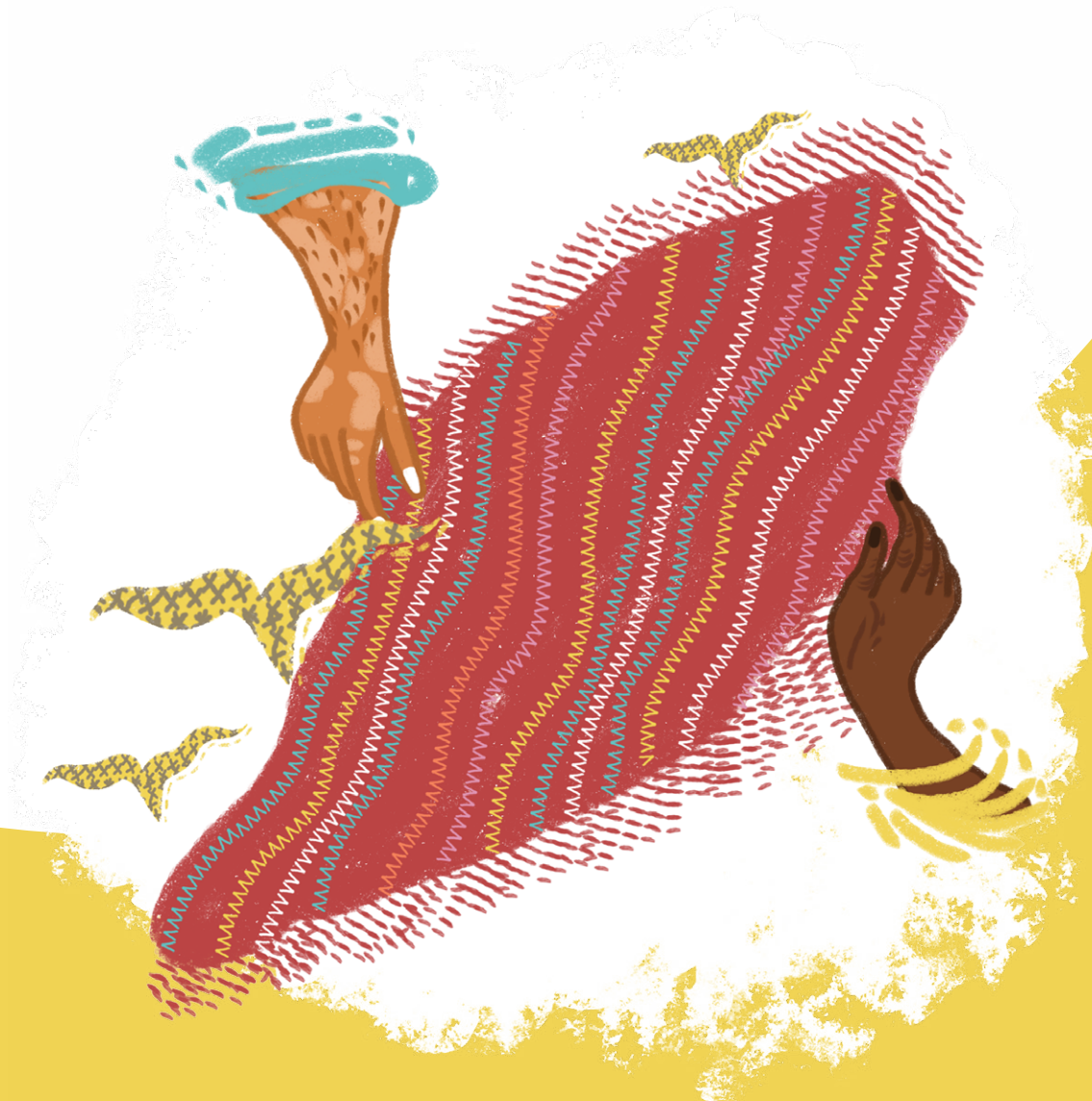
FRIDA is currently working with an array of young feminists organisers that demonstrate the diversity of the organisational spectrum - from informal unregistered collectives without paid staff - right through to registered NGOs with paid team and office space - and everything in between. The aspirations and goals of the groups, as well as their politics are vastly different. It is therefore necessary that we as a funder are adaptive and flexible in our approach. This means finding creative

ways to get resources to informal groups, being flexible in requirements and listening to their needs in terms of sustainability and growth.

For some groups they want to secure more financial resources, and hire more staff. For others the goal is not to grow, or in some cases not even to sustain due to emerging in response to a specific moment. This requires a dialogue with groups on their needs. We always provide core flexible funding, and are also open to different funding methods and strategies, such as working through host organizations and intermediaries, and encouraging groups to say whether they want to increase or decrease the funding they receive based on their own needs. Groups continue to tell us that relationship, visibility, access to networks, opportunities to connect

with other activists and funders, and specific skillbuilding and training opportunities are as valuable - or sometimes even more valuable - than the funding itself.

Our experience has been that young feminists groups in all their diversity, often have more than one leader - often leaning towards the co-leadership or more of a consensus model. Their leadership style is often a clear expression of their values, and we believe these collective leadership styles are some of their greatest contributions to the world. Finding ways to respond to this diversity in leadership styles is key. See recommendations for some tips on this!



What does meaningful engagement with girls look like at FRIDA?

One of the examples of our principles of engagement with YFOs is related to our support to girl led or centered organizing. At FRIDA we believe in transforming power of girl activists to fully participate in social justice movements. We aim to recognize and understand power relations, age specificities and diversity of experiences and backgrounds and identities.

◆ We acknowledge the intersectionality of thematics, issues, communities that girl organisers represent.

FRIDA promotes meaningful girl engagement in its governance and thus ensures a representation of girl expertise in her Advisory committee. Girl advisors bring their knowledge from each region where FRIDA funds and shape FRIDA's support to girl led and centered groups. In addition, Girl Advisors regularly contribute to FRIDA strategies and policies to ensure prioritization of girl - led groups and their identified issues which in turn support setting institutional, program, or project standards for teenage girl engagement.

◆ We acknowledge that girl organizing is not homogeneous and not siloed:

Since the very first grantmaking cycle, FRIDA has been funding and supporting young feminist groups led by teenage girls or teenage girls - centered from different identities and backgrounds. Girl Advisors participate in outreach to girl groups in their regions to contribute to increased direct and flexible funding for girl - led groups through participatory grantmaking. Moreover, they participate in reviewing the applications as well as participate in reviewing reports.

◆ We understand that financial support is key but NOT the only need of girl-led groups.

As part of Funding+ model that FRIDA practices, girl advisors, grantee partners led and centered by teenage girls are invited to join opportunities for mutual exchange, experience sharing and accompaniment "mentorship" program.

◆ We are committed to challenging tokenistic and/or protectionist attitudes towards girl activists

Girl - led and centered groups as well as Girl

advisors shape FRIDA's knowledge building and philanthropic advocacy. For example, Girl Advisor was involved as peer researcher in "Girls to the Front" report while other girl led and centered groups contributed to this report by bringing their voices and experience(s).

Building relationships based on trust and respect has been foundational

A clear intention to form a relationship based on trust is critical. Of course it takes time and modelling of practice to achieve this. FRIDA using a collective participatory process whereby groups vote for each other to receive funding addresses some of the power dynamics in philanthropy. However, entering into a donor/grantee relationship - power imbalances are unavoidable. Nevertheless, it has been our experience that from the very outset, taking time to establish equitable practices and open up dialogue is a key step in establishing trust and a healthier, more fruitful relationship.

In our experience, the first steps of this relationship building starts with a series of welcome emails quite informal language and a welcome pack with core information. Then follows a welcome call where we invite staff,

advisors and other new and existing grantee partners to join. Where it is safe and where there is consent, we also turn on the camera - putting a face to a name makes us feel more human. This welcome call helps to share a bit more about FRIDA and the groups to share who they are and enable us to understand their work. Having staff that is from and represents FRIDA's constituency - in our case - predominantly young women staff from the global south - has also supported for more ease in relationship building. Often people expect to meet someone older when they meet you, just by being a similar age or from their region, this can support to generate trust.

Young feminist organisers want to be recognized for their expertise and treated as partners who have as much say in how funds are managed as their funding partners. Young feminist organisers also want to be acknowledged in their international partners' communications for their participation in the creation and design of knowledge projects and programmes published by their international partners.

Recognising how power dynamics impact relationships

As funders, in FRIDA's experience it has

been critical to acknowledge the power and privilege that we hold as a funder and be conscious of how this influences interactions. Navigating these power dynamics and supporting collectives with funds for the first time has needed to be intentional work, with humility and an eagerness to learn and listen with each step. When we ask a grantee partner to do something it is often hard for them to say no. Trusting activists and creating intentional space for values-based conversations between activists and funders where activists can ask hard questions / give feedback - anonymously and directly - timing matters - may be for example outside of renewal time, and being transparent about our own limitations - what you are and what you are not as a funder.

Systematic ways to really listen, hear and build accountability

Over the course of the relationship, we cover key questions such as:

- ◆ What are their expectations of FRIDA?
- ◆ What does accountability mean to them?
- ◆ What are their non-negotiables?

These questions are answered through the welcome process described above as well as other ways. For example, in 2017, FRIDA opened its first annual grantee feedback

NOTES

15. The Central American Fund for Women - FCAM also has a similar annual survey that was the direct inspiration for FRIDA's.

survey, which enabled anonymous and direct feedback from grantee partners to the FRIDA team.¹⁵ Ensuring this feedback is then taken seriously and used to influence decisions and flows of resources, as well as coming back to the grantees to share how the survey results were taken on board is key.

Prioritising communication and transparency are similarly critical points, as are humility and being direct about your limitations. This is of course no easy task, and FRIDA itself is in a constant state of learning on what is multi-directional conversation and dialogue, and how to balance what may be an oversaturation of communication.

Flexibility in everything that we do


Flexibility and an openness to unlearn and be questioned on the way structures and systems are created has been an essential part of working with young feminist activists as a funder. This means a willingness to be open to changes and flexibility in timelines in some cases. In our experience this has been about being upfront when things cannot be negotiated - say timelines etc - but this can be done with more openness and humility to give the detail on why restrictions are the way they are. Other times, it may mean giving no-cost extensions in funding, or pulling funding windows forward so a group can respond to an urgent opportunity in their context.

"It's having the understanding and flexibility to put the safety of the people [working locally] themselves as a priority... give the organisation or projects the right to decide their priorities."

Member of a young feminist-led organisation, Egypt

"We really try to stand for what we believe and what we think, and of course we are always open to [receive] advice from others and from funders, but we prefer to have the last word."

Bochra Triki, Chouf, Tunisia



"We have our own agenda and our own policies and what we want to do, and what we think is right in our contexts. Even when funders say that they trust the organisation and they don't want to control what our needs are, they always [try to impose control]."

Ninka Khaindrava, Women's Gaze, Georgia

"We come up with this great idea, and just because [we] don't have the money or the resources to be able to execute this idea, this big INGO will just have me in meetings, make me tea, give me juice in their air-conditioned office – next thing... they have launched my project. This happened to us."

Member of a young feminist-led organisation in Zambia

"We are the local organisations working on the ground, we speak the local language, we know more about the needs and priorities, and everything that women in our community are facing. So we would like them to trust us in deciding the approaches and the top priorities that we want to work on."

Hayat Mirshad, Fe-Male, Lebanon

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on FRIDA's learnings and findings, the following recommendations can support INGO and funders efforts to meaningfully engage with young feminists organizing.

We recognise that the realities and needs of INGOs and funders vary vastly. This means that the type of engagement and approach they will have with young feminist organisers will also be different.

To ensure that the recommendations are useful and as practical as possible, we have clustered them then under different entry points. In a moment where the lines between a funder and an INGO are becoming more blurred, with some INGOs developing funding mechanisms, and some funders increasingly exploring more holistic programming, we felt it made the most sense to focus our recommendations more in terms of the type of engagement you envision with young feminist organisers.



1. Grantmaking directly to young feminist organisations:

If you plan to directly resource young feminist organisations with funding or services.



Raise awareness with your team on the lived experiences of young feminist organisers and how they operate in order to foster a shared commitment of flexibility, respect, and creativity.

All members of the staff should especially understand and be mindful of the reasons why young feminist groups are unregistered or informal, which can either be a political choice, necessity due to security reasons, or because they are still emerging and nascent.



Set aside a percentage of your annual budget and disaggregate allocations by looking at age and gender.

This will naturally enable you to set and achieve goals, and give you a structure to track some impact. Furthermore, tracking allocations and actual expenditure

will contribute to the overall need for a tip for INGOS - where possible look to draw on your unrestricted funding when working with young feminist organisers, as that will enable you to offer more flexibility in your approach.



Consider diversity even within the subset of young feminist groups.

This means paying attention to identities of race, class, ability, and more. Often those young people who have access to technology and have stronger proposal-writing skills will come from more urban or privileged backgrounds. Consider accepting proposals in non-written form. Age diversity is also important even within the 'young feminist' demographic. Funders tend to fund groups led by young women in their late 20s.



Make sure to allocate enough budget that can cover the core operating costs of the group, such as rent, transport, and other essential costs.

Support groups to pay people fair wages and help

young people claim what they are worth. Often, young people are seen as volunteers and stereotyped for not needing to provide for a family, even though they may work just as much as others and be a key breadwinner at home.



However, respect those groups that do not want to have paid staff for political reasons. In these cases especially, do not overlook the importance of supporting the group to build in other compensation mechanisms that may address other needs such as self-care and security.

For example, while a group may not want to have paid staff in order to remain more informal, their members and volunteers may still need stipends or allowances for transport, security protections, and/or team-building and collective care activities.



Find alternative ways of transferring funding. This is especially important for Finance Staff to investigate. Be open and explore how to do transfers to

individuals in an accountable way via memorandums of understanding, and consider how to borrow practices from cash transfers programs in other development work in order to apply it to groups that do not have organizational bank accounts.



Support program officers to exercise flexibility and adaptability on a case by case basis.

Young feminist organisers are not a monolith and social change is never linear.

- This could be in the form of offering no cost extensions, in cases when groups are still new at receiving funding and implementing projects in a set amount of time. This gives them space to practice emergent learning and manage their projects carefully.
- For groups in high security risk contexts, writing reports and keeping records in their places of work is dangerous. A member of your Program Staff can offer to hold a reporting session where groups report verbally, and your staff keep a written record at your secure office instead.

- If you are funding groups who have one or two other funders, try to find out who those funders are and coordinate with the permission of the group, communicate with the funders to reduce burden and see how you can support the group.



Work with other established organizations as hosts or sponsors, if it is not an option for you to support unregistered or newly established organisations or groups that may not have a financial track record.

FRIDA, other women's funds, or local organizations in particular can potentially provide this support.

- In this scenario, ensure that young activists are involved in this decision and the process of creating formal agreement documents (ie, MoUs, contracts, etc) to ensure that they will in the end have access to the funds. This may mean **creating space to be discuss possible generational power dynamics** when the host organization staff are older and may exercise some control over funding with the intention of being 'helpful'.

We learned that youth play an important role in seeding adolescent and girl or non-binary child-led initiatives. So if you want to fund adolescents and younger, make sure to be clear about funding girl-centered groups where work is implemented jointly with and for girls. If they can be co-led by young feminist activists older than 18 years old but younger than 30 years old the better. These young leaders meaningfully engage girls and nonbinary children to enter feminist movements, and consequently bridge intergenerational divides between really young and older generations.



If you decide to fund unregistered groups, make sure to draw on the advice and support from other local organizations or funders who also do this. Discuss it openly with the grantee partner in order to mitigate risks, troubleshoot, and learn together.

Financial support is key but **NOT** the only need of girl-led groups. Although financial support is one of the most significant needs of girl-led groups, girls all over the world also need and want other forms of support such as technical assistance, networking opportunities and the ability to interact with peers.



2. Grantmaking through other funders or donor collaboratives:

If you plan to fund young feminist organisers through another organizations - such as FRIDA, a women's fund, donor collaborative or another funding mechanism.



Use existing mechanisms: a variety of funding mechanisms exist that are reaching young feminist led groups across the world, in particular these include [global, regional and local women's funds](#) - [The With and For Girls Collective](#) and others.

Seek to work with these existing mechanisms where possible and steer away from creating new ones unless there is a strong rationale for this, backed by a thematic, geographic or population based need - consult core constituencies in this process.



Where possible minimise restrictions that will have a flow-on effect to the group. An example of this could be asking your grantee - in this case perhaps a womens' fund - to ask the group it funds to produce receipts for the details of the grants made. If women's funds of funders can directly fund to YFOs they ideally hold the burden / risk for that group.



Support funders to be intersectional in their approach and be driven by young feminist groups. This one may be more difficult, but a more holistic approach to change and engaging with grassroots YFOs will be a powerful way to make transformative changes. Trust partners to work with YFOs to analyse change processes through monitoring and evaluation.

Be clear on your role and entry point in the ecosystem and respect the expertise of the organisation you are granting to to work directly with young feminist organisations, this means giving them space, resources and trust to do the

important relationship building work, and being mindful of pushing an agenda.

3. Programs about, for, or with young feminist organisers:

If you plan to create programs that engage young feminists organisers, or have young women and girls as part of, driving or beneficiaries from a project or program:



Before setting up the program, ask yourself clearly how you want young feminists to be engaged, consider the pathway to getting the program approved, funded, designer... where in the process can you infuse young feminists organisers. **Ask yourself - is it a good use of their time, and how it will enrich the quality and legitimacy of the work.** Communicate the method of involvement, consultation or participation that you plan young feminists to have in the process with all involved in the work.



Include young feminists in the design of the initiative.

Some concrete ways to engage young people in your work include this include:

- Set up an advisory groups such as [FRIDA Advisory Group](#) and where possible compensate advisor time and consider reciprocity.
- Explore participatory or peer led decision making models.



Hire young people at your organisation.

Could you prioritise someone under 30 and perhaps from the global south for certain positions? How can you support this sort of accessibility in your organisation?

Build in some form of grassroots accountability in the program, this could be getting feedback from those who are part of the program, as well as creating regular moments to reflect and ensure the design is responsive

to the changing needs of young feminist organisers.



Challenge / re-examine internal organizational structures that reproduce sexism or ageism.
To do so requires recognising sexism and ageism faced by young feminists and valuing their struggles and experiences as much as those of other organizations.

4. General recommendations for working with young feminist organisers - directly or indirectly



Engage young feminists in strategy development or advice for your organisation or foundation. Consider FRIDA itself, or borrow from our practice of creating Advisory Committees of young women and trans*youth from specific regions or themes, as well as a Girls Advisor Group, composed of girls under the age of 19. There are other existing structures like the With and For Girls Collective to also engage with or borrow from.



Give recognition and compensation to the YFOs with whom you work with. This includes crediting them in your communications as well as paying them for their time, expertise, or other contributions. If you are asking for advice, factor in the costs from the outset. We shouldn't expect activists to give up their time, knowledge, or labour for free. Ensure intellectual property is protected.

◆

Acknowledge and talk openly about the power differentials and imbalances. YFOs already place their politics at the centre of their work and will welcome this discussion with you. They are actively working to decentralise power and cultivate a flatter, more horizontal style of leadership. They may be championing different, intersectional and less hierarchical ways of working than more traditional organizations. Even though YFOs are often very new, small organisations with relatively little negotiating power, they have the capacity to engage INGOs and funders on their own terms. Take steps to ensure any “negotiations” or partnerships are conducted in a “friendlier”, more transparent, accountable, respectful and collaborative approach. When creating MoUs or contracts - ask if there are any questions, comments or changes. Be prepared and open to try and accommodate these changes. The investment in starting off right usually pays off in final results.

◆

Do not rely on the quality of the personal relationship with a particular individuals of the INGO or Foundation staff. Some institutional steps could include:

- Create a policy for engagement with young feminist organisations or engagement with youth, ensure the policy looks at things such as power differentials.
- Co-develop MoUs with YFOs based on mutual partnership to work through the different contributions and make clear both of your commitments to each other (not just the YFO's obligations to the funder).
- Ensure staff who work with young feminist organisers have training or awareness of the power dynamics at play.

Funders and INGOs should support young feminists to **grow and cultivate their preferred leadership style**.
Concretely this can mean:

- Fund or invite more than one person to enter into a conversation, conference, or any space hosted or

facilitated by the funder. By inviting more than one person you can enable co-leadership structures and combat competitiveness. It can also support more organizational learning and intergenerational exchange, supporting younger and older people to attend.

- Make an effort to create opportunities for collective engagement that mirrors collective structures - such as group conference calls, provide time for feedback to enable individuals to consult the collective.
- Be conscious when you may be creating heroes or focus on individuals and overshadowing the collective work and struggle.



Be a two-way bridge to try to **really listen**, operate from a place of **humility and self awareness** and **be open to learning** and **be more willing to take risks**, as activists do every day.

- Continuously improve the knowledge of your staff on why it is important to engage with and support the

young feminist organisations. Organisation staff, and in particular those engaged in gender equality and youth programming on the ground, should be aware and conscious of how to meaningfully work with young feminist organisers.

- Always offer extra information and context to explain your internal processes. Considering the amount of information groups need to submit to funders, it is more fair and mutually beneficial to share the same amount of information back to them about your own governance, systems, and capacities. This openness may invite you all to be more creative in dealing with challenges and support your relationship throughout the project.



Flexibility matters. Bending is better than breaking when it comes to supporting social movements. Allow for as much **flexibility** as you can when working with YFOs in order to respond to their particular contexts. Of course, be aware of the limitations that you face within your organisations and communicate these openly but from a place of trying to adapt together in

a creative way. See some examples listed in the above sections of different alternatives you can offer for more spacious reporting and timelines.



Prioritise the security of data - ask groups for their consent in publishing their photos or information. Furthermore, be conscious that information is power, and that activists need to be informed about what funders are doing with their data, as it is theirs – they own it! FRIDA tries to consider implications of providing information to many different audiences including the general public, auditors, and other funders. When we are unsure, we ask YFOs what they think.



Speaking of security, **support YFOs to access flexible or specific funding for holistic security**, and to link with key funders who prioritise this work such as the [Urgent Action Funds for Women Human Rights](#). This is important in times of emergency but also outside of it as all activists need resources to prepare, heal, recover, and build overall resilience.

ANNEXES

1. The people behind this research

Christy Selica Zinn is a young feminist consultant working at the intersection of women's rights, youth development and organisational change in Sub-Saharan Africa. She is especially interested in the physical body as a political entity and bearer of memory. She is based in Durban, South Africa.

Katrina Anderson is a human rights advocate and feminist consultant based in New York, USA. She works primarily with NGOs and grantmakers in the U.S. and globally on women's rights, gender justice, sexuality, and sexual and reproductive health and rights. Her current work focuses on strategies to encourage innovation and radical collaboration in social justice movements.

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Key advisors + allies who supported along the way

Funding scan research team and advisory group

- ◆ Angelika Arutyunova
- ◆ Ani Hao
- ◆ Chloe Safier
- ◆ Martin Redfern
- ◆ Christen Dobson
- ◆ Sarah Rosenhek
- ◆ Kamardip Singh
- ◆ Lorraine Perricone – Dazzo



2. Organisations and people interviewed

A. Young Feminist Organisations + Activists

- ◆ Drama Queens - Akosua Hanson
- ◆ MAD Sisters - Susan Mueni and Siama Yusuf
- ◆ Chouf - Bochra Triki
- ◆ Fe-Male - Hayat Mirshad
- ◆ Gerehu Waikele Women's Sewing Group - Anne-Marie Lilih
- ◆ MamyGlos - Sylwia Wodzinska
- ◆ Women's Gaze - Ninka Khaindrava
- ◆ Copper Rose - Faith Suwilyanji Kaoma and Natasha Salifyanji Kaoma

Note: the above organisations have given permission to be named - while other organisations have opted to remain anonymous.

B. International NGO and contact people interviewed

- ◆ Plan International
 - ✦ Oliver Trumble
 - ✦ Georgia Booth
 - ✦ Madeleine Askham
 - ✦ Nadine Karmann
- ◆ Oxfam
 - ✦ Emily Brown, Oxfam UK
 - ✦ Gopika Bashi, Oxfam International (and FRIDA advisor)
- ◆ Save The Children UK
 - ✦ Nina Gora
- ◆ ActionAid
 - ✦ Jo Feather, ActionAid UK
 - ✦ Anjana Luitel, ActionAid Denmark

- ◆ CARE
 - ✦ Allison Burden, CARE International
 - ✦ Nidal Karim, CARE USA
 - ✦ Lotte Renault, Care International
- ◆ Restless Development
 - ✦ Primrose Manyalo



C. Funders interviewed in 2016 during Funding Scan

The following individuals contributed their time to be interviewed for this research project in 2016. We recognise many of these individuals have moved onto new roles in new organisations, but for the purpose of capturing this work we want to ensure we capture their names:

- ◆ Paulina Barrios, Semillas
- ◆ Sarah Hobson, Global Fund for Women
- ◆ Sasha Rabsey, How Fund
- ◆ Sara Piot, MTV Foundation
- ◆ Annie Hillar, Mama Cash (former)
- ◆ Adam Vink, Plan International (former)
- ◆ Lucy Mungála, HIVOS
- ◆ Lopa Banerjee and Ines Estaban Gonzales, UN Women
- ◆ Rini Banerjee, Foundation for a Just Society (former)
- ◆ Emily Barcklow D'Amica, Central America & Mexico Youth Fund (CAMY)
- ◆ Elizabeth Schaffer, Amplify Change
- ◆ Gabrielle Tang, Open Society Foundations (former)
- ◆ Emily Brown, Oxfam
- ◆ Nafi Chinery, African Women's Development Fund



