

RECOMMENDATION PAPER FOR DEVELOPMENT
PRACTITIONERS AND POLICY AND DECISION
MAKERS:

FEMINIST
DEVELOPMENT POLICY:
A PATHWAY TOWARDS
FEMINIST GLOBAL
COLLABORATION

#4
Funding beyond
power differentials



This recommendation paper offers development practitioners and organisations some reflections to shift international development policy towards intersectional Feminist Global Collaboration.

It accompanies our podcast episode [“Funding beyond power differentials”](#) and aims to stress that a strong feminist funding ecosystem can be the foundation for true transformation towards Feminist Global Collaboration.

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THE CURRENT ECOSYSTEM

THE CURRENT FUNDING ECOSYSTEM

The current funding system within the international development space is tainted by deeply rooted structural challenges. In the following we would like to highlight a few of these.

- Funds which are predominantly flowing from the Global North towards the Global South have been generated through generations of unjust extraction from the Global South or in the form of wealth accumulation by a very wealthy few on the backs of people and nature. Framing such funds as charity or distributing them as loans erases this history.
- The claim that there is a scarcity of resources instead of a distribution problem is inaccurate and works to obscure how current funding systems maintain existing systems of inequality. A bulk of resources are directed towards [military](#) and police forces, [fossil fuels](#), and the [“anti-gender” movement](#) rather than education, care or [climate finance](#) for the most affected countries, which are predominantly in the Global South.
- According to a [report by the Association for Women’s Rights in Development/AWID](#) (2021), women’s rights organisations receive only 0.13% (\$198 million out of \$153 billion USD) of the total Official Development Assistance and 0.4% of all gender-related aid.
- Different types of donors often demonstrate a [lack of trust towards](#) the communities they claim to serve, especially racialised groups, thus maintaining a hierarchy of knowledge in which the donor has the solutions. This is visible by the statistics provided by the [Global Fund for Women](#): Only 1.9% of all charitable donations are made to organizations dedicated to women and girls; and Black feminist social movements get even less - smaller than 0.5%.

FUNDING

- Grassroots movements and organisations are in many cases pressured to comply to strict metric targets and burdensome reporting. This coupled with the nature of project funding, in contrast to long term and flexible core funding and intersectional approaches, does not support salaries, regeneration and care, which are all necessary to the work activists are trying to do.

Even though there is much space for improvement, it is important to recognise that some donor institutions are trying to overcome these power differentials and walk the talk. A rise of 'trust-based' philanthropy, which aims to dismantle these unequal power dynamics, can be observed in recent years.

DON'T IGNORE POWER!

Being a donor or grantee means holding different and unequal positions of power. Within feminist spaces the analysis and discussion around power is central. More often than not, power goes unspoken in personal relationships, workspace hierarchies and of course also in funder/grantee relationships.

To create transformational social change it is vital that the power differentials in donor/grantee relationships are openly talked about. This can also offer the first step to starting dialogue around the political aspect of international development. As international development has been sold as something technocratic and neutral, bringing in a more political perspective would support the work being done around challenging social norms, values and structures.



“The way we can look at it is there is a power differential among all of us in whatever ways we show up. It becomes imbalanced when it's not recognised, when it's not named, when it's not addressed.”

Angelika Arutyunova

HOW CAN WE MOVE FORWARD?

Sanyu Awori: “There’s just something magical about when feminists come together to dream and imagine other ways of being. It’s not just magical, it’s powerful. It’s the reason why our societies look the way they look now, because of the work that our feminist elders have put. I love demanding for change as part of a collective. I love people power and what it can do. Feminists have been doing the work of analysing, documenting, dreaming, imagining other ways of being that would centre collective care, wellbeing – and that’s who we need to be paying attention to as we move forward.”

Many organisations and movements that rely on funding have been clear about the limitations and burdens of the current system. For a more enabling environment, feminist principles can support changing the current system towards a [Feminist Funding Ecosystem](#).

A FEMINIST FUNDING ECOSYSTEM

- Stands for policy coherence across different political and economic areas and strategies
- Stops resources from being dedicated towards violence, war, oppression, greed and corruption
- Wants to deeply undo the colonial relationship in the development world and redistribute the resources back to the exploited communities
- Supports resource distribution towards education, health system, social justice and social beauty
- Understands that long-term, sustainable and structural change cannot be fully captured in traditional metrics
- Works towards societies driven by joy, care and dignity of people

The recommendations on creating a Feminist Funding Ecosystem presented here are based on conversations with [Angelika Arutyunova](#), a feminist thinker, strategist, advocate and consultant and [Chantelle de Nobrega](#), Grants Manager at Mama Cash and the work done by many other feminist thinkers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS

To have a Feminist Funding Ecosystem the work of internal reflection and power analysis must start within organisations/institutions/foundations holding financial resources. And also, within movements and organisations, who are seeking funding.

As in previous recommendation papers we want to support this reflection process with some questions firstly addressing donors and then grantees:

DONORS

SELF-REFLECTION

- Do you reflect on how and why funding from the Global North to the Global South is likely to replicate the colonial approach to development?
- What is your own place within the hierarchy of power imbalances? Are you aware that you and the receiver of funds are holding different and often unequal positions of power? Are you ready to recognise, name and address these power differentials and be transparent?
- Are you aware of the privilege you hold as a donor and how it is impacting your decisions?
- Are your decisions on how to spend funds made with or without the people who the funds are directed to?
- How could you shift your approaches to make funding more available for those people who are creating the most impact in society?
- Do you channel your resources to people who are at the forefront of experiencing oppressions?

FUNDING STRUCTURES

- Are you ready to explore modalities to share power and overcome the prevailing unequal power dynamics, for example through practicing participatory grant making?
- How can you ensure that your funding is accessible for smaller groups too? For example, if smaller organisations may not have the mechanisms to receive grant funds - put in systems that support the re-granting of funds to these organisations. Perhaps even consider working with them as a partner to help build their capacity to be able to receive funds directly.
- How do you interact with grantees? Do you monitor or attempt to steer their work, or do you aim to build relationships with them? Do you co-create and co-develop initiatives with your grantees?

- How much space/time does monitoring, evaluation and reporting take up for the communities/projects you are funding? Have you ever asked them what would make reporting less time-intensive, and could you meet them halfway?
- How might the language in your applications shape or limit how movements are able to change power structures or societal norms?
- Are you ready to recognise that organising social change is shifting away from creating NGOs to much more agile, fast initiatives and the coming together of a collective around a particular strategy? Is your institution prepared to support such initiatives?
- Are you ready to look beyond individual grants and take on a movement-building perspective e.g., by supporting groups who have alliances within and beyond their field?
- Is it possible you are distributing funds which are reproducing injustices? See our 3rd recommendation on [Intersectionality of Gender & Economy](#).
- Are you already offering core funding possibilities? Do you include salaries, other overhead costs as well as possibilities to finance collective care and rest for grantees? If not, what would you need to make this change?

THE CULTURE OF FUNDING:

- Do you provide opportunities for your grantees to connect with each other?
- Is there an open culture within your funding institution to talk about where the wealth of the foundation/individual/country came from?
- Focus on how and whom you fund not just what you fund. Are you ready to adapt your funding criteria to embrace following guiding questions: Are the grantees connected to other movements? Are they using a feminist approach? Are they trying to impact systems and structures? Are they self-led?
- If potential grantees meet this criteria and you understand who they are and what their politics are around the work they do, are you ready to place trust into them to use the funding accordingly?
- Do you encourage your grantees to take the time and space they need to do their work and maintain the sense of their identity and their politics?

“Women’s funds in general, I think, actually have some really similar principles, which is that we fund self-led work. We fund groups that are really being led by women, girls, trans and intersex people. And this is true of many women’s funds, because not every donor, particularly government donors, but even just large foundations or multilateral funders are really in a good place to channel their funding to work that is being led by those who are most affected by patriarchy or racism.”

Chantelle de Nobrega



GRANTEES

SELF-REFLECTION

- Chantelle De Nobrega: “Receiving funding, particularly for the first time, can really be the death of radical politics. That has been my experience, unfortunately. [...] On the part of Mama Cash, I think we are aware of the risks and so we tend to ask these questions before we even give the first grant: How are you going to make decisions? How are you going to ensure that the priorities that you set will actually remain? If you want to change these decisions, how are you going to agree to that?” Would you agree with Chantelle’s statement? Have you had similar conversations in your movements?
- Are you donor-driven in your approaches or are you focusing on your own agenda based on the needs of societies you work in?
- Are you focusing on building your organisation or on movement building? Are you focusing on short-term projects or on creating long term structural social changes through social movements?
- Are you aware of how receiving funds can impact your independence and radical politics, and how you could avoid this?

If you have any questions or would like to get in touch with us, you can reach out to Lisa Tatu Hey, Co-Executive Director at FAIR SHARE of Women Leaders via lisa@fairsharewl.org or to Jana Prosinger, Office Director Global Unit for Feminism and Gender Democracy at Heinrich Boell Foundation via prosinger@boell.de.

The ideas and practices introduced here are based on the podcast episode of “A pathway towards feminist global collaboration: Funding beyond power differentials”. It was published as part of the podcast series “[Our Voices, Our choices](#)” from the Heinrich Boell Foundation in collaboration with FAIR SHARE of Women Leaders and the members of a new emerging feminist network on feminist development policy based in Berlin.

LITERATURE &

LINKS

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