

Donor support to southern women's rights organisations

OECD FINDINGS



THE DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE COMMITTEE:
ENABLING EFFECTIVE DEVELOPMENT

Donor support to southern women's rights organisations: OECD findings ¹

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^a This report was written by Emily Esplen (GENDERNET Secretariat, OECD). The statistics were produced by Olivier Bouret (WP-STAT Secretariat, OECD). Janina Fischer (GENDERNET Secretariat) carried out the statistical analysis. The report has been reviewed by Keiko Nowacka (OECD Development Centre) and zohra moosa and Esther Lever (Mama Cash). It is the responsibility of the GENDERNET Secretariat and does not necessarily represent the views of the members or bureau of the DAC Network on Gender Equality.

Introduction: why this report?

Members of the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) provided USD 35.5 billion in aid to gender equality in 2014;^b this was an all-time high. Around 28% – nearly USD 10 billion – went to civil society organisations (CSOs).

The majority of this aid supported international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) or CSOs based in the donor country. In 2014, 8% of gender focused aid to civil society went directly to CSOs in developing countries. Little was reported as going directly to women’s rights organisations – USD 192 million in 2014.^c Where resources are reaching women’s rights organisations, they are typically small-scale and short-term. Small amounts of money can stimulate learning and innovation, but they do not enable vital expansion, scale-up and strengthening of organisational and operational capacity.

It was in this context that the DAC Network on Gender Equality (GENDERNET)^d initiated a review to deepen understanding of how donors are partnering with southern women’s rights organisations, and of what is working well and less well. The study was based on interviews that the GENDERNET Secretariat undertook in 2016 with DAC member agencies, as well as with other key funders, women’s rights organisations and independent experts (Annex 2). Donor respondents were primarily from gender and/or civil society units at headquarters, but several also consulted with gender focal points at the country level. The statistics are based on a review of the data DAC members provided, dating up to 2014 (the latest year for which data is available).

The findings suggest that development co-operation agencies are adopting quite different approaches to their partnerships with southern women’s rights organisations. Some agencies earmark flexible funds for “catalytic work” on gender equality to support learning and innovation. Others nurture medium-size women’s rights organisations over the longer-term through core support. Some invest in bilateral and multilateral gender equality funds to support women’s groups and grassroots activities which they could not fund directly. A handful of donors look to women’s funds as an effective way to get resources to smaller southern women’s groups. The most promising approaches use a mix of funding modalities to support partnerships with CSOs of different sizes and capabilities.

This report documents trends and strategies in DAC donor support to southern women’s rights organisations that have emerged from the GENDERNET study. It identifies approaches, models and mechanisms for DAC donors to strengthen the quantity and quality of support to southern women’s rights organisations.

The opinions expressed and arguments employed herein are the responsibility of the GENDERNET Secretariat and do not necessarily reflect the views of GENDERNET members or bureau.

^b Statistics contained in this paper are based on reporting by OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) donors. See Annex 1 for further detail of the methodology.

^c USD 192 million is the figure reported for all women’s rights organisations, in the north and south. The limitations of the data are summarised in section 2iii.

^d The GENDERNET brings together gender advisors from the development co-operation agencies and ministries of foreign affairs of the 29 DAC member countries: www.oecd.org/dac/gender-development/.

1. Why invest in women's rights organisations?

By adopting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, governments have committed to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. This is reflected in Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG5) and in gender-specific targets in 11 of the 17 SDGs. Never before has the determination to achieve gender equality been so impressive – nor the need so self-evident.

The SDGs set out to systematically address tough gender and development challenges, from ending all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls, to ensuring women's equal rights to economic resources and their full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership. Achieving these commitments is a long-term endeavour that will require support for locally generated change led by women and girls themselves.¹

Defined here as civil society organisations with an overt women's or girls' rights, gender equality or feminist purpose, women's rights organisations play a central role in spearheading change in support of gender equality.² Below are four reasons why partnerships with women's rights organisations are essential for the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.

1. Evidence shows that women's rights activism and movements are the key drivers of legal and policy change to address gender inequality.

A large-scale quantitative study based on data from over four decades in 70 countries found that autonomous women's movements are the single most significant factor in influencing progressive policy on violence against women. Their influence even surpasses that of having more women in the legislature, progressive political parties in power or improvements in national wealth.³ Few of the normative advances on women's rights would have been possible without the advocacy of women's rights organisations and movements to raise public awareness, pressure governments for change, and hold governments to account for implementation of laws and policies.

2. Sustained progress towards gender equality will only be achieved through transforming entrenched social norms and practices. This requires shifts in power that can only be brought about through change within society itself.

Women's rights organisations and movements are fundamental to this. Organisations led by women and girls share a common experience and understanding of gender-based discrimination and can thus start from the reality of women's and girls' lives. Other women facing the same challenges are more likely to trust them and want to work with them. This gives women's rights organisations a unique ability to reach women in marginalised communities, and bring them together to analyse their situation and realise that the inequalities they experience are also experienced by others, are structural and can be changed.⁴ On the basis of its research in multiple sites, the Pathways of Women's Empowerment Programme found that the relationships fostered in the spaces created by women's rights organisations and networks often bring about changes associated with empowerment. These include growth in self-confidence, new capabilities and consciousness about gender inequalities, and the capacity to act collectively to demand rights.⁵ Support from external actors, such as donor agencies, is more likely to be effective when harnessed to these locally-owned processes of change.

3. Women’s rights organisations are pioneers in designing effective and innovative approaches to advance gender equality.

Examples include women’s police stations and family courts, which are now adopted widely by security sector agencies and international bodies,⁶ as well as community mobilisation approaches for social norm change. In Uganda, the “SASA!” community mobilisation methodology developed by the women’s rights organisation Raising Voices and implemented by the Center for Domestic Violence Prevention (CEDOVIP) has had remarkable results: women in SASA! communities are 52% less likely to experience physical violence from an intimate partner than women in control communities.⁷ The SASA! methodology has now been adapted for use in more than 20 different countries (see section 4.2). There have been similar successes in Ethiopia and Senegal where community mobilisation has led to wide-scale abandonment of female genital mutilation.⁸ These approaches work, but they require sustained efforts led by organisations with an in-depth understanding of the issues, a connection to a constituency of women and a direct stake in the outcome.

4. With progress has come tremendous backlash. Women’s rights groups and movements are a crucial antidote to regressive forces that are pushing back gender equality gains.⁹

In this context, it is more critical than ever that women’s groups in the global south are supported to show that demands for gender equality stem from and are legitimate in their communities and societies.¹⁰ At the same time, the shrinking of civil society space has entailed severe attacks on women’s rights activists, groups and movements, which are at risk precisely because of their work to challenge gender norms and power structures.¹¹ This makes it all the more essential that donors resource women’s groups and movements so that they have the resilience to weather threats, and build safe and enabling environments in which civil society can thrive.¹²

There is significant knowledge of the types of support that are most effective.¹³ This has shown that core, flexible funding to women’s rights organisations is generally more effective than project funding for gender-related work. Core support is unrestricted funding that enables an organisation to deliver its mission. It can be used to underwrite administrative infrastructure and/or maintain core programmes and essential staff.¹⁴ This kind of unrestricted support is vital for the well-being of women’s rights organisations and activists (for example, ensuring minimum wages and social entitlements). It enables them i) to strength their organisational capacity and preparedness to seize new political opportunities, ii) to strategically adapt and innovate, iii) to persevere in the face of backlash¹⁵ and iv) to plan ahead and develop independent agendas that are responsive to their constituents’ most pressing needs. Core funding also represents value for money: it frees up time and energy that would otherwise be spent on fundraising or implementing short-term projects, and allows investments in the longer-term organising and rights work needed to transform root causes of gender inequalities.

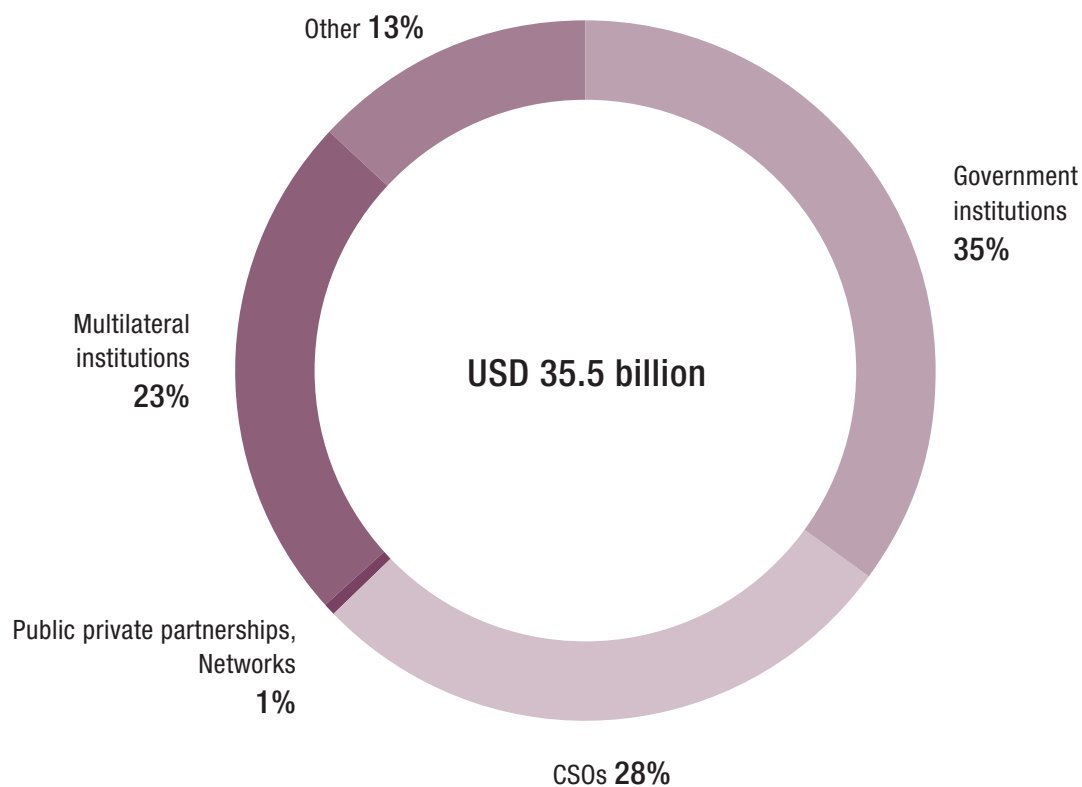
2. What does the data tell us?

The statistics in this report are based on three tools: the DAC gender equality policy marker, the CSO channel of delivery code, and the women's equality organisations and institutions code (Code 15170). For a full description of the methodology, see Annex 1.

i. How much aid goes to civil society for gender-related work?

Chart 1: Distribution of gender focused aid by channel of delivery, 2014

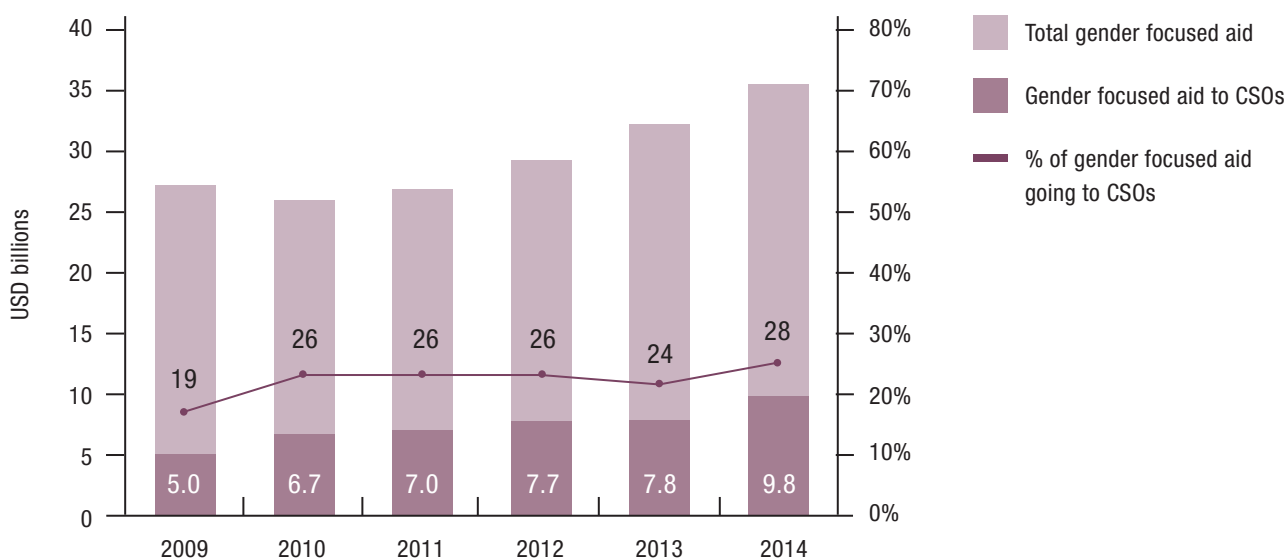
Commitments, USD billion, 2014 prices



As described above, DAC members' gender focused aid reached an all-time high of USD 35.5 billion in 2014. More than a quarter (28%) of this goes to civil society (Chart 1) – around USD 10 billion. Prior to a slight increase in 2014, this share has remained stable (Chart 2). However, most of the aid to CSOs is for implementing gender-related projects and activities, with just USD 2 billion reported as core support to their institutional budgets. This can result in organisations working on donor priority issues, without a sustainable organisational base. It can also create a false impression of impact: suggesting that a lot is happening when in fact much of it may not be sustainable.

Chart 2: Gender focused aid to CSOs as a share of total aid to gender equality, 2009-2014

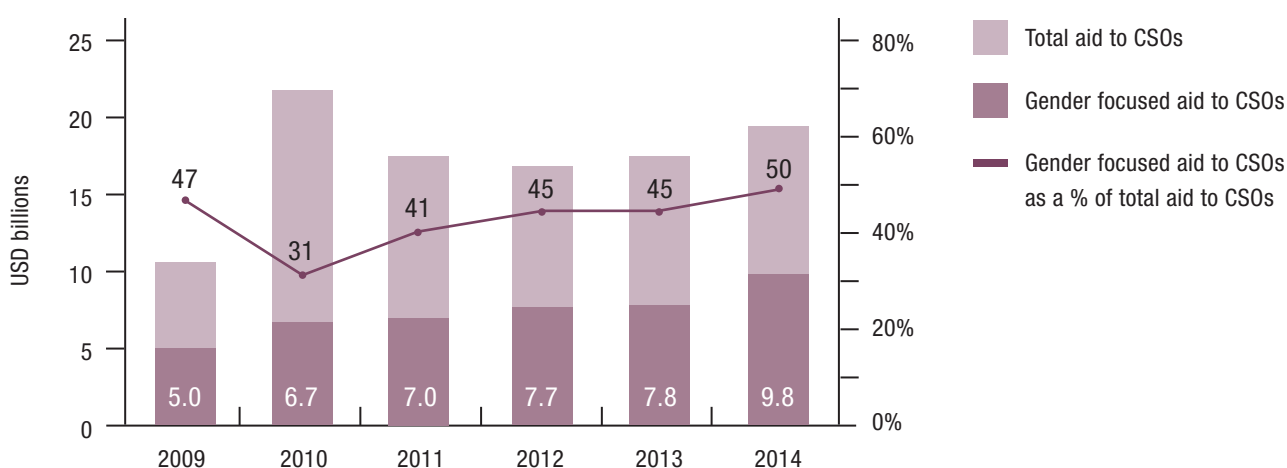
Commitments, USD billion, 2014 prices



When looking at the share of ODA to civil society that targets gender equality, the picture appears encouraging: in 2014, exactly half of DAC members' aid to CSOs was gender focused,^e up from 31% in 2010 (Chart 3). Most of the increase is for projects where gender equality is mainstreamed (score 1 with the DAC Gender Marker – see Annex 1) rather than the principal focus (score 2). Only USD 2.3 billion of the aid to civil society target gender equality as a principal objective.

Chart 3: Gender focused aid to CSOs as a share of total aid to CSOs, 2009-14

Commitments, USD billion, 2014 prices



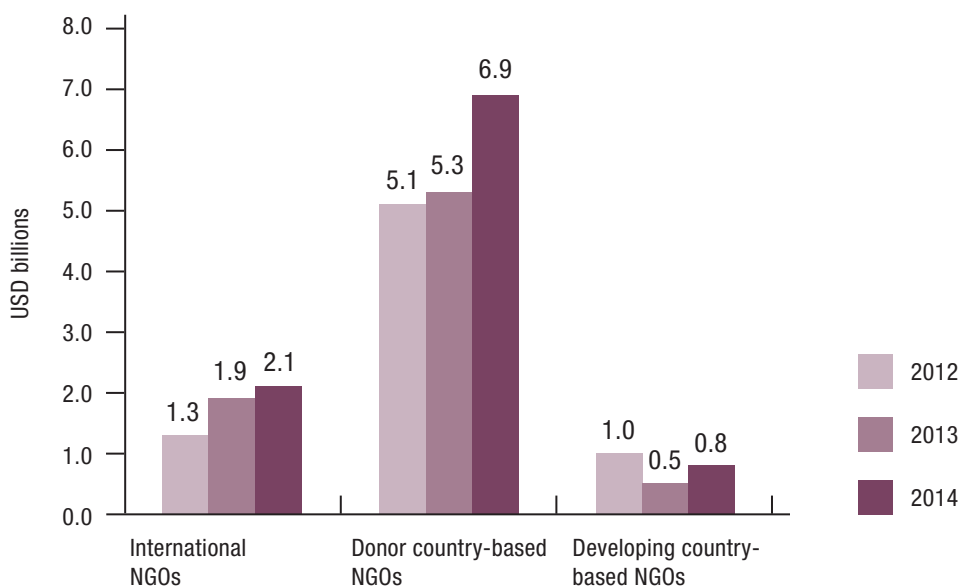
^e Projects are considered *gender focused* when they target gender equality as a principle (primary) or significant (secondary) objective.

ii. Which CSOs are benefiting?

The majority of civil society funding goes to organisations based in donor countries or to INGOs. In 2014, 8% (USD 836 million) of gender focused aid to CSOs went directly to those in developing countries (Chart 4). While gender focused aid to INGOs and CSOs based in donor countries is growing, amounts going directly to CSOs in developing countries have decreased slightly since 2012. These findings reflect wider funding trends: in 2014, DAC members provided around eight times more aid overall to CSOs based in their countries than to those in developing countries.¹⁶

Chart 4: Distribution of gender focused aid to CSOs, by type, 2012-14^f

Commitments, USD billion, 2014 prices



Increasing restrictions on civil society's ability to receive funds from external donors are exacerbating the situation by cutting off the primary source of funding for many NGOs.¹⁷ CIVICUS's 2015 State of Civil Society Report highlights the precarious situation facing southern CSOs caught between measures that increasingly restrict access to foreign funding and the fact that domestic funders are not yet supporting their activities.¹⁸ Rights-based organisations can find it particularly difficult to raise domestic resources – even more so when governments are conservative.¹⁹

Of the USD 836 million that goes directly to civil society in developing countries for gender-related work, around 39% goes to CSOs in sub-Saharan Africa, 22% to South and Central Asia, 10% to East Asia and the Pacific, 9% to the Middle East and North Africa, 7% to Latin America and the Caribbean, and 4% to Eastern Europe.⁹ This reflects the regional distribution of gender focused aid more generally.

Afghanistan received the highest amount of gender focused aid to CSOs in 2013-14, followed by **Ethiopia** and the **Democratic Republic of the Congo**. This is not surprising since all three countries are also among the largest recipients of aid in general and of gender focused aid in particular. No Latin American country appears among the top ten recipients. India, the third largest recipient of gender focused aid, is notably missing from the top ten recipient countries of gender focused aid to CSOs.

^f This chart excludes amounts that could not be attributed to a specific type of CSO (undefined).

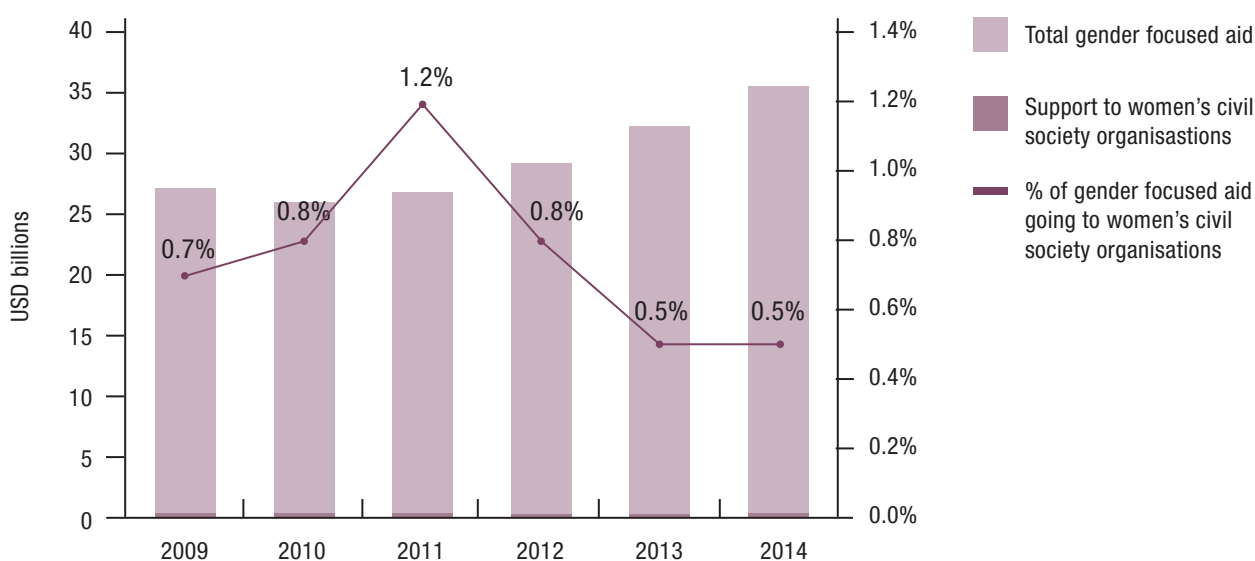
^g The remaining 9% is unspecified.

iii. How are women's rights organisations faring?

No DAC agency is able to systematically track its funding to women's rights organisations. However, data reported by DAC members suggests that women's groups may be missing out from the increase in aid going to CSOs for gender-related work. In 2014, USD 192 million was reported as targeting women's rights organisations directly. This volume is lower than in previous years. USD 192 million represents 3% of the aid that targets gender equality as a principal objective, and 0.5% of the total aid to gender equality in 2014 (Chart 5).

Chart 5: Aid to women's rights organisations as a share of gender focused aid, 2009-14

Commitments, USD billion, 2014 prices



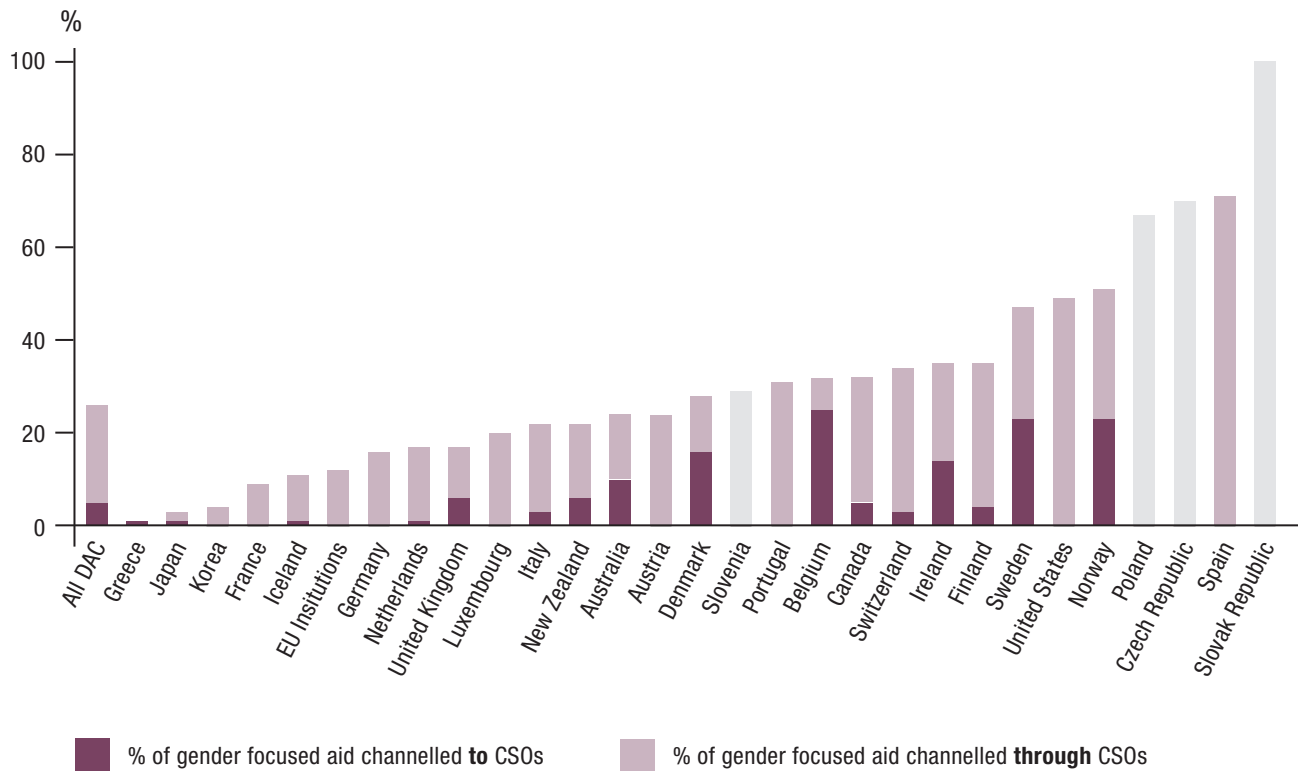
It is important to note that these figures do not capture all bilateral funding reaching women's groups. For example, they exclude ODA that trickles down to women's rights organisations via United Nations (UN) agencies and INGOs. In some instances, funding to women's rights groups for work in a particular sector, such as peace and security or reproductive health, may be classified under that sector code rather than the women's organisations and institutions code, and will thus be excluded from these figures. A statistical review by one DAC member in 2016 also found that much of the aid that it had reported under the women's organisations and institutions code was actually going to multilateral organisations.

Nonetheless, these figures are based on data that is reported by DAC members themselves and remain the best global estimate of ODA reaching women's rights organisations directly. The figures reaffirm findings from other studies, notably by the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID).²⁰ Interviews with DAC members also generally supported the statistical findings, with donors either reporting that direct funding of women's groups was limited or that they did not know the extent of their agency's support to women's groups because this was difficult to track.

iv. Who are the leading donors?

Chart 6: Share of gender focused aid to and through civil society organisations by donor, 2013-14, average commitments

Commitments, USD billion, 2014 prices



Countries in light grey reported very small amounts of gender focused aid to CSOs and have not therefore been considered relevant for this data set.

On average, DAC donors channel just over a quarter of their gender focused aid to or through CSOs. The countries that reported the highest share in 2013-14 are Spain, Norway, the United States and Sweden, in that order (Chart 6).

Very little of this is funding to CSOs as core support rather than funding through CSOs to implement specific projects. This suggests that gender focused organisations are being incentivised to act primarily as implementing agencies rather than to pursue their own agendas. Their energy and resources thus risk being directed towards short-term projects that reflect donor priorities rather than constituents' needs and that are less sustainable in the longer-term.²¹ The exceptions are Belgium, Denmark, Ireland, Norway and Sweden, which report that a significant percentage of their gender focused aid goes to CSOs as core support.

Table 1: Gender focused aid to CSOs and women's rights organisations, by DAC member, 2013-14 average

Commitments, USD billion, 2014 prices

Country	Total gender focused aid	Gender focused aid to CSOs	Aid to CSOs as a % of total gender focused aid	Aid to women's CSOs
All donors	33,864	8,840	24%	180
Australia	1,623	388	24%	11.2
Austria	97	23	24%	3.1
Belgium	750	241	32%	1.4
Canada	1,729	562	33%	1.7
Czech Republic	9	6	70%	0.0
Denmark	904	252	28%	1.1
EU institutions	4,181	493	12%	0.0
Finland	307	108	35%	4.6
France	786	69	9%	0.8
Germany	5,448	878	16%	14.9
Greece	4	0	1%	0.0
Iceland	22	2	10%	0.2
Ireland	218	75	35%	5.4
Italy	220	47	21%	2.1
Japan	2,677	86	3%	0.3
Korea	267	10	4%	0.1
Luxembourg	71	14	20%	0.4
Netherlands	1,189	196	17%	18.4
New Zealand	194	43	22%	0.2
Norway	1,231	617	50%	54.7
Poland	2	1	67%	0.1
Portugal	38	12	31%	0.0
Slovak Republic	1	1	100%	0.0
Slovenia	1	0	29%	0.2
Spain	346	246	71%	23.2
Sweden	2,291	1,078	47%	21.5
Switzerland	412	140	34%	1.0
United Kingdom	3,360	572	17%	6.3
United States	5,489	2,677	49%	6.8

Five donors provided almost three-quarters of all aid to women's rights organisations in 2013-14 according to the data reported to the DAC (Table 1). Norway reported the largest amount, making up one-third of the total committed by all members. Spain, Sweden, the Netherlands and Germany provided the next highest amounts, in that order.

Donors that have a strong focus on funding civil society in general, such as Norway, Spain and Sweden, tend to be among the leading donors when it comes to supporting women's rights organisations. By contrast, many of the top donors to gender equality in volume terms do not have a particularly strong focus on women's rights organisations according to the data they report to the DAC (see Table 1).

3. What are the challenges?

Gender advisors in DAC agencies report a common set of challenges in their efforts to fund southern women's groups, many of which relate to institutional barriers inherent in donor funding architecture. This section explores these challenges and their implications for women's rights organisations.

i. A squeeze on official development assistance (ODA) in some countries

Overall, ODA rose in 2015.²² However, in some donor agencies, cuts or the reallocation of ODA are adversely affecting civil society funding. Aid spent on refugees in donor countries more than doubled from 2014 to 2015. In Denmark, spending on refugees is expected to triple in 2016, reaching 30% of the country's gross ODA.²³ In Norway, shifting political priorities and a redistribution of funds towards refugees and humanitarian assistance has contributed to a cut to the Women's and Gender Equality Grant Scheme (section 4.2), with some recipient countries already reporting impacts. These developments are troubling given the leading role that the Nordic Plus Group^h has played in supporting CSOs, especially women's rights organisations.

ii. Lack of dedicated gender budgets and expertise

"I need a gender budget of my own."

Gender advisor, DAC donor agency, interviewed for the GENDERNET review

Many donor agencies lack a budget line for gender equality at headquarters, making it difficult for gender advisors to take decisions to support women's rights organisations directly. Often decisions about funding women's groups are taken at the country level in the absence of any corporate guidelines or common understanding of how best to do this. Support for women's rights organisations then depends on the gender capacity of the country office and on how useful the head of office or embassy perceives supporting women's groups to be.

This has advantages and disadvantages. Where corporate policy does not prioritise women's rights, project officers at country level may have some leeway to resource women's groups under the radar. However, the absence of dedicated gender experts in country offices who understand the critical role of women's rights organisations and how best to support them can be a major constraint. Most country offices rely on gender focal points who are typically in junior roles, lack prior expertise on gender equality, have other primary responsibilities beyond gender and lack the authority to convince senior management of the need for

^h The Nordic Plus Group consists of Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden, plus Ireland, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom.

dedicated support to women's rights groups.

iii. More money managed by less people and a pressure to keep transaction costs low

“Ten years back, the bureaucracy was less. We didn't have these extremely demanding administrative set-ups. There has been a change towards stricter monitoring and evaluation requirements and strong financial control. Now we have more money managed by less people”

Gender advisor, DAC donor agency, interviewed for the GENDERNET review

“Funding grassroots organisations is only viable if it won't lead to proliferation of partners and an explosion of transaction costs.”

Gender advisor, DAC donor agency, interviewed for the GENDERNET review

Gender advisors described a number of pressures in their agencies that conspire to create less of an appetite for supporting southern CSOs, especially smaller women's rights organisations:

1. **Concerns over perceived risk** – financial and reputational. As a result, donors tend to fund organisations that are already familiar to them (mostly northern based).
2. **A pressure to demonstrate impact** and a perception that (smaller) southern organisations typically have less capacity to deliver at scale and to report results in a way that meets donor requirements.
3. **A pressure to keep transaction costs low**, exacerbated by staffing cuts in some agencies resulting in fewer people to administer grants. A related concern is that building the capacity of southern organisations – for example, to strengthen financial systems and monitoring and evaluation systems – can be time and resource intensive.

These trends are incentivising support to fewer, larger organisations that can absorb big grants at the expense of smaller, local players. This risks undermining diversity and potential for innovation. Some gender advisors spoke of the futility of investing in building the capacity of local organisations while at the same time undermining their capacity by funding larger organisations that can crowd out the space and funding for local organisations.

Concerns over risk and results were often leading to heavy demands on organisations applying for or receiving aid. One gender advisor expressed concern about the “*long list of difficult requirements*” that her agency places on CSOs in order to qualify for funding, especially core support. She questioned the focus on internal management systems at the expense of what organisations are doing and achieving. Another felt that the amount of detail and work required in proposals is heavy, especially when compared with the quantum of funds and timeframes on offer.

These concerns were reflected in the experiences of the women's rights organisations interviewed for this study. One organisation had received a USD 300,000 grant from a DAC donor but was given only eight months to implement it. In another instance, the same organisation was audited before they had even received their grant. Women's groups felt that reporting requirements were often inappropriate for capturing the structural changes which they were seeking, which are not easy to measure or quantify. They suggested that simpler, more creative measures were needed to report effectively on social change. The women's groups recommended that donors develop monitoring and evaluation frameworks in partner-

ship with them. They also challenged perceptions that women's groups lack capacity, noting that they do not lack capacity per se but lack the capacity to meet donor requirements.

4. How are donors navigating these challenges?

Gender advisors are navigating these constraints with some success. For the most promising outcomes, a mixed funding portfolio and a diversity of funding mechanisms are required. These allow donors to support the efforts of a range of CSOs, from INGOs and global women's networks, to medium-sized national women's rights organisations, to grassroots mobilisation.

4.1. Influencing the central pot of CSO funding

“Generally, it is difficult to prioritise women's CSOs in our general civil society grant scheme but they are not excluded – they are on an equal footing with other NGOs.”

Gender advisor, DAC donor agency, interviewed for the GENDERNET review

“We can't assume that funding will automatically reach CSOs through generic funding mechanisms – we need to take an intentional approach and build support for women's rights organisations into the structure of funding mechanisms.”

Gender advisor, DAC donor agency, interviewed for the GENDERNET review

At headquarters, some gender advisors have a dedicated budget for gender equality, which can be used to fund women's rights organisations and institutions directly. Since gender advisors lack the capacity to administer a lot of small grants, they generally focus on a select number of high-value partnerships with organisations that can absorb large funds. Mostly these are NGOs with a global reach, or multilateral organisations and funds. For example, the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida) uses its global and regional strategies to provide core support to women's rights networks and organisations. These include international women's rights organisations based in the global south, such as CREA, and the global women's rights network AWID, funded through the global strategy for human rights and democracy. It also includes regional networks such as the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development, funded through the Asia regional strategy.

However, gender budget lines at headquarters are typically very small and often non-existent. The big win would be to influence the central pot of civil society funding. At present there is little attention to the gender-responsiveness of mainstream civil society funding streams, nor much consideration (or tracking) of whether or not women's rights organisations are benefiting equally.

Some donors are making important efforts. For example, the Norwegian Agency for Development Co-operation (Norad) requires all CSOs receiving funding to assess gender impacts in proposals and reports.²⁴ The European Union's call for proposals usually includes a target on gender mainstreaming. Some agencies have annual thematic calls for grants, which sometimes prioritise gender. For instance, Ireland's Civil Society Fund has selected gender equality and gender-based violence in the past, helping to raise the political visibility of these issues, though they are not consistently prioritised in each annual cycle. At minimum, it should be mandatory for all grantees to carry out a gender analysis, use the findings to

ⁱ A “do no harm” approach requires that projects and programmes analyse the potential risks of the intervention, proactively monitor risks, and take corrective and compensatory measures if applicable.

inform the project/programme design, include gender equality in the indicators for measuring progress and take a “do no harm” approach.¹

Many agencies explicitly expect INGOs and NGOs in donor countries that receive funding for gender-related work to partner with local organisations. Often this is backed up by requirements or incentives. This is a positive step, but donors should also monitor the quality of the sub-grantee relationships – for example, asking whether capacity support is provided to local organisations, and whether they receive core funding not just funding to implement project activities. This means that, where possible, donors should meet with sub-grantees not just primary grantees.

There are good examples to build on. When the European Union provides funding to INGOs, it insists that they sub-grant to local partners and seeks to evaluate the quality of these partnerships. In Norway, the parliament prioritises funding Norwegian NGOs, but organisations that receive aid must sub-grant to local partners. Norad monitors how much Norwegian NGOs and INGOs transfer to local partners and raises this issue with their grantees. Similarly, although the French Development Agency only signs contracts with French organisations, it uses quality of partnerships with local organisations as a criteria to guide grant-giving. In reality, this is hard to assess and often depends on familiarity with the NGO and knowledge of their work on the ground.

The experience of most gender advisors is that funding does not automatically reach women’s rights organisations through mainstream funding mechanisms. Donors need to build support for women’s rights organisations into the structure of funding mechanisms, for example through earmarking a percentage specifically for southern-based women’s rights organisations or weighting criteria in favour of them. It is also crucial to fund in ways that do not result in INGOs and women’s rights organisations competing against each other for the same funding pot. Donors can reduce such competition by establishing separate funding windows.

4.2. Catalytic funding and longer-term support

At the country level, heads of mission often have a small budget that they can use to provide funding at their discretion. The advantage is that this funding is flexible, but it also tends to be small amounts and can be very short-term – often a year or less.

In addition, some agencies support a small number of medium to large national women’s rights organisations over a longer period. The advantage of this is that it allows funding at sufficient levels for organisations to deepen their capacities and scale-up their work. Mid-size women’s rights organisations are critical, and yet they often fall between the cracks – too small to access the large global funds earmarked for INGOs and too big for the small grants that northern organisations administer in the global south.²⁵

Even with longer-term support, donors need to fund sustainably. They should link women’s rights organisations to ongoing national government support and other sources of finance. They can also build women’s rights organisations’ skills to diversify their funding base and mobilise resources from local sources.

At the same time, in contexts where the state may be failing to protect – or even violating – the human rights of its citizens, or where an alternative domestic resourcing base for rights-based work is lacking, foreign aid remains a vital and often primary source of funding.

The most promising examples are where donors adopt a range of funding mechanisms and adapt their approach as the partnership evolves. The examples below illustrate a range of encouraging approaches that DAC donors are using to support women's rights groups at the country level.

i. Longer-term, flexible partnerships that evolve as an organisation grows

Irish Aid's support for the Uganda-based women's organisation **Raising Voices** demonstrates the value of flexible partnerships that evolve as an organisation grows. Initially, the Irish Embassy in Uganda provided funding to support community mobilisation efforts to prevent gender-based violence and HIV. In 2012, Ireland and the United Kingdom funded a randomised control trial to assess the impact of Raising Voices' SASA! community mobilisation methodology. Following the highly successful results (see section 1), Raising Voices began adapting the SASA! methodology for different contexts and stepped up its learning and advocacy on gender-based violence prevention at regional and global levels.

In response, Irish Aid took a decision to shift its support from its embassy to headquarters and from project funding to core funding. It also supported Raising Voices in non-financial ways. These included connecting the organisation with Irish Aid's other partners and potential funders, and supporting their influence at the global level, for example through a joint side-event at the UN Commission on the Status of Women. While the practice-oriented work continued under the Ugandan Centre for Domestic Violence Prevention (an independent NGO, co-founded by Raising Voices in 2003), Raising Voices was able to take on a regional and global role. Raising Voices and CEDOVIP have now established a close partnership with the Government of Uganda, allowing Irish Aid to put in place a two year transition programme to ensure that the progress achieved to-date can be sustained after Irish Aid's programme support through the Embassy is completed. DFID Uganda is also funding CEDOVIP to help build capacity amongst the policy and court services to implement new domestic violence legislation.

ii. Nurturing national organisations with established links to the grassroots

Supporting grassroots efforts requires DAC donors to partner with organisations that understand the local context and have established relationships and legitimacy within communities. One way to do this is through identifying strategic national organisations and investing in them to sub-grant to and build the capacity of local organisations.

A good example is the **Creating Opportunities for Poor and Excluded People (COPE) programme in Bangladesh**, supported by the UK Department for International Development (DFID).^j The programme is implemented by a national NGO, the Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF), which supports 117 CSOs including women's rights groups to work with marginalised communities (e.g. minorities, people with disability, Dalits) with whom they have long-standing relationships. MJF, through partner organisations, supports building citizens' awareness and capacity to raise their voices and claim their entitlements. MJF also works with government to improve the accountability of service providers and public institutions, and to respond to citizens' demands. The objective is to generate enough public pressure to bring about changes in governance that will secure citizens' rights and entitlements for the long-term.

MJF-supported civil society partners range from those that are large and well-established to others that are smaller and depend more on MJF for funding and capacity building. The model enables local CSOs to come together to exchange lessons, innovate and strengthen solidarity in the face of tough political challenges.

^j Australia's Department for Foreign Affairs and Trade also supported COPE from 2013-15.

MJF is unique in providing capacity building to community-based organisations that applied to MJF for funding but were unsuccessful due to their weaker capacity. CSOs of all sizes reported that being an MJF grantee had improved their management and financial systems; 41% of the smaller partners have secured funding from other sources since the project's inception.²⁶

The link between MJF and its grassroots partners enables the voice of poor and minority communities to be included systematically in the legislative process. For example, drawing on its experience of working with poor and minority communities, MJF and its partner NGOs are advising the government on drafting of an anti-discrimination act and will work with government to shape the rules supporting implementation of existing laws such as the Disability Act and Labour Law. Once legislation is passed, MJF will work with its partners to monitor and advise on the implementation of these laws at a local level.

This example shows the value of partnering with national organisations that have strong relationships with and understanding of local communities and their needs. A DFID review of the programme praised not only MJF's fund management capacity, but also its ability to adapt programmes to local context, activate community support and establish effective links between grassroots work and national policy processes.²⁷

iii. Catalytic, flexible funds

Catalytic funding and small amounts of money can stimulate innovation and allow smaller or newer organisations to act, experiment and to learn from the experience. Established in 2007, **Norway's Women and Gender Equality Grant scheme** is a dedicated funding pot to support catalytic work on gender equality and women's rights, principally at the country level. Although the largest share of resources goes to multilateral institutions (41%) and INGOs (24%), around 21% goes to local NGOs.²⁸ The intention is increase the share going to regional and local organisations.

An advantage of the grant is its flexibility, which allows recipients to innovate and adapt to changing conditions, emerging issues and opportunities. It also enables supporting dimensions of gender equality that would not be easily addressed through mainstream sector budgets. In Nepal, for example, the grant has been used to challenge discrimination against lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender people, as well as women in other minority groups, and to address underlying socio-cultural norms that contribute to violence against women and girls. The fact that the grant is managed at the embassy level allows for a more direct engagement with the organisations that are delivering the work, opening space for continual dialogue and monitoring of progress. Having a dedicated fund for gender equality is also politically useful, raising the profile of the issue and improving women's groups' direct access to funds at the national level.

Despite these advantages, Norway's experience also demonstrates some of the challenges of grant mechanisms. In some countries, grants have been underutilised because of concerns about transaction costs.²⁹ Staff acknowledged that this type of direct grant funding to local organisations can require more follow-up and that resources need to be set aside for this.

An evaluation of Norway's support to women's rights and gender equality (2015) made several recommendations to improve the impact of the grant scheme: strengthen awareness of the grant's purpose and of how management and staff can access it; document and disseminate examples of the grant's impact; promote its use in non-traditional sectors; and earmark a specific budget line to strengthen capacity on monitoring, evaluation and learning. The review concluded that, when used well, the grant can play a catalytic role in supporting organisations that would struggle to get funding through sectoral budget lines.

What catalytic funds cannot do is enable organisations to build their organisational capacity and develop long-term agendas. For this, adequate, longer-term support is needed, as illustrated in the previous examples.

4.3. Bilateral and multilateral gender equality funds

When well designed, dedicated gender equality funds have proven an effective mechanism for reaching southern women's rights organisations with funding that is flexible and responsive to their needs. This section provides an overview of the main bilateral and multilateral gender equality funds and assesses their strengths and limitations in supporting southern women's rights organisations. It begins with a summary of the lessons from the landmark Dutch MDG3 Fund. It then discusses newer funds introduced in the last few years that have made deliberate efforts to reach southern organisations working on gender equality, such as AmplifyChange. It looks specifically at promising United Nations funds such as the UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women, UN Women's Gender Equality Fund, and the new Global Acceleration Instrument on Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action. Finally, the section considers national and regional funds before looking beyond gender equality funds towards mainstream funding mechanisms.

i. Bilateral funds

The Dutch MDG3 Fund

The Dutch Government's MDG3 Fund was a flagship funding model in its support to women's rights organisations and women's collective action. Notably, it provided core, flexible funding and supported organisations to scale up the organising and rights work that they specialise in. The Fund was explicitly designed to target women's rights organisations: 35 of the 45 MDG3 Fund projects were awarded to such organisations. By funding well-anchored intermediaries with expertise in re-granting, such as women's funds (see section 4.4), the MDG3 Fund was able to reach women's rights organisations at the most grassroots levels.

Dutch MDG 3 Fund (2008–11)³⁰

- The Netherlands introduced this fund in 2008 in response to declining funding for women's rights organisations in developing countries and the slow pace of progress in meeting Millennium Development Goal 3.
- Its initial budget of EUR 70 million for 2008-11 was topped up in 2011 with an additional EUR 7 million.
- The Fund supported 45 projects with grants ranging from EUR 750,000 to over EUR 5 million.
- Most grantees were large, well-established organisations such as women's funds, international networks and INGOs that operated in more than one country and which re-granted to smaller and grassroots organisations.
- Preference for southern applicants was one of the assessment criteria: over two-thirds of the grantees were from the global south.
- No monitoring framework was imposed.
- The Ministry's Gender Unit held the budget, while management and monitoring were outsourced to a consortium made up of PriceWaterhouseCoopers and Femconsult.

Strengths

- Targeted women's rights organisations: 35 of the 45 MDG3 Fund projects were awarded to women's rights organisations.
- Ensured smaller women's rights organisations could access resources by funding women's funds that had close links to grassroots organisations and a tradition of re-granting. Women's funds comprised 23% of the MDG3 Fund's beneficiaries, and over 50% of the Fund's projects re-granted part of their funding.
- Supported a mix of well-known women's rights organisations in addition to lesser-known and newer organisations.
- Targeted southern organisations: 64% of grantees were based in Africa, Asia and Latin America.
- Provided core funding.
- Did not impose a monitoring framework.
- Outsourced the administration of the Fund, making it a realistic model of bilateral funding.

Limitations

- Most grantee monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems only provided data at activity and output levels. Information on outcomes was anecdotal.
- Outsourced fund management limited the build-up of a knowledge base within the ministry and relationships between the ministry and grantees.
- Gave insufficient attention to sustainability and organisational development of implementing partners/beneficiary organisations: (i.e. small civil society and community-based organisations). Limited duration of the projects made it difficult to provide the necessary support.
- Did not create opportunities to strengthen co-ordination between donors as was not multi-donor.

In 2015, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs published an evaluation of the MDG3 Fund which identified a number of lessons, including:

- Instead of funding international organisations that already have a wide donor-base, it is more strategic to focus on smaller, local women's civil society and community-based organisations.
- Attention to enhancing sustainability and institutional capacity of partner organisations in the south is crucial, rather than involving these partners only for realising specific short-term project aims.
- Strengthening M&E capacity could be incorporated as a standard principle in all projects.
- Outsourcing fund management has pros and cons for donors. The downside is that it can hamper building up a knowledge base and developing relationships with grantees.

In 2012, the MDG3 Fund was renewed as the Funding Leadership and Opportunities for Women (FLOW) Fund. The FLOW 1 Fund also awarded a relatively high 34% of grants to women's rights organisations based in developing countries. FLOW 2 (2016-20) took a different approach, favouring northern-based INGOs rather than southern-based women's rights organisations, networks or funds. This was met with concern from civil society. A subsequent lobbying effort contributed to a decision by the Dutch Parliament to allocate an additional EUR 40 million over four years to be channelled through four southern women's rights funds (see section 4.4).

AmplifyChange

AmplifyChange is a joint funding mechanism that enables donors to support civil society in the south directly, on a large scale and in a co-ordinated and harmonised manner.³¹ Denmark, the Netherlands and two private foundations launched the initiative in September 2014, in response to an identified gap in funding for southern civil society advocacy on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). Amplify Change has four types of grants tailored to a range of organisations, including for small, grassroots and/or newer organisations. The fund is committed to further improve its accessibility to southern-based civil society organisations.

The fund has already proved attractive to DAC donors, securing an increase in its funding base from EUR 16.1 million in 2014 to approximately EUR 44.2 million in 2016 as new donors have come on board.³² It has also performed strongly in initial donor reviews.³³

- This multi-donor civil society fund was launched in 2014 to strengthen advocacy in support of sexual and reproductive health and rights by providing financial support and capacity building directly to civil society in those countries where the need is greatest.
- It is managed by a consortium that includes MannionDaniels as well as two women's funds: Global Fund for Women and the African Women's Development Fund.
- AmplifyChange provides four types of grants, which cover core and/or project costs:
 - **Strengthening grant:** capacity-building grants of up to EUR 100,000 for small to mid-size organisations for up to two years (around 50% of the portfolio).
 - **Network grant:** between EUR 150,000 and EUR 350,000 for two years to coalitions and networks that have been established for more than three years to dialogue with policy makers and support convening, lesson learning, and capacity building for smaller civil society organisations (around 20% of the portfolio).
 - **Opportunity grant:** seed grants of up to EUR 10,000 for up to one year for smaller and/or newer organisations or themes to test innovative approaches (around 5% of the portfolio).
 - **Strategic grant:** up to EUR 1.2 million per year for up to three years for international organisations' work in the south, including capacity and alliance-building among local CSOs.
- It has a particular focus on sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.
- The fund allocates a share of its resources to more difficult or controversial issues and harder to reach groups and 'not to be missed' countries – those with the worse SRHR indicators.
- Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway and the United Kingdom make up its current donors, alongside private foundations and private sector partners.

Strengths

- Focuses explicitly on southern organisations.
- Tailors grant windows to different types of organisations, including small, grassroots and/or new organisations.
- Tackles sensitive issues that donors might find difficult to fund individually (e.g. accessing safe abortion or reducing discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation).
- Focuses on ‘neglected’ and most challenging countries.
- Encourages donor co-operation, e.g. donors have agreed a common Theory of Change, results framework and funding timeframe.
- Takes a demand-driven rather than top-down approach.
- Provides capacity building to grantees, including on financial management, M&E and reporting.
- Manages by consortium that includes a commercial partner and women’s funds, combining commercial expertise with women’s rights expertise.
- Has strong governance mechanisms, risk management and due diligence procedures in place.
- 50% of those on the board are CSOs.
- Actively raises awareness among donors, contributing to a significant expansion in its funding base since its inception as new donors have come on board.

Limitations

- While working on sexual and reproductive rights and gender equality, it is not intended specifically to target women’s rights organisations.
- Is limited to funding SRHR and does not fund other women’s human rights issues.
- Has some delays in processing smaller grants as a result of due diligence processes.
- Grants can be used for organisational core activities but are not flexible.
- Some grants are very short-term – as short as 1 year for small organisations.
- New organizations and those with smaller budgets and a shorter record are less likely to be funded.
- Some donors would prefer to prioritise grassroots organisations rather than also funding INGOs.

ii. Multilateral funds

Some donors prefer to harmonise with existing funding instruments for gender equality rather than setting up new funds. A number of well-established multilateral funds have a mandate to support CSOs to advance gender equality, including women's rights organisations. These include long-standing funds such as the UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women and UN Women's Fund for Gender Equality, as well as newer mechanisms such as the recently launched Global Acceleration Instrument for Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action.

The advantage of multilateral funds is twofold. Firstly, they enable donors to support small women's rights organisations and grassroots activities which they could not fund bilaterally. Secondly, they create opportunities to influence the international system and to improve co-ordination of donor and wider international efforts to support gender equality.

For these reasons, a number of DAC donors are investing in and pro-actively shaping UN funds as one way to deliver on their own gender equality objectives. One example is the UK Department for International Development's dialogue with the UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women. A priority for DFID has been to get more resources to smaller southern-based CSOs and women's rights groups, in support of steps the Trust Fund itself was taking. These efforts are paying off: the Trust Fund has adopted a new strategy for supporting small organisations and women's rights organisations and recruited a small Grants Portfolio Manager to provide specialist support. Specific criteria for selecting small and women's rights organisations have been included in the 20th Cycle of the Call for Proposals (2016).

Rather than developing its own logical framework, which would have increased reporting burdens and administrative costs, DFID worked with the Trust Fund and other donors to support a new overarching Results Framework. To facilitate joint conversations on the strategic direction of the fund, DFID also initiated quarterly donor meetings. Stronger co-ordination among DAC donors around funding instruments – to agree a common Theory of Change, results framework and funding timeframe for joint funding mechanisms – can significantly reduce the bureaucratic burden and enable a more coherent and effective donor engagement.

UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women

UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women

www.unwomen.org/en/trust-funds/un-trust-fund-to-end-violence-against-women

- This fund was established in 1996 and remains the only global multilateral grant-making institution dedicated to addressing violence against women and girls (VAWG).
- UN Women manages the fund on behalf of the UN system.
- Funds are given to national and international NGOs, government institutions, and UN country teams, with the majority of grants going to NGOs.
- Two types of grants are provided – for large CSOs and governments: USD 125,001 to USD 1 million for 2 or 3 years; for small CSOs: USD 50,000 to USD 125,000 for 2 or 3 years.
- A new Strategic Plan for 2015-2020³⁴ and Results Framework was developed following significant donor consultation. This has three pillars: grant-giving for ending VAWG; building a global evidence hub on ending VAWG based on evaluations of grantees; and galvanising global giving for ending VAWG.
- Donors include Australia, Austria, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Kazakhstan, Liechtenstein, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Trinidad and Tobago and the United Kingdom as well as private sector partners.

Strengths

- Increasingly funds smaller CSOs, women's rights organisations and smaller youth-led organisations. In the 2015 grant-making cycle, 13 of 33 organisations awarded grants were small organisations (requesting less than USD 125,000), of which 6 were women's rights organisations. Of the larger grantees, 2 were women's rights organisations.
- Has developed a strategy for supporting small organisations and women's rights organisations, and recruited a small Grants Portfolio Manager to provide specialist support. Specific criteria for selecting small and women's rights organisations have been included in the 20th Cycle of the Call for Proposals (2016).
- Will double core funding to small women's rights organisations in the next grant cycle, from 7% to 14%.
- Has a strong capacity-building component (financial systems, M&E and fundraising), including close relationships between small grantees and Trust Fund country focal points/UN Women field officers.
- Has developed a new overarching Results Framework which allows aggregated results from individual grantees, and has undertaken efforts to improve tools for monitoring results.
- Has a very high performing portfolio of grantees; only 4% of outputs are off track.³⁵
- Commits to an intersectional approach that prioritises the most marginalised women, including efforts to get more funding to disabled women and girls.
- Includes CSOs and an evaluations expert on the advisory committee.
- Is improving co-ordination among its existing donors, and has established quarterly donor meetings.
- Enables bilateral donors to sub-contract the partnership and administrative workload.

Limitations

- Has relatively short grant cycles (two to three years), limiting the scope for transformative change.
- Does not fund organisations that are not legal entities in the national context.
- Does not fund networks.
- More outreach and communication would help to increase awareness of the fund, although it was noted that this is already improving.

UN Women Fund for Gender Equality

UN Women Fund for Gender Equality (FGE)

www.unwomen.org/en/trust-funds/fund-for-gender-equality

- The FGE is UN Women's mechanism to support civil society's initiatives for women's political and economic empowerment and gender equality.
- It was launched in 2009 as a result of discussions between UN Women (then UNIFEM), the Government of Spain and the women's movement on how to create a funding model that would constitute a leading example of development assistance in support of gender equality.
- The FGE supports women-led CSOs at local, national and regional levels with grants for two to three years, ranging from USD 200,000 to USD 1 million.
- There have been three grant-making cycles, allocating a total of USD 64 million to 120 programmes in 80 countries. This includes support to 145 civil society organisations. Throughout the years, the Fund has awarded both large implementation grants as well as smaller catalytic grants aimed at supporting smaller initiatives with an exponential potential for impact at national level.
- In its latest Call for Proposals (2015), the Fund made it an eligibility requirement for civil society applicants to be women-led organisations (i.e. with a majority of women in decision-making), making its support to the women's movement more intentional.
- Donors are Germany, Japan, the Netherlands, Switzerland (returning contributions); Israel, Mexico, Norway and Spain (one-time contributions); and private sector partners.
- The Fund was originally created with a USD 65 million investment from Spain. No subsequent contribution has exceeded USD 4 million.
- In 2015, an independent meta-analysis of existing evaluations of FGE programmes validated the effectiveness of the FGE grant-making model.³⁶ The FGE will undertake its first evaluation in 2017.

Strengths

- Has a demand-driven approach that responds to the priorities of southern women's rights organisations and enables projects to adapt to changing local dynamics.
- Prioritises women-led civil society organisations (100% of current grant recipients).
- Prioritizes the most marginalized groups of women and girls, including rural women, indigenous women, domestic workers, migrant, refugee and displaced women, and women living with disabilities.
- Provides funding to women's funds and women's CSO programmes that have a sub-grants component to support and strengthen smaller grassroots organisations.
- Strong capacity building component complements the financial allocation of resources. The FGE mentors grantees through the project cycle, provides technical assistance and builds their capacity on results-based management.
- Gives grantees access to UN Women's network at the country level.
- Committed to knowledge generation and management and to building the evidence base.
- Creates informal spaces for grantees to interact and learn from each other.

Limitations

- Has a relatively short time-frame for grants (two to three years), limiting the scope for transformative change.
- The due diligence process can be a barrier to smaller organisations qualifying for funds.
- Grant amounts and number of grantees per cycle has decreased over time given shrinking resources and lack of sustained contributions.

Global Acceleration Instrument on Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action

One important new financing mechanism is the Global Acceleration Instrument (GAI) for Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action. This was established in 2016 by civil society, the UN and its Member States^k to fill a critical funding gap and steer resources directly to women's civil society organisations at the forefront of conflict prevention, resolution and recovery efforts.

The crucial contribution of women's rights organisations to conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts was explicitly recognised in UNSCR 2122 (2013), which calls on Member States to develop dedicated funding mechanisms and increase their contributions to women's rights organisations at the local level. Gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment also emerged as an overarching theme of the World Humanitarian Summit in May 2016. A large number of commitments pledged to draw on the skills and expertise of local women and women's groups and empower them as central actors, leaders and agents of change.³⁷

Australia has been active in supporting the efforts by civil society to ensure that the GAI is accessible to women's groups. Australia's Department for Foreign Affairs and Trade was strongly supportive of the GAI's engagement with and funding of women's organisations, and of CSOs being represented on the national steering committees. In this way, donors can influence the funding landscape for women's groups beyond the impact they can have through their direct funding alone.

^k The GAI was established under the leadership of civil society, notably the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders and Cordaid; UN Women and other UN entities; and Member States, notably Australia, Ireland, Spain and the United Kingdom. Australia provided funding for the development of the GAI in 2014, as part of the Global Facility for Women, Peace and Security.

Global Acceleration Instrument (GAI) on Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action

- The GAI is a multi-partner UN trust fund designed to strengthen the capacity of women's organisations to participate in peace processes and respond to crises and emergencies. It was established following discussion among donors, conflict-affected Member States, UN entities and civil society in the Women, Peace and Security Financing Discussion Group, and a subsequent recommendation in the Global Study on the Implementation of 1325.
- UN Women is the fund's secretariat, with donors, civil society and UN partners on the steering body.
- Current donors include Australia, Ireland, Lithuania, Spain and the United Kingdom.

Strengths

- Explicitly focuses on resourcing civil society: a minimum of 50% of its funds go to CSOs working in conflict affected countries.
- Allows CSOs a say in decision-making on how funds are raised and managed. They are represented on the global funding board and national steering committees alongside donors and UN entities. Civil society nominates its own representatives, rather than being nominated by governments or UN agencies (avoiding only those "in favour" being selected).

Limitations

- Requires CSOs to apply to UN entities at the country level for funding, rather than being able to apply directly. This may extend the time taken to process grants.
- The size of the fund is small – just over USD 6 million in November 2016. This reduces its capacity to respond to conflicts and emergencies.

iii. National and regional funds

Especially in agencies that are very decentralised, national- and regional-level donor funds can offer the most potential for reaching local organisations. They are often best placed to respond to local contexts, build and sustain long-term funding partnerships, and get funding to where it matters the most.

One way of reaching local organisations while keeping the administrative burden to a minimum is through the use of joint funding arrangements at the country level. An interesting mechanism exists in Burkina Faso, where Denmark, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland and others together with UN organisations are providing funds to a donor basket used to support women's rights organisations. This joint fund, initiated by the Dutch Embassy in 2005, aims to increase access of local women's rights organisations to funds.

Another example is the **Fiji Women's Fund**, developed by the Australian Department for Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) to support women's rights organisations, including very small organisations. The Fund will provide small and mid-level grants, as well as capacity building support. It aims over time to transition to a "home grown" women's fund, which will be sustainably owned and led by women's groups in Fiji.

A large number of national and regional women's funds already exist, which are a good option for embassies and country offices looking to support local women's groups (section 4.4). An interesting example at the regional level is the **UN Women Pacific End Violence Against Women Facility Fund**. This specialised regional facility supports Pacific Island governments and civil society organisations to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls. It provides grants of between USD 10,000 and USD 100,000 for projects of one to three years, alongside capacity building. The Australian Department for Foreign Affairs and Trade recently evaluated the Fund. This concluded that the Fund would be more effective if it supported a smaller number of organisations for a greater number of years and provided institutional as well as programmatic support. The potential side effect of this is that smaller organisations may drop off from being able to access this funding source.

v. Beyond gender equality funds

Dedicated gender equality funds are essential but not enough, not least because their budgets pale into insignificance by comparison with investments made in larger mainstream funding mechanisms. For example, the Global Fund to Fight Aids, Tuberculosis and Malaria's fifth replenishment in September 2016 mobilised nearly USD 13 billion for the next three years. Similarly, countries had pledged USD 10.3 billion to the Green Climate Fund (GCF) as of October 2016.³⁸ Gender equality funds remain in the millions at best.

Strategic engagement with financing mechanisms such as the GCF is vital to ensure that mainstream funding mechanisms are gender-responsive and accessible to women's civil society groups. The GCF is a positive example: it is the first multilateral climate fund with a gender policy and action plan. It also requires that implementing entities have a gender policy or action plan. Yet, stronger efforts are needed to improve the direct access of women's groups to GCF funding and to ensure their meaningful participation in all stages of GCF project and programme cycles.³⁹

4.4. Women's funds

Supporting women's funds is one of the most effective ways for donors to get resources to southern women's rights organisations and movements, especially those considered too small or risky by mainstream funders.⁴⁰ They are uniquely well-connected with women's rights organisations at the grassroots level and can reach small and emerging groups that are less able to access larger sources of funding.⁴¹ Women's groups often report that support received from women's funds tends to be more flexible, and that application and reporting procedures impose fewer burdens compared with other sources of funding.⁴² Some women's funds, such as the Urgent Action Funds, also play a critical role in providing rapid response or emergency funds in crisis situations where time is of the essence.

A handful of donors are looking to women's funds as crucial partners in getting resources to southern grassroots women's groups and movements. For example, Sida is preparing its third round of support to the international women's fund, Mama Cash. The partnership is driven by Sida's commitment to supporting grassroots women's rights organisations, in a way that is not too burdensome for its own administration. The Netherlands has also prioritised strategic partnerships with women's funds as part of its goal to strengthen the international women's rights movement. One of the lessons from the Dutch MDG3 Fund (section 4.3) was the demonstrable benefits of devolving funding through women's funds, with women's funds comprising 23% of the beneficiaries.⁴³ Building on this, the Netherlands has allocated EUR 40 million

over four years to be channelled through four southern women's rights funds, the majority of which is going through the African Women's Development Fund. Of this, 10% is earmarked for community organisations, 30% for upcoming organisations with budgets of around EUR 200,000 per annum and 50% for regional networks.

In general, however, DAC donors show a limited awareness of the role and impact of women's funds, and are underutilising their potential to reach southern women's groups.

Women's funds⁴⁴

Women's funds are public foundations that aim to fund women-led solutions to the root causes of social injustice.⁴⁵ Their primary purpose is to mobilise resources to distribute to women's rights organisations and movements, rather than implementing programmes or services directly.⁴⁶

There are almost 40 national, regional and international women's funds around the world that are experienced in administering grants to women's rights organisations, including:

- international funds such as Mama Cash and the Global Fund for Women
- regional funds such as the African Women's Development Fund and the Central American Women's Fund
- the three Urgent Action Funds for Women's Human Rights
- funds targeting specific groups of women such as the Young Feminist Fund FRIDA and the Indigenous Women's Fund FIMI.

Strengths

- Prioritise flexible financial support that allows women's rights organisations to set their own priorities, respond to unexpected opportunities and cover their essential operating costs.
- Have strong local knowledge and connections with grassroots organisations, and are able to reach small, remote and minority organisations.
- Intentionally fund new and non-mainstream groups, including those not legally registered and those in early stages of their development.
- Are willing to fund difficult or emerging issues that mainstream donors find harder to support directly.
- Build organisational capacities, including for fundraising, financial management, strategic planning, evaluation and managing leadership transitions. Also support connections between grantees to support learning and alliance-building.
- Are designed to be adaptive and able to respond quickly, e.g. providing emergency assistance to activists at risk.
- Allow simplified and accessible grants application, monitoring and reporting processes that help ensure low-capacity groups can access funding (e.g. Urgent Action Fund accepts applications in any language).
- Facilitate knowledge-sharing among women's groups and movements across regions.
- Enable bilateral donors to sub-contract the partnership and administrative workload.

Limitations

- Offer donors little or no control over decisions on the allocation of funds and no direct relationship with the groups they are supporting. Donors also have less direct control over the due diligence process, being required to put their trust in the women's funds and their processes which may be different from those of bilateral agencies.
- Are primarily grantmakers, not project implementers, which may not suit all bilateral project objectives.

5. Ways forward

The case for investing in women's rights organisations is firmly established. This review has sought to shed light on how this can best be done. The examples above highlight many ways that DAC agencies can successfully navigate institutional constraints to funding southern women's groups, often by partnering with specialist intermediary organisations, or nurturing medium and larger women's rights organisations with established links to the grassroots. These effective approaches can be scaled up and more systematically applied across individual agencies and the DAC donor community as a whole. A number of ways forward have emerged:

1. Reaching women's rights organisations takes deliberate effort and an intentional approach that builds support for women's groups into the structure of funding mechanisms. This can be done through:

- introducing funding targets or earmarking a percentage of the budget for women's rights organisations
- establishing separate funding streams or windows – for example, one for larger, more mature and/or established partners and another for newer and/or smaller organisations
- insisting that women's rights organisations sit on boards of funds
- involving women's rights organisations as experts and leaders in designing, managing and evaluating funding mechanisms
- actively reaching out to self-led groups of women who face multiple disadvantages, such as indigenous, disabled, lesbian, bisexual or transgender groups, and ensuring that funding applications are accessible to them
- developing an organisational strategy that identifies support for women's rights organisations as a priority and outlines the agency's approach to this
- establishing a fund or grant scheme for work on gender equality, with a dedicated stream for women's rights organisations.

- 2. Better monitoring is needed of how much finance reaches southern women’s rights organisations – directly and indirectly, as core and project funding – and of the quality of this support.** Donors should improve internal tracking and information systems to monitor this, and evaluate the support they provide to women’s rights organisations. This should include particular attention to relationships between grantees and the local women’s groups they sub-grant to.
- 3. Women’s movements require breath, depth and diversity. Donors can best fund this diversity using a mix of funding streams and mechanisms** that allow partnerships with CSOs of different sizes and capabilities, working at different levels and on different issues. Diverse funding portfolios enable donors to support a mix of well-known proven partners as well as lesser-known and newer or smaller organisations that may be perceived as higher risk and require more intensive support.
- 4. Investing in the infrastructure of organisations and movements is the basics of sustainability, resilience and long-term change.** This requires a long-term view of partnership that builds organisational capacity through multi-year core support and recognises “increased capacity” as a tangible and positive funding outcome in itself. Catalytic funding can be useful in allowing smaller and newer organisations to learn and grow. Yet it should not come at the expense of longer-term core support, which is vital for the well-being and sustainability of organisations and activists.
- 5. Reaching the grassroots can be achieved by investing in specialist, well-anchored funding intermediaries, such as women’s funds.** The latter often have a track record of grant-making, connections with grassroots women’s groups, simplified application processes and systems to deal with financial risk. DAC donors should increase devolved funding through women’s funds as part of a deliberate strategy to support organisations that would otherwise be beyond their reach. This is a win-win for donors, enabling them to get funding to the grassroots while subcontracting the partnership and administrative workload.
- 6. A proactive approach is needed to reach beyond “usual suspects”.** At the country level, donors should start by analysing the context they are in, identifying local champions with a specialisation in women’s rights work and being sufficiently in touch with women’s groups to ensure that those they are supporting are representative and effective.⁴⁷ Stronger co-ordination between donors, for example through gender co-ordination groups, could help ensure that women’s civil society as a whole is adequately resourced.
- 7. Funding relationship-building, alliances and learning between women’s rights organisations, and with other social movements, is critical to strengthen collective voice, impact and sustainability.** Coalition-building – especially when it connects elite and grassroots organisations – leads to a louder voice, co-ordination, solidarity, broader expertise and greater ability to mobilise public opinion and exert pressure for change.⁴⁸ However, this takes additional time and resources. Donors can contribute by financing the co-ordination efforts required to build coalitions, investing in women’s CSO platforms and networks, and funding convenings, including travel. Funding in ways that incentivise women’s groups’ working together is important, especially in contexts where the women’s movement is fractured or civil society is under threat.

- 8. Donors have a responsibility to understand and respond to the political environment in which women's groups are operating.** Politically-informed and adaptive approaches improve the effectiveness of support to women's rights organisations. Such approaches strengthen women's groups' capacity to seize unexpected opportunities and their resilience in the face of threats, engage with potential spoilers of gender reforms, and ensure that foreign funding does not put women's groups at greater risk. For this, resources need to be flexible so that organisations can respond to changing circumstances, needs and opportunities. Specialist rapid response funders and mechanisms also need resourcing; they have a unique role to play in supporting women's groups to deal with sudden crises or threats.
- 9. DAC donors should think big – beyond gender equality funds.** The real win would be to influence large mainstream funds that can be hard for women's rights organisations to access.
- 10. DAC members can use not only financial but also non-financial means:**
- convening peers and building collaborations around strengthened support to southern women's groups
 - commissioning research into the value-added of women's rights organisations
 - supporting women's rights organisations to conduct baselines and document their impact and added value
 - linking women's rights organisations with other potential funders and local sources of finance, and building their skills to diversify their funding base
 - creating opportunities and spaces for women's groups to be heard and have influence, for example pushing for the inclusion of women's groups in political decision-making and peace processes, and linking state and civil society institutions
 - engaging in policy dialogue to support safe and enabling environments in which women's rights groups are able to thrive.

Annex 1. Statistical methodology

The statistics in this report are based on three tools: the DAC gender equality policy marker, the CSO channel of delivery code, and the women's equality organisations and institutions code (Code 15170). All data is based on donors' commitments.^l

a) The OECD-DAC gender equality policy marker

The OECD-DAC gender equality policy marker^m is a statistical tool to record activities that target gender equality as a policy objective. In their annual reporting to the DAC, members are required to indicate for each aid activity whether it targets gender equality as a policy objective according to a three-point scoring system:

1. Principal (G2): Gender equality is the main objective of the activity (the activity would not have been undertaken without this objective).
2. Significant (G1): Gender equality is an important objective but not the principal reason for undertaking the activity.
3. Not targeted (G0): The activity has been screened against the maker but has not been found to target gender equality.

All activities marked G1 and G2 are counted as gender focused aid.

b) The CSO channel of delivery code

Official development assistance (ODA) can also be classified according to the specific channel through which funding is delivered. The main channels of delivery include CSOs, governments and multilateral institutions. This report analyses gender focused aid to CSOs,ⁿ which includes:

- aid to CSOs – **core contributions** to the institutional budget of civil society organisations
- aid through CSOs – **earmarked funds** to civil society organisations for implementing a specific project.

^l Commitments are a firm obligation expressed in writing and backed by the necessary funds, undertaken by an official donor to provide specified assistance.

^m For more information about the DAC gender equality policy marker, see www.oecd.org/dac/gender-development/dac-gender-equality-marker.htm.

ⁿ The OECD's Creditor Reporting System allows members to report ODA flows to four types of civil society organisations:

1. **Donor-country based NGOs (channel code 22000)**: an NGO organised at the national level, based and operated either in the donor country or another developed (non-ODA eligible) country.
2. **International NGOs (channel code 21000)**: an NGO organised at the international level. Some INGOs may act as umbrella organisations with affiliations in several donor and/or recipient countries.
3. **Developing country-based NGOs (channel code 23000)**: an NGO organised at the national level, based and operated in a developing (ODA-eligible) country.
4. Undefined (channel code 20000).

c) The women's equality organisations and institutions code

In addition to screening projects against the gender marker and specifying the channel of delivery, DAC members are required to classify each of their aid activities under a specific Creditor Reporting System purpose code. One code is particularly relevant for this report: the women's equality organisations and institutions code (code 15170). This code is used to track support to women's ministries and women's civil society organisations. **For the purposes of this report, we have differentiated between support for women's civil society organisations and government institutions and have focused specifically on the former.** Activities recorded under this purpose code are marked "principal" (G2) with the DAC gender equality policy marker by default.

As noted above, there are some challenges with the application of the women's organisations and institutions code, notably (1) It is not always clear whether projects/programmes should be reported under a sectoral code (e.g. health, education, government and civil society) or under this code and (2) It appears that international organisations/UN agencies are sometimes being reported under this code in addition to women's organisations and ministries. A working group of GENDERNET members is being established to develop options to strengthen the use of the women's organisations and institutions code.

Annex 2. Organisations and individuals interviewed

DAC members

Australia: Felicity Errington and Helen McDermott, Gender Equality Section, Multilateral Policy Division; Carly Main, Indonesia Cross-Sectoral Programs, South-East Asia Maritime Division; Tracy Newbury, Gender Equality and Disability Inclusiveness Section, Pacific Division; and Suzanne Bent, Gender Equality, Fiji post, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Austria: Christina Stummer, Gender and Development Advisor, Austrian Development Agency

Belgium: Saskia Ravesloot, Gender Expert, Belgium Development Agency

Denmark: Thomas Nikolaj Hansen, Desk Officer for Civil Society Organisations, Danida; and Stefan Kovacs, Senior Advisor, Gender Equality, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

European Union: Marina Marchetti, Gender Policy Officer, Governance, Democracy, Human Rights and Gender Equality, European Commission DG International Cooperation and Development

France: H el ene Willart, Division du partenariat avec les ONG, Agence Fran aise de D veloppement

Germany: Anja Pauls, Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development

Iceland: P rarinna S ebeck, Director, Multilateral Development Cooperation, Ministry for Foreign Affairs

Ireland: Niall Morris, Governance, Human Rights and Gender Equality, Irish Aid

Italy: Bianca Pomeranzi, Senior Gender Advisor, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Netherlands: To Tjoelker, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Norway: Marie Osnes, Advisor, Civil Society Department, and Inger Brodal, Assistant Director, Civil Society Department, Norwegian Agency for Development Co-operation (Norad); and Turid Kongsvik, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Sweden: Carolina Wennerholm, Lead Policy Specialist Gender Equality, Department for International Organisations and Policy Support, Swedish International Development Co-operation Agency

United Kingdom: Ashufta Alam, Head, Violence Against Women and Girls Team; Ruth Graham, Violence Against Women and Girls Team; Louise Coskeran, Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Team; Rebecca Terzeon,

Head, Gender Team; Jo Cooke, Deputy, Gender Team; Magdalene Lagu, Advisor, Gender Team; and Benjamin Zeitlyn, Advisor, Gender Team, Department for International Development (DFID)

United States: Cathy Cozzarelli, Senior Gender Advisor, United States Agency for International Development (USAID)

In addition, the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Swiss Development Agency provided written inputs.

UN funds and women's funds

Aldijana Sisic, Chief, UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women

Elisa Fernandez, Chief, Fund for Gender Equality, UN Women

Esther Lever, Senior Programme Officer for Influencing, Mama Cash

PeiYao Chen, Director of Learning, Evaluation, and Impact, Global Fund for Women

Zohra moosa, Director of Programmes, Mama Cash

Civil society organisations and independent experts

Bethan Cansfield, Head of EVAWG Campaign, Oxfam International

Chitra Nagarajan, independent consultant

Colleen Lowe Morna, Chief Executive Officer, Gender Links

Dinah Musindarwezo, Executive Director, African Women's Development and Communications Network (FEMNET)

Joni van de Sand, Global Coordinator and Advocacy Manager, MenEngage Alliance Global Secretariat

Lee Webster, Head of Policy and Communications, Womankind Worldwide

Mavic Cabrera-Balleza, International Coordinator, Global Network of Women Peacebuilders

Nerea Craviotto, Lead Advocacy Coordinator, Resourcing Women's Rights Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID)

Netty Musanhu, Director, Musasa Project, Zimbabwe Simitie Lavalay, Executive Director, AdvocAid Sierra Leone

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