

# Bridging the Gap: Empowering Youth Feminist Organisations

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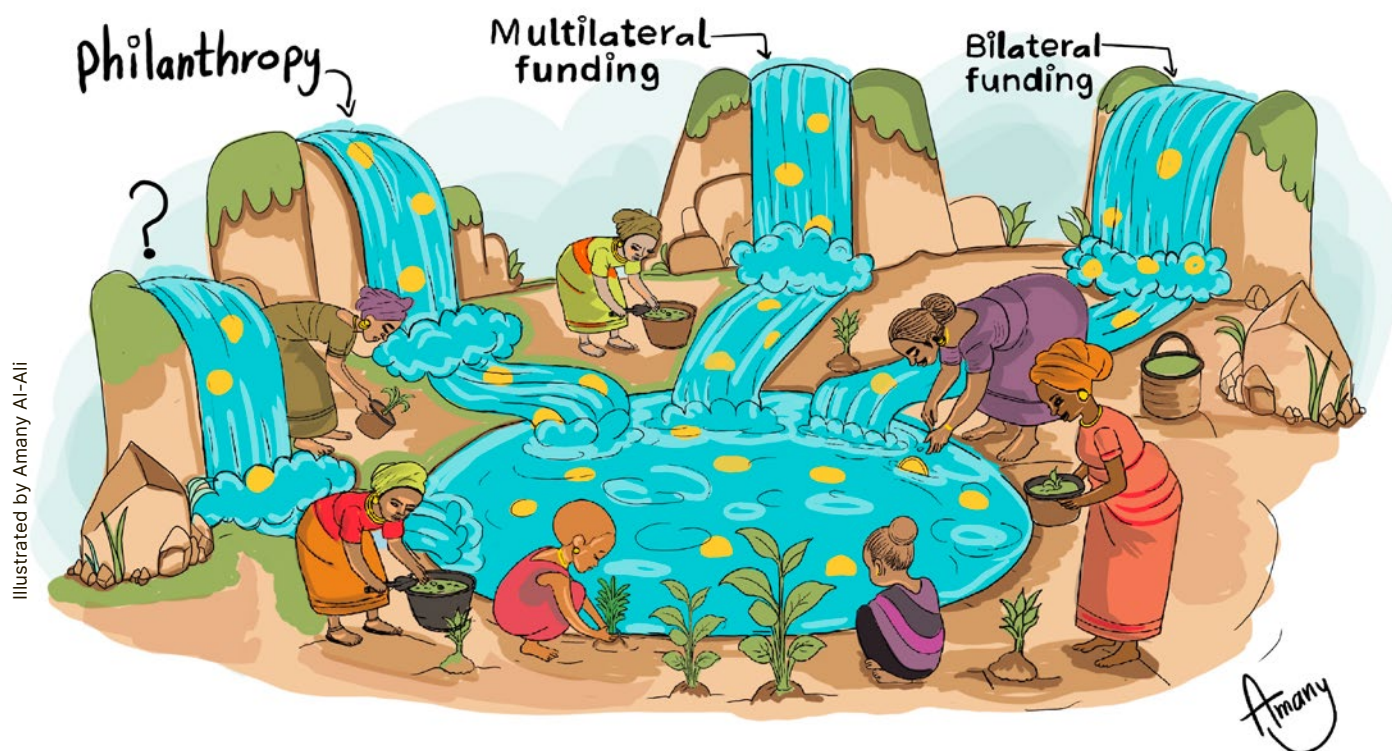
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Illustrated by Amany Al-Ali

## Advocacy Summary

### ■ Background and Research Question

Young Feminist Organisations (YFOs) across Africa are central to the pursuit of gender equality and the eradication of gender-based violence (GBV). By centring youth-led activism and community-driven approaches, they mobilise grassroots communities, challenge oppressive power structures, and champion inclusive policies. However, these organisations face persistent structural barriers: patriarchal norms, political instability, restrictive legal frameworks, and minimal financial support—that impede their impact.

### ■ Key Findings

YFOs receive less than 0.02% of global funding for women's rights, forcing many to operate on annual budgets as low as USD 500. This chronic scarcity hinders their capacity to sustain programs, employ staff, and expand influence. Legal obstacles, such as Zimbabwe's Private Voluntary Organisations (PVO) Act and conflict-affected contexts like Sudan, tighten civic space, undermining YFO operations. In Tunisia, digital divides limit internet access, making outreach difficult.

Rigid grant requirements, such as multi-year operational histories and audited financials, often exclude smaller grassroots groups. Many YFOs serving LGBTIQ+ communities, for instance, face bias from mainstream funders. A lack of training in financial management, proposal writing, and digital engagement exacerbates funding difficulties, while over-reliance on volunteers can lead to burnout.

### Emerging Solutions:

- **Alternative Funding Models:** YFOS are increasingly adopting social enterprises, crowdfunding, and community-based fundraising to diversify their income streams and foster local ownership.
- **Collaborative Partnerships:** Feminist networks and cross-regional coalitions provide resources, mentorship, and shared advocacy platforms, promoting movement-building and reducing operational costs.
- **Advocacy for Flexible, Decolonial Funding:** Multi-year, core, and participatory grants that prioritise grassroots leadership and local realities are essential to sustainably strengthening YFOs.

## ■ Key Recommendations

- **Governments:** Remove legal barriers, allocate budget lines specifically for YFOS, and establish accountability mechanisms to ensure transparent distribution of funds.
- **Multilateral Institutions and Philanthropy:** Allocate earmarked funding for YFOs, lower administrative hurdles, and embed capacity-building support into grant programs.
- **Private Sector:** Invest in CSR portfolios prioritising feminist initiatives; provide mentorship, pro bono services, and inclusive workplace policies to embed gender equality.
- **Civil Society:** Include YFOs in coalitions and leadership spaces, facilitate cross-regional knowledge exchange, and document effective grassroots strategies to shape policy debates.

By addressing systemic funding gaps, building cross-sector partnerships, and centring youth-led feminist leadership, we can create equitable, community-driven solutions to end GBV and advance gender equality across Africa.

## **Authors and Acknowledgements**

### **Authors**

**Yasmina Benslimane** is a feminist advocate and founder of Politics4Her, a platform dedicated to amplifying the political participation of young women and fostering inclusive leadership. With experience in global advocacy and youth engagement, Yasmina has consulted and advised leading feminist organisations and funds, including Vital Voices, Equal Measures 2030, SheDecides, the World YWCA, the United Nations (UN) Spotlight Initiative, and the UN Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund. Her expertise spans capacity-building, feminist policymaking, and advancing women's rights globally.

**Marie-Simone Kadurira** founded Vasikana Vedu, a nonprofit organisation that addresses menstrual health and empowers marginalised communities in Zimbabwe. Marie-Simone's work integrates advocacy, education, and resource distribution, impacting thousands of individuals globally. She has collaborated with organisations such as Womankind Worldwide, UN Women, and Equal Measures 2030, specialising in the prevention of gender-based violence and feminist movement-building.

### **Positionality of Authors**

The authors, Yasmina and Marie-Simone, bring firsthand experience as young feminist leaders from the Majority World, with Yasmina from Morocco and Marie-Simone from Zimbabwe. This shared positionality informs their deep understanding of the unique challenges faced by Young Feminist Organisations (YFOs) across Africa. Their work, rooted in intersectional feminism and decolonial frameworks, amplifies the voices of marginalised communities while advocating for equitable funding and sustainable solutions to advance gender equality.

### **Acknowledgments**

The authors thank the YFOs across Sudan, Tunisia, Senegal, Zimbabwe, and Kenya who participated in the research and shared their insights and experiences. Special thanks to Walking The Talk for their invaluable support in convening networks, facilitating connections, and contributing to the research. The authors also acknowledge the researchers, activists, and feminist leaders whose groundwork has informed and inspired this report.

## Acronym List

<b>AWID</b>	Association for Women’s Rights in Development	<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>CBO</b>	Community-Based Organisation	<b>PVO</b>	Private Voluntary Organisation
<b>CSR</b>	Corporate Social Responsibility	<b>SGBV</b>	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
<b>GBV</b>	Gender-Based Violence	<b>SMEs</b>	Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
<b>ITU</b>	International Telecommunication Union	<b>UN Women</b>	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
<b>NGOs</b>	Non-Governmental Organisations	<b>YFOs</b>	Young Feminist Organisations

## **Introduction**

Young Feminist Organisations (YFOs) in Africa are driving forces in the fight for gender equality and the eradication of gender-based violence (GBV). These youth-led, grassroots organisations bring innovative, community-centred approaches to activism, challenging deeply entrenched power systems and advocating for inclusive policies that foster empowerment (Cornwall & Darkwah 2022; Mama 2021). However, YFOs face significant structural and financial challenges, which are compounded by patriarchal norms, political resistance, and limited access to sustainable funding (Tripp 2019). These barriers are particularly acute in Sudan, Tunisia, Senegal, Zimbabwe, and Kenya, where political instability, restrictive policies, and inequitable resource distribution hinder progress (Tripp 2019; Mama 2021).

The global funding landscape for feminist movements further exacerbates these challenges. Research reveals that grassroots women's rights organisations, including YFOs, receive a minuscule portion of available resources—often less than 0.02% of global funding (AWID, 2020; OECD, 2021). This systemic underfunding impedes their capacity to scale their impact, sustain operations, and advocate effectively (Arutyunova & Clark, 2013; UN Women, 2022). Amid these obstacles, YFOs continue to demonstrate resilience and creativity, employing alternative approaches, such as social enterprises and feminist philanthropy, to bridge resource gaps (UN Women, 2022).

This article examines the critical role of YFOs in promoting gender justice and explores innovative funding models that could enhance their financial sustainability. By addressing the systemic barriers YFOs face and identifying practical, equitable funding strategies, this study aims to empower these organisations to amplify their transformative work and secure their place as key actors in the feminist movement. This study begins by highlighting the critical funding obstacles faced by YFOs, illustrating the intertwined nature of political resistance, gendered power imbalances, and the historical context that shapes their realities. The outlined study aims to shed light on alternative funding opportunities that promote the sustainability and impact of YFOs within their communities. By identifying unique challenges and exploring collaborative and innovative financial strategies, the research will contribute to nurturing robust feminist movements that can sustain long-lasting change amid challenging conditions.

## **Methodology**

The research employed a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative techniques to gather comprehensive data.

It aims to explore innovative funding models that could provide YFOs with enhanced financial independence, sustainability, and scalability of their efforts. By investigating the barriers YFOs face in accessing funding, the study proposes strategies to equip these organisations better to fight for gender justice.

### ***Research Objectives and Scope***

The primary objective of this study was to investigate the role of YFOS in promoting gender equality and addressing GBV across five African countries: Sudan, Tunisia, Senegal, Zimbabwe, and Kenya. Furthermore, it sought to examine alternative financing models that can bolster the sustainability of these organisations. The research explored YFOs' challenges in securing funding, revealing systemic barriers such as donor prioritisation, political resistance, and the masculinisation of funding mechanisms.

Ultimately, the investigation aimed to provide actionable insights into how YFOs can access more equitable and sustainable funding sources, despite the backlash against feminist initiatives. The study draws on literature on feminist funding ecosystems, youth-led activism, and gender financing, providing a well-rounded perspective on the challenges and opportunities that YFOs currently face.

### ***Research Design***

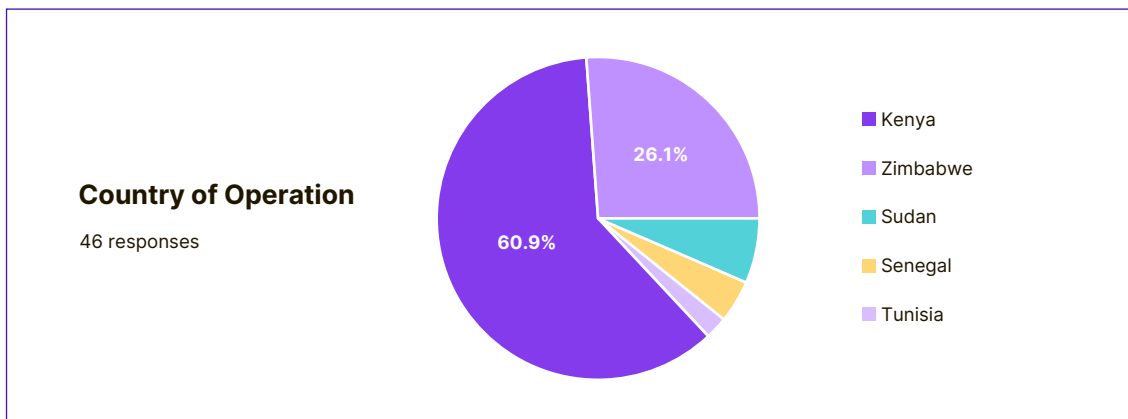
The study used a combination of surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions to collect primary data from YFOs, funders, and policymakers in four African countries. Secondary data was gathered by reviewing existing literature, reports, and case studies on YFOs and donor relationships related to funding mechanisms and feminist financing.

### ***Data Collection***

**Primary Data:** Surveys were distributed to various YFOs in five African countries: Tunisia, Senegal, Sudan, Kenya, and Zimbabwe. To gather data on their funding experiences and needs, the research team conducted in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with YFO leaders and young feminist activists. 77 YFOs in Tunisia, Senegal, Sudan, Kenya, and Zimbabwe were reached.



### Distribution of Surveyed YFOs Across Five African Countries



**Secondary Data:** The literature review focused on research on alternative funding mechanisms, the effectiveness of current funding models, and the specific needs of feminist organisations. In total, 30 reports, research papers, and advocacy briefings were consulted for this analysis.

#### Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to interpret qualitative data from interviews and focus groups, identifying key themes and patterns. Quantitative data from surveys was analysed using statistical methods to identify trends and correlations.

## Literature Review

### Young Feminist Organisations (YFOs) in Africa

Feminist organisations globally aim to promote gender equality, challenge oppressive power structures, and advocate for women’s rights (Federici 2004). Within this broad movement, Young Feminist Organisations (YFOs) stand out by centring young women and marginalised youth in their leadership, strategies, and advocacy work (FRIDA, 2019; Mama Cash, 2020). YFOs bring fresh perspectives, innovative approaches, and renewed energy to feminist activism, often intersecting their work with other social justice issues (Equality Fund, 2021). In the African context, this role becomes even more critical, as YFOs respond to unique regional challenges, such as limited access to funding, political instability, and deeply rooted patriarchal norms, all while reimagining activism in deeply community-rooted and culturally relevant ways.

In Africa, YFOs are particularly crucial in advocating for gender equality and combating GBV, especially in countries such as Sudan, Tunisia, Senegal, Zimbabwe, and Kenya. Young women and marginalised groups typically lead these organisations, actively challenging entrenched power systems, promoting inclusive policy changes, and fostering community empowerment (Fanon, 1961; Nkrumah, 1965; Spivak, 1988). However, YFOs encounter significant challenges in securing sustainable funding, which are further compounded by patriarchy, political resistance, and systemic inequities in resource allocation (FRIDA 2019; Mama Cash 2020).

## **Decline in Global Funding and Its Impact on YFOs**

The global funding landscape for gender equality and women's rights organisations has declined sharply. According to UN Women (2020), international aid for gender equality initiatives fell from approximately \$8.3 billion in 2018 to around \$7.5 billion in 2019—a decline of nearly 10%. Additionally, new donor commitments in several regions reportedly decreased by up to 15% during the same period. These trends, combined with political backlashes, increased restrictions on civil society, and a contracting philanthropic foundation environment, have further strained the financial stability of these organisations, creating a severe disadvantage for YFOs. Research from EQI and the Accelerator for GBV Prevention reveals that grassroots women's rights organisations receive less than 0.02% of global resources, highlighting the systemic exclusion of YFOs from sustainable funding mechanisms (EQI and Accelerator for GBV Prevention 2021).

This chronic underfunding directly impedes the ability of YFOs to scale their interventions, maintain operations, and advocate effectively. The scarcity of resources limits their capacity to address systemic issues, such as gender-based violence (GBV) and gender inequality, despite their demonstrated potential to create transformative change in their communities (Federici 2004; UN Women 2022). For example, in Kenya, studies and interviews have documented that many YFOs have experienced funding shortfalls, which have forced them to reduce their program reach by up to 40%, thereby limiting their capacity to conduct sustained advocacy and community outreach (UN Women, 2020; EQI and Accelerator for GBV Prevention, 2021). Similarly, in Zimbabwe, grassroots feminist organisations have reported that inconsistent and inadequate funding has led to suspension of critical community engagement activities, resulting in a loss of organisational capacity and impact (Arutyunova & Clark 2013).

## The Infantilisation of YFOs

Globally, the rise of youth-led feminist movements has shifted public narratives around gender equality, yet they face significant resistance, particularly in authoritarian regimes (Tambe 2018). This resistance is evident in state repression, such as detentions during protests, and restrictive legal measures that force grassroots organisations underground. Additionally, targeted harassment and censorship on social media further undermine these movements, while stringent funding criteria limit their operational capacity. African YFOs, shaped by unique historical and social contexts, often lead grassroots efforts to address gender disparities but face systemic marginalisation within the global feminist ecosystem. The belief that they cannot lead their emancipation and that of their communities often means they seldom receive core flexible funding and remain limited in their potential remit.

This marginalisation is reinforced by perceptions of YFOs as inexperienced, high-risk, and incapable of managing funding independently. Such perceptions stem from a global neoliberal capitalist framework that equates validity with institutional recognition and power, sidelining community-driven and youth-led initiatives (Nkrumah 1965; Equality Fund 2021). Postcolonial theory highlights how these narratives infantilise African organisations, framing them as dependent on external aid rather than capable of self-determination (Fanon 1961; Spivak 1988). This dynamic perpetuates dependency cycles and erases the agency of young activists in designing and implementing solutions tailored to their communities (Kabeer 2005).

## Alternative Funding Mechanisms for YFOs

With these systemic barriers, YFOs use innovative funding mechanisms to sustain their work. One promising avenue is the adoption of gender-focused bonds—financial instruments often issued by governments or multilateral institutions to raise capital for gender equality initiatives. However, their complexity, including stringent regulatory requirements and high issuance costs, has limited accessibility for smaller, grassroots organisations like YFOs (Equality Fund 2021).

Feminist philanthropy has emerged as another critical funding model, emphasising long-term, flexible funding and donor accountability. Organisations like Mama Cash and FRIDA (the Young Feminist Fund) have pioneered approaches prioritising community-based solutions. For example, they support participatory grantmaking processes where local community members help set funding priorities, organise capacity-building workshops to train grassroots activists in digital advocacy and

social enterprise management, and establish local advisory councils to oversee projects and ensure culturally responsive programming. These models empower YFOs to design their advocacy strategies and build the capacity needed for long-term sustainability (FRIDA 2019; Mama Cash 2020)

Digital platforms and crowdfunding campaigns have also provided YFOs with alternative pathways to financial stability. Platforms like GoFundMe and Kickstarter enable grassroots organisations to bypass traditional gatekeepers and engage directly with global audiences who align with their mission (Ford Foundation 2021). However, digital divides persist as a significant hurdle. According to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU, 2020), internet penetration in Sub-Saharan Africa remains at approximately 28%, which is significantly below the global average. Moreover, research by the World Bank (2020) shows that limited digital literacy and technical skills further constrain under-resourced organisations, impeding their ability to manage online fundraising campaigns and digital advocacy effectively.

YFOs are also exploring localised resource mobilisation strategies, including social enterprises that align with their social missions. They can reduce their reliance on external donors while fostering local economic empowerment by generating revenue through initiatives such as artisanal crafts or community agriculture projects. These innovative approaches demonstrate the resilience and creativity of YFOs in navigating restrictive funding landscapes; however, they require more robust support from funders and policymakers to scale their impact effectively (Mama Cash, 2020; Equality Fund, 2021).

## **Why Supporting YFOs Matters**

Funding YFOs is not just a financial imperative but an investment in transformative social change. These organisations bring unique strengths to the feminist movement, including intersectional approaches that address the overlapping oppressions of race, gender, class, and sexuality. YFOs are often embedded in their communities, enabling them to design solutions that are deeply responsive to local needs.

Moreover, their focus on youth leadership ensures the sustainability of feminist movements by cultivating the next generation of advocates. By addressing systemic funding barriers and prioritising the voices of young feminist leaders, stakeholders can empower YFOs to drive long-term change in the fight against GBV and gender inequality (UN Women, 2022; Equality Fund, 2021).

## Findings

YFOs across Africa play a vital role in advancing gender equality and combating GBV despite facing systemic barriers. Financial instability remains a critical challenge, with most organisations relying on short-term or external funding sources, which are often insufficient to cover their operational needs. Structural barriers exacerbate their struggles, such as restrictive funding requirements, limited network access, and geopolitical challenges. However, YFOs exhibit remarkable resilience and innovation, employing alternative funding mechanisms such as community fundraising, social enterprises, and collaborations with feminist networks. Using an intersectional feminist and Pan-African decolonial framework, this analysis highlights the need for inclusive, flexible funding models that prioritise grassroots organisations, enabling them to scale their transformative impact effectively. These findings underscore the importance of addressing systemic inequities while amplifying the voices of young feminist leaders to promote equitable and sustainable solutions.

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### Data Analysis Survey

Operating in diverse contexts, YFOs confront systemic barriers, including restrictive funding mechanisms, geopolitical challenges, and capacity limitations. Financial instability is a recurring theme, with most surveyed organisations reporting a reliance on short-term or external funding sources, which often cover less than 50% of their operational budgets. This analysis draws on the experiences of YFOs from Kenya, Zimbabwe, Sudan, Tunisia, and Senegal to highlight the structural inequities inherent in traditional funding systems. These countries were chosen due to their varied socio-economic and political climates, which reflect the broader challenges faced by YFOs across the continent, as well as to ensure fair geographical representation from East, Southern, North, and West Africa. Organisations in these contexts face complex application processes, stringent donor requirements, and limited access to networks and partnerships. Despite these challenges, they demonstrate resilience and innovation, exploring alternative funding mechanisms like social enterprises, community fundraising, and partnerships with feminist movements.

Using an intersectional feminist and Pan-African decolonial framework, this analysis delves into the financial and operational challenges articulated by the respondents. It also highlights emerging solutions, including localised funding opportunities, capacity-building initiatives, and advocacy for policy reforms prioritising grassroots organisations. The findings underscore the urgent need

for inclusive and flexible funding models that support and empower YFOs to lead transformational change in their communities. By addressing these systemic issues and amplifying the voices of young feminist leaders, this analysis aims to provide actionable recommendations for developing equitable funding mechanisms and enabling YFOs to scale their impact effectively.

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## **Country Profiles**

The survey responses from Sudan, Tunisia, Kenya, Zimbabwe, and Senegal highlight both common and unique challenges that YFOs face in diverse socio-political contexts. In contrast, each country presents distinct structural barriers, and key recurring themes emerge, including restrictive legal environments, financial exclusion, and the need for adaptive strategies to sustain their activism.

### ***Structural and Legal Barriers***

YFOs in Sudan and Zimbabwe operate under some of the most restrictive civic spaces. In Sudan, ongoing conflict and an inability to formally register organisations force many initiatives to rely on informal networks, limiting coordination and funding opportunities. Similarly, Zimbabwean YFOs struggle under laws such as the PVO Bill, which restricts legal registration, making it challenging for them to access institutional funding. Kenya, while offering a comparatively more open civic space, imposes financial and bureaucratic hurdles. Funding bodies often require audited accounts and extensive operational histories, effectively excluding grassroots initiatives from funding opportunities. The government's proposed regulations on crowdfunding could further constrain an already limited financial ecosystem.

### ***Financial Exclusion and Resource Limitations***

Across all five countries, access to funding remains a significant barrier, particularly for informal and rural-based organisations. Tunisian YFOs heavily rely on social media for outreach due to limited resources for website development and formal communication channels. In Senegal, international funding transfers in local currency instead of dollars result in significant value loss, negatively impacting operations. Meanwhile, in Kenya and Zimbabwe, strict funding requirements favour larger, well-established organisations, leaving grassroots movements with few viable funding alternatives. Despite these financial constraints, YFOs across the region are finding innovative ways to sustain themselves. Kenyan organisations leverage community fundraising and social enterprises to diversify income, while Zimbabwean YFOs employ collective movement-based frameworks

and human-centred design to foster local ownership. Senegalese groups focus on grassroots engagement and community-driven impact measurement, tracking behavioural changes as indicators of success.

### ***The Way Forward***

While each country presents specific challenges, the overarching need for inclusive funding models, flexible registration processes, and capacity-building support is evident. Funding bodies must adapt their approaches to support informal and grassroots YFOs, particularly in conflict zones and environments with restrictive laws. By amplifying the voices of these organisations and investing in context-specific solutions, the broader feminist movement can enhance its resilience and impact across the region.

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### **Statistical Overview**

The survey's statistical findings provide a detailed snapshot of the systemic challenges, capacity constraints, and innovative practices that shape the work of YFOs in Africa. These insights are crucial for understanding the operational realities of grassroots feminist movements and designing strategies that address their unique needs.

### ***Financial Instability***

Financial instability emerged as the most pressing issue, with 91% of YFOs (out of 77) identifying a lack of financial resources as their primary challenge. The precariousness of funding is stark: 76% of organisations reported unstable or at-risk funding, with 50% operating on annual budgets of less than \$5,000, and a quarter of respondents surviving on less than \$500 annually. This situation underscores the unsustainable nature of current funding models and the critical need for diversified, stable income streams. Alarming, 30% of YFOs rely on a single funding source or have no income, leaving them vulnerable to abrupt funding cuts. A Sudanese respondent remarked, *"We have ready projects but cannot implement them due to funding issues and the ongoing conflict,"* illustrating how limited financial resources exacerbate the operational challenges posed by geopolitical instability.

### ***Structural Barriers***

Structural barriers are another significant impediment, with 83% of respondents highlighting issues such as complex application processes, stringent eligibility

criteria, and limited access to networks and partnerships. For example, funders often require audited financial statements or a minimum operational history of five years—criteria that exclude many grassroots initiatives, particularly those in their early stages, such as YFOS. Linguistic and cultural barriers exacerbate these challenges, with 67% of respondents, primarily from Tunisia and Sudan, reporting difficulties in accessing funding opportunities. A Tunisian organisation shared, *“We rely on informal platforms like Facebook for outreach, as we lack the infrastructure for formal communication channels.”* These barriers hinder access to funding and limit the visibility and reach of feminist movements in these regions.

### **Staffing and Capacity Constraints**

Capacity limitations are widespread among YFOs, with 46% relying entirely on volunteers and only 14% employing paid staff. Limited staffing and technical expertise were cited by 70% of respondents as critical constraints, particularly in proposal writing, financial management, and digital literacy. A Kenyan organisation emphasised, *“We need financial capacity, auditing support, and annual reporting assistance to meet donor requirements.”* This gap highlights the importance of integrating capacity-building initiatives into funding programs to equip YFOs with the necessary skills and resources for sustainable growth.

### **Impact Measurement Practices**

Despite resource limitations, 90% of YFOs assess their impact using qualitative and quantitative methods. Storytelling and *herstories* of change are widely used to highlight personal and collective transformation, while baseline surveys and participant data provide measurable insights into program effectiveness. *Herstories*, a feminist reimaging of the term “histories,” centre on the lived experiences and perspectives of women and marginalised groups, emphasising narratives often excluded from traditional historical accounts. Additionally, 80% of organisations actively use feedback from beneficiaries to refine their programming. This practice reflects a commitment to human-centred approaches prioritising the needs and experiences of the communities they serve, even in resource-constrained environments.



## Findings

### Challenges in Accessing Funding

Systemic barriers significantly hinder YFOs in their pursuit of sustainable funding and operational stability. In Sudan, the ongoing conflict has caused near-total operational pauses for many organisations. The conflict in Sudan, which began in April 2023, has profoundly impacted the nation, with devastating consequences for communities already facing systemic inequalities. The ongoing violence has disrupted access to essential services such as healthcare, education, and humanitarian aid, deepening vulnerabilities among women, children, and marginalised groups. For YFOs, the conflict has further exacerbated existing challenges, forcing many to pause operations due to safety concerns and logistical barriers. These interruptions hinder their vital work in addressing GBV and advocating for women's rights. Despite these obstacles, YFOs continue to demonstrate resilience, with some initiating grassroots responses to support affected communities, underscoring the importance of feminist solidarity in times of crisis. This situation has drastically limited their access to critical resources and networking opportunities. One respondent highlighted that *“some initiatives are doing great work, but they cannot implement projects due to the lack of funding and the conflict context.”*

In Zimbabwe, restrictive legal frameworks, such as the Private Voluntary Organisations (PVO) Act, have significantly constrained YFOs, shrinking civic space and undermining their ability to operate effectively. The PVO Act, signed into law in 2023 despite widespread criticism, grants authorities extensive oversight powers, including the power to deregister organisations for vaguely defined “political activities” and impose severe penalties for non-compliance. These provisions create an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty, making it increasingly difficult for grassroots initiatives to register, secure funding, and sustain operations. The hostile implementation of these laws further exacerbates the challenges, as enforcement is often used to target dissenting voices, disproportionately affecting young activists and feminist movements. For example, Namatai Kwekweza, a young feminist leader, faced arrest and intimidation for her advocacy work, exemplifying the precarious position of those pushing for social change. The restrictive environment has led to a chilling effect on activism, discouraging engagement and limiting access to resources, as donors become wary of partnering with organisations operating under such conditions. These legal and political barriers collectively hinder the transformative potential of YFOs, leaving many individuals struggling to navigate an increasingly repressive civic landscape.

Tunisia presents a unique challenge for YFOS, as many rely heavily on Facebook for outreach rather than formal websites. This reliance on social media platforms highlights the digital and structural limitations of smaller organisations, including the high cost of establishing and maintaining websites, as well as a lack of digital tools and training. Web designers are also in short supply, further compounding these challenges. As a result, many feminist organisations struggle to establish a strong digital presence or effectively showcase their work. During the survey, only two feminist organisations out of 77 were accessible for interviews, clearly reflecting both limited visibility and the lack of digital capacity among Tunisia's young feminist movement. This limited visibility is not just about online presence; it also encompasses offline interactions. It also highlights the broader issue that young feminists are less active and visible in the public sphere than their counterparts in other regions. This trend is evident in the fact that fewer organisations can establish themselves in the digital space, and those that often face significant challenges in reaching wider audiences. These constraints on digital outreach contribute to a sense of isolation for feminist movements in Tunisia, hindering their ability to attract support, funding, and broader recognition for their work.

In Kenya, grassroots organisations encounter strict funding criteria that disproportionately affect smaller initiatives. Many funders require audited financial accounts and extensive operational track records, criteria that often exclude informal or newly established organisations. One Kenyan respondent explained that the requirements *"make it impossible for small grassroots organisations to access much-needed funding."* Gatekeeping within traditional funding systems remains a significant obstacle for YFOs. Many funding calls are closed to pre-selected partners, leaving newer or informal groups excluded from opportunities. This exclusionary practice reinforces systemic inequities and limits the reach of vital feminist initiatives. A respondent from Zimbabwe noted, *"We fail to access opportunities as funding calls are mostly closed to already benefiting partners."* Such practices perpetuate the marginalisation of emerging organisations, regardless of their impact or potential. YFOs serving marginalised groups, particularly LGBTQI+ communities, face additional layers of exclusion. Kenyan organisations reported experiences of backlash, gatekeeping, and classism from mainstream feminist organisations, which often act as gatekeepers rather than allies. This dynamic exacerbates the challenges already faced by vulnerable groups, restricting their access to critical funding and support. These systemic, exclusionary, and discriminatory practices highlight the urgent need for more inclusive, flexible, and equitable funding mechanisms to empower YFOs to sustain and expand their transformative work.

## Resource Limitations

Resource constraints for YFOs are a deeply rooted challenge, stemming from scarcity and barriers to accessing resources. The scarcity reflects the lack of sufficient funding, infrastructure, and skilled personnel to support grassroots efforts, especially for smaller or newer organisations that lack the visibility or connections to access more significant funding sources. However, the barriers to access are just as damaging. These organisations often face bureaucratic hurdles, restrictive donor requirements, and a lack of opportunities to form vital partnerships. Even when resources are technically available, the complicated processes to access them often leave out smaller or informal initiatives at the heart of feminist movements. This combination of scarcity and inaccessibility limits the potential of YFOs, stifling their ability to sustain their work, fulfil their missions, and truly create the transformative change they envision.

The survey revealed that a staggering majority of YFOs report unstable financial footing, with 76% relying on external funding sources that cover less than 25% of their budgets. This precarious financial state forces many organisations to operate with minimal resources, often jeopardising the continuity of critical programs. Capacity constraints are another pressing issue for YFOs. Many organisations highlighted challenges related to staffing, technical expertise, and compliance with donor requirements. A Kenyan organisation described their struggle, emphasising the “*need for financial capacity, auditing support, and annual reporting assistance*” to align with donor expectations. Although standard for large and established organisations, such requirements often become insurmountable barriers for smaller grassroots initiatives that lack the necessary infrastructure or skilled personnel to fulfil them. The absence of sustainable funding streams compounds these limitations. Short-term and project-specific grants dominate the funding landscape, leaving YFOs without the flexibility to invest in operational costs, professional development, or strategic growth initiatives. One respondent explained that unstable funding leads to a reliance on volunteer labour, which is unsustainable in the long term. This over-reliance on volunteers can often become exploitative, as many YFOs struggle to offer compensation or financial incentives, despite the significant demands placed on their staff. Volunteers, particularly those in grassroots organisations, frequently work long hours without pay, and their labour is often expected to cover a wide range of tasks from administrative duties to organising campaigns and events. This situation can lead to burnout and attrition, undermining the organisation’s sustainability.

Furthermore, this exploitative dynamic disproportionately affects marginalised individuals, particularly young women, who may not have the financial cushion to

sustain themselves while working without compensation. As a result, volunteers may be caught in a cycle where they are expected to offer their time and skills freely, even when facing economic insecurity. In this context, while volunteerism is vital to many organisations, the lack of financial support or stable funding makes it an unsustainable model in the long run, stifling the growth and impact of YFOs and perpetuating inequalities within the sector. This dynamic affects organisational effectiveness and places undue strain on individuals within these movements, particularly in contexts where external pressures such as political instability or restrictive policies are already significant. The lack of technical expertise further exacerbates these challenges. Most organisations noted a need for capacity-building in financial management, proposal writing, and monitoring and evaluation. Without these skills, grassroots initiatives often struggle to compete for funding or effectively demonstrate the impact of their work in ways that align with donor priorities.

## **Alternative Funding Mechanisms Employed by YFOs**

Despite persistent structural and financial barriers, African YFOs demonstrate resilience and ingenuity by adopting alternative funding mechanisms. These approaches reflect their ability to navigate restrictive funding landscapes and sustain critical work in advancing gender equality and combating GBV. The survey responses highlight the diversity and innovation of these mechanisms, offering valuable lessons for funders and policymakers.

## **Social Enterprises and Economic Innovation**

Social enterprises have emerged as a transformative model for many YFOs, providing financial stability while advancing the organisations' social missions. These enterprises sell goods or services that align with their values and objectives, generating revenue to sustain their core activities. For example, in Zimbabwe and Senegal, YFOs have explored ventures such as artisanal crafts, agricultural products, and eco-friendly solutions as sources of income. These initiatives do more than just provide funding as they also foster skills development, local economic empowerment, and social cohesion, particularly among marginalised groups. A respondent from Zimbabwe noted, *"Our social enterprise helps fund our advocacy while providing jobs for women in the community."* This approach highlights the potential of integrating economic innovation into feminist activism, creating pathways for financial sustainability and long-term social impact.

Despite the promise of social enterprises, the lack of clear legal frameworks in some countries presents significant challenges. In many countries analysed, such as Zimbabwe, Sudan, and Tunisia, there are no specific laws or regulations explicitly governing the registration and operation of social enterprises. In Zimbabwe, for instance, organisations often have to register under the Private Voluntary Organisations Act [Chapter 17:05], the Companies and Other Business Entities Act [Chapter 24:31], or as trusts under the Deeds Registries Act. None of these frameworks is tailored to accommodate the hybrid nature of social enterprises, which aim to achieve both social impact and financial sustainability. This legal ambiguity presents challenges for YFOS seeking to operate as social enterprises. Without clear guidelines, they may face uncertainty regarding taxation, business operations, and legal status, which can make it more challenging to secure funding, attract investment, and ensure long-term viability. Starting a social enterprise can be particularly daunting in countries like Zimbabwe, where the broader regulatory environment is already restrictive. The absence of a supportive legal infrastructure leaves YFOs vulnerable to compliance issues, forcing them to navigate a complex web of inconsistent policies that fail to reflect their dual-purpose missions.

Additionally, while social enterprises can provide financial sustainability, accessing startup capital is often a significant hurdle. Indeed, financial systems do not support startups, especially those with a social mission. Traditional funding channels, such as banks and investors, may be reluctant to invest in ventures that do not promise high financial returns. In this context, YFOs must rely on alternative funding sources, such as crowdfunding, grants, or partnerships with local businesses and cooperatives. Even when such funds are available, the startup money is often insufficient to scale social enterprises or sustain their operations in the long term. There is a need for stronger legal frameworks, more accessible startup capital, and improved support for social enterprises. Establishing a supportive environment for social enterprises in feminist spaces could significantly strengthen the capacity of YFOs to sustain their activities and increase their impact on the ground.

## **Community Fundraising, Crowdfunding, and Digital Campaigns**

Community-focused fundraising has emerged as a vital strategy for many YFOs, enabling them to reduce reliance on external donors while fostering local ownership and support. 60% of respondents reported leveraging social enterprises, crowdfunding platforms, and local fundraising initiatives to sustain their operations.

One respondent shared, *“We fund our projects through poultry farming and gardening, which provide a steady income while keeping us connected to the community.”* These activities generate revenue and align with the organisation’s broader goals of promoting food security and community resilience. Similarly, in Kenya, grassroots initiatives organise community fundraising events and member contributions to fund their programs. These approaches emphasise the importance of local buy-in, ensuring that funding remains closely tied to the communities they serve.

Crowdfunding and digital campaigns have become vital lifelines for YFOS, providing an innovative way to connect with a broad base of supporters and reduce their reliance on traditional funding structures. By utilising platforms like GoFundMe and local equivalents, many organisations can raise small contributions from individuals who may not have the financial means to make large donations, but still believe in the cause. One Kenyan organisation shared their experience: *“Crowdfunding allows us to connect with individuals who believe in our cause, even if they cannot contribute large amounts. Every small donation counts.”* These digital tools help YFOs bypass traditional gatekeepers, offering greater access to financial support for grassroots initiatives. However, while crowdfunding can be a game-changer, it also comes with hidden costs and challenges. For one, the digital divide remains a significant barrier in many regions. In countries where internet access is limited or expensive, or digital literacy is low, YFOs face an uphill battle reaching potential donors. Special skills are required to create effective campaigns, including digital marketing, social media management, and crafting compelling narratives that resonate with potential supporters. Additionally, the platforms often charge fees, and managing a crowdfunding campaign can be time-consuming, requiring dedicated staff or volunteers to monitor progress, engage with donors, and handle the financial aspects of the campaign.

Crowdfunding has proven to be particularly effective in times of crisis. In Kenya, for instance, during last year’s protests, crowdfunding was essential for organising and mobilising resources quickly. It allowed activists to bypass traditional funding structures, enabling them to access immediate funds to support their work. However, this has led to a proposed bill to regulate crowdfunding platforms, signalling the state’s intention to control how such resources are raised and spent. The bill, if passed, could impose restrictions on fundraising activities, adding another layer of challenge for organisations already operating in a restricted and hostile environment. This tension highlights the risks of relying on digital tools in politically volatile contexts, where activism is often under threat.

## Collaborative Partnerships and Feminist Networks

Collaboration has proven to be a cornerstone of alternative funding strategies, offering YFOs the opportunity to pool resources, share expertise, and amplify their collective impact. 75% of respondents emphasised the importance of partnerships with other feminist organisations and networks as a key strategy in navigating resource constraints and reducing operational costs. Feminist funding circles, where organisations collectively allocate resources to shared priorities, have emerged as an innovative model, reflecting a commitment to solidarity and mutual support. One Kenyan respondent noted, *“Collaboration through feminist networks not only strengthens our work but also provides access to resources and mentorship.”* However, while collaboration can be transformative, it has challenges. Existing organisations—especially those with longer histories—often dominate these networks, unintentionally sidelining nascent groups still finding their footing. This dynamic creates a power imbalance, where older, more established organisations set the agenda and control resources, making it difficult for younger feminist organisations to be heard or fully participate. The barriers to intergenerational collaboration are particularly evident when nascent YFOs lack the same access to networks, institutional knowledge, or digital capacity as their more established counterparts. Despite these obstacles, many nascent YFOs remain determined to build connections, navigating these power imbalances by seeking out smaller, more informal networks and feminist circles that are more inclusive and supportive of new initiatives. This struggle highlights the need for more intentional strategies to create space for younger feminist organisations in collaborative spaces, ensuring that intergenerational solidarity is not just an ideal but a practical reality.

## Local Resource Mobilisation

Localised resource mobilisation efforts have become a vital strategy for many YFOs, especially as they seek to reduce their dependence on external donors and strengthen their ties to the communities they serve. These organisations cultivate a sense of shared ownership by engaging community members, local businesses, and regional philanthropists, fostering greater accountability and trust. This localised approach helps organisations build a more sustainable funding base and promotes long-term impact, as it ties the success of initiatives to the community’s well-being.

In Senegal, for instance, some YFOs have formed strategic partnerships with local cooperatives, which serve as critical sources of funding and resources. These

cooperatives, often composed of community members pooling resources for mutual benefit, enable organisations to access financial contributions, materials, labour, and technical skills. One respondent shared, *“Our partnership with local cooperatives has been instrumental in sustaining our work, especially in rural areas where external funding is harder to secure.”* This localised support network enables organisations to operate in areas where external funding is scarce or non-existent, particularly in rural regions where financial resources are limited. However, while these efforts are innovative and influential, they are not without challenges. Given the widespread poverty in many communities, the financial capacity to contribute to these initiatives can be limited. In many cases, the resources available through local businesses or cooperatives may be modest, affecting the overall scope and sustainability of YFOs’ programs. Additionally, the financial contributions of local philanthropists may be constrained by their economic realities, limiting the impact of such fundraising efforts.

Another potential connection between localised mobilisation and sustainable funding is the establishment of small- to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that community members or local activists often lead. By fostering these local businesses, YFOs can create more robust economic networks that generate income to support social causes. However, YFOs must navigate challenges such as limited access to capital, infrastructure, and market opportunities for this model to be effective. Moreover, for those living in poverty, investing in or supporting local enterprises requires careful attention to balancing social impact with economic feasibility.

## **Advocacy for Flexible and Decolonial Funding Models**

Beyond implementing alternative mechanisms, YFOs actively advocate for changes to existing funding models to make them more inclusive and sustainable. **85%** of respondents supported multi-year flexible grants, feminist funding circles, and participatory grant-making as viable alternatives to traditional systems. A Sudanese respondent emphasised the importance of co-creating funding frameworks: *“Donors should work with us to design funding models that are equitable, culturally sensitive, and reflective of local realities.”* This call for a decolonial approach to funding underscores the need to dismantle paternalistic practices and centre the voices of grassroots movements in funding decisions.



## Measuring Impact and Advocacy

YFOs in Africa demonstrate a range of creative and context-sensitive approaches to measuring their impact, reflecting the diversity and adaptability of their work. Many organisations prioritise qualitative methods to capture the depth and complexity of their interventions. Storytelling, for instance, is widely used to document “*herstories*” of change, highlighting personal and collective experiences that illustrate progress in gender equality and the fight against gender-based violence (GBV). This approach allows YFOs to showcase the human impact of their initiatives, moving beyond traditional metrics to emphasise lived realities.

Community-driven frameworks are also central to impact measurement for many YFOs, particularly in contexts where quantitative data are insufficient or inaccessible. Organisations employ baseline surveys and human-centred design methodologies to ensure their programs are grounded in the needs and aspirations of their communities. One respondent from Zimbabwe shared, “*Our programming is purely community-driven, and we co-create knowledge and solutions with our stakeholders.*” By engaging communities in developing theories of change and tracking indicators that reflect local priorities, these organisations ensure their work remains relevant and impactful.

Advocacy remains a cornerstone of YFOs’ efforts, with many highlighting the critical need for flexible funding models that enable responsiveness to emerging challenges. A respondent from Kenya emphasised, “*Flexible funding is essential to address emerging needs and build grassroots resilience.*” This sentiment highlights the importance of flexible financial support for advocacy campaigns, rapid responses, and long-term movement-building initiatives. These innovative impact measurement strategies and advocacy priorities reveal the unique strengths of YFOs. They underscore the need for funding mechanisms that respect and accommodate these organisations’ diverse approaches to create change, ensuring their efforts are sustained and amplified.

## **Limitations in Outreach and Research**

Challenges in outreach and research underscore significant barriers to engaging with YFOs in regions like Sudan and Tunisia, where digital divides, conflict zones, and structural inequalities persist. These limitations highlight the need for localised, adaptive, and culturally sensitive approaches to ensure inclusivity and comprehensive representation.

In Sudan, ongoing conflict has disrupted communication networks and limited the operational capacity of many YFOs. One organisation noted that their members are scattered across different locations due to the conflict, making it challenging to maintain coordination or participate in regional networks. Despite these barriers, grassroots initiatives often operate informally, relying heavily on personal networks and community connections. However, these efforts are primarily underrepresented in formal research and funding due to the lack of accessible outreach channels. Similarly, in Tunisia, the reliance on informal and digital platforms, such as Facebook, rather than formal websites or structured networks, has created obstacles to identifying and engaging with feminist organisations. This reflects a broader digital divide that disproportionately impacts smaller and informal groups, limiting their visibility and access to research and funding opportunities. One Tunisian respondent mentioned that their reliance on social media resulted from resource constraints and limited access to the technical expertise needed for formal organisational development.

The gaps identified in the survey responses point to a critical need for more localised and adaptive outreach strategies. Traditional engagement methods—such as relying on formal registration databases or maintaining an extensive digital presence—often exclude informal or emerging YFOs. To bridge this gap, funders and researchers must adopt approaches that consider the unique challenges faced by organisations in conflict-affected and under-resourced regions. For instance, partnerships with local networks, on-the-ground intermediaries, and community leaders can provide valuable entry points for identifying and supporting these groups. Capacity-building initiatives that equip YFOs with digital tools, technical expertise, and resources to enhance their visibility can address some of the structural barriers. These measures would strengthen outreach and empower YFOs to participate more effectively in regional and global discussions. By addressing these limitations, stakeholders can create a more inclusive ecosystem that values the contributions of all feminist movements, regardless of their size or formal status.

## **Recommendations**

### **Governments**

- Enact direct funding policies for YFOS: Develop legislation or budget lines that support YFOS working on gender equity and preventing GBV. Prioritise flexible, multi-year funding that allows for long-term planning and capacity-building.
- Establish enabling environments: Amend or remove restrictive laws that limit the operation and registration of YFOs. Simplify bureaucratic processes and provide transparent channels for youth-led organisations to access governmental grants and resources.
- Strengthen accountability mechanisms: Create oversight bodies or advisory councils with representation from YFOs to ensure the transparent distribution of government funds. Publish annual reports detailing how much is allocated to feminist and youth-led organisations, including measures to reduce corruption and political interference.

### **Multilateral Institutions**

- Increase earmarked funding for YFO-led initiatives: Allocate specific percentages of development aid and gender-focused funds to YFOs, especially those addressing GBV. Introduce streamlined application processes that lower administrative barriers for smaller, youth-led groups.
- Facilitate capacity-building programs: Collaborate with YFOs to design training sessions on grant writing, financial management, and advocacy strategies. Provide opportunities for peer learning among youth-led organisations across different regions.
- Incorporate YFOs into decision-making structures: Invite representatives from YFOs to participate in program design, monitoring, and evaluation. Prioritise local expertise, intersectional perspectives, and the lived experiences of young activists in shaping global funding frameworks.

### **Private Philanthropy**

- Fund feminist movements directly: Shift from large intermediary organisations to direct grants for grassroots YFOs. Emphasise core, unrestricted funding that allows YFOs to address urgent needs, innovate, and scale their interventions against GBV.
- Adopt participatory grantmaking: Involve YFOs in deciding which projects and groups receive funding. Reduce or eliminate rigid reporting requirements and co-design flexible evaluation metrics tailored to context-specific challenges.

- Champion intersectional approaches: Recognise the multi-layered realities of race, class, sexuality, and disability in youth-led activism. Encourage multi-sector partnerships and joint grants integrating anti-colonial, anti-racist, and feminist principles.

### **Private Sector**

- Invest in social impact projects led by Young Feminist Organisations (YFOS): Create dedicated corporate social responsibility (CSR) portfolios or impact investment streams focused on feminist and youth-led initiatives. Offer venture seed funding or social enterprise opportunities to amplify their reach.
- Develop mentorship and partnership programs: Partner with YFOS and private sector professionals to build skills in areas such as communications, leadership, strategy, technology transfer, and pro bono services, thereby strengthening operational capacity.
- Promote inclusive workplace policies: Collaborate with YFOs to draft workplace guidelines on gender equity and GBV prevention. Extend these practices to supplier codes of conduct, thus reinforcing a culture of equality and accountability in broader value chains.

### **Civil Society**

- Elevate YFO voices in coalitions: Encourage established NGOs and coalitions to include youth-led groups in leadership roles and decision-making committees actively. Share resources, campaign platforms, and advocacy networks to strengthen collective impact.
- Promote cross-regional collaboration: Connect YFOs across African countries to share best practices, pool resources, and engage in joint advocacy campaigns. Use digital platforms and regional convenings to facilitate ongoing exchanges.
- Foster knowledge sharing and documentation: Collaborate with YFOS to publish case studies and toolkits that highlight effective grassroots strategies for GBV prevention and gender equity. Disseminate these materials widely to inform policy discussions and shape donor priorities.

## **Conclusions and Way Forward**

YFOs in Africa are at the forefront of addressing gender equality and GBV, bringing essential perspectives and strategies rooted in youth-led, intersectional activism. They stand out for their ability to mobilise communities, challenge entrenched power structures, and champion innovative solutions tailored to local realities. However, they continue to face significant funding barriers—from limited donor trust and restrictive grant requirements to entrenched patriarchal norms and political resistance. These obstacles hinder YFOs from scaling successful interventions and achieving sustainable impact.

The recommendations above aim to address these systemic challenges by urging governments, multilateral institutions, private philanthropy, the private sector, and civil society to invest in, collaborate with, and amplify YFOs. By offering flexible, long-term funding, adopting inclusive decision-making practices, and reducing administrative burdens, stakeholders can help build YFOs' capacity to lead transformative change. Moreover, nurturing cross-sector partnerships and creating open channels for youth representation ensures that the specific needs and insights of young feminist leaders are recognised and prioritised.

Moving forward, stakeholders can utilise this research to restructure current funding mechanisms, foster collaborative ecosystems, and secure meaningful participation from youth-led organisations in policy and practice. This requires ongoing dialogue, transparency, and mutual accountability. By committing to these changes, powerholders will strengthen the financial security of YFOs and contribute to a broader shift toward equitable, community-driven solutions that effectively combat GBV and advance gender equality across the African continent.

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