

An Evidence- Based Approach to Adopting the GEDI Lens among Women and Queer- Represented Family Philanthropy in India and South Asia

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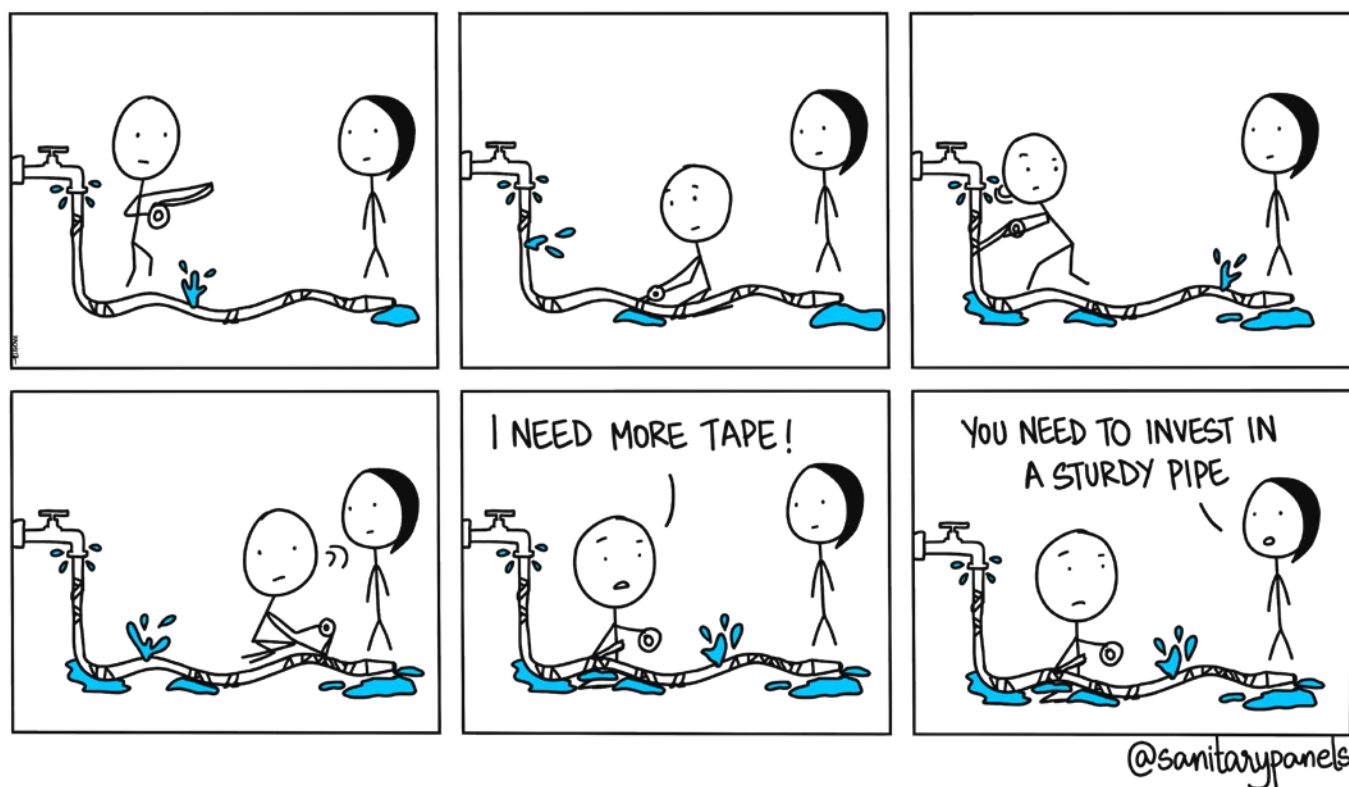
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Illustrated by Sanitarypanels



Advocacy Summary

■ Background

Most donations from Indian family funders focus on education and health, leaving gender equity initiatives severely underfunded. With regulatory constraints in foreign and corporate social responsibility (CSR) giving, family philanthropy can be vital in long-term resourcing towards gender equity. A new generation of family givers is beginning to adopt more inclusive and transformative giving practices, and it is necessary to leverage this momentum. Addressing intersectional inequalities by adopting Gender, Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (GEDI) can build proximate leadership and create intergenerational benefits for women, girls, and gender minorities. This research codifies good practices by feminist funding groups and cross-pollinating insights into family giving with a focus on India.

■ Literature Review

Funders neglect the complex and intersectional needs of women and marginalised genders, limiting their empowerment and societal participation. Engaging funders in reflection and collective action can address the root causes of inequity and

drive sustainable, transformative change. However, a notable lack of research on engaging family philanthropists in India with gender-intentional, intersectional strategies is missing an opportunity to enhance impactful giving. Women's funds have established partnerships and flexible funding models that respond to local contexts and the needs of historically marginalised communities. The literature highlights the importance of cross-learning and collaboration between women's funds and family philanthropists by combining expertise and resources to strengthen philanthropy for gender and intersectionality.

■ Key Findings

This research examines feminist grantmaking practices in India and South Asia to identify good practices and inspire greater domestic capital deployment toward funding gender and intersectionality in the regional context. It aims to bridge the gap between traditional philanthropy and feminist grant-making. Drawing on feminist principles, the researchers developed the GEDI framework, a reflective tool designed to guide family philanthropists in analysing their funding strategies. The GEDI framework emphasises long-term, trust-based, flexible, transparent, participatory, accessible, and community-centred funding. The framework was applied and tested in interviews with family philanthropists. Conversations with feminist grantmakers, family philanthropists, and sector experts shed light on the practical application of these principles, revealing both alignment and challenges. The study highlights that GEDI implementation is often imperfect, influenced by internal constraints and external dynamics, affecting the on-the-ground outcomes. The research employs a systems thinking approach and utilises feedback loops to illustrate these dynamic interactions. The study underscores the GEDI framework's critical role in fostering consultative processes and reflective inquiry among grantmakers.

■ Key Recommendations

- **Philanthropy**
Support and resource organisations embedded in feminist movements
- **Civil Society**
Reflect on internal structures and shift power to proximate leaders
- **Multilaterals/ Government**
Anchor convenings and platforms to promote dialogue
- **Private Sector**
Commit to GEDI principles within business processes and systems

Authors and Acknowledgements

Author Bios

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Acronym List

BIPOC	Black, Indigenous, and people of colour
ESG	Environmental, Social, and Governance
GEDI	Gender, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion
LGBTQI+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Plus
MEAL	Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
ODA	Official Development Assistance
UHNH	Ultra-High-Net-Worth Individuals

Introduction

India's civil society and philanthropy practice is rooted in the Freedom Movement against British colonisation. Throughout history to the present day, women and individuals from intersectional identities have been critical in shaping the discourse and on-ground mobilisation for social change. From Savitribai Phule, who was an educator and social reformer, fighting discrimination on grounds of caste and gender in 1800s, to Elaben Bhatt who founded SEWA Bharat, as a federation that dismantles the economic and societal barriers for women in the 20th century – the pursuit of gender equity has been a persistent effort by different actors. While the Indian Government's Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) repository shows over 80,000 organisations dedicated to women's development and empowerment, funding for gender equity remains critically low.¹

Research shows that women's rights organisations globally receive less than 1% of total foundation funding, and only about 1% of gender-focused international aid goes to these groups (Shifman, Deepak, and McHarris, 2022). This lack of funding is particularly pronounced for organisations based in the Majority World, with 94% of foundation giving directed to organisations in the United States and Europe (Johnson et al., 2018).

In India, 60% of donations from the most prominent family givers are channelled into education and health initiatives, leaving philanthropic efforts for promoting gender equity struggling to receive contributions (India Philanthropy Report 2022). Mainstream charitable causes such as health, education, and livelihoods often do not prioritise gender equity in a targeted way, even though issues affecting women and girls are deeply intertwined with these areas (Ackerman et al., 2023). While investments in these specific areas are valuable, these are insufficient to drive the transformative change needed to challenge the power dynamics and build the agency of communities. In the current scenario, funders lack a deep understanding of the contexts in which the organisations they support operate, resulting in unconscious biases and fragmented approaches to giving (Mohapatra et al., 2022). Equitable giving must extend beyond gender to incorporate other intersectional lived experiences across a spectrum of identities related to gender, sexuality, disability, caste, ethnicity, class, and religion.

Family philanthropy is uniquely positioned in India. It can provide risk and patient capital to address systemic challenges. Family philanthropy faces fewer compliance

1. Based on data accessed on 25th February, 2025 on Government of India's official website as a repository of NGOs: <https://ngodarpan.gov.in>

and infrastructure constraints than other forms of philanthropic capital in India. Therefore, it is well-poised to focus on underserved causes, sectors, regions, and communities (Nundy & Chatterji, 2023). Based on this context, this study aims to build a compelling case for increasing investments by family philanthropists in gender, equity, diversity, and inclusion by applying principles based on good practices from feminist grantmaking.

Methodology

Research Questions

- What are the key principles and good practices in feminist grant-making applicable to the Majority World (with a focus on India and South Asia)? How are feminist grant-making strategies building proximate leadership and creating intergenerational benefits for women, girls, and gender minorities?
- How can women/queer-represented family philanthropy leverage feminist grant-making strategies in expanding and diversifying their portfolios? What is the current intentionality of women/queer-represented family philanthropy to adopt a GEDI approach in India and South Asia?

Research Objectives

This research aims to compile and promote good practices from feminist grant-making that can be adapted for family philanthropy, emphasising inclusive, equitable, and sustainable funding strategies. It seeks to evaluate the extent to which family philanthropists are adopting a GEDI lens in their giving practices through reflective conversations with funders. The research also aims to identify pathways for collaboration between feminist organisations and family philanthropists to adopt GEDI-centred approaches, focusing on the potential for systemic change.

Conceptual Framework

The research adopts a GEDI framework to distil and analyse grantmaking, emphasising intersectionality to ensure no one is left behind. GEDI principles are borrowed from good practices in feminist grantmaking to underscore fair access to opportunities, representation, and respect for all individuals and communities. The sections below explain the framework in greater detail. The GEDI framework has been integrated at every stage of the research process and thereby refined through the development of interview tools, selection of

stakeholders, and analysis. Socio-economic factors unique to India, such as caste and ethnicity, are considered.

Approach to Data Collection

In the first phase, the researchers used primary research to collate good practices on feminist funding principles through discussions with regional women's organisations. This was complemented by a secondary desk review of available academic and grey literature to contextualise feminist funding practices within broader development frameworks. The second phase focused on a reflective inquiry with awareness and critical consciousness within women and queer-led family philanthropy to facilitate this shift. The primary research component was qualitative, based on a mix of deductive and inductive reasoning and feminist reflexivity. The researchers undertook a stakeholder mapping to define archetypes - representative models of different types of actors in the feminist funding landscape. These archetypes guided interviewee selection to ensure that key perspectives were included, allowing for a broad and balanced understanding of feminist funding practices across the ecosystem. Furthermore, ethnographic and participatory tools were employed to align respondents with research objectives and generate actionable insights.

Limitations

The limited academic research on feminist funding, particularly in India and the Majority World, challenges the study's theoretical depth and rigour. This necessitates reliance on grey literature, which lacked academic rigour but provided practical insights. To address the challenge, the research employed a feminist lens to analyse available resources. The study's qualitative approach, including ethnographic and semi-structured interviews with a small, purposively selected group of stakeholders, provided nuanced insights but limited generalisability. Additionally, the funders interviewed for the study were at different stages of their giving journeys, making it difficult to identify clear trends. The research team tried to ensure diverse perspectives by including different archetypes of informants. Despite the intention to cover South Asia, the research study primarily captured insights from the Indian context. The researchers also acknowledge the potential for biases to arise from their professional experience within the philanthropy advisory research field, notwithstanding their efforts to maintain analytical objectivity.

Literature Review

Programming for gender equity requires a transformative approach

Despite evidence of the power of gender-transformative programming, philanthropic contributions from foundations and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives aimed at promoting gender equity in India focus mainly on programming for family planning, reproductive health care, and support for women's rights organisations (OECD, 2022). This distribution of resources indicates a tendency to prioritise health-related interventions. Indeed, reproductive health care receives ten times more funding than gender-based violence (OECD, 2022). Such a focus may inadvertently continue to perpetuate gender-focused programming aimed only at gender roles and overlook the multifaceted aspects of gender equity, including the aspirations of women and girls. By concentrating primarily on reproductive health, philanthropic efforts may overlook critical domains that are essential for the full societal participation of women and marginalised genders (Lam, 2020).

Academic research on feminist approaches to philanthropy has intersected with perspectives such as gender-transformative approaches, which seek to reshape gender dynamics by redistributing resources, expectations, and responsibilities among men, women, and non-binary individuals. This type of programming often focuses on norms, power, and collective action (MacArthur et al., 2022). Research from the Pathways of Women's Empowerment project (2006) indicates that for programs to achieve transformative change, they must engage women in critical and conscious reflection on their circumstances and facilitate the sharing of this process with other women. Additionally, the effectiveness of these initiatives hinges on engaging frontline intermediaries who implement policies, projects, and programs. Finally, when women come together to advocate for change, build networks, and form alliances, they are more likely to witness broader transformations and experience the empowering effects of collective action (Cornwall, 2016).

Likewise, agency – the ability to make decisions about one's life – is central to women's empowerment. Empowerment is described as the process by which those who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such ability. Genuine choice requires several conditions: the availability of alternatives, the awareness of these alternatives, and the significance of the choices in terms of life impact. Gender norms often obscure power relations, leading women to internalise disempowerment, such as accepting lesser claims on household

resources or enduring domestic violence. Therefore, empowerment in the gender-transformative sense would involve expanding women's ability to make meaningful, strategic choices in ways that challenge patriarchal power structures. It is not merely about becoming more effective in fulfilling assigned roles but about exercising transformative agency that actively questions and changes societal constraints (Kabeer, 2005).

It is critical to build solutions with an intersectional perspective

Coined by the feminist legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), the term “intersectionality” captures the complexity of social relations, highlighting how multiple, intersecting forms of discrimination shape individuals' experiences. As such, funders need to integrate an intersectional approach into their philanthropic efforts. This integration means reaching people as they live intentionally, recognising that varied identities and characteristics can elevate privilege or compound injustice (Human Rights Funders Network, 2022). An intersectional approach fosters open, continuous dialogue to better understand diverse experiences across intersections and enable more effective solutions. This includes prioritising leadership development within diverse caste groups, marginalised genders, and individuals with disabilities, as representation is crucial for creating inclusive strategies. It is also a tool for social change and can help build solutions that consider individuals' varied lived experiences.

Flexible funding is equally important. Addressing complex intersectional realities often requires investment in innovative, transformative programs that may not yield immediate results. Organisations focused on gender equality usually need dependable, long-term financial support to fulfill their missions effectively. However, philanthropic donors predominantly offer short-term funding, which can impede partners' ability to operate efficiently and sustain their efforts (Pawar & Mishra, 2022). This calls for a shift toward “systems change philanthropy,” focusing on long-term investments to address root causes and drive structural shifts rather than short-term, project-based funding (Bukachi & Mwangangi, 2022).

In this context, the family philanthropy community must reflect on its power and privilege, recognising that the responsibility for driving social change lies with the communities. Their role should be facilitation rather than appropriation (Pawar & Mishra, 2022). For instance, it is insufficient to allocate funds to address violence against women or to support women and girls; resources must be used to confront the socio-political dynamics that perpetuate inequality, discrimination, and violence (Srivastava, 2019).

The shifts in philanthropy across India and South Asia

Intermediaries have primarily researched philanthropy in India based on their vantage points. Despite the limitations in data, macro-trends indicate that the philanthropic landscape in India and South Asia is evolving, driven by a new generation of family givers committed to more inclusive approaches. The India Philanthropy Report (IPR) 2023 identified two cohorts as forerunners in reshaping giving: Now-Generation (NowGen), comprising professionals and entrepreneurs who are first-generation wealth creators, and Inter-Generational (Inter-Gen), comprising the next generations of wealth creators.

Family givers can provide long-term risk capital (Kapur et al., 2023). Therefore, the shoots of change visible for both groups are in their increasing interest in diversifying their giving approaches. Early trends indicate that these donors are adopting transformative approaches, which include a willingness to share insights and provide unrestricted or collaborative funding. For instance, Amira Shah Chhabra of the Harish and Bina Shah Foundation supports several nonprofits with flexible, accountable, and goal-oriented funding to create purposeful and patient impact. Furthermore, over 90% of donors from the Inter-Gen and Now-Gen cohorts expressed interest in strengthening philanthropy infrastructure (Kapur et al., 2023).

As global wealth distribution evolves, Asian women are also increasingly becoming influential players in the philanthropic and investment landscape (Raman, 2022). Women's wealth in Asia is projected to increase by over \$1 trillion annually over the next four years, given the current annual growth rate of 10.4% (Zakrzewski et al., 2020). With this increase in wealth, Asian women are increasingly aligning their investments with funds that perform well and positively impact communities, social causes, and the environment. In a recent survey, 64% of Asian women reported incorporating environmental, social, and governance (ESG) factors into their investment decisions (HSBC Holdings Plc, 2023). As their wealth grows, these considerations become even more central. For example, a study conducted between 2020 and 2022 by the WealthiHer Network found that 75% of women prioritise responsible investing over financial returns. Additionally, 53% expressed a desire to give back to their communities, and 63% emphasised the importance of practising philanthropy, compared to 56% of men (HSBC Holdings Plc, 2023).

There is a lacuna of research on the giving behaviours of women in the Indian context. However, based on a limited dataset from Dasra's GivingPi network,²

2. GivingPi is an invite-only network for India's most philanthropic families to engage, learn and accelerate philanthropy

we observe that while women constitute a minority of Ultra-High-Net-Worth Individuals (UHNI), wealth and philanthropic contributions, their impact is still significant. Emerging insights from GivingPi in 2025 also highlight significant engagement: 54% of members indicate women-led family philanthropy, with 70% reporting active female representation in their family philanthropy efforts. Women and queer individual givers are reshaping funding narratives and institutions by including a gender lens to their giving (44% vs. 33% men). The emphasis on gender could be correlated to their lived experiences in the Indian landscape. This can help shift historically gendered power dynamics by addressing complex issues, including social justice, caste discrimination, and intersectional mental health (Sheth et al., 2024).

The value proposition in feminist funds

To date, most official development assistance (ODA) and cross-border philanthropic funding promoting gender equality has not effectively reached feminist movements. However, philanthropic foundations focused on gender equality and women's empowerment increasingly channel their efforts through re-granting organisations in the Majority World (Hessini, 2020). These include local grassroots groups and women's funds, which have been established since the early 2000s to consolidate financial and non-financial resources in support of feminist movements worldwide. For instance, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) collaborates with intermediaries such as the African Women's Development Fund, FRIDA, the Global Fund for Women, and Mama Cash. These funds can play a crucial role in enabling philanthropy to back transformative gender initiatives, particularly in contexts of systemic oppression where ODA donors may have limited flexibility (Leading from the South, 2023). Women's funds also create pathways for philanthropists to enhance the effectiveness of their contributions and engage other donors in the field. With their on-the-ground presence and closer connections to their communities—often facilitated by their organisational structures—they are better positioned to attract local philanthropic support (OECD, 2024).

While funders are increasingly striving to adopt intersectional perspectives in their philanthropy, it is essential to build on this momentum by integrating existing good practices from feminist praxis. Women's funds are reshaping the dynamics of power and decision-making in philanthropy by shifting control over resources to grassroots organisations, centering lived experiences, and challenging traditional top-down funding models. This shift has led to a global movement advocating for more core, multi-year, and flexible funding, particularly

for the Majority World, ensuring that funding structures are more responsive to the needs of marginalised communities (Equality Fund, 2020). An analysis by the Human Rights Funders Network (2023) reveals that 92% of the grantmaking by women's funds in the Minority World is directed to the Majority World, with half of that support being flexible funding. Women's funds provide more flexible funding to the Majority World than any other donor group, including public, family, and corporate foundations, community philanthropies, and donor collaboratives (Vaill et al., 2024). Therefore, exploring avenues to facilitate knowledge exchange and collaboration between these organisations and family philanthropists is valuable, bridging expertise and practices to drive impactful change.

These examples illustrate that women's funds, through their work with partners, have effectively leveraged their institutional knowledge to develop frameworks and good practices for integrating feminist principles into philanthropy and grantmaking. However, while much of this research addresses the Majority World, it may not be entirely generalisable to India and South Asia due to its distinct cultural nuances. Consequently, there is a dearth of literature focusing specifically on the Indian context. Additionally, there is a significant gap in engaging family philanthropists in the region to gauge their understanding of intersectional approaches and the extent of their willingness to integrate these principles into their philanthropic strategies.

Findings

The findings below draw upon insights from two interviews conducted with feminist practitioners and funders (women givers engaged in family philanthropy within India). The discussions provided an in-depth exploration of the principles that guide feminist philanthropy and the evolving practices within the field. Further, the research uncovered the gaps and challenges in family philanthropy in attaining the precedents set by feminist funds. Juxtaposing feminist grantmaking principles helps articulate the opportunities for transforming grantmaking through gender equity, intersectionality, and community-centred approaches. Studying the perspectives of family philanthropists helped in understanding the inherent limitations and unconscious biases held by this cohort.

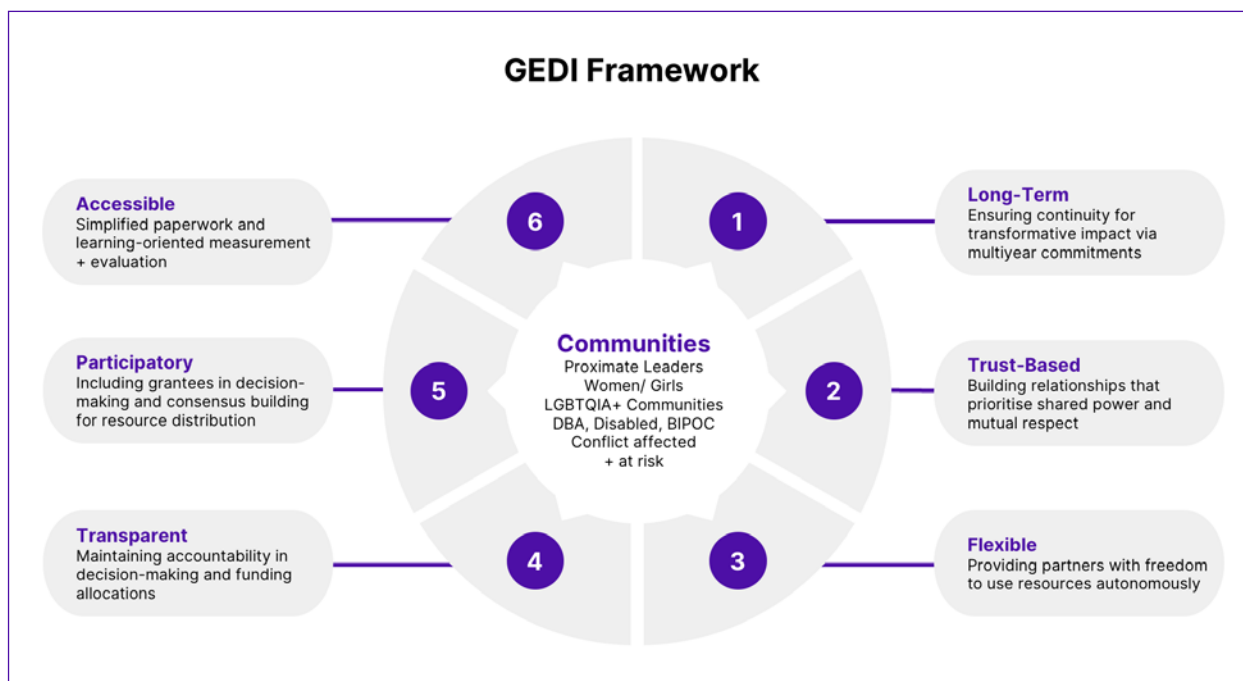
- **Part I** introduces the GEDI Framework, which outlines key principles for feminist philanthropy. It was a precedent for funders prioritising gender equity and intersectionality in their giving practices.

- **Part II** presents perspectives from reflective conversations with family philanthropists to reveal the limitations, challenges and practical implications of applying these principles in family philanthropy, offering insights on integrating GEDI values.
- **Part III** examines the concept of feedback loops, using it to analyse how grantmaking practices either reinforce existing power structures or catalyse shifts toward more equitable and transformative outcomes.

Part I: The GEDI Framework

Phase 1 of the research comprised interviews with feminist funds and gender equity experts based in India (and South Asia) to understand their perspective on grantmaking and the core principles defining feminist philanthropy. These conversations highlighted the salient features and key principles used in feminist philanthropy for inclusive, intersectional, and transformative grantmaking. The insights gleaned from the interviews informed the development of the conceptual backbone for the study, with the GEDI Framework (figure 1).

Figure 1: GEDI Framework based on Good Practices in Feminist Grantmaking



The GEDI framework was built upon feminist grantmaking to guide funders interested in funding for gender equity and intersectionality. The GEDI framework encompasses both the “who” and “how” of giving, centring the lived experiences of grantmakers and grant recipients by emphasising trust-based, participatory

grantmaking practices that prioritise long-term, flexible, and unrestricted funding. The framework empowers partners to develop innovative solutions tailored to their specific contexts and reduces administrative burdens, allowing a focus on their core mission and impact. The paragraphs below describe insights from interview conversations on the practice and meaning of each principle outlined above.

1. Long-Term: Ensuring continuity for transformative impact via multi-year commitments

- Feminist grantmaking recognises that sustainable change is nurtured over generations and should not be constrained by short-term grant cycles. Moving beyond project-based funding, feminist funds prioritise multi-year, flexible support that allows programs to grow strategically yet organically, without the pressure of securing the following grant.
- Many funds have institutionalised multi-year grant commitments to provide stability and build trust with partners. Some offer transition grants to support financial sustainability beyond the funding cycle. These models acknowledge that long-term impact requires more than a single funding window.
- However, sustaining long-term commitments remains a challenge, especially for smaller feminist funds that rely on annual fundraising. As one fund leader reflected, “We want to offer long-term grants, but when our funding is uncertain, how do we make promises we may not be able to keep?” Despite these challenges, long-term funding remains a feminist imperative - an investment in movements, people, and transformation’s slow, non-linear work.

“Feminist funding is not about quick wins. It is about showing up, year after year, for work that is slow, messy, and necessary.” - Feminist Practitioner.

2. Trust-based: Building relationships that prioritise shared power and mutual respect

- Trust in feminist grantmaking moves beyond compliance-driven funding toward relationships built on mutual accountability. One fund leader shared, “Our role is not to oversee but to support, listen, and co-create solutions that truly build movements.”
- Many feminist funds prioritise flexible, unrestricted funding, acknowledging that grassroots organisations are best positioned to determine how to allocate resources effectively. This autonomy bolsters NGO agility, allowing them to respond to needs on the ground swiftly and without bureaucratic constraints.
- Sustaining trust in an increasingly restrictive political climate is a challenge. The rise of backlash against progressive feminist work has made transparency

risky for many organisations working on gender equity. One fund leader noted, “Being too visible can be dangerous in some regions. We need donors who understand this and adapt their processes to protect us.”

“Trust is about standing beside movements, even when the path is uncertain. Trust-based philanthropy is a political commitment that prioritises solidarity over control.” - Feminist Practitioner.

3. Flexible: Providing partners with the freedom to use resources autonomously

- Feminist grantmaking prioritises flexibility, ensuring organisations can allocate funds based on their needs. Core unrestricted funding allows organisations and movements to sustain themselves beyond specific, condition-bound projects.
- Many funds institutionalise flexible funding through core grants covering operational costs, internal systems, or strategic priorities. Some introduce models like risk reserves, enabling partners to prepare for crises, adapt to changes, and ensure sustainability.
- Feminist grantmaking prioritises accessibility by simplifying application and reporting processes, ensuring that grassroots organisations can make applications with reduced barriers posed by language, internet access, or formal grant-writing experience. Many feminist funds accept offline applications and alternative formats such as videos or phone calls and focus on vision and long-term impact rather than traditional formats, ensuring smaller grassroots groups are not overwhelmed or excluded.
- Beyond crisis response, flexible funding supports the well-being of those leading feminist movements. Many organisations use unrestricted grants to cover salaries, rent, or care-related expenses, which traditional donors often overlook. By allowing partners to determine the allocation and use of funds, feminist funds ensure the long-term well-being and resilience of the individuals and communities driving change.

“During COVID-19, many organisations struggled to reallocate funds as activities were suspended, facing delays in donor approvals—even for essential expenses like staff salaries. Core and flexible funding is critical, not just for survival during crises, but for sustaining and advancing their work beyond them.” - Feminist Practitioner.

“Flexible funding is not just about money—it is about shifting power, ensuring movements have the resources and independence to determine their priorities and respond to both urgent needs and long-term aspirations.” - Feminist Practitioner.

4. **Transparent:** Maintaining accountability in decision-making and funding allocations

- Feminist and women's funds emphasise that transparency is a two-way street. It is about partners making information available and ensuring they can navigate the funding landscape with clarity and confidence. Open communication about funding priorities, decision-making processes, and grant criteria helps dismantle the opacity that often excludes smaller, under-resourced groups from accessing critical funding.
- Transparency also extends to reporting expectations. Rather than imposing rigid compliance structures, feminist funds focus on learning-driven, co-created reporting that captures impact meaningfully without excessive bureaucracy. The emphasis is on making transparency a tool for collaboration rather than control.
- Transparency is about honesty and communication. It is essential to ensure that partners understand how and why funding decisions are made while creating space for their feedback. Feminist grantmaking prioritises a process of continuous learning and adaptation.

"Because the decisions themselves are made by partners, there is a high level of accountability and transparency that exists over there. For a call for applications, we share how many applications we received, from what regions, and the percentage of funding allocated where." - Feminist Practitioner.

"We believe that those receiving funding should know exactly how it was allocated, why some applications were chosen over others, and what percentage of resources are going where. This builds trust and accountability." - Feminist Practitioner.

5. **Participatory:** Including partners in decision-making to ensure shared ownership

- Feminist grantmaking embraces participatory approaches, ensuring that those most affected by funding decisions have a direct role in informing them. Participatory philanthropy redistributes power to communities or those closest to them by involving partners and movement leaders early in decision-making, fostering shared ownership and accurate representation.
- Participation exists on a spectrum, from involving communities in grant design and allocations to ensuring they shape how funding is communicated/ accessed. Some feminist funds integrate participatory voting, where applicants and advisory committees composed of movement leaders collectively determine funding priorities. As one fund leader shared, *"We are very consultative with*

our community of partners and advisors about the support that we offer. Whenever we are designing new strategies, we ensure that we get enough feedback to guide our work.”

- Participation also extends to monitoring and evaluation, recognising that learning and impact measurement is best articulated by those closest to the work. Many funds include peer panellists and rotating advisory committees, ensuring diverse representation from marginalised communities, including sex workers, trans and intersex individuals, and Dalit and Adivasi groups.

“Women’s funds recognise that those closest to the challenges are best positioned to drive solutions. Through participatory processes - whether peer panels, advisory committees, or community-led voting - they create funding models where partners are not just recipients but decision-makers.” - Feminist Practitioner.

6. Accessible: Simplified paperwork and learning-oriented measurement and evaluation

- Feminist Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) practices guide reporting processes, emphasising dialogue, adaptation, and learning over rigid, top-down metrics. Accessibility also means maintaining trust-based, flexible reporting structures that acknowledge shifting contexts. Rather than requiring partners to “prove” impact through exclusively quantifiable metrics, feminist funds create space for real-time learning, ensuring that grantmaking leads to lasting qualitative outcomes.
- Feminist grantmaking also allows space for contradictions, responding thoughtfully to conflict and critique. It acknowledges that change is complex and layered, requiring imagination, unlearning, and co-creation alongside engaged communities. Trust, accessibility, and transparency in information sharing are vital, ensuring equitable and respectful relationships between funders and partners.

“Grantmaking should empower, not overwhelm. By valuing vision over polished applications and offering simple, accessible processes, women’s funds ensure grassroots groups can thrive.” - Feminist Practitioner.

7. Community-centred: Placing the needs, voices, and aspirations of diverse communities, particularly the most marginalised, at the heart of decision-making (e.g., proximate leaders, women and girls, LGBTQI+ communities, Dalit-Bahujan-Adivasi, disabled, BIPOC, conflict-affected and at-risk groups)

- Feminist funds intentionally support the most marginalised communities, strongly emphasising identity intersectionalities. At the core of their work is an explicit funding focus on proximate leaders, women and girls, LGBTQI+ communities, Dalit-Bahujan-Adivasi groups, disabled people, BIPOC communities, and conflict-affected groups.
- A fundamental tenet of feminist grantmaking is the commitment to decolonised practices for resource distribution. This means shifting power in decision-making, ensuring that young feminist organisers and excluded communities determine how much funding is allocated, what kind, and which feminist strategies are most relevant. By focusing on individuals and leaders from social movements, this approach challenges traditional philanthropy and ensures that resources serve those building long-term, systemic change. Feminist funds also hold themselves accountable to the movements they support. “We are constantly learning from the communities we fund,” one fund leader reflected. “The more we listen, the better we become at redistributing power, not just money.”

“Sustained engagement with communities is essential. We work in a way that is supportive and deeply mindful of context - whether it’s with rural communities, marginalised communities, or young women. Context is central to our work and long-term relationships with communities have been critical to our impact.” - Feminist Practitioner

Part II: Insights from Reflective Conversations with Family Philanthropists

Drawing on the GEDI framework, the researchers developed a rubric (Annex 3) to facilitate reflective conversations with family philanthropists. This process initiated an inquiry for funders to reflect on their perceptions of feminist funding principles. It provided valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities of integrating GEDI-aligned approaches within family philanthropy. The responses from grantmakers included mixed responses with willing acceptance, unconscious biases, and restrained limitations. While overarchingly, most family philanthropists were interested in aligning or engaging with feminist principles outlined in the GEDI framework. However, principles such as participatory and transparent grant-making seemed restrained, and long-term, trust-based, and flexible principles were based on conditions. A summary of their responses is noted below.

1. Long-term:

Most family philanthropists interviewed acknowledged that achieving meaningful impact requires sustained commitment. While many begin with short-term learning grants, their ultimate goal is long-term engagement. As one funder noted, *"The goal of the learning grant is clarity. It's not just a placeholder to defer decision-making."* This approach ensures stability for organisations while allowing funders to refine their strategy. Some funders now extend commitments to a decade or more, recognising that lasting change requires sustained support. As one funder noted, *"Long-term support truly enables change - it's about staying the course, not just looking for the next shiny, innovative thing."* Family philanthropists are also considering how to create sustainable pathways for organisations when they eventually exit or shift funding priorities. While these transitions can be disruptive, especially for partners in underfunded sectors, family philanthropists are ensuring continuity. One funder explained, *"In cases where our funding no longer aligned with an organisation's goals, we pivoted away from long-term support. However, we always ensured a sustainable pathway for the organisation to continue or find alternative ways to support the project."*

2. Trust-based:

Few funders were able to operationalise trust-based relationships in the local context. Partners may struggle to engage openly, even when funders try to foster open dialogue, shaped by years of operating in a high-stakes environment. The fear of scrutiny, judgment, or losing funding remains a critical concern among organisations supported by the funders consulted. As one funder reflected, *"It's difficult for NGO leaders to show vulnerability - it's a learned behaviour on all sides, not just one. And it doesn't change with just one donor. Even if you approach things differently, you're still one among many, and the fear remains real."*

3. Flexible:

"Under a certain amount, grants are unrestricted - no questions asked. Beyond that, we practice 'directed flexibility,' asking organisations where our grant would be most useful and align with their insights. And if their needs evolve, we remain open to change. No program should exist just because we fund it—it should exist because the organisation sees its value." - Funder.

Most funders practice flexibility in their grantmaking by providing unrestricted or minimally directed grants, allowing organisations the autonomy to adapt their work as needed. As one funder explained, *"For the most part, our funding is*

unrestricted. If a partner wants to reallocate, it's not a problem." - Funder Funders also adopt a model of 'directed flexibility,' offering guidance on fund allocation while still centring the organisation's expertise. However, decision-making power often remains in the funder's hands. As one funder described, *"Below a certain amount, we just make it unrestricted, no questions. Above a certain amount, we ask organisations where they think our grant would be most useful, and we go with it"*. While this approach introduces a synergy between agency and collaboration, it may carry an implicit expectation that organisations align their priorities with donor preferences rather than independently shaping long-term strategies.

4. Transparent:

"It is a balancing act. I have realised that finding exceptional partners is difficult if they don't know you're looking. In investment management, you source deals because people know you want to invest; philanthropy is no different. While my network builds through word of mouth, I see the merits of sharing information openly on public platforms." - Funder.

Most family philanthropists keep their giving private, often due to personal comfort levels. One funder shared, *"I don't feel comfortable talking about it. It's a personal thing, I think."* In contrast, corporate philanthropic spending is disclosed in annual reports for compliance. Some philanthropists rely on intermediaries such as Dasra to track their giving and share details within trusted circles such as Giving Pi,³ ensuring transparency without public disclosure. Moreover, most funders we interviewed lacked a formal process for partners to provide feedback on the grant cycle or a structured approach to communicating funding criteria, expectations, and outcomes to partners. However, this gap stemmed from a lack of a formal structure in their philanthropic approach rather than a lack of transparency. As a funder shared, *"Some philanthropies have a grants manager or family office staff overseeing giving. That's not us - I manage our family investments personally."*

One funder highlighted the ongoing challenge of balancing transparency with trust-based philanthropy. While their grant agreements aim for clarity, execution remains complex. *"We are constantly on a learning curve,"* they admitted, emphasising the trial-and-error nature of their grantmaking approach. They described the challenge of utilisation-based disbursements, where funds are tied to spending reports that arrive six months later. *"Am I going to hold back*

3. GivingPi is an invite-only network for India's most philanthropic families to engage, learn and accelerate philanthropy.

the disbursement or, in good faith, go ahead?" they reflected, illustrating the fine line between accountability and flexibility. This perspective highlights that transparency in philanthropy is about creating structured, yet flexible, mechanisms that build trust and responsibility between funders and partners.

5. Participatory:

"When it's just one or two people making decisions, it's difficult to incorporate community input meaningfully." - Funder.

Most funders recognised the value of participatory grantmaking but struggled to implement this principle. Collective giving structures, such as pooled funds and networks, make shared decision-making easier, whereas individual philanthropists find it challenging. One funder noted, *"It's just me and my mother—we're not a full foundation,"* highlighting the difficulty of integrating community voices in smaller setups.

Some funders see their philanthropy as conviction-driven rather than participatory but acknowledge its importance in specific contexts. In cases where funding involves multiple contributors, participatory approaches become more necessary for accountability and representation. Others emphasise open dialogue with partners and flexible funding but have yet to formalise participatory governance. Some take a more pragmatic stance, expecting partners to engage communities rather than doing so themselves, prioritising effectiveness over process. For many, participatory grantmaking remains a distant aspiration, shaped by structural constraints and individual philosophies. As one funder put it, *"A network provides the space and framework for shared decision-making in ways that individual giving cannot."*

6. Accessibility:

"We try to make it as simple and easy as possible for organisations to engage with us, but it's not always as formal or structured as possible." - Funder.

In India, many family funders use a flexible, personal approach to grantmaking instead of lengthy, detailed paperwork. One funder explained, *"I trust a good conversation over a mountain of forms,"* which shows their preference for getting to know organisations through conversations, video calls, and referrals. This method helps them intuitively understand an organisation's work without being slowed down by lengthy applications.

Language accessibility is also an essential part of the process. For example, few funders accept proposals in Marathi or even in video format. At the same time, some funders work mainly in English—a practice that, as one noted, “*rarely creates communication issues but might inadvertently introduce bias.*” This mix of approaches highlights a desire to keep things simple while recognising the need to reach a broader range of organisations.

Many funders mentioned that NGO site visits allow them to build a personal connection, to first-hand understand the work on the ground, and access the local context in which the organisation operates. Most funders keep their application process straightforward with a one-page form. One U.S.-based funder added, “*Organisations must have a 501(c)(3) or a fiscal sponsor,*” showing that while the process is relaxed in some areas, specific formal requirements still apply. Funders are trying to balance simplicity and direct communication with the need for clear guidelines to ensure fair access for all organisations.

7. Community-centred:

All funders interviewed prioritise marginalised communities, supporting groups facing significant social or economic exclusion. Their grantmaking strategies are deliberately designed to emphasise community engagement by focusing on one or more priority groups. However, the extent to which funders can support community-driven, transformative change varies. Some funders, notably smaller family philanthropies, have the flexibility to take risks and fund grassroots, experimental initiatives that directly address community needs. As one funder noted, “*We can take many risks because we don’t have staff depending on us. So, we can move into risky spaces for bureaucratic funders.*” In contrast, larger institutions, which control the majority of funding, often prioritise initiatives with limited backlash and align with existing systems. This cautious approach can lead to funding strategies that favour incremental change rather than the deep, structural transformations that marginalised communities seek.

Part III: Feedback Loops

Part 1 of the research focused on interviewing women’s funds to identify good practices in feminist grantmaking to inform the GEDI framework. Building on this, Part 2 comprised engaging family philanthropists to gather their reactions and assess their intentionality in adopting GEDI practices. Conversations with both cohorts revealed key differences in philanthropic principles and approaches

— while some practices reinforce existing power structures, others aim to challenge and transform them.

Drawing upon these findings, Part 3 of this research leverages the systems thinking tool, i.e., feedback loops, to explore how these strands interact and influence one another. It compares and contrasts the grantmaking approaches of the two cohorts, highlighting points of alignment and divergence. Feedback loops serve as a valuable tool in this analysis, illustrating how actions within a system can either reinforce entrenched power and resource distribution patterns or create shifts that challenge and rebalance these structures over time (unttools, n.d.). This tool can guide future research and facilitate reflection for advocacy efforts focused on intentional GEDI outcomes.

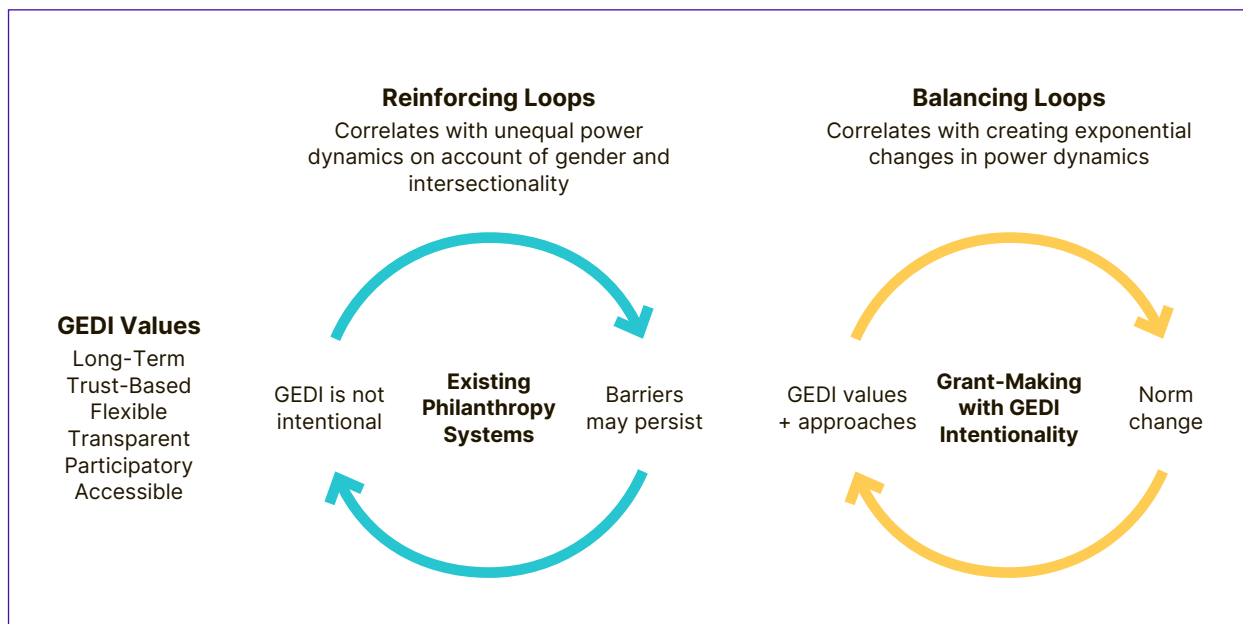
Feedback Loops provide a lens to analyse complex relationships, making them a practical framework for exploring the impact of interventions in interconnected systems.

Reinforcing Loops: Processes where behaviours or events amplify each other, creating a cycle that either perpetuates certain outcomes

Balancing Loops: Processes that stabilise systems by counteracting deviations and maintaining equilibrium for the ideal state (in this case, aligned with GEDI outcomes)

In the context of this research, reinforcing loops demonstrate how traditional philanthropy, when not intentionally guided by a GEDI lens, maintains hierarchical resource flows and hinders transformative change by failing to address systemic barriers that marginalise individuals based on gender, caste, disability and other barriers. In contrast, balancing loops capture how grantmaking, rooted in GEDI values, redistributes decision-making power, cultivates proximate leadership, and supports long-term movement-building. This is illustrated in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Feedback Loops for GEDI Grantmaking



	Stages>>		
Outcomes	Philanthropy where GEDI is not intentional	Grant Makers Giving with a GEDI Lens	Feminist Grant Makers
Capital, resources, time	Generated for the short term for project-based funding	Generated for the medium-term initiatives for project-based funding or organisational development	Generated for long-term movement building
Capacity building	Capacities built for program delivery with a focus on efficiency	Capacities built for service delivery and leadership development with a focus on sustainability	Capacities built to undertake reflexive work and change the status quo with a focus on empowerment
Power dynamics and agency	Traditional power structures are retained, with limited agency built in	Traditional power structures change with limited intentional representation in decision-making	Proximate and intersectional leadership cultivated with more significant equity and agency for communities
Narratives and acceptance	Neutral acknowledgement of GEDI, with broader alignment to mainstream approaches	Responsive to mainstream approaches, with broader alignment to GEDI; low backlash	Transformative, compared to mainstream approaches, rooted in GEDI; more backlash

The research process revealed that the implementation of the GEDI framework is rarely a straightforward process. Respondents within feminist funds and family philanthropy acknowledged constraints, such as limited resources and overarching power dynamics, while applying GEDI principles. These imperfections and influencing factors directly shape the outcomes of grant-funded projects. The figure above illustrates outcomes across distinct stages of applying the principles.

To better understand the interplay of these factors, the feedback loops conceptually represent how actions and reactions within the grantmaking ecosystem influence each other over time, highlighting the interconnectedness of its various elements. It demonstrates that applying the GEDI framework is not merely a checklist but a dynamic and iterative process requiring constant adaptation and critical self-assessment. The three stages of using the GEDI framework, in correlation to the outcomes, are described below.

Grantmakers where GEDI is not intentional: Many funders, while not explicitly adopting a GEDI lens, prioritise scale, efficiency, and measurable impact, often viewing gender inclusion as a byproduct rather than a core objective. Their philanthropy is driven by sectoral priorities such as education, health, and livelihoods without necessarily interrogating who benefits most or who is left out. As a result, while their funding may support women and marginalised communities, this occurs incidentally rather than through a deliberate strategy to address systemic inequities. One funder said, *“I don’t consider gender—many of the organisations happen to work with women but don’t look at it in an isolated sense”*, emphasising that the issue of gender equity is so widespread that it requires broader systemic action rather than targeted interventions. This approach can yield significant reach but risks overlooking the more profound structural barriers that prevent equitable access to resources and opportunities.

Grantmakers giving with a GEDI lens: This group comprises funders beginning to integrate a feminist lens into their giving while navigating the nuances of language, perception, and personal beliefs. Their approaches reflect an effort to embed GEDI values in philanthropy, though their strategies and levels of commitment vary. As one funder shared, *“For me, feminism is fundamentally about equality, and its values deeply align with my beliefs. I don’t think it would be true as much for my family. Across generations, the term carries more heat or activist undertones or are associated with particular times and movements as opposed to the values and philosophy itself... it can spark more debate than the words necessarily hold.”* This highlights how funders may embrace feminist principles in practice while navigating the complexities of family dynamics,

language, and perception. Another funder noted that she prioritises giving to feminist organisations and marginalised groups. Her family members support different causes, and their philanthropic decisions reflect mutual respect rather than complete alignment on sector focus. This reflects a broader trend where funders strive to embed GEDI values in philanthropy while balancing generational and ideological differences in their giving strategies.

Feminist Grantmaking: At the farthest end of the spectrum, feminist grantmakers are shifting from short-term funding cycles to long-term movement-building. Their focus extends beyond leadership development to reflexive work that actively challenges the status quo. Most of the group of funders interviewed acknowledged that caste remains a defining force in the South Asian context, concentrating decision-making power within homogenous caste groups and creating skewed funding patterns that reinforce existing privileges. In practice, the grey areas are acknowledged and there is a thriving culture of critique and debate among feminist experts, practitioners and grant-makers. As an activist stated, *“Frontline human rights defenders struggle to raise resources due to language barriers and bureaucratic hurdles, reinforcing a beneficiary-oriented, charity-driven, and patronising approach. A feminist approach asserts that marginalised people have rights. In rights-based language, there is no space for charity or patronisation - everyone is a rights holder and entitled to resources.”* Therefore, feminist grantmaking prioritises redistributing financial resources and transferring decision-making power to historically excluded groups. By positioning them as leaders rather than beneficiaries.

Recommendations

This research was conducted to deconstruct the role of private philanthropy and civil society in financing feminist futures. Therefore, the recommendations are directed primarily towards these stakeholder groups. Since the study acknowledges the interconnected roles of government/multilateral and the private sector in shaping feminist grantmaking, the way forward section covers specific recommendations for these groups.

1. Fund organisations and individuals rooted in feminist movements

“Feminist funds evolve out of movements and continue to support movement building. There’s enough said about the importance of movement building. There is strong evidence to show that women’s rights and gender equality are highly dependent on the health of movements and women’s movements.”

The increasingly restrictive global political economy is severely limiting funding for feminist work, jeopardising organisations focused on gender and intersectionality. Now, more than ever, funders must prioritise grantmaking for organisations and individuals rooted in feminist movements. At this critical juncture, where the space for feminist activism is shrinking, funders must prioritise grantmaking that directly supports organisations and individuals deeply embedded within grassroots feminist movements. Often operating with limited resources, these organisations possess invaluable expertise and community trust, enabling them to address the nuanced and complex challenges women and marginalised groups face. These organisations can carry movements forward by balancing complex compliance demands with vital on-the-ground program delivery.

2. Support organisations with small budgets and rethink scale

“Feminist funds tend to give a larger number of smaller grants with more flexibility. This becomes extremely important when you’re supporting grassroots work.”

Emerging research from India shows that most Indian nonprofit organisations operate on budgets of less than INR 100 million (Dasra; Kearney 2025). This finding underscores a critical need for a paradigm shift in how funders approach grantmaking. Traditionally, funders prioritise large-scale growth, equating impact with an increased operational reach and geographical expansion. However, this focus on numerical growth can inadvertently

pressure grantees, forcing them to prioritise expansion over their core mission, ultimately leading to mission drift. Organisations may feel compelled to take on projects or expand into areas that do not align with their original goals, simply to meet the demands of funders. Organisations focusing on gender and intersectionality may have to focus on scaling deep, concentrating efforts in a specific geography, persistently, concentrating efforts in a particular geography, persistently, to change norms. (Darcy and Michele-Lee 2015) Supporting smaller-budget organisations is crucial for enabling effective interventions at the hyperlocal level, ultimately creating intergenerational benefits.

3. Build infrastructure for dialogue, cross-learning, and collaborative action

*We need spaces and venues where people with shared values can find each other, forge deep personal connections, exchange ideas, co-learn in real time, and co-create enduring solutions. For social change to occur, relationships must serve as the scaffolding for growth. This relational foundation is not a secondary feature; it is the essence of meaningful, adaptive change.*⁴

South Asia and India urgently require more dialogue, cross-learning, and collaborative action spaces. The current funding landscape, heavily inclined towards supporting service delivery, undermines vital movement-building efforts and reduces relationship strengthening to transactional exchanges. By investing in infrastructure for dialogue, grantmakers can empower communities to become stewards of change. This shift enables a move away from instructive pedagogies, tapping into the collective wisdom and hidden knowledge found in oral histories and personal memories, crucial elements of feminist epistemology. The historical success of feminist movements underscores the necessity for these spaces.

4. Integrate intersectionality with a focus on dismantling caste discrimination

As people from marginalised communities, we often ask ourselves: Why can't I do something that others can? If we can't find answers and there is no one to help us with our queries, we start blaming ourselves and our community. Where do these self-perceptions come from? Is this the result of an underlying mental illness? No, it is a product of discrimination and social hierarchies. We need conversations that address the root causes of our mental stressors. For thousands of years, our people have been told that

4. This text is copied from the following article on the India Development Review by Gautum John: <https://idronline.org/article/perspectives/connection-not-abstraction-rethinking-philanthropy-for-social-change/>

*they are inferior to the privileged few. They have heard their caste being mocked in daily conversations.*⁵

Caste discrimination remains a pervasive and deeply entrenched reality across South Asia, transcending regional and cultural boundaries. Despite constitutional protections and affirmative action policies, caste continues to dictate socio-economic relationships and power dynamics. Notably, individuals from dominant castes disproportionately occupy positions of influence within philanthropy and civil society, despite not representing the majority. To achieve genuine GEDI, practitioners must confront these structural barriers head-on. This requires actively dismantling the concentration of power and fostering meaningful representation within organisational leadership and decision-making. Funders are critical in driving this transformative shift by promoting affirmative action policies and strategies.

Both civil society and philanthropy can shift power dynamics. Philanthropy must evolve to support feminist futures by aligning funding decisions with community needs. While traditional grantmaking approaches demonstrate good intentions, they can unintentionally perpetuate power imbalances, with funders often setting the terms of support without listening to the communities. Civil society must build solidarity for feminist narratives through storytelling and setting precedents that challenge existing power structures. In synchronicity, philanthropy and civil society can foster community resilience and equitable proximate leadership.

5. This text is copied from the following article on the India Development Review by Deepa Pawar: <https://idronline.org/article/social-justice/mental-justice-addressing-the-mental-health-of-de-notified-tribes/>

Conclusions and Way Forward

This research highlights family philanthropy's critical role in advancing gender equity by integrating the GEDI lens into their funding strategies. Despite the increasing wealth among family funders, particularly women leaders, the philanthropic landscape remains dominated by traditional approaches. These often neglect the intersectional needs of marginalised communities, perpetuating systemic inequities. The GEDI framework developed through this research provides a reflective tool for funders to align their strategies with feminist principles.

The findings emphasise the transformative potential of feminist grantmaking, which prioritises solidarity, decolonised practices, and sustained community engagement. By adopting GEDI principles, stakeholders can address systemic barriers, centre marginalised voices, and enable innovative solutions tailored to local contexts. Moreover, the research identifies the value of feedback loops from systems thinking to guide this shift, replacing reinforcing cycles of inequity with community-centric, adaptive approaches.

Here's how each stakeholder can utilise the research moving forward:

- ➔ **Private Philanthropy:** Funders must support and resource organisations embedded in feminist movements to drive positive impact for gender and intersectional causes. Family funders can use the GEDI framework as a reflective tool to evaluate and evolve their grantmaking approaches. It encourages considering processes like participatory decision-making, reducing administrative burdens, and offering unrestricted, long-term funding.
- ➔ **Civil Society** Organisations should reflect on internal structures and shift power to proximate leaders. This research study can help discern the need to advocate for systemic shifts. Civil society must also work in solidarity to strengthen narratives through data and storytelling. Combining such practices can help amplify and implement GEDI principles with greater rigour across the ecosystem.
- ➔ **Government and Multilaterals:** As critical ecosystem infrastructure builders, government and multilateral entities can anchor convenings and platforms to promote dialogue. Policymakers can integrate GEDI principles into regulatory frameworks to set high precedents that are followed. Furthermore, creating platforms for multi-stakeholder engagement can enable collaboration among funders, civil society, and communities, ensuring solutions are anchored around community needs.

- ➔ **Private Sector:** Businesses can align their philanthropic initiatives with GEDI values by embedding them into corporate strategies and Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) frameworks. Supporting gender-equitable supply chains and promoting diverse organisational leadership complements philanthropic efforts. It is also critical for businesses to do this with committed intentionality, which remains untethered to populist narrative shifts.

The GEDI framework developed through this research is not a fortress. Instead, it is a reflective tool that opens the gates to a garden. It helps understand the ethos of feminist funding, emphasising building grantmaking practices that can generate intergenerational benefits for communities. In an era of growing uncertainty, the approach offers a starting point for implementing feminist funding practices prioritising gender and intersectionality. It encourages supporting organisations embedded in feminist movements to cultivate equitable futures. It seeds GEDI-intentional grantmaking, as one participant aptly stated,

*“...we need to let a **thousand flowers bloom.**”*

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Annex 1: Research Methodology

Phase 1: Identifying Good Practices

This phase focused on mapping good practices in feminist funding globally, with a specific emphasis on India and South Asia.

Secondary Research

The secondary review consisted of a comprehensive analysis of available literature, both academic and grey, to contextualise feminist funding practices within broader development frameworks.

Academic Literature on Development Practice:

While traditional academic literature on philanthropy, especially in the context of gender equity funding in India, was limited, the researchers reviewed available feminist academic literature that discussed development practices. This helped situate the work of feminist funds within a wider historical and political context, enabling framing feminist funding as a form of development intervention.

Grey Literature on Philanthropy and Feminist Praxis:

A significant portion of the secondary review focused on grey literature. This included reports, case studies, and policy documents produced by feminist funds and other organisations involved in philanthropy and development practice. Grey literature is particularly valuable because it often reflects real-world practices and challenges that may not yet be captured in formal academic research. These documents, produced by feminist funds, are crucial knowledge sources reflecting lived experiences and feminist praxis in action. Given the limited academic material on feminist philanthropy, especially in the Majority World, these resources provide a necessary and valid perspective on the strategies, challenges, and opportunities faced by feminist funds and movements. By integrating this material, the researchers could balance theory with practice, ensuring that our analysis reflects the realities on the ground.

Primary Research

Semi-structured Interviews with Sector Practitioners:

The researchers conducted interviews with 15 key informants who held deep knowledge of the feminist funding landscape. These stakeholders were selected using a purposive sampling strategy based on archetypes identified through initial stakeholder mapping. This ensured that the researchers captured a broad spectrum of perspectives across geographies, funding levels, and thematic priorities within the feminist ecosystem. This group included civil society practitioners, feminist funds, academics, and thought leaders. Interviews were guided by a structured interview guide (Annex 2) to ensure that conversations remained focused on the research objectives while allowing flexibility to explore specific insights and lived experiences. The interviews were both qualitative and ethnographic to understand the complex, nuanced dynamics of the feminist funding landscape.

Sampling: The stakeholder mapping helped define archetypes, representative models of different types of actors in the feminist funding landscape. With an emphasis on feminist grant-makers, the researchers also covered the spectrum of actors by interviewing feminist non-profit organisations, thought leaders, and activists. These archetypes guided interviewee selection to ensure that key perspectives were included, allowing for a broad and balanced understanding of feminist funding practices across the ecosystem. The archetypes helped generalise findings while still reflecting the diversity of stakeholders.

Stakeholder Mapping: By developing these archetypes, the researchers highlighted patterns in feminist funding practices and identified key characteristics of successful funding models. This was particularly useful for creating a framework that can be applied by funders, NGOs, and other actors looking to adopt or adapt feminist funding strategies in their contexts. The initial mapping exercise identified the key players in feminist funding in India and South Asia, spanning grassroots organisations, international philanthropies, regional feminist funds, and other relevant actors.

This stakeholder map supported the archetype development and provided a valuable visual tool for

understanding the relationships and power dynamics within feminist funding networks.

Phase 2: Reflective Tool for Funders

Building on the insights from Phase 1, Phase 2 focused on creating a practical framework to guide family foundations in adopting GEDI-intentional giving. In this phase – the researchers developed the following tool for in-depth reflective conversations with family philanthropists.

Rubric for Reflection: A rubric was developed using insights from regional organisations that have adopted a GEDI lens to their giving. Designed as a non-evaluative tool, it featured benchmarks and reflective prompts. It aimed to inspire self-reflection among funders, offering them a flexible framework for aligning their giving patterns with transformative systemic shifts. It

also helped gauge the current intentionality of women/queer-represented family philanthropy to adopt a GEDI approach.

Reflective Interviews with Family Givers: We engaged with 5-7 family funders led by women and queer individuals in one-on-one reflective conversations using the prompts. These interviews encouraged participants to reflect on their existing giving practices, identifying progress and areas for improvement, and equipping family philanthropists with actionable guideposts for adopting good practices from feminist grantmaking, coded as the GEDI framework, in their philanthropy.

Annex 2: Interview Guide for Experts

Approach

1. What principles and values guide your feminist grant-making approach? How do you define feminist funding in your organisation?
2. How do you ensure that intersectional feminist approaches are embedded in your grant-making practices?
3. How do you support partners beyond providing financial resources (e.g., capacity building, technical support, or network building)?

Grant-making process

4. How are partners involved in the decision-making process? How do you balance power between the funder and the partners?

5. How do you maintain transparency and accountability in your grant-making process, particularly regarding decision-making and funding allocations?
6. How do you maintain feedback loops and partners' autonomy in the grant-making process?

Challenges and Opportunities

7. What are some of the key challenges you face in feminist grant-making? How do you address power imbalances, especially with donors?
8. What strategies have you found effective in scaling the impact of feminist funding or reaching under-represented communities?
9. How has your grant-making evolved in response to feedback from partners or changes in the feminist movement?

Annex 3: GEDI Rubric for Funders

GEDI Funding Principle	Guiding Question	Comments from Funder
Long-term Ensuring continuity for transformative impact via multiyear commitments	Are the majority of grants structured as multiyear commitments for partners?	
	Have partners reported deficits in their long term funding pipelines?	
	Do you provide core funding for the corpus or capital expenditure?	
Trust-based: Building relationships that prioritise shared power and mutual respect	Is trust foundational in your due diligence and contracting process?	
	Are partners encouraged to share challenges or failures without fear of negative repercussions?	
Flexible Providing partners with freedom to use resources autonomously	Do you consider the evolving needs of partners when structuring funding agreements, such as allowing for the reallocation of funds during unforeseen circumstances (e.g., crises, emergencies)?	
	Are partners empowered to make decisions about resource allocation to achieve program goals?	
	Are there caps on using funds across programmatic, administrative, and personnel costs?	
Transparent Maintaining accountability in decision-making and funding allocations	Are funding criteria, expectations, and outcomes communicated to partners?	
	Is there a system for partners to report concerns, share feedback, or seek clarification about funding priorities?	
	Do you share details about your grant-making on public platforms?	
Participatory Including partners in decision-making to ensure shared ownership	Does your decision-making process include input from partners or community members?	
	Do partners have representation and space to share feedback on your strategies during or before/after the grant cycle?	
Accessible Simplified paperwork and learning-oriented measurement + evaluation	Do you believe that your evaluation process prioritises learning, failure, and improvement rather than standalone compliance?	
	Does your MEL process include storytelling, narrative change, and qualitative indicators?	
	Do you take measures to ensure the application and reporting processes are inclusive for partners (e.g., allowing proposals in multiple languages or providing alternative formats for accessibility)?	
Community-centered Placing the needs, voices, and aspirations of diverse communities, particularly the most marginalised, at the heart of decision-making	Do you work with the following communities: Proximate Leaders Women/ Girls LGBTQI+ Communities DBA, Disabled, BIPOC Conflict affected + at risk	