

The Feminist Public Financing Ecosystem in Central Africa: Status, Challenges and Prospects

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Illustrated by Mariana Lorenzo



Advocacy Summary

This study follows the work of analysing public funding for women's and feminist organisations worldwide. It is based on data collected in three Central African countries, namely Cameroon, Chad and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), to highlight the specific challenges of the funding ecosystem in this sub-region. Based mainly on primary data from semi-structured interviews, this research analyses how feminist financing operates at national, regional and international levels. It also examines the opportunities and relationships between local women's and feminist organisations and public funders at each level. Thus, as with earlier studies, this research aims to show that the feminist funding ecosystem is still fragile worldwide.

■ Literature Review

Indeed, the literature shows that national governments struggle to financially support local women's and feminist organisations (Laila Hessini, 2023; Cazabat, 2016; Eval4change, 2024). Even ministries dedicated to gender issues often lack sufficient resources to implement their activities and support women's civil society organisations (MINPROFF, 2020; Onu Femmes, 2023). At regional and international levels, the dependence of community institutions on foreign funding (González 2017) and the requirements of international donors to access

their funding opportunities further complicate the feminist funding ecosystem (Equipop 2022, Mama Cash 2024).

■ Findings

Institutionalised precariousness of feminist public funding is evident in the three countries studied. Technical, rather than financial, support is generally provided to local women's and feminist organisations. Additionally, at the regional level, funding opportunities lack visibility and women's and feminist organisations lack confidence in regional institutions. At the international level, foreign feminist policies are diversified, but their implementation in funding local organisations remains debatable. This dynamic exerts considerable pressure on relations between international public funders and regional women's and feminist organisations.

Beyond the usual findings on the chronic underfunding of African feminist organisations, our research brings an innovative perspective to the existing literature. It reveals that the challenges of the feminist funding ecosystem cannot be attributed solely to funders but are a shared responsibility between all actors. From this perspective, this contribution highlights the mutual criticisms between public funders and feminist organisations. It underlines the need for a reciprocal commitment to optimise the feminist funding ecosystem and its impact.

■ Recommendations

Main recommendations for achieving this goal, according to each actor:

- **For multilateral institutions**, this means adopting an inclusive approach to feminist funding, putting an end to discrimination against organisations based on the age of the leader or organisation, the field of intervention and the geographical area. The abovementioned elements collectively constitute a multi-tiered filter that diminishes funding prospects for numerous organisations dedicated to women's issues and feminist causes.
- **For local governments**, it is essential to cleanse the feminist public funding system, ridding it of corruption, favouritism, nepotism and other abuses that are sources of prejudice in the allocation and use of feminist funds.
- **For local women's and feminist organisations**, it is imperative to continuously consolidate institutional and human capacities. The organisations should prioritise and facilitate the continuous professional development of members in areas such as financial management, project proposal development, and other relevant domains. This strategic investment will enhance their overall credibility and expertise.

Authors and Acknowledgements

About the authors

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Acronym List

ADIEFA	Association for the Development, Innovation and Entrepreneurship of Women and Girls for Empowerment	NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development
AFLADEGT	Association of Feminist Leaders for Access to Rights and Gender Equity in Chad	OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
ALVF	Association for Combating Violence Against Women	PILC	Public Interest Law Centre
AMEN	Alternative, Ménage, Nature et Marché	RAGFHT	Network of associations and groups of disabled women in Chad
ASFM	Association for the Relief of Young Mothers	REFED/N-K	Women and Development Network-North Kivu
CSO	Civil Society Organisations	REJEFEMAC	Network of Young Feminists of Central Africa
FDA	French Development Agency	REJEFFT	Network of Young Women and Girls Leaders of Chad
FDA	Focus, Droits et Accès	REFELA	Network of African Elected Women
FONAREV	National fund for reparations to victims of conflict-related sexual violence and other crimes against the peace and security of humanity	SCAC	The Cooperation and Cultural Action Service
GRB	Gender-Responsive Budgeting	UCLG Africa	United Cities and Local Governments of Africa
IGA	Income-generating activities	UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
LGBTQI+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer and Intersex	UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
LTDF	Chadian League for Women's Rights	WPMC	Women for Peace, Mediation and Conflict Prevention

Introduction

Feminist movements are essential drivers of social transformation (Eyakuze, 2019). In Africa, as elsewhere, they play an invaluable role in combating the gender-based violence and inequalities present in the public and private spheres. However, their activities are often compromised by their poor financial viability, whose sources of supply, although diversified, present considerable complexities regarding their allocation, acquisition and use. Indeed, feminist funding, defined by Michael Edwards as “the set of different income-generating options tailored to the diversity of needs required by social change” (Edwards, cited by AWID 2019: 5), is crucial in ensuring the sustainability and impact of feminist initiatives. However, its scope and terms of access are still subject to criticism in discourse and literature.

This study analyses the feminist funding ecosystem, focusing on its public component in Central Africa. It examines funding from national governments, African regional institutions and public development partners and their interaction with women’s and feminist organisations. It is structured around two fundamental questions: How are feminist public funding systems structured, presented and organised in Central Africa, regarding actors, mechanisms and challenges? Moreover, how can this funding be optimised for accessibility, sustainability, monitoring and evaluation to ensure social and systemic transformation?

Therefore, this study’s overarching objective is to analyse the feminist public funding ecosystem across national, regional and international levels and to propose practical recommendations drawn from the experiences of women’s and feminist organisations approached in the course of field surveys. The aim is to analyse each actor’s actions and their interactions to understand the dynamics, meanings and counter-meanings of these actions. From an intersectional feminist perspective, this study also aims to highlight feminist movements in Central Africa, which are often marginalised in literature and the allocation of financial resources, compared with black feminist movements in Europe, America and West Africa. It is led by two Cameroonian feminist associations: the Association for Feminist Research in Central Africa (ARFAC) and the Network of Young Feminists of Central Africa (REJEFEMAC).

Methodology

The research is anchored in the field of feminist research and based on a rigorous qualitative methodology, combining documentary research (scientific articles, legal texts and reports from national and international organisations), in-depth semi-structured interviews (with discussion guides adapted to each category of actors) and direct observation¹ (Bloor & Wood, 2006; Creswell, 2003). Feminist anchoring enables a shift from the default androcentrism of the social sciences to implement modes of knowledge construction that are more sensitive to the realities of dominated social groups (Charron & Auclair, 2016). Field surveys of 40 women's and feminist organisations in Cameroon, Chad, and the Democratic Republic of Congo were conducted to understand their experiences and positions on feminist financing with national, regional, and international donors. The surveys generally indicated that public funding for feminist initiatives in Central Africa is insufficient, less frequent and less consistent than private feminist funding.

Twenty representatives of public funders (ministries, communes, embassies and development agencies) in the three countries studied were also interviewed to understand their perceptions of their financial and/or technical support for women's and feminist organisations in Central Africa. The concepts of "women's organisations" and "feminist organisations" are used concomitantly and non-interchangeably in this study to refer to women's organisations that campaign for the rights of women and girls and may or may not assume the feminist label (Aboudi 2024) depending on the political context or ideological goals they pursue.

The limits

This study encountered several challenges during data collection and analysis. Field teams in all three countries encountered difficulties obtaining interviews with specific organisations, particularly at the regional level. Challenges arose in accessing public funding data, possibly due to intentional withholding or interviewees' limited knowledge stemming from their organisational roles. During the analysis, the main challenge was to extrapolate the results to the three countries due to their different political, economic and cultural contexts. Nevertheless, mitigation strategies were developed to overcome these obstacles and produce this study aimed at cleansing the feminist financing ecosystem in Central Africa. The objective is to rebalance relations between national, regional and international donors and women's/feminist organisations, to increase feminist funding and to

1. Direct observation was carried out at the sites of women's and feminist CSOs, national and local public administrations and international organisations approached for the surveys. The aim was to observe the respondents' environments and behaviours during the interviews.

adopt a more inclusive approach to funding by taking into account all women's and feminist organisations, irrespective of their size or age, while respecting their areas of intervention.

Literature Review

While several studies focus on women's access to financing (Akouwerabou, 2020; Djodjo, 2021; Bentancor, 2022; Okopoue & Bangagnan Yanga, 2024), there is a paucity of research specifically focusing on the feminist financing ecosystem, or on the efforts made by financing players to support feminist activities and initiatives. This dearth of research is more evident in Africa, particularly in the Central African sub-region, where the websites and annual reports of national and regional public institutions rarely highlight their efforts² dedicated to funding gender equality (ICR, 2022). Consequently, scientific articles and other publications analysing these efforts are few and far between (ICR, 2022). Thus, this non-exhaustive literature review aims to show the few works on feminist financing carried out by authors and research or funding institutions that analyse, globally or partially, the feminist financing ecosystem at the national, regional and international level.

A. Research on feminist financing at the state level

According to Laila Hessini (2023), very few countries currently have sources of funding to advance feminist agendas. However, alternative sources of funding remain woefully inadequate. This situation particularly hard hits African countries, as they struggle to mobilise specific funding to support feminist initiatives spearheaded by women's civil society organisations. These African CSOs, which have only low membership fees at their disposal, stand in stark contrast to Western NGOs, which benefit from the support of private donors and extensive fundraising (Cazabat, 2016). This financial precariousness forces them to turn to international donors to ensure their survival and continue their activities.

In its final report on the "interim evaluation of the 'Feminist in Action' 2021-2023 project", Eval4change (2024) reiterates this alarming finding, revealing that *"national funding remains scarce unless they assume the role of public service*

2. Regional organisations could include in their reports detailed documentation of budgets specifically earmarked for gender equality programmes, as well as initiatives taken to support women's and feminist CSOs in achieving their goals and building their capacities. Thus, these documents would combine qualitative and quantitative data to highlight existing opportunities, identify African organisations and sub-regions that have already benefited from these programs, and highlight geographical areas where these resources remain underutilised. The analysis of challenges encountered and the proposition of concrete avenues for their surmounting would offer a clear and actionable vision of the progress made and the efforts to be intensified.

operators". Furthermore, African women's CSOs only receive national public funding for service provision. Despite the commitments made by some states to significantly increase their financial support for gender equality, Mama Cash (2024) points out that these promises and intentions are not systematically followed by an increase in commitments or the establishment of funding mechanisms for women's rights organisations. In Central Africa, the minimal budgets allocated to ministries in charge of women's rights often do not allow them to support their activities, let alone those of women's and feminist organisations.

In Cameroon, for example, the Ministry for the Promotion of Women and the Family (MINPROFF) has only 2% of the total government budget (MINPROFF, 2020). As a result, women's CSOs operate under challenging conditions and focus on international aid (Cazabat, 2012). In the Chadian context, national mechanisms for promoting gender equality are equally fragile and suffer from a chronic lack of funding. Following an evaluation and positioning survey conducted in 2021 among women's and feminist CSOs, the latter cited the lack of financial resources as the primary obstacle to integrating the gender approach into their projects (DAI, 2021). This financial challenge for CSOs persists in a national context where the ministry in charge of gender issues receives less than 1% of the national budget (Onu Femme, 2023) and where the government relies mainly on Technical and Financial Partners (TFPs) to implement National Gender Policy programs (National Gender Policy Chad, 2011). In the DRC, the situation is no better. Although the country has many women's NGOs and associations, most do not have access to national funding (Hilhorst and Bashwira, 2016), making them dependent on foreign funds.

In West Africa, feminist movements are not exempt from funding challenges at the national level. Organisations campaigning for gender justice in this subregion sorely lack the resources to function (Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung 2022). Doubogan (2021) uses Benin's example to denounce the heavy dependence of feminist movements in the South on Western ideology and financial aid.

This pattern of dependence on women's and feminist organisations, constantly noted in the literature, generally highlights a decolonial approach to feminist funding that requires restructuring relationships. However, this is difficult in a context where states are struggling to develop viable national funding mechanisms and where the organisations themselves do not have sufficient funds to continue their activities. On the contrary, they are subject to national legal and political constraints that seal their dependence on foreign aid.

In Cameroon, only women's organisations with NGO status are eligible for national and international public subsidies, donations or legacies (Cazabat, 2016). This status is granted upon government approval after an arduous and complex procedure (Cazabat, 2016). Based on the findings of Jules Falquet (2007), whose research examines civil society organisations (CSOs) in Latin America, it is posited that the "NGOisation" of associations may result in a diminished autonomy for the women's movement, especially within contexts characterised by rigorous and more transformative struggles.. This dynamic is explained by the fact that this status subjects local organisations to the constraints imposed by projects and funding conditions determined by the specific interests of development agencies.

B. Feminist financing at the regional and international level

Although the African Union (AU) and the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) coordinate the multilateral action of African states in gender equality, funding difficulties are also perceptible. Femmes Africa Solidarité (FAS) noted in its report analysing the "contribution of African women to the declaration on the integration of the gender perspective in the African Union" that the AU's Women's Directorate lacked resources (FAS, 2004; Guignard, 2016).³ This statement highlights the inability of this regional body to provide financial backing for gender equality projects and/or organisations.

Moreover, the work of Olga M. González (2017) has underscored the reliance of African regional bodies on international aid in the same way as local CSOs. However, at the regional level, the way they operate means that the resources of regional bodies that support projects and organisations campaigning for gender equality come mainly from member states' membership fees. According to González, these institutions and CSOs depend on donors and competition for funds, which considerably limits their ability to promote gender equality in Africa.

As for the international level, several works highlight the feminist foreign diplomacy of Western states (Equipop, 2022; Mama Cash, 2024), defined as "the policy of a state that defines its interactions with other states and movements in a way that prioritises gender equality and enshrines the human rights of women and other traditionally marginalised groups, allocates significant resources to realising this vision, and seeks, through its implementation, to disrupt patriarchal power structures..." (Thompson & Clement, 2019). Actions in this direction are carried out within bilateral and multilateral frameworks (Reminy-Elizor et al., 2023).

3. Created in 2002 within the office of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, this department promotes gender equality in Africa and within the AU, and oversees the development and harmonisation of gender-related policies, etc.en Afrique et au sein de l'UA et supervise l'élaboration et l'harmonisation des politiques liées au genre etc.

If foreign policy, as formulated, guarantees feminist funding for other states' and local feminist movements, several pieces of research point to a gap between theory and practice. For example, Mama Cash (2024) draws on a recent report by the International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW), which published data from seven countries committed to feminist diplomacy. Overall, women's equality organisations and institutions have only received \$2.37 billion, or 9% of these states' commitments to the governmental and civil society sectors (i.e. \$26.1 million). It should be noted that the percentage received by feminist movements (9%) represents only a minuscule fraction (2%) of overall gender-based aid (\$117.6 billion). These figures reinforce the relevance of the question posed by AWID in its report, "Where is the money for organising feminist movements?". Indeed, these organisations receive a mere 0.13% of official development aid and only 0.4% of all gender-related aid (AWID 2021).

In addition to these figures, which call into question the effectiveness of bilateral and multilateral aid to feminist movements, other studies examine the challenges in granting this international aid and its impact on achieving gender equality objectives. According to Coordination SUD (2024), international aid is not always adapted to the needs and realities of local feminist organisations. Complex procedures, restrictive eligibility criteria and long disbursement times can hamper the effectiveness of organisations and limit their ability to respond rapidly to urgent needs. What is more, the agencies through which these funds are channelled to implement the feminist foreign diplomacy of Western states are accused of being responsible for many of the shortcomings in the states that "benefit" from this aid. Mirla Cisne and Telma Gurgel (2015) show how, in the Brazilian context, feminist NGOs have developed their activities thanks to the support of international cooperation and development agencies. However, they underline that the latter act as intermediaries for organisations primarily responsible for poverty and inequality on the Latin American continent, namely the IMF, the Inter-American Development Bank and the WB (Cisne & Gurgel, 2015).

Findings

I. The underfunding of women's and feminist organisations by national governments in Central Africa

The analysis of data procured from a selection of women's and feminist organisations and public authorities in the three studied countries shows that the feminist public funding ecosystem at the national level is in its nascent stages. The issue is primarily driven by the restricted financial resources of national governments and the fundamentally suspicious dynamic between civil society organisations and governments. This sub-section analyses the forms of public support identified (A) while concurrently addressing the salient challenges characterising this feminist funding ecosystem in Central Africa (B).

A. A support system that is more technical than financial

It is very challenging to speak of feminist public funding at the national level in Central Africa, as most of the leaders of women's and feminist organisations in the countries studied stated that they had never received direct funding from the government, a decentralised local authority or any other public institution. Nevertheless, the interviews revealed at least five forms of technical and financial support from public authorities to these organisations.

The first form is the provision of premises (rooms or discussion areas), which organisation leaders obtain free of charge or at a flat rate. In Cameroon, organisations like the Association for Combating Violence Against Women (ALVF), Women for Peace, Mediation and Conflict Prevention (WPMC), Sourire de Femmes, and the Association Parler d'Elles receive this assistance through partnership agreements with MINPROFF's regional delegations or their local communes.

The second is support in the form of work materials. In Cameroon, the *Association for the Relief of Young Mothers* (ASFM) often receives dignity kits for GBV survivors from the MINPROFF regional delegation through the municipalities' women's and family promotion centres. In Chad, some organisations, such as the *Network of Young Women and Girls Leaders of Chad* (REJEFFT), are provided with vehicles and office equipment by the Ministry of Women and Early Childhood Protection to facilitate the implementation of their activities.

The third form of support is the provision of public personnel to support women's or feminist organisations in their activities. This may be an expert or a public official who acts as a facilitator in women's capacity-building workshops run

by these organisations, or a social worker who helps an organisation achieve a specific objective over a given period. By way of illustration, the Cameroon government supported the installation of the ALVF branch in the Far North by allocating the services of a social worker who worked 15 hours a week. The fourth form of technical support is establishing a strategic partnership between a public institution and a women's or feminist organisation. This may take the form of sponsorship by a ministry, which provides the organisation with administrative facilities or expertise in seeking and obtaining funding, or the signing of a partnership agreement that defines the roles and responsibilities of each party and enables the organisation to be registered in the ministry's file of partners or its project bank (depending on the country). This strategic collaboration enables women's or feminist organisations to benefit from several advantages, such as being given priority for providing public services or obtaining referrals to donors. To take advantage of this support, women's and feminist organisations must fulfil several conditions that differ by country: they must be authorised to operate, be registered and assessed beforehand, and be highly active in the field, among others.

Funding was identified as the final form of support, but it was found to be minimal. Most leaders from women's and feminist organisations reported never having received financial support. Some had heard of such an initiative in favour of other organisations,⁴ while a negligible proportion said they had benefited from direct public funding. In the three countries studied, it was mainly the ministries in charge of gender, youth and economic issues that were cited as providing one-off funding for select women's and feminist organisations, either on the occasion of specific events such as the celebration of International Women's Day or within the framework of projects.

The mechanisms for accessing these public funds are diverse. They may be allocated following a call for projects, a funding application submitted by an organisation, or through informal mechanisms (favouritism, clientelism, etc.). In the DRC, for example, Alliance pour la Vie, a feminist organisation operating in the provinces of North and South Kivu, received funding from the provincial government of South Kivu to run a project aimed at raising awareness about sexual health and menstrual management among young people and teenagers. Also, the National Fund for Reparations to Victims of Conflict-Related Sexual

4. Interviews with Brenda and Faycal, respectively Deputy General Secretary and Communications Officer of the Pan-African Youth Networks in Search of Excellence for Sustainable Development (REJEUPARED); with Maître Delphine Kemneloum Djiraibe, President of the Public Interest Law Center (PILC); with Minguemadji Elodie, General Secretary of SuperBanat, Nadege Doumdanem, Artistic Director of Fille'ture, Viviane Tathi, Executive Coordinator of the Association Sourire de Femmes and Laetitia Lowe etc.

Violence and Other Crimes against the Peace and Security of Humanity (FONAREV)⁵ allocates modest financial resources to women's and feminist associations such as Women and Development Network-North Kivu (REFED/N-K), whose mobilisation of community workers has been financed by this public institution. In Cameroon and Chad, none of the organisations approached during the surveys claimed to have received any funding.

Another indirect funding mechanism is gender-responsive budgeting (GRB), which has been tried out by some public administrations and local authorities in the three countries in the study. This approach allows funds to be directed towards programs and initiatives that specifically address the needs of women and girls. Many other mechanisms are specific to each country and integrated within ministries or local authorities.

B. Structural constraints on feminist public funding in Central Africa

An analysis of the feminist financing ecosystem in Central Africa reveals a series of constraints that justify its nascent stage. From a multidimensional perspective, these obstacles can be classified into three categories: systemic, economic and socio-political.

On a systemic level, relations between public authorities and women's and feminist organisations in Central Africa are generally distant and self-serving. Communication between these two actors is typically only established in administrative interactions (requests for authorisations). Only a handful of organisations request technical and/or financial support from the state. At the same time, the majority express reservations about the ability of public authorities to grant them financial backing due to the governance problems affecting their countries. On the other hand, public authorities favour community-based women's organisations, which they support through donations of agricultural equipment (hoes, machetes, seeds). At the same time, they adopt a wait-and-see attitude towards women's and feminist organisations, seeking to take advantage of the opportunities they offer.

Several organisation leaders stated during interviews that *"public authorities expect us to come and give them money", or "when we invite the authorities to our activities, it's like I told you, it's in exchange for money. They don't do it for free (...) so when we do activities, we're the ones who take care of everything"*.

5. FONAREV is a public institution of a technical, financial and social nature, under the supervision of the Ministry of Human Rights. It encourages women's CSOs to register in order to access its various support programs. However, obtaining this support does not seem to be systematic.

As a result, information is difficult to circulate between governments and feminist organisations in their territories, making the national feminist funding ecosystem fractured. The relationship between these two actors is made all the more fragile because Central Africa has legal mechanisms dedicated to controlling the evolution and activities of CSOs wishing to acquire NGO status. As a result, many women's and feminist organisations voluntarily remain "associations", refusing to migrate to NGO status because of the consequences this entails.⁶ ALVF is a case in point. This organisation refused NGO status and remained an association because one of its founders believes that *"the Cameroonian state wants to control them, but gives nothing [in terms of financial support]"*.

Whatever their legal status, women's and feminist CSOs remain classified in general categories, which deprives them of specific recognition and support. Even when public funding is allocated to CSOs directly or through GRB, it is impossible to quantify the share that goes to organisations campaigning for the rights of women and girls. Several administrative authorities in the study countries have stated that there is no mechanism or procedure for distinguishing women's and feminist organisations from other CSOs. The situation is made all the more complex because the state and local authorities are struggling to identify and map these organisations, whose exact number is still poorly understood. Systemic constraints are also perceptible when it comes to conditions of access to the few public funds available, as information, when it is available, remains confined to the bulletin boards of central government departments or is sometimes relayed to a few organisations based on favouritism.

On the economic level, in all the countries studied, government institutions in charge of gender issues suffer from a chronic shortage of budgetary resources. They receive only a marginal share of the state budget - around 1% in Chad and the DRC and 2% in Cameroon - which has to be divided between implementing the ministries' activities and supporting the thousands of CSOs listed. As the communes approached, they generally limited their support for women's and feminist organisations to material assistance. This is due, on the one hand, to insufficient communal resources and, on the other, to mistrust stemming from past experiences where specific local organisations had not demonstrated rigorous management of allocated funds, as *"they take the money and share it"*.

6. Cameroon has a Commission in charge of examining applications for approval and monitoring the activities of non-governmental organisations. According to decree no. 2001/150 of May 03, 2001 on the organisation and functioning of this institution, its mission is to carry out technical studies of applications for approval, examine the financial accounts and inventory of the movable and immovable property of NGOs, monitor the activities of NGOs with a view to ensuring the proper use of subsidies from legal entities under public law, and control the activities of NGOs with a view to proposing sanctions applicable to them.

Conversely, as an economic mechanism and governance instrument, GRB has been the subject of substantial criticism. Effective monitoring of the funding utilised for gender equality, let alone that allocated to women's CSOs, remains unfeasible. This calls into question the impact of GRB on social change in Central Africa. Indeed, the research in the three countries did not identify any monitoring and evaluation mechanism to ensure the transfer and use of public funds to women's and feminist organisations through GRB. There is speculation that nepotism and clientelism may be involved in allocating some public funding.

It has been observed that the allocation of funds through formal mechanisms is often accompanied by delays in disbursements, which impede the effective implementation of activities by women's and feminist organisations that cannot self-finance. Furthermore, grievances have been lodged against specific focal points, particularly ministries, who have been found to demand financial compensation from women's and feminist organisations in the course of their administrative procedures associated with disbursements or other undertakings..

On the socio-political level, feminism, particularly in its intersectional manifestation that accentuates all sexual identities and safeguards the rights of LGBTQI+ individuals, encounters staunch opposition from national governments, as they are fiercely opposed to homosexuality. Moreover, it is subject to criminal sanctions. As a result, women's and feminist organisations advocating for these rights are unable to receive state support, including operating permits. These cannot be obtained by organisations identifying as feminist or that explicitly prioritise the well-being of LGBTQI+ individuals. Feminism itself is not yet completely free of the stigma of being an imported concept, overshadowing notions such as the promotion of women and the family, the protection of girls and children, and the enhancement of the status of women, as shown by the names of the ministries in charge of gender issues in the three countries surveyed.⁷ This approach hurts feminist public funding, confining it to areas of intervention that are no longer relevant to communities and organisations. This sometimes results in the distribution of hoes and machetes to rural women, an approach that “keeps women in the conditions of the 1800s.”⁸

7. In the West, the names of the ministries dedicated to gender issues directly highlight the issue of sought-after equality. In France, for example, it's the Ministry for Equality between Women and Men and the Fight against Discrimination, and in Germany, it's the Ministry for Gender Equality and Diversity.

8. By referring to the “conditions of the 1800s”, Ms. Sike Bilé is referring to a time when women's rights and freedoms were severely restricted. With a touch of irony, this phrase underlines the persistence of archaic conditions reminiscent of the 19th century.

II. The opacity of regional feminist funding mechanisms in Central Africa

The feminist public funding system at regional level in Africa suffers from a profound lack of visibility and confidence. Although opportunities were identified in the course of the surveys (A), the majority of organisation leaders interviewed were unaware of them or had not yet explored them (B).

A. Marginal feminist financing opportunities at the African regional level?

Leaders of women's and feminist organisations surveyed agree that the AU, its institutions, and sub-regional bodies like CEMAC have significantly promoted gender equality. However, the actions of these institutions in terms of concrete funding of organisations working in this field are not known. Despite this lack of transparency, some organisations have claimed to have received funding from one of the regional bodies.

In Chad in 2022, REJEFFT received a funding proposal request from the AU to run the “16 Days of Activism” campaign against gender-based violence. The association's national coordinator explained that no funding application had been submitted to the regional body, but that it was the latter that had taken the initiative of contacting them to propose. Moreover, the budget submitted by REJEFFT had been increased by the AU. In the same country, the feminist organisation, *Fille'ture*, received funding from the AU for training in information processing on the issues of female genital mutilation and gender-based violence in Addis Ababa. In the DRC, Smart Hub Kivu, an incubator that supports women and young people in setting up businesses, also received funding from the AU as part of the fight against GBV.

The surveys also identified feminist financing opportunities often launched by CEMAC, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and regional African banks, although the organisations that identified them have not yet taken advantage of them.

In addition to this financial support, women's and feminist organisations mentioned other forms of support from regional bodies, including participation in regional and sub-regional workshops and conferences, which are fully covered, as well as frameworks for collaboration with certain regional bodies. Concerning the latter, the feminist association *Parler d'Elles in Cameroon* has collaborated with the *Network of African Elected Women* (REFELA) and *United Cities and Local*

Governments of Africa (UCLGA). However, these collaborations were not pursued by the association due to a lack of resources.

B. Understanding the lack of connection between African regional bodies and Central African feminist movements

The AU has established a Women, Gender and Development Directorate which promotes gender equality and women's empowerment in AU activities, and ensures that member states comply with the AU Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa. However, the AU faces major challenges in terms of funding and remains largely dependent on external financing to implement its programs. This is due to a significant shortfall in statutory contributions, with several member states failing to meet their annual financial obligations (Bidouzo, 2019). These funding difficulties are well known to many leaders of women's and feminist organisations, and partly justify their apathetic attitude towards funding opportunities at a regional level. Many leaders of women's and feminist organisations are unaware of funding from African community institutions. Others, on the other hand, are aware of them but point to the difficulty of accessing information, despite having subscribed to these organisations' *newsletters* and social networks, or stress their dismay at applying and never being selected.

Beyond this informational opacity, the organisation leaders also pointed to the predominance of English in African institutional spaces. This phenomenon puts Central Africa's predominantly French-speaking women's and feminist organisations at a disadvantage. The restricted ability to understand and apply for funding opportunities, and form regional partnerships, was attributed to the predominant publication of regional tenders in English.

A representative from the Association Sourire de Femmes stated: "Having the capacity to apply in English also requires double the work for us, because we need to translate so that the application we send out is coherent, and we haven't just gone to Google Translate to copy and paste".

This situation is reinforced by an even more paradoxical one: leaders of women's and feminist organisations are regularly asked to act as consultants to regional and sub-regional organisations. This choice of the individual as expert, rather than the organisation she coordinates, is increasingly criticised. "As a consultant, you're still thinking for someone else, for another organisation (...) so you don't even have time to think for your association", opined the ALVF coordinator. Thus, analysis of the feminist funding ecosystem at the regional level highlights minimal interconnection between actors and low accessibility to funding opportunities

due to prejudice, poor information flow and language barriers. Nevertheless, opportunities to participate in workshops and conferences at the regional level are numerous and important for building capacity and expanding address books, but do not enable local organisations to finance their activities. This is why interest in international feminist funding is so high.

III. Is international feminist policy on track or the sidelines when financing women's and feminist organisations in Central Africa?

Over the past decade or so, Western states have been gradually adopting a feminist foreign policy, particularly after Swedish Foreign Minister Margot Wallström announced in 2014 that Sweden would become the first state to implement a feminist approach in terms of diplomacy (Mama Cash 2023). Data from Cameroon, Chad and the DRC underline the need to go beyond rhetoric and increase the regularity and volume of funding for feminist movements. This section analyses the feminist diplomacy of some of the international donors cited in the surveys (A) and the challenges impinge on construction of a balanced and egalitarian funding ecosystem (B).

A. Feminist diplomacy is supported and implemented by diplomatic bodies and development agencies

This sub-section does not aim to map or classify the international donors working in Central Africa, but it does draw on a few examples from the surveys to analyse the overall state of feminist international aid in terms of mechanisms and arrangements.

France's feminist foreign diplomacy

France has adopted a feminist diplomacy formalised in a five-year plan, translating into the systematic integration of gender indicators into projects financed by French cooperation. This strategy focuses on three key areas: the environment, the political and civic participation of women and young people, and the fight against gender-based violence and sexuality. The gender equality and gender inclusion dimension, with a particular focus on women and girls, must be visible in all projects dealing with these themes. To elaborate further, strict inclusion criteria are applied in all projects, encompassing a target of 50% female participation, including collaborations with ministries. France's approach is, thus, in line with the OECD's gender markers (0, 1 and 2). Projects are submitted to the Ministry in Paris for validation, with the obligation to justify the level of gender

mainstreaming according to these markers. Increasing attention is paid to projects reaching marker 2, corresponding to the highest level of gender mainstreaming.

This policy is supported by a dedicated annual budget managed locally by each embassy. In Cameroon, this budget amounted to 300,000 euros for 2024, divided equally between funding for international mobility (150,000 euros) and direct support for local initiatives (150,000 euros). The feminist funding strategy France favours is an integrated approach⁹ rather than exclusive support for explicitly feminist organisations. Emphasis is placed on projects that “aim to reinforce gender equality, to work as closely as possible with women and girls, and to integrate women into the whole process of implementing, participating in and contributing to the realisation of the project”.

The mechanisms for allocating feminist funding are diverse and varied. They generally involve calls for projects. But for the aforementioned annual budget envelope, launching calls for projects, as mobilities constitute a specific funding channel. As for direct support to local initiatives, the French Embassy in Cameroon states that it receives requests on an ongoing basis, which means that it does not need to launch calls for projects. This budget envelope is an open call. The sole requisite is to adjudicate the submitted projects, based on a set of predetermined criteria: the area of operation, specifically rural regions, adherence to gender equality, the quantity of female beneficiaries, the inclusion of women in the project execution process, the duration of the organisation’s existence, and the organisation’s social media presence.

Based on this criterion, an organisation that has existed for 30 years and one that has only existed for 5 years are not subject to the same requirements. However, according to the respondents, the French Embassy sometimes gives preferential support to young associations, created less than 5 years ago, to avoid always working with the same structures that are more experienced with donors and already know how to set up a project or a budget. The aim is also to build the capacities of small organisations by entrusting them with small grants of between 5,000 and 10,000 euros, so that they can acquire the skills they need to compete for larger grants. Several women’s and feminist organisations have received funding from the French Embassy in their respective countries, including REJFEMAC and Sourires de Femme in Cameroon, and LTDF in Chad.

9. For example, the Comité Inter-États des Pesticides de l’Afrique Centrale (CPAC) financed women in the agricultural sector to help them form cooperatives and improve production while respecting the environment. There was also another project with Women Development Advocate in Campo, on the preservation of mangroves, which helped to strengthen women’s capacity for income-generating activities.

Local French embassies play an important role in the overall resource allocation policy, as they are more familiar with the local contexts in which they operate. They collaborate and work regularly with women's and feminist organisations. This knowledge of the local context makes their advice important to other European donors, notably AFD,¹⁰ the European Union and the British and US aid departments, who generally consult them before committing to funding an organisation. France's feminist funding policy is implemented not only by embassies, but also by the French Development Agency (AFD), Expertise France and the SCAC. AFD¹¹ is a development bank separate from the cooperation department. Its resources are mainly provided by France's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Finance. Within the AFD group is Expertise France, which holds a fund to support diversified initiatives in several sectors. Given that France contributes to the Global Fund to Fight Malaria, Tuberculosis and HIV, etc., an initiative called "L'Initiative" has been set up within Expertise France to directly support women's and feminist associations working on these three themes. AFD also has specific funding for feminists: the Support Fund for Feminist NGOs. The process for benefiting from this fund can be very long, as it involves different levels of instruction: the local office level, the Paris office, with back-and-forth exchanges accompanied by comments. Several organisations in the three study countries have benefited:¹² REJEFEMAC, Association Parler d'Elles, ADIEFA, PILC, Chadian League for Women's Rights, AFLADEGT and RAGFHT.

However, AFD does not finance CSOs, as *"it's not our job to make grants"*. Instead, it relays funding offers published by the French funding agency, the Paris-based Service de Coopération et d'Action Culturelle (SCAC). Unlike embassies, SCAC funds projects for higher amounts, generally over 500,000 euros. The conditions for receiving this funding are still high: "Only CSOs that have already received large amounts of funding, and AFD funding in particular, have a better chance of being selected", as the minimum funding from this structure is 100,000 euros.

Feminist diplomacy in the United Nations system

The United Nations system is also a source of feminist funding that is regularly mentioned by women's and feminist organisations in the three countries surveyed. This funding is allocated for development projects, operating through various specialised agencies, each with a specific mandate:

10. AFD, through its support fund for women's organisations, had, for example, asked the French embassies in Cameroon, the DRC and the Central African Republic (CAR) for references of women's and feminist associations they knew of. These references were used to launch the call for projects, and the embassies were again asked to give their opinions.

11. AFD works primarily on governance, education and climate, and the feminist approach is at the level where all projects have a gender approach.

12. Most of them have benefited from the Gender Sahel project.

- UN Women: for gender equality and women's empowerment;
- UNDP: for development;
- UNICEF: for the protection and rights of children;
- UNFPA: operating with a mandate centred on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR).

According to survey results, the funding mechanisms of international organisations have evolved. The old “basket funds”, where funding was available on simple request, has been replaced by a more structured program approach, based on multi-year strategic plans, broken down into annual work plans. This planning now conditions the allocation of funding: for a local women's CSO to receive financial support, its proposed activities must be closely aligned with the objectives and priorities defined in the international organisation's strategic plan. In this context, CSOs acquire the status of Implementing Partners (IP), establishing, according to a respondent who is a gender expert, a win-win partnership: CSOs obtain the funding they need to carry out their activities, while international organisations can integrate the results obtained into their performance indicators.

UN Women does not list funding as an action in support of women's and feminist organisations. It is more a question of « *building the capacities of these women and women's groups* », ¹³ advocating for organisations, discussing funding conditions with donors and developing training and support activities. For example, on the theme of access to funding, several webinars on resource management have been set up in Dakar, but they can be accessed from any country.¹⁴ Another concrete action is to support in applying for calls for projects. Some of the organisations approached have benefited from feminist funding from the United Nations, namely: ASFM¹⁵ and REJEFTT (UN Women); AMEN (FAO); Super Banat (UNDP, UNICEF) and RAGFHT¹⁶ (UNDP).

Other feminist funds supported by bilateral cooperation agencies such as GIZ and the Netherlands were also mentioned. For many women's and feminist organisations, international funds are not yet large enough to cover their real needs, and they pose procedural challenges. However, they cannot yet do without them, given the lack of alternatives at national and regional levels.

13. Interview with a UN Women representative from the regional office for Central and East Africa.

14. Ibid.

15. ASFM was supported by UN Women at the launch of the 67th session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

16. According to the association's President, these funds have supported the project linked to the rights of disabled women, their economic empowerment and the fight against gender-based violence.

B. The challenges of accessibility and appropriation of international feminist funding

Funding from bilateral and multilateral cooperation represents a crucial source of support for African women's and feminist organisations, particularly in Central Africa. However, the surveys revealed several mutual grievances, which trouble relations between international donors and local organisations and, consequently, the international feminist funding ecosystem in the three study countries.

Overall, women's and feminist organisations have grievances with international funding agencies. Firstly, the fact that calls for projects are the main way of obtaining funding. Indeed, according to the organisation leaders approached, these calls for projects *"take an inordinate amount of time"* to understand (sometimes with the need to translate the call from English to French), draft (when the first proposal is accepted) and implement. On this last point, leaders of women's and feminist organisations criticise the lengthy procedures during which they have to answer questions to prove their expertise or work on the accounts. The coordinator of ALVF, for example, shared her experience of using an international public grant in the following terms: *"The conditions are tough! For 3 million, we spent 6 months answering their questions"*. What's more, this project-based funding approach eliminates organisations run by women with low levels of education. Indeed, as the AMEN representative pointed out, most organisations are run by women with secondary education, because, unlike in European countries, very few university-educated women are involved in women's and feminist organisations in French-speaking Africa. As a result, *"there are even organisations run by illiterates, women who can barely write, read or do arithmetic. But since they have the leadership, they come forward. But when it comes to speaking the language of projects with donors, they can't do it"*. Another negative aspect is that some calls for projects distance women's and feminist organisations from their objectives, insofar as they work for the objectives of donors. As a result, they are sometimes rejected by local communities, who accuse them of serving foreigners and instrumentalising their needs to obtain funding.

The second area of contention is that international public donors mandate a wide array of criteria to access funding, including submitting audit reports prepared by accredited firms. The expense of producing these reports represents a substantial financial burden for grassroots women's and feminist organisations.. Furthermore, the number of years of experience an organisation has is also taken into consideration by donors. In this case, young organisations are generally overlooked, as donors consider them *"too young to handle a certain amount*

of money". Even when the local organisation has all the required skills, donors still use this "magic phrase": *"You don't have the capacity to absorb the funds (...) your project is interesting, but your organisation is too young. You have no experience of managing large sums of money"*. In the three countries surveyed, most women's and feminist organisations were confronted with this difficulty, including REJEFEMAC, Sourires de Femmes, WPMC, Smart Hub Kivu, PILC and others. Sometimes, philanthropic entities preferred to give funds to established organisations to manage for promising new organisations. In addition, some projects require pre-financing, leading some organisations to withdraw or refrain from applying. Finally, when organisations succeed in obtaining funding, they have to deal with issues of accountability and *reporting*. According to several organisation leaders and some donors, it is important to respect all these criteria, as failure with one donor can jeopardise opportunities with other donors, due to the rapid circulation of information.

The third complaint is the lack of flexibility in international public funding, which is rigidly aligned with international standards and disconnected from local realities. As a woman leader of a feminist organisation put it:

"(...) what's flexible in Yaoundé isn't necessarily so in Bertoua, even if we consider Cameroon alone. In other words, there's a real problem of contextualisation. It's all very well to talk about flexibility, but as long as flexibility is aligned with the standards of a donor who, however well-intentioned he may be, is sitting in his own context, he may always find that he is flexible, when in reality he is always far from reality."

This remark is all the more pertinent as African states, particularly in French-speaking Africa, have their own environmental, climatic, socio-political¹⁷ and economic specificities, which do not allow women's and feminist organisations to comply rigorously with the requirements of international public donors. For example, several organisation leaders highlighted that some donors require them to use funds rigorously, with a requirement for traceability (receipts,¹⁸ invoices, attendance lists¹⁹). However, given the divergent cultural, political and economic

17. Some leaders of women's and feminist organisations have pointed out that sometimes when a conflict occurs in their country or locality, some donors understand the need to adapt the use of funds, but others do not, and suspend funding.

18. Leaders of women's and feminist organisations pointed out the difficulty of issuing small receipts. For example, to produce proof of payment of 5, 10, 15 or 20 thousand FCFA as per diem for participation in an activity as part of a funded project. Generally speaking, the people who receive these sums are outraged to be asked to sign for such a derisory amount.

19. A respondent from PILG, pointed out, for example, that some donors require attendance lists with the signatures of people who have taken part in an event or awareness-raising activity organised by the organisation. But in some localities, participants refuse to sign these lists because of prejudices about the use of their signatures. When the organisation therefore submits a list without signatures, or with insufficient signatures, the lessors consider it ineligible.

contexts. For some international public funders, all these requirements “seem normal” because *“it’s public money, we can’t just give it to anyone, otherwise there’s a risk of losses, of waste... We need a safeguard somewhere”*. A male respondent’s assertion that *“international public organisations are systems, and therefore difficult to change”* makes perfect sense.

Finally, leaders of women’s and feminist organisations accused public funders of favouritism in allocating their funds. Some of them even said that they have the impression that it’s always the same organisations that receive funding, because these backers have like a *“club of friends built around their funding”*, i.e., *“organisations they’re used to”* and which have all the criteria they’re looking for. This strategy marginalises young organisations, because *“to be big, you have to start small”*. Furthermore, leaders of local organisations mentioned the importance of networking in obtaining international funding: *“to get funding, you need to know someone, a white person in the industry to support you”*, said a feminist association leader.

Grievances were also levelled at women’s and feminist organisations. From a comparative perspective, women’s and feminist organisations in Central Africa were said to be less dynamic than those in West Africa, both on social networks²⁰ and in the field. This argument relativises the language barrier raised during the interviews, as West Africa also abounds in French-speaking countries and French-speaking feminist organisations. However, the feminist movement there is described by both donors and some Central African organisation leaders as more structured, dynamic and impactful, thanks to local organisations.

The research also uncovered a lack of synergy amongst women’s and feminist organisations in Central Africa, as many leaders were found to be unaware of other similar organisations operating within their own countries. This lack of awareness often results in competition for international funding, rather than collaboration and a unified approach to addressing gender-related issues. This lack of cohesion ultimately impedes the overall effectiveness of the women’s movement in the region.

Furthermore, many organisations in Central Africa are entirely dependent on foreign funding and have no funds to pre-finance certain activities. As one organisation leader said; *“If I say to myself that I’m going to set up an association, it’s because I’ll have 60% to give to that organisation. And then, the support of*

20. Many women’s and feminist organisations are still neglecting social networks in Central Africa, yet it is through this channel that international donors conduct surveys to assess certain capacities of these organisations to implement projects. Still others are only visible on one social network and neglect the others.

A, B, C, who will be convinced by what we're doing and who will want to take part in our action should only come in support. But, unfortunately, it's the poor in Africa who create associations so that the poor can benefit. Many women's and feminist organisations have no IGAs.²¹

On another note, women's and feminist organisations are criticised for being opportunistic, i.e., submitting applications to all calls for projects, including those that don't fit in with their field of intervention. Their strategy is, thus, to *"pull all the strings to get funding"*. Except that this *"blurs their message and their guideline"*, as they become associations that work on everything, but ultimately do not have an area of expertise recognised by funders and other local associations.

The final grievance at women's and feminist organisations is that some are not making enough effort to obtain the administrative and operational documents required for their functioning and credibility. For more than three years, some have been complaining about the same difficulties, which could demonstrate their laxity in obtaining these documents.

Recommendations

Discussions with international donors, women's organisations and feminist organisations have led to a number of recommendations to improve the feminist financing ecosystem in central Africa. These recommendations aimed at multilateral institutions (A), government (B) and women's civil society (C).

A. Multilateral institutions

- Adopt an inclusive approach to feminist funding: Stop discrimination against organisations on the basis of the age of the leader or the organisation, the field of intervention and the geographical area. All these elements form a multi-layered sieve that reduces funding opportunities for many women's and feminist organisations.
- Trust small organisations: by prioritising results-based rather than appearance-based evaluation, as small organisations' fund management and project implementation capabilities are usually systematically questioned. Yet, they generally have very good knowledge of the field and of women's issues, but need to gain the trust of donors in order to grow and seek larger funds.

21. For IGA organisations, IGAs account for only 5% of revenues, whereas international financing accounts for 60%.

- ➔ Strengthen communication about feminist diplomacy: by organising information, training and awareness-raising sessions that enable women's and feminist organisations and governments to understand and appropriate feminist funding mechanisms, their access criteria and terms of use.
- ➔ Adopt flexible financing: by migrating from the concept of flexibility to that of adaptability, feminist funds can be used without restriction or determination and can be adapted to local contexts that are clearly different from the socio-political, economic, security, cultural and environmental contexts of the countries for which multilateral institutions allocate funds.
- ➔ Restructure fund allocation mechanisms: by simplifying procedures for obtaining funds and reducing prerequisites (audit reports, bank accounts and excessive administrative and operational paperwork), as resources are not the same in all organisations.
- ➔ Increase feminist funding: by increasing subsidies to local organisations, so they can not only implement their projects properly, but also cover other expenses, such as the salaries of teams involved in project implementation, rents and other administrative and operational costs.
- ➔ Consult women's and feminist organisations before allocating funding: it's important to talk to the selected or consulted organisations to implement a project, to understand their real needs in terms of financing and human resources, as well as the real problems of the identified target. Indeed, donors generally set an amount and identify a problem to be solved in a community unilaterally. This distorts the results to be achieved in advance.
- ➔ Diversify the forms of funding: Utilising a diverse array of funding forms makes it possible to resolve needs that vary in numerous respects, and considerably reduces suspicions of misappropriation of funds. By allocating both general and operational funding, leaders of local organisations can distinguish between funding intended to support general costs and that dedicated to project implementation.
- ➔ Offer regular support to small and young organisations with direct funding: Small and young organisations generally have difficulty getting off the ground due to a lack of funds and structuring. It is, therefore, important to support them with small grants (*seed grants*) to enable them to grow and strengthen their institutional and human capacities.
- ➔ Establish close collaboration with local organisations: Send emissaries to local organisations to assess the work being done in the field and observe how they operate, adapting the financial resources allocated. This approach helps to improve relations through direct contact.
- ➔ Improve communication on available funding opportunities (at the regional level): by clearly communicating funding opportunities through all AU, REC or other regional public institution websites and social networks.

B. The governments

- Facilitate the dissemination of national and international feminist funding opportunities: by maximising the sharing of information both at the capital city level and in the provinces/regions and rural areas through ministerial delegations to ensure a symmetry of information.
- Create a national file of international donors: This file will classify donors by country, continent, and field of intervention and will be available online for consultation by all women's and feminist organisations. This will enable them to target only the donors whose actions and funding correspond to their core business.
- Advocate for better feminist funding: political decision-makers should use their strategic positioning and diplomatic influence to bring the voice of local women's and feminist organisations to the attention of international donors and negotiate funding conditions better adapted to local realities.
- Simplify administrative procedures: reduce the time required to obtain administrative authorisations, so that women's and feminist organisations can have a formal status and carry out their activities within a formal framework.
- Initiate gender-sensitive budgets within local authorities: include a chapter in commune budgets to provide financial support to women's and feminist organisations in their area, not to be limited exclusively to material support.
- Facilitate collaboration between international donors and local organisations: local public authorities must fully transfer feminist funds to local feminist organisations, which pass through them, and redistribute them based on objective and equitable criteria, and by eliminating favouritism practices.
- Organise a government-CSO dialogue: dispel the mutual distrust between the two parties and strengthen collaboration to combat GBV in a complementary manner while jointly seeking national and international funding opportunities.
- Operationalise GRB at the level of all public institutions: define a national quota or percentage of funds to be allocated to women's and feminist organisations as part of the definition and implementation of GRB at the ministerial and communal levels.
- Cleansing the feminist public funding system: ridding it of corruption, favouritism, nepotism and other abuses that plague the allocation and use of feminist funds.
- Develop community-based feminist philanthropy: drawing on and structuring the virtues of charity and hospitality recognised by the African people to find mechanisms for raising funds at the local level. This implies involving the community and local donors.

- Increase the budgets of certain ministries: Increase the budgets of ministries in charge of gender issues so that they can better financially support women's and feminist organisations.

C. Women's civil society

- **Constantly seek information:** by subscribing to all national, regional and international donor *newsletters*, visiting their websites and approaching them to find out about available opportunities or projects.
- **Strengthen the subregional feminist movement:** Map women's and feminist organisations in Central Africa, create or integrate an existing subregional network (like REJEFEMAC) in which organisations share experiences, opportunities and build each other's capacity to set up projects, and advocate for a feminist funding ecosystem that is healthy for all stakeholders.
- **Transparent use of feminist funds:** these resources must be dedicated to achieving concrete gender equality objectives, not personal enrichment. Organisations must therefore accept accountability and show the impact of their actions in the field, to co-construct a trusting collaboration.
- **Strengthen the cohesion and effectiveness of the local feminist movement:** women's and feminist organisations in the same country need to meet regularly to get to know each other better and pool their efforts in searching for grants and even in implementing projects.
- **Regular institutional and human capacity building:** training in financial management, project writing and other skills that strengthen the organisation's credibility and expertise.
- **Work on visibility and dynamism on social networks:** Be dynamic without neglecting any, regularly publish content that fits in with the organisation's activities, and encourage volunteer work if you can't recruit a permanent team.
- Professionalise **organisational practices:** even if an organisation operates on its funds, it must produce quantified reports on its activities that it can present to donors to demonstrate the efforts made with the available funds.
- **Stay true to the organisation's vision:** apply only for opportunities that correspond to the organisation's core business, and stop any opportunism that disperses expertise and reduces the organisation's credibility. This vision must be anchored in community needs, not donor agendas.
- **Combining research and activism:** Feminist research should be carried out not only by feminist academics, but also by feminist organisations, as it enables local feminist activism to be rethought and scientific knowledge based on local knowledge to be produced.
- **Being affiliated to a network:** Belonging to a feminist network enables an organisation to show that it shares a common message with that network,

that it can join forces to define common advocacy messages. It also shows that the organisation is not a free electron with no interconnections.

- **Have measured ambitions:** small or young organisations applying for donor funding should adopt a strategy of small steps. For a first initiative, they should focus on one area of action or target audience, rather than several regions or targets.
- **Promote a culture of solidarity and ethics in accessing funding:** organisations are encouraged to actively share project and funding opportunities within their networks, and to develop an ethical approach to funding selection: declining those that do not match their expertise and proactively directing donors to organisations with the appropriate skills.
- **Develop a self-financing system:** local women's and feminist organisations need to have their own IGA funds to finance activities and reduce dependence on donors.
- **Involve the State in the search for funding:** overcome prejudices about its inability to support feminist organisations and explore all possible forms of partnership, including those that are not strictly financial.
- **Remain calm and active in all circumstances:** Local women's and feminist organisations must keep up their courage even when they have no funding, and continue to carry out activities that correspond to the small resources available.
- **Adopt a proactive and diversified approach to fundraising:** don't just wait for calls for projects to apply, but research women's issues related to or close to our core business and create a fundraising environment.

Conclusion and Way Forward

The future of feminist financing in Central Africa is contingent upon a profound transformation of current practices. The study's recommendations identify three key areas for development. Firstly, there is a necessity to democratise access to funding, notably through adopting an inclusive approach by multilateral institutions, which would no longer discriminate against organisations according to their size, age, or area of intervention. This reform would facilitate the utilisation of the field expertise of small organisations and their capacity to address local needs. Secondly, enhancing transparency and access to information is paramount. Establishing a national donor database and the enhancing the dissemination of funding opportunities, particularly in rural areas, are promising initiatives for democratising resource access. Finally, the strengthening of links between national and local governments and the development of a strong regional dynamic, notably through the consolidation of existing networks such as REJEFEMAC, offer encouraging prospects for the future. The consolidation of experience and resources through such collaborative endeavours holds the potential to catalyse the emergence of a more robust and equitable feminist financing ecosystem in Central Africa. The implementation of these recommendations necessitates a sustained commitment from all stakeholders—governments, multilateral institutions, and civil society organisations—to establish a feminist financing system that is more accessible, transparent, and effective in the sub-region.

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Annex

A selection of women's and feminist organisations approached during the field surveys and their geographical location:

Noms des OSC féminines et féministes	Acronymes	Centres d'intérêts	Localisations
Association for Combating Violence Against Women	ALVF	Combating all forms of violence against women	Cameroon
Association for the Relief of Young Mothers	ASFM	Promoting and defending the rights of girls, in particular young mothers and girls married at an early age	Maroua, Cameroon
Network of Young Feminists of Central Africa	REJEFEMAC	Leadership of young feminists in Central Africa	Yaoundé, Cameroon
Association for Feminist Research in Central Africa	ARFAC	Feminist and gender research in Central Africa	Cameroon
Wake Up Ladies	-	Protection, empowerment and capacity-building of vulnerable girls and women	Bertoua, Cameroon
Sourires de Femmes	-	Feminist organisation providing emergency services to women and girls victims of violence, especially in rural areas (medical, psychological, psychosocial and legal support, as well as security for victims of violence). Also works on sexual and reproductive health, survivors of violence and the empowerment of women and girl survivors of violence.	Yaoundé, Cameroon
Association Parler d'Elles	-	Advocacy, leadership promotion, women's empowerment and well-being..	Yaoundé, Cameroon
Leap Girl Africa	-	Rights and education of girls and young women on sexual and gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health	Yaoundé Cameroon
Women for Peace, Mediation and Conflict	WPMC	Peace and security, mediation and conflict prevention and peacebuilding	Cameroon
Hope Advocate Africa	-	Women's rights, human rights, minority rights, sexual and reproductive health peacebuilding etc.	North-West and South-West, Cameroon
Vivre en Comptant sur les femmes	VECOF	Women's rights and empowerment	Cameroon

Alliance pour la vie	-	Promoting and defending the rights of women, girls, children and minority groups. Action is mainly focused on sexual and reproductive health, combating violence against women and gender inequality.	Feminist organisation based in South and North Kivu, DRC
Alternative Ménage, Nature et Marché	AMEN	Promoting and defending women's household rights	Mwenga, RDC
Kongo Mwinda, Dynamique citoyenne de femmes leaders	-	The cognitive emancipation of girls and the digital fulfilment of adolescent girls	Goma, RDC
Focus, Droits et Accès	FDA	Women's rights, gender equality, empowerment and inclusive leadership of women, girls and other marginalised social groups in North Kivu province.	Goma, RDC
Smart Hub Kivu	-	Supporting women and young people in setting up businesses	Goma, RDC
Women and Development Network-North Kivu	REFED-NK.	Promoting and defending the rights of women and girls in rural areas, in armed conflict and post-conflict zones	RDC
Association pour le Développement, l'Innovation et l'Entrepreneuriat des femmes et filles	ADIEFA	Promoting and defending the rights of women and girls	N'djamena, Chad
Chadian League for Women's Rights	LTDF	Sexual and gender-based violence against women	Chad
Association of Feminist Leaders for Access to Rights and Gender Equity in Chad	AFLADEGT	Fighting gender-based inequalities, including gender equality, and women's entrepreneurship, and ensuring girls' and women's access to essential health services, and promoting girls' schooling in rural and urban areas.	N'Djamena, Chad
Pan-African Youth Networks in Search of Excellence for Sustainable Development	REJEUPARED	Education, entrepreneurship, climate change and social justice	Chad
Network of Young Women and Girls Leaders of Chad	REJEFFT	A specific area for young women, aged 15 to 35, to provide a space for free expression and implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda.	Chad
Public Interest Law Centre	PILC	A public interest legal centre that focuses on access to rights for vulnerable people, specifically women and girls.	Chad