

Towards Feminist Philanthropy: A Global Majority-Led Solution for Bridging the Needs of Activists and the Interests of Donors in a Changing Political Context

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Advocacy Summary

■ Background and research objective

This research examines the funding landscape for gender justice organisations in Latin America (LATAM) and the South West Asian and North African region (SWANA). It identifies the administrative, ethical, and political challenges they face when applying for, receiving, or managing funds. The study aims to provide actionable insights and recommendations to address systemic funding barriers, strengthen organisational sustainability, and amplify the impact of gender justice movements. The need for this research stems from persistent inequities in funding distribution and the unique challenges that grassroots and marginalised organisations face in these regions.

■ Literature Review

The literature highlights the transformation of social justice movements into institutionalised NGOs, often referred to as the “NGOisation” of movements. This shift, influenced by international cooperation and funding structures, has led to tension between grassroots activism and the professionalisation demanded

by donor agendas. In regions such as Latin America, feminist movements have faced the challenge of maintaining political autonomy while securing international funding, which often necessitates adjustments to their missions to align with global priorities. Critics argue that this dynamic weakens the transformative power of movements, as neoliberal and postcolonial forces increasingly shape them. The emergence of feminist philanthropy seeks to address these challenges by advocating for more equitable, long-term, and flexible funding models that prioritise local leadership and address the root causes of oppression. However, systemic barriers, such as rigid funding policies, donor-driven agendas, and the professionalisation of activism, continue to hinder the full realisation of feminist philanthropy's potential. Funding to empower grassroots movements must embrace decolonisation, decentralise decision-making, and ensure the most marginalised voices are heard and supported.

■ Key Findings

The findings highlight significant administrative and political challenges that gender justice organisations in LATAM and SWANA face when securing and managing funding. Administrative barriers include financial instability due to short funding cycles and the lack of coverage for living wages, forcing organisations to rely on volunteer work. This leads to activist burnout and weakening of the movement.

Organisations also face pressure from donors to align their political views with donor agendas, compromising their independence and advocacy efforts. Both private and public donors impose constraints, such as expectations to adopt particular political stances or participate in projects that do not align with their movement's goals. Organisations are also concerned about the risk of censorship and the loss of funding due to political views. These power imbalances between donors and grantees create a tension between securing necessary resources and maintaining the integrity of their mission, ultimately affecting the transformative potential of these organisations in their respective regions. A shift in this dynamic is needed to ensure donors partner with organisations, uplifting their expertise and political vision to achieve impact.

Organisations are interested in developing self-funding strategies that ensure sustainability despite changing political climates and donors' agendas. Investment in an organisation's longer-term sustainability is a funding stream that can address some of these issues and provide political autonomy.

■ Key Recommendations

- **Adapt funding schemes** to provide flexible, long-term, and unrestricted funding that supports the autonomy and transformative goals of Majority World feminist organisations, enabling them to adapt effectively to evolving political and administrative needs.
- **Recognise and remunerate the labour of activists fairly**, particularly in grassroots and community-based organisations, to ensure the financial sustainability of movements and the protection of the well-being of activists.
- **Reduce dependency on specific donors** by implementing funding models that diversify sources, promote self-sustainability and allow organisations to maintain autonomy and resist political or ideological pressures.
- **Ensure organisations can align with their agendas and principles** without fear of compromising economic sustainability and promoting authentic, impactful work.
- **Promote inclusive and decolonised funding models** that actively involve and support grassroots and non-institutionalised organisations, ensuring equitable access to resources in horizontal partnerships.
- **Adapt funding requirements** to the sociopolitical contexts and needs of social movements, recognising the expertise of activists and organisations to guide solutions to their needs.

Authors and Acknowledgements

About the Authors

Natalia Marsicovetere Fanjul (she/her) is a social psychologist, feminist researcher, and queer activist focused on gender justice issues and human rights. Her recent work has focused on gender-based violence, the dynamics of social justice movements and the threat of the global anti-gender movement.

Maria Aïcha Boumeddiene (she/they) is a researcher, advocate, and activist specialising in LGBTQI+ rights. Their work spans global advocacy, international human rights mechanisms, and exploring funding landscapes, with a focus on marginalised communities, particularly those in the Majority World and their diaspora.

This research aims to present evidence-based data through an objective lens and do justice to the perspectives of those who shared insights. At the same time, all research is influenced by the authors' lived experiences and positionality. Natalia is a Guatemalan queer cis woman, she is mestizo-ladina and at the time of publication was 31 years old and based in Guatemala City. Maria is an Algerian queer person, raised in Algeria and France, and at the time of publication was 29 years old and based in Berlin.

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The authors are deeply grateful to all the activists and organisations that shared their perspectives, lived experiences, and visions for the future, and believed in the potential of this research project. They also extend their gratitude to the numerous social justice movements across their regions that continue to fight for rights and strive for a better future, even amid the complex political challenges they face today. It was truly inspiring to see how this research topic resonated with so many visionaries, and the authors hope this report honours the trust placed in them by sharing their needs, wisdom, aspirations and dreams.

Acronym List

BIPoC Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour

LATAM Latin America

LGBTIQI+ Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex and queer

NGO Non-governmental organisations

ODA Official Development Assistance

SOGIESC Sexual orientation, gender identity, expression and sexual characteristics

SWANA South West Asia and North Africa

Introduction

The critique of the non-profit industrial complex has been present for decades, denouncing how neoliberal models of movement financing have stifled the transformative political visions of Black, Indigenous, People of Colour (BIPOC) and Majority World activists and collectives. This critique feels especially relevant in 2025, where anti-rights and far-right movements are consistently gaining power and further threatening the rights of women, gender and sexual diversity, immigrants, and those living in occupied territories. The increase of anti-gender politics in Minority World governments has severely impacted the sustainability of social movements around the world. Thus, it is crucial to rethink funding dynamics that return the system-breaking power to these activists and collectives and find solutions in this rapidly changing political context.

Feminist philanthropy,¹ as an alternative to funding dynamics, has been discussed, particularly around who² is financed and to what amount.³ However, the conversation must also include the “how”, particularly when the notion of “partnerships” has become depoliticised and neutralised⁴. Collectives in the Majority World consider that a true feminist philanthropy must include a decolonial approach to funding.⁵ At the same time, philanthropy organisations often lack systematic data and evidence to advocate for this with private donors. Thus, this research project aims to bridge the gaps in systematised information that give way to advocating for a change in funding frameworks as part of the feminist philanthropy conversation, focusing on Latin America, North Africa, and Southwest Asia.

This research aims to create a roadmap toward implementing feminist philanthropy principles that bridge the political demands of feminist organisations with the interests of private and public donors. It analyses ethical dilemmas and administrative challenges that feminist organisations face when resorting to the private sector of philanthropy, as well as public/State donors, and their impact on their work, while collecting lessons learned and successful sustainability practices that can inform feminist philanthropy.

1. Ostrander, “The Growth of Donor Control.”

2. Howe and Frazer, “Pocket Change: How Women and Girls of Color Do More with Less.”

3. Shifman et al., “Lighting the Way: A Report for Philanthropy on the Power and Promise of Feminist Movements.”

4. Daly and Carrasco-Scherer, “Feminist Philanthropy: A New Era for the Philanthropy Field?”

5. Private meeting with Latin America and the Caribbean feminist and post feminist collectives, February 2023.

Methodology

Data Collection

The authors conducted secondary research based on various documentary sources, including scholarly articles, feminist philanthropy reports, essays, manifestos, and reports from civil society organisations.

An online survey was also administered to feminist and gender-transformative organisations that have worked with either private or public funding, or are self-sustaining. The survey's sample size comprised 122 participants from at least 10 countries in Southwest Asia and North Africa, as well as at least 14 countries from Latin America, and regional organisations focused on these contexts. Seventy-five per cent of survey respondents are from Latin America, and 25% are from Southwest Asia and North Africa.

Fifteen in-depth interviews were conducted with representatives of gender-transformative organisations operating in five countries in Latin America, four countries in North Africa and Southwest Asia, and two organisations working regionally in both contexts. Participation in the interviews was fairly compensated.

Limitations

Due to the exploratory nature of this research, the survey sample is small and not statistically representative of either region. Participation was higher in LATAM than in SWANA, as ongoing political crises in the latter region limited the capacity to engage in such initiatives. Data collection took place from November 2024 to February 2025, a period marked by unprecedented colonial aggression, political repression, and persecution of activists in and from the SWANA region.

Additionally, during this time, the global political landscape saw a significant rise in far-right movements and democratic backsliding in donor countries, leading to drastic cuts in funding for sexual and reproductive rights, gender justice, and LGBTQI+ issues. While this research seeks to honour the testimonies shared by participants, it cannot fully capture the extent or impact of these rapidly evolving contexts on gender-transformative organisations in the SWANA and LATAM regions. Further research is needed to explore the complexities arising from this global democratic backtrack.

Ethical Considerations

Participation in this research was through informed consent, and the project prioritised the protection of all participants' anonymity. The present report does not include information that could jeopardise participants' anonymity. For this reason, no country names, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, or sexual characteristics (SOGIESC) are disclosed for the survey or interview participants.

Literature Review

The NGOisation of Social Justice Movements

Activists have denounced the effects of the institutionalisation of civil society movements since this phenomenon began in the 1990s around the United Nations World Conferences.⁶ These world conferences set the global agenda to advance human rights and strongly shaped the funding streams from international cooperation that would impact social justice movements in the Global Majority. After these, organisations had to shape their aims, alliances, and even their names to be eligible for these new forms of funding.

In Latin America and the Caribbean during the early 2000s, feminist activists believed that donors had compromised their original political views, values, and goals by channelling them into funding streams related to global agendas from the World Conferences. The movement, which had gained significant momentum in the preceding decades, was then torn between the benefits of receiving international funding and remaining true to its original mission.^{7 8} This turned into a debate that was referred to as "autonomous" vs "institutional" feminism, in which organisations got involved in the international cooperation funding dynamic while others were critical of the neoliberal and postcolonial nature of this dynamic and refrained from participating in it.⁹ Today, a significant portion of feminist, LGBTQI+, and gender justice organisations in the region are established as NGO.

The transformation of social movements into NGOs has become known as the "NGOisation of movements"¹⁰. This phenomenon has also been strongly present in the SWANA region over the last three decades, primarily due to increased

6. Curiel, "El Lesbianismo Feminista En América Latina y El Caribe: Una Propuesta Política Transformadora."

7. Curiel.

8. Mogrovejo, *Movimiento Lésbico En América Latina y Sus Demandas*.

9. Espinosa-Miñoso, "Historizar las disputas, indagar las fuentes."

10. Mitri, "From Public Space to Office Space: The Professionalization/NGO-ization of the Feminist Movement Associations in Lebanon and Its Impact on Mobilization and Achieving Social Change."

international cooperation and funding. Notably, around the global schemes for development promoted by the World Bank in the 1990s and the increased interest of the United States in “promoting democracy” in the region during the 2000s.¹¹ The resulting proliferation of women’s NGOs in the region promoted the “professionalisation” of activists, in which donors favoured highly skilled professionals while “non-professional” forms of women’s organisations found it increasingly complex to sustain their work.¹²

These resulting dynamics have been named “non-profit industrial complex”¹³ by critics in which the state, in combination with capitalistic interests, uses nonprofits to monitor, manage, and control dissent, push social movements into adhering to capitalist structures, and redirect activist efforts into career-based modes of organising that render organisations incapable of holding transformative power.¹⁴

Feminist Philanthropy

The NGOisation of social justice movements presents a dilemma for philanthropic funders and activists alike: how can activism be economically sustainable while also remaining politically autonomous and transformative? The criticism towards the non-profit industrial complex highlights the paradoxical nature of these dynamics. At the same time, proponents of feminist philanthropy consider that relationships between funders and civil society organisations can be nuanced, and power imbalances can be revised, particularly regarding funding for gender justice issues.

Feminist philanthropy can be defined as “redistribution of wealth with trust in the leadership and strategy of those most marginalised, women and gender-expansive people of colour.”¹⁵ It is built upon these key principles: respecting local contexts and knowledge, providing long-term flexible funding, and supporting women’s leadership.¹⁶ It understands that traditional philanthropy reinforces unequal power dynamics in multiple ways. For instance, feminist philanthropy has denounced the unequal distribution of funding for gender justice¹⁷, particularly for organisations led by Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPoC)¹⁸. Additionally, it understands that imposing political agendas from a top-down

11. Jad, “The NGOization of the Arab Women’s Movements.”

12. Ghoul, “The NGO Industrial Complex and Palestinian Feminism: A Case Study.”

13. Rodríguez, “The Political Logic of the Non-Profit Industrial Complex.”

14. INCITE!, *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded*.

15. Brathwaite, “Feminist Philanthropy.”

16. Peñaloza, “Feminist Philanthropy Can Do More to Save Democracy—Here’s How.”

17. Lilly Family School of Philanthropy, “Women & Girls Index 2024.”

18. Howe and Frazer, “Pocket Change: How Women and Girls of Color Do More with Less.”

perspective, rather than a horizontal liaison, reduces the capacity of civil society organisations.¹⁹ Furthermore, it emphasises the importance of contextualising gender justice and its intersectionality with other social movements.²⁰

Proponents of a change in funding frameworks also raise the pressing issue of decolonising philanthropy, acknowledging that this may be perceived as paradoxical. The proposition of decolonising philanthropy, in line with feminist philanthropy principles, asserts that philanthropy must address the root causes of current societal systems of oppression, rather than just their symptoms, such as poverty and inequality. This includes philanthropy's role in participating and perpetuating the social and political architecture left behind by colonialism.²¹

Funders following philanthropic frameworks have also highlighted the current state of funding for gender justice, LGBTI, and feminist organisations, advocating for increased funding while denouncing existing power imbalances in the field. As of 2021, women's rights organisations received only 0.13% of the total Official Development Assistance (ODA), and only 0.42% of foundation grants are allocated towards women's rights.²² Furthermore, estimates show that 99% of ODA funding for gender equality supports large, mainstream organisations and has gone to governments or development agencies rather than directly to organisations and activists.²³ Furthermore, with the rise of far-right governments in donor countries, the available public funding for gender justice is going to decline further, making it urgent to create new effective financing frameworks, applying feminist and decolonial philanthropic principles to ensure funds increase the transformative power of organisations.²⁴

Roadmaps and Gaps for a Feminist Philanthropy

Feminist philanthropy seeks to correct the historical imbalances that have characterised global funding systems, which have often marginalised gender justice movements, especially in the Majority World. A key aspect of this philanthropic model is the shift toward long-term, flexible funding that empowers grassroots movements, rather than imposing rigid conditions that restrict their ability to lead political change on their own terms.

19. Gill and Wagner, "Why Feminist Philanthropy?"

20. Brathwaite, "Feminist Philanthropy."

21. Banerjee and Urvi, "Decolonising Philanthropy."

22. Dolker, "Where Is the Money for Feminist Organizing? Data Snapshots and A Call to Action."

23. Staszewska et al., "C."

24. Benjamin and Mwende Kinjili, "Change That Lasts."

However, systemic barriers persist, as highlighted in AWID and Mama Cash's report²⁵. On the donors' side, these challenges include insufficient internal capacity, a lack of movement-connected staff within institutions, and short and rigid policy cycles, as well as inflexible budget timeframes. Funding thresholds often exclude grassroots organisations, being either prohibitively high or unrealistically low. At the same time, formulaic due diligence processes, resistance to regranteeing funds, and a reluctance to collectively pool resources hinder efforts to implement feminist funding models. Addressing these structural issues is crucial for feminist philanthropy to move beyond theory and become a transformative force.

Funders, while claiming to support feminist principles, continue to maintain control over resource distribution, often imposing restrictive criteria that prioritise alignment with global agendas over local grassroots needs.^{26 27} This can lead to a conflict where organisations feel pressured to conform to external frameworks rather than maintain the radical and intersectional approaches that many feminist movements initially advocated for. The tension between accessing essential resources and staying true to a movement's political goals creates a critical gap in the landscape of feminist philanthropy.²⁸

Additionally, the professionalisation of activism often favours well-resourced NGOs and trained professionals while putting less formal grassroots organisations on the sidelines. This dynamic risks excluding the voices of the most marginalised, who typically lack access to these structures.²⁹ While some initiatives aim to address these disparities through decolonised and participatory funding models, such approaches remain in their early stages and face resistance.³⁰

To realise feminist philanthropy's transformative potential, it's essential to dismantle the colonial and capitalist frameworks that underpin the current philanthropic systems. Bridging these gaps requires a radical shift in funding practices that redistributes resources and redefines power dynamics. A genuinely feminist model would prioritise the leadership of grassroots feminists, embrace participatory approaches, and reject donor-driven priorities.³¹ Until these systemic barriers are addressed, feminist philanthropy will struggle to achieve its full potential.

25. Lever, E., Miller, K. and Staszewska, K. (2020). Moving More Money to the Drivers of Change: How Bilateral and Multilateral Funders Can Resource Feminist Movements. AWID and Mama Cash with support from the Count Me In! Consortium.

26. Yucel, "Money and Power."

27. Ostrander, "The Growth of Donor Control."

28. Bloodgood and Tremblay-Boire, "Does Government Funding Depoliticize Non-Governmental organisations? Examining Evidence from Europe."

29. Mitri, "From Public Space to Office Space: The Professionalization/NGO-ization of the Feminist Movement Associations in Lebanon and Its Impact on Mobilization and Achieving Social Change."

30. Daly and Carrasco-Scherer, "Feminist Philanthropy: A New Era for the Philanthropy Field?"

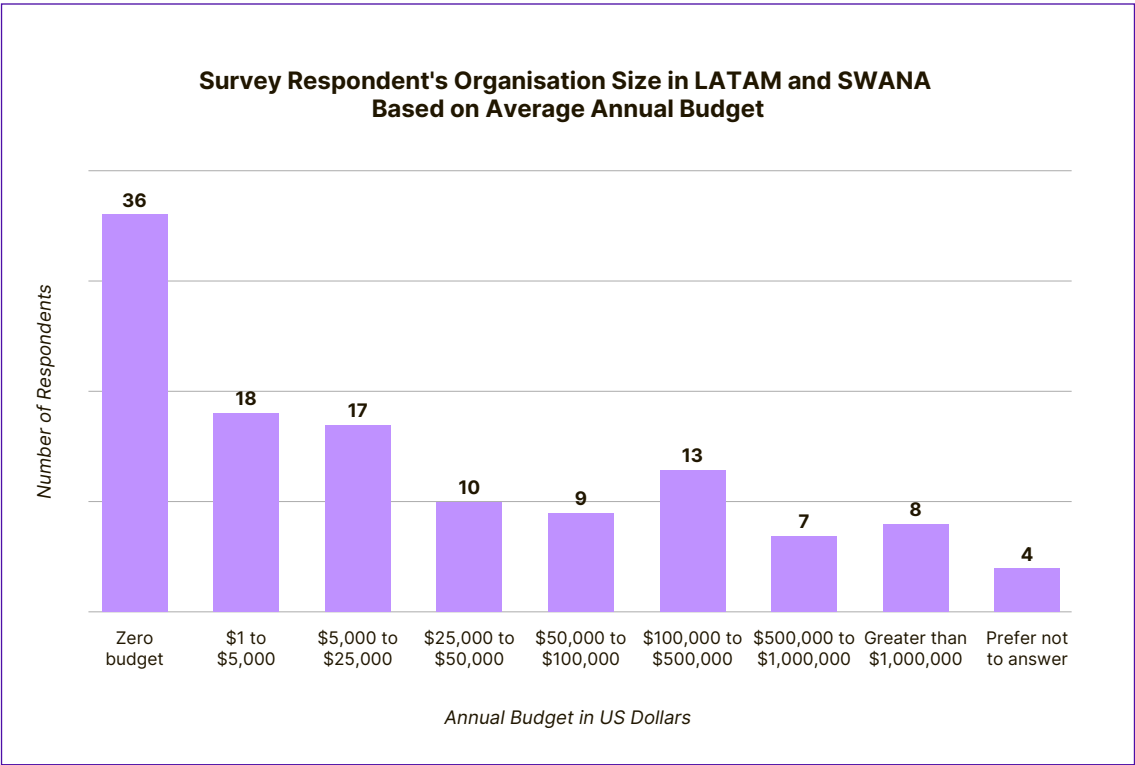
31. Yucel, "Money and Power."

Findings

The following findings reflect the core issues and needs that organisations working on gender justice in LATAM and SWANA face regarding funding dynamics. The main barriers identified can be categorised into administrative and ethical/political issues. These barriers prevent organisations from accessing funding or hinder their work by restricting their transformative potential. The findings also include organisations’ perspectives on avenues for balancing donor-grantee funding dynamics and how these can help shape feminist philanthropy.

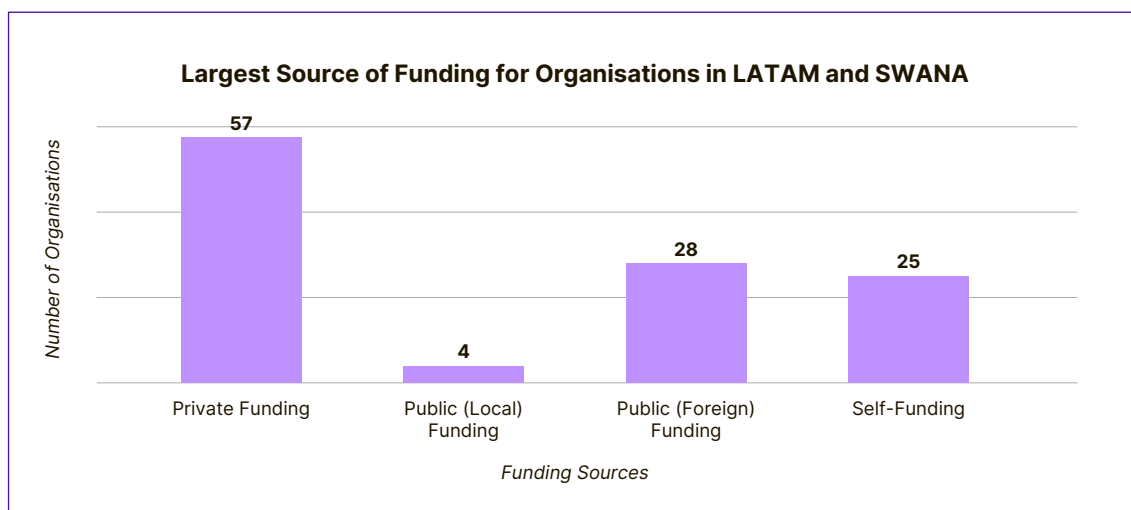
Funding landscapes of Gender Justice organisations in SWANA and LATAM

Some of the main challenges organisations encounter when applying for, receiving, or executing funding are administrative in nature. These challenges include the amount and types of funding received, the financial sustainability of their organisations and work, and the administrative and legal requirements they must fulfil to be eligible for financing.



Source: Research survey “Challenges in Funding for Gender Justice organisations from LATAM and SWANA” (2025) (n=122)

In line with feminist philanthropy reports, the survey found that the majority of gender-transformative, LGBTQI+, or feminist organisations in the LATAM and SWANA regions are severely underfunded. Approximately 30% (n = 36) of respondents reported having no average annual budget, while an additional 29% (n = 35) reported an average annual budget of less than \$25,000. The majority, 66% (n=81), of organisations have used private funding, and approximately 44% (n=53) have used public funding, including both local and foreign sources. Approximately 20% (n = 30) of the surveyed organisations rely on a combination of private and public funding sources, including both local and foreign sources. A significant portion of survey respondents, 37% (n = 46), also rely on self-funding strategies to compensate for the funding gaps observed in the first chart, which will be addressed below.



Source: Research survey "Challenges in Funding for Gender Justice organisations from LATAM and SWANA" (2025) (n=122)

The majority (47%, n = 57) of survey respondents rely primarily on private or philanthropic funding as their primary source of funding. At the same time, 20% of those who primarily rely on private funding report an average budget of zero and 40% have an average budget of \$25,000 or less. Interviewees confirm that this type of funding, although more flexible and more accessible for smaller organisations compared to public funding, is an unsustainable source as they often rely on fragmented, short-term funding streams that undermine their long-term stability. On the other hand, 22% (n=28) of organisations rely primarily on foreign public funding sources. These organisations tend to have larger average annual budgets, with approximately 32% (n=39) of organisations whose primary funding source is public foreign funds having budgets exceeding \$1,000,000 annually.

The Urgent Need for Living Wages

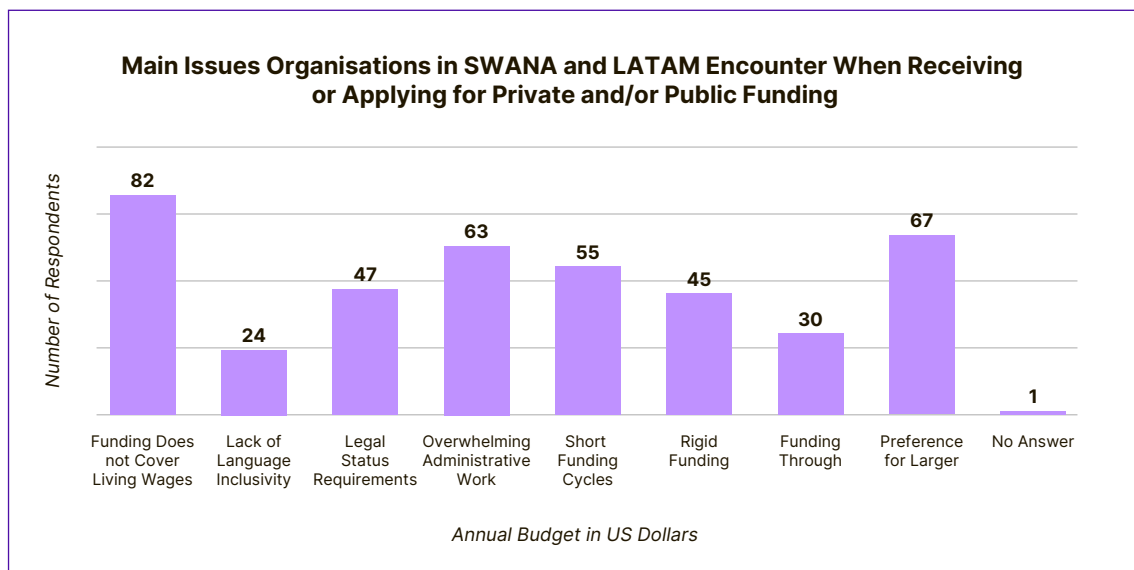
*“[The lack of living wages] forces us to become a [grants] executing entity, it hides the fact that **social movements are made up of people**, we need a funding logic that prioritises the work that people already do and builds towards social movements.” – activist from LATAM*

Among the issues reported by organisations when applying for or receiving funding, significant challenges to financial stability and flexibility were revealed, the most pressing one being the lack of coverage for living wages by both public and private funders. An overwhelming 67% (n = 82) of survey respondents stated that grants did not adequately cover salaries. Interviewees elaborated on how they often received funding for projects or specific activities, but little to no money to pay the individuals carrying out this work.

This funding gap forces organisations to underpay staff, often leaving them without access to healthcare, social security, and other labour benefits. Organisations may hire consultants or external service providers for specific tasks in such scenarios. However, this approach weakens movements, as external providers are not necessarily aligned with the organisation’s political mission.

Furthermore, 67% (n = 82) of the surveyed organisations reported relying on volunteer work to compensate for insufficient funding. This pushes activists into precarious living conditions, where they must balance income-generating work with their demanding voluntary commitments, all while facing the same inequalities and oppressions they seek to transform. Interviewees highlighted the perception among funders that human rights work is a “duty” or “sacrifice” that activists must endure, leading to the exclusion of living wages from grant allocations.

Interviewees emphasised that people drive social and political change. They argued that current funding dynamics neglect the core of social movements: the individuals behind them. By investing in the living conditions of those working for gender justice, movements become more substantial and sustainable. There is a need for core funding that prioritises sufficient resources for operational costs, mainly living wages, over the limitations of project-based financing, which often imposes low salary budget ceilings or excludes salary allocations entirely.



Source: Research survey "Challenges in Funding for Gender Justice organisations from LATAM and SWANA" (2025) (n=122)

Breaking Down Bureaucracy: Addressing Inequities in Grantmaking

"The proposal and funding process is a rat race. It exhausts activists, limits their creative thinking, and almost always leads to inefficiency ... The bureaucracy is even more insidious than any perceived politics." –activist from SWANA

Research participants highlighted the burdensome and often harrowing process of applying for funding. The competitive nature of grant applications creates divisions within social movements, as organisations compete against one another for limited funds. Moreover, the application process demands significant unpaid labour, without guaranteeing that the time and resources invested will yield results.

In line with this, 52% (n = 63) of survey respondents identified overwhelming administrative requirements as another significant issue in applying for and receiving funding. Interviewees shared that instead of focusing on their organisation's or movement's goals, they are often bogged down by extensive administrative work required to utilise granted funds. This is particularly detrimental for organisations working in crisis contexts in the SWANA region, where urgent action is often needed but hindered by lengthy administrative procedures and inflexible funding structures. In LATAM, interviewees emphasised the disproportionate operational costs of applying for and executing grants compared to the amount of funding

provided. This issue is further exacerbated by the insufficient allocation of funds for living wages in grants, as previously discussed.

Furthermore, 55% (n=67) of survey respondents expressed that donors' preference for working with larger organisations is a significant issue when applying for private or public funding. Interviewees noted that this is particularly problematic for public funders, who often require a more robust administrative structure for grant execution, reporting, and auditing processes than private donors. This issue is closely tied to the legal status requirement for accessing more substantial funding opportunities, which 38% (n = 47) of survey respondents identified as a significant barrier. Interviewees elaborated that obtaining legal registration carries substantial financial and political consequences for organisations. In many countries across SWANA and LATAM, legal registration exposes organisations to scrutiny from local and international governments, which is incredibly unsafe and unviable in contexts where criminalisation of LGBTQI+ individuals or human rights activists is rampant, or where laws restrict the work and international funding of NGOs. Even when legal registration is possible, the process is often costly and involves lengthy bureaucratic procedures, making it inaccessible for organisations that lack the necessary resources. Additionally, organisations may compromise their political vision to meet legal registration requirements.

“If you [legally] register, you then depend on foreign funds who want you to conform and comply with conditions that do not fit the reality of your region, you can get lost in constantly looking for funds and trying to adjust to [their] procedures.” – activist from the SWANA region

A typical solution to these challenges is the creation of regranting structures, where larger national organisations redistribute funding to smaller or grassroots organisations, particularly those without formal legal registration. However, interviewees in LATAM highlighted that this structure often creates tension between re-granters and grantees due to power imbalances and competition for funds, fracturing local movements rather than fostering solidarity. In SWANA, interviewees noted that funding tends to be concentrated in specific countries—often those perceived as more “westernised”—which re-grant to the rest of the region. This results in insufficient funding for grantee countries and places an excessive administrative burden on regranting organisations, leading to overwork and burnout.

Interviewees advocated for more equitable feminist philanthropy practices, such as compensating organisations for their application efforts and allowing them to self-determine the content of their proposals. This contrasts with the

current competitive models, which often require organisations to submit similar themes and methods, which are disadvantageous to smaller or less experienced groups. Additionally, funders should be supportive by guiding, notably those that are more undersized, grassroots, or inexperienced organisations, through administrative procedures to access funding. Participants also called for revising regranting models to ensure organisations are fairly compensated and that there is prioritisation of the autonomy and needs of grant recipients.

Bridging the Divide in Donor-Grantee Relationships

As previously mentioned in the literature review section of this report, since the trend of NGOisation began, international cooperation has vertically imposed its political agendas onto the Majority World through rigid funding schemes. Interviewees from the LATAM and SWANA regions emphasised that, to this day, funders continue to dictate the priorities organisations should focus on, often disregarding the relevance or viability of these priorities within local contexts.

A striking data point from the survey is that nearly half of the respondents (48%, $n = 59$, regarding private funding and 51%, $n = 62$, regarding public funding) expressed concern about the pressure to adapt their political vision to receive funding. This compromises organisational independence and highlights how power dynamics undermine responses to local needs in funding relationships. Such dynamics minimise the transformative potential of activists, who often must trade their political goals for economic sustainability. Interviewees shared how they have frequently had to shift their primary focus to align with funders' priorities when their original scope of work is deemed "no longer trending." Additionally, they noted how funders often impose strategies irrelevant to the local organisational ecosystem or incompatible with the sociopolitical context.

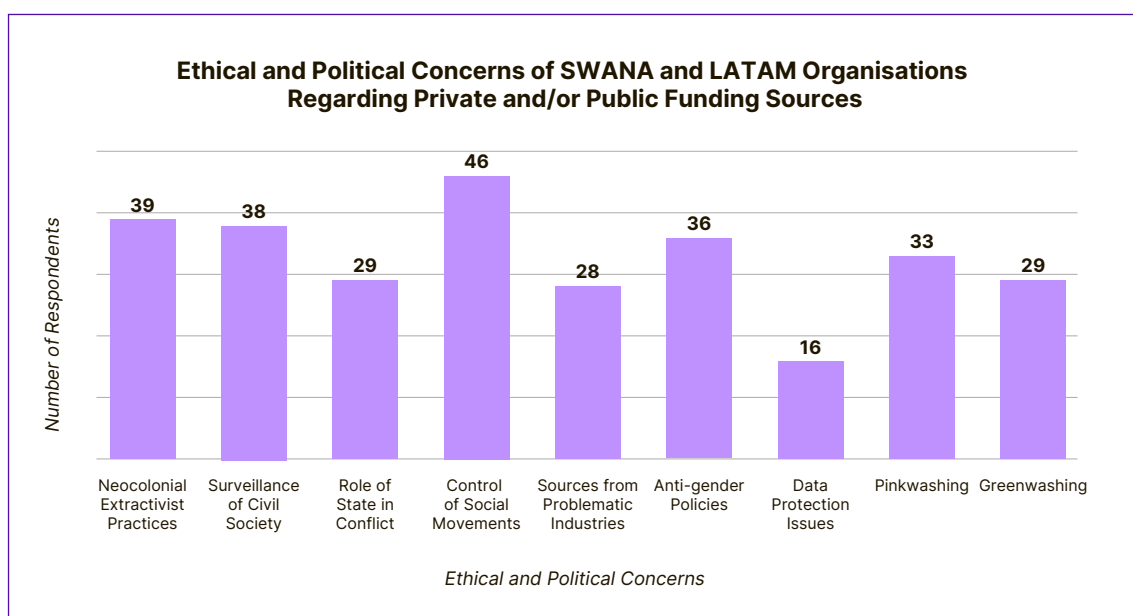
Another manifestation of this political disconnect is the retraction of funds in contexts of shrinking civic space. Activists from LATAM and SWANA, who are under authoritarian regimes, shared how funders retreated when political contexts shifted, leaving organisations unprotected and unfunded. Similarly, funders should advocate for and protect organisations and communities in occupied territories, particularly when these are being subjected to aggression and repression by colonising entities, such as the ongoing genocide in Gaza. Many interviewees expressed that donors should play a braver role in such contexts, holding their ground to safeguard grantee organisations through their international infrastructure, access to support networks, and advocacy capacity.

“I think political and organisational autonomy has matured [in the last decade]. Receiving funds does not make organisations more or less politically autonomous; autonomy is when organisations are, autonomy is organisations being able to decide how and on what terms this funding is granted. Being able to dictate and establish ways of working with funders, choosing how these relationships are built; that is autonomy, too” –activist from LATAM

According to activists interviewed from both regions, the relationship between donors and grantees needs to shift toward a more horizontal partnership to address these challenges. This requires acknowledging the underlying power imbalances while recognising the local expertise of organisations to determine the most effective ways of working within their contexts. Grantmaking processes should be participatory and collaborative, ensuring that relevance, care, and sociopolitical nuances are central considerations in the decision-making process. Safeguarding organisations, notably smaller grassroots groups in countries with shrinking civic space, should be a key priority in this partnership.

Ethical and Political Concerns of Funding Sources

Sources of funding often place organisations in political dilemmas, forcing them to balance their political integrity with the need for economic sustainability. These tensions are particularly pronounced when working with specific funders whose agendas may conflict with the values and missions of the organisations they support.



Source: Research survey “Challenges in Funding for Gender Justice organisations from LATAM and SWANA” (2025) (n=122)

Regarding private or philanthropic funding sources, the most common concerns shared by survey respondents included funding tied to anti-gender politics or lobbying (30%, n=36), “pinkwashing” (27%, n=33)—where donors promote pro-LGBTQI+ policies while simultaneously harming related or other causes—and “greenwashing” (24%, n=29). Notably, 23% (n = 23) of respondents reported having no ethical concerns when applying for or receiving private funding. This suggests that some organisations may have established clear boundaries or rely on carefully vetted donors. However, these cases are exceptions rather than the norm, reflecting the widespread ethical challenges faced by many organisations. These findings emphasise the critical need for funding practices that respect organisations’ political and moral integrity, enabling them to pursue their missions without compromising their values and greater transparency regarding funding sources and their involvement in political practices.

Regarding public funding, 38% (n = 46) of respondents expressed concerns about government control of civil society action through funding mechanisms. Similarly, 31% (n=38) are concerned about funds used by state entities to surveil civil society, highlighting organisations’ vulnerability in certain regions where public funds may come with heightened scrutiny and reduced autonomy. Additionally, 32% (n = 39) identified the role of states in neocolonial extractivist practices as a key ethical issue in receiving public funding.

For most organisations, these concerns evidence the double-edged nature of private and public funding. While such funding provides vital resources, it often introduces constraints that challenge the independence and effectiveness of civil society organisations.

The Cost of Political Autonomy: Funding and Censorship in Advocacy Work

*“[It feels like] I am wearing a straitjacket. I am banned from discussing abortion [by the donor], as an activist and as an individual, even though it is my human right as someone who can get pregnant. **This is how they pressure and force you to modify your core to adapt to their ways.**” –activist from LATAM*

In a similar vein, participants shared their experiences with censorship from funders. Twenty-nine per cent (29%, n = 35) of survey respondents reported refraining from expressing their political views due to fear of losing funding. Organisations working on gender justice and advocacy often face financial risks

tied to their political stances, with potential repercussions from both public and private funders. Political alignment can become a decisive factor in sustaining funding, as evidenced by the 19 organisations that reported losing public funding and the 16 that lost private funding due to their expressed views.

These losses highlight the challenges of maintaining financial security while adhering to organisational values and political beliefs. Warnings from funders, though less frequent than funding losses, further underscore an environment of conditional support. Public funders warned 13 organisations, while 16 were warned by private funders, signalling pressure to modify or downplay political stances to ensure continued funding. Such dynamics undermine the autonomy and authenticity of advocacy efforts. Notably, 17 respondents chose not to answer this question, indicating that it may be a sensitive issue.

Political views expressed by gender justice organisations for which funding was withdrawn by private and/or public donors (n=35)*		
Theme of Political View	SWANA (n=11)	LATAM (n=23)
Supporting general LGBTIQ Rights	45% (n=5)	52% (n=12)
Supporting trans rights	18% (n=2)	35% (n=8)
Supporting Sexual and Reproductive Rights	18% (n=2)	70% (n=16)
Supporting Indigenous and Land Rights	36% (n=4)	30% (n=7)
Calling out war crimes	45% (n=5)	30% (n=7)
Criticising a State or political entity	67% (n=7)	52% (n=12)
Denouncing far-right or far-right actors	27% (n=3)	61% (n=14)

**35 respondents shared that they lost funding for expressing political views, but one participant refrained from sharing which.*

Source: Research survey "Challenges in Funding for Gender Justice organisations from LATAM and SWANA" (2025) (n=122)

As shown in the table above, LATAM organisations face more repercussions for advocating for sexual and reproductive rights and denouncing far-right actors, which, according to interviewees, is often linked to views on abortion rights. This is particularly critical, as these issues are central to the work of gender justice and gender-transformative organisations. Censorship from funders, thus, reduces their capacity to address these key issues effectively. In both the SWANA region

and LATAM, criticising a state or political entity also led to significant backlash. In SWANA, this was especially pronounced when organisations called out war crimes. Interviewees across regions shared that backlash—or the fear of it—is often associated with criticising the United States, the State of Israel, and their perpetration of genocide in Gaza.

The withdrawal of funding is closely tied to political views that are central to the work of gender-transformative, LGBTQI+, and feminist organisations and to the survival of the communities they serve. The fear of funder backlash severely restricts these organisations' political autonomy and transformative capacity. This data underscores the need for funders who prioritise movements' long-term sustainability and independence over political conformity, as well as the importance of diversified funding strategies to safeguard organisational missions.

Navigating Funding Gaps: Strategies for Sustainability

Organisations have adopted various strategies to sustain their operations and address funding challenges. The most common approach, used by 67% (n = 82) of respondents, relies on volunteer work. While this reflects the importance of community support, it is also tied to the lack of funding available to cover living wages, which ultimately weakens movements and organisations, as previously discussed.

Other strategies include autonomous funding methods such as selling ticketed events (25%, n=30), crowdfunding or mutual aid (25%, n=30), offering services or consultancies (24%, n=29), selling merchandise (23%, n=28), and, to a lesser extent, online subscription models like Patreon or Ko-fi (3%, n=4). These approaches demonstrate the creativity and resourcefulness of organisations in navigating financial constraints. Interviewees highlighted the nuances of these strategies. While selling services, ticketed events, merchandise, and subscriptions can generate small amounts of income for specific activities, they are rarely sufficient to cover the operating expenses of organisations with long-term programs or political goals, particularly those providing health services, legal support, or humanitarian aid.

Crowdfunding and mutual aid are popular strategies, as they raise awareness of an organisation's work and build solidarity around human rights issues. However, crowdfunding requires infrastructure that many organisations lack. For instance, organisations without legal registration or bank accounts must rely on individual accounts, posing data safety risks. Additionally, most crowdfunding platforms

operate primarily in the Minority World, forcing organisations in the Majority World to depend on partnerships or diaspora networks for access.

Both survey and interview participants expressed interest in further exploring self-funding strategies but cited a lack of knowledge, skills, and funding for infrastructure as barriers. They identified this as an area where funders could provide support, through seed funding, capacity building, or infrastructure development, to help organisations achieve greater sustainability. Interviewees shared that seed funding to kickstart sustainability projects could be directed at farming projects, research centres, training centres, and other initiatives that address community needs while creating creative sustainability models. Such support could shift power dynamics, reduce dependency on traditional funding streams, and foster economic and political autonomy.

Insights from Southwest Asia and North Africa

“We’re not fighting anymore for the rights and the freedoms of the people or the communities we serve, we are fighting for our existence.” Activist from the SWANA region

Gender-transformative organisations in the SWANA region face context-specific barriers in accessing and utilising funding under political repression, war and conflict and anti-LGBTQI+ laws. Bureaucracy forces organisations to divert resources from their core missions, leaving little room for strategic planning or long-term activities that address systemic oppressions. Beyond the bureaucratic barriers, several interviewees highlighted how donor-driven reporting structures force organisations into constant cycles of justification rather than action, making them feel like they are in a perpetual state of proving their legitimacy rather than being supported to carry out their work. Many funders demand compliance with rigid grant structures that fail to accommodate the realities in which these organisations operate. Restrictions such as a lack of living wages and inflexible budget lines exacerbate these challenges. For example, organisations cannot reallocate funds during emergencies, such as providing legal or financial support to detained members of their communities and organisations.

Furthermore, funders often prefer larger, regional, more established, or more “Westernised” organisations over smaller, grassroots groups more connected to local communities’ needs. Funders also push for artificial collaborations, such as consortia in the region, which lack genuine trust and dissolve after funding

ends. This undermines solidarity and reinforces inequities, rather than building on existing networks of solidarity and communities.

Participants recommend shifting power to local movements by prioritising grassroots leadership and providing flexible, long-term funding to address these challenges. Interviewees from conflict zones also stressed that funders must recognise the emotional and physical toll of activism in crisis settings, advocating for funding that includes mental health support, rest, and recovery measures. Funders should reduce bureaucratic barriers, consult directly with communities, and ensure funding addresses intersectional challenges faced by women and LGBTQI+ people in contexts of displacement, conflict and restrictive laws. Moving away from short-term, crisis-driven funding is essential to support sustainable, systemic change in the region.

Insights from Latin America

“Latin America can strategise new futures, especially having fascism [in the United States] around the corner. We need to make more radical, longer-term, and more urgent strategies based on coalitions and collaboration”.
Activist from LATAM

Funding challenges in Latin America are characterised by insufficient resources for gender justice and LGBTQI+ issues, fostering competition and fracturing movements. Regranting schemes exacerbate these issues by concentrating money and political power in institutionalised organisations while neglecting grassroots and politically independent groups. The strong presence of intermediary organisations, often competing for funding with grassroots, further complicates the landscape. The role of these intermediaries should be critically evaluated to ensure they support, rather than undermine, local movements. Donor requirements are also frequently disconnected from local contexts. For example, reporting and auditing demands, such as requesting receipts for services or goods in rural communities reliant on informal economies, are often unviable.

Additionally, funding streams tend to follow donor trends rather than addressing urgent regional needs. Critical issues, such as responding to the rise of far-right and anti-gender movements, are overlooked. For instance, gender justice organisations working on masculinities or with young men struggle to secure funding. Funders also compartmentalise topics, categorising organisations into rigid boxes that fail to reflect their complex, intersectional work. For example,

organisations are often excluded from funding streams for migration, climate justice, and democracy, as they are narrowly labelled as “gender justice-only” or “LGBTQI+-only” groups.

Conclusion: Toward a Transformative Feminist Philanthropy

This research highlights the urgent need to reimagine funding ecosystems for gender justice movements in Latin America (Latam) and the South West Asian and North African region (Swana). The findings reveal a stark contradiction: while feminist and LGBTQI+ organisations drive transformative change, they are systematically undermined by funding models that prioritise donor agendas over local expertise, short-term projects over long-term sustainability, and bureaucratic compliance over political autonomy. This leads to activist burnout, fractured movements, and the dilution of radical political visions for social justice.

The path forward demands a fundamental shift in power dynamics. Feminist philanthropy must embody its core principles: trust in grassroots leadership, decolonised decision-making, and an unwavering commitment to intersectional justice. To achieve this, funding must become flexible and long-term, prioritising living wages and core funding so that organisations can focus on transformative impact rather than on economic sustainability. Donors must build horizontal partnerships, co-creating strategies grounded in local realities rather than imposed global agendas. In contexts of political repression and crisis, funders should offer protection and solidarity, rather than retreating due to their own administrative or political risks. Donors should invest in self-sustaining models to break the cycle of dependency and promote organisational autonomy.

The rise of anti-gender movements and anti-democratic backlash globally makes this transformation essential. The activists and organisations featured in this research are not merely recipients of aid; they are architects of liberation. Feminist philanthropy has the potential of being a reparative practice, one that redistributes wealth, power, and trust to those who have long been denied all three. The future of gender justice depends on funding that matches the courage of the movements it seeks to support.

Recommendations and Way Forward

- **Prioritise core funding:** Allocate funding that covers essential operational costs for organisations, with a primary focus on living wages, social security, and the health of activists and staff involved in grant-related activities. Ensuring the well-being of those at the core of movements ensures their sustainability.
- **Create longer funding cycles:** Establish multi-year, renewable funding cycles that align with organisations' long-term goals and impact. These cycles provide financial stability, reduce the administrative burden of frequent reapplications, and allow organisations to work on long-term advocacy goals.
- **Adapt funding requirements to sociopolitical contexts:** Adjust funding requirements to what is feasible and practical, while protecting organisations and reducing bureaucratic burdens. For instance, create flexible agreements for organisations that cannot legally register due to democratic threats, allow alternative documentation in informal economies, and adopt flexible and culturally relevant monitoring and evaluation practices.
- **Revisit the use of umbrella regranting:** Evaluate the power dynamics and administrative challenges between regrants and grantees, ensuring there are adequate resources to support smooth collaboration and promote movement building in these relationships through fair compensation and political autonomy. Accountability measures should be in place to prevent larger entities from dictating grassroots priorities or misallocating resources.
- **Co-construct grant objectives with civil society:** Ensure grantmaking processes are developed through horizontal, participatory decision-making processes in setting grant goals, expectations and political objectives. Avoid setting political agendas from a top-down approach by building partnerships based on trust before developing grants and ensuring alignment with local priorities.
- **Learn the context of grantees:** Understand the contexts of grantees thoroughly, not only on a political level, but also in terms of the social and cultural nuances and dynamics of civil society. This allows them to allocate funding to specific context-based needs and understand what type of program and funding address them. Funders should integrate contextual risk analysis and consult with local actors before imposing funding conditions that could compromise safety or strategy.
- **Support self-funding strategies:** Support civil society efforts to develop self-funding and autonomous funding strategies, such as cooperatives, social enterprises, and activist-led resource generation initiatives, that foster sustainability and political independence. This includes providing seed funding

for financial sustainability projects and capacity building, as well as supporting the development of self-funding and autonomous funding strategies, such as cooperatives, social enterprises, and activist-led resource generation initiatives, that foster sustainability and political independence. This includes providing seed funding for financial sustainability projects, capacity building or supporting infrastructure implementation. This can reduce dependence on external donors and strengthen local ownership over funding structures.

- **Protect civil society:** Funders play a crucial role in safeguarding organisations and activists in contexts of shrinking democratic space. They should allocate resources for protection, but they also have a role in advocating for the protection of activists with local governments, policymakers, and authorities. Funding should invest in long-term security infrastructure, relocation support, legal defence funds, and digital protection measures. Protection mechanisms must be designed in collaboration with grassroots organisations to ensure they address real security needs.
- **Implement intersectional funding streams:** Ensure that funding streams encompass the intersectional work of gender justice, feminist and LGBTQI+ organisations working on overlapping issues of migration, transitional justice, humanitarian emergencies, democracy, climate justice and Indigenous rights.
- **Promote transparency in ethical funding sources: Increase transparency regarding the funding source and its** involvement in political practices and policies to prevent partnerships that may harm activists' credibility or safety. Ethical guidelines should be developed in collaboration with grantees to ensure that funding aligns with the movement's values.

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Unseen,
un(der)paid,
yet we carry
the economy

