

## EVENT REPORT

# PUTTING WOMEN'S RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS UP FRONT: LESSONS LEARNED IN BUILDING SUPPORT AND PARTNERSHIP FOR SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

March 15, 2016, New York

## 1. Overview

This report provides a summary of the discussions at the Global Fund for Women, Womankind Worldwide (Womankind) and CARE's parallel event at the 60<sup>th</sup> Commission on the Status of Women titled "Putting Women's Rights Organizations Up Front: Lessons Learned In Building Support and Partnership for Social Transformation" (henceforth known as the event). This report does not necessarily represent the views of Global Fund for Women, Womankind or CARE; instead we hope it captures the vibrant discussions and recommendations made by the participants – a mixture of women's rights organizations, INGOs and donors – on what actions can be taken to increase financial and non-financial support to women's rights organizations (WROs) and movements.

## 2. Introduction

Whilst the evidence base is building on the vital role of WROs and movements in achieving women's rights and gender equality, these organizations are often struggling for survival. WROs and movements in sub-Saharan Africa are no different, with many being forced to close their doors or operate on a shoe-string budget. There are however some glimmers of hope and innovation in the efforts of some donors, INGOS and non-traditional actors that are looking to support women's rights civil society in resource mobilization, capacity building and advocacy efforts. To unpack the challenges facing WROs and movements in sub-Saharan Africa and explore solutions, Global Fund for Women, Womankind and CARE held an event which brought together representatives from various sectors, including grassroots, national and international women's rights organisations, regional and international women's funds, INGOs and multilateral and bilateral donors.

The format of the event included an opening statement laying out the context for women's rights movements (presented by African Women's Development Fund); a panel of activists across several issues sharing models of successful partnerships with progressive donors on strategic women's rights agendas; question and answer with the audience; and breakout groups to dive deeper into recommendations and the way forward. The program and list of participants are attached as appendices. Approximately 50 attendees participated. Outlined below is a summary of the participants' recommendations for all actors on steps that can be taken to address some of the most significant challenges facing WROs and movements.

## 3. Challenges and solutions

### a) Core, flexible and long-term funding

Many participants raised the lack of core, flexible and long-term funding available to WROs and movements as a major challenge in achieving gender equality and women's rights. By funding an organization as a whole, core funding offers flexibility and agility, allowing organizations to define their

own priorities and political agendas. Core funding is particularly suited to supporting social change processes as it gives organizations the opportunity to focus on accomplishing their mission and vision rather than on, often disconnected, projects. Similarly, multi-year funding is key for ensuring predictability and sustainability for organizations. Participants also raised WROs and movements' lack of access to productive resources, including land and money, as a key challenge.

Participants recommended that **donors** should urgently increase core, flexible and long-term funding available to WROs and movements and assess grant requirements to ensure WROs and movements can apply (in principle and practice). Participants also recommended that donors invest in women's funds that are committed to the principles of core, flexible and long-term funding. One participant pointed to FRIDA - the Young Feminist Fund - as applying flexible principles to funding, saying 'FRIDA is very flexible and trusts you to make decisions on how to move your work forward.' Similarly, the Urgent Action Fund was given as a good practice in terms of flexible and accessible funds. Participants recommended that when donors are exploring and assessing re-granting organizations, they should ensure these organizations/funds have deep and demonstrable expertise and understanding of women's rights and the women's movement.

Participants recommended that **all actors** should advocate for the full spectrum of women's rights to be realized, including women's land rights.

There was an extended discussion of the implications of the lack of grant awards to women's rights groups from the most recent round of gender equality grants from the Dutch Ministry (FLOW). There were passionate interventions stemming from perceptions that bilateral donors and basket funds are not significantly committed to women's rights issues. Instead participants reported that some bilateral donors are partnering with corporate entities that implement priorities that are not defined by women's movements, or at times "poach" ideas from the movement without including them as partners. Women's funds at the event shared the steps taking place to dialogue with the Dutch Ministry, while others described other philanthropic advocacy efforts that can provide the significant resources the women's rights movement needs to thrive lest the successes of the last three decades be lost.

### **b) Donor priorities and trends**

Many participants pointed to shifting donor priorities and trends as a major challenge, including focusing on few thematic areas, the move to allocating larger grants to fewer organizations, narrowing geographical focus and an increased focus on delivering impact at scale.

Participants recommended **donors** work with women's funds to ensure a holistic approach is taken towards achieving women's rights. They urged donors to distribute large grants to women's funds, who can distribute amongst a diverse range of WROs and movements. Participants also recommended donors engage in mapping to ensure there is clarity on the level of need and gaps in funding (for example, thematic and geographical gaps).

Participants recommended that **WROs and movements** revisit their articulation of interventions and impact at scale. It was noted that WROs and movements have had significant impact at scale and there

needs to be stronger articulation of these successes in the framework of 'impact at scale'. The body of significant contributions from the women's movement – from HIV/AIDS models of intervention, to policy frameworks, to strategic analysis of peace and security processes – demonstrates the depth of expertise in the women's movement and this expertise can be more clearly presented to key stakeholders. As an example, the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) offers an opportunity to truly partner with women's rights groups to monitor their implementation, instead of seeing WROs as simple recipients of SDG interventions. The participants felt that the SDGs offer a useful framework for systemic transformation and that women's movements held the depth of expertise to be meaningful partners to SDG stakeholders.

Participants also recommended that **WROs and movements** need to be more effective at collaborating amongst themselves, including to increase their political power and negotiating position vis-à-vis donors and larger consortia

Participants also noted the increased focus on monitoring and evaluation (M&E) as a challenge for WROs and movements. Participants noted that the increase focus on M&E has primarily been on numbers rather than on the transformative change in the lives of women and girls. One participant stated: 'we don't work just for numbers, we work for transformational change.' While both donors and WROs and movements are keen to capture impact, there is clearly a disconnect on what changes are important and how this can be meaningfully measured.

Participants recommended that **donors** should work with WROs and movements to develop M&E processes that go beyond numbers and capture the transformative changes occurring in the lives of women and girls.

Participants also recommended **WROs and movements** work to document 'Our Own Story'. This should articulate the successes of WROs and movements and the changes in women and girls' lives that go beyond numbers and tell the story of change.

### **c) Reaching a diversity of WROs and movements, including grassroots and youth-led organisations**

Participants stressed the importance of not viewing WROs and movements as a homogenous body. Participants recommended that **donors** have an inclusive definition of WROs and movements, including grassroots and young women-led organizations. They also noted that grassroots and young women-led organizations are particularly struggling to access quality funding and to ensure their priorities and experiences are heard. Participants highlighted that diversity is also reflected in the spaces that WROs and movements occupy and the need for support to reach WROs and movements operating in new spaces. For example, one participant noted the growing feminist movement in virtual spaces. Participants recommended that **WROs and movements** hold strategic dialogues, particularly to open the space for grassroots WROs to share experiences and learnings.

Participants also raised the importance of donors supporting the growth of the women's rights movement. One participant stated that Global Fund for Women encourages WROs to support the grassroots movements they work with to grow and to, hopefully, one day directly apply to the Fund.

Participants pointed to specialized women's funds, such as FRIDA, as key mechanisms in reaching certain WROs and movements. Participants also recommended donors investigate how re-granting organizations are supporting the growth of the women's rights movements and investing in those re-granting organizations who build the movement.

It was also noted that the women's movement has a growing culture of intermediaries (larger WROs speaking on behalf of grassroots WROs) and this contributes to the invisibility of many grassroots WROs and the issues they address.

#### **d) Meaningful partnerships with INGOs**

A major challenge highlighted by the participants was the increasing role, presence and power of INGOs. With many INGOs establishing offices at the regional and national level, competition over funding between local NGOs and INGOs is seen to be increasing. Many participants highlighted a lack of meaningful partnership between many INGOs and WROs as particularly concerning. Some pointed to a problematic 'sub-contractor' relationship, with INGOs setting priorities and keeping the majority of funding while WROs implement the vast majority of activities with limited core support.

Participants recommended that **INGOs** should commit to equal and meaningful partnerships where both WROs and INGOs are mutually accountable to each other and the expertise each party brings is recognized. This should include partnership from proposal development right through to evaluation. Participants also recommended INGOs ensure that core funding reaches implementing organisations.

Participants recommend that **donors** recognize the expertise of WROs and movements and encourage INGOs to develop meaningful partnerships with these organisations. As an example, one participant emphasized that rural women have organized into powerful networks and are key leaders. They are not passive recipients of aid. Participants also recommend that donors look beyond 'donor friendly' language<sup>1</sup> (for example, ensuring that the quality of the idea is assessed, not just its articulation on paper) and ensure grantees have the expertise and experience to deliver work in local communities.

Participants recommended **WROs and movements** should map areas for complementary action between themselves and INGOs. Participants also stressed the importance of WROs and movements coming together to strengthen the movement and to advocate for meaningful partnerships.

#### **e) Enabling environment for WROs and movements**

The shrinking space for civil society, including threats and attacks against women human rights defenders (WHRDs), was raised as a major challenge. It was also noted that many WHRDs face burn out and increasing support to ensure self-care is critical. Participants saw the enabling environment as extending beyond civil society organizations, to the wider political, economic and social sphere in which these organizations operate. In this context, many participants felt national governments are failing to realize and protect women's rights and support an enabling environment. Several participants

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<sup>1</sup> This includes using technical or donor-specific terminology

particularly noted the lack of women in decision-making processes as a major challenge to delivering work on women's rights. Linked to this, participants felt another barrier was the high level of need at the local level versus the resources available.

Participants recommended that **donors** invest in holistic protection for WHRDs, including security measures and self-care initiatives.

Participants recommended **national governments** urgently and significantly accelerate efforts to achieve women's rights and gender equality, including women's meaningful participation in all levels of decision-making. They also recommended national governments engage in regular, direct dialogues with WROs and movements to facilitate learning, sharing of evidence and, importantly, to try and bridge the gap between local level need and institutional mechanisms.

Participants recommended **all actors** urgently increase campaigning calling for WHRDs to be protected and for a broader enabling environment.

#### **f) Building capacities**

Participants articulated a need for the capacity of WROs and movements to be strengthened, including human resources and technical capacity. There was a strong focus on the positive role of women's funds in supporting the women's movement to build capacity. Participants were also clear that capacity-building needs to go beyond workshops and should be clearly linked to the needs of the organisation.

Participants recommended that **donors** work with, and invest in, women's funds to build the capacity of WROs and movements. Participants recommended that **all actors** engaged in capacity-building, and ensure these initiatives are grounded in the needs and wants of WROs and movements.

#### **4. Conclusion**

While the challenges facing WROs and movements across sub-Saharan Africa are significant, there are steps all actors can take to reverse these negative trends. It is vital that donors increase investment in quality funding for WROs and movements, including utilizing women's funds as re-granters. INGOs must challenge their existing models of partnership and move towards a more meaningful and equal model of working with WROs and movements. Furthermore, the women's movement must come together to have strategic conversations on funding and ensure that the voices of all in the movement are heard.

The event served as a clarion call for essential interventions to enable the global women's movement to remain relevant, impactful, and sustainable. Global Fund for Women, Womankind and CARE would like to thank all those who participated in the event and we hope these cross-sector conversations can be continued.

**For more information about the event or any issues raised in this briefing, please contact:**

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### Annex 1: Event Agenda

Date/Time: March 15, 10am-1pm

Location: Foundation for a Just Society, New York

- Opening remarks and context setting - Abigail Burgesson - African Women's Development Fund
- Moderated panel
  - Moderator - Dr. Musimbi Kanyoro - Global Fund for Women
  - Panelists - Violet Shivutse (Coordinator, Shibuye Community Health Workers), Dr. Abiola Akiyode-Afolabi (Executive Director, WARDC), Eunice Musiime (Executive Director, Akina Mama wa Afrika), Tanya Ghani (Grants Manager, UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women) and Josee Ntabahungu (Manager, Women's Empowerment Program r, CARE Burundi).
- Break
- Break-out group discussions
  - Identifying key challenges in ensuring quality funding reaches women's rights organisations and discussing solutions to these challenges.
- Reconvene and share out in plenary
- Closing remarks – Ndana Bofu-Tawamba (Urgent Action Fund Africa)

### Annex 2: List of participants and organization

A. Oleateru Ologbegi - WOCON  
Dr Abiola Akiyode-Afolabi - WARDC  
Abigal Burgesson - African Women's Development Fund  
Aisha Rahamatali - CARE International  
Alison Preston - Anglican Overseas Aid  
Aqsa Khan - CARE International in Pakistan  
Babatunde Jilce  
Bethan Cansfield - Womankind  
Catherine Nyambura - Dandehon Kenya/FEMNET  
Christiana Olechulue - Inwelle Study & Research Center  
Christina Wegs - CARE USA  
Connie Nawango  
Dorcas Iorlhusa - Gender and Community Empowerment Initiative (GECOME)  
Doris Bartel - CARE USA  
Elisabeth N. Jeiyol



Eunice Musiime - Akina Mama wa Africa  
Eva Kolodner - Global Fund for Women  
Fanes Tmlkan - Groots International  
Fiona Jarden - CARE International  
Gemma Wood - UN Women  
Graciela Coy - Fundacion Guatemala / Huainrow  
Haycke Rodrigues - Cooperativa las Bruma  
Helen Kezie-Nwoha - Isis-Wicce  
Homa Mungapen - African Women's Development and Communications Network (FEMNET)  
Jade Maina - Trust for Indigenous Culture and Health (TICAH)  
Jessica Horn - AWDF  
Johnbull Omowumi - Solar Sister Nigeria  
Josee Ntabahungu - CARE Burundi  
Joy Arichas Ijuwo  
Joy Emone - Inwelle Study & Research Center  
Julie Freeman  
Juliet Were- Isis-WICCE  
Junemarie Justus - GFW  
Kathleen Hunt - CARE International  
Laura Taylor - CARE International  
Lotte Ten Hoove - CARE Netherlands  
Lyabo Bashir  
Maite Rodenging Blanderri - Fundacion Guatemala / Huainrow  
Margaret Acka  
Maria Jose - Zonta International  
Mary Pat Brennan - Presbyterian Church USA  
Maya Crawford - MADRE  
Milkah Kihunah - CARE USA  
Mirjam Krijnen - Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Netherlands  
Mmadubuko Philipa - Inwelle Study & Research Center  
Morenike Omaiboje - WOCON  
Muadi Mukenge - Global Fund for Women  
Musimbi Kanyoro - Global Fund for Women  
Naiwanga Resty - ATHENA / UN YPA  
Ndana Tawamba - Urgent Action Fund - Africa  
Ocakian Ocaizen Ocagblcy - WOCON  
Olasimbo Sojinrin - Solar Sister Nigeria  
Olukunle Adegun - WOCON  
PeiYao Chen - Global Fund for Women  
Rulti Serech Icu - Fundacion Guatemala / Huainrow  
Sandy Schilen - Groots International  
Sharon Kathryn D'Agostino - Say It Forward  
Tanya Ghani - UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women, UN Women



Teresia Ojieno - ATHENA  
Teresia Otieno - ATHENA Network  
Vesna Jaric - UN Trust Fund on VAWG  
Violet Shivutse - Shibuye Community Health Workers  
Welson Olucemi  
Yasling Haysin Rodrigues  
Yvette Kathurima  
Zennou Fatma - CARE International in Niger