



**PREVENTION
COLLABORATIVE**
feminist inspired | evidence driven



TALKING MONEY:

Conversations on Funding the Prevention of
Violence against Women and Girls

FOREWORD

The Prevention Collaborative is excited to launch its **Investing Wisely** *Talking Money Conversations*. As part of this initiative, we are talking to various stakeholders in the violence against women and girls (VAWG) prevention ecosystem. We launched the *Talking Money Conversations* to create a platform to unpack and think about the challenges that impact how funding is deployed from Global North funding agencies to the Global South. We are gathering information on the impact of existing donor policies, procedures and practices on funding amounts, timeframes and flexibility.

In this series of conversations, we think about **how power relations amongst stakeholders affect programme design and who gets to participate in setting agendas and priorities**. We explore **how implementation and reporting requirements shape programme implementation, agility and sustainability**. Additionally, we reflect on **the political and institutional forces that affect how bilateral and multilateral donors fund violence prevention**.

Our aim is to generate discussion about innovative and creative ways to address the challenges that organisations experience in implementing effective violence prevention. We want to think about how to mitigate unintended harm that can potentially be caused by funding approaches that detract from effective violence prevention —such as wanting to reach as many communities as possible without taking the time to consult, adapt programme models to fit local contexts and ensure they are properly piloted.

Importantly, we want to shine a light on funders who are consciously working to subvert traditional ways of funding, receptive to the needs of their funded partners and working to transform funding practices to equalise the inherent power dynamics at play.

We kick off the series of conversations by talking to feminist funders. We spoke to Nadia Ahidjo, the Director of Partnerships and Philanthropy at the African Women's Development Fund, who shares her insights on how funders centre movements in partnerships to resource gender justice. Timiebi Souza-Okpofabri, the Programmes and Grantmaking Coordinator at the Black Feminist Fund, tells us why it is critical to shift power and trust feminist movements. And lastly, Beth Woroniuk, the former Vice President of Policy at the Equality Fund. All the interviews are invigorating and rich in food

for thought. The three participants and the organisations they represent foreground their approach to funding by centring deep listening exercises with feminist movements and women's rights organisations. They are reflexive in their efforts to consistently examine the underlying power dynamics at play and how they 'show up' in their relationships with grantees in ways that anchor feminist values.

We have also developed a [survey](#) to help us understand the experiences and practices that practitioners face when implementing funded projects on the prevention of violence against women and children. We will be using the findings to advocate with funders for more and better policies and processes to enable effective, innovative and equitable violence prevention programming. We encourage you to complete the survey, and we look forward to sharing the results of the [survey](#) and more findings from the initiative with you.



NADIA AHIDJO

Director of Partnerships and Philanthropy
African Women's Development Fund

Joy Watson talks to Nadia Ahidjo at the African Women's Development Fund about grant-making from the heart.

Joy: Nadia, thank you for chatting with me today. As part of the Investing Wisely initiative, I previously mentioned that we are interested in tracking models of best funding practices. We are looking at situations where funders have gotten it right to fund in ways that subvert traditional approaches to funding and break down the power relationships with grant recipients. To start, can you tell me a bit about the work of the African Women's Development Fund (AWDF)?

Nadia: Yes, of course. Thank you for talking with me, Joy. The AWDF is a feminist fund that has existed since 2000. Three amazing African feminists realised that no money was coming to women's rights organisations (WROs) on the African continent. So, they constituted a fund that would be able to directly resource WROs. I think the value-add of AWDF as a feminist fund, as with other Global South feminist funds, is that we focus on more than just the money. We see resourcing as both a financial and a political tool.

For this reason, we invest in knowledge, solidarity, and care for our movements. We also invest in the agency and resilience of organisations. The AWDF is at an exciting point in time because we just launched a new ten-year strategic framework, which really revisits how we think about our ecosystems on the African continent.

I want to highlight that we no longer resource around themes. In the past, we used to work on themes such as body health and rights - which is where the bulk of our portfolio around violence against women and girls sat. We also had a portfolio on women's political leadership and another one on economic empowerment. Our new way of thinking is that people do not live single-issue lives, and there is no reason why our funding should focus on one specific issue that is boxed into a theme. We decided to fund strategic priorities and have chosen to focus on '*Resourcing, Knowledge and Voice*', '*Agency and Resilience*' (where we support organisations to learn different skills such as financial management and the nitty gritty of capacity support - for lack of a better word), '*Solidarity and Care*', and '*Impact and Listening*'.

We also have a pillar focusing on strategic influencing of the philanthropic system. ***We see ourselves as being part of a movement and so we work with others to think differently about how we best resource WROs on the continent.*** I think that I will stop here to hear from you - what are some of the specifics that you would like to learn more about?

Joy: I am so excited by what you are saying, particularly the bit about building philanthropic

movements. Before we go on, could you explain what you mean by that? How are you thinking about the system of funding disbursement within the context of skewed power relations, within the broadness of this concept?

Nadia: The AWDF sits in various consortiums - with other sister organisations, such as the Leading From the South Consortium. We are also a Prospera International Network of Women's Funds member. In these spaces, we see that the work of resourcing movements globally cannot be limited to one fund or organisation or one way of doing things. It's important for philanthropic entities within the ecosystem, whether you are a feminist or any other kind of fund to network, understand the ecosystem together, listen to movements and to be in service of movements. In the development of our ten-year strategy, we spent almost a year in what we called a 'Listening to Movements' exercise where we surveyed various grantee partners, but also other partners in our ecosystem with whom we did not have a financial relationship. We also had a steering committee of African feminists who called us to order when we were doing things not aligned with African feminist values. I think we learned so much about what needs to be done differently to centre movements. These are some of the things that we want to share with others.

Joy: So Nadia, the Investing Wisely initiative is specifically trying to look at how funding is deployed - largely from the Global North to the Global South - and how the power relationships

between funders and grant recipients impact programme design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, amongst others. *We are trying to understand - what are the things that limit better programming and what are the things that enable better ways of programming?* In your experience, what would you say are the key challenges in the funding ecosystem that inhibit effective VAWG prevention?

Nadia: There are so many. I think the first one I will start with is funding is often for the short term. People get funding for a project for a year, maybe two years. If you're lucky, you get three-year funding. Essentially, we are trying to solve a complex issue with a project timeframe that is not realistic in any way, shape or form. That's the first thing. I think the other issue is funds are often not in service of movements in the way they should be. We find organisations or individual entities trying to align their programming or work with the funder's strategy or priorities. ***We don't see funders saying, 'Look, you work on VAWG in this specific context. How can the finances be used to resource you in the way you need?'*** In the listening exercise we did leading up to the development of our strategy, and even through our Kasa!¹ programming, many of our partners tell us, 'Just give us long-term funding. Don't restrict it, make it flexible.'

¹ Kasa grants are for organisations working on sexual violence in Ghana, Nigeria and Senegal.



In funding prevention work, many dynamics tend to come to the fore in the relationships between funders and movements. When that dynamic is in the middle of the relationship, then effective programming cannot work because you have the people with the money making the decisions and those who receive the money trying to align with this. So organisations are trying to fit people's lives into resource frameworks, and the issues are way more complex.

We are talking about people's lives. These are some of the things that have come up in our conversations with our partners and some of the things we are learning.

Joy: Nadia, just as a matter of interest, could you explain, on average, how long your grants are? As you have mentioned, it is certainly a challenge to effectively ensure that longer-term social transformation comes with fitting goals into a very tight funding period. What is the average duration of your grants, and what is the average grant size?

Nadia: This is a difficult question to answer because the size, the length, etc, depends on multiple factors, including the criteria of our funders. At the AWDF, we have some funders who are flexible, but we also have some who aren't, so it's always a tight balance of having to navigate through this. Increasingly, we are trying to give two or three-year grants as much as we can, but

we are not able to do it with every single grantee partner for a number of reasons. We rarely ever give grants of less than a year unless they are short-term travel grants.

In terms of the range, we don't have an average range. We fund organisations of all sizes, so we've funded folks to the tune of \$1,000,000 and others about \$500,000. So, it depends on the grantee partner's context and the issue they are working on. During COVID-19, we piloted an amazing initiative that gave every grantee partner \$5000 as flexible, unrestricted funding they did not have to report on. For us, it was a crisis situation, and we had to support organisations to meet the pressures they were facing. Sometimes, we get requests in emergency contexts - folks need to be evacuated, or there has been a climate crisis - so we really try to adapt to our grantee partners' needs and capacities. But we also have to manage the tension that we have with our own funders, who don't give us flexible, unrestricted funding, yet, they still expect us to fund in a feminist way. I hope that this answers your question.

Joy: It absolutely does. I am also thinking that you are working on the African continent where there is a legacy of colonialism and extraction and we're talking about aid and resource flows within the context of significant power dynamics. When we think about how money flows, what the priorities are, the political dynamics in a country that can affect what is a priority or not - what do you think - specifically in relation to the African

continent, what do you think are the socio-political trends that impact where the money goes and what the priorities are?

Nadia: That's a hard question and there isn't one answer to it, but there are some things that we are seeing. Number one is global trends impact our trends. For example, we see the rollback in what is happening in countries like the US and some European countries around reproductive rights, as well as other kinds of rights - this directly influences the continent, which results in a situation where some of the funding folks used to receive has been halted. We see countries and policymakers tightening up our spaces, restricting our funding, and restricting when or how we can receive funding for big and small organisations. Also, racism is, at times, an underlying factor.

Most Global North funders trust Global North entities to resource in Global South contexts.

To be trusted as a Global South funder - whether as a funder who has existed for 24 years or four years, the extended level of trust is not always the same.

Global South feminist funds have mobilised in the past to shift the needle. ***I want to highlight the 'Leading from the South Consortium,' where the Dutch government took a bold step with its feminist foreign policy - saying that they are going to fund feminist funds from the Global South directly, and it's working well.*** Another thing we shy away from is feminist funds and women's funds tend to speak the language of gender justice and gender

equality and feminist issues that are very well understood in certain circles but not in others. So, there is a lot of work to do in meeting people where they are and speaking a language that enables people to understand how patriarchy hurts everyone. At the AWDF, what we try to do is to really prioritise community engagement and participation in what we fund. We try to engage in culturally sensitive advocacy and look at how we're looking at the unique challenges that communities face before determining how best to resource them.

Joy: We have, in fact, designed a **survey** that targets both funders and grant recipients to ask about the challenges they experience in funding practices and to what extent this affects whether VAWG prevention programmes are successful or not. Some of the issues you have raised have already emerged as significant. One example is the adaptation of VAWG programmes when there is no proper consultation with communities and funders not being in touch with their needs. The issue you raised on flexible and core funding is also an issue that has emerged. What I wanted to check in with you is - how does the AWDF try to be innovative, feminist and different in the way that it funds?

Nadia: One thing that we always try to do is to leverage existing networks and collaborate with local organisations. We would never go into a context and start something new. We would rather go and establish who are the people and organisations that are working there. Outreach

and relationship building are really central to our work. We do have more formal calls for proposals, which we launch on our website. Still, they are accompanied by a prior engagement within a community and with existing networks and organisations already doing work. I think the other thing is that, as much as possible, we try to centre the African Women's Charter in how we show up in spaces. For us, it is very important to be aware of the power dynamics to ensure that we have contextual and respectful connections with WROs and movements.



Another thing is that we do our best to celebrate the wins with communities. For example, there were a number of policy wins on the African continent, especially in the early 2000s. We have documented these with partners and developed guides a few years ago, especially for organisations working in VAWG. With our **KASA!** initiative, one thing we are trying to do is to align our grant-making with advocacy. So we invest

in supporting our partners to do advocacy in communities.

Joy: Nadia, I had the pleasure of hearing about the KASA! funding before, but can you quickly explain what it is?

Nadia: Sure. So the Ford Foundation in West Africa, the Open Society offices in West Africa, and AWDF set up a pooled fund to fight sexual violence in three West African countries: Nigeria, Senegal, and Ghana. AWDF holds the funds for funding WROs. The initiative has been running for about two years, and we're seeing a strong impact. We're hoping to extend Kasa! to other countries on the continent.

Joy: You know, Nadia, I've been thinking about the fact that as I talk to you - you are reflexive in how you try to look back at yourself as a funder in terms of how you show up in spaces, what the power dynamics are between you and those you fund and because of that - there are all these innovations. The Equality Fund also talked to me about how they sometimes accept NGO reports via WhatsApp - that they're open to different forms of reporting - such as including videos, not just written narratives. But what I sometimes hear is that it is not quite possible to replicate these innovations with bilaterals because their money is public money, and they have to be more accountable. So, how do we get our heads around thinking that there have to be accountability measures for spending public money, but at the same time, how do we dare to

dream about ways of bilateral funding that might look a bit different?

Nadia: I think that we are so scared of bilateral funders that we stop seeing them as people. We see the machinery instead of the programme officers with whom we are building relationships who can move the needle on an issue. Removing that lens of the bureaucracy and the machinery and focusing on the relationships is something that has helped us. We have the Leading from the South Consortium funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (DMFA) and now in phase two of the consortium. In the relationship with the DMFA, we have been able to shift the needle so much - for example, in how we think about impact and what is important for the staff at the DMFA to report on. In this relationship, we do not think about how we will do away with all the checks and balances that come with funding because governments are a system, a machinery - it's way beyond our power to change this - they are accountable to their taxpayers. ***What we can shift is how people working within the machinery think about working with women's funds, feminist funds, Global South organisations and then carry our advocacy internally with those who have the power to change things.*** This approach, working with bilateral partners, has worked well in the sense that we acknowledge where the blockages are, and then we are able to work together and try to find a way of moving forward. You end up being successful in some instances but not in others. But when you are thinking about

systemic change, it's a long-term game, and the relationship building is central to that. At the end of the day, those who work in bilateral agencies do not necessarily believe in the same issues as you. They might trust you because you're in a partnership with them, but they are also challenged by the internal machinery they have to contend with and sometimes fight with on behalf of their grantee partners.

Joy: This is a very useful way of thinking about systems change - that it is a longer-term vision and the wheels of that kind of change often grind very slowly, and therefore important to find allies. Before we close off Nadia, I was also thinking at the very outset of our conversation, you talked about and used the words 'building resilience.' A particular challenge that I have recently heard from WROs in Kenya - they talked about the growth of NGOs in the Global South. As organisations grow, they need funding to sustain that growth. Often, funders focus on funding programmatic work and not on factoring in the organisational development that has to happen alongside that enhanced programme growth. Funders generally do not want to fund the organisational development component. Usually, funders want to fund a small percentage of project management costs, usually around seven to ten per cent. The problem is that WROs are saying, realistically, project management costs are more at around 20 per cent of the project costs, a component that is underfunded. Tell me about the context in which you were talking about resilience - was it in relationship to any of this?

What are your thoughts?

Nadia: AWDF has what we call an 'accompaniment' to our partners, which means we provide 'capacity strengthening', for lack of a better word, for all our funded partners. With every agreement we have, there is always a significant budget line for capacity support so that we are able to provide different types of training to our grantee partners, depending on where they are in their growth journey as individuals or as organisations - so it can go to resource mobilisation, to governance - it depends. We offer a few of these in a year, and we bring different partners together - so it's also an opportunity for organisations whose paths have not crossed to network and learn from each other - to talk about the challenges they face and their growth as leaders. We've just concluded a very exciting two-year programme that Comic Relief funded through the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). The programme was to invest in the leadership of WROs on the African continent. It was fascinating because they had a coach to accompany them in their leadership journey over two years and we also had a series of training for the organisations and their staff. So, being deliberate about capacity building is at the core of what we do. One of our co-founders, Bisi Fayemi, says that AWDF always does grant-making from the heart, which is not just the money but all the other things organisations and individuals need to thrive to be resilient in the face of crises. With our new strategy, we are even more deliberate about it.

Joy: Nadia, it has been invigorating talking to you, and I wish many more Nadias and like-minded thinkers emerged in the next while. In closing, let us move from the organisation to the individual. What is the single biggest thing that you want to do in your role at the AWDF in 2024?

Nadia: Look at you ending with a hard question! You should have made a note of this at the beginning and said, 'by the way, I'm going to ask you this question.'

Joy: I'm sure that whatever you say is going to be brilliant!

Nadia: I want to be big, but I am just going to be realistic. 2024 is almost the second year of our new strategy, and I am just excited to see how we pivot our approaches, continue to centre our movements and do our work whilst staying accountable to the funders who have been with us on this journey. I'm excited about the opportunities. The **African Feminist Charter** has its 20th birthday coming up in 2026 so we also have something to celebrate. We have things planned in terms of reviving the African Feminist Charter and some other feminist forums. These are the things that I am excited about that are in the works.

Joy: I want to wish you all the best for the incredible work that you do. Thank you for talking to me, Nadia.



TIMIEBI SOUZA- OKPOFABRI

Programmes and Grantmaking Coordinator
Black Feminist Fund

Joy Watson talks to Timiebi Souza-Okpofabri at the Black Feminist Fund about flexible, core and long-term funding necessary to support sustained feminist resistance.

Joy: Timiebi, I am so excited to hear the views of the Black Feminist Fund on how to fund effective violence against women and girls (VAWG) prevention. But I am also excited to hear from you specifically, given that I really enjoyed your insights on a recent Coalition of Feminists For Social Change (COFEM) member hub call. As mentioned to you before, I love the fact that in addition to all the amazing work that you do, you're also a DJ! Can you start by telling me a bit about yourself?

Timiebi: My name is Timiebi Souza-Okpofabri and I am a queer Nigerian-Trinidadian researcher, writer, archivist and DJ. I'm from Trinidad and Tobago in the Southern Caribbean, where I've worked as a research consultant for a number of years. At the Black Feminist Fund, I support our grantmaking. In this role, I've had the honour and privilege to work with and learn from Black feminists around the globe who are doing powerful, transformative, and intersectional work to build new worlds that are affirming of Black women and gender-expansive people and promise a future that is safe and equitable for all.

Joy: In light of the wars happening in the world at the moment, we definitely do need to build new worlds. At the Prevention Collaborative, we are working to establish what supports and

undermines the effectiveness of violence against women and girls (VAWG) prevention programmes in relation to funding practices. Can you tell me what you think are some of the key challenges in terms of funding practices, particularly in relation to how money flows from the Global North to Global South organisations with inherently skewed power dynamics?

Timiebi: Throughout history, communities in the Global South have had to shoulder the burden of the impact of systems of exploitation and extraction created by actors in the Global North while receiving the least amount of resources to address the harms caused by these systems.

Despite their role to drive positive change in social movements around the world, community-led organisations in the Global South are met with a lack of trust to manage funding. This lack of trust shows how and where funding intended for work in the Global South flows and contributes directly to the severe under-resourcing of organisations in the communities where funding is most needed. For

example, ***Where is the Money for Black Feminist Movements*** found that only 33 per cent of human rights funding went ***directly*** to organisations based in Africa, with just 8 per cent of this as flexible funding. In the Caribbean, only

18 per cent went directly to organisations, with 2 per cent being flexible funding.

The trust gap is upheld by several barriers to accessing funding, such as citizenship status, registration status, and an organisation's age, visibility and language. Cynthia Eyakuze of the Equality Fund says it best in her chapter **Through The Philanthropic Lens:**

"There are many ways that biases show up and are experienced in funding, from perceptions about capacity and risk, to opaque processes, to accessibility of funders and funding opportunities, funder proximity to certain organisations coupled with distance from marginalised contexts and communities, and burdensome application and reporting requirements. We must be clear that these barriers are not essential technical barriers for due diligence, but rather systemic barriers rooted in white supremacy that come from the 'civilising' and 'charity' roots of development and philanthropy."

In addition to these barriers, the scarcity of available intersectional funding for community-led feminist organisations adds pressure to fit work into a box to conform to scopes and themes defined by funders. Most Black feminist groups, for example, work across multiple issues, but the funding available is often siloed by issue or population, which makes it harder to access funding. Added to this, not much funding is available to support collective care, rest, recovery and security for individual activists and groups, contributing to a risk of isolation, burnout and illness among activists and leaders. Project-specific funding poses significant obstacles for

community-led feminist organisations at this time of heightened attacks on feminist agendas. Flexible, core and long-term funding is necessary to support sustained feminist resistance.

Joy: I hear you. The need for core, flexible and long-term funding has come up in all the conversations that I have had. It's particularly necessary in the context of the history of colonialism and systematic extraction from the African continent. So the fact that you're saying an estimated 8 per cent of core funding went to organisations in Africa is an indictment. Tell me how the Black Feminist Fund has been working to address funding challenges for VAWG.

Timiebi: **Our research** found that 53 per cent of Black feminist groups do not have funds available for the next fiscal year. At the Black Feminist Fund, we want to contribute to changing this reality through grantmaking and philanthropic advocacy. We provide eight-year core, flexible grants to Black feminist-led and serving organisations in Africa, the Middle East, the Caribbean, South and Central America, North America and Europe because we believe in the strategies and wisdom of Black feminist movements and trust that Black feminist organisations know best how to respond in their own contexts, as well as when and how to pivot their work to create lasting change. *Sustained investment is necessary for this transformative work in the long run.*

Through the Solidarity Fund, we provide funding for Black feminists working to strengthen relationships, collaboration and solidarity with

other movements. We believe in the power of networks and collective action. Decisions on who receives the funding are made by the Black Feminist **Grant Review Committee**, a participatory grantmaking decision-making body made up of Black feminist activists from multiple generations, geographies and movements. They support the Black Feminist Fund's efforts to continue to improve and strengthen the participatory nature of our grantmaking. Through our philanthropic advocacy, we are committed to challenging traditional philanthropic practices and mobilising leaders across the



sector to move more resources to Black feminist movements. This means coming together to strategise when we see that in the face of crises, funds are not flowing towards Black feminist movements. The **Black Feminists in Philanthropy (BFiP)** network is building a transnational base of Black women and gender-expansive people in philanthropy to serve better and resource Black feminist movements like we

want them to win.

Joy: I have such respect for this work. It seems obvious why there is a need for a Black Feminist Fund - but for those who may not necessarily appreciate the value-add, tell us why there is a need.

Timiebi: Black feminist movements play a crucial role in driving lasting change that positively transforms societies for all. However, despite their work on the frontlines of resistance, Black feminist movements continue to be disproportionately underfunded. This disparity is particularly pronounced for Black feminists who experience intersecting forms of oppression—such as Black trans women and gender-expansive people, Black feminists with disabilities, Black feminists who are economically disadvantaged, Black sex workers and those living in rural areas—and so is the risk of violence that comes with engaging in this work. In addition to barriers to accessing the little funding that does exist, there is a lack of core, flexible, long-term funding that integrates collective care and the well-being of Black feminist activists. The Black Feminist Fund exists to increase the resources available to Black feminist movements significantly and offer a space for Black feminist organisations and funders across the world to build relationships with one another, exchange strategies and brainstorm solutions in the face of heightened attacks on Black feminists and Black feminist agendas.

Joy: I love that you frame the work of Black

feminist movements as contributing to lasting societal change that benefits everybody - because this is the case. It's the same argument for those who are working towards eradicating violence against women and children - this work benefits everyone - communities, societies, and the world in general. I have been hearing from others with whom I have talked that socio-political trends greatly influence funding priorities - that over the course of the next few years, in light of shifting priorities, we are likely to see less funding for VAWG prevention and response. What do you think are the socio-political trends that determine what are funding priorities and what are not?

Timiebi: In times of visible crisis, those working at the frontlines of resistance and the emergency response are often disproportionately impacted by violence and most overlooked by mainstream responses, be they humanitarian or otherwise. In recent years, we have seen funders voicing solidarity with Black social movements and pledging to bolster funding to Black feminist causes. However, as noted by Cynthia Eyakuze in **[Through The Philanthropic Lens](#)**, 'philanthropy is fickle and can often be more interested in funding an issue when there is visibility around violence, rather than consistently supporting transformation.' As Tynesha McHarris of the Black Feminist Fund puts it, 'Funders are often mobilised around Black death, but less interested in funding Black life.' Funding in these moments of heightened visibility tends to increase but then subsides, and this funding is often project-specific and focused nationally. Changes in government policies and international agendas related to gender equality and human

rights also influence funding priorities, directing resources toward initiatives aligned with these policy objectives.

Joy: What you're saying about increasing funding when there is visibility around violence resonates. This goes beyond funding approaches - even as a society, we are more conditioned to react to brutal and visible manifestations of violence. This is often what drives what the media picks up on in relation to stories pertaining to violence against women and children - it's the approach of 'If it bleeds, it leads.' When, in fact, it's the less brutal, everyday acts of violence that create a social order in which more brutal manifestations of violence can thrive. It's also a tragedy that we mobilise more around Black deaths than Black lives. Timiebi, tell me what you would like to see in terms of different, innovative and more equitable ways of funding.

Timiebi: Philanthropy has been slow to meet community-led feminist movements where they are in their advocacy and action towards a safe and equitable future. As funders, we must examine the ways in which power asymmetries in philanthropy reinforce racism, sexism, classism, ableism, colourism, transphobia and homophobia, among other biases and question the funding practices in our own organisations that may be creating harm and deepening existing inequalities.



It is important to ask ourselves, for example, what are some of the rules that are not needed for due diligence that are creating obstacles for feminist movements and making it harder for them to do their work? It also means being receptive to feedback from movement partners, holding ourselves and other funders accountable, and taking the initiative to address funding gaps and harmful philanthropic practices that perpetuate inequality.

We also need to shift how we think about what is considered important to resource. When and how to distribute funding should be decided by the activists on the ground who know best what action is needed in their communities. It is necessary to listen to the needs of movements and establish more participatory funding practices that allow activists and communities to direct funding. We need to provide long-term, core, flexible grants that give groups the flexibility to develop and sustain their work over time. Resourcing safety, protection, rest, and care for activists is essential to sustaining movements. Adopting flexible funding mechanisms also allows for quicker responsiveness to the diverse needs and contexts of feminist movements, enabling tailored support rather than a one-size-fits-all approach. We need to approach funding practices with an intersectional lens to ensure that funding initiatives are inclusive and responsive to movement needs. We have to explicitly name and prioritise communities of colour in funding calls and commitments and disaggregate giving by race and gender to get a more accurate picture of funding gaps. We also need to build on the

power of funder co-strategising and collaborating to meet movement needs and catalyse change in the broader philanthropic sector. Lastly, we need to support community-led movements for economic and reparative justice and explore ways in which philanthropy can be used as a tool to shift resources away from systems of exploitation, extraction and harm towards economic models that sustain the growth of just and equitable worlds.

Joy: I so agree with you on the bottom-up approach to funding - that we need to centre community needs and participation in developing and adapting violence prevention models. Doing so through an intersectional lens is pivotal. It is so important to think about how funding practices might be causing harm and how to disperse the rules that are not actually needed for due diligence. In responding to what you have said, it has struck me that the only way we can ensure that funding practice is transformed is if we can learn from models of best practice. But, importantly, we also need to be able to have honest and open conversations about where we have failed to get it right - so that we are able to learn from this. Timiebi, you have given me so much to think about - your words hold so much power for me in taking this work forward.



BETH WORONIUK

Former Vice President of Policy
Equality Fund

Joy Watson interviews Beth Woroniuk, Former Vice President, Policy at the Equality Fund, about the Equality Fund's approach to funding and its impact on violence prevention programming.

Joy: It's so great to have this opportunity to talk about the Equality Fund. As part of the Investing Wisely initiative, we are interested in documenting best funding practices and looking at ways of funding where the power dynamics between a funder and grant recipient are put under an analytic lens. We are thinking about creating more equitable relationships when money flows from the Global North to the Global South and how funding is disbursed and how it impacts violence prevention programming. We are also keen to hear from you about your approach to working with your partners. Can we start with you telling me a bit more about the Equality Fund?

Beth: Yes, sure. The **Equality Fund** is only about four years old. It was started in 2019 with 300 million Canadian dollars from Global Affairs Canada. From the outset, we decided to incorporate feminist values into our approach, with the goal of engaging in transformative funding practices that support women's rights and gender justice organisations. Our approach is to centre the power dynamics between funders and grant recipients. As part of this commitment, we've documented our approach in our **'Principles for Feminist Funding'**, an evolving set of principles for feminist philanthropists and funders.

IN DETAIL

In 2023, the Equality Fund

- ▶ Allocated 21.2 million CAD in grants to feminist movements across the globe.
 - ▶ Increased its grantmaking by 134% over the previous year.
 - ▶ SupportED 95 women's rights organizations and funds (with the ongoing grantmaking in the Activate stream supporting an addition 501 organisations).
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When we started, we had a series of consultations with feminist activists in different parts of the world, asking what they would like to see in good funding practices. One of the key messages that emerged was, *"Please don't use thematic funding as an approach."* This came up in all our conversations. The ecosystem is so underfunded. Everyone needs resources - so rather than try to sort through different themes such as violence against women and girls (VAWG), gender and climate justice, gender and disability rights - all of which are important - we decided not to use thematic approaches. Our only exception to this is the funding that we disperse under our 'Prepare, Respond and Care' stream, which focuses on feminist responses to crises, including but not limited to natural disasters and situations of armed conflict.

Joy: The Equality Fund receives both bilateral and philanthropic funding, and your model is to generate additional income for feminist movements and women's rights organisations (WROs) through gender-lens investing. I know you try to approach this in ways that address structural inequalities and ensure profits do not solely drive investment choices—that you seek an ethical approach to funding. Can you tell me a bit more?

Beth: We have an Investment Advisory Council comprised of investment advisers, feminist economists, and feminist activists. It was set up to guide investments and inform the development of an investment-related advocacy strategy.

Generally, there are **two elements**. First, there is the potential to generate returns on investment that can be used to resource WROs and feminist movements. We are also engaged in extensive consultations with stakeholders on how to approach **gender-lens investing** in ways that address structural inequalities and ensure that profits do not solely drive investment choices. The Equality Fund's vision is to mobilise capital for feminist social transformation in ethical ways.

Joy: Currently, you have four streams of funding. Can you talk to me a bit about what the funding priorities for each of those streams are?

Beth: The first stream, '*Catalyse*', provides support to WROs and feminist movements with flexible grants through core support. Equality

Fund staff do not make the decisions here. The Global Advisory Panel makes the decisions. We use a two-step application process, hopefully minimising the time spent on proposal preparation.

The second stream, '**Activate**', is for feminist and women's funds. We really believe in strengthening the whole ecosystem of feminist funders. We recognise that there are funds that do certain things better than we can. For example, rather than setting up our own rapid response fund, we work with Urgent Action Funds and support their work with core funding.

Our third stream, '*Connect*', is still partly in the design stage. During our initial consultations, the feedback was there is a need for a funding stream to support networks and coalitions, particularly for getting together to develop strategy. Very few funders provide support for ongoing meetings and networking opportunities. We recognise that to build networks, there is a need for ongoing get-togethers of feminist movement and stakeholders.

Our fourth stream, '*Prepare, Respond and Care*,' focuses on supporting feminist responses to crises. Emphasis is placed on self and collective care for those in crisis situations. One of the things that emerged in our consultations is the absolute centrality of collective care for activists as they are trying to deal with multiple crises. For example, we have done some grant-making under this stream and supported organisations

responding to the crises in both Ukraine and Sudan. We have a strong commitment to also fund crises that do not receive much media focus.

Joy: In our conversations with grant recipients, one of the biggest challenges experienced by those doing VAWG prevention work is the lack of core and longer-term funding. The Sexual Violence Research Initiatives's study on tracking funding flows to research on violence against women also showed that grants are approximately one to three years in duration on average. What is the average duration of your grants?

Beth: We are still working through a process of trying to ensure that we can provide longer-term grants. We would like to be able to provide grants over five to eight years, but we are not quite there yet, given the restrictions on where our money comes from.



I should mention that in making decisions about resourcing women's funds, we use a **community-informed process**. So, instead of asking for applications, the women's funds sit together and decide on criteria for accessing funds. With this process, women's funds either step up or step back. The response is basically, 'We all need resources. But some need the money more than we do at this particular moment.' So, for example, one fund had already received funding from the Government of Canada and therefore decided to 'step back.' In the end, there were enough resources to provide significant grants to all those who had 'stepped up.' The great thing about this process is that there is no funding application, no competitive process, and no one spends three days writing a proposal that does not get funded.

Joy: In our consultations on the challenges experienced by grant recipients, many organisations talked about how cumbersome donor administrative processes can be. Firstly, even in terms of accessing funds - there are many instances where the application process is so technical that many smaller organisations are unable to apply. This is also the case when applications are in English, and many organisations in the Global South who are not proficient are disadvantaged from the outset. But we also heard about how onerous donor administrative requirements can be. Often, the work required for writing reports takes up a chunk of time disproportionate to the actual implementation of a programme. Can you tell me a bit about your administrative requirements?

Beth: We have been having great conversations with our finance team about how to make administrative processes less complex. ***We have been thinking about how to do ‘feminist financial audits.’ What we mean by this is that we want to move away from a ‘gotcha’ audit process to being supportive. We’re trying to think about how we can best manage money with the least amount of burden to our grant recipients.***

Currently, we use a ‘sampling’ approach for more detailed reporting. We ask our grant recipients to keep all their expense receipts and every year, we audit a sample number of grantees in a more detailed manner. So not everyone has to do all the onerous uploading of everything. We are trying to move our funding management systems to be more trust-based, with the occasional check-in and validation. We are also accepting reports via WhatsApp and video - to try and be more inclusive in our approach.

Joy: That’s amazing.

Beth: It’s very important to us - to make it easier for organisations, where they are not spending about one day a week filling out forms for reporting purposes. Because this is the feedback we received - funder requirements can be so cumbersome that they require a significant amount of time.

Joy: It’s so encouraging to hear that you’re consistently reflecting on this. I have heard from

grantees who talk about funding modalities and funding relationships that negatively impact how they do prevention work. Not only that, in some instances, the role and expectations of the funder can actually cause harm. In instances where this does happen, it’s very hard to document because of the inherent power dynamics between grantees and funders. It’s so important to think about how to create safe spaces to talk about this - one where it is not necessarily structured around blame? It’s a tricky one to do.

Beth: The International Women’s Development Agency did **some work** on this. They talked to a number of women’s organisations who reflect quite honestly on their relationships with funders and the damages and the challenges. It’s a very useful read.

Joy: I will definitely look for it. One of the things that I wanted to mention to you is that the Investing Wisely initiative is not only interested in the funding going to WROs and feminist movements. We are also interested in the funding flowing to development more generally - and trying to look at where there are opportunities for harnessing resources for VAWG prevention work. We’re also interested in the intersections between VAWG and more generic issues - say, for example VAWG and women’s economic empowerment.

Beth: It’s very difficult to track this. Funding flows can be difficult to follow, and more transparency is needed.



Joy: This is a very important issue to flag. Beth, as we draw our conversation to a close, I was wondering if the Equality Fund will make its funding flows transparent - in terms of, for example, uploading it to a database?

Joy: Thank you so much for your time, Beth. It's been so useful to talk with you. I really think that we need a thousand more Equality Funds!

Beth: We will be uploading to **IATI**. It will be possible to track all our funding there - we want to make it transparent.

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