



Christina grows maize and she was shown how to make compost as part of the CRAFS (Climate Resilient Agriculture and Food Systems) programme. The Presbyterian Agriculture Station, Garu (PAS-G) is Oxfam's partner in the Upper East Region of Ghana.  
PHOTO CREDIT: Nana Kofi Acquah / Oxfam

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# A LEAP OF FAITH

## CONVERSATIONS WITH FUNDERS OF WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS

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**I.G. ADVISORS**  

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IMPACT. GROWTH.



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# FOREWORDS



This report explores some of the biggest questions facing individuals and organizations working to improve the lives of women and girls. How do we know we're making a difference? How do we work together to achieve our goals? And how do we pay for this vital work?

amplify the voices of those working at the grassroots level? This cannot be an afterthought, but a central priority.

This report shows that trust is fundamental to effective partnerships. Funders must earn this from their grantees and provide opportunities for them to honestly share their experiences. In turn, funders must demonstrate trust in the expertise and experiences of their grantees, by valuing and responding responsibly to the messages they hear.

A quote from one of the interviews for this research that struck me was from the funder who recognized, '*The grantees have the power of the information that you need.*' Knowledge is certainly power, but we must also recognize the many other power imbalances that prevent this valuable insight being shared and put into practice, to the detriment of all involved.

From this report, through our wider research and our programme work with partners across the world, Oxfam is committed to the feminist principles of collaboration and co-operation. We stand alongside funders, women's organizations, activists, experts and partners committed to gender justice, and know that our role involves raising their voices, responding to their challenges and acknowledging that our work is part of a far wider landscape of change.

As a large NGO committed to gender justice, we must ask ourselves difficult questions. How is knowledge produced, and what do we regard as 'evidence'? How do we build trust and belief in the knowledge of others? How do we create spaces where knowledge can be shared, and

## **Dr Fenella Porter**

Interim Deputy Director of Women's Rights and Gender Justice, Oxfam GB



At I.G. Advisors, we play many different roles with our varied clients: consultant, critic, cheerleader. But none is more challenging and rewarding, than our role as translator. Our unique position at the nexus of donors and charities means we can witness and identify

as part of this research. If we can tackle these perceived divergences head on, we can achieve much more, more quickly, together.

points of convergence or divergence among these diverse sets of actors.

This research has some clear calls to action for our sector: we need to build a bold, powerful system of donor and charity collaboration that is on our own terms, not replicating existing patriarchal structures. We need vehicles for giving that are built on trust and inclusion. We need to help others understand how gender is a cross-cutting lens through which we can address poverty, climate change, social exclusion and the other critical challenges. And perhaps most critically, we need a definition of impact that is right for the long-term, systemic change we want to see.

However, what we often spot is not actual difference, but perceived difference: areas where the goals and needs of both donors and their grantees intersect, but for a number of reasons, get lost in translation. These misperceptions lead to missed opportunities for partnership, mismatched flows of funding, and slower progress toward the more equal and equitable world we want to see.

The urgency of moving these discussions forward now cannot be understated. We hope this research will continue the conversation about how we create a collaborative, innovative, vibrant network of donors and their grantees working with and for women and girls: no translation required.

While this challenge exists in many sectors, it was thrown into sharp relief in the conversations we had with funders of women and girls and gender justice

## **Alisha Miranda**

Chief Executive, I.G. Advisors

# 1 INTRODUCTION

This report aims to help funders and organizations working with women and girls to better understand each other, find solutions to challenges and to work more effectively towards their shared goals. It is based on 26 interviews with funders with a connection to the UK, and a one-day workshop held with 10 representatives from nine women's organizations. In addition, over the last two years, Oxfam has conducted more than 60 interviews with philanthropists, advisors and experts in philanthropy, Trustees and Grant Managers within Trusts and Foundations to better understand their funding motivations, ambitions and experiences. This research into the funders of women and girls builds on our learnings and recommendations from those previous reports,<sup>1</sup> and adds to a growing body of research on philanthropic investment on women and girls.

## Background

I.G. Advisors are a consultancy on a mission to bridge the gap between fundraisers, businesses and philanthropists. They have previously published relevant research including a 2017 report 'The State of Funding for Girls.'<sup>2</sup> As a certified B-Corp, I.G. is passionate about working with actors at the forefront of creating systemic change. Over the past two years, they have particularly focused on convening diverse actors in the philanthropic sector to better collaborate in support of women and girls.

Oxfam works with women's organizations all over the world and also receives funding for work to improve the lives of women and girls from the general public, individual philanthropists, private sector partnerships and institutional funders. This report will influence decisions about how we work with women's organizations in the future. It also tells us how the organization can best serve the sector in working towards gender justice, for example:

- Creating safe spaces for women's organizations to share their reflections and experiences, and providing a platform for these perspectives;
- Sharing expertise through open access to resources, models and case studies of effective impact measurement;
- Acknowledging the true cost of impact measurement, to establish a precedent that empowers smaller organizations to ask for the resources they need to demonstrate their own skills and insights.

## Talking the talk

In recent years, feminism has become marketable and mainstream, with slogans appearing on t-shirts from the high street<sup>3</sup> to the catwalk,<sup>4</sup> and emblazoned across a giant screen behind one of the world's biggest pop stars.<sup>5</sup>

At the same time, gender equality is increasingly permeating discussions around social change more broadly.<sup>6</sup> In research on the funding landscape for women's rights, the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) states that a significant trend is '*the presence of women and girls as a priority – at least a rhetorical one – in nearly every funding sector and in the mainstream.*'<sup>7</sup>

## Learning to walk

Despite increasing conversations on investing in women and girls, historically the sector has received a fraction as a percentage of overall funding.<sup>7</sup> For example, a report from IUPUI Women's Philanthropy Institute shows that of all gifts of \$1m or more made between 2000 and 2014, just 1.2% of these were

made to specifically benefit women and girls.<sup>8</sup> Only an estimated 23% of human rights funding from Foundations between 2011 and 2015 targeted women and girls,<sup>9</sup> and a further study from IUPUI Women's Philanthropy Institute found that an estimated 7% of all US Foundation grants specifically benefit women and girls.<sup>10</sup> However, there is evidence that investment is increasing, rising from \$224.7 million to \$1.1 billion between 1990 and 2006, a higher rate than the overall growth of Foundation giving.<sup>11</sup> Nonetheless, as the findings from this report demonstrate, it is widely acknowledged that the sector remains significantly under resourced.

## Signposts

Existing research has identified quality funding as a priority for women's organizations and paints a clear picture of what quality funding in this sector looks like. For example, consultative reports from Womankind Worldwide<sup>12</sup> and AWID<sup>7</sup> emphasize the importance of flexible, multi-year, and core funding, which grants women's organizations financial stability and an ability to concentrate on a social change agenda, which requires sustained investment.<sup>13</sup> Quality funding allows feminist movements to prioritize important activities such as: core costs, security issues, intersectionality, connection to wider platforms, communication and ICT support, self-care and well-being, research and connecting to movement actors.<sup>12</sup>

## Stumbling blocks

According to AWID research,<sup>7</sup> women's organizations are often reliant on project support rather than long-term, flexible funding. 48% of respondents to AWID's survey of 1,000 organizations had never received core funding, 52% never received multi-year funding, and they most commonly received restricted grants for service provision.<sup>7</sup> A study by IUPUI Women's Philanthropy Institute<sup>10</sup> into Foundations in the US whose funding specifically benefits women and girls showed that the vast majority of their funding (69%) is restricted to individual projects or programmes, rather than offering the flexibility of core funding.

To quote Mama Cash: *'when we make the case for "more" funding, it should be within a framework of "better" funding. Better funding helps to link actors, build joint agendas, and contribute to the infra-structure of movements.'*<sup>14</sup>

## Looking ahead

Investment in women and girls is growing: as we see the launch of new funds<sup>15</sup> dedicated to work in this area and an increasing discussion among funders around gender (in)equality, how can we maximize this momentum? Private philanthropy offers a huge opportunity to offer creative solutions to underfunded issues and to fund in more flexible ways which institutions and governments cannot.<sup>14</sup> Through conversations with Trusts, Foundations and philanthropists with a connection to the UK (either funding in or based in the UK), this report explores the funding approaches that shape investment in this area, and the challenges that may be preventing the rhetoric of support for women and girls from becoming reality.

By also consulting women's organizations, this research reveals the alignments and gaps between the priorities and perspectives of funders and grantees. It demonstrates how more open communication can build mutual trust, encourage stronger partnerships and enable more effective work to improve the lives of women and girls.

# 2 METHODOLOGY

## RESEARCH AIMS

This report is intended to be read by individuals and organizations who fund or fundraise for work that benefits women and girls. The research involved conversations with both funders and women’s organizations, to better understand their respective priorities and challenges. It represents a subset of funders with a connection to the UK – either based or funded in the UK – and is not a review of the global funding landscape.

As both a fundraiser and funder, Oxfam has a responsibility to be an effective partner to funders and an ally to women’s organizations. An essential step to improving our partnerships is to create space and opportunities to hear from the organizations and people we work with, and those working towards the same goals of gender justice across the sector. To that end, women’s organizations were consulted in the planning stages of the project, to inform the research objectives. As a result of this consultation, this project aims to:

- Clarify the priorities and challenges for funders of work for women and girls;
- Understand whether funders of work for women and girls feel a responsibility to encourage other more generalist funders to give more to this area;
- Understand how they see the role of large INGOs and small organizations;
- Understand how funders assess the impact of their grants;
- Articulate what funders need from their grantees in order to build more rewarding partnerships.

The overall purpose of this research is to encourage better conversations between funders and women’s organizations. It seeks to understand the sector better, increase dialogue, and ultimately improve partnerships, with the potential to unlock more quality funding opportunities.

## METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The findings in this report are a result of 26 qualitative interviews with funders of women and girls. Those findings were then presented in a one-day workshop to 10 representatives from nine women’s organizations in order to hear their reflections and build recommendations to funders.

REPORT PHASES	
<b>1. Planning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Research aims and methods confirmed.</li><li>• Brief consultation with three women’s organizations to shape questions as part of the research.</li><li>• Audience selection and invites.</li><li>• Snowball sampling, sample and data quality check.</li></ul>
<b>2. Data collection: interviews</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 26 in-depth, semi-structured, qualitative interviews with funders of women’s organizations lasting</li></ul>



	<p>approximately 60 minutes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interviews recorded and transcribed.</li> </ul>
<b>3. Analysis</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Desk research: review of current research.</li> <li>• Interview transcripts are coded and analysed for themes and conclusions.</li> </ul>
<b>4. Recommendation building</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sharing key findings with representatives from nine women’s organizations to listen to their reflections, highlight any mismatches and build recommendations together.</li> </ul>
<b>5. Final analysis and report writing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full report with analysis of findings and recommendations made publicly available.</li> </ul>

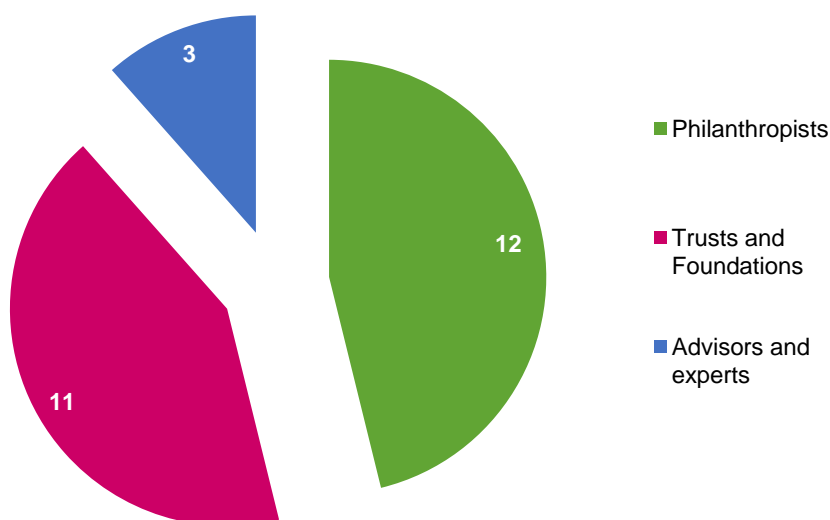
## DEFINITIONS AND SAMPLE CRITERIA

In this report, we use the terminology ‘women’s organizations’ to refer to organizations who work to advance gender equality and the rights of women and girls, have feminist objectives or represent women’s interests.

Sample criteria for inclusion in study:

- Trusts and Foundations with a specific gender programme, women and girls as a priority funding area or taking a gender lens approach to their funding.
- Experience of or expertise in funding women and girls.
- Operational in the UK, but not limited to funding in the UK: must have a presence or link to the UK.
- 5 to 6 figure individual philanthropic donation to women’s organizations, or to a programme or project that specifically benefits women and girls.
- Each interviewee was assigned a primary category: philanthropist, Trusts and Foundation or advisor / expert. Many interviewees fell into multiple categories, however, the below shows an overview of the breakdown of the sample.

**Image 1. Sample breakdown**



# 3 FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Oxfam and I.G. Advisors held semi-structured interviews with 26 funders of women’s organizations to hear first-hand their experiences, reflections and ambitions. In this section, we detail the themes that emerged in our analysis of this data. First, an overview of the funding approach taken by the sector: why, what and how they fund. Second, the key priorities and challenges for the sector from the point of view of the funders: resources, power, trusting relationships and impact.

## FUNDING APPROACH

### Why they fund

RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH	INSTRUMENTALIST APPROACH
Funding this area because women and girls should have rights; funding specifically because they are interested in this area, they believe it is the right thing to do.  <i>‘They should be supported, educated, kept safe, because they should. Just in their own right, even if they never contribute anything to the world. That’s fine.’</i>	Funding this area because it is the most efficient way to end poverty or achieve impact; has the biggest impact on the community as a whole or has a ripple effect within communities. Women are seen as agents of change and a reliable investment.  <i>‘A lot of the projects, I do end up focusing [on] still are somehow focused on women and girls but not because I’m purposely looking to fund women and girls, it’s because it’s what’s giving you the results.’</i>

Motivations for wanting to work with women and girls were split between a rights-based and instrumentalist (‘means-to-an-end’) approach. Several funders described working within both approaches simultaneously; supporting women because women deserve equal rights, while at the same time acknowledging that working with women often has an amplification effect on whole communities. While these were the two ends of the scale, we found that many people were a mixture of the two or were compelled by the instrumentalist argument even if that wasn’t their main motivation. Often people’s motivations and approach change over time the longer they fund a particular cause: as they learn more, gain more expertise and listen to the sector, they adapt their giving.

### What they fund

#### Service delivery or systems change?

Shifting behaviours, attitudes and norms is seen as integral to create long-lasting change. However, funders spoke of a need for service delivery in addition to systems change, to address immediate needs. While service delivery programming was perceived as simpler to monitor and assess in terms of its short-term success, permanently solving a problem remains a priority for funders.

Interviewees often spoke about service delivery and systems change as if it were a dichotomy, however, many funders recognized that both can occur, and are needed simultaneously, to reach their desired end goals of systemic long-term change.



*'I think we need long term solutions and short-term fixes. For example, you have a headache. Your short-term fix is to take a pain medication, maybe increase your fluid level...those are very much short term – you want to get rid of the headache right now. The bigger thing is, what's causing those headaches? Maybe you need to start looking at your work environment, maybe you have a brain tumour. So, it's what we need to look at systemically, what we can fix.'*

## How they fund

The particular need for quality funding for grassroots women's organizations is well understood by these funders. Because they felt that other funders were less likely to offer this type of support, these specialist funders spoke of a dual responsibility to both provide quality funding now and educate other funders about the benefits of this approach, to encourage them to do the same in the future.

The components of quality funding were widely agreed upon:

- Long-term
- Unrestricted
- Flexible

Interestingly, some interviewees expressed a desire to fund grassroots or smaller organizations but felt there were barriers for them doing so, for example, a perception that small organizations cannot absorb large grants and a lack of capacity to oversee donations or grants to a high number of different recipients. Women's Funds were often raised as examples of best practice in reaching the communities and grassroots organizations with quality funding that they weren't able to.

*'For some of our partners to know we're there for the long term takes a lot of that pressure off and they can really focus on what they're trying to achieve. Because the things I've learned is how essential core funding is, how essential long-term partnership is.'*

*'I think we've evolved. We didn't start off giving core funding. I think the instinct within philanthropy for a long time was defined by project. That was just the way that it was, and it still is for many donors. But again, when we started to listen to the field, and when we started to think about how you do movement-building, and how you respond to, how you help organizations to become stronger and more resilient, flexible funding is a really important tool for that.'*

# PRIORITIES AND CHALLENGES

## 1. Resources

Funders repeatedly acknowledged the lack of resources directed to the sector and stated that many women's organizations operate on 'shoestring' budgets. As a result, they felt that women's organizations often lack the time and resources to invest in their own communications, marketing and fundraising, as well as not having time to collaborate, be creative and be inspired. Many perceived work to benefit women and girls as difficult to fundraise for due to it being 'political' in nature.

Despite expressing an understanding of the lack of funding and commenting that the funding system is set up in a way that fosters competition, we heard a desire from funders to see more collaboration and less competition between organizations. Funders want to see organizations sharing learning, taking inspiration from each other and building upon the successes of other actors in the sector, however lack of time and resources limited opportunities for this type of work and there was a perception that the sector is sometimes reinventing the wheel. Many of these funders saw increasing the overall amount of funding to the sector, or investing in what is particularly hard to fund, as an integral part of their role.

*'For us as an organization, the number one priority is to increase the level of flexible funding available to grassroots organizations.'*

*'Over the years we've moved much more to funding a lot more flexibly. So we give unrestricted funding. That now generally goes to things like renting office space, employing people, salary of a CEO, training – because we know other funders won't necessarily fund that stuff.'*

*'They are working on such a shoestring, most of the small women's organizations, that they can't really carve-out the time to collaborate.'*

*'Often our grantees are working...almost in a vacuum, almost unconnected with other sectors that are also promoting progressive policies of working. So not necessarily working at odds with each other, but certainly not working to reinforce or strengthen the work of the other.'*

## 2. Power

Funders consistently raised the topic of power as integral to analysing and combatting gender inequality and spoke of the importance of taking an intersectional approach to programming. However, there was considerable variation in interviewees' understanding of power.

In their relationships with grantees, funders acknowledged the power dynamics present, and their efforts to minimize the disparity. Interestingly, in previous research on individual philanthropists as well as Trusts and Foundations,<sup>1</sup> power dynamics were less commonly acknowledged or discussed. It appears that these funders place much more importance on addressing power dynamics than other funders. Many spoke of deeply entrenched structural inequalities present in society. In some situations, they felt that as an individual they identified strongly as feminist, but that the funding institutions – including INGOs – and funding landscape in which they operate were reflecting or reproducing a patriarchal system that prevented them from giving in the way they wanted to and reaching their desired gender justice goals.

*'Feminism is about challenging power, and I think, for me, you can't be a grant-maker in the gender field if you're not aware of the power dynamics, and you're not making efforts to try to at least mitigate them.'*

*'We consider it self-evident that there is a power dynamic in the relationship with the people who hold the money and the people who need and want it. And that to pretend that that power imbalance is not there is a stupid form of denial.'*

*'I think that governmental systems, humanitarian architecture, the mechanisms of aid are so patriarchal, and so embedded.'*

## **From listening to inclusion**

Funders agreed that national implementing organizations are best placed to understand what works, and that listening to these voices is essential to finding effective solutions to improve the lives of women and girls. The most common way that funders sought to rebalance the power dynamic with grantees was a commitment to listening to the voices of grassroots organizations and the communities they work with.

In their approach to addressing power dynamics, funders landed somewhere on a scale from a straightforward listening approach to a more holistic ambition to include grantees in their decision-making processes. Listening to local communities, grassroots organizations and national funders, such as through grantee surveys, is regarded as key to planning their programming and funding, however, some funders went further, and aimed to include perspectives from grantees and people they work with on the design of their application forms, monitoring requirements and grant-giving strategies, for example, participatory grant-making. Funders hoped that this type of consultation would not only make their processes more efficient and less onerous for grantees, but more accurate, transparent and effective.

*'If we're going to fund women and girls, let's listen to what women and girls have to say.'*

*'I've learned to listen more and speak less. I've learned that the experts are the people on the ground, you know, the voices from the front line, they're the experts. They're living it, working it, they're out there fighting every day the little battles.'*

## **Multiplying power**

In addition to minimizing the power imbalance, numerous funders spoke of trying to use the power that their status as funders affords them for good – for example by joining forces with other funders to plan their giving or to campaign more effectively, and shouldering risks that grantees could not. Others spoke of their frustration that fellow funders seemed unwilling to share their expertise and collaborate.

*'I really do believe that collaboration is the key. We can do so much more together than we can do individually. It's not one plus one, it's more like two times six.'*

*'I think we need to get over our egos. I think we need to group together and use our collective power to create change, or be able to speak to government, or be able to speak to policymakers.'*

## Sharing power

Another way funders spoke of using their power for good was through power sharing: some showed a commitment to use their privileged position to provide a platform for the voices of partners, for example inviting (and providing funding for) grantees to attend conferences and events, rather than speaking on their behalf.

*'We try and bring girls' voices wherever we go. So every conference that we go to, every event that we go to, we really try and bring over organizations if they want to, if it's relevant for them, and have them speak and not speak on their behalf.'*

*'Finding ways of sharing the stage, of sharing, giving access and redefining partnership. I think these are all things that are probably being discussed within the sector, but operationalizing those, and moving beyond nice speeches, and beyond nice policies on websites, is a good start.'*

## Power dynamics within the sector

From listening to the communities they work with, funders spoke of many examples of INGOs not addressing power dynamics with local partners, and were highly critical of this behaviour. Funders felt that just as they are working to use their power responsibly, large INGOs should do the same, by listening to grassroots organizations, funding those organizations and using their scale and resource to share expertise and learning that could lift the whole sector.

*'Because there's a slight arrogance, sometimes, with the big organizations in the field...A slight separation, slight patronage to the smaller organizations, you know, you're used when you're useful.'*

*'I don't think you guys can exist without the smaller community-based organizations, because you need the people there and they're the ones that find out how things are done in there, and let you guys have the capacity to multiply and implement. So I think it's just everybody playing their role.'*

*'I do think that some INGOs do have value-add, and are useful, very much, to the field, and are unique to maybe smaller specialist organizations, because of the megaphone that you have, the spotlight that you have, the niche that you have... INGOs [that] have really strong advocacy departments, have really strong research departments, have really strong campaigns. When those things are linked up and working well together, that is a really important role to be playing.'*

## Trusting relationships

We heard a desire from funders for open and honest relationships, built on trust and understanding. This is closely linked to power, as many funders understood the inherent power dynamics between funders and organizations due to the involvement of money. Through the interviews, we heard how funders were concerned that the power dynamic between funder and grantee can inhibit honest conversations. Creating a space for grantees to speak honestly, and establishing the requisite level of trust was described as a challenge. Funders who described such open communication with grantees tended to credit personal relationships built up over several years. They acknowledged that although many funders prioritized listening to the sector, creating the level of trust required for frank conversations and openness with grantees required significant work. However, once they had achieved these relationships, they felt confident that their grantees were able to give them honest feedback.

*'We have a very deliberate style of working, which is around: I ask them how to prevent trafficking. They go, "No, no, no, you give us the money and then tell us what to do". I go, "No, no, no, we're not doing it that way" ... Genuinely, it's taken about three years to grow the partners, to really start telling me the truth, as a funder.'*

*'We have such an open relationship with our grantee partners. They tell us everything.'*

### 3. Impact

That funders want to see demonstrable impact from their giving is well established.<sup>16</sup> Previous research on the motivations of Trusts and Foundations and philanthropists<sup>1</sup> show how impact is an increasingly important motivator, in order to determine that their funding is effective: there is an increasing desire to see the biggest possible impact from a donation and to permanently solve a problem. For Trusts and Foundations, tracking impact is integral to being able to learn, review and improve, in order to ensure their grant-making is strategic.<sup>1</sup> From this research,<sup>1</sup> we found that measuring impact is a norm across the sector, albeit there is no universal definition of impact – the term means a myriad of different things to different people. However, what appears to differentiate funders of this particular area, is an uncertainty around the most appropriate way to measure this impact and questioning whether current models of measuring this are fit-for-purpose.

#### The 'challenge' of measuring

Measuring the impact of their giving was an often-discussed topic among funders, and a challenge that all were grappling with. In working to improve the rights of women and girls, funders report they find measuring impact uniquely difficult. They are seeking to change behaviours, norms and perceptions. They felt that even in relatively simple service delivery interventions, quantifiable outcomes may not reflect the true impact on people's quality of life. Additionally, funders recognize the need for quality funding in this area: long-term, core funding, and many funders found it challenging to provide evidence of impact on work which changes perceptions and cultural norms over the long-term.

Funders perceived a tension between providing quality funding and measuring impact. Although examples exist,<sup>17</sup> funders were either not aware of or confident in following those models.

*'...when you talk about gender justice, or women's rights, or girls' rights, the funder has to take a leap of faith... They have to be moved by the story of the women and girls. They have to believe in what you believe in, to a certain extent. They have to buy into an agenda of freedom and emancipation, and transformation, and equality. If they say that they buy into that, then they have to suspend their primal urge for this sort of, "What do I get for my...for 25 thousand dollars?"'*

*'It's something we're looking at a lot at the moment. But I haven't seen particularly innovative ways of measuring impact for perceptions. I haven't seen that yet.'*

*'The idea of tracking, "measuring or understanding" long-term change efforts, is as a bit beyond the capabilities of some of these institutions, or – what they do is not – what their systems are not a fit for measuring this, and telling that story. And I think that's why you have a lot of conversations now within the funding community.'*

#### Attribution versus contribution

Funders felt that changing societal norms is often a complex multi-faceted long-term project and measures of success cannot easily be attributed to a single intervention or funder. We heard much discussion around the need to see impact directly

attributable to funding versus being satisfied in the knowledge that you are contributing to positive outcomes. Some donors, particularly those committed to providing flexible funding or supporting movement building, accepted that they would never be able to quantify the direct impact of their funding, but were happy to be part of a wider movement for change, working in collaboration with other funders and organizations with similar goals.

Too much focus on measuring progress was seen by some of these funders as inherently futile, a waste of resources, and an act of ego. They felt that this was a reflection the dominance of the 'effective giving' culture, governed by tightly monitored key performance indicators, and there was a lot of doubt and uncertainty expressed over whether this was the best approach for this sector.

*'Civil society is about working together, not claiming that it was you.'*

*'Somewhere in that spectrum also are those who are comfortable with contribution rather than attribution. They say, "realistically as a Foundation, we are only one part of a massive picture of change and we're never going to know whether our £50,000 was the tipping point or the straw, or was really what sparked the change. But we know that before we were funding it, nothing was happening, and now loads of stuff is happening, and there were lots of other people involved, and we are quite happy to just be part of the story.'"*

## **Redefining impact**

Funders who expressed a committed to providing quality funding recognize that the changes they want to see are long-term and complex. These funders were starting to trial different ways to approach impact with more of a qualitative focus, foregrounding the stories and perspectives of those they are funding: speaking to their partners, hearing the stories from those affected about the change made to their lives.

*'I was quite shocked to be honest, when I was talking to different organizations, people saying, "I'm not measuring impact". Or... "I'm not measuring impact in the way normally people measure impact". I mean it's much more qualitative, anecdotal evidence, talking to the people.'*

*'I would do something quite radical like you ask the girl if they're feeling better, getting better, if their life has gotten any better a year later.'*

*'A lot of qualitative change is around stories of change. So how you collect and aggregate those stories of change to tell a coherent story is time consuming and difficult.'*

*'We know the organizations we support have an impact. We see in the stories they tell us, in the information that they want to share. But in terms of our appointment we don't have specific KPIs around impact or number of participants reached, number of organizations reached. For us, impact means that we know the organizations are thriving in their communities. We know that they are being part of global conversations. We see the young leaders taking on stages on global conferences, making their case, accessing additional funding. This is the kind of impact that we want to see.'*



# 4 GRANTEE PERSPECTIVES

Oxfam and I.G. Advisors held a one-day workshop with 10 representatives from nine women’s organizations based in the UK to hear their reflections on the research findings and to build recommendations together. We wanted to understand whether what we heard from funders matched the organizations’ experiences, and what the areas of convergence and divergence might be. There is a large and diverse pool of women’s organizations operating in the UK, and therefore the points discussed here are not representative of all women’s organizations, however, where all organizations were in agreement is illustrative of the key challenges and priorities of this sector. Below is a summary of the themes, priorities and challenges for the women’s organizations we spoke to.

PRIORITIES & CHALLENGES	DESCRIPTION
<b>Resources</b>	One of the biggest challenges for the organizations we spoke to was a lack of funding combined with a growing demand for their services, resulting in a chronic deficiency in resources. As a result, fundraising and communications are often deprioritized (and are rarely funded), producing a self-perpetuating cycle. As gender equality is becoming more mainstream, they feel at risk of losing funding to larger organizations and concerned that specialisms will become lost. Women’s organizations felt that calls for funding are often set-up in a way that creates competition between organizations for resources, and found it challenging to be expected to compete for funds with large INGOs, who have significantly more resources and dedicated staff to create proposals and reports.
<b>Quality funding</b>	Due to the lack of resources and the complexities in which they work, the organizations valued long-term, flexible and core funding, such as investment in operational costs. Flexible funding allows them to be iterative with their work in changing and challenging circumstances; long-term funding and core costs allows the time and financial security to solve complex situations and create systemic change. In addition, the majority of the organizations also valued additional non-financial support from funders, for example, to use their voice and position to advocate on behalf of the women’s organizations and their causes. However, when funders offer non-financial support such as training sessions, it is essential that grantees are consulted on the design of this. Many of the organizations had experienced funders with the best of intentions offering (sometimes mandatory) training which grantees felt obliged to participate in even if they had previously undertaken the same (or similar) training from another funder.
<b>Power</b>	The women’s organizations we spoke to keenly felt the power imbalance in their relationships with funders and wanted funders to do more to acknowledge and address this. A perceived risk to their funding meant they did not feel able to have frank and open conversations with their funders about time-consuming application processes, reporting requirements or other obligations attached to their support which the organizations felt was an unproductive use of their resources.
<b>Trusting relationships</b>	Women’s organizations sometimes feel overwhelmed by the requirements of funders. Many wished that they would take the time to speak to them and build a relationship which would foster better communication over lengthy forms. The best experiences with funders were where there was a personal relationship and dialogue. Many organizations often wished they were consulted more often by funders, and a ‘dream donor’ was described as someone organizations could have conversations with, including about how the impact of projects are measured.

<b>Impact</b>	<p>Women's organizations felt burdened by the range and complexity of systems of impact measurement imposed by funders. Different funders have different ways of measuring things, and they were rarely consulted or invited to help design these. They often felt that these systems did not effectively measure the complicated and non-linear improvements in women's lives, and that the focus on quantitative measures missed the nuance of their work and failed to provide an accurate impression of their impact. They experienced a perception from some funders that higher numbers equal bigger impact, but in their experience, this is not always the case. Women's organizations were confident of the positive impact their work has on the lives of those they work with and felt frustrated that they were having to expend time and resources on a wide variation of impact measurement frameworks. They recognized that their work is often part of a far larger collective movement for change over the long-term.</p>
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From the interviews with funders and conversations with women's organizations we heard very similar themes, goals and priorities:

- An awareness of power dynamics in the funder-grantee relationship, between small grassroots and large INGOs, and wider society;
- Acknowledging the lack of resources and funding in the sector;
- They need to place significance on contribution in addition to attribution;
- A desire to increasingly use qualitative approaches to impact;
- An understanding that quality funding for this sector means long-term, flexible, core funding;
- An ambition to creating long-term change to the systems, behaviours and perceptions which perpetuate gender inequality and injustices.

Interestingly, despite the shared goals and understanding of priorities and challenges between funders and grantees, there were also gaps and mismatches between the two groups. Despite funders stating that they understand the value of quality funding, the women's organizations were rarely experiencing this type of support. This may be due to a difference in definition of what long-term and core funding constitutes – for the women's organizations, long-term funding meant a minimum of five years. It could also be attributable to the limited number of funders who give quality funding in practice: we did not collect statistical evidence on amount or type of funding given as part of this research.

Additionally, many women's organizations felt constrained by the high demands placed on them by some of their funders and questioned whether funders truly understood the challenging situations they were operating within. On the contrary, through the interviews, funders repeatedly expressed the significance of listening to the organizations they fund in order to understand the realities in which they operate and in order to create effective partnerships that avoid unnecessarily onerous requirements.

We conclude this section with recommendations for funders developed from the workshop, which may help address some of the mismatches we heard and greater strengthen the areas of overlap between funders and the organizations they fund, building partnerships which are mutually more rewarding.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Recognizing what we heard about the role of Oxfam as providing a platform and creating spaces to encourage dialogue and networking for women’s organizations, the below are recommendations to funders co-created by women’s organizations on how to develop effective partnerships and maximize their funding to this area. These recommendations were designed through a workshop with 10 representatives from nine women’s organizations. The recommendations are a synthesis of discussions throughout the day, and the quotes are from representatives from the organizations on their experiences with funders. We are hugely grateful to the women’s organizations who took part in a one-day research workshop to build recommendations for this report.



<p><b>Allow space (and funding) to plan and be creative</b></p>
<p><i>‘It’s important to have that thinking time... not having to rush in the minute the cheque hits the bank.’</i></p> <p>We heard a desire from funders to move beyond incremental steps and make transformative change. To do this requires creativity and planning, which takes time and money, and this should be resourced accordingly. For example, providing an inception period allows time and space for strategic planning in partnership, without the need to rush into action as soon as funding is confirmed.</p>
<p><b>Build trusting relationships</b></p>
<p><i>‘Our best partnerships are always based on actual relationships, rather than transactional models.’</i></p> <p>The best experiences with funders were those based on positive relationships built on trust, where there was open dialogue and a feeling of partnership. Many women’s organizations felt frustrated at a number of top-down impositions from funders without being consulted with. They valued being consulted and welcomed time invested in the relationship over time spent on completing long and complicated forms.</p>
<p><b>Value contribution as well as attribution</b></p>
<p><i>‘We are standing on the shoulders of the women who came before us.’</i></p> <p>The women’s organizations we spoke to are working on extremely complex and nuanced areas where no one intervention will provide a solution. There are many contributing factors, which build over time, and any measure of success cannot easily be attributed to a single intervention or funder. Contributing towards a greater goal as part of a wider movement for change is just as important and valuable as attributing a specific change to your donation.</p>

### **Understand the realities in which they are operating**

*'If a business was given the budget we're given and resources we do, then they'd fail.'*

Recognize the reality of the situation they are operating in: acute lack of funding and increasing demands on their resources. Their best partnerships were with funders who understood the realities in which they are working, and the importance of resourcing properly. These organizations had a multitude of funders with a multitude of requirements: resource these appropriately, for example, covering the costs of complex, long-term evaluation in their budgets.

### **Incentivize collaboration**

*'When I hear this word, it sounds like funders want to fund more organizations with less money.'*

We heard a desire from funders for more collaboration and less competition between organizations working in this sector. However, the organizations we spoke to felt that the way that funding is set up increases competition and limits collaboration. Organizations agreed that successful collaboration can be hugely impactful, however, collaboration takes more time, energy and effort for organizations which are already lacking in resources.

### **Give quality funding**

*'The work we do takes a long time because it's about changing communities.'*

Consensus was that they are often having to work to short timeframes to solve complex situations or create systemic change. Even two- and three-year grant periods could be unrealistic to achieve this. For these organizations, long-term funding means a minimum of five years. It also requires investing in operational costs, core costs and being flexible with funding. Interestingly, we heard this from funders too: they understand what quality funding means in this sector; however, this doesn't seem to be translating into standard practice.

### **Recognize your position of power as funders**

*'The idea of power is essential to this conversation.'*

Due to a power dynamic with funders, women's organizations felt that speaking their mind was a high-risk strategy, especially if that particular funding stream is not stable. They felt that the responsibility should sit with funders to counter power dynamics and allow a space for those conversations. Whilst honest communication comes from both partners, funders can take responsibility for inviting transparency and practicing horizontal approaches to power.

### **More than money: use your influence and advocate**

*'All of us want money, but we also want to have other assets.'*

When asked to think about their most positive funding partnerships, the majority of organizations valued more than money from funders. They valued funders who use their influence to champion the charity, who advocate and shout about the charity or cause and open their networks to increase awareness or new funding opportunities. Women's organizations found both listening and amplifying important aspects of a funding partnership.

### **Prioritize funding to this area**

The lack of resources to this sector was highlighted repeatedly by funders and organizations: funders and organizations both stated that the sector is operating on a shoestring. This can only be addressed, not just through quality funding, but through prioritising funding to this area and therefore increasing the overall amount of funding reaching the sector.

# 5 CONCLUSIONS

The interviews and workshop demonstrated how funders and organizations hold many of the same goals and priorities. Despite this, we heard mismatches between the two groups. While funders felt that they were making efforts to trial ways of working that would reduce workload for their grantees and allow more autonomy and flexibility, women's organizations still feel that their funders often have rigid and demanding requirements, that they dare not challenge, because of a risk to scarce and precarious funding.

## Challenges

### Funders

Measuring impact was identified as one of the biggest challenges for funders giving to benefit women and girls. They felt that approaches to measuring impact for other funding areas were not fit-for-purpose when working on long-term complex issues such as changing social norms and did not reflect the transformative change that can come from providing quality (long-term, flexible, core) funding. Funders were also struggling with how to balance qualitative and quantitative measures to provide robust and accurate evidence of the impact of their work, and how to balance their desire for impact measurement with the extra work that these assessments create for grantees.

Funders in this area have begun to explore different definitions and alternative methods of measuring impact, particularly gathering qualitative information that can foreground the experiences of the communities they are working with. However, these experiments were in their early stages, and most funders had yet to establish a system they had confidence in.

### Organizations

For women's organizations, resource (both in terms of time and money) was the biggest challenge. The requirements of funders, such as applications, reporting requirements and other stipulations attached to funding, were time consuming, yet often felt irrelevant and inefficient. These organizations did not feel that their funders recognized (or paid for) the amount of additional work created. In many cases this led to a resentment that their own assessment of the impact of their work was not asked for or recognized as sufficient.

Grantees were reluctant to share these frustrations with their funders because in a competitive market, any risk to funding was deemed too high. As a result, and despite their clear desire to work together as effectively as possible, funders remain unaware of the frustrations of their grantees, and are unable to respond and make improvements. In this way, the lack of trust and open communication between funders and women's organizations holds back progress towards their shared goals.



## Solutions

Women's organizations are confident that their work is effective. Their close knowledge of the impact that their organization can have on the lives of women they work with provides proof that their interventions are making a difference. However, this is rarely the same information or evidence they are required to provide funders.

Funders are grappling with how to adapt traditional impact measurements more suited to short-term service-delivery interventions, to the complex interconnected and long-term social change goals associated with achieving improving the lives of women and girls. Meanwhile, they acknowledge that grantees hold the knowledge and expertise that they rely on.

*'The grantees have the power of the information that you need.'*

The barrier to this vital information being shared is a lack of transparent communication. As the power dynamics inherent in the funding relationship currently inhibit grantees from giving frank feedback directly to their funders, spaces where women's organizations can share this feedback without the fear of repercussions may be a valuable first step to bridging the gap. In the longer term, open two-way conversations will be an essential component to building the trust necessary for the most effective working relationships. Previous Oxfam research<sup>1</sup> has demonstrated that open and frank sharing of information with funders, including 'bad news' builds trust and relationships, and is essential to collaborating successfully, and building more mutually rewarding partnerships.

Funders appreciate the scarcity of resources in this sector, and want to support transformative work, without burdening their grantees with unnecessary and unhelpful work. To achieve this, they recognize that they need honest feedback from their grantees about the impact measurements they see as most effective, and the true cost in terms of time and resources of this work.

Women's organizations, who are chronically underfunded, believe that funders are demanding irrelevant impact measures which take up their time and that the work involved is unrecognized. However, they are reluctant to be perceived as critical by sharing this feedback, and fearful of putting valuable funding at risk. The pressure on these organizations would be significantly reduced if funding requirements on measuring impact aligned with women's organizations' own assessments of their work or that the collection of this information was explicitly funded and resourced sufficiently.

## How can we move forward?

Both funders and grantees hold the same aspirations and believe in the same priorities to achieve these. Each is able to solve the others' greatest challenge, if they are able to communicate more clearly. It will take a leap of faith for organizations to rock the boat by sharing honest feedback on past reporting or application obligations. It may feel equally daunting for funders to trial innovative new approaches that are being used by grassroots implementing organizations, but they are explicit about being ready to work in new ways.

When the barriers to funding this work are addressed, the potential to transform the lives of women and girls is huge. Can we commit to relationships built on trust that address power dynamics to allow open communication between funders and grantees? Can we come together as a sector to develop systems of measuring impact that work for both funders and women's organizations?



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# APPENDIX

## 1. INTERVIEW DISCUSSION GUIDE

### 1.1 IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW – Trusts and Foundations, individual philanthropists

*Time: 60 min*

#### **OPENER**

What's the first thing that comes to mind if I ask you for an example of an exceptional grant/gift you've made?

- What was it that made it exceptional?
- What really stood out for you?

#### **IDENTITY**

How would you describe yourself as a funder?

- In terms of your work with women and girls, how would you describe this?
- Would you describe yourself as a funder of gender justice?
- Why do you use [given terminology] to describe your funding?

How does [gender justice/their terminology] fit into to your overall philanthropy/grant giving strategy?

- Is it core to your philanthropy/grants or is it one of several priority areas of focus?
- How much of your total giving would you say is focused towards women's rights or gender?
- Why?

Have you always funded work that benefits women? What first motivated your interest in this area?

- How has your/your organization's funding changed over time?
- What caused your shift in focus?
- Why?

How do you see your role alongside other funders and organizations in the sector?

#### **LANDSCAPE, PRIORITIES AND CHALLENGES**

What are the biggest funding priorities in terms of gender justice over the next 5-10 years?

- What will bring about the most change for women and girls?

What do you think are the biggest challenges for work benefitting women and girls?

- Why do you think that is?
- Which aspects do you think are particularly difficult to fund?
- How do you think the sector could respond to these challenges?

How do you measure the impact of your work with women and girls?

- What is the change you expect to see from programmes?
- How do you know when a project is successful?
- What is your approach to programmes where impact is hard to measure?

What have you learnt from your funding in this space?

- How do you think the sector has changed?

### **WORKING WITH OXFAM**

How do you view the role of large NGOs and smaller, specialist organizations in the sector?

- Do you think they have different roles? Why?
- Do you see different challenges for large NGOs and smaller organizations in this sector?

What is your impression of Oxfam?

- What are your impressions of Oxfam's work in relation to gender justice?

What do you think Oxfam should focus on in our gender justice programmes in order to have the biggest impact?

### **CLOSE**

How could the sector (funders and NGOs/partners) work better together in order to have the most impact for women and girls?

Is there anything that you'd like to tell us or ask us that we may have missed?

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**Rosa Fund**

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**Equality Now**

**Latin American Women's Aid**

**Solace Women's Aid**

**Women for Women International**

**Women Working Worldwide**

**Young Women's Trust**

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