



## Feminist Foreign Policy:

# Stronger Action Needed to Resource Feminist Movements

Mama Cash Policy Brief, November 2022

**The growing number of countries adopting a feminist foreign policy (FFP) reveals increasing recognition of the importance of gender equality and women's rights. Yet evidence shows that feminist movements and women's rights organisations remain dramatically underfunded.**

**At a moment when feminist movements are both making important gains and also facing increasing threats around the world, Mama Cash calls on governments to ensure that the implementation of feminist foreign policies goes beyond political gestures and feminist rhetoric to deliver meaningful support to those at the forefront of advancing gender equality and human rights: namely, autonomous feminist movements.**

### **Snapshot: the feminist foreign policy landscape**

In 2014, Swedish Foreign Minister Margot Wallström announced that Sweden would become the first state to implement a feminist approach to foreign policy. Since then, 12 countries have followed suit<sup>1</sup>, with some implementing changes across all departments and aspects of foreign policy and others applying this approach only to international

development assistance. While the approaches vary, advocates of the policy share a commitment to moving beyond traditional gender-mainstreaming and 'add women & stir' approaches, to a more holistic, intersectional approach that recognises how gender relates to other forms of oppression, such as on the basis of class, race, ability and sexuality.

A number of feminist civil society actors<sup>2</sup> have undertaken efforts to provide conceptual clarity on what a feminist approach to foreign policy entails, focusing on the need for transformative change through reexamining power, priorities, and structures within the global system, challenging existing inequalities, and considering, for example, anti-racist and decolonising perspectives. Critiques so far highlight how policy incoherence across development cooperation, trade, security, and diplomacy and labeling a 'foreign policy as usual approach' as feminist will undermine feminist foreign policy's overall ambitions. The [Global Partner Network on Feminist Foreign Policy](#), a multistakeholder initiative including governments and civil society, recognises this tension and is working to advance sound feminist policy and practice across all aspects of foreign policy.

<sup>1</sup> Canada, Colombia, France, Germany, Liberia, Libya, Luxembourg, Mexico, Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden.

<sup>2</sup> Including the Centre for feminist foreign policy (CFFP), the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), and the International Women's Development Agency (IWDA).

The emergence of feminist foreign policy as a concept and practice has coincided with an increased awareness that while general investments in gender equality are important, more direct investments in women's rights organisations and feminist movements are needed. A feminist foreign policy, in theory, should contribute to an enabling environment for participation, democracy, and respect for human rights. This is particularly crucial in a context of growing pushback on women's rights, worsening conflict, and the ongoing climate crisis. **Without concrete investments in feminist movements, governments will fall short of achieving the vision and transformative potential of their feminist foreign policy.**

## Defining Feminist Movements

The terms "feminist movements" and "women's rights organisations" are frequently used and may become diluted and confused. In this report, we use these terms interchangeably to refer to groups that:

- Work from feminist and/or women's rights perspectives;
- Are led by the people they serve;
- Have the promotion of women's, girls', and/ or trans people's human rights as their primary mission, and not just as part of their programmes:
- Push for structural change; and
- Work on issues that are marginalised and/ or contested.

**SOURCE:** "Moving More Money to the Drivers of Change: How Bilaterals and Multilateral Funders Can Resource Feminist Movements", November 2020.

[Read more](#)

## The role and impact of feminist movements

A [growing body of evidence](#) shows feminist movements are essential for creating and sustaining social change through their critical role in addressing the structural drivers of inequality and other forms of injustice. Movements rooted in their own communities have contextual expertise and lived experience, giving them a concrete stake in the outcome of their work and making them more likely to support consistent engagement and follow through. [Over the last seven decades](#), frontline participation by women in mass movements has proven to be a significant advantage, both in terms of a movement's immediate success and for securing deep and lasting social change.

- [Analysis shows](#) that feminist movements are a powerful force against authoritarianism: women's demands for political and economic inclusion have helped catalyse democratic transitions and ensure mass movements are more likely to lead to egalitarian democracy.
- Women's movements play critical roles in opposing militarism and strengthening initiatives for peace. In the DRC, Liberia, and Somalia, women employed visible and high profile tactics to pressure parties to begin or recommit to peace negotiations, successfully staging mass actions and mobilising public opinion campaigns to encourage progress<sup>3</sup>.
- Cross-national research finds that the presence of national feminist movements significantly increases the likelihood of government action to end violence against women through legal and policy reform, and has a greater effect than women's representation in parliaments<sup>4</sup>.
- While there are a number of variables impacting women's reproductive rights, feminist movements make a statistically significant difference to reproductive rights over the longer-term when they work together with women lawmakers<sup>5</sup>.

3 How Women's Participation in Conflict Prevention and Resolution Advances U.S. Interests Report Author(s): Jamille Bigio and Rachel Vogelstein Published by: Council on Foreign Relations (2016).

4 Htun and Weldon (2018) The Logic of Gender Justice: State Action on Women's Rights Around the World. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- On economic justice, [feminist movements and mobilisation are associated with stronger economic rights](#) and with progressive recognition and support for both unpaid and domestic work in policy frameworks.
- Feminist movements [are at the forefront of climate action](#), leading innovative and sustainable solutions and actively resisting exploitation and environmental degradation, while strengthening connections with other movements across borders.

## The Opportunity: Resourcing Women’s Rights Organisations

**Embedding accessible and impactful funding to feminist movements into policy frameworks is a necessary starting point for governments that are serious about delivering on their promises and the much needed outcomes for gender equality. Yet, governments are failing to bridge the gap between intent and practice.** While resourcing is recognised as a key pillar within existing frameworks, and provides a concrete indicator for tracking progress against policy goals, governments have not systematically accompanied their policy announcements with an increase in commitments or introduction of funding mechanisms for women’s rights organisations.

A [recent report](#) by the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) analysed development finance data across seven countries that have committed to a feminist foreign policy. Their research found that “at \$2.37 billion, commitments for women’s equality organisations and institutions remain a fraction (9%) of the group’s commitments to the government and civil society sector (\$26.1 billion) and a sliver (2%) of their overall gender-focused aid (\$117.6 billion).”

## Good Practice

There are promising practices governments can build upon. In Canada, the [Equality Fund](#) was established in 2019, having received the largest single investment ever made by a government in global feminist movements. While the Equality Fund is at present the only example of feminist foreign policy translating into tangible new commitments to directly resource feminist movements, other funding mechanisms, such as the [Leading from the South Fund](#), demonstrate good practice in feminist funding as well as the increase in feminist control over resources – two key outcome measures included in the [Feminist Foreign Policy Framework](#).

Throughout the design stages of the Equality Fund, feminist movements were extensively consulted as part of a collaborative process with women’s funds, philanthropists, and the private sector to achieve change at scale<sup>7</sup>. The Leading from the South Fund was developed as a partnership between the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Southern-led women’s funds, adopting a power-sharing approach through joint goal-setting and a collaborative monitoring and learning agenda<sup>8</sup>.

Further examples of how to ensure funding instruments and modalities are fit for purpose and respond to the needs of feminist movements are included in Mama Cash and AWID’s [Moving More Money](#) report. The OECD’s [Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls Guidance for Development Partners](#) also provides practical steps for government donors.

5 Ibid.

6 While not applied by all governments, the “R’s” framework of Feminist Foreign Policy – rights, resources, representation – provides a basis for shaping approaches and recommendations. The [FFP Framework developed by ICRW provides such an overview](#).

7 AWID (2020) High Hopes and High Expectations for Resourcing Feminist Movements: Recommendations to the Equality Fund.

8 OECD (2022) In Practice: The Netherlands partner with local women’s rights organisations and feminist movements for gender-transformative change.

While governments do consider increasing or securing gender-sensitive development aid as an important part of their feminist foreign policy, the report concludes that this has only sometimes been met with an increase in commitments or the introduction of a funding mechanism for women's equality organisations and institutions.

This data reflects an overall landscape in which women's rights organisations remain structurally underfunded globally. [Official Development Assistance \(ODA\) data](#) across its membership shows that funding with gender equality marked as a principal objective accounts for roughly 5% of all bilateral ODA, and less than 2% of all gender-focused aid reaches women's rights organisations directly. Furthermore, [the OECD reports](#) that "two-thirds of aid for gender equality is channelled through [civil society organisations] based in DAC member countries rather than locally based." This demonstrates that even funding that is allocated for gender equality is not reaching the Global South based women's rights organisations that are actually propelling the change the funding aims to secure.

## Recommendations: Moving from Intent to Practice

Foreign policy with the stated aim to achieve gender equality must be honest and realistic about the investment that is needed to deliver on the intended outcomes. The realisation of a successful feminist foreign policy, and the ability and credibility of governments and donors to meet their stated policy intentions, is dependent upon resourcing the work of autonomous feminist movements.

The current disconnect between intent and practice reveals the unrealised potential of feminist foreign policy. We acknowledge that, even when the political will is there, government donors who wish to fund feminist movements continue to face a number of constraints, many

of which are identified as 'stumbling blocks' in our 2020 [Moving More Money report](#).

As we look forward, we echo [ICRW's recommendation](#) for governments that commit to feminist foreign policy to adopt the highest level of ambition possible. Specifically, we call on governments to prioritise and embed resourcing for feminist movements as a central component of their policy, introducing measurable targets to drive more core, flexible, and multi-year funding directly to these organisations.

## KEY ACTIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

**The following actions outline steps governments can take as part of their feminist foreign policy to directly support, protect, and sustain the work of feminist movements and women's rights organisations through increased and fit-for-purpose development assistance.**

### Set targets

- Increase investments in gender equality by ensuring 100% of ODA commitments have gender equality as a significant component and 20% as a principal component<sup>9</sup>.
- Increase the overall percentage of gender-focused ODA commitments going directly to women's rights organisations to 10%, in line with the [W7 target](#). Consider allocating 10% of gender-equality principal funding directly to women's funds as [Prospera INWE](#) has championed.

### Review and revise how money moves (modalities of funding)

- Apply [feminist funding principles](#) to the greatest extent possible and adjust practices using the [four building blocks](#) to better fund feminist movements.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.oecd.org/dac/gender-development/dac-gender-equality-marker.htm>



- In recognition of a twin-track approach to gender equality (i.e., stand-alone and mainstreamed):
  - intentionally design stand-alone funding streams and mechanisms that are directly accessible to feminist and women’s rights organisations and movements, beyond directing this funding via multilateral institutions.
  - embed funding for women’s rights organisations and feminist movements through all thematic development assistance funding streams, including climate, trade, etc. At a minimum, prioritise organisations that are led by the communities whose rights they work to advance as distinct from non-constituency-led organisations.
- Offer different funding tranches, with different threshold criteria, to reach a continuum of women’s rights organisations and feminist movements.
- Provide multi-year, core, flexible funding. This enables organisations to adjust to changing circumstances, invest in their capacities, and seize opportunities to advance agendas as they emerge.
- Make good use of trusted, proven mechanisms, such as women’s and feminist funds. By working transnationally as well as thematically, women’s and feminist funds respond to the needs of local feminist activists and their movements. This includes adjusting practices to enable regrants as an instrument within funding streams.
- Engage feminist activists and feminist funders in the design of new funding instruments, including when outsourcing fund management to a third party, recognising their expertise in building a strong feminist funding infrastructure and addressing power dynamics to strengthen and improve governance and programme management.

### **Adapt accountability systems**

- Identify and address contradictory funding policies that prevent feminist movements from accessing funding. Where possible, reduce burdensome due diligence practices and restrictive requirements, including monitoring and evaluation, assessing these requirements against scale of funding (including the size of grants being provided).
- Building on the above, examine how fiduciary risk is defined – in a system that is already very controlled – compared to what is on the line for people organising against injustice and the risk of maintaining a status quo that is harming people and planet. Governments must match the courage of activists and assess perception of risk against the timescales and flexibility needed for organisations to navigate changes in their context, test new approaches, and bring about social change.



***We urge governments to ensure the development and realisation of feminist foreign policy and practice is transparent and co-created with feminist movements and women’s rights organisations as key partners, and informed by the priorities, insights, and feedback of those most impacted by foreign and development policy.***

***A feminist foreign policy must ensure policy coherence across development cooperation, trade, diplomacy, and security agendas to guarantee they are all contributing to advancing gender equality and transforming power relations.***

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