



Building effective funding structures for prevention of violence against women and girls: **Aspirations and barriers among Women's Rights Organisations seeking bilateral and multilateral funding**

What Works to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls: Impact at Scale

A seven-year initiative funded by the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) to scale up evidence-based, practice-informed prevention of violence against women and girls. The programme will invest £67.5 million to prevent and contribute to eliminating violence against women and girls (VAWG) by:

- Systematically designing, implementing, and rigorously evaluating a range of approaches to scaling up violence prevention efforts, translating proof-of-concept evidence into robust, large scale programmes and strategies.
- Designing, piloting, and testing new theory-driven violence prevention approaches (innovation).
- Strengthening long-term capability and capacity to deliver cutting-edge, evidence-based violence prevention programmes across the programme's grantees, the UK Government (principally FCDO), and developing country governments
- Using evidence to influence a more effective, scaled-up global response to end VAWG.

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Overview

What Works to Prevent Violence: Impact at Scale is a seven-year programme funded by the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) to improve prevention and response to violence against women and girls (VAWG). What Works brings together five Consortium partners led by the International Rescue Committee with Breakthrough CARE, International Rescue Committee (IRC), Raising Voices, and Social Development Direct. Together, the consortium is committed to channelling funding to women's rights organizations (WROs) in the Global South leading the prevention of VAWG.

In February and March 2022, on behalf of the What Works 2 consortium, Raising Voices conducted a consultation to examine the factors that limit southern-based WROs access to donor funding for preventing VAWG, particularly within bilateral & multilateral funding initiatives such as What Works 2.

This policy brief aims to summarise findings from the consultation and barrier analysis in order to shed light on the barriers faced by WROs in accessing bilateral and multilateral funding for VAWG prevention and recommendations to overcome them.

Context

Globally, WROs and feminist organizations face unprecedented challenges in their efforts to address VAWG and achieve justice for all women and girls in all of their diversity. Many of these challenges constitute backlash which comes in countless forms—violence (sexual, physical, emotional, financial, cyber), restrictive policies, power inequities, rising authoritarian governments, men's rights movements, death threats, and murder. More implicit forms of backlash include denying that gender inequality exists, downplaying its prevalence, and not addressing root causes of VAWG, particularly men's power over women¹.

WROs also face challenges internal to the social development sector, particularly within funding spaces. Despite clear evidence that feminist activism works to end VAWG and realize gender justice², women's rights and feminist organizations are severely underfunded. "99% of gender-related international aid fails to reach women's rights and feminist organizations directly," according to the

Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID)³.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) determined that among the \$10 billion given to civil society organizations (CSOs) for gender equality work in 2014, 92% went to international non-governmental organizations, leaving just 8% to go directly to CSOs in the Global South⁴.

In recent years, there has been significant attention to funding practices and their implications for organizations, particularly WROs dedicated to feminist action. In VAWG prevention efforts, considerable funding has been channelled to INGOs and consortia, leaving small and medium WROs without access to these funds, yet they continue tremendous work on the ground.

"We need to ask ourselves, what kind of world would we be in if feminist movements hadn't made the gains they had, and is that the world we would want to live in?"

Hakima Abbas, Co-Executive Director of AWID

"Increasing support for programmes and projects dedicated to ending violence against women and girls is essential for implementing SDG 5.2, "Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation."

OECD⁵

For the purposes of this paper, we have internally defined small and medium WROs as those with a few staff members (from 10 to 50 staff members), working at community and national level with limited resources. Typically recipients of small grants, WROs often lead learning and innovation, but they are not sufficiently resourced to enable the strengthening of organizational and operational capacity that would allow vital expansion, scale-up, and advocacy efforts⁵.



How did we approach this consultation?

In February and March 2022, Raising Voices conducted a consultation comprised of an online survey, a literature review, key informant interviews (KIIs) and a focus group discussion. The consultation captured experiences and opportunities from 58 WROs in the VAWG prevention field, particularly from Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia. The literature review included academic and non-academic papers, commentaries, and webinars around the barriers WROs face in accessing funding. Six KIIs were conducted with key decision makers in the What Works 2 consortium and What Works 1 grantees with significant experience on key drivers and limitations for WROs' access to funding within large scale initiatives. Finally, a focus group discussion of seven participants deepened our understanding of the barriers to WROs working on VAWG prevention within the context of What Works 2, including how consortium members envisioned engagement with and funding to WROs.

What did VAWG prevention WROs tell us?

1. WROs need more direct, flexible, and core funding.

Feminist movements and WROs have largely received funding for specific projects rather than organisational strategy, organisational strengthening and/or core costs. **Only 7% of survey respondents receive core support**, while 84% indicated receiving project-based funding and/or 1-year contracts. Provision of core funding can sustain organisations beyond the duration of a project cycle, building out a stronger team and processes to acquire future funding and maintain organisational health. Consistently, respondents from the survey and the informational interview noted a mismatch between donors' expectations of results and the limited funding and time that organisations are given to deliver the work. This is particularly important as VAWG prevention and social norms change is a dynamic process and can take considerable time. While cycles of three to five years can yield progress, WROs are often expected to meet unrealistic outcomes under the conditions of specific grants, such as expecting rates of violence to decrease in a short period of time. One survey respondent noted the challenges in receiving reimbursement for not meeting certain results during the COVID pandemic. "We struggled to receive reimbursement worth approximately \$34,000 as we could not attain the indicated results for more than 9 months during the pandemic and we failed to pay salaries."

WROs noted that salaries, as well as other operational costs, are difficult to fund. In speaking about a negative experience regarding funding, one respondent said "There is an idea that the work should be on an almost voluntary basis, so, the salaries/stipend/allowances are very low." While many women join these movements due to commitment and passion, staff need liveable wages for their work.

2. Due diligence required for large grants should be commensurate with WROs' size and capacity

A recent report from Shake the Table and Bridgespan Group questioned donor practices that end up screening out key actors in the VAWG prevention field, including many WROs, due to thresholds for “size, history, [and] impact [that may be considered unrealistic given the size and budget of the organization”⁶. The consultation revealed an overemphasis on a long, consecutive organisational history for grant applicants. Newer organisations and/or those that have faced challenges in securing consistent funding can be automatically ineligible. Key informants indicated that the requirement for the three most recent years of financial statements has been especially difficult given the implications of COVID-19. Because funding for working on VAWG has been severely reduced, “many women’s rights organisations virtually operate from hand to mouth” (Key Informant).

Donors could better align their application and reporting systems, making them more relevant and applicable to WROs, meeting standards for basic application and reporting requirements without being so cumbersome that organisations need to rework all of their structures and processes. In some cases, WROs are meeting requirements, but not always in ways that “look” the way that donors expect, particularly with regard to Western “norms,” such as prioritizing certain forms of knowledge production and evaluation (logframes, randomized-controlled trials, etc) over practice-based learning. This puts WROs in a state of vulnerability where they are unable to stand on their own and demands are made for them to “partner with” INGOs to access funding.

3. Promote respectful relationships between WROs, researchers, funders, and fund managers.

WROs highlighted the need for mutual respect, and how a lack thereof, undermines the integrity of feminist programming which relies on collaboration, accountability and respectful exchange among all partners. WROs described experiences where funders recommended implementation of activities that may have been impactful in other contexts, without recognizing the unique challenges and opportunities of the local context in which the WRO works.

“The perceived high handedness of a donor who was dismissive of our work, didn’t make the effort to understand challenges on the ground and came across as doing us a favour.”

Survey Respondent

These sentiments reflect a larger pattern and need for critical reflection in international development. A recent global consultation with aid practitioners recommends that donors, implementers, and other stakeholders acknowledge the possibility that systems of oppression can be replicated within development and humanitarian settings and work together to prevent this risk.⁷ What Works 1 shed light on the reality that VAWG can be prevented with the right conditions: adequate time, resources, and meaningful relationships. To realise this impact at scale, the values

underpinning funding mechanisms must go deeper and further to challenge and replace systems and patterns that are not serving the women and girls we ultimately aim to support. Funding WROs in ways that allows for more sustainable, dignified programming is possible when mutually respectful and trusting relationships exist between funders and grantees.

Shaping grant-making structures to better support WROs and feminist movement building

Provide ample, flexible funding

Bridgespan and Shake the Table recommend philanthropists invest an additional \$6 billion by 2026 (\$1.5 billion annually) in feminist movements that enable WROs to be “imaginative, responsive, and playful.”⁸ Our respondents similarly suggested that multilateral and bilateral funding mechanisms fund more to meet changing and dynamic needs.

Create accessible and responsive systems for requests for proposals (RFPs)

A more tailored process will reduce the burden both on WROs and funding mechanisms to submit and review non-essential paperwork, and also allow more time for funding mechanisms to provide meaningful feedback that WROs can use to strengthen future applications.

Customise due diligence

Requiring small organisations to overly bureaucratise their operations can place undue burden on WROs and weaken rather than strengthen them. Therefore, a flexible due diligence process that recognises diverse types of organisations and their context is a goal to collectively work towards.

Lead with humility

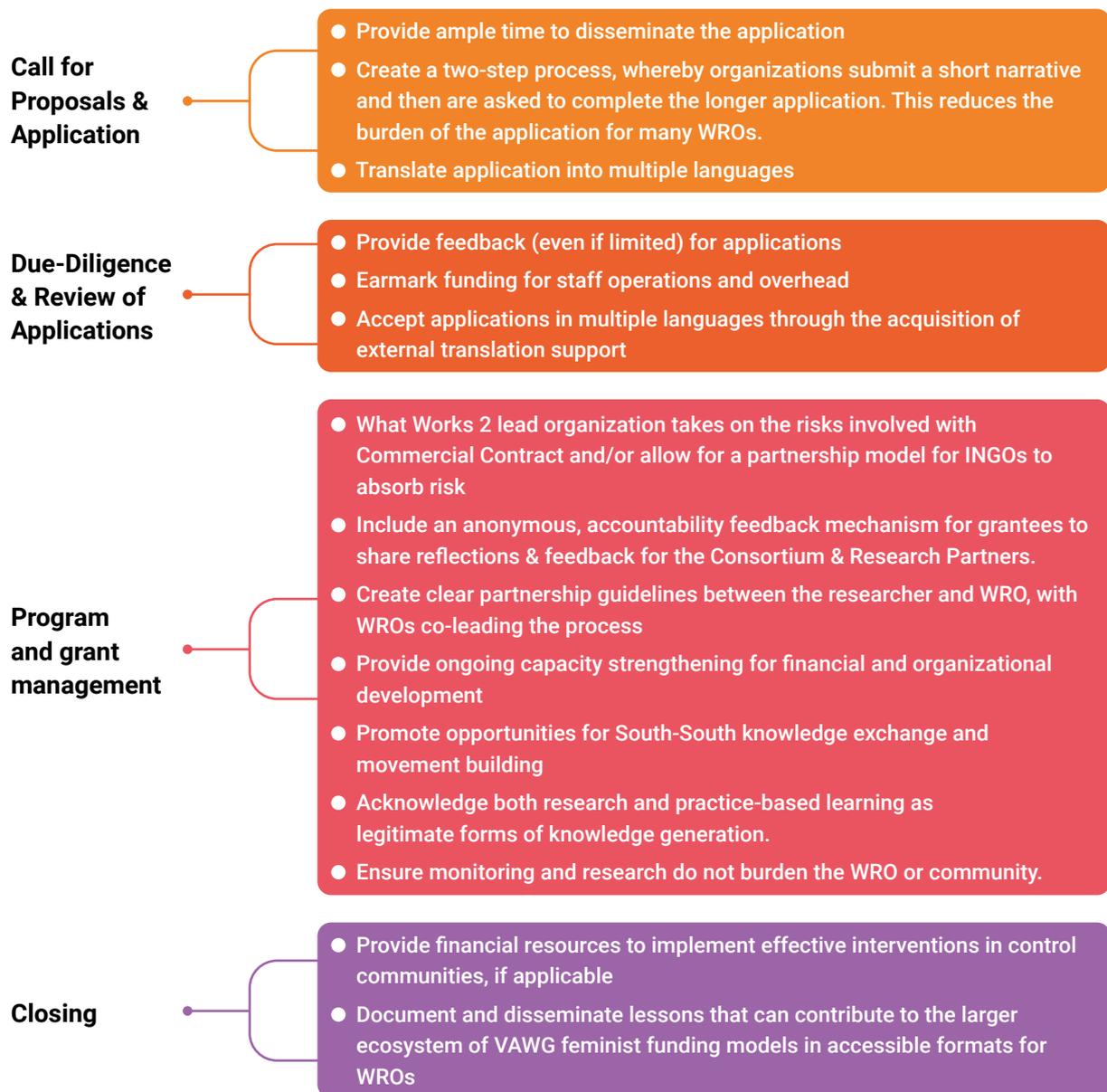
Donors can be realistic about what they can and cannot promise in terms of grant making. Be direct with grantees, avoiding making promises which cannot be delivered, while also working collaboratively to find creative solutions to meet stakeholders’ needs, particularly those of WROs.

Build in sufficient programme length and set realistic goals

Transformational work takes considerable depth, time, and resources. WROs expressed challenges with meeting unrealistic and decontextualized goals set out by donors. WROs can best yield change if donors provide ample time to brainstorm, pilot, and manage backlash in their efforts to undo generations of deeply held beliefs and behaviours⁹.

Based on the consultations the following actions were proposed for the What Works 2 grant-making process, adapted from the Sexual Violence Research Institute (SVRI)¹⁰.





The future of bilateral and multilateral funding can be (more) feminist

While some philanthropic organisations are demonstrating how flexibility and trust-based partnerships can unlock untapped potential for feminist movements to prevent VAW, we believe that large scale funding mechanisms such as What Works 2 can provide much-needed leadership toward more inclusive, accessible structures. In general, VAWG prevention funding can better meet the needs of WROs in order to deliver impact at the level in which it has the potential to do. Internalising equity and respect within partnerships and throughout the entire aid infrastructure can help realise WROs and donors' collective vision of a violence-free world. WROs can, and do, deliver change when provided with the resources, trust and support needed to thrive.

Endnotes

- 1 Jiménez Thomas Rodriguez, D., Harper, C. and George, R. (2021) *Mobilising for change: how women's social movements are transforming gender norms*. ALIGN Report. London: ODI (<https://www.alignplatform.org/resources/reportmobilising-for-change>).
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- 6 Shake the Table & Bridgespan Group. (2022). *Lighting the Way: A Report for Philanthropy on the Power and Promise of Feminist Movements*. Shake the Table & Bridgespan Group. p. 25
- 7 Peace Direct, Adesco, Alliance for Peacebuilding, WCAPS (2021). "Time to Decolonize Aid: Insights and lessons from a global consultation." Peace Direct. <https://www.peacedirect.org/us/publications/timetodecoloniseaid/>
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- 10 Adapted from: Mago, A, & Dartnall, E. (2021). *Funding Ethically: Better funding for Violence against Women and Violence against Children Research in Lower- and Middle-Income Countries*. Sexual Violence Research Initiative.

To find out more, please visit our website: <https://ww2preventvawg.org/>



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