

Where next for feminist foreign policy on funding feminist movements?

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Key messages

Adopt feminist funding practices to facilitate social movements' access to long-term, core and flexible funding. As donors, governments with (or aspiring to develop) feminist foreign policy (FFP) can learn from the approaches of existing women's funds, adopting principles such as non-competitive selection processes, grantee-led identification of funding priorities, and trust-based disbursements.

Expand existing development finance and ringfence funding to reach feminist movements. Stricter gender-markers for official development assistance and new commitments to direct funds to civil society are particularly urgent in the context of increasing backlash from anti-gender actors and attacks on human rights and civic space.

Shift macroeconomic policies to alleviate financial conditions and pressures on women's organising. Feminist-inspired governments can leverage their power within international finance institutions and through their diplomatic and bilateral relationships to shift macroeconomic policies on issues such as debt and tax – this can also increase the funding available to feminist movements and for global public goods.

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About this publication

This policy brief forms part of the ODI series: *Where next for feminist foreign policy?* and was developed from a set of closed-door roundtables with leading experts and feminist actors.

It aims to bridge technical expertise, feminist advocacy and global scholarship, and delves into emerging aspects of feminist foreign policy. This series intends to advance understanding on intersecting agendas to establish potential directions for future research and policy.

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Photo credit: Feminist movements march through the streets of Bogotá on International Women's Day in Colombia. 8 March, 2021 Credit: Laura Olejua / Shutterstock.com

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About this policy brief

This brief explores how governments with feminist foreign policy (FFP) along with those aspiring to have FFP, collectively referred to as FFP+, can more effectively resource feminist movements as critical actors driving forward gender equality and intersectional social justice agendas.

Key recommendations are drawn from the existing literature, together with new insights gathered from ODI's closed-door convening series *Where next for feminist foreign policy?* hosted online May–August 2023. This policy brief was developed out of the roundtable 'Can foreign policy be a pathway to effectively fund feminist movements?', building on participants' expertise as well as both sceptical and hopeful views about the potential of FFP (see Annex for a partial list of attendees).

It also brings forward ideas based on an ODI policy brief, 'How to partner with feminist movements for transformative change' (Tant and Jiménez Thomas Rodríguez, 2022) and should be read alongside a FFP background note (Michalko, 2023) which outlines some of the key tensions and lessons learnt about FFP implementation.

Introduction

‘If women’s rights movements with a feminist vision of social justice can do so much with so little, isn’t it time for progressive foreign policy to get behind the feminist agenda in a more significant and sustained way?’

Srilatha Batliwala, Senior Advisor, Knowledge Building at CREA
ODI Roundtable 2023

Feminist movements have been instrumental in shifting norms and securing a broad array of social, legal and civil rights for more than a century (George and Harper, 2022). This has come from their collective mobilisation, advocacy for legislative changes, such as on the issue of gender-based violence (Weldon and Htun, 2013; Jiménez Thomas Rodriguez, 2022), and provision of frontline services, for example in reproductive health, education and legal aid (Jiménez Thomas Rodriguez, 2021; Karim, 2022). However, insufficient funding of feminist movements and women’s rights organisations (WROs) persists, even with extensive evidence of their importance for driving transformative change in society, including across multiple justice issues beyond gender inequality, such as the environmental crisis (Jiménez Thomas Rodriguez, 2023).

In recent years, attacks and backlash against gender equality and feminism has become extremely well-organised and well-financed. For example, from 2008 to 2018, anti-gender actors received more than \$6 billion for their activities (GPP, 2020). These movements are mounting a powerful offensive to counteract the progressive achievements of women’s rights mobilisations, and to re-entrench patriarchal norms (Khan et al., 2023). And, while anti-gender networks are financially well-supported by those who benefit from the status quo, feminist movements and WROs are systemically underfunded.

This underfunding takes place in a world beset by extreme economic inequalities, austerity politics, and unjust global tax and trade policies. As a result, the richest (predominantly male) 1% of the global population increased their wealth during the COVID-19 pandemic, accumulating 45.6% of all global wealth (Brehm-Christensen et al., 2023). At the same time, women bear the greatest burden of poverty and yet supplement the lack of public services and essential health, education and transport infrastructure with their own unpaid labour.

In light of these persistent inequalities, the Gender Equality Forum in 2021, hosted by the governments of Mexico and France along with UN Women, aimed to bring together changemakers and donors to make unprecedented commitments towards advancing gender justice. This culminated in financing pledges totalling \$40 billion, in recognition that to really address gender injustice internationally, substantial investments are sorely needed. However, three years later, there remains much scepticism on whether donors made good on their financial promises across areas including gender-based violence, economic justice and rights, and sexual and reproductive autonomy (Chebbi, 2024).

Resources are one of the foundational principles of FFP – one of the so-called 3Rs, alongside representation and rights (Michalko 2023; Kitchens West, Borja and Barter, 2024). As a result, governments that support FFP can be much-needed allies in influencing international financing for gender equality, especially by leading the way on funding feminist movements and advocating for fiscal policies that significantly address gender inequalities around the world.

Many FFP+ governments have the policy tools at their disposal to improve the resourcing of feminist movements, without which the feminist ambition of their foreign policy would remain hollow. When governments adopt feminist approaches to foreign policy, they have an opportunity to re-examine the existing structures, principles and assumptions that underpin the global financial, development and philanthropic ecosystem. Through transforming these structures, they can put the ambitions and principles of FFP into practice. Spain, for example, has recognised that an effective implementation of its FFP ‘requires... an increase in available resources to make gender equality a reality’ (MAEC, 2021).

Context

Mobilisations led by feminist organisations campaigning for women’s rights have proven to be some of the most effective routes to securing long-term and sustainable norm change towards gender equality and justice (Jiménez Thomas Rodriguez, 2021; Cookson et al., 2023). Social movements trying to change hearts and minds, as well as laws and policy, need time to make generational shifts – meaning that their impact is not always immediately obvious or quantifiable.

Feminist movements and WROs use a diverse array of strategies to shift gender inequalities around the world. They harness unique ways of operating – ranging from informal, voluntary, flat-structured networks of individuals and collectives to sophisticated organisations and collaborations built over the long-term – to remain agile, responsive and flexible (Tant and Jiménez Thomas Rodriguez, 2022). These ways of organising and operating reflect feminists’ commitment to applying different approaches that are not rooted in patriarchal norms, power hierarchies and inequalities that define many formalised non-governmental organisations (NGOs). As a result of this informality and non-hierarchical structure, their volunteer-based mobilisations, and other ways in which they challenge dominant systems of power, feminist movements are perceived by international donors and funders as difficult to fund, unreliable, ‘high-risk’ and incompatible with their modes of operation (Karim, 2022).

Feminist grassroots movements and WROs currently receive less than 1% of global official development assistance (ODA) and philanthropic funding (AWID, 2021; Martínez et al., 2021). Similar patterns of underfunding and exclusion of feminist civil society permeate the humanitarian sector (Guidorzi, 2023). As a result of the current system, feminists are often excluded from foreign and development decision-making, policy and action. This marginalisation is further exacerbated for women from racial, ethnic or sexual minorities. For example, black feminist movements only receive somewhere between 0.1% and 0.35% of annual grant dollars from foundations (Abbas and Miller, 2021). This systemic exclusion of women of colour prevails, despite policy commitments to support intersectional gender equality and localisation, which recognises that interventions are most effective, efficient, sustainable and equitable if meaningfully led by the most marginalised in any given locality. In other words, despite the recognition that feminists, women, and gender and LGBTQI+ minorities ought to have power to lead policy efforts and decision-making, they are underfunded and excluded.

As feminists argue, *not to fund feminist movements* is high-risk, especially in the face of anti-gender movements gaining power and momentum across the world. Right now, to meet the scale and scope of the anti-gender movement, which is undermining the global consensus around human rights norms, challenging gender equality frameworks and threatening democracy (Khan et al., 2023), a minimum of \$6 billion in additional resources for feminist funds is required by 2026 (Shifman et al., n.d.).

Calls for larger volumes of more effective and higher-quality funding to feminist movements are not new. On the contrary, activists have been calling on governments and philanthropists to meaningfully change their funding approaches for decades, especially while recognising the colonial legacies of the funding relationships through development assistance which are rooted in unequal systems of global power (Nevens and Shahnaz, 2024). Some bilateral donors have heeded the call and have committed, for example, to the Addis Ababa Action Plan on Transformative Financing for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, which commits its implementers to increasing funds while also undertaking action to create an enabling environment for women's economic advancement and sustainable development at large (UN Women, 2015).

Other initiatives include the Equality Fund, which emerged from the MATCH feminist fund with financial investment from Global Affairs Canada in 2019, and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Leading from the South initiative, building on the history of the so-called MDG3 Fund (see Box 1), which for the first-time channelled funding to four women's funds in the Global South.¹ These and other funding mechanisms have successfully piloted and embedded feminist funding principles, learning from women's funds like Mama Cash, the African Women's Development Fund and other members of the Prospera International Network of Women's Funds, to deliver long-term and trust-based funding, rooted in analysis of power differences and intersectional forms of marginalisation.

Box 1: Examples of funds supporting feminist civil society

Equality Fund: Canada and UK

Seeded with more than \$300 million CAD in 2018 by the Canadian government and supported with an additional \$54 million CAD from the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office in 2023, the Equality Fund emerged from the work of feminist organising in Canada in the 1970s. The fund provides grants to feminist movements, including their coalition- and network-building, and strives to change the philanthropic ecosystem for the movements, while following feminist funding principles. Some of its initiatives include the Women's Voice and Leadership programme in the Caribbean, which advances women in their areas of interest, be it sexual and reproductive health and rights or climate justice.

1 The term 'Global South' is increasingly used to refer to many countries around the world. Often it is employed as a substitute to refer to nations that have been historically exploited through colonisation. Current international debates question the usefulness of this term and whether another generalising and binary framework (Global North-Global South) is productive for reconstituting and challenging global power relations.

Box 1: Examples of funds supporting feminist civil society (continued)

MDG3 Fund: Netherlands

The fund (set up to address Millennium Development Goal 3, to promote gender equality and empower women) distributed more than €82 million in the early 2000s, reaching more than 220 million people and more than 3,600 women's organisations. It enabled various achievements, from movements' advocacy impact on legislation, to the strengthening of movements' cohesion and women's leadership. The large size of grants, financial stability and core-mission funding were considered some of the key factors making the fund effective in supporting initiatives, such as those that increased women's understanding of their rights in the legal system through media campaigns and those that trained volunteers to raise awareness of intimate partner violence.

Source: (Batiwala, 2013); Equality Fund, n.d.)

In addition to these positive initiatives, further policy avenues, as discussed in this briefing, can be considered by FFP+ governments to improve the resourcing of feminist movements. These policy considerations include engaging with innovative funding practices, safeguarding development finance mechanisms, as well as supporting macroeconomic policies that create conditions that reduce pressures on women's organising. These policy actions span three levels: national, bilateral and multilateral within international institutions. Based on the views of leading scholars and activists in the field, and ODI's own research, this policy brief suggests areas of action that governments with existing and aspirational FFPs should consider to strengthen the power of feminist movements and, in so doing, counter concerning trends of democratic recession and rollbacks to gender rights all over the world.

1 Adopt feminist funding practices to facilitate social movements' access to long-term, core and flexible funding

'We need more money, but we get crumbs. Forget the myths we can't absorb it – we can.'

Françoise Moudouthe, CEO, African Women's Development Fund,
Shaping Feminist Foreign Policy Conference 2023

A widespread assumption permeating the global funding and foreign policy ecosystem, is that feminist funds and grassroots organisations in the Global South are not 'able' to receive large volumes of funding. As the ODI roundtable participants highlighted, movements are perceived to lack the administrative and management systems, or financial structures and capabilities to meet the accountability, risk mitigation and reporting expectations of Global North institutions. As a result, large international NGOs and increasingly for-profit private consultancy companies, mostly headquartered in the Global North, tend to serve as funding recipients or intermediaries and managers of global funds (Shift the power, 2024; Whitty et al., 2023). They retain some of the funding for their own operations and hence indirectly compete with feminists in the Global South for the limited resources available (Miller and Jones, 2019).

Adopting a feminist approach to resourcing feminist movements is an opportunity for FFP+ governments to rebalance the inequalities that are inherent in the global funder/recipient power dynamics, which reproduce ongoing global legacies of colonial hierarchies. At the heart of current funding norms and practices is a narrative that feminist organisations are too high-risk, lack capacity, or first need to formalise and mature to be fundable (Tant and Jiménez Thomas Rodriguez, 2022).

Instead, feminist-inspired governments can change their own ways of working to ensure they meet feminist organisations where they are at. Analysing and addressing power inequalities underpins feminist approaches to foreign policy; FFP+ governments can act according to feminist principles by shifting power from donors to those doing the work of gender equality in the Global South, including feminist movements. This approach values movements' expertise, skills and networks. It also means recognising that advocacy and gender norm change takes a long time and cannot be achieved in project funding cycles over one to two years.

FFP+ governments can approach alternative ways of working as an opportunity to change their own expectations and practices with the aim of improving the targeting and impact of their funding. According to ODI roundtable participants, such alternatives could include adopting trust-based models of long-term funding, beyond short-term cycles – that measure impact and ensure accountability through creative methodologies that do not constrain vital funding flows to locally-led organisations. The Black Feminist Fund for example, has a standard granting cycle of eight years.

Feminist funding approaches are already well-established and utilised by women's funds, such as members of the Prospera International Network of Women's Funds (see Box 2 for an example). Many of these funds are located in and operate from the Global South, and several consortia run and administer bilateral donor grants or pooled funding (e.g. the already mentioned Equality Fund and the Leading from the South initiative). These funds take on the administrative and reporting burdens from grassroots feminist organisations and movements, directly disbursing funds and giving them access to resources that would otherwise be out of reach, while at the same time relieving them of administrative tasks that divert their attention and labour away from activities on the ground.

Box 2: Feminist funding principles

(according to Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice)

1. Fund those most impacted by gendered oppression
2. Fund at the intersection of women's rights and LGBTQI liberation movements
3. Apply an intersectional lens to break down funding silos
4. Provide flexible and sustained core funding to activists
5. Fund efforts to make social and cultural change, alongside and as part of legal and policy change
6. Support cross-issue and cross-regional movement building
7. Go beyond grantmaking: accompany activists with capacity building and leadership support
8. Invest in holistic security and healing justice
9. Support work at the crossroads of feminist activism, digital rights, and internet freedom
10. Partner with women's and other activist-led funds to ensure that funding reaches the grassroots

Source: Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice (2019)

Channelling funding through existing women's funds also increases the likelihood of resources reaching genuine feminist movements, rather than actors who pose as gender equality or women's rights champions but can ultimately undermine feminist aims (Provost and Sekyiamah, 2023). This becomes even more critical as anti-gender movements organise to disrupt and participate in civil society spaces dedicated to upholding women's rights at the United Nations (UN) (Holmes, 2024). Funds can build on the learnings from evaluation of earlier initiatives, such as the Dutch Ministry for Foreign Affairs' MDG3 Fund (see Box 1).

Other feminist funding models and practices that FFP+ government funds can adopt include non-competitive selection processes (see, for example, Equality Fund, 2022), shared governance, which means participatory/grantee-led identification of funding priorities, and trust-based disbursements, which are long-term, predictable, flexible and cover all operating costs (Djordjevic, 2022; Mama Cash, 2022). It is this type of funding which is required for the transformation of unequal gender norms and other feminist objectives and hence crucial for the fulfilment of the FFP objectives (Michalko and Somji, 2023).

Feminist movements and WROs represent a diverse group of people, some of whom tend to be further excluded from positions of power, leadership and accessing funding. These include, for example, young women and girls (Arutyunova et al., 2023), indigenous women and women in conflict-affected areas (WfWI, WILPF and Saferworld, 2022; Guidorzi, 2023). It is crucial that donors widen their understanding of women and feminist movements, providing funding to diverse feminist constituencies in targeted ways, such as through the Young Women's Fund (FRIDA) or the International Indigenous Women's Forum. Similarly, as feminists and their allies adopt an intersectional understanding of the struggles and lived experiences of women and gender and sexual minorities (Baldoumas, 2023), donors can facilitate feminists' resourcing through avenues that are not siloed exclusively as gender equality or feminist, such as through climate or education.

Lastly, participants in the ODI roundtable highlighted the need for feminist funding to be open and cover core operational activities that are essential for movements to achieve their goals. The experiences of collective organising, activism and anti-feminist backlash are causing high levels of burnout, which means that feminists really benefit from receiving funding for their daily operations, as well as for time to recover, care for each other and strategise for the long-term, rather than simply for responding to attacks, fundraising and 'firefighting'. This also means recognising the added value and unique skills, insights and efficiencies of the movements that funders should seek to support in meaningful ways.

'When it comes to implementation, what is the capacity of the resources to do this work on the ground? Some funders are well meaning and supportive, but the implementation becomes very taxing for movement actors who do not have the capacity to complete this, or even apply for the funding.'

Anuradha Chatterji, Director, Resource Development Impact and Learning, CREA
ODI Roundtable 2023

Policy recommendations that FFP+ states should consider:

- **Intentionally fund feminist movements and organisations** because of their proven impact on changing gender norms and driving long-term shifts towards equality. This could entail supporting them directly or leveraging existing women's funds that already have a proven track record of supporting feminist civil society, especially those located in the Global South and working regionally.
- **Avoid creating competition between feminist groups by providing different funding routes that can be accessed by diverse feminist actors.** Being mindful of ongoing power inequalities (especially between Global North and South organisations), acknowledge feminists in their diversity, and create separate funding streams to allow smaller movements and other feminist organisations to develop and grow so they can apply for larger amounts of funding in the future.
- **Adopt or maintain feminist funding principles** as indispensable guardrails that enable feminists' access to funding. This includes feminists having decision-making power, building relationships of trust with local organisations, and re-evaluating what funding relationships pose financial, reputational or other risks. A reconsideration of donor approaches to risk should be based on a recognition of both the added value and limitations of what movements in their diversity can realistically do. For example, donors should avoid imposing bureaucratic and unrealistic rules for financial reporting or timelines for evaluation that are not suitable for the contexts in which movements operate (Prevention Collaborative, 2024).
- **Allocate more resources to understand and counter anti-gender actors and de-democratisation.** Gender justice and democracy are inextricably linked, with women relying on strong civil society protections (such as rights of assembly and freedom of association) in order to participate in feminist movements and demand change, as well to mobilise financial support domestically (Khan, Tant and Harper, 2023).

2 Expand existing development finance and ringfence funding to reach feminist movements

Progress towards gender justice around the world cannot feasibly be achieved without efforts to make gender inequalities an explicit focus and primary goal of bilateral and multilateral ODA. Leveraging existing mechanisms can more efficiently channel funds to leading agents of change: feminist movements. FFP+ governments who are members of the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC) can play a critical role in improving the existing ODA spending on gender equality, which also requires increasing its volumes and effectiveness in reaching autonomous feminist movements and WROs.

‘When looking at funding from bilateral donors, one of the challenges we face in trying to move funds in more feminist ways is the shrinking volumes and all the demands on bilateral funding money.’

Beth Woroniuk, former Vice-President, Policy, Equality Fund, Canada
ODI Roundtable 2023

Today, analysis shows that ODA with gender equality as a principal objective – meaning it seeks to explicitly and primarily address gender inequalities – is only at 4%, and thus falls significantly behind committed ODA that has gender equality as one component among many other policy objectives 39% (DAC Network on Gender Equality, 2024). This sizeable gap hints to well-noted problems of inflated gender marking, which can create a misleading picture of levels of ODA being put exclusively towards gender equality, because of a tendency and potential to overestimate gender-focused finance (George and Gulrajani, 2023).

Data on the level of allocable ODA dedicated to feminist movements and WROs is even lower – below 1% – having fallen in the 2021–2022 period, reaching only \$453 million (DAC, 2024). Currently there are no benchmarks for allocable funding to be committed to feminist movements to which donor governments could be held accountable. Moreover, ODA reporting lacks transparency and combines allocations to both government and civil society under the same categorisation, with funds destined to government ministries counted alongside those destined to WROs. This means funding volumes directed to movements are likely to be seen as higher than they really are, and speaks to how current ODA reporting makes tracking of funding, evaluations of their impact and accountability to feminist principles more difficult (Dicks and Woroniuk, 2023).

These small amounts of ODA reaching feminist actors must further be understood within a wider context of overall low levels of ODA spending, as many countries fail to meet the agreed standard

of a 0.7% allocation of their gross national income. In 2023, only five countries within OECD-DAC met this threshold (OECD, 2024b), despite this having been agreed within the United Nations system since the 1970s.

While ODA flows have increased in real terms, they are still insufficient in the face of rising costs and a multiplying of the needs that the 0.7% was established to meet. Recent years have also seen funding allocations be frequently reoriented towards in-country spending on refugees and asylum seekers, or the humanitarian response in Ukraine (OECD, 2024a). The future outlook and integrity of ODA spending continues to be uncertain, with many countries, such as the UK and France, planning to miss the legally binding targets (Brien and Loft, 2023; Focus 2030, 2024). In an increasingly multipolar world, and at a time when Global South nations are losing trust in Global North partners, it is crucial for OECD and feminist-inspired countries to invest in collective prosperity by maintaining their commitments to ODA.

Specific improvements can therefore be made to existing mechanisms by setting percentage targets to ringfence finance for feminist movements, and to change the corresponding ODA accounting so that resources are directly reaching drivers of change (George and Harper, 2022; Farley et al., 2024). For example, if FFP+ governments committed to guaranteeing 20% of ODA towards policies with a primary focus on gender justice, this would enhance the precision and ambition of such funding (see Box 3). Considering ways to prioritise feminist movements over international NGOs and governmental institutions in the allocation of funds and eligibility criteria would similarly help to raise funding levels for WROs, and support their transformative work (Mama Cash, 2022).

Box 3: Legislating for ODA in France

On 4 August 2021, France enacted a new law to reframe its development policy and establish gender equality as a cross-cutting objective of French ODA.

The Programming Law on Inclusive Development and the Fight against Global Inequalities specifies that 75% of all projects financed by French ODA should have gender equality as their principal or a significant objective by 2025 (according to the OECD gender marker). Of this, 20% should have it as their principal objective.

This commitment could result in €3.3 billion being allocated to the direct promotion of equality in 2025, which is four times the amount dedicated in 2021.

While legislating ODA commitments is a helpful way of future-proofing ODA, and of creating systemic change in the long-term, the French government's postponing of this commitment to 2030 in early 2024 demonstrates the ultimate reliance on political will for feminist-inspired policies to be carried through and implemented in practice.

Source: Focus 2030 (2024)

Establishing and meeting legal and normative commitments to the provision of ODA, which withstand changes in governments, is key to providing a stable and enabling environment for feminist movements. This is crucial because movements require long-term support and the ability to rely on global partners to deliver on their financial promises, so they can operate with the security that these will not be rescinded. Such withdrawal of development funds, as was seen, for example, in the case of the UK, have a devastating impact on gender equality (Breed et al., 2022). With budget cuts to ODA by the UK government for 2023–2024, millions of girls and women are set to miss out on education and healthcare provisions (International Development Committee, 2023).

FFP+ governments have an opportunity and responsibility to serve as role models that can mobilise allied governments to meet these financial targets, and to bring other non-traditional partners on board to make longer-term ODA financing commitments for gender rights. For example, since Canada adopted feminist approaches to its international development cooperation, 88% of its ODA has a gender component, up from 60% in 2013–2014. Similarly, Germany has committed to 85% of gender-sensitive funding by 2022 (Papagiotti, 2023).

Part of championing reform of ODA at the multilateral level can also involve efforts to shift lending institutions' perceptions of risk. This is necessary to increase funding to the grassroots or smaller-scale WROs in conflict-affected contexts. These countries and regions face multiple compounding crises, not just insecurity, but also accelerating impacts of human-made climate breakdown (IPCC, 2023), high levels of poverty and weak governance (Achampong, 2023; International Rescue Committee, 2023). Similarly to the barriers on the bilateral level, WROs and feminist social movements struggle to meet many multilateral funds' compliance requirements and application criteria, because they are perceived as too risky. As a result, they miss opportunities to access multilateral funding.

FFP+ governments can increase gender-focused financing to feminist movements through international institutional reforms that support ecosystems for change by providing smaller- and medium-sized grants to fit the needs of growing social movements. For example, the UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women made headway by offering a diversity of granting scales, including a small- and medium-grants funding modality, that better suited the demands of civil society organisations (Karim, 2022; Mama Cash, 2022).

However, many governments and foreign policy actors, including the European Union, are driving efforts to mobilise private investment through ODA as an alleged means to increasing funds to address the world's pressing needs. Yet, despite expectations driving political interest in blended finance – that trillions of dollars can be mobilised for 'development' – such promises have remained largely unmet. Rather, systemic changes to private sector finance would be required to really alleviate global poverty (Attridge and Engen, 2019: 59), and even more so to address gendered inequalities as private sector investments have considerably lower commitments to gender equality than conventional ODA: 2% versus 40%, respectively. The continued focus on

private sector instruments could therefore siphon billions of dollars of ODA away from gender equality, undermining its focus contribution to meeting Sustainable Development Goals and reaching the most marginalised (Meeks et al., 2020: 12 ; POLITICO, 2024).

Similarly, there is limited evidence of positive impact of the mobilisation of private capital through gender impact investing (Amin and Yahaya, 2023). In fact, much of the private sector involvement in financing of gender equality reinforces economic practices that systematically marginalise and exploit women of colour in particular, for example by pushing women into precarious, informal or low-pay income activities (Marcus and Somji, 2024).

Policy recommendations that FFP+ states should consider:

- **Honour and futureproof the 0.7% commitments of ODA.** Reliable and long-term funding will strengthen relationships in an unstable geopolitical context and enhance avenues for global cooperation at a time when progress towards development goals is in jeopardy. Future ODA can be protected and secured by making advance funding disbursements, or by enforcing legal or fiscal rules in budgetary allocations that can withstand changes in government.
- **Increase commitment to allocate funds with gender equality as a principle focus of ODA.** FFP+ states and those with strong commitments to gender equality and justice can set a goal of earmarking 20% of ODA for initiatives that have gender equality as their principal objective (Khan et al., 2023; Mama Cash, 2022). To ensure that this funding reaches WROs, it may be necessary to change how the OECD-DAC gender component is applied and develop stricter gender markers. This will limit the tendencies of some governments to boost their gender commitment by loosely labelling interventions as gender sensitive (George and Gulrajani, 2023).
- **Support OECD rule changes to minimise domestic reallocations** so that much-needed finance is not diverted to migration-related in-country spending.
- **Change funding requirements to enable feminists to access more funds.** This could include altering bureaucratic funding procedures and making other changes so that feminist organisations can access funds not earmarked for ‘gender equality’ – reflecting feminists’ mobilisation across multiple intersecting issues exacerbated by gender inequalities, such as education and climate.
- **Influence donor lending approaches and ODA risk appetite** to increase WROs access to finance, and channel more resources towards conflict-affected states, so that more resources are made available to the most excluded.
- **Reconsider private sector solutions such as blended finance or impact investing.** Traditional ODA mechanisms tend to have higher levels of gender focus and do not drive private sectors’ systemic undermining of gender equality. Alternatively, governments can substantially increase their human rights and gender equality requirements for private sector instruments (Miller and Jones, 2019: 28–34).

3 Shift macroeconomic policies to alleviate financial conditions and pressures on women's organising

'Beyond funding – if countries consider themselves to have feminist foreign policy – we really need them to try and dismantle the power dynamics between countries. We need them to bring conversations around debt, reparations and inequality harming communities in the Global South. If we are not allowed to be in those conversations – these economic forums – we need them to be the voice.'

Tania Turner, Former Co-Executive Director, Fondo Semillas, Mexico
ODI Roundtable 2023

Macroeconomic policy environments, both at the global and national level, substantially shape feminist movements' priorities and activities. Many movements and WROs currently spend considerable resources supplementing the gap in the provision of essential services in the absence of the state – especially to socially marginalised populations, including women escaping violence, women seeking reproductive healthcare, refugees and migrants, sex workers, and LGBTQI+ communities.

The existing chronic underfunding of public services, such as childcare provision, secondary education and reproductive healthcare, results from a set of complex intertwined measures, including austerity policies, high-interest loan instruments and conditionalities attached to debt relief (Ghosh, 2021). In part, public budget cuts and constricted fiscal space in formerly colonised countries is driven by their obligations to service and repay high levels of foreign debt (Abed and Kelleher, 2022; Cook and Kabeer, 2023). For example, nearly a third of Nigeria's 2023 budget was spent on debt servicing, in comparison to 8% spent on education and 5% on health (Ekeruche et al., 2023).

Many feminist movements are already making the case for policy changes, calling on their governments to end austerity and prioritise spending on services that are needed by women and girls in their diversity to live dignified lives. However, in some countries, movements and WROs are restricted in their ability to mobilise and advocate for such changes due to political and legal conditions imposed on civil society, which function to shrink civic space.

FFP+ governments can seek to create enabling environments to positively support the day-to-day operations of feminist movements, through their seats in international financial institutions (IFIs), such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and through their diplomatic relationships. By challenging the dominant policy of austerity, FFP+ governments can push for more funds to be made available for essential public services in countries that receive financial support through the World Bank and the IMF.

This can be achieved by changing debt relief and restructuring conditionalities (Ghosh, 2021), given that gender equality is already an existing commitment of these institutions (IMF, 2022). For example, the IMF guidance note for country staff recognises the gendered impact of policies, such as subsidies cuts, and recommends that other policy responses should be pursued if such cuts have negative impacts on gender equality efforts (IMF, 2018).

Other policies promoted by IFIs that narrowly focus on economic growth can often be at odds with feminist approaches to well-being and sustainability. This is because economic growth is not automatically inclusive, and economic benefits do not ‘trickle down’ to increase income for poor people and other marginalised groups excluded from the formal economy (Cook and Kabeer, 2023). Fiscal policies and taxation, in particular, have immense impacts on gender equality, due to gendered income inequalities and differences in consumption (Abramovsky and Selwane, 2023).

‘The prioritisation of debt servicing results in social spending cuts because neoliberal thinking assumes that women will fill the gaps with unpaid work.’

Mae Buenaventura, Senior Program Manager for Debt and Green Economic Building,
Asian Peoples’ Movement on Debt and Development,
68th annual Commission on the Status of Women, 2024

FFP-inspired governments can also pursue progressive feminist policies advocated for by feminists globally, such as reforming the global tax governance system. The mandate for such reform comes from the UN member states themselves, who voted for a UN Global Tax Convention in 2023 (Noble et al., 2020; Hicks et al., 2022). By supporting these efforts, led by the Africa Group in the UN to close taxation loopholes and expand the global tax base, FFP+ governments can help offer systemic solutions to resource gender equality and tackle multiple overlapping crises worldwide. Their leadership can build momentum behind reforming the global tax regime, to raise sufficient financing and collect the much-needed resources to invest in global public goods, such as inclusive care systems (Kabeer, 2024; Global Alliance for Tax Justice, 2024).

These tax reform efforts can be accompanied by advocacy for progressive wealth tax systems of between 2% and 10% on the world’s millionaires and billionaires. Some FFP and Global South governments, along with many of these high-net-worth individuals, already show considerable buy-in for such reforms and back calls for a fairer tax system (Proud to Pay More, 2024; Schulze, et al., 2024), which could raise \$1.1 trillion more than the annual average savings that governments enact through cuts (Abed and Kelleher, 2022: 30). This can go hand in hand with efforts to challenge the continued existence of tax havens, which allow for the private appropriation of public resources and for multinational corporations or high-net-worth individuals to offshore accumulated wealth and evade paying their fair share of taxes. By also helping to track and inhibit illicit financial flows leaving the Global South, FFPs could help halt \$100–200 billion flowing out of countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America each year. Some estimations suggest that the African continent loses up to \$50 billion annually as a result of illicit financial flows (Noble et al., 2020: 37).

These policy changes to create more funds available for feminist causes must be underpinned by diplomatic efforts to safeguard democratic rights for feminist movements and WROs while preventing further deteriorations of civic space. As feminist movements are being shut down, they require funds to lead strategic litigations that challenge laws limiting their rights. This includes laws that limit the right to assembly and regulations that undermine progressive organisations' legal status or deny their right to register as NGOs, as has been the case with LGBTQI+ organisations in Uganda since the passing of the Anti-Homosexuality Act in 2023.

Policy recommendations that FFP+ states should consider:

- **Use decision-making power in IFIs to improve implementation of commitments to prevent negative gendered impacts caused by debt management policies and assistance conditionalities.** These policies, rooted in austerity logic, tend to disproportionately impact women and create resource constraints for national budgets, and thus increase the burden on feminist movements and WROs (Arbab and Abdo, 2022). FFP+ governments can thus hold IFIs accountable to their existing gender equality commitments and procedures.
- **Advance global tax reform by supporting the UN Global Tax Convention** to promote inclusive and effective tax transparency and cooperation internationally. FFP+ governments can also strengthen policies that target corporations registered in their own territories (as well as in the countries where they seek to support feminist movements) for tax avoidance, and support policies that redistribute global wealth, targeting the wealthiest individuals through progressive tax systems.
- **Enhance mechanisms to tackle illicit financial flows** from and in collaboration with FFP partner-countries.
- **Expand funds available to feminist movements through reforms to IFIs.** FFP+ states can use diplomatic influence and their decision-making powers within various IFIs to increase policies around risk absorption. Such reforms would be enabled through supporting the promotion of diverse leaders with feminist values and experiences to the helm of IFIs.
- **Engage in diplomatic efforts to safeguard democratic rights for feminist movements** by working with governments to guarantee protections of civic space, which goes hand in hand with strengthening democracy and upholding freedom of speech.

Conclusion

Three years on from the 2021 Generation Equality Forum, where the international community pledged to invest \$40 billion in gender equality by 2026, not enough financing is being funnelled into efforts to push forward gender equality and justice goals. For governments inspired by the transformational potential of feminist approaches to development policy and foreign affairs, one fundamental aspect to consider is the level and quality of financing directed towards movements leading feminist change.

This policy brief has outlined three arenas in which governments can demonstrate their leadership. These range from direct improvements in the quality and mode of donor funding, the enhancement in volume and reach of funds through bilateral and multilateral mechanisms, and the influencing of the wider fiscal landscape in which social movements operate.

At this time of rising polarisation, violence from anti-gender actors, and attacks on human rights and liberties, FFP+ governments can lead the way towards a more just future by fully investing in the efforts of those working to create a more stable, equal and safe world. This is a much-needed step for FFP+ governments, which continue to face scepticism from civil society on their intentions and ability to operationalise feminist principles. They can mobilise their resources in ways that substantiate their vital progressive role in the world of international relations, alongside pragmatically exercising diplomacy or decision-making power in ways that tackle persistent structural gender inequalities. As a coalition, by funding feminist movements, FFP+ governments can more effectively promote a world order based on democracy and collective prosperity.

Annex: Partial list of participants

The table below lists the participants of the ODI roundtable ‘Can foreign policy be a pathway to effectively fund feminist movements?’ (31 May 2023) who agreed to include their names in this policy brief. Please note: while the brief draws on the expertise and insights of the roundtable participants, they do not bear any responsibility for its content.

Name	Role and organisation
Spogmay Ahmed	Senior Policy Advisor, FFP Collaborative (USA)
Srilatha Batliwala	Senior Advisor, Knowledge Building, CREA (India)
Rosa Bransky	Co-Founder and Co-CEO, Purposeful (Sierra Leone)
Anuradha Chatterji	Director, Resource Development Impact and Learning, CREA (India)
Swatee Deepak	Founding Member, Shake the Table (UK)
Gráinne Kilcullen	Head of Programmes, ActionAid (Ireland)
Nathalie Margi	Senior Advocacy Officer, Urgent Action Fund for Feminist Activism (USA)
Leah Moss	Influencing Officer, Mama Cash (Netherlands)
Judyannet Muchiri	Doctoral Researcher, Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador (Canada)
Foteini Papagioti	Senior Global Policy Advisor, International Center for Research on Women (USA)
Elisabeth Prügl	Professor of International Relations, Geneva Graduate Institute (Switzerland)
Anika Snel	Political Coordinator, WO=MEN Dutch Gender Platform (Netherlands)
Tania Turner	Co-Executive Director, Fundación Semillas (Mexico)
Beth Woroniuk	Former Vice-President, Policy, Equality Fund (Canada)

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