النهضة العربية للديمقراطية والتنمية
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LOCALIZATION

Position Paper

Localizing the gender agendas

Going the extra mile: Being at the table, not in the back seat

ARDD

March
2021

Arab Renaissance for Democracy & Development

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February 2021

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Introduction

The purpose of this research is to develop a position paper for ARDD to shed light on the work of women-led and women rights organizations on the issues of gender programming and advancing women's rights in country context. It explores the understanding of and approaches to gender programming and methods used to promote women's rights. It documents experiences of women-led organizations, in selected countries in Africa, Asia and MENA region, working on women's rights and the lessons learned in making the issue appropriate to a country and its culture. It studies the examples of countries from other regions with a similar cultural context and that face similar issues. It also reviews donor policies and the approaches of aid organisations that support women's rights movement and implement feminist programming. Most of the research on women-led organizations that has been published recently has been commissioned by international actors; this is an attempt to add a voice from a local actor's perspective.

Methodology

The research used qualitative methodology based on individual and group interviews. A literature review of was carried out which included organizational reports, grey and published literature relevant to the research. Primary interviews were carried out with 14 women-led organizations and networks from 10 countries, to document their experiences. The interviews were reinforced by the documented views stemming from past workshops, reports and other published papers on women-led and women rights organizations with localization commitments. The limited time allocated to the research means it is not a comprehensive study, but it does identify the constant and common challenges faced by local women-led organizations and organizations working on women's rights, and makes recommendations to take the gender equality and gender rights agenda forward.

Background

Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but also the necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world. Today, women's empowerment remains a top priority of global development agendas. According to these agendas, such as the Sustainable Development Goals, women's empowerment can be loosely defined as the "process[es] by which women attain autonomy and self-determination". [1] It is a measure of women's agency, or their ability to make their own choices and to exercise their own will.[2] In practice, this has meant a focus on empowering women in their everyday lives by increasing their access to economic, social and political resources. With access to these resources, it is assumed that women will have all the necessary components needed to reach gender equality in the current global system.

There are multiple schools of thought on women's empowerment. Although liberal and post-colonial feminists agree that there is gender inequality, their approaches toward attaining gender equity differ. There is an ongoing discussion on the importance of focusing on feminism and a women empowerment approach that is unique to a context or a region rather than based on ideas imported[3] from Western liberal approaches. Criticism of Western liberal feminism has come from feminist scholars in different parts of the world who see its normative prescription as an imposition on local cultural and religious traditions in the name of women rights. In this vein, Aguilar's work about the evolution of feminist movements in the Philippines warns about the risk that may be derived from uncritically embracing the ideas of Western feminism, which she sees as "a feminist replication of neo-colonialism". In Aguilar's perspective, the idea of a universal sisterhood of all feminists on the globe reinforces the colonial standing of national feminist movement. She sees the emulation of foreign feminism as "the Trojan horse of feminist ethnocentrism" and an international expression of "cultural imperialism".[4]

Leila Ahmed states that feminism is a "handmaid to colonialism". "Whether in the hands of patriarchal men or feminists," she writes, "the ideas of western feminism essentially functioned to morally justify the attack on native societies and to support the notion of comprehensive superiority of Europe. Colonialism's use of feminism to promote the culture of the colonisers and undermine native culture has... imparted to feminism in non-western societies the taint of having served as an instrument of colonial domination, rendering it suspect in Arab eyes and vulnerable to the charge of being an ally of colonial interests."[5]

Indeed, many Muslim women are suspicious of Western-style feminism for this very reason, a fact which it is crucial for feminists in the west to understand, before they do a Cromer[1] and insist that the removal of veils is the route to all liberation. The growing Islamification of Arab societies and the neo-colonial impact of the war on terrorism has meant that, according to academic Sherin Saadallah, "secular feminism and feminism which mimics that of the west is in trouble in the Arab world".[6]

Kumar states that "women's rights in Muslim majority countries need to be understood in terms of nation, region, class, nationalist politics, the part played by Islam in political movements, etc. Western commentators fail to acknowledge the agency of Muslim women and the struggles for women's rights, for instance, in Morocco, Iran and Egypt.[7] Today's discussions on de-colonisation of aid has brought this issue again in stronger focus. All the organizations interviewed confirmed that the way women's equity programmes are designed leaves little room to involve "women on the ground" in decision-making processes that affect their lives. Often projects or programme proposals are developed in a western capital and then implemented through a partner directly in a country, often without real knowledge of women's realities.

There is the assumption that work on gender and the rights of women is based on a shared vision of what equality for women entails. The discourse in feminist networks in Africa and other continents shows that there are tensions caused by the assertion that the pursuit of certain rights for women is an elite-based concern (see Wanyeki 2005). The term "elite" is often used as a placeholder for "foreign", pointing to externally generated interests that are disconnected from the "real needs of women on the ground in their communities.[8] Some of the issues include sexual and reproductive health rights, particularly concerning abortion, as well as sexual orientation and gender identity. The "women on the ground" are rural or peri-urban women whose needs are perceived to differ from those of urban women, due to the geographical distance from state services as well as class differences. It should be emphasized here that rural is not synonymous with poor, and that class concerns should not be conflated with geographical location.[9]

Arundhati Roy writes that "the liberal feminist movement in India had become inordinately NGO-ized. Many of these NGOs have done seminal work on queer rights, domestic violence, AIDS, and the rights of sex workers. But significantly, the liberal feminist movement has not been at the forefront of challenging the New Economic Policies, even though women have been the greatest sufferers. By manipulating the disbursement of the funds, the foundations have largely succeeded in circumscribing the range of what 'political' activity should be. The funding briefs of NGOs now prescribe what counts as women's 'issues' and what doesn't. The NGO-ization of the women's movement has also made Western liberal feminism (by virtue of its being the most funded brand) the standard-bearer of what constitutes feminism".[10]

For the specific purpose of this paper, we need to understand the background and evolution of the gender discourse, and to learn and evolve to forward-looking strategies and the emerging future. Women-led and women rights organizations have been conducting the gender work for many years in development, emergency and peace programs around the world.

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[1] Lord Cromer, the founder and president of the English Men's League for Opposing Women's Suffrage, vehemently condemned how Islam treated women, in his capacity as British consul general in Egypt from 1883 to 1907. While Christianity "elevated" women, Cromer thought, Islam "degraded" them: It was Islam's degradation of women, expressed in the practices of veiling and seclusion that was "the fatal obstacle" to the Egyptian's "attainment of that elevation of thought and character which should accompany the introduction of Western civilization." In Egypt, Cromer actively ensured that women's status was not improved: he raised school fees (so preventing girls' education) and discouraged the training of women doctors. Susanna Mancini, 2012 Patriarchy as the exclusive domain of the other: The veil controversy, false projection and cultural racism, Oxford University Press and New York University School of Law, p415

The gender-equality work is guided by some international conventions developed over many years. The table below shows the key conventions guiding gender-equality work of international aid agencies.

- Convention on the Political Rights of Women (1954)

  This convention›s purpose is to codify a basic international standard for women›s political rights.

- Convention to the Consent of Marriage, Minimum Age of Marriage, and Registration of Marriages (1964)

  This convention requests setting a minimum age for marriage by law and ensuring the registration of marriage while reaffirming the need for consent to marriage by both parties.

- Declaration on the Protection of Women and Children in Emergency and Armed Conflict (1974)

  This convention states that women and children are often the victims of wars, civil unrest and other emergency situations that cause them to suffer. Furthermore, it enshrines women›s and children›s rights, such as access to food, shelter and medical care in emergency situations.

- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (1979)

  This convention is thought of as an international bill of women›s rights It is a defining document for gender-equality work.

- Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993)

  This international convention recognizes the right of a woman to live a life without violence.

- Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (PFA) (1995)

  Adopted by governments at the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women, this document sets forth governments' commitments to enhance women's rights.

- CEDAW's Optional Protocol

  It is a subsidiary agreement to CEDAW. It does not establish any new rights, but enables enforcement of the rights guaranteed in CEDAW.

- Maputo Protocol – Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (2003)

  The Maputo Protocol guarantees comprehensive rights to women, including the right to take part in the political process, to social and political equality, to control women›s reproductive health, and asks for ending female genital mutilation.

- Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention) (2014)

  The Istanbul Convention is the first legally binding instrument that criminalizes violence against women. The convention creates a legal framework and approach to combat violence against women and focuses on preventing domestic violence, protecting victims and prosecuting accused offenders.

- The Paris Agreement (under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change)

  The Paris Agreement constitutes a breakthrough; for the first time, a climate treaty commits parties, in its Preamble, to promote and consider their respective obligations on human rights, as well as on gender equality, and the empowerment of women. The agreement also mandates gender-responsive adaptation actions and capacity-building activities.

The normative framework and international conventions above have been built over many years. They are positive for women equality, but the manner in which they were conceived, who controls the agenda and how they are being implemented are subject to ongoing discussion. Understanding their evaluation will shed light on why there is still contestation and how we need to move forward.

As can be seen above the normative framework and international conventions have built over many years. These are positive for women equality however, how they were conceived and who controls the agenda and how they are being implemented is an ongoing discussion. Understanding their evaluation will shed light on why there still contestation and how we need to move forward.

Understanding the evolution of the focus on women's rights and empowerment

Understanding the evolution of the women's rights and empowerment movement is important to its future and the way forward. Internationally, the concept of "women's empowerment" gained traction during the United Nations Decade for Women. It was at that time that development practitioners faced serious criticism for the gender-blind nature of development projects. Classical development theory, which conceptualized poverty, among other social issues, as a problem to be solved by Northern expertise, was continuing to fail in various contexts in the global South. This was further compounded by the fact that classical development theory continued to perpetuate normative gender roles.[11]

Although focus on women and "women's empowerment" has a long history in the West, for others, the term originated within a network of activists and scholars located primarily in the global South, known collectively as DAWN, or Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era. Concerned with how normative development frameworks were impacting poor women of colour in the global South, DAWN began using the much more comprehensive term of "women's empowerment". According to DAWN, financial and other material resources could not, alone, guarantee empowerment; and, contrary to normative development frameworks, the solution for women's empowerment was not the same across various contexts. Instead, true women's empowerment requires an analysis of local power relations.[12]

The current conceptualization of women's empowerment is individualistic and does not pay enough attention to "intersectionality", the way women live-in various systems of oppression that goes beyond gender, such as race, class and disability. It is problematic because it assumes that women worldwide are a homogenous social group that can be "added" in a specific development equation to produce gender equality, no matter their attachments to other social categories. This definition also assumes that power is an "asset", or something that can be "acquired, bestowed, or wielded".[13] This is a simplistic definition of power that singlehandedly maintains current social hierarchies at both local and global levels. It assumes that power can be "given" by powerful development agencies located in the global North to women primarily in the global South who would remain "helpless" if not for this help. The interviews with women's organizations confirmed that there is a real power imbalance in the way international agencies work, that there is lack of recognition and acknowledgement of the agency and existing capacities in a country; throughout, there have been calls for deeper reflection on how normative standards are being implemented.

Gender discourses generated by the development ecosystem, which determines who the targets of "development" are and where they are located, lead to a homogenization of the "poor", underprivileged and underserved. These global development discourses have been criticized by many scholars who question the homogenization of "women in the third world" and the assumptions that follow about how gender operates in those contexts.[14] These scholars are interested in the discourses produced by the distinctions between the global North and global South, particularly in their construction of universalized subjects who are always acted upon and not acted with.

One other challenge is to explicitly identify an organization as feminist. As discussed in the previous section, in some quarters, the term "feminism" is viewed as distinct from women's rights or gender, and often as a foreign export mobilized by elite women from the west unconcerned with "bread and butter issues". This criticism of feminism as Western, alien, is also alive in the Middle East, where some denounced feminisms as imperialist.[15]

It is important to understand how all these views then play out in terms of how gender programmes are implemented. The next section lays out how gender mainstreaming is conceived and current challenges, and suggests a way forward.

Gender mainstreaming

"Gender mainstreaming" refers to the assessment of the gender component of legislation, policies and programmes, in all their processes, from the design to the implementation of policies and programmes, with a view to attaining gender equality. It emerged in the wake of feminist movements in North American and European countries, whose objective was to attain equality through public policies. Over the years, there has been growing awareness and a substantial increase in commitments to gender mainstreaming in the major areas of work of development

practitioners, including the UN system. There is now greater recognition of the centrality of gender equality and women's empowerment to sustainable development, and both national governments and the international community increasingly institutionalize gender mainstreaming.

Misleading and false dichotomies between targeted program interventions and those incorporating gender perspectives across different sector policies and programs persist.

Yet, despite these gains, evaluations and studies have found that gender mainstreaming has not been effective in all aspects of policy and programming, or in all sectors. Misleading and false dichotomies between targeted program interventions and those incorporating gender perspectives across different sector policies and programs persist. There is also a persistent lack of comparable data for tracking allocations and expenditures of resources for gender equality and the empowerment of women. Lack of accountability, on the other hand, delays progress in advancing gender equality.[16]

Gender mainstreaming leans towards liberal feminism. Liberal feminism believes unequal social power relations breed inequality between men and women, and that such inequality can be addressed by giving women the same rights as accorded to men. (Kinsella, 2017) Hence, for liberal feminists, gender mainstreaming serves the purpose of bringing women on the same page as men by looking at the gendered impact of development on women and their participation in developmental processes and decision making.

On the other hand, post-colonial feminists caution that gender mainstreaming risks derailing the feminist political project of equality that challenges social hierarchies and the unequal power relations that are constructed along gender, racial and class dichotomies. (Walby, 2005) For post-colonial feminism scholars, universalized projects aimed at promoting equality that are ahistorical and decontextualized risk creating more challenges than addressing structural inequalities. Scholars who have contributed in these perspectives include Mohanty, Russo, and Torres, 1991; Hiddleston citing Spivak, 2007; Mama, 2013; Mukhopadhyay, 2013.[17]

Today, the donor policy is shaped by Western liberal feminist lens; it inherently shapes the organizations' agendas. This has led to a certain controversy around the term, as it can be seen as a gendered political and policy practice. Criticism surrounding the concept of gender mainstreaming is that ownership of the concept lies in institutions rather than local civil society organizations and activists. The concept also raises the question of how donors' gender-equality vision tackles other factors of inequality, such as class, ethnicity and faith, and how this vision of gender equality could differ from the strategies adopted to achieve true equality for all.

Gender sensitivity and gender equality are prominent policy and practice concerns in international aid. Donors ask for gender-disaggregated data from need assessments to reporting on project activities and results. Some ask questions about the gender balance and gendered allocation of roles and responsibilities in agencies, be they international or national/local. Occasionally, a gender audit of the organizational culture is suggested or called for (Mollett 2016: 21). Governments such as those of Sweden and Canada adopted feminist foreign policies that have guided their assistance and development priorities, and the UK government adopted a Strategic Vision on Gender Equality. In 2017, the Canadian aid administration launched Canada's new Feminist International Assistance Policy, stating that the feminist approach, solidly anchored in the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, is the best way to reduce poverty and create a world that is more inclusive, more peaceful and more prosperous.[18] USAID aims, in all its programming in Jordan, to reduce gender disparities and empower women and girls to attain their rights, determine their own life goals and help Jordan build a prosperous, self-reliant future.[19] The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) is committed to promoting gender equality, following Switzerland's national and international commitments. To facilitate the implementation of its policy on gender, SDC produced "Gender in Practice: A Tool-kit for the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and its Partners" (2003). This kit outlines key questions to ask on gender and tools that can be adapted to different situations.[20] SIDA also came up with a guidance tool.[21]

The conceptualization and implementation of gender mainstreaming has been adopted in a top-down approach. The strategy has been more technocratic than political. Institutions across levels and sectors were tasked with engaging technocrats and experts to help with interpretation and implementation of gender mainstreaming (True, 2003; Mama, 2013; Mukhopadhyay, 2013). Doing so has undermined the political goal of gender mainstreaming, as much of the work became policy focused, done by experts, and leaving no room for civil society to have an input

in its implementation (Verloo, 2005). There was a mushrooming of gender experts in donor agencies, in the UN and INGOs who conceived projects and programs without really including the voices of women activists and women's movements in the countries where the programmes were implemented. Until more recently, only middle-class, well-educated, liberal-thinking women were on the radar and the local women's organizations and movements with more conservative, social, Islamic outlook were totally left out.[22]

> *Gender mainstreaming was unable to transform existing oppressive institutional power structures and regimes.*

This has led some critics to consider that gender mainstreaming as a strategy for achieving equality has failed for various reasons: lack of understanding of the concept and its implementation strategies before the adoption by governments, intergovernmental bodies and INGOs; lack of funding due to lack of serious commitment; lack of understanding of how gender mainstreaming should affect the policies and daily practice of development practitioners. Furthermore, gender mainstreaming was unable to transform existing oppressive institutional power structures and regimes. While providing aid for gender programmes, some Northern donor states continue to sell arms to authoritarian regimes that continue to suppress women's right and, in some cases, perpetrate abuse and violence against their populations. In many places in the world, civil society space is limited or shrinking, and this also affects the gender agenda and women's rights movement.

Gender in humanitarian action

Good gender programming will necessarily take different shapes in different operational contexts.[23] Given the increasingly protracted nature of humanitarian crises, promoting positive gender and social norms from the start of an emergency response provides the basis for continued efforts throughout a crisis and sets the foundation for longer-term interventions, acknowledging that changes of attitudes, beliefs and practices may take time. "Transformative programming must be undertaken carefully and requires gauging community acceptance before engaging in conversations on deeply rooted issues".[24] The response should support women's empowerment and community leadership, prevent and respond to violence against women, advance gender equality and support long-term development as a fundamental goal. Despite progress being made over the last decades, challenges surrounding this issue remain.

In the field of humanitarian action, there have been decades of feminist influencing, lobbying and practical action to ensure gender-sensitive responses humanitarian responses. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) has adopted a revised Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (2017), accompanied by a Gender Accountability Framework (2017), to help hold the IASC and its bodies accountable for the commitments they have made. Through annual reporting against a comprehensive framework of indicators, the mechanism aims to highlight progress made toward these commitments, as well as persisting challenges. Other important developments in the humanitarian field include the New Way of Working (NWOW), embraced as the vehicle to bridge the humanitarian-development-peace divide and enhance coordination for common outcomes. More recently, in May 2020, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, more guidance has come from ILO: Getting gender equality right for a better future for women at work. Despite all these efforts, in a majority of cases the specific needs of women and girls continue to be inadequately addressed by humanitarian responders.

There are a number of political and institutional constraints to the introduction of a gender perspective in relief work. Some of these relate to the separation of relief and development work, the practical need to respond to emergencies quickly and the tendency of relief operations to be characterised by top-down, donor-dependent, expatriate-run operations, drawing on separate funds, with minimal appraisal and approval procedures, unlike development programmes. These factors create a culture clash when trying to introduce gender concerns.[25]

There are broadly three most prevalent ways of understanding and approaching gender in humanitarian aid. **The basic needs approach to gender in humanitarian aid** is motivated by the classic humanitarian imperative to save lives and reduce suffering. **The purpose of humanitarian aid**, in this interpretation, is to respond to the needs of people affected by emergency and displacement, "ensuring that the specific needs, capacities and priorities of women, girls, men and boys are identified, and that assistance *targets the persons and groups most in need"* (IASC, 2018). **In practical programming**, this approach often leads to a focus on the numbers of male and female beneficiaries reached by, or included in, a particular program. Monitoring the number of men and women beneficiaries is a central strategy to ensure gender-equal access to services and resources. In addition, reporting of

gender-segregated beneficiary data is also required by many humanitarian donors, which reinforces the focus on equal access in terms of numbers.

While human rights have become central to humanitarian rhetoric, signalling an attempt to frame beneficiaries of aid as holders of rights rather than just people in need of help, the line between focus on rights and focus on needs is often blurry in practical programming. Further, the concepts of protection and vulnerability are central to the basic needs approach to gender. In much humanitarian aid work, vulnerability constitutes the criterion for the allocation of resources. Consequently, those who are the most vulnerable are most in need and require specific assistance in order to be protected. Women are often designated as a "vulnerable group" by humanitarian organizations. As a result, much emphasis is placed on women's vulnerability, especially when talking of gender-based violence (GBV). Although there is guidance on an analysis of the causes of GBV, the practice is largely absent, and programs focus on response to cases of GBV, for example, developing standard operating procedures for response and providing medical and legal assistance. Interviews with members of women's organisations confirm that there is major focus and funding for "case management approach", with little funding for more holistic, longer-term approach. The focus on measuring equal access through counting the numbers of male and female beneficiaries sometimes draws attention away from the gendered dynamics and relations of power behind the numbers. The understanding of why gendered inequalities and differences in access occur is therefore likely to remain limited. (Olivius, 2013)

The instrumentalist approach to gender in humanitarian aid rests on an understanding of gender as differences between women and men. Women and men are thought to be differently affected by, and to respond in different ways to, emergency and displacement. Consequently, these differences must be understood and taken into account in order to target aid properly and deliver effective humanitarian programs. In contrast, if gender differences and roles in the beneficiary population are not taken into account, it may lead to scarce resources being badly used. As expressed by the IASC Gender Handbook, "gender equality programming leads to better quality and more effective humanitarian outcomes for individuals, households and communities". (IASC, 2018:1) However, in this approach, existing gender differences should not only be taken into account in program design and implementation, they should also be utilized to achieve humanitarian goals in the most efficient way.[26]

In particular, women are assumed to possess gender-specific qualities and capacities that are seen as particularly important to harness. By virtue of the reproductive roles women (are expected to) fulfil, they are seen as strategic partners whose active participation facilitates effective and efficient programs. Humanitarian policy texts describe women in emergency situations as "the secret weapon to beat hunger" (WFP, 2011) and therefore, "The inclusion and leadership of local women is crucial to the successful outcomes of these efforts and should be facilitated and enabled". (IASC 2018:105)

> *Women-led civil society and women's rights networks offers an opportunity to support and sustain localized action to address violence against women and girls in humanitarian action.*

Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies Programming, published in 2019, also states that "local partners also play a vital role in humanitarian contexts, including measures to prevent, mitigate and respond to GBV. The Minimum Standards highlight this role in line with the NWOW, which calls for partnering with local and national actors, and reinforcing existing national and local capacities. The 2016 World Humanitarian Summit recognized that localization is fundamental to the delivery of a dignified and effective humanitarian response". The associated Grand Bargain emphasized the need to make more deliberate and explicit efforts to better engage with, empower and promote the work of local actors. For GBV prevention and response actors, partnership with local women's movements, women-led civil society and women's rights networks offers an opportunity to support and sustain localized action to address violence against women and girls in humanitarian action.

However, the insistence on an "inclusive" approach to GBV translates into diminished attention to the specific rights, risks and needs of women and girls, while simultaneously compromising consideration of and reflection on the needs and experiences of men, boys and LGBTI populations, and how best to address them. Rather than helping to redress the power imbalance between men and women that drives GBV, an inclusive approach risks reinforcing this imbalance by eclipsing women's and girls' different and specific needs and equating them with the different and specific needs of men and boys. In one example of many, safe spaces for women and girls that were

developed in response to the Syrian refugee crisis are expected by some donors to serve men and boys (even if on a different floor or at different hours). This results in fewer safe spaces for women and girls when, in this context, safe spaces are their only spaces. The push to have GBV services expanded to meet the needs of other groups not only presents a problem in terms of shrinking space for women and girls but may also result in services of questionable quality or that do harm because they are not conducted through the appropriate channels.[27]

A woman leader from the Middle East stated: "We have noticed that the organizations are being forced into working on LGBTQ, even though there are other issues that need more urgent attention. We are very clear that we work on women's and girl's issues, that is our mandate; we decided not to work on LGBTQ because women did not want to take the risk. We know we will be targeted in our country context. We fear for our own safety. We know we will be attacked, then we will not be able to provide the assistance to women and girls. We had to make a deliberate choice."[28] Another woman leader from the Middle East stated that "one of the internati onal agencies put our name down as a contact point on LGBTQ issues without our permission. It has led to threats to our organization and our staff have also been threatened. When these things are done without dialogue and conversation, it obstructs our work."[29]

The main advantage of the instrumentalist approach is the largely positive and active images of women that it conveys. Women are described as strategic humanitarian partners, important actors and key stakeholders, and their participation in the planning, design and implementation of humanitarian programs is encouraged and described as essential to aid effectiveness. In contrast to an often-overwhelming focus on women as victims and as particularly vulnerable individuals in humanitarian aid, this approach emphasises women's agency and ability to impact their communities.

However, women's participation is not primarily represented as an issue of equality, justice or power; rather, it is discussed in terms of the contribution it can make toward the achievement of humanitarian goals such as protection, public health or food security. Women's inclusion in matters that affect their lives is not seen as an important end in itself, but rather as a resource that humanitarian organizations should utilize better in order to achieve other goals. The emphasis on women's participation as the solution to a range of problems can also increase women's workload, as it makes them responsible for addressing complex issues such as child malnutrition or poor health, the causes of which often lie far beyond their control. (Olivius, 2014b)

> *Addressing gender in humanitarian aid entails a commitment to a project of societal transformation far beyond the immediate delivery of effective, life-saving aid.*

The modernization approach to gender in humanitarian aid is based on an understanding of gender as structural relations of power rooted in the cultural, social, economic and political systems of the communities that are assisted by humanitarian organizations. Societies and communities affected by conflicts or disasters are described as less developed, traditional or backward. Thus, the modernization approach represents gender inequality, discrimination and violence as symptoms of underdevelopment that can be overcome through the transformation of traditional societies into modern, democratic societies with liberal values. The pursuit of gender equality is, therefore, necessary both to the protection of women in situations of emergency and to the achievement of development, peace and security in the long term. In this approach, addressing gender in humanitarian aid entails a commitment to a project of societal transformation far beyond the immediate delivery of effective, life-saving aid. In humanitarian gender handbooks the link between promotion of gender equality in emergencies and the achievement of development in the long term is emphasized.

Nevertheless, the modernization approach also has weaknesses. It constructs a link between gender inequality, underdevelopment and beneficiaries of aid, on the one hand, and gender equality, modernity and humanitarian actors, on the other. Based on this simplified binary, humanitarian actors are assumed to be the "good guys" who promote gender equality, and beneficiary populations are cast as the "bad guys" who perpetuate gender inequality, discrimination and violence. (Olivius 2016) This polarized image is obviously not consistent with reality. As discussed above, humanitarian aid programs are informed by different, sometimes contradictory, understandings of what it means to work with gender in humanitarian aid. Consequently, programs may easily lead to unintended effects and diverging interpretations may create misunderstandings and tensions between agencies seeking to coordinate their work, and in relation to actors within the communities which receive aid. These tensions are also present in the work on gender in Jordan. The next section explores how women activists have engaged in the gender discussion and actions in Jordan.

Women activists leading the gender agenda in Jordan

Jordanian women activists were among those who came together in Beijing in 1995 for the 4th World Conference on Women to jointly develop its Platform of Action. The Jordanian government has signed this and other conventions on women, which technically means it owns them. Over the years, Jordan has had an evolving "national strategy for Jordanian women" (starting from 2006-2010, with the most recent one for 2020-2025, endorsed by the government in March 2020). Its "National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security" (Nov. 2018-Nov. 2021) is currently applicable.

"The Jordanian Government has committed to close the gender equality gap by 2030 through a variety of actions, including intensifying efforts to align national legislation with the Kingdom's international and regional commitments, in a participatory manner that ensures gender equality and the elimination of violence against women. The Government pledges to accelerate the implementation of resolutions to which it has committed itself before international committees and review relevant national plans and strategies to bring them in line with the Sustainable Development Goals for 2030, as well as provide the necessary financial and human resources to carry them out.

"Jordan pledges to expand the scope of economic, social, cultural and political support to women and girls, with special emphasis on marginalized adolescents, elderly women, poor or vulnerable women, rural women, women with disabilities, female refugees, displaced women and survivors of gender-based violence. It will address social norms and stereotypes that instil discrimination against women through education, cultural and media productions that promote positive roles of women as active partners in sustainable development and community building."[30]

A key national actor here is the Jordanian National Commission for Women (JNCW). It has gained broad recognition across different sectors of society. Partially because it has some guaranteed core funding, it is able to set and control the agenda and negotiate terms of collaboration and funding with international assistance agencies. Sara Ababneh, researcher at the Centre for Strategic Studies, Jordan, argues that the shift in global discourse has been adopted by Jordanian women's movement and how they conceptualize women's rights discourse. It helps to explain why the list of women's issues ignores the lived realities of most Jordanian women.[31]

Different countries in the Middle East have moved at a different pace in terms of women's rights agenda and women's movements. The traditional view is that women's movement in Jordan is not as active as elsewhere in the Middle East, such as in Iraq, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia, Palestine and other parts of the world. In Jordan and other Middle Eastern countries, women rights activists are rightly hailed and recognized for their contribution, and changes to laws are regarded as victories. These activists are acclaimed and congratulated on matters that have long been taboo but are now being viewed in a more humanitarian light.[32] Sometimes, depending on the magnitude of the "victory", the activists are even seen as national heroes and a source of pride for the collective Arab identity. But such praise does not always last long. Women often quickly are shamed and marginalized when addressing other issues deemed *ayb* - or culturally inappropriate - until they break yet more barriers. "Being a women's rights activist in the Middle East is not easy," says Palestinian feminist Suad Abu Dayyeh.[33] This could also be because these activists use western approaches which are deemed to depart from cultural norms.

Several Jordanian women interviewed, all in responsible positions in government, CSO or international aid agencies, expressed nuance and sometimes certain reservations about the international engagement with gender in Jordan. One mentioned how, growing up as a girl, she had become aware of the notion that the honour of her family is embedded in her body, and developed a critical reflection on that. At the same time, she insists that progress needs to come from within. She did not think that there should be a *"white or western liberation of Muslim Arab women; if I adopt that idea, then I undermine my belief in Arab women".*

Other Jordanian women interviewed had critical views on approaches that pursued "women economic empowerment" as the proven "theory-of-change" path to gender equality. At a deeper level, the main criticism is that the international gender agenda falls short of a broader structural and strategic picture. The most common "women's issues" are:

- Fighting gender-based violence (including sexual harassment)
- Increasing women's political participation
- Women's economic empowerment

- Legal reform in favour of equal rights for women

These are utterly valid and require action. But they cannot be seen in isolation from wider socio-economic and policy issues in Jordan that affect men and women alike.

Several Jordanian women promoters of women's rights and gender equality that were interviewed acknowledge that activists largely came from middle- and upper-class women in the capital, Amman, and that, unlike, e.g., in Morocco, there never was a more broad-based "movement". Shortcomings are recognized but also need to be understood in the context of a deliberate de-politicization. Nonetheless, a recent report on women's political participation in Jordan concludes that "*notable progress has been made in the past 15 years to increase women's representation in elected decision-making bodies in Jordan, but the rate of change is slow*". (OECD 2018) A significant number of Jordanian women are also to be found in academia and other civil society organizations.

The top priority, for many men and women in Jordan alike, is under- and unemployment and poverty. These have an impact on men just as much as on women: boys forced to leave school to go and earn some income, or migration of many skilled and educated Jordanians of working age, many of them men, because of a lack of economic opportunities are a shared problem. Part of this is related to the economic policies that aid donors promote and leverage, and that a country accepts or not as a matter of political choice. On several occasions, in the past two decades, when social unrest caused by economic pressures manifested itself in demonstrations and public protests (e.g., Day Wage Labour Movement in 2006, 2018 protests against a proposed new tax law, or the 2019 teachers' union strike), women participated often in prominent roles. But they mobilized behind a broader and more inclusive agenda of issues that affect men and women alike, not specifically women.

The last few years have seen an increase in research focused on women-led organizations and support for women-led and women-centred organizations in humanitarian response. Below are some core contributions.

Core contributions of women responders

1. They have access permitting them not only to act as first responder, but also to support more marginalized populations.
2. They have contextual understanding of the language and know about the needs and realities of different groups.
3. They are able to provide space through their social networks to reach other women, make women's voices heard, support strengthening of CBOs and support women leadership.
4. They are able to show solidarity with other women and girls in their day-to-day challenges.
5. They contribute to interventions that are longer team and more sustainable because they are of the community and from the community.
6. They know how to engage with the key stakeholders at local and national level and have the ability to think and act creatively to find solutions against the systematic and cultural barriers and deal with them in a more sensitive and appropriate way, taking into account the risks women may incur.

The teachers' strike raised tensions among women rights organisations because of the different approaches used to support the teachers. Some took a more subtle, sensitive, and holistic approach and worked to influence the change, working behind the scenes. Those women were labelled as pacifists and sometimes aggressively treated by others who took a more activist feminist approach by protesting in the streets. Some of the women leaders interviewed felt that those activists were seen as encouraged by western liberal feminist approaches, which may lead to a backlash on women's rights work in Jordan.

The question then remains how best to support women's rights work, so it is contextual and ground up, and that keeps the needs of the women at the centre, rather than adopting top-down approaches that are conceived somewhere else.

Supporting women rights and women-led organizations

The women leaders interviewed for this research emphasized that women, and their groups and organizations, are rooted in the community and have intimate detailed knowledge of their contexts. Women from all regions confirmed that they are uniquely able to work across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus in ways that respond to short-term, immediate, needs, with an eye on the longer-term needs that are rooted in pre-crisis periods, before pandemics, floods, famine or armed conflicts hit their community. And they will be the ones to pick up the pieces

and continue this work post-crisis. There was a clear message of the need to be part of the decision-making processes.

Sixteen days of activism on GBV

The group discussion with women-led organizations highlighted some key issues. There is no disagreement on the reasons for localizing gender agendas; everyone agreed on it. The key issue is who sets the agenda. Conflicting priorities in community-based and global agendas were one of the big issues flagged by women leaders. Currently, during COVID response, there is lack of health services, which is a major concern, together with GVB. Local women-led organizations cannot afford to spend 16 days only on this global agenda. They must be able to set their own agenda in their countries and localities. In different communities there are different issues related to GBV. Local actors' agency is still not recognized. And who decides what message they should carry? After these 16 days, what follows? There are so many other international days that it becomes burdensome to deal with the issues they raise without the right resources.

Women-led organizations should have the agency to decide when to join and how many days to dedicate to advocacy for GVB. of Lack of capacity is not the only issue; so are priorities of the communities on the ground. During the current COVID pandemic, people are dying because of lack of health services. GBV is growing, but there is also more notion of solidarity and there a need to support communities› resilience.

In countries such as Lebanon, Jordan, Liberia, Uganda, Iraq and the Philippines, present at the discussion, many gender CSOs are moulded by their international donors, to the extent that every time an assessment is carried out, there is a big gap between the priorities set by them and the actual needs in the community. GBV is not the most pressing issue; there are other more pressing issues, but there are no critical voices coming from women's organizations. There should be more space for criticism. The imposition of 16 days of GBV activism does not resonate in some communities; it might even be out of context.

Women leaders also notice that often there is commemorations of 16 days of GBV activism without it having a real impact on the lives of the women in the community. In many preparatory meetings suggestions were made by local women leaders on how to design programs during these 16 days so that progress can be monitored and be more impactful, but more often their voices do not get heard because they do not come with funds. Most of the aid money is spent on ceremonial meetings, T-shirts, caps and on dignitaries bringing to the events a handful of women affected by GVB. Most of the time women cannot participate in these events because they are held in cities have difficulty reaching. Women leaders deem this to be a waste of precious resources. If, instead, these funds were spent on empowering 50-60 IDP women, if they would be given the resources, one would be able to see the real impact and success stories.

One good example that was shared from Nigeria was an awareness-raising program in schools, entailing distribution of sanitary pads among girls and establishment of a GVB club. The recommendation is that funds should not be spent on fancy celebrations and ceremonial events, but on more grounded campaigns that are more contextual and have a real impact on the lives of women.

Recently, in an election Jordan, millions of euros were spent by international agencies on pushing women leaders' in the elections. Many local women were against this and called for a political boycott, especially because elections were held during the COVID pandemic. The election went ahead and no women were elected, and COVID cases went up because everyone was forced to come to vote. A lot of resources were wasted and only one side was supported.

In the Philippines, the violence against women is increasing but also against children. There is a need to look a bit more holistically at the issue. Mother who are poor and are economically under pressure and are now having to educate their children. We need to set up support groups for them and take a more holistic approach. The solutions need to come from the community, and we should facilitate with resources.

Local women's organizations: toward empowering partnerships

The research commissioned in the run up to the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 and pre-summit consultation reports led to calls for more funding, resources and equitable partnerships.[34] The Middle East and North Africa consultation report stated: "The current humanitarian system was cited as inadequate in the face of the changing humanitarian landscape in the region. There were consistent calls for real reform; change that better engages and promotes the efforts of numerous regional and national institutions and organizations. International assistance should work toward localizing humanitarian response, emphasizing national responsibility and accountability and strengthening local capacities to prevent, manage and respond to crises."[35] The Grand Bargain commitment 2 on localization was specifically aimed at reinforcing and supporting local actors.

However, the Grand Bargain (and several other statements of international commitments) have been criticized as weak on gender. An informal "Friends of Gender for the Grand Bargain" group was formed a few months after the World Humanitarian Summit. UN Women was one of the driving agencies to address this issue. In 2018 and 2019, CARE, ActionAid and UNFPA (as lead of the Protection Cluster GBV Area of Responsibility) ran a project on *"GBV and Localization"*. Research was commissioned and included regional meetings for the Middle East, to be held in Amman in June 2019. Participants came from Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, and Iraq. Similar meetings were also held for Asia and Africa regions.

"The Call-to-Action Commitments are a great call to arms in the localisation agenda but must be shaped and informed with evidence and input by field-based actors and other local stakeholders to have legitimate and sustainable impact, as well as to build on momentum in terms of policies and funding. Creativity and relationship-building at the grassroots are also needed to enable national and local actors to participate with confidence in accessing protection funding." (Action Aid 2019:15)

The link between gendered needs and the underlying gender inequality they arise from is still poorly understood by many humanitarian policymakers and practitioners. Research shows that when women are involved in prevention and crisis response, it leads to better humanitarian outcomes and lowers risks. (UN Women 2015) Gender equality programming thereby generates a more effective humanitarian response and a more efficient use of the limited funds available for such responses.[36]

> *The power relations between international agencies with relatively high levels of resources and authority on the world stage, and local organizations can so often lead to a sense of "unequal partnership", and to mission drift for the local organization during crisis and, over time, to these local organizations losing their identity.*

A key means of involving local women in ways that potentially enable them to set the agenda for humanitarian response is for international responders to work in partnership with local women's organizations. Yet, the power relations between international agencies with relatively high levels of resources and authority on the world stage, and local organizations can so often lead to a sense of "unequal partnership", and to mission drift for the local organization during crisis and, over time, to these local organizations losing their identity. Yet, a local women's organization can provide invaluable expert insight into the needs and priorities of women in their area, which can lead to an effective short-term response that empowers women in the longer term, enabling genuine transformation.[37]

Women rights organizations understand the fundamental importance of involving and representing women in the targeted locations, of gaining detailed knowledge of how gender roles and relations play out in different contexts, and of the need to collaborate with these women in devising crisis responses. Only when local women are involved will humanitarian responses work well for women and girls, in ways that ensure the longer-term work they undertake for women is supported, rather than eroded, by foreign presences aiming to help, but who often think short term and lack a contextual understanding of gender. Long-term work is needed that takes into account gender dynamics and aims to change them. Collaborative multi-year planning and funding is an ideal opportunity to make progress toward gender-responsive humanitarian action.

Members of women organizations who were interviewed pointed out that they find it much harder to get a seat at the table, be taken seriously and get quality funding. The same international organizations that promote women organization compete with them for funding and space at the table. Many INGOs have now opted, in response to changing international and national contexts, to register as national NGOs in the countries they operate. By doing so, they earn legitimacy to operate in local spaces. This leads to the bigger problem: by occupying the space that was previously occupied by local and national NGOs, the INGOs are literally squeezing and shrinking the space for local civil society. This can do long-term damage to the local CSO ecosystem. With their financial muscles and well-paid human resources, INGOs are wittingly or unintentionally taking over the space that should be occupied by national and local CSOs to influence national policy making. "And they are loving it – you can actually see the excitement in their reports splashed with big colourful pictures of their staff posing with decision makers! Local organisation nowhere to be seen ... when things get difficult with the government then we hear calls of 'local CSOs need to take a lead'."[38]

Local NGOs also object to being pushed to become instruments for the prevention of violent extremism and de-radicalization agendas of international political actors. Local and national women-focused organizations are sought out because of their suitability to work on GBV. They have repeatedly asked for better funding to work on the

broader prevention of gender-based violence, where most resources are concentrated on case-management and service provision. In different countries, they can also be "encouraged" by international actors to play a significant part in preventing radicalization and violent extremism. Many are deeply uncomfortable with this, as it can put them under the spotlight of radical elements, of their own government and of international actors who, at the same time, want to be assured that aid does not contribute to "terrorist financing"; too many pressures to handle.[39]

Over time, agencies have developed guidance on working with women and feminist movements.[40] However, the good guidance is not always followed. Women's organizations object to being "projectized", used as sources of case studies and forced into artificial consortia. Some women organizations are under real stress to provide services in the most difficult conditions without sufficient resources. In that light, they feel that "there is such a burden of reporting, they seem to spend more time in reporting and audits than having time to actually help women. Sometimes there is not even that much money involved. Some of them have refused funding because there is excessive reporting even if the amount is only $20k. We are meant to work on women's right and well-being but end up very stressed with all the pressures being placed up on us."[41]

The INGOs that are advocates of promoting women's and women-led organizations themselves often fail to practice what they preach to others. Their commitments often fail to be put into practice, as often the gender specialists within INGOs often fail to influence other divisions within the organisations where decisions are made. The administrative procedures are rarely fit to partner with women-led organizations. Strict donor requirements, project-based operational systems and organizational bureaucracy frustrate much of the effort of these INGOs to effect change toward more equitable and sustainable relationships with their local partners. In recent times, there has been a lot of research on how to support women-led organizations, and some very good recommendations.[42]

Even though there is plenty of good-practice guidance emphasizing the need to design programmes with women participation,[43] the biggest issue faced is the agenda from outside. Many feel that international agencies have already conceived and designed the projects somewhere in their own capital city with the donors, and there is no room for meaningful participation of women on the ground to meet their priorities and needs. Women leaders often mention that it is important to work with both men and women. Gender specialists in aid-recipient societies have drawn attention to the fact that singling out women issues ignores their belonging to families and communities that have very strongly shared economic and political concerns. There is discomfort with the individualistic approach of Western actors, which is also the cornerstone of capitalist market economics. They feel they need the support of men from their societies to influence other men and to change legislation. What is appropriate in Europe may not always be appropriate in the Middle East.

Many women-led and women rights organizations face external pressures to develop a programming approach with distinct portfolios that could be funded to be sustained as solidarity network. NGO-ization is the product of an external environment that has converted a debate on structural inequalities into projects and activities.[44] This issue was highlighted in interviews with women organizations and movements in, among others, Jordan, Palestine, Lebanon, Iraq, Nigeria, Philippines, and Uganda.

> *Finding the right pace and tactics is a delicate balancing act that national and local actors are better equipped for. Gender equality agenda can be supported from outside but needs to be driven and led from within.*

The reports highlighting the slow pace of progress on the 2030 SDG gender targets and puts pressure on governments to meet these targets.[45] The urgency to drive gender equality_and the eagerness of international actors to meet the 2030 SDG can divide women's movements in a country and provoke a backlash in a society where national and local gender activists are more vulnerable than international ones. Outsiders rightly promote gender equality but cannot engage in social engineering another society. Finding the right pace and tactics is a delicate balancing act that national and local actors are better equipped for. Gender equality agenda can be supported from outside but needs to be driven and led from within.

The way forward on funding and resource allocation

Recently, in response to COVID-19, gender-focused initiatives have so far seen 84 funding announcements worth $25.8 billion, with support for small and medium enterprises that are women-owned as an area of focus in this sector with a link to economic development. When it comes to delivering on these announcements, this has so far produced 17 gender-focused programs worth $2.7 billion, 64 tenders worth $201 million, 72 grants worth $153 million, 17 open opportunities worth $720,000, and 41 awarded contracts worth $16 million. It is a sector of focus supported by

governments, bilateral donors, multilateral donors, philanthropic institutes and the private sector,[46]

Investment in gender equality programming is difficult to track (even with the use of tools like the IASC Gender and Age Marker), but it is obvious that it is chronically underfunded. GBV services accounted for just 0.12 percent of all humanitarian funding between 2016-2018, which is on average less than $2.00 to each targeted woman or girl at risk of violence in crisis and conflict settings (IRC and Voice 2019, 9). In 2019, 0.3 per cent of humanitarian funding was channelled toward GBV programming (Financial Tracking System 2019, no page number). It is critical that we see greater investment in gender-equality programming for longer terms, and funding to women rights organizations who play a key complementary role.[47]

The challenges for women rights and women-led organizations to access international funding exist in Jordan as well. A recent study commissioned by Action Aid on Localization of Aid in Jordan and Lebanon stated: *"Our findings (...) suggest that the biggest challenge for women-led organizations in both Jordan and Lebanon is access to sustainable funding, especially in the context of a high level of competition among local NGOs. INGOs provide project-based funding when they should also invest in capacity-building. The interviews evidenced the fact that INGOs are still reluctant to share decision-making power regarding project allocation, location, beneficiaries and budget allocation. Local NGOs are considered as implementing partners. Cultural norms further prevent women-led organizations to effectively participate in the humanitarian efforts".[48]*

Moreover, the level of expertise provided by INGOs has been relatively low in Jordan. At the same time, it has been very difficult for NGOs in Jordan to articulate with clarity the issues at hand. The level of investment in technology, formatting and producing papers and research has been very unequal. INGOs have not invested funds or time in increasing women organizations research capacities, but rather, have invested in how they conducted research. Furthermore, INGOs constantly hired people with NGO experience rather than support their work within their NGO. Human resources have been a critical matter in the past years between NGOs and INGOs.

The table below shows funding analysis in a study carried out by UN Women and UNFPA that reviewed the current context for funding for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women and Girls (GEEWG) in Jordan, including the levels of funding approved and the consequences of the funding gap.

The 2017 Jordan Response Plan (JRP) had a total approved amount of $1.72 billion.

- Of the total amount of funding approved, $37 million (2 percent) had a principal or "targeted" focus on women and girls.
- The analysis did not focus on or include projects that would have been categorized as being significantly focused on or "tailored" for women and girls.
- According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (OECD DAC) data for 2017, projects with a principal focus on gender represented 2 percent of humanitarian funding received for all sectors, and projects with a significant focus on gender represented 48 percent of the funding for all sectors.
- In 2017, the majority of funding approved for projects with a principal focus on women and girls was for health and social protection, with some funding approved for livelihood/food.

The 2018, JRP had a total approved amount of $877.8 million.

- Of the total amount of funding approved, $39.7 million (4.53 percent) had a principal (targeted) focus on women and girls.
- The analysis did not focus on or include projects that would have been categorized as being significantly focused on women and girls (tailored).
- In 2018, the majority of funding approved for projects with a principal focus on women and girls was for social protection and livelihood, with some funding approved for health, local governance and municipal services.

The biggest share of the funding is allocated to government departments, UN agencies and INGOs. The FTS tracking system is not reliable as it does not track funds to sub-grantees, most of whom are local and national NGOs, including national women-led organizations.

UN Women manages a Women Peace and Humanitarian Fund. INGOs and Jordanian CBOs and CSOs can all apply. UN Women is active on localization. Following a regional event on gender equality and localization in the summer of 2019, a task force was formed involving Jordanian and international actors. It commissioned a study on the relationship between women's movements and localization; the preliminary findings are currently being reviewed.

Even if INGOs work with Jordanian organizations as "partners", de facto there is competition. There is also strong

competition amongst INGOs working with the same partners. Globally, there is also competition between UN agencies and INGOs for funding and who will be championing women-led organizations, which sometimes leads to a toxic environment, with women-led organizations stuck in the middle. Because of Grand Bargain-related donor encouragement, international actors in Jordan are expected to strengthen the capacities of their partners. But as it is "easier" to work with stronger Jordanian CSOs, which can meet the administrative and reporting requirements, there is the temptation to choose the larger, capital-based organizations as "partner"; these might also be led by women. Just because CBOs get involved in implementation, it cannot be assumed they have had input in conceptualization and design. This carries the risk of creating tension between national CSOs and socio-geographically more local organizations. A call for proposals was issued recently by the Women Peace and Humanitarian Fund for responses to the negative impact of COVID-19 and the resulting lockdown on women and girls. Proposals this time could be submitted in Arabic. Of 47 proposals received, nine were shortlisted. Further efforts are needed to make the fund more accessible to Jordanian CSOs.

Conclusion

Awareness of power and privilege

The global development of a normative framework on gender equality has taken many years and has seen as a positive progress. However, the liberal feminists from the North are seen to continue to dominate the discourse. Transnational relationships must therefore be consistently attentive to how power and privilege are exercised. This means attention to how resources, opportunities, rights and privileges are distributed in the aid system, to the distribution of decision-making privileges in the different spaces in which they operate, and to who occupies space, who does what and who defines agendas and therefore shapes solidarity work. At a basic level, this requires deeper listening with an open mind and attentiveness to how women who are not located in the global North would like to define the partnerships and collaborations necessary for a collective agenda on women's rights. This includes getting away from the assumption that women and their organizations need capacity building, and lobbying for scarce resources to be reallocated to the priorities set by women's movement in the countries. Therefore, their alliances must entail unpacking relative privileges and patriarchal attitudes, and ensuring that the Northern model is not blindly reproduced in partnerships with women-led organizations in the South.[49]

Trust, transparency and accountability

While there have been shifts in the discourse about the agency of women in the South, development resources flowing predominantly from the global North to the global South continues to restrain women's agency in practice. Currently, even while INGOs and UN agencies are advocating for women-led organizations, they themselves instrumentalize them in an unequal and abusive relationship. There is need for more transparency and accountability for the amount of funds that need to be raised, for how decisions are made and how funds are allocated and disbursed to women-led organizations. At present, there are examples of INGOs approaching women-led organizations for partnerships that remain in name only, while most the funds remain with INGOs and are far from benefiting the work of women-led organizations on issues that concern them. Solidarity should be based on trust, transparency and accountability.

Opportunity for solidarity and equity

A skewed development funding framework consistently places Southern CSOs at the mercy of the global North. However, now the global North finds itself in unknown territory in which the very problems that have historically been framed as entrenched in the "South" are now problems at "home": from stolen elections to sexual violence, the closure of civic space and the rise of fundamentalist regimes. An opportunity exists to move solidarity to a different type of collaboration; a solidarity that comes from the heart and enables women on the ground set the agenda and take the helm. The threats to freedom, justice, body and the exercise of sexuality are now everywhere, and may come from state actors. The political violence perpetrated by Northern states through arms sales to authoritarian regimes and the violence perpetrated by armed groups in Yemen, Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, etc., are testimony to that. Freedom and justice have no geographic home. This awareness should create an opportunity for shared understanding of global inequality and a starting point for collective work.[50]

Taking agency and providing a critical voice

The changing geo-political landscape and wealth means the global South can define, shape and fund its own agenda, as demonstrated by the African Union's Agenda 2063, which formed the basis for Africa's negotiating position in the post-2015 development process. This is a good example of how Southern activists engaging in global policy spaces need to shape the discourse, recognising that this is an act of reclaiming a space of power that has historically privileged the global North. Women-led organization from the South also need to come together and articulate their solidarity and be willing to act together. They also must build a solid support base and constituency in their own countries. They need to be well informed and willing to be critical of their partners. Building solidarity amongst them is also critical to standing up to their international partners and making them more accountable for delivering on their commitments.

Changing the funding ecosystem

There should be a recognition that money is an important political resource, and that financial resources flowing from the global North are not a favor to countries in the global South, but the product of a range of unequal historical colonial and contemporary neo-colonial political and economic relationships. These include skewed international aid for development and bilateral funding. Transforming the funding ecosystem is a conversation about power and an acknowledgement that dismantling patriarchy requires the transformation of the funding mechanisms. The current movement toward aid decolonization is very pertinent.

In light of the increasing needs and shrinking funds, It is important to ensure that the funding is used effectively and meets the needs of the women, men, boys and girls. The current funding system is described by Edwards as, "weak, distorted and fragmented - patchwork quilts that are full of holes, unreliable where funding is most needed, suffering from escalating transactions costs and shot through by power dynamics between patrons and their clients." He and others developed a counterapproach, presented in "Ecosystems of Philanthropy". Instead of activists being forced to compete constantly and navigate each of the discrete funding pillars and sectors, movements' needs and priorities should be positioned as the central objective, with funders as active agents in collaboratively supporting those priorities[51]. At present, this is rarely the case, and always contingent on funders' willingness to open the door to shared priority setting and decision making. An ecosystem starts with the simple principle that we are all interconnected. To be a part of an ecosystem is to interact, support each other and adapt, both in a state of harmony and when an ecosystem is under threat. Every part of an ecosystem affects the others, and the relationships between them define the whole.

Taking leadership and creating support and solidarity networks

The degree to which women's rights organizations remain underfunded and understaffed has been captured most prominently through AWID's efforts to track funding for women's rights (see Arutyunova et al 2013) and a number of reports from INGOs in the last two years. The current spotlight on the lack of progress on gender agenda and on promoting women-led organization means they are often in demand to speak at many conferences, yet they are not being given resources and support to cope with the increased workload. Under-resourcing is compounded by project-based funding that restricts organizations to activity-based work, leaving little room to respond to advocacy opportunities that are often not planned or budgeted for. This results in a situation where organizations located in the global South are forced to choose between fund raising to sustain organizations and ongoing work, on the one hand, and capitalizing on important policy-shaping opportunities that will ultimately have a major impact on their work and institutional survival, on the other. Local women-led organizations need to demand and take the leadership in the Friends of Gender group as they engage with donors on new funding mechanisms for women-led organizations to ensure that they are at the decision-making table for funding discussions. The feminist activists from the North need to stop dominating the discussions and be aware of their patriarchal attitude and speaking on behalf of women.

Points for discussion

International community

- Start with an open mind, without perceptions, prejudices and biases; listen to the people who are impacted, they are the experts, and figure out who is best placed to help them at local level.

- Show up with an open heart, be aware of your own attitude and behaviour, show humility and self-awareness and integrity.
- Be aware of your own power and develop processes that are accountable to local communities and local leaders. Give time to get the processes right.
- Invest in building trust and cultivating relationships that go beyond the transaction of the grant or project to serving the higher purpose. Building trust takes time and requires intentionality and care.
- Show open will to create an ecosystem that supports women-led and women's rights organizations to achieve their mission and vision in their own context.
- Get them to identify the environment that facilitates their growth and help them to thrive.
- Make sure that the processes are not used for extracting information and used for legitimising your action.
- Transformative programming must be undertaken carefully and requires gauging community acceptance before engaging in conversations on deeply rooted issues.
- Change the language that leads to wrong perceptions and labelling such as "Global South" which reinforces colonial legacy.

Donors

- Do not separate women's rights into silos, use an intersectional approach.
- Develop a balanced ecosystem in which local women-led organizations have the power to define funding priorities themselves with their communities and in dialogue with funders.
- Investing in collective action increases the sustainability of the impact; achieving gender justice requires community-based solutions.
- Provide support to ensure participation of movement actors at key events/moments in national and international spaces to advance their movement's agendas and goals. This may mean INGOs giving up a seat at the table in some instances.
- Approach funding challenges with a can-do attitude, find creative ways of working the system to transform it over time. This is a cultural shift, so figure out ways of being flexible and bringing leadership along. Find ways to develop flexible funding mechanisms and participatory models whereby women leaders are part of this work and decisions. Compensate them for their time and recognize their expertise and contributions.

Women-led organizations

- Develop solidarity movements with other women-led organizations in the region.
- Be well informed and prepared and develop critical perspectives.
- Be informed about rights and international commitments and hold your partners to account.
- Be confident in your own agency and capacity.
- Create an opportunity for exchange and learning from each other.
- Create a support network to advocate common issues.
- Document evidence of your work and communicate regularly.
- Demand space at the decision-making table and come well prepared with your own perspectives.

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