



European
Commission

WORKING BETTER TOGETHER WITH CSOs TO ADDRESS GENDER INEQUALITY AND CHAMPION WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' VOICES AND AGENCY

GENDER EQUALITY IS A CORE VALUE OF THE EU.

With the adoption of the **Gender Action Plan III** in November 2020, the EU reaffirms its centrality throughout EU external action.

GAP III aims to promote a gender transformative approach through supporting meaningful participation of women's and girls' organisations and other civil society actors committed to gender equality and women's rights.

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PROMOTE AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS ORGANISATIONS (WROs)

Women's Rights Organisations and movements have been key in achieving transformational change for gender equality and in moving forward the women's rights agenda.

However, 27 years after the Beijing Conference, many of the hard-won victories for women appear to be at risk. The COVID pandemic and measures taken by some states have only worsened the situation. Recent attacks on the civic space also have specific gender elements and particularly affect WROs and feminist movements.

Despite the ongoing restrictions and attacks, WROs across the world continue to resist regime attempts to close civic space. They employ various strategies to negotiate and challenge the limited civic space. They range from preserving and amplifying the civic space using solidarity networks across CSOs, to resisting and adapting to the new conditions.

Case study I "The Story Kitchen" in Nepal

The Story Kitchen (TSK) is a Nepali NGO driven by the belief that upholding the stories of women can unravel systems of gender oppression and patriarchy that continue to exist in Nepal. The NGO was born in 2011 from listening to the stories of our grandmothers, mothers, mothers-in-law, sisters and daughters and realizing that their stories were rarely documented, heard, or taught.



Source: © Nareesh Newar

TSK enhances women's participation and representation in the media using a from-the-ground-up approach: meeting women locally and sharing their stories nationally. TSK invites women of different castes, ages, communities, cultures and languages to experience the powerful transformation of storytelling and narrative journalism. Since 2019 and with the support of the EU, TSK has been implementing SAHAS for Justice 2.0 project, which aims to empower Nepali women and girl survivors of armed conflict to document their narratives, amplify their voices, gather courage to claim justice and participate in transitional justice seeking processes.

Documented targeted restrictions and attacks on WROs.

Administrative restrictions to registration and access to funding.

Stigmatisation, defamation and negative labelling, also using social media.

Judicial harassment & prosecution, investigation and criminalization of WROs and HRD.

Intersectional forms of discrimination.

Physical harassment, intimidation & lack of protection.



THE CALL TO ACTION

- Invest systematically in better understanding the context in which WROs and CSOs working for gender equality operate (in CS mappings; in gender and sectoral analyses; identification & formulation studies).
- Consult WROs to understand and integrate in the EU response their own context-driven approaches and strategies to address the enabling environment.
- Systematically include into the political dialogue with the authorities the importance of civic space for democracy, and its gender ramifications.
- Take safety issues into account and provide political and financial support for the protection of WRO and CSO leaders who are threatened and persecuted for their work to advance women's rights and GEWE.
- At the country and global level, build alliances to share knowledge, monitor the context and launch joint campaigns with relevant CSOs and other key stakeholders championing GEWE at a national, regional and global level.
- Use soft diplomacy, political & policy dialogue to broker safe spaces for dialogue between the authorities and WROs and CSOs.

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PROMOTE ALLIANCES AMONG ACTORS CHAMPIONING GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Case study | "The Spotlight Initiative" in El Salvador

In the framework of the global EU –UN Spotlight Initiative, El Salvador engages with religious actors to address femicide and early pregnancy.

Partnering with the Evangelical University of El Salvador, it developed a diploma course entitled "Pastoral action against femicidal violence and pregnancies in girls and adolescents". The course works to transform the attitudes and beliefs of religious leaders that normalise violence against women, and to motivate them to develop care routes to assist survivors in their churches. This course is for religious leaders from different denominations and has been completed by 360 religious leaders from the three prioritised municipalities.



Source: Unicef

The Initiative has now extended this work to the Catholic and Lutheran community, through the Central American University José Simeón Cañas and the Salvadoran Lutheran University.

More than ever before, it is important for WROs to join forces and establish alliances and synergies with other CSOs working for gender equality and women's rights, from organisations engaging men and boys for gender equality to youth organisations, religious actors, social enterprises and cooperatives, artists and the media.

They can be powerful allies to advance the GEWE agenda.

CSOs which can become powerful allies

Artists, cultural actors and the media, as powerful channels to combat gender stereotypes and promote gender equality.

Religious actors can promote, or hinder, GEWE – their reach and influence should not be ignored.

Social enterprises and cooperatives have the potential to become a key player on gender equality, as well as on the agenda on sustainable and inclusive growth and jobs.

Youth organisations and activists are key in forming a gender equality agenda for the future, that respects the rights of children and young people to meaningfully influence political and social change.

Men for gender equality organisations can be key players for scaling up efforts to combat discriminatory gender norms.



THE CALL TO ACTION

- Both in dialogue and financial support, go beyond the "usual suspects" and support alliances across WROs, between WROs and other CS actors advancing GEWE, avoiding silos and adopting a multi-sectoral approach.
- At the country and global level, partner with other actors like the media, academic institutions and think tanks to expand the knowledge on how to better work with these emerging actors and how to strengthen synergies with WROs.
- In the financial support (CSO thematic programme; EIHDR, etc) support networks and alliances and actively promote partnerships, also as an effective framework for reaching out to smaller/grass roots organisations.
- When organising consultations (i.e. for the RM; GAP/CLIP; geographic programmes; TEI) adopt an intersectionality approach and ensure that accessibility barriers are not an obstacle and that diverse voices are heard:
 - Consult civil society to identify intersectional accessibility barriers and formulate criteria for a balanced representation of voices.
 - Provide inclusive and accessible information.
 - Pay special attention to young women organisations and other organisations representing vulnerable groups and the most left behind's voices.

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BETTER AND MORE INCLUSIVE DIALOGUE WITH WROs AND CSOs

Over the past years, significant progress has been made at the country level to organise more systematic consultations with WROs, and more broadly with CSOs.

There is also emerging evidence of EUDs reaching out beyond their usual interlocutors to consider a wider representation of actors, including young activists, grass roots organisations, vulnerable groups, etc.

However, additional efforts are needed to sustain the 2021 momentum and continue improving the quality of the consultations and to create or reinforce structured dialogue mechanisms with a gender lens.

Case study | EUD co-chairing the Sector Working Group on gender



Source: Adobe Stock

In 2021, the EU Delegation Kenya completed the first year of its two years' mandate as chair of the Development Partners Group (DPG) on Gender and co-chair of the Sector Working Group on Gender (together with the State Department on Gender).

The EU enjoys a leading position in terms of policy dialogue on gender matters, and a privileged relation with the State Department for Gender. Meetings of the Gender DPG took place every two months, with a wide participation from MS and like-minded donors, and systematic participation of women's organisations who were invited to present on a range of topics.

100

INTPA countries organised consultations with CSOs in 2021.

+8400

CSOs consulted in 2021, of which 17% were WROs.

All EUDs

(but Iran) organised consultations with WROs and CSOs advancing GEWE for the MIP 2021-2027.

60%

of EUDs believe WROs made very strong contributions to the different consultations organised.

More than 80%

EUDs organised consultations with CSOs/WROs for the CLIP/GAP III.



Source: 2021 survey to EUD on their consultation practices. RMF 2022 (103 INTPA countries answered).



THE CALL TO ACTION

- Sustain the consultations momentum created in 2021 by ensuring the systematic and meaningful involvement of WROs and CSOs in the design, implementation and follow up of the RM, GAP/CLIPs, the geographic programmes within the MIPs 2021-2027, TEIs, etc.
- Enlarge the scope of dialogue with WROs and CSOs to include them in the "hard sectors", where their voices are hardly heard (energy, trade, digitalisation; etc.).
- Adopt an intersectionality approach and ensure that accessibility barriers are not an obstacle and that diverse voices are heard.
- At the global level, develop clear standards and guidelines to enhance the quality, outreach, safety, accessibility and inclusion of the consultations and dialogue undertaken by EUDs.
- At the global level, invest in mapping and sharing good practices, which can inspire EUDs to improve the quality of their consultations.
- Provide support and funding to enable local WROs and CSOs to prepare and actively participate in political and policy dialogues.
- Tap into the opportunity offered by other EU processes to explore opportunities on how to advance the objectives of GAP III within these processes (i.e. Youth Action Plan, TEIs, JP/WBT, blending, etc.).

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PROVIDE GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE AND INNOVATIVE FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Case study | Women's Funds

Women's Funds play a key role in funding WROs as they are often the first source of funding for groups often disregarded by the broader donor and philanthropic community.

Mama Cash was the first international women's fund addressing specific target groups or themes. Other examples are: the Black Feminist Fund, the African Women's Development Fund, Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice, which invests in LGBTQI activists and artists and, the Global Alliance for Green and Gender Action, which provides technical and legal support, thematic expertise and enhances connections with gender-just environmental movements.

FRIDA is an initiative run by young feminists to support and establish emerging feminist organisations and collectives. The Canadian Equality Fund brings the philanthropic and investment worlds together, to mobilise resources under the Principles for Feminist Funding.

In addition, networks like Women Win and Prospera strengthen, and connect women's funds, and leverage opportunities to transform the funding landscape, including non-traditional actors. Other examples are Fondo Lunaria, Calala, Fondo Semillas, Fondo de Mujeres Bolivia Apathapi Jopueti or Gender Founders Co-lab.

Despite notable advances, CSOs addressing gender inequality remain severely under-funded. Over 99% of Official Development Assistance (ODA) does not directly reach women's rights, gender justice, or feminist movements and the shares of aid focused on gender equality in the hard sectors (e.g. energy, infrastructure) remain low. This trend is also confirmed in the case of philanthropy.

In several countries, funding for women's rights has receded as ultraconservative, patriarchal agendas and other forces opposed to gender equality have gained visibility and political influence. Systematic and institutional barriers to directly fund feminist movements in partner countries prevail.

On the positive side, recent years have seen the emergence of a number of innovative funding schemes, including Women's Funds, multi donor GEWE funding models and other innovative funding instruments, such as gender lens investing. They aim to address the gender funding gap. Even though they are still quite limited in their use, they represent a unique window of opportunity to leverage resources to support the work of CSOs on gender equality.

Barriers for funding feminist movements in partner countries



Limited donor capacities to manage small grants due to **transaction costs**.



High financial **thresholds**, complex **selection** and reporting **procedures**.



Short **policy cycles** and budget **timeframes**.



Resistance to re-granting and innovation in funding due to risk adverse culture.



THE CALL TO ACTION

- 👉 Ensure that the financial commitments of the GAP III are met, quantitatively but also qualitatively:
 - 📌 Promote the use of Financial Support to Third Parties to ensure better outreach to smaller and grass roots organisations.
 - 📌 Ensure that EU funding mechanisms not directly targeting women (both thematic and geographic programmes) are gender-responsive and can be accessed by local WROs and other CSOs.
 - 📌 Review selection and funding modalities and procedures in order to provide more flexible and sustainable support to WROs and CSOs.
 - 📌 Explore alternative inclusive & feminist funding modalities that shift money and decision-making power and foster partnerships with grassroots organisations.
 - 📌 Leverage political commitments to start new funding programmes to provide more substantial, predictable, multi-year funding to address GEWE.
- 👉 Engage in dialogue and establish alliances with key donors and partners, including foundations, financial institutions, women's funds, etc. to establish synergies and complementarities in funding and address large scale issues.
- 👉 Connect & join forces between local interventions and those at the regional and global level (i.e. Women's Funds, UN Women, etc.).
- 👉 Invest in existing multilateral and women's funds with established track records in effectively reaching local women's rights organisations in partner countries with funding that is flexible and responsive to their needs.