



# Reflections on the Generation Equality Forum

**Future Opportunities for Feminist Movements & Funders**

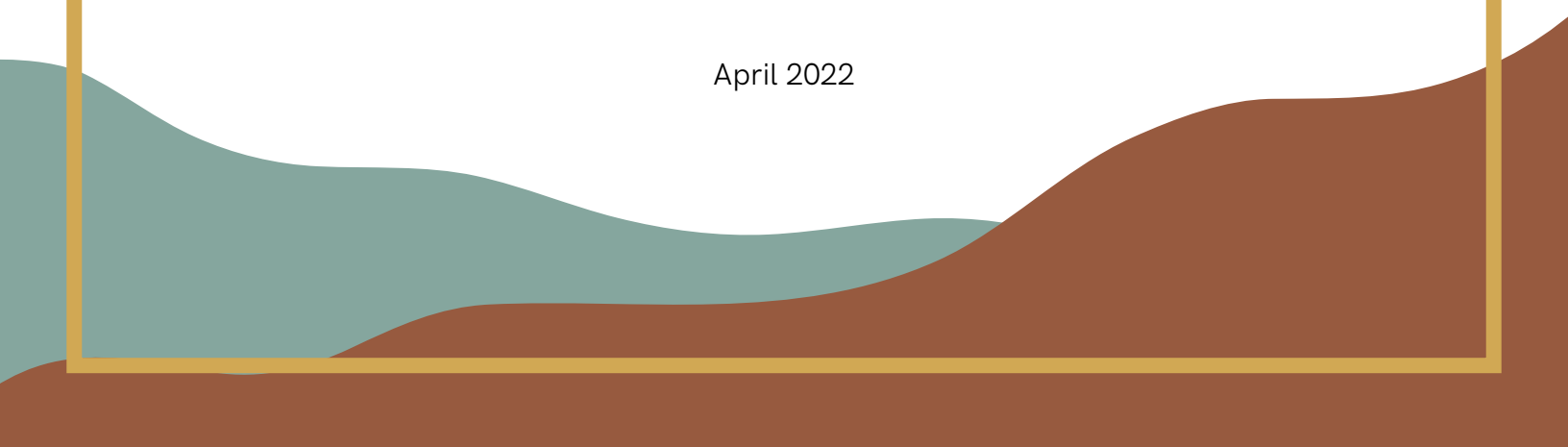
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## Introduction

Organized on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the adoption of the landmark [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#) (BPFA), the [Generation Equality Forum](#) (GEF) comprised two forums, held in Mexico and in France in 2021, which convened civil society, governments, multilateral institutions, and the private sector to make bold commitments towards a common agenda and undertake an ambitious effort over the coming five years to accelerate progress towards gender equality. With its focus on gender equality and its multi-stakeholder process, the GEF offered an entry point for progressive feminist movements to use the occasion as an opportunity for catalytic change in the lives of women, girls, and gender non-conforming communities. The GEF process innovated how progress could be achieved through a multi-stakeholder, multilateral, and intergenerational cooperative approach that had the potential to defy the fractured global space within which it found itself.

Three feminist funds - [Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights](#) (UAF), [Urgent Action Fund Africa](#) (UAF-Africa), and [Women's Fund Asia](#) (WFA) - came together and formed the Feminist Generation Consortium (hereinafter, the Consortium). The Consortium, led by Urgent Action Fund Africa, engaged with the GEF process to mark 25 years of the BPFA. Throughout the process, the Consortium sought to amplify the activism and the voices of girls', women's, and gender non-conforming communities and support their efforts to

participate in and influence the GEF process and commitments from the local to the global levels.

This field brief comes at an important inflection point - towards the end of this two-year collaboration, the Consortium undertook a reflection and learning process focused on the GEF process, and the work of the Consortium. *Reflections on the Generation Equality Forum: Future Opportunities for Feminist Movements and Funders* chronicles the important victories and disappointing missteps that came to define the GEF process. It also documents the Consortium's collaborative efforts and the challenges faced during this process. As work gets underway to implement the GEF outcomes, this field brief also highlights key opportunities for engagement by feminist movements, and provides recommendations to guide the work of feminist funds and philanthropy more broadly over the next half-decade and beyond.

A mixed-methods approach consisting of desk research, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions contributed to this field brief. In addition to the Consortium's members, those consulted include grantee partners of the Consortium, representatives of feminist organizations that participated in the GEF process, those who worked internally to shape the process, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.



## Reflections on the Generation Equality Forum

The COVID-19 pandemic cast a long shadow over the rights, organizing, and spirits of activists worldwide. It deeply impacted all aspects of our lives, from the health and well-being of self and loved-ones, to unrelenting pressures and isolation that prompted and exacerbated mental health struggles, to social and economic stressors. The pandemic also contributed to practical challenges in engaging with the GEF process. COVID-19 waves arrived in different regions at different times, thus posing challenges for coordinating work around the GEF and necessitating a shift towards largely virtual forums.

Specifically, the GEF process, utilizing a hybrid in-person and virtual approach, consisted of two forums, one held in Mexico in March 2021 and the other in France in June 2021. The forums included a series of official sessions and side events that brought together governments, civil society organizations, private sector entities, and philanthropic actors. At the concluding forum in Paris, the [Global Acceleration Plan](#) (GAP), which lays out a set of targeted actions, strategies and tactics to achieve progress in six key areas that underpin gender equality, was launched. At the same forum, and beyond, governments, civil society organizations, philanthropic actors, and the private sector made over [2,700 financial, policy and programmatic commitments](#) towards advancing gender equality.

The forums were intended as a robust exercise in multi-stakeholder engagement for accelerating progress towards gender equality. While significant gains were realized as a result of the GEF process, they were also deeply marred by challenges related to accessibility and inclusivity, among others.

## Successes

The Generation Equality Forum resulted in [USD 40 billion dollars in pledges made - the single largest resource mobilization for gender equality to date](#); this includes 21 billion in commitments by government and public sector institutions, 13 billion by the private sector, 4.5 billion by philanthropy, and a total of 1.3 billion pledged by UN entities and international and regional organizations. These pledges can be, quite simply, game changing for efforts to advance gender equality and human rights, and doubly so if rooted in a vision of abundance. Key stakeholders interviewed expressed cautious optimism that even if only a fraction of the 40 billion commitment came to fruition, it would still be consequential for feminist movements and women, girls, and gender non-conforming communities.

At the time of writing, however, these commitments have yet to be thoroughly unpacked. Hence, questions remain about how much will be directed towards grassroots and feminist groups and organizations. [Preliminary analysis by AWID](#) highlights that only USD 2 billion or 5 percent has been specifically pledged towards feminist and women's rights organizations. Moreover, of the 2 billion pledged, key informants note that much of this represents existing commitments, rather than new and distinct investments in gender equality. For example, the largest investment pledged for feminist movements (made by the Netherlands) during the GEF was a commitment made in 2019 towards the SDG 5 fund. Somewhat relatedly, and recalling recent history, a secondary concern that emerges is the extent to which funding will be directed to large organizations that work on 'gender mainstreaming,' as took place in the years following the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action. The flow of resources is political, and it is critical that GEF investments prioritize those doing transformative work rather than business-as-usual.

In some instances, the **investments pledged appear to be inconsistent with other actions** of the commitment makers, including sunseting support for women's rights programs in other areas or employing models that otherwise harm the communities of the women they aim to support. This begs the question: Will women, girls, and gender non-conforming communities truly benefit from these GEF investments when other concurrent policies and actions are disproportionately harming them? It is important for all commitment makers to continuously examine the rest of their policies and actions (e.g. through social and gender audits) for possible harms they may be causing, and to modify them accordingly.

The GEF as a whole was largely embraced as a **new and exciting reimagining of how progress towards gender equality could be made**. In bringing diverse stakeholders together, the GEF attempted to disrupt the business-as-usual approach and challenge narratives about who needs to be at the table, and even how that table should be built. In creating a process that could potentially produce the transformative outcomes necessary to advance gender equality, while simultaneously recasting the conversation about what that progress looks like, the GEF allowed governments, civil society, and the private sector to think boldly about how they could contribute to the GEF's collective vision. Unencumbered by a deeply fraught and political intergovernmental policy-making space where progress is slow and incremental, the GEF provided a refreshing glimpse into what is possible.

The **creation of the six [Action Coalitions](#)** on technology and innovation for gender equality; economic justice and rights; gender-based violence; feminist action for climate justice; feminist movements and leadership; and sexual and reproductive health and rights and bodily autonomy has been welcomed as a critical space within which to move key issues.

The coalitions were formed to foster multi-stakeholder partnerships that would inspire collective action, spark dialogue, catalyze innovation, ramp up investments, and achieve tangible outcomes for girls and women. An outcome of particular significance, and a result of collective advocacy, is the centering of feminist movements and leadership as a core strategy for advancing gender equality and driving change. As a colleague from Women's Fund Asia stated: "*The sixth Action Coalition around strengthening feminist leadership and movements is a clear win ...*" This **recognition of the role of feminist movements** demonstrates an initial commitment to a grassroots approach that seeks to dismantle structural barriers to achieving gender equality. Moreover, aspirationally bringing together diverse stakeholders as equals with a collaborative mandate to design actions to accelerate progress towards gender equality both during and post-GEF is novel and unlike the Beijing and Cairo<sup>1</sup> processes.

A key achievement of the GEF forums was the elevation of **discourses that challenged entrenched narratives around gender equality, power, and how change comes about**. Discourse that predates COVID-19, which problematized inequities in resource distribution and access to resources, as well as existing power dynamics between, for example, the Global South and Global North, between philanthropy and grantees, and between governments and citizens, gained traction and validity. The focus on strengthening feminist and grassroots movements in order to drive change for women, girls, and gender non-conforming communities further disrupts existing practices and narratives of how change can be achieved.

Possibly due in part to the current political moments of the pandemic as well as multiple worldwide movements for racial and social justice, stakeholders also highlight as a critical success the **use of language and framings**

1. This refers to the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development, held in Cairo, which yielded the ICPD Programme of Action, and its reviews.

**popularized by feminist groups in key outcomes of the Action Coalition blueprints**, which together form the Global Acceleration Plan. An emphasis on intersectionality, feminist leadership, and transformation as core principles of the Action Coalitions contributes to the Global Acceleration Plan's robust and inclusive approach, allowing it to move beyond superficial remedies and instead prescribe actions that tackle deep-rooted structural inequalities. For example, the GAP includes a focus on norm change and foregoing gender binaries; centers the role of, and funding for, feminist-, women-, and girl-led movements, organizations, and funds; emphasizes historically marginalized and criminalized groups as drivers of change; includes collective commitments such as the [Global Alliance for Care](#) and the [Global Alliance for Sustainable Feminist Movements](#); includes language on safe and legal abortion as part of a comprehensive framework of sexual and reproductive health services as well as evidence-driven comprehensive sexuality

education. As a blueprint for future work, the potential of the GAP to drive progress is immense if resources come to bear and commitments are upheld.

The **GEF also complemented movement building** at the national, regional, and global levels and offered activists clear footholds through which to engage their country governments. It also remedied feelings of isolation experienced by some activists - particularly resonant within a pandemic that has led to periods of extreme isolation; as one activist put it, "[participation in the GEF] ... *lessens the loneliness some of us can feel while working towards a future free of violence for all women, girls, and gender diverse peoples.*" In addition, virtual forums allowed participants to form new partnerships that may otherwise have not materialized, provided broader networking opportunities, offered opportunities to learn from one another, and jointly strategize.

### Box 1: Snapshots of GEF successes

- Over [2,700 policy, programmatic, and financial commitments](#) made by governments, civil society, international financial institutions, media, academia, international and regional non-governmental organizations, UN system, philanthropy, private sector, and youth-led organizations.
- [USD 40 billion in financial commitments mobilized to advance gender equality](#). Funding commitments for feminist organizing included USD 620m by the governments of the Netherlands, USD 81m by Canada, USD 60m by Sweden, as well as USD 420m by the Ford Foundation, USD 230m by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, USD 100m each by Open Society Foundation, Women Moving Millions, Channel Foundation, and GAGGA with GreenGrants Fund.
- A [Global Acceleration Plan](#) that maps concrete actions and strategies to be undertaken between 2021-2026; intersectional, inclusive, bolder, and more transformative than its predecessors.
- Innovative multi-stakeholder approach to accelerating progress on gender equality that centered feminist leadership: The creation of the six [Action Coalitions](#) on technology and innovation for gender equality; economic justice and rights; gender-based violence; feminist action for climate justice; feminist movements and leadership; and sexual and reproductive health and rights and bodily autonomy offered new ways to come together to advance gender equality.
- Narrative shift that recognizes the centrality of feminist leadership and the pivotal role of feminist movements in driving long-term change for women, girls, and gender non-conforming communities.

## Limitations

The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated a shift from a physical in-person to a virtual global meeting for the vast majority of participants. While disappointed, key informants understood the rationale underpinning the shift but were concerned about key missteps that resulted from the shift. Key informants were aggrieved at the **lack of accessibility**, particularly of the Paris Forum. This included a lack of reasonable accommodations for people with disabilities both at virtual events and in different physical forum spaces, and an insufficient response to activists' outreach efforts to ensure an inclusive and accessible Paris Forum until weeks after it had concluded. Reliance on a steady internet connection and the associated costs which prevented the participation of grassroots feminist organizations, problems with registration, and limited language interpretation at side events were just a few other challenges named. Participants from Asia and the Pacific were especially impacted by lack of interpretation and the timing of scheduled events. Additionally, feminist organizations from the region expressed concern that the region was not prioritized and that no governments participated in either the opening or closing ceremonies. The absence of a feedback mechanism to voice concerns was also problematic, particularly so given the wide breadth of the challenges faced by participants.

Although the virtual space allowed for broader participation, and it was a logical compromise given the global pandemic, it came at the cost of **losing opportunities for connection, and vital in-person trust-building**. The possibility of connecting in-person with like-minded feminist activists, colleagues, and friends could have been a restorative space in the face an isolating pandemic. Beyond this, the shift to a virtual process may have particularly had an impact on relationships between non-traditional partners, such as those between grassroots organizations and the private

sector who may have otherwise had space to more deeply explore areas of alignment, for example. It also limited collective strategizing spaces and joint actions as the move to a virtual platform led to more individual engagements by participants.

**Challenges also plagued the governance process** of the Generation Equality Forum from the start and grassroots feminist activists reported obstacles to their ability to meaningfully engage and influence the process. As funders of each forum, France and Mexico assumed ultimate decision-making power, despite the formation of the Core Group - the decision-making body of the GEF, which was co-chaired by UN Women, France, and Mexico, as well as two civil society representatives. Notably, UN Women negotiated separate agreements with France and Mexico and thereafter, the two nations operated completely independently, resulting in disparate and distinct approaches and decisions (on issues ranging from the GEF platform to interpretation services, and selection of participants) being taken for each forum. This negatively affected the coherence, accessibility, and inclusivity of the space and led to highly problematic scenarios in which sex workers were initially excluded from the Paris Forum and young people were treated tokenistically, highlighting the ways in which the GEF may not have worked in alignment with the existing priorities of feminist movements. In addition, activists expressed that their participation was hindered by a communications gap with organizers and coordinators.

The opacity of the GEF process and near absence of external communications to stakeholders by UN Women headquarters and country offices posed obstacles to civil society engagement and the equitable participation of feminist movements and highlights the tangible risk and trade-off of moving away from a UN event, towards a nation-controlled event. It raised questions about the strategic value of feminist movements' reliance on UN Women as the primary multilateral agency for advancing the priorities and objectives of feminist



organizations and funds; this is especially unfortunate since its creation was the result of organizing by feminist movements. UN Women may have feared losing momentum around the GEF once the shift to a virtual meeting was announced, and thus organized a series of curated conversations, in which activists invested their time and labor. These, however, did not meaningfully feed into the GEF process and ultimately did not have much impact.

Key informants did point out, however, that many of the challenges UN Women faced in acting as the GEF convener were because they were deeply under-resourced and did not have the internal capacity and skills to lead external communications efforts of the scale required.

Capacity aside, despite some laudable intentions and efforts to shift the structure of the event, the **framing of the GEF as a civil society-led and -driven space unfortunately mostly rang hollow** for many of those involved throughout the process. Instead, key informants described a State-centric process which was not conceptualized in partnership with civil society (in fact, the announcement of a civil society-led forum at the 2019 UN Commission on the Status of Women session – just one year before the GEF was slated to be held – was the first many civil society organizations had heard of the process) and in which grassroots organizations were sidelined, the ‘usual suspects’ were still favored, and newer and more diverse voices were for the most part tokenistically included. Moreover, concerns were raised that the power dynamics and lack of commitment to feminist leadership contributed to an evolving mission for the GEF – from a forum that could make progress despite the polarizing global context to instead prioritizing the creation of an ever-bigger event. One key informant noted that *“once the framing shifted and the tent expanded, neither purpose – as a feminist space or as a widely inclusive space – was served well.”* This shift in framing might also explain the discrepancy between the transformative power of the Action Coalition blueprints, the agendas of which civil society were able to shape, versus the forums, which civil society did not drive

and which in combination with the challenging and alienating operational aspects of the GEF contributed to overwhelming fatigue among activists and organizations engaging in the process.

## Feminist Generation Consortium

With financial support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Feminist Generation Consortium implemented the Surge Fund, a project that sought to support the activism of women, girls, and gender non-conforming communities to influence their governments and other stakeholders to make transformative commitments at the GEF, and to hold them accountable for the implementation of those commitments.

Soon after the start of the project, the COVID-19 pandemic struck; as a result, the GEF was postponed and its modalities changed, and the implementation of the Surge Fund was disrupted and delayed. Adapting to the pandemic, the Consortium, with support from the project funder, built flexibility and responsiveness into the project. For example, movement partners were consulted to understand their needs and discern how best to offer support and engage most strategically; grants programs in most regions were postponed; some portion of grants could be utilized for COVID-19 response work; and the project timeline was expanded from one year to two.

Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, over 2020-2021 the Consortium provided advocacy and alliance-building grants to women’s rights and gender non-conforming groups (see Box 2 for examples), organized convenings, provided one-on-one accompaniment support and established [a call](#) to “center the full participation, power and perspectives of intersectional feminist activists in the Generation Equality Forum and beyond,” which they shared with peer funders and feminist activists across social media.



## Box 2: Snapshots of grantee partners' engagement with the GEF

- [Ladies First Association](#) was very new to the Beijing process and learned about the GEF from UAF - Africa. They used the grant received to carry out a study on gender-based violence in rural areas in Tunisia, publish a report, and work with local institutions, and lobbied and advocated for the implementation of the 2017 law on violence against women. In addition to national advocacy, the GEF was an opportunity for the organization to learn about international work on gender-based violence.
- [Blind Women Association of Nepal](#) produced a policy review document assessing the implementation of the BPFA in Nepal from the standpoint of girls and women with disabilities. The document, which was developed from desk research and consultations held with women with disabilities and government stakeholders in all seven provinces of Nepal, is currently in use for national-level advocacy.
- The South African government made 12 commitments at the GEF. [Black Womxn Caucus](#), a broad-based feminist social movement in South Africa, has started hosting community assemblies where they share the State's commitments with communities. In the words of a representative of the movement, *"the accountability framework we are most interested in is communities holding decision-makers accountable. For that we need to raise awareness."*
- [Public Association Women's Organization Alga](#), Kyrgyzstan, was a co-lead on the Feminist Action for Climate Justice Action Coalition, and participated in all stages of development of the blueprint and action areas. They were a featured speaker at both GEF forums, raising issues identified within the Action Coalition as well as the aspirations and hopes of rural women that they work with. They became a commitment-maker as part of the Action Coalition, and are now part of the [Gender and Environment Data Alliance](#), which seeks to advance gender-just climate action at all levels through improved accessibility, understanding and application of gender-environment data, and was formed in order to take the commitments forward. Participating in the GEF gave Public Association Women's Organization Alga the confidence to exercise greater leadership in national processes such as a national consultation relating to a gender equality strategy. *"As a result of GEF participation, we had the confidence to participate and government officials trusted us to mobilize grassroots organizations, local self-government structures and other stakeholders, and conduct a process of regional consultation,"* said a staff member.
- The [SDGs Kenya Forum](#) is a coalition of over 350 civil society organizations across the country, which aims to drive policy reform and action through a multi-sectoral framework. Post GEF, the coalition is running a Campaign TIMIZA (Towards and Beyond Commitments) that aims to create awareness about the government's commitments on gender-based violence and female genital mutilation. The coalition is a member of the national Gender Sector Working Group that shapes and promotes advocacy around gender-based violence at the national and county levels. They use their position within the working group to hold the government accountable to commitments made at the GEF. This includes advocacy to implement a national gender-based violence monitoring tool, public awareness of GEF and GEF commitments, as well as capacitation of women human rights defenders with advocacy tools.
- [Youth Advocacy Network Sri Lanka](#) built partnerships with other organizations in the country, and implemented collaborative projects using funds received from the Surge Fund. As a result of this collaboration, they learned about issues facing persons with physical and intellectual disabilities and deepened their work serving these groups, including their sexual and reproductive health and rights.

## Successes

The coming together of organizations that are **aligned in politics, values, and approaches**, provided a strong foundation for collaborative work as a consortium. This resulted in a number of achievements and successes borne out of the work of the Feminist Generation Consortium, as discussed below.

Through financial and technical support, the Consortium **facilitated the participation of grassroots feminist organizations in the Generation Equality Forum process** - particularly organizations that had not engaged with UN processes before, and those that work with structurally excluded groups. In doing so, the Consortium sought to ensure that the GEF may be informed by those at the forefront of the movements to advance gender equality, and grassroots groups may be equipped to push for accountability of GEF outcomes. Consortium members **awarded USD 1 million in advocacy and alliance-building grants** to 131 organizations - including 101 that interacted with a global process for the first time and 36 organizations working with structurally excluded groups - supporting them to bring their perspectives, voices and messages to the GEF. This engagement was empowering for grassroots organizations, building their confidence to do advocacy and reminding them that they were part of a larger community and movement.

Consortium members **provided accompaniment support and technical assistance** to grantee partners. This support included introductory information on the UN and the Beijing process, guidance on how to strategically engage with various UN spaces, introductions to relevant UN, government, and donor representatives, as well as advocacy support and solidarity. These inputs prepared grantee partners to engage meaningfully with the GEF. In the words of a WFA staff member, *"if we're going to engage traditionally excluded groups, we need to build their capacity to participate."*

The Consortium's collaboration around the GEF **served to strengthen relationships** between Consortium members, and with other movement partners, such as [Prospera - International Network of Women's Funds](#), whose [advocacy campaign](#) the Consortium supported, and which called for 10 percent of new funding for gender equality to go directly to and through women's funds so that it may reach grassroots groups and activists. This also led to the Consortium collaboratively reflecting on better defining the future of their collaboration and the unique role it can play in the feminist funding ecosystem.

The Surge Fund also **created space for strengthening alliances and the formation of new coalitions** of grassroots feminist organizations, which can help to build movements, accelerate action, and increase the effectiveness of advocacy efforts. For example, UAF Africa supported [GenEgaliteECCAS](#), a coalition of women human rights defenders from 11 countries in Central Africa, where 60 percent of the members are young women. With this support, the coalition was able to host a cross-regional solidarity visit in Chad, where they engaged with the gender ministry, and to organize advocacy meetings with over 70 female parliamentarians from Chad, Cameroon, and Equatorial Guinea. In another example, UAF Africa supported a consortium, comprising GenEgaliteECCAS and women's rights organizations from 13 countries, to mobilize, convene, and lead the engagement of African women, girls, and non-binary persons in Beijing@25 review processes and the GEF to ensure that commitments made speak to the unique needs, aspirations and ambitions of African people in their diversity.

The Consortium played an important role in raising awareness of grassroots feminist organizations about the GEF process and **pushing out strategic information and updates**. Given the dearth of information about the GEF process forthcoming from the organizers in a timely fashion - from national to international levels - this information-sharing was even more

critical and filled in deep gaps. Simultaneously, the Consortium learned from grantee partners about their experiences of engaging with the GEF process, including the challenges faced, which informed their technical support and advocacy. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation had access to timely information and was able to share this with the Consortium on a regular basis throughout the grant duration, and the Consortium members were able to then pass on strategic information to their partners and networks.

## Challenges

The Feminist Generation Consortium encountered some challenges in implementing the Surge Fund, spanning the range from operational to strategic, as discussed below.

The Consortium received a large, short-term, restricted grant to support greater influence of women, girls and gender non-conforming communities in the Generation Equality Forum process. The Consortium then utilized this funding to **execute a short-term intervention** in the form of the Surge Fund, within the long-term process that is Beijing Platform for Action implementation, monitoring and review, and indeed the movement towards gender equality. This generous funding enabled the Consortium to support the crucial participation of groups who would have otherwise faced considerable barriers to engaging with the GEF process. It also filled an important gap by intentionally supporting the inclusion of structurally marginalized feminist activist movements into this global advocacy process focused on gender equality.

In addition to earmarked funding for targeted interventions like these, moving forward, it is critical that donors significantly increase long-term and/or flexible support to groups and movements (whether directly or via feminist funders like women's funds that center trust-based relationships with frontline movements) so that these movements may

set a proactive agenda for themselves. Of course, rapid response grants - one of the core strategies of the Urgent Action Funds - play a key role, and they are one part of the funding ecosystem that must be complemented with long-term, unrestricted, abundant funds for movements. In situations like advocacy and follow-up related to the 25-year review of the BPFA - a planned event - longer-term financial support would facilitate the achievement of the broader objectives of movements while allowing for the flexibility to shift interventions as the context evolves. In a similar vein, operating in ways that are flexible allows movement-rooted funders like women's funds to be better aligned with the needs and strategies of grantees and movements in real time, even in rapidly evolving contexts. Crucially, this experience highlights the important role of women's funds, and the opportunity they provide for larger donors that are more removed from community-based efforts to support these movements in effective and meaningful ways.

The **COVID-19 pandemic undoubtedly impaired the work** of movements and organizations, from the grassroots to global levels, who sought to participate in and influence the GEF. Additionally, the pandemic was used as an excuse by many governments to intensify their attacks and hostility towards feminist movements or social movements, which further impacted the rights of women, girls and gender non-conforming communities. Given these critical challenges, priorities shifted from project implementation towards the safety of individuals and the sustainability of organizations.

The Surge Fund was also impacted by the pandemic. Upon receipt of the grant, Consortium members geared up to augment restricted grant support with enhanced technical assistance to support grantees' participation in the GEF process, but without significantly increased capacity. Soon after, their capacity was even further limited by the COVID-19 pandemic. As staff dealt with illness, working from home, child care, death in families, and so on, the Consortium's



capacity was significantly challenged. Further, as the pandemic progressed differently in separate regions and countries, cross-regional coordination became difficult and each Consortium member had to respond according to the circumstances they witnessed, from suspending activities to extending timelines and modifying activities. As the GEF was modified to a predominantly virtual format, travel plans were canceled, and resources were repurposed towards local activities and virtual participation. Consortium members faced unexpected and constantly shifting realities and needs; while women's funds are particularly accustomed and well positioned to respond with flexibility, the strain of this and the toll it takes must be acknowledged.

## Looking Ahead: Opportunities for Feminist Movements

From mobilization and advocacy to grantmaking, the Beijing@25/GEF process gives rise to a number of opportunities for feminist movements, including activists, organizations, and funds, to take actions to strengthen their movements and advance gender equality across political and social spheres.

Most immediately, there is **still time for governments and other stakeholders to make commitments** to advance gender equality. Feminist movements have the opportunity to continue raising awareness about the GEF process and advocating for commitments to be made, and indeed many are doing so.

With the conclusion of the GEF forums, and hundreds of commitments having been made, **the focus is turning to the implementation of the commitments as well as accountability for the fulfillment of the commitments.** The first priority here may be for feminist movements to be fully informed about the commitments made by various stakeholders pertinent to their contexts - including governments, corporations, NGOs, and others - so that they can follow-up with them and hold them accountable.

With regards to implementation of GEF commitments and indeed the BPFA more broadly, feminist movements may find or create opportunities to **engage in dialogue and/or work in collaboration** with other stakeholders to drive progress towards gender equality, through bringing their knowledge of the problems and solutions. This process offers opportunities for collaboration and partnerships that otherwise may or may not



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have come about; for example, between civil society organizations, government bodies and private sector entities, as well as with youth groups and philanthropies that may not previously have been at the forefront of gender equality work.

With respect to accountability, there is an opportunity to build a movement of GEF accountability from the ground up by **informing communities about the GEF commitments and mobilizing them to collectively hold commitment-makers accountable**. In addition to watching the official monitoring and reporting process, feminist movements could take the opportunity to **devise independent, creative accountability mechanisms** that suit their contexts and capacities - for example, community report cards, shadow reports, and press conferences.

While not adequately prioritized in the GEF process thus far, **civil society leadership and participation could be prioritized in the design and execution of GEF implementation and accountability efforts**, particularly the leadership of structurally marginalized groups, while avoiding extractive practices. This may be an opportunity for advocacy by feminist groups and movements, as well as for those with access to decision-making spaces (e.g. donor institutions) to amplify their asks and call out if and when they are being marginalized or excluded. Feminist donors could also take the opportunity to monitor whose voices are meaningfully included in GEF follow-up and accountability processes, as well as the security of activists and groups engaging with these processes, and address any shortcomings through communications products and rapid response grants.

The narrative shifts that emerged or accelerated during the GEF process - on the power dynamics present in gender equality investments, the impact of grassroots and feminist movements' organizing on gender equality and effective ways to invest in them - present an **opportunity to make bold asks**, building on the momentum generated. This includes advocating for increased and better

quality resources to flow to grassroots and feminist movements, including advocacy for resources to flow to women's funds, at the national, regional, and international levels; demanding transparency regarding the flow of resources; demanding accountability for the security and protection of women, girls, and gender non-conforming human rights defenders; and calling for greater investments for gender equality, particularly in the context of broader budgeting policies such as military spending and corporate subsidies, among others.

#### **The collective commitments emerging from the GEF process include:**

- **The Global Alliance for Sustainable Feminist Movements** is formed to exponentially increase, sustain, and improve financial and political support for women's rights and feminist organizations and movements.
- **The 2X Collaborative** seeks to advance the field of gender finance, innovate the culture of investment, and convene and equip capital providers to increase the volume and impact of capital flowing towards projects, businesses, asset managers, and financial institutions that meaningfully support women.
- **The Action Nexus of Feminist Collective Action for a Just and Healthy Planet** seeks to advance an economic agenda for people and planet by advocating for the implementation of a feminist economic justice blueprint and ensuring activists and leaders are capacitated and networked.
- **The Global Alliance for Care** seeks to disrupt the structures, norms, and institutional arrangements that disproportionately allocate care work to women and girls around the world through policies, advocacy, research, and funding to normalize co-responsibility for care, protect the labor rights of care workers, and develop universal and sustainable public care systems.



These can each potentially be important spaces for learning, exchanging ideas, and driving change in the field of gender equality. There is potential within these initiatives for **developing innovative actions and ways of working that may disrupt existing status quos**. These present opportunities for feminist movements to participate, collaborate, learn, and support each other as well as other stakeholders. Feminist funders have the opportunity to support these partnerships and alliances through financial and non-financial means.

It is vital that UN Women take on **strong leadership of the follow-up and accountability phases of the process**. Feminist movements could seize this opportunity to advocate for strengthened staff capacity at UN Women

headquarters; timeliness and transparency in the development of a monitoring framework for GEF commitments; coordinated efforts by the headquarters, regional and country offices; and improved communication between UN Women and grassroots movements.

## Recommendations to Feminist Funders & Donor Institutions

Considering the many opportunities arising from the GEF process, the Consortium offers the following recommendations to our peers in philanthropy. These ideas represent a range of strategies that women's funds and larger philanthropies can select from based on their mandates as well as available resources.



Photo provided by  
Urgent Action Fund Africa



## Recommendations to Feminist Funders, including Women's Funds

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### Funding-related support:

- Fund urgent efforts by feminist groups and organizations to inform their communities about the GEF process, its follow-up, and accountability.
- Fund urgent efforts by feminist groups and organizations to advocate for additional GEF commitments.
- Make public commitments as part of the GEF process that ensure that feminist groups continue to engage meaningfully with GEF follow-up and accountability.
- Provide sustained financial support to coalitions and consortiums being formed in countries to hold governments and other stakeholders accountable for the commitments they made at the GEF throughout the five-year period.
- Provide financial support to partnerships and alliances formed through collective commitments to undertake innovative and transformative initiatives.
- Develop a grantmaking strategy from 2022-2026 that supports a key group of organizations and coalitions engaging with GEF follow-up and accountability, with a focus on intersectionality, cross-movement building, and centering structurally marginalized groups.
- Fund proactive, longer-term work of feminist groups and organizations, including organizing, research, advocacy and data generation, where GEF follow-up and accountability may be part of their longer-term agenda. This funding should allow groups to hire staff and invest in their training.
- Provide abundant and flexible funding that enables feminist groups to engage in these advocacy efforts while providing fair wages and benefits to their staff and covering the

costs of unexpected expenses, security planning and risk assessments, institutional and movement sustainability, and collective care needs.

### More-than-money support:

- Continue efforts to inform partners and networks about GEF follow-up and accountability.
- Develop and disseminate knowledge products that enable exchange of information, experiences and learning, including successful strategies of feminist funds and grantee partners. For example, experiences of providing accompaniment support and technical assistance in relation to global advocacy; and experiences of utilizing feminist and justice-centered approaches to adapt grantmaking and other programming to emergency situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Support institutional strengthening for grassroots feminist groups, including financial management, feminist leadership, movement building, and working in coalition, especially cross-movement coalitions.
- Support continued capacity building for grassroots feminist groups to engage with GEF follow-up and accountability through training and accompaniment, as needed.
- Support the strengthening of technical expertise to analyze budgeting, funding, and expenditure by governments and other funders.
- Facilitate connections - between feminist movements in different countries and regions, between the various Action Coalitions, and possibly between UN Women and grassroots movements - through workshops and convenings.
- Provide non-financial support to the partnerships and alliances formed through collective commitments, as per their needs.

## Advocacy:

- Leverage the power of organizational platforms and voice to improve funding, support feminist movement advocacy post-GEF and in anticipation of Beijing@30.
- Advocate for institutional and bilateral donors to continuously increase the amount and quality of long-term and flexible funding given to feminist groups and movements, including from GEF financial commitments.
- Monitor gaps in the enabling of meaningful participation in GEF follow-up and accountability processes, as well as the security of activists and groups engaging with these processes, and advocate for any shortcomings to be rectified.
- Support the post-GEF advocacy of movement partners (such as [Prospera](#), [AWID](#), [Count Me In!](#) and others).
- Together with broader feminist movements, encourage and influence UN Women to strengthen their leadership over GEF processes to benefit civil society leadership and participation and access of grassroots and feminist movements.
- Start planning ahead and be ready for Beijing@30; be part of setting the agenda rather than responding or reacting.
- Ensure that long-term, flexible funding covers critical accompaniment support provided by feminist funders, an essential resource for grassroots organizations to effectively engage with these global processes.
- Provide abundant and flexible funding that enables feminist groups to engage in these advocacy efforts while providing fair wages and benefits to their staff and covering the costs of unexpected expenses, security planning and risk assessments, institutional and movement sustainability, and collective care needs.
- Ensure rapid response funding is a key part of a sustainable funding ecosystem to support feminist movements in order to complement other funding and provide the flexibility to respond to rapidly evolving situations.
- Advocate with peer donors to contribute to improving the overall quality and quantity of funds for intersectional feminist movements and structurally marginalized groups.
- Consider the contexts within which many organizations working on the rights of women, girls, and gender non-conforming communities operate, which in many instances includes State hostility towards feminist movements or social movements more broadly, and adjust strategies, programs, and operations accordingly.

## Recommendations to Donor Institutions

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- Provide long-term and/or flexible support to feminist groups and movements so that they may set a proactive agenda for themselves related to the GEF, Beijing@30 and similar global processes.
- Support women's funds and other movement-rooted funders to ensure they are sufficiently resourced and strengthened with skills and capacities to add their unique value and expertise to the work of activists and movements.
- Continuously examine the full range of one's own philanthropic institution's policies and actions (e.g. social and gender audits) for possible harms they may be causing to the intended beneficiaries of grantmaking support, and modify them accordingly.

## Annex: Participants in the GEF reflection process

Feminist Generation Consortium offers our gratitude to people from the following organizations for sharing their time, their observations, and their experience to inform the above reflections and recommendations:

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- Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (USA)
- Black Womxn Caucus (South Africa)
- Count Me In! (Global)
- Secretariat of the Global Alliance for Sustainable Feminist Movements
- Initiative Pananetugri pour le Bien-être de la Femme (Burkina Faso)
- International Women's Health Coalition (USA)
- Kenya SDG Forum
- Ladies First Association (Tunisia)
- Open Stadiums (Iran)
- Public Association Women's Organization Alga (Kyrgyzstan)
- Réseau des Femmes Leaders pour le Développement (Benin)
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