Generation Equality Forum

Organized on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the adoption of the landmark Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Generation Equality Forum (GEF) comprised two forums held in Mexico in March 2021 and in France in June 2021. The forums 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.

Key highlights of GEF successes include:

- Over 2,700 policy, programmatic, and financial commitments.
- USD 40 billion in financial commitments mobilized to advance gender equality.
- A Global Acceleration Plan that maps concrete actions and strategies to be undertaken between 2021-2026.
- The creation of six Action Coalitions, an innovative multi-stakeholder approach to accelerating progress on gender equality that centered feminist leadership.
- A narrative shift that recognized 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.

The Generation Equality Forum resulted in USD 40 billion dollars in pledges made— the single largest resource mobilization for gender equality to date. These pledges are, quite simply, game changing for efforts to advance gender equality and human rights. Still, 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.

Reflections on the Generation Equality Forum: Future Opportunities for Feminist Movements and Funders

HIGHLIGHTS FOR DONOR INSTITUTIONS
In 2020, 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. With financial support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Consortium implemented the Surge Fund, a project led by UAF-Africa that sought to support the activisms 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.

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. Consortium members also provided accompaniment support and technical assistance to prepare grantee partners to engage meaningfully with the GEF. 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.

A snapshot of the work supported includes:

- **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 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.

- **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.

- Following the GEF, the **SDGs Kenya Forum**, a coalition of over 350 civil society organizations across the country, 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.

Throughout the process, 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.
In late 2021, the Feminist Generation 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. While significant gains were realized, the GEF process was also deeply marred by challenges related to accessibility and inclusivity, among others.

*Reflections on the Generation Equality Forum* also documents the Consortium’s collaborative efforts, the challenges they faced, and the learning that emerged from their experience with the Surge Fund. Generous short-term funding, for instance, enabled the Consortium to support the crucial participation of groups who would have otherwise faced considerable barriers to engaging with the GEF process. Moving forward, however, the Consortium emphasized the importance of 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 they may set a proactive agenda.

Talking into account the challenges and successes related to the GEF process, the Feminist Generation Consortium offers the following recommendations to our institutional donor peers in philanthropy:

- **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.

- **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.

- Continuously examine the full range of one’s own 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.

For related recommendations, please see the Consortium’s Highlights for Feminist Funders. To read the full field brief, see: Reflections on the Generation Equality Forum: Future Opportunities for Feminist Movements and Funders.