

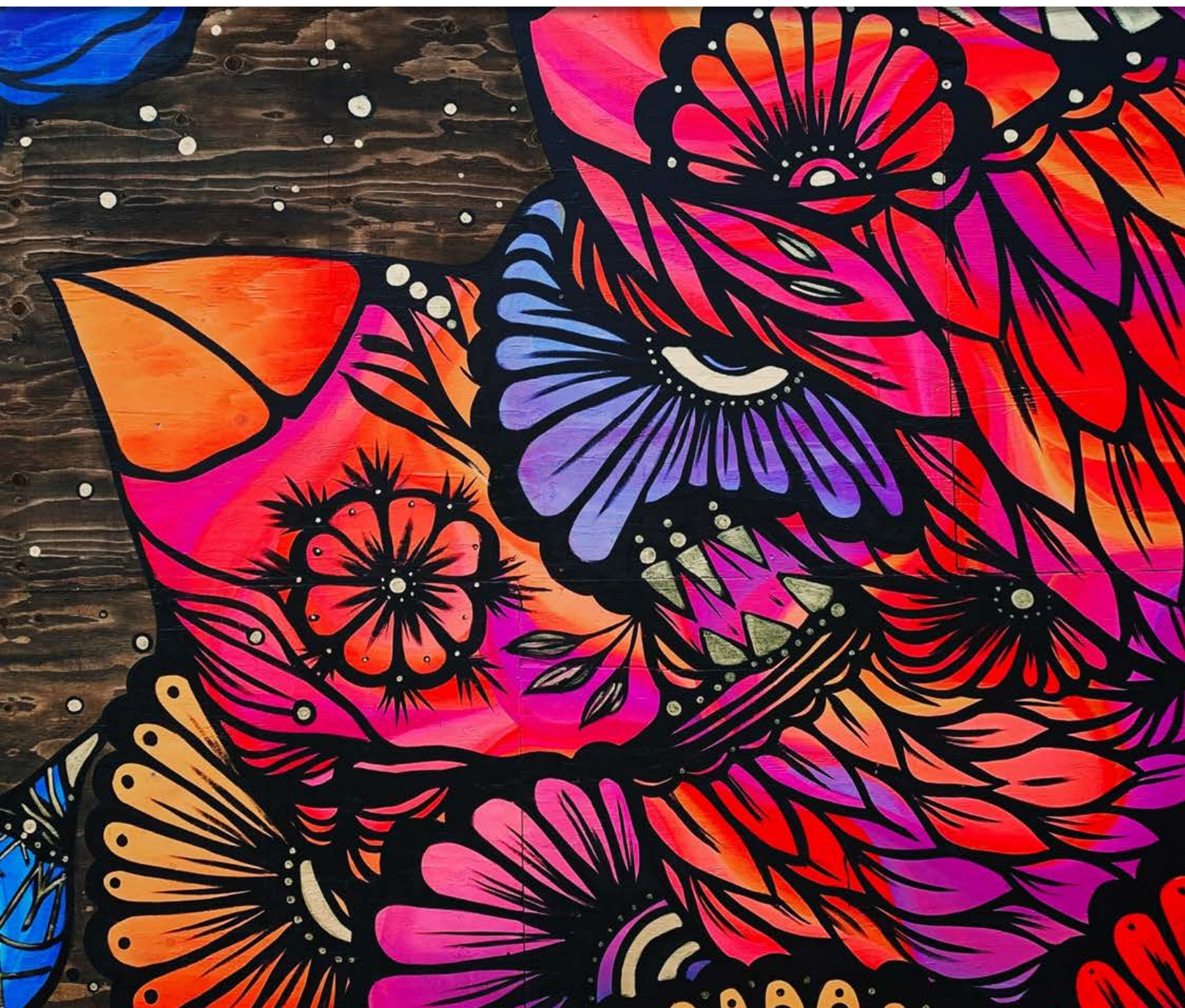


Government of the Netherlands



*Resourcing advocacy
for women's rights*

SYNTHESIS REPORT OF THE MID-TERM REVIEW FOR THE LEADING FROM THE SOUTH



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All errors and omissions remain the responsibility of the authors.

ACRONYMS

AI	Accompaniment Initiative
AIWO	Africa Indigenous Women Organization
AWDF	African Women's Development Fund
AWID	Association for Women's Rights in Development
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
FIMI	International Indigenous Women's Forum
FLOW	Funding Leadership and Opportunities for Women
FMS	Fondo de Mujeres del Sur
G@W	Gender at Work
HRFN	Human Rights Founders Network Meeting
IATI	International Aid Transparency Initiative
IIN	Indigenous Information Network
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
LFS	Leading from the South
LFSF	Leading from the South Funds
LGBTQI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands
MTR	Mid-Term Report
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PAWHR	Philanthropy Advancing Women's Human Rights
SAWF	South Asia Women's Fund
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
ToC	Theory of Change
VAW	Violence Against Women
WF	Women's Fund
WFA	Women's Fund Asia
WRO	Women's Rights Organization

1. BACKGROUND

Leading from the South (LFS) is a feminist alliance of philanthropic women's funds, conceptualized and managed by four leading women's funds based in the global south that are committed to strengthening women, girl and trans*led movements for realisation of their human rights: African Women's Development Fund (AWDF), Fondo de Mujeres del Sur (FMS), International Indigenous Women's Forum (FIMI) / AYNÍ Fund (AYNÍ), and Women's Fund Asia (WFA). These four women's funds were selected by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) because of their uniqueness in terms of their commitment to feminist ideology as well as their location in the Global South.¹

To reach its goals, LFS funds (1) provide innovative and flexible grants to women's organizations and change agents in the Global South; (2) support capacity building through technical and financial resourcing to strengthen capacities of change agents; (3) promote advocacy by supporting women's movements and networks in the Global South; and (4) help build partnerships across strategic regional and global alliances that can provide critical spaces for South-South learning as well as advance the human rights of women and girls.

This report is a midterm review of the €42 million LFS fund and its efforts to strengthen the lobbying and advocacy capacity of Southern women's organisations, movements and networks at the regional, national and grassroots level as well as to support these organisations to make the voices of women heard and hold businesses and governments accountable for their policies.

1.1. Funding for women's rights organizing

Over the last decade, there has been growing recognition among governments and private funders that women's and girls' empowerment is central to sustainable development. This has resulted in an increase in funding for gender equality, especially over the last five years.² Still, the bulk of bilateral and private philanthropy is gender blind. For example, a 2010 AWID survey showed that the combined incomes of over 740 women's organizations were only US\$106 million.³ In the same year, the income for Save the Children International and World Vision International – both mainstream civil society organizations - was US\$1.442 billion and US\$2.611 billion respectively. More importantly, only a small proportion of these funds addressed women's specific needs by, for example, preventing violence against women (VAW) or supporting women's rights organizations.

In 2013, AWID conducted a preliminary mapping of 170 private sector initiatives whose commitments focused on women and girls are worth US\$14.6 billion. Out of those, only 14% had a thematic focus on women's rights and just 9% provided any form of direct funding to women's rights organizations.⁴ In 2016-17, of the Official Development Assistance (ODA) provided by OECD members, the funding for dedicated programmes that targeted gender equality and women's empowerment as a principal (primary) objective

1 Grants framework for Southern regional women's funds : a) they are based in a Southern country; b) they have a feminist mandate; c) they have demonstrable experience and the capacity to strengthen local women's organisations and connect them within the region; d) they have demonstrated their legitimacy by ensuring a balanced regional distribution of partner organisations and target groups. The four funds were chosen through a process of waiver.

2 Angelika Arutyunova and Cindy Clark. (2013). 'Watering the leaves starving the roots: The status of financing for women's rights organizing and gender equality.' Association for Women's Rights in Development.

3 <https://www.awid.org/news-and-analysis/20-years-shamefully-scarce-funding-feminists-and-womens-rights-movements>

4 https://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/awid_funding_ecosystem_2019_final_eng.pdf

remained low at 4%; 62% of aid remains gender blind.⁵ Furthermore, the amount allocated to women's rights organizations in the south is negligible. While there might have been a slight increase over the last few years (since 2012) on total gender-focused aid to INGOs and CSOs based in donor countries, amounts going directly to CSOs in developing countries have decreased slightly. In 2014, the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC) members provided around eight times more aid overall to CSOs based in their countries than to those in developing countries.⁶ The latest figures from 2016-2017 show that a meagre 1% of all gender-focused aid went to women's organizations.⁷ (see box on the left).

In 2017, 15% of private philanthropy supported gender equality and women's empowerment (US\$0.9 billion).⁸ Yet, only a small proportion of these funds address women's specific needs, such as preventing VAW or supporting women's rights organizations.⁹ Philanthropic giving to support gender equality remains largely concentrated on a few issues, mainly health (including reproductive health) and

In 2015-2016 an average of US\$41.7 billion per year, corresponding to 37% of bilateral allocable aid, targeted gender equality and women's equality as either a significant (secondary) or principal (primary) objective.

Total aid to women's institutions and organisations (governmental and non-governmental) amounted to US\$ 464 million on average per year in 2015-2016.

Out of this, US\$225 million on average per year was committed specifically to non-governmental women's organizations.

The largest donors were the Netherlands (US\$91 million), and Sweden and Norway (both at US\$35 million each). Out of the aid to non-governmental women's organisations, US\$ 38 million on average per year went directly to women's organizations based in developing

education. Support for gender equality in lower-income and fragile/ conflict-affected countries, as well as in the economic and productive sectors, and around rights-based issues (such as advancing LGBTQI rights) remains largely limited. Overall, there is very little funding available for advocacy and movement building that tackles the deep structures required for transformative change on gender equality.

At the same time, private foundations are increasingly using their neo-liberal and conservative agendas to influence grant making priorities. This is adversely affecting what and who gets funded and who gets left out. Some feminists have argued that the co-optation of the gender equality/women's rights agenda by neo-liberals has discredited international efforts to empower women (Abdullah and

Fofana-Ibrahim, 2010; Miller and Razavi, 1998; Batliwala, 2007; Cornwall and Edwards, 2014).¹⁰

1.2. Role of feminist organizing in advancing gender equality and women's rights

This funding gap is especially worrisome given what we now know about the significant role of feminist organizations and feminist organizing in effectively addressing women's holistic interests. We know that women's movements, defined as an organized set of constituents pursuing a common political agenda of

⁵ <https://www.oecd.org/dac/stats/aidinsupportofgenderequalityandwomensempowerment.htm>

⁶ OECD Report (2016), Donor support to southern women's rights organisations, OECD Findings. <https://www.oecd.org/dac/gender-development/OECD-report-on-womens-rights-organisations.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2019/jul/02/gender-equality-support-1bn-boost-how-to-spend-it>

⁸ Source; OECD DAC Statistics, 2019

⁹ http://www.oecd.org/site/netfwd/Final_Gender_WG_Policy_Note_7319.pdf

¹⁰ <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/9282.pdf>

change through collective action¹¹, are instrumental in challenging social norms that keep gender discrimination intact. These movements work to change policies and laws to promote women's safety and security¹², and help women reimagine and act to create a different world for themselves. As Françoise Girard notes,

"From the creation of the UN Commission on the Status of Women in 1946 to the negotiations that led to the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015, it has always been the mass mobilization of the global women's movement that has pushed governments to include gender equality and women's rights in international agreements and norms, whether in health, education, water and sanitation, or criminal justice reform".

Multiple studies have highlighted the role of the women's movement in reducing discrimination and advancing equality. For example, a 2013 study (Htun and Weldon) finds that a strong, autonomous feminist movement is both substantively and statistically significant as a predictor of government action to redress violence against women.¹³ Similarly, a 2018 study by Alice Kang and Aili Mari Tripp analyzing data from 50 African countries finds that legislative reform on women's rights was significantly less likely without action by domestic women's coalitions.¹⁴ We also know that collaboration between female delegates and women civil society groups positively impacts peace processes (Krause et al, 2018)¹⁵. As Srilatha Batliwala notes, "Where movement building has weakened, we see a far greater focus on implementing short-term projects and providing services. While these are certainly useful, they are often palliative, without a clear political agenda aimed at transforming gender and other social power relations in the longer term."¹⁶

1.3. The LFS funding mechanism

The Dutch Government has been a leader in developing bilateral funding streams, such as the Millennium Development Goals 3 Fund and its successor, Funding Leadership and Opportunities for Women (FLOW), to support WROs globally. These two funds represented a historic commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment and provided core funding and strategic support to women's rights organizations in several countries.¹⁷ However, the FLOW II 2016-2020 tender results reflected a shift in funding modalities from direct funding of Southern-based civil society and women's rights organizations towards Northern based INGOs.¹⁸

11 Srilatha Batliwala, *Changing Their World: Concepts and Practices of Women's Movements*. Association of Women's Rights in Development, 2012.

12 Weldon, S. L., & Htun, M. (2013). Feminist mobilisation and progressive policy change: why governments take action to combat violence against women. *Gender & Development*, 21(2), 231-247.

13 ibid

14 Kang, A., & Tripp, A. (2018). Coalitions Matter: Citizenship, Women, and Quota Adoption in Africa. *Perspectives on Politics*, 16(1), 73-91. doi:10.1017/S1537592717002225

15 Krause, J., Krause, W., & Bränfors, P. (2018). Women's Participation in peace negotiations and the durability of peace. *International interactions*, 44(6), 985-1016.

16 Batliwala, S. (2012). *Changing their world: Concepts and practices of women's movements*. Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID), Toronto, CA. https://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/changing_their_world_2ed_full_eng.pdf

17 See Batliwala, S., Rosenhek, S., & Miller, J. (2013). *Women moving mountains: Collective impact of the Dutch MDG3 Fund*. AWID (Association for Women's rights in Development); and Mukhopadhyay, M. and Eyben, R. 2011. *Rights and Resources: the Effects of External Financing on Organising for Women's Rights*, Royal Tropical Institute and Pathways of Women's Empowerment

18 Dutch CEDAW Network Unfinished Business - Women's Rights in The Netherlands Shadow report by Dutch NGOs and CSOs; 2016 <https://www.gwi-nl.org/docs/ShadowReportCEDAW2016.pdf>

The LFS funding mechanism was, in turn, created in response to a worldwide call by women-led organizations to address this lacuna in the FLOW II grantmaking, which did not provide direct support to organizations based in the Global South. To address the demand from women's rights organizations for more direct support to organizations in the global south, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) felt that it would be most appropriate to set up a separating funding mechanism for women's funds. The MFA felt that women's funds were best positioned to support women's rights organizations (WROs) through their funding because of their deep understanding of the context, dynamics, constraints, needs and opportunities of the WROs and of the feminist movement. Accordingly, it invited four women's funds (South Asia Women's Fund (SAWF), African Women's Development Fund (AWDF), Fondo de Mujeres del Sur (FMS) and the International Indigenous Women's Forum (FIMI) / AYNÍ Fund (AYNÍ)¹⁹, all in the global south and representing three regions and indigenous women globally, to participate. All four funds are led and managed by women.

LFS is a four-year (2016 – 2020) €42 million programme that falls under the policy on women's rights and gender equality, as well as the policy framework Dialogue and Dissent of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands. The overarching goal of this policy framework is to strengthen the lobbying and advocacy capacity of civil society organisations (women-led organisations, groups, and movements working on women and girls' rights) in low- and lower-middle-income countries, to influence policy in order to ensure that women's rights and gender equality are placed – and kept – on the agenda at local, national, regional and international levels as well as to lead change and transform societies towards the full achievement of their human rights in the Global South. The specific goals of the LFS are²⁰ :

- To strengthen Southern feminist women's organisations, movements and networks, enabling them to influence policy at local, national, regional and international level;
- To set in motion an empowerment process to improve women's social, political and economic participation in order to influence government so that barriers to participation are removed;
- To provide women's organisations, movements and networks with the tools to reduce exclusion, discrimination, violence and unequal treatment.

At the time the LFS was set up, it was a completely new funding modality for bilateral donors who had so far only provided funding at this scale to northern organizations; as a result, it was not without some risk to the MFA. At least two of the funds had a smaller area of operation than was being conceived under this new funding modality. Since then, SAWF has transformed into Women's Fund Asia (WFA) and has expanded its mandate to include South East Asia and Mongolia, AWDF has expanded its mandate for the purposes of this funding mechanism to include the Middle East and FMS has expanded its operation to all of Latin America. The total funding apportioned among the women's funds is based on the size of their previous budgets and according to the Dutch MFA's identification of priority countries for receiving international assistance.

Within LFS, a balance is sought between working on various themes and supporting diverse types of organisation including small grassroots organisations, medium-sized organisations and large organisations/networks.

¹⁹ One other women's fund was invited, but declined the invitation to be part of this funding mechanism.

²⁰ Criteria for granting Southern regional Women's Funds (AVT16/BZ120136)

1.4. Purpose

1.1.1. Overall objectives

As laid out in the Terms Of Reference (TOR), the overall objective of the mid-term review is to assess in what way and to what extent the LFS has succeeded in resourcing and supporting women-led organisations, groups, and movements working on women and girls' rights and strengthening their capacity to lobby and advocate towards the full achievement of their rights in the Global South. In order to do so, the review focused on the following:

1. Assess the significant factors that are facilitating or impeding the delivery of expected results and movement towards achieving LFS' four-year goals and the progress made in this regard at the mid-point of the programme.
2. Identify the level of appropriateness of the different methods and instruments used to reach, link and strengthen the capacities of women's rights organisations in the global South to lobby and advocate.
3. Verify whether the (context-specific) assumptions that underlie the Theory of Changes (ToCs) are still valid, and if not, identify the consequences and adaptations to the intervention logic and develop lessons learned and actionable recommendations for the future implementation of the programme.

1.1.2. Scope

This mid-term review (MTR) covers the period from 2016 to February 2019. As per the TOR, the scope of work involved the following:

- a) Look into the achievements of the programme over the review period and describe how these have resulted (or not) from activities undertaken;
- b) Analyse the outcomes in relation to the outcomes stipulated in the Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) framework of the programme (both the overarching M&E framework as well as individual M&E frameworks);
- c) Analyse the relationship between outcomes, the programme strategies and the validity of underlying assumptions, as laid out in the ToC, based on the implementation of the program and actual results;
- d) Bring LFS partners and stakeholders along the learning journey, building a collective understanding of the above and sharing experiences and lessons across regions to contribute to overall insight and regional differences in context, programming and results;
- e) Assess the nature of the programme's future work and provide recommendations, including on expanding the program, adjusting the ToC and underlying assumptions, securing additional funding and influencing the funding paradigm towards increased global support for women's funds.

1.4.1. Intended use and audience

This report aims to inform the work supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands with regards to the LFS and its grantees. Moreover, drawing from the lessons learnt and best practices, it aims to inform the work of the four funds and their grantees as well as the work currently being done by other women funds, organizations, groups, movements that advocate and influence policies regarding women's empowerment/rights and gender equality.

The findings, conclusions and recommendations of this MTR aim to inform the aspects that need to be improved under the LFS fund as well as how the LFS will support current/ongoing and future grantees and

possible synergies for collective work that, if possible, can be done by the four funds and their grantees to achieve greater results and ensure sustaining changes in women's rights and gender equality in their communities and countries. It is also intended to inspire other donors to support/fund women's rights and gender equality.

1.5. Report structure

The remainder of the report is structured as follows: in Section 2, we present the review methodology; in Section 3 we undertake a brief review of the external context for LFSF grantees; in section 4 we present the key findings and lessons learned, and in Section 5 we share the analysis and recommendations for consideration to strengthen LFS.

2. MID-TERM REVIEW METHODOLOGY

2.1. Approach

Our approach to this review assumes that social change, especially around gender equality is an endogenous, non-linear and complex process that is influenced by internal and external factors. Hence, we used a flexible, deductive approach rather than working to establish a causal relationship. Two guiding approaches were used to review the programme's achievements:

2.1.1. A feminist approach

The mid-term review used a feminist lens in reviewing LFS funding strategies and the impact of its grant making. The feminist approach to this review draws upon the critical theory school of thought, which is explicitly political. Feminist evaluation methods stress the interaction among gender, caste, class, religion, ethnicity, and sexual identity, for example, which often remain invisible in traditional evaluation practice.

This approach considers the systemic and practical difficulties that women's rights organizations face with respect to accessing funds, scaling up and capacity building. It also assesses the processes of the feminist movements that have been supported and amplified by LFS to change systems and structures and raise their problems (and solutions) at local, national, regional and international levels. In addition, it recognises the complexity of social change processes and thereby follows a contribution-based approach to this review, rather than an attribution-based approach.

The mid-term review locates the work of LFS within a wider analysis of how change comes about and acknowledges the complexity of social change while drawing on external learning about how feminist transformation happens for triangulation of the findings of the review. In addition, it recognises the need to capture the experience and expertise of LFSF grantees.

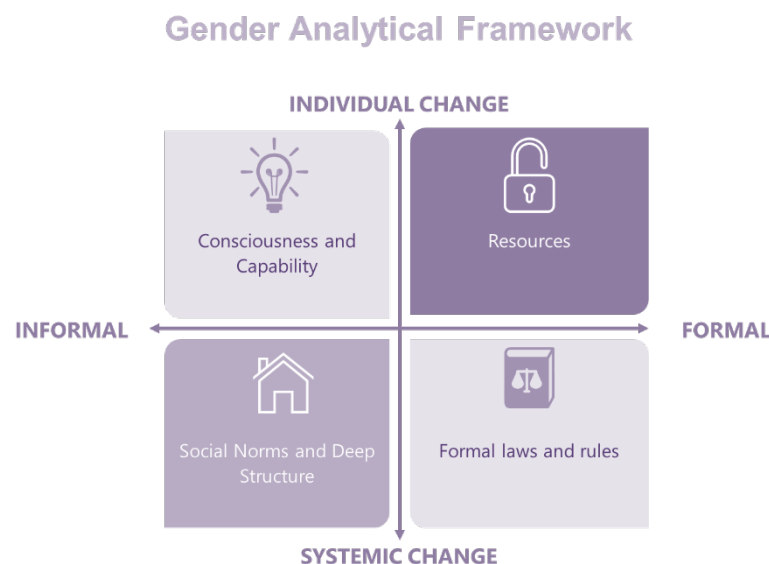
We have aimed to use a consultative and *participatory* approach – the participation of LFS (program staff and grantees) and other stakeholder experiences is a key dimension in understanding and reviewing the processes put in place by LFS fund partners and the outcomes achieved so far. Moreover, the LFSF members have been able to provide feedback/validate the findings and recommendations.

Instead of using an accountability approach to this review, we have taken a utility-focused approach such that the analysis, findings and recommendations generate actionable learnings for LFS.

This report also builds on the work that was carried out by Srilatha Batliwala on behalf of AWID for her review of the MDG3 fund for women's rights organizations.

2.1.2. Gender at Work's analytical framework

The Gender at Work analytical framework can be used to both map out programmes /strategies undertaken as well as outcomes achieved by LFS partners. The framework shows four interrelated clusters of changes that need to be made in order to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment. Two clusters (1 & 2) are individual resources and opportunities (changes in measurable individual conditions - resources, voice, access to health) and individual consciousness (knowledge, skills, political consciousness and commitment to change toward equality). Two clusters are systemic (3 & 4). Two of them represent the formal institutional rules (2 & 4) as laid down in constitutions, laws and policies, and two represent the informal norms and cultural practices (1 & 3) that maintain inequality in everyday practices. Change in one cluster is related to change in the others.



The Gender at Work analytical framework posits that for deep and transformative changes in gender equality to occur, changes must occur in women's and men's consciousness, capacities, and behaviour; for example, in the way that they understand, communicate, and prioritize gender. Changes must occur in terms of access to resources and services, such as access to skills, leadership opportunities, or land/property titles. Adequate and gender-equitable policies and laws must be in place to protect against gender discriminations. Of particular importance is the fourth quadrant, which focuses on changes in deep structure and social norms, which moderate the way that women are able to access resources and opportunity and influence the way that formal (such as government bodies) and informal (like family courts) institutions operate, often in invisible ways. This is particularly important to understand if women's voices matter in key policy spaces and if they have power and influence.

The Gender at Work analytical framework is helpful in terms of understanding the way in which the LFS support contributed to gender equality under each of the clusters. This allows us to explore the extent to which LFS' support increased resources for gender equality and women empowerment, if and how it

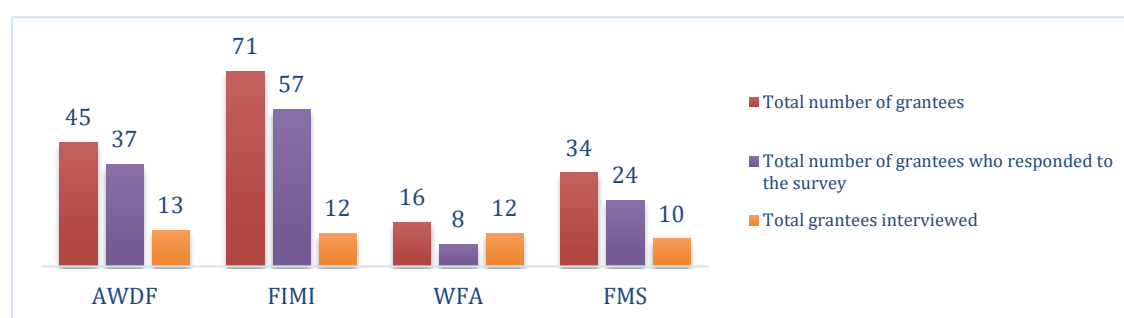
contributed to changing attitudes and/or consciousness about gender equality or to shifts in discriminatory traditions or cultures, and how it may have led to changes in formal institutions on gender equality and women's empowerment, for example with regards to laws and policies.

Given that each of the women's funds had a different theory of change, we mapped the Outcomes articulated in their individual theory of change onto the G@W Analytical Framework to assess the collective impact of their work (see Annex 1).

2.2. Review process

The mid-term review (MTR) was carried out from June to November 2019. Following the document review, a survey questionnaire was developed. The methodology, including the survey questionnaire, was agreed upon with all four LFSF members. A set of questions was also developed for an in-depth interview with a select sample of grantee partners.

Figure 1: Grantee response levels across the 4 funds



2.2.1. Document review

The bulk of the document review was undertaken at the front end of the mid-term review. However, the team reviewed documents (including grantee partner reports) throughout as they became available and were requested to fill in gaps. The G@W team reviewed additional literature to complement and substantiate the analyses and recommendations.

2.2.2. Key informant interviews

In conducting key informant interviews, the G@W team utilised a purposeful (non-random) sampling strategy, based on an initial list of 166 grantees. A total of 47 key informants²¹, were interviewed. These interviews were conducted between 15th July and 15th September to allow for the availability of grantee partners.

In selecting key informants, the G@W team sought to account for the following key aspects, in a proportionate manner:

- the size of the organizations or size of the grant: large, intermediate and grassroots organizations;

²¹ Includes grantees, LFSF staff members, Dutch MFA and other key stakeholders (staff of Mama Cash and Prospera)

- the projects' thematic focus, which varied depending on the fund
- geographic diversity of grantees to ensure regional balance.
- language: Arabic, English and French, Spanish;
- size of the grants: large size grants, medium size grants, and small size grants;
- duration of the grant: 1 and 2 years;
- type of organization: association, movement, network and coalition

In addition, the review team spoke to staff members of the four funds and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that were connected to the LFS Funds. The team also spoke to other donors and key allies from Mama Cash and the Prospera Network.

Figure 2: Distribution of Survey Respondents, by Region (n=126)

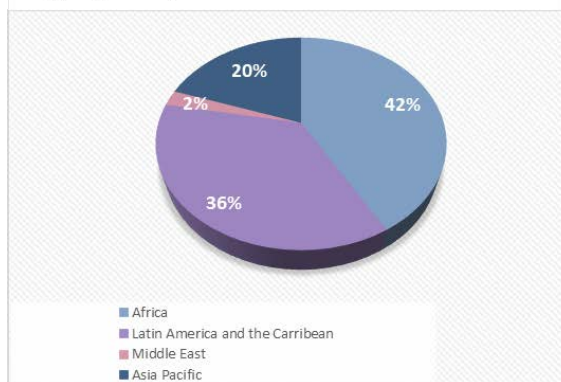
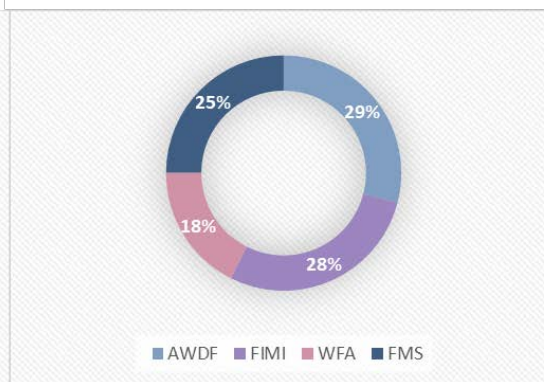


Figure 3: Distribution of Survey Respondents, by Fund



2.2.3. Survey

Every organization that received grants from an LFS partner between 2017 and February 2019 was invited to complete the survey. A total of 126 grantees (76% of the total number of grantees) participated in the survey. In keeping with the geographical representation of the grantees across the four funds, three-fourths of the participants were either from Africa or Latin America and the Caribbean (see [Figure 1](#) below).

Survey responses and key informant interviews from grantees show several overall trends, results and achievements across the four funds. These results demonstrate changes at the systems and context level, results at the individual and community level, a strengthened capacity of grantee organisations, and observations about the value-added of the LFSF members.

2.2.4. Reflection workshop in the Hague

In keeping with a feminist praxis, the Gender at Work team also convened a reflection workshop for the staff from all four funds to reflect on their progress so far, review their theory of change and develop recommendations on way forward.

2.3. Limitations of the mid-term review

The mid-term review focuses on the progress made towards impacts and long-term results, processes put in place by the four funds and key strategies used by the LFSF members. It looks at the inter-relations between the four funds and the key value-added of LFS. There are several key limitations to this review.

Given the short time frame, the mid-term review did not include any site visits but was based primarily on a document review, survey and key informant interviews. Although we spoke to grantees, the review team was unable to include the voices of women in the communities. What this means is that we have not really been able to interrogate the changes in power relations in women's lives – within households, communities, in public spaces and in policy forums or decision-making spaces as a result of the grants received by the women's rights organizations. We have relied on the information provided by the grantees, but it has not been possible to triangulate this data through other sources.²²

Another significant limitation faced during the review related to difficulties associated with accessing grantee partners because of several safety and connectivity issues. All regions had major connectivity problems which hampered our data collection efforts through survey and interviews. More generally speaking, the breadth of LFS's reach and the sheer number of grantees meant that it was difficult for the review team to speak to a majority of the grantees. We addressed this constraint by including a survey instrument that covered a majority of the grantees (76% of all grantees participated in the survey). We also used a robust purposive sampling methodology to select our interviewees (28% of all grantees) to ensure that we have covered a representative sample of the grantees.

The other limitation of this review has been our inability to look at the leadership and organizational processes of the four women's funds in-depth. Although this was beyond the scope of this review, the functioning of the LFSF is mediated by how well the individual functions operate, the style of their leadership and the organizational development processes instituted.

This review also has not undertaken a detailed assessment of the grantee selection process, as this was explored in the 2017 evaluation. We recommend that each fund undertakes an internal review at a later date to shed some light on their organizational approach and processes.

3. EXTERNAL CONTEXT FOR LFSF GRANTEES – WOMEN'S RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS AND TRANSGENDER RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS

The LFS grants have been disbursed at a time when women's rights organizations (WROs) and transgender rights organizations are facing a particularly hostile external environment. Some of the challenges that were brought up in our discussions with LFS members are listed below.

3.1. Closing space for civil society

The space for human rights activists and organizations to influence political discourse is increasingly limited. Many governments in the countries in which LFS grantees function are slamming the door shut on the possibility of civic debate and negotiations on key policy decisions. The space for dissent is shrinking

²² Other than the annual reports submitted by the four funds to the Dutch MFA.

and women's and transgender rights organizations are finding it even harder to raise their voices on rights violations and abuse. As a recent Amnesty International Report notes:

*"An increasing number of states around the world are restricting the space for civil society by imposing legal and administrative requirements that curtail the rights to freedom of movement, expression, association and peaceful assembly, such as restricting or banning sources of funding, travel, non-governmental organisation (NGO) registration, and peaceful demonstrations. These measures are often first directed against women-led and LGBTI groups because of their open challenge to the status quo through their defence of women's rights, gender equality, sexual and reproductive health rights, all of which are increasingly contested. A renewed emphasis on "traditional values" and anti-feminist narratives are fuelling efforts to redefine and weaken hard-won progress in national and international human rights law, based on intolerant views, propaganda and conspiracy theories."*²³

Furthermore, decades of pursuit of a neo-liberal agenda has led to the delegitimization of human rights mechanisms that protect the citizenry while continuing to ignore violations carried out by the private sector.²⁴ As the power of the private sector continues to grow, the influence of and space for civil society continues to decrease. The issues of women and transgender people continue to be deprioritized over economic agendas; there is little recognition of the impact of neoliberal economics on forced migration, violence in communities and the suppression of rights of certain communities²⁵. This is particularly true for indigenous people whose land continues to be appropriated by businesses. Hostile migration policies from right-wing governments have also made the position of migrant women particularly vulnerable. This means that most of the energies and resources of grassroots women's rights organizations are spent on resisting and stalling backlash rather than being able to advance women's rights in their countries.

3.2. Security and wellbeing of staff /activists of women's rights organizations

In the face of ethnonationalism that advances militarisation and weakens democratic accountability mechanisms, the security and wellbeing of many LFS grantee partners are being threatened, often by the state security apparatus that is meant to protect them. Many women human rights defenders and activists face criminalization and subsequent incarceration because they raise their voices against patriarchal and oppressive State machineries.²⁶ In some extreme situations, activists have also been murdered or have been part of forced disappearances and extrajudicial killings.

3.3. Increased threat to the life of environmental defenders

New research shows that environmental defenders are being killed at the rate of almost four a week across the world.²⁷ As John Knox, UN special rapporteur on human rights and the environment, notes, "There is now an overwhelming incentive to wreck the environment for economic reasons. The people most at risk are people who are already marginalized and excluded from politics and judicial redress and are dependent on the environment." Environmental defenders have therefore become one of the most at-risk categories of human rights defenders. There has also been an increasing focus on the imprisonment

23 Challenging Power, Fighting Discrimination: A Call To Action To Recognise And Protect Women Human Rights Defenders, Amnesty International, November 2019.
<https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/ACT3011392019ENGLISH.PDF>

24 <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2017/aug/18/neoliberalism-the-idea-that-changed-the-world>

25 Tobias, S. (2012). Neoliberal Globalization and the Politics of Migration in Sub-Saharan Africa. *Journal of International & Global Studies*, 4(1).

26 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/11/from-slurs-to-sexual-violence-women-human-rights-defenders-come-under-global-attack/>

27 <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/ng-interactive/2017/jul/13/the-defenders-tracker>

and murder of women's environmental defenders. Given that women are also one of the most vulnerable groups in relation to the climate change crisis, many current (and potential) LFS grantees, especially those working with indigenous communities, are at a greater risk of being persecuted by both State and private machinery.

3.4. Sustainability of the WROs and ease of financial operations

Many governments have started using restrictive legislation to stifle the work done by CSOs working on human rights: by denying their rights to register, preventing their ability to receive funding from external sources and suspending their banking accounts. This has made it increasingly difficult for small grassroots organizations to sustain their work. They risk closure of their organization and this also has consequences in terms of the financial operations and the speed with which grantees can accept and start utilizing funds. Due to legal constraints, it has become difficult for grassroots groups to receive foreign funds into their bank accounts; in many cases, it might take six to seven months from the time the contract is signed until the time the funds are received in the bank account of these organizations.²⁸ The utilisation of funds might then get further delayed due to additional requirements for permissions. This is often combined with shrinking resources in public budget allocation for social justice, human rights and social protection initiatives, especially in countries where conservative governments are in power.

4. FINDINGS

4.1. Theory of Change

A theory of change (ToC) is a comprehensive description and illustration of how and why a desired change is expected to happen in a particular context.²⁹ Patricia Rogers, a well-known evaluation expert defines ToC as : 'Every programme is packed with beliefs, assumptions and hypotheses about how change happens – about the way humans work, or organisations, or political systems, or eco-systems. Theory of change is about articulating these many underlying assumptions about how change will happen in a programme.'

Each of the four funds have a different theory of change (ToC) for the LFS programme. In order to arrive at a common understanding and map out the commonalities across the four funds, the reviewers reconstructed a common theory of change for LFS that is based on the individual ToCs and draws on the four funds' vision towards feminist resourcing. The reconstructed Theory of Change is presented below and in Annex 3. Note that this is not a comprehensive summation but is more of an attempt to represent the similarities across the four funds.

Some of the common and underlying assumptions of the ToC³⁰ for the LFSF are as follows:

Assumption 1: The primary role of LFSF is to increase financial resources in the hands of women-led and trans-led organizations by providing funding that follows feminist principles.

Assumption 2: Resourcing of grassroots women's rights organizations is critical to resourcing intersectional feminism activism and movement building, without which there will be rollbacks in democratic rights and equality.

²⁸ Discussions and interviews with LFSF staff.

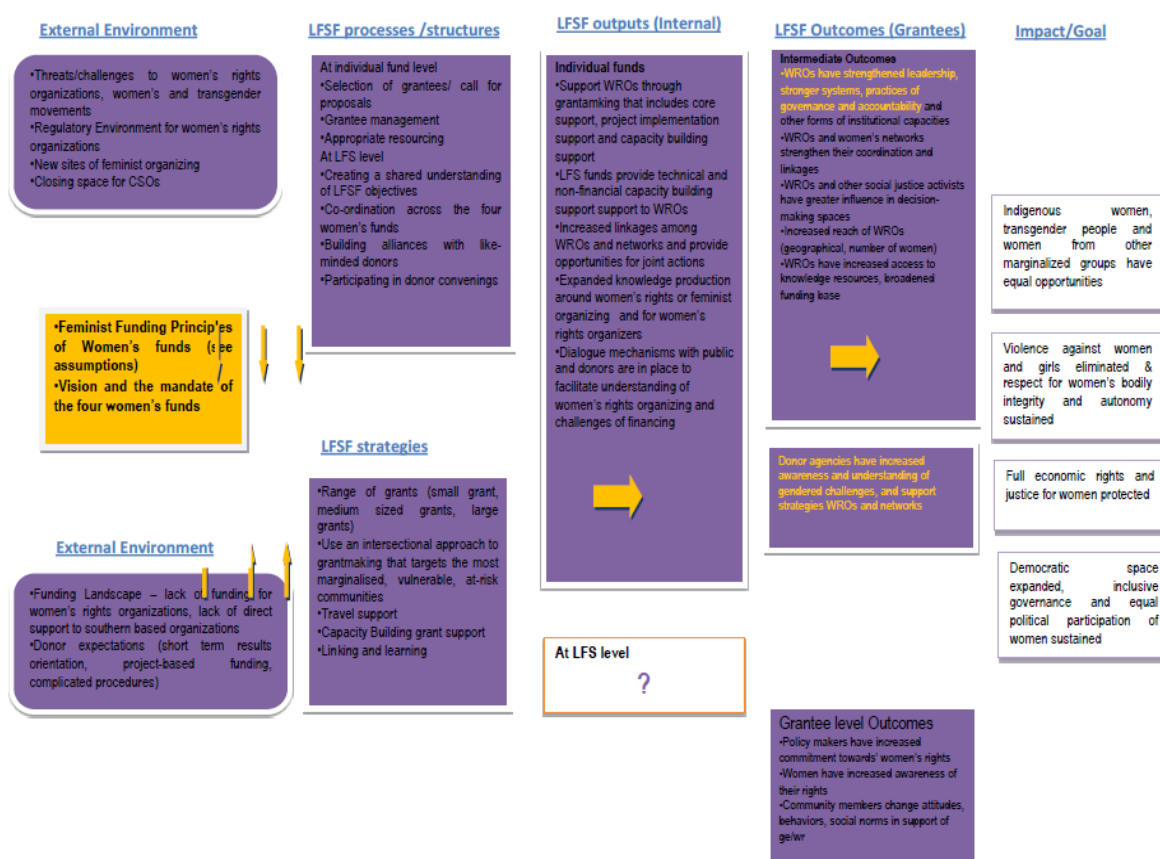
²⁹ <http://www.theoryofchange.org>

³⁰ These assumptions have been drawn out based on a collective reflection process with all four LFSF staff members in the Hague, July 2019.

Assumption 3: If women's rights organizations' and trans-led organizations'³¹ capacity are strengthened through training, learning from each other and other technical support, then they would build long term sustainability, greater autonomy and strategic acumen, which would then help them to more effectively challenge discrimination and inequality.

Assumption 4: Women are agents of change and investments (both financial and non-financial) are required to ensure that their voices are amplified and that they can assume leadership of processes at various levels (local, national and regional).

Figure 4: Reconstructed Theory of Change



See Annex 3 for a larger picture of the Theory of Change

³¹ Women's Fund Asia's ToC is explicitly inclusive of trans-led organizations.

4.1.1. Validity and Relevance

The ToC is broadly representative of the expected trajectory of changes needed to support social justice movements and advance women's rights.

Firstly, as noted earlier, the ToC assumes the centrality of the role of women's organizing in advancing a women's rights agenda and avoids reducing women and women's rights organizations to mere 'targets' or 'beneficiaries'. We know from existing research that civil society has been an important space for women to advance political change from below through grassroots social mobilisation (Molyneux, 2003³²; Rai and Waylen, 2004).³³ Building up the capabilities of WROs has the potential to support social mobilisation that contests power relations, discriminatory practices and social norms and challenges the exclusion of women and marginalized groups in formal and informal spaces. Our subsequent analysis of the outcomes achieved (or being worked towards) indicates that the WFs have been right in assuming that empowering women's rights organizations and investing in their capacity can contribute to shifts in transformative social change.

Secondly, the WFs recognise that by developing women's capability and consciousness or "power within"³⁴, women can go on to challenge gender norms in the wider community, whether together or as individuals. There is a significant body of literature that substantiates a clear link between women's leadership and gender-responsive legal and policy reform and improvements in women's access to public goods and services.

Thirdly, the ToC recognises the importance of the role of collective power ('the power with') and strategic alliances in building up feminist and other social justice movements. This collective dimension is critical in ensuring that there is a shared understanding of the institutionalised nature of the discriminatory norms and that women's rights groups are organizing in a collective fashion to address and overturn them. By strengthening WRO efforts to enhance women's awareness and their collective voice, the four WFs are fostering demand-side advocacy for legal change and policymaking to advance women's rights.

Fourthly, LFSF members correctly assume that it is not just about funding, but that it is the accompanying support provided to the women's rights organisations, such as strengthening their capacity to function or providing opportunities for linkages, that will enable them to be more resilient and sustainable. The current environment for women's rights organizations is very hostile; shrinking civic space is combined with security concerns. Women's funds acknowledge that in the current context, this environment for women's rights organizations could change rapidly for the worse. Women's funds aim to ensure that their funding contributes to the resilience of the women's rights organizations so that they can sustain themselves even if the external environment worsens. To that extent, the four WFs have developed a range of strategies to support women's rights organizations and movement building work such as financial and technical support, providing spaces for linking and learning from each other and providing opportunities to access policymakers and other influencers.

Finally, the focus on supporting small grassroots organizations through LFSF is also in line with feminist principles of shifting resources (and power) to those without, and the common indicators demonstrate a multilayer approach taken by LFS which specifically aims to create changes at the macro, meso, and micro-levels.

32 Molyneux, M. (2003). Women's Movements in International Perspective: Latin America and Beyond, [Maxine Molyneux](#).

33 Waylen, G., & Rai, S. M. (2004). Special issue on "Gender, Governance and Globalization.". *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 6(4).

34 Rowlands, J. (1995) 'Empowerment Examined', *Development in Practice* 5.2: 101-7

In addition, FIMI brings an indigenous lens to its theory of change. FIMI is not only a women's fund, but also a network where grantees are viewed as partners. FIMI's board and executive staff are governance instruments of a collective organization. They articulate a vision of change that is based on traditional indigenous principles of reciprocity, solidarity and complementarity and aimed at advancing the collective and individual human rights of Indigenous Peoples. Because of their global mandate, they work with ethnic communities that are spread across national borders.

4.1.2. Gaps

While the ToC is broadly representative of the expected trajectory of change, we also identified the gaps outlined below.

Firstly, the ToC is largely externally focused on how the work of WROs is expected to contribute to changes in the capabilities of women as rights holders. It does not make explicit the institutional capacities and outputs of the four WFs that are critical to strengthening the WROs and furthering the women's rights agenda. We recommend that such outputs be constructed within the ToC of each fund and at the consortium level. This will allow each fund to assess their own capacity infrastructure in order to implement the LFS programme. As feminist funds, it is also important to constantly reflect on their own performance and way of working and having measurable outputs (and outcomes) for the funds themselves will encourage them to look inwards and build a more learning/reflective organization. We acknowledge that most of the funds already have reflective practices in place but making them more explicit will be indicative of and consistent with feminist principles of transparency and openness. Some of the dimensions around which the fund level outputs could be crafted are the grantee selection process (recognizing the diversity and linkage to feminist/indigenous movements), grantee engagement, feminist leadership within the WFs, organizational culture, learning agenda related to LFS, and staff roles and processes.

Secondly, there are no outputs or outcomes at the LFS consortium level that has been identified with the current Theory of Change. However, as we read through the proposal and arrived at the initiatives outlined under the Linking and Learning Initiative, we came across the following three outcomes:

- Strengthened programmatic processes of grant-making, learning, monitoring and evaluations and communications; as well as financial and administrative systems of each of the four funds.
- Strengthening the South-South collaboration of the regional women's funds leading to more collective strategies and initiatives
- Strengthening of the overall movement of women's funds, ensuring the strategies, lessons³⁵

The reviewers recommend that these three outcomes also be incorporated under a joint theory of change (or in the individual TOC for each fund, as the case maybe) for any next phase. We feel that that LFS has the potential to strengthen transnational women's movement that goes beyond regional borders. The true potential of the four women's funds will be realised if they start seeing value in supporting joint action that goes across regional borders.

³⁵ See page 50, WFA (formerly SAWF) proposal submitted to the MFA.

Thirdly, there is an underlying assumption that supporting formal women's rights organizations and their efforts at collectivizing will foster movement building. However, we also know that this is not necessarily true – supporting women's rights organizations is not the same as supporting feminist movement building. Firstly, not all women's organizations are feminist or engaged in movement building activities. Similarly, movements may be composed of both formal and informal organizations or networks or collectives that are loosely organized; there is currently no support for such informal organizations. That being said, international feminist movements like #MeToo and Time's Up's legal defence fund provide examples of new approaches to addressing and funding emerging issues, from which there might be important takeaway lessons on how to effectively rise up to address these issues.

The current ToCs of the WFs and the reconstructed one presented above does not adequately capture the complexity in which the women's funds and their grantees work. It would be helpful to construct a theory of change that encapsulates the lived realities of women's rights organizing which is often non-linear and more complex than presented by the individual ToCs adopted by the four LFS funds. It would be useful to think about and visually map the pathways of change that the four funds are supporting rather than the more rigid frameworks that are being used. It is also very important to take into account the multiplicity of actors that contribute to the ecosystem and influence parts of the feminist movements in a positive or negative way. We feel that the current TOC does not allow the WFs to capture the inter-relations between the different actors. For example, robust movement building³⁶ also requires the involvement of critical allies, and other organizations that support movement build infrastructure (through capacity building, convenings, harvesting learning). In another example, there has to significant mobilisation of and sustained collaboration with femocrats within multilateral organizations for "Multilateral spaces (to) include individual and collective rights of indigenous women in political agendas and resolutions³⁷".

The current TOCs forces the users to make wide conceptual leaps (e.g. between supporting individual women's organizations to robust women's movement building) and does not consider the intermediate changes that are necessary to bring about such changes. It would be good to consider and articulate the stages in between the outputs and outcomes as mentioned currently. For example, in order for WROs to get more resources, an intermediate outcome could be the establishment of dialogue mechanisms/convenings that brings WROs together with donors (some of the regional funds have considered it but not all). Furthermore, we feel that it would be preferable to introduce some intermediate outcomes that can be measured within the course of the grant period. Many of the outcomes are difficult to capture within the programme duration.

4.1.3. Process and review

It is commonly reflected in the literature that, "the process of developing a ToC is in itself is as much an objective as the product that results from it."³⁸ Although the ToC was drafted in support of a specific programme (LFS) and is influenced by the vision of the four WFs, it was not developed in a process of consultation with WROs. We feel that the ToC should be shared widely with women's groups and validated through a consultative process with at least a sub-section of grantee partners. For instance, the ToC is neither available on the joint LFS website, nor is it available on the website of each of the four

36 WFA Outcome 5

37 FIMI Outcome

38 Wigboldus, S. and Brouwers, J. (2011). Rigid plan or vague vision: How precise does a ToC needs to be? Hivos E-dialogues. Available at http://www.theoryofchange.nl/sites/default/files/resource/e-dialogue_2_rigid_plan_or_vague_vision.pdf

individual women's funds. The ToC could itself form a part of a communication tool that explains what the LFSF intends to achieve and help other funders learn from their experiences and insights.

It would also be good for the WFs to review the ToC internally from time to time beyond conducting periodic external reviews. It would be good to reflect on the extent to which the theory of change is being used as a learning tool on a continuous basis by the WFs to review their strategies and also that of their grantees.

4.1.4. Areas of limited progress

In terms of the overall outcomes, we find that broadly the four funds are on course to achieve the outcomes outlined in the ToC. The details are provided in subsequent sections. However, the two areas where there is less traction are:

- Creation and dissemination of knowledge products for women's rights activists and donors: Women's funds are producing some tools and knowledge products for their grantees, but there is no systematic approach to 'harvesting' and sharing learning on an ongoing basis to support grantees. In our interviews, the WF staff note that documentation of learning, as well as the creation of more analytical pieces, will be accelerated towards the end of the programme. We feel that it is a missed opportunity that more analytical tools on urgent /emerging issues has not been shared with grantees for their learning and capacity building. There are no resources available on the LFS website – it would have been immensely useful if the learnings from the linking and learning events could have been distilled and shared with other organizations in the women's movement.
- Donor engagement and awareness: With support from MFA, the four funds have started approaching other bilateral organizations. However, there are no knowledge tools on analytical pieces that have been created for donors and even the interaction with bilateral donors and private philanthropy is uneven across the four funds. It is also too early to really report on the extent to which these interactions are having an influence on thinking and practices of other donors, especially in the bilateral community.

4.2. What are some of the significant achievements supported by financial resourcing through LFS?

Although there are regional variations³⁹, the following synthesis presents a vision of overall results.

Finding 1: The LFS grants have allowed each of the funds to considerably strengthen their reach, significantly increasing the funds available to women's rights organizations, especially in the hands of small grassroots organizations (those with an annual budget below US\$50,000).

The LFS funding window has considerably increased the reach of each of the women's funds. It has enabled AWDF, which was already functioning pan-Africa, to support organizations in the Middle East. Women's Fund Asia was able to leverage the LFS funds to expand its focus from South Asia (as it did as the erstwhile South Asia Women's Fund) to South East Asia and Mongolia. FMS expanded its operation from the Southern Cone to the Caribbean and was able to fund 34 women's rights organizations in 21 out

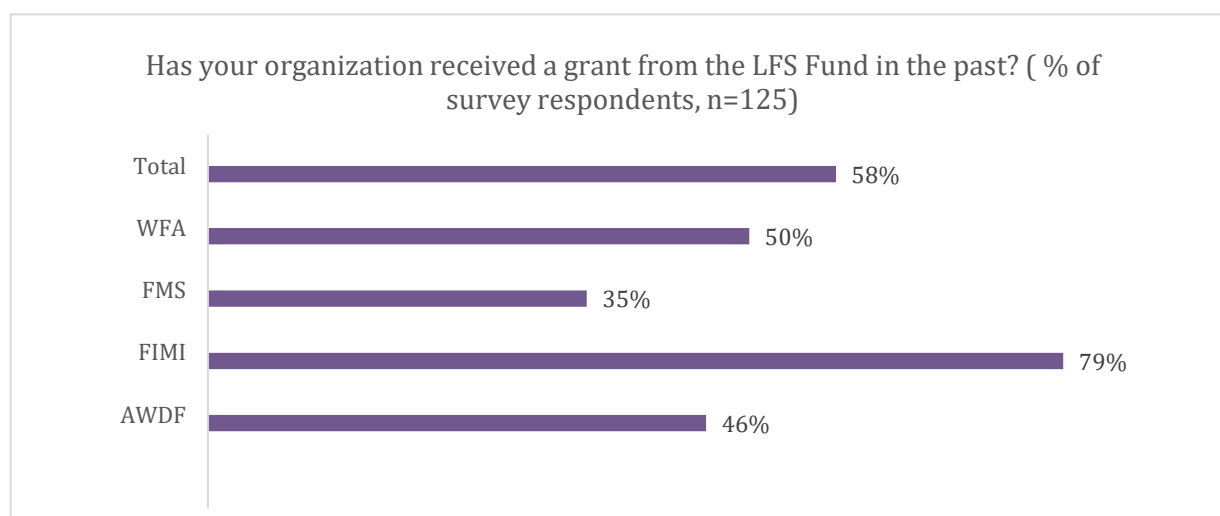
³⁹ Please see regional chapters for more detail.

of these 23 countries in Latin America. FIMI has also strengthened its geographical reach, in particular expanding to MENA and the Pacific region and a few new countries in Asia.⁴⁰

During the period under review, LFSF directly supported 166 women's rights organizations. All four WFs also supported consortia and networks (both formal and informal), broadening their reach even further. For example, FIMI was able to expand its reach to another 62 organizations through its funding to 8 consortia. Similarly, FIMI also supported three regional networks (ECMIA (Americas); AIWO (Africa); and TEBTEBBA (Asia)) and two national networks (National Indigenous Women's Federation (Nepal) and Ecommunnis AC (Mexico)). In the case of FMS, eight of the projects supported were implemented by consortia, thereby broadening LFS' reach even further to include indirectly an additional 62 organizations, for a grand total of 96 organizations in all.

This is corroborated by the survey respondents. 58.4 % of survey respondents noted that they had never received funds from the four WFs before the LFS grants. As seen in Figure 4, all the funds were successful in reaching newer grantees through the LFS funding mechanisms. Even AWDF, which has a long history of working in Pan-Africa, was able to reach out to new groups, 45.9% of the survey respondents noted that they had not received a previous grant from AWDF. Similarly, for both FMS and WFA, the LFSF enabled them to reach new grantees; 35% and 50% of survey respondents were first time grant recipients. In particular, FIMI was able to strongly leverage the funds to reach out to a significantly large pool of new grantees, 79% of the survey respondents noted that they had not received a grant from FIMI before.

Figure 4: Previous LFSF grants



A large majority of these organisations were small grassroots organizations, enabling the fund members to reach diverse and locally-grounded groups. As we know from past studies, small grassroots are often at a higher risk of being excluded from funding mechanisms because of their inability to meet the stringent guidelines imposed by donors. The effect is that small women's rights organizations are rarely able to scale up their interventions. It is, therefore, not unsurprising to note that for some funds, these small organisations reported the largest shifts in certain areas.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Malaysia and Indonesia.

⁴¹ Please refer to the individual reports for further details.

LFSF grants have significantly increased the ability of women’s rights organizations to reach a larger number of women, work with diverse groups and expand their geographical reach. The LFSF funding has made it possible for the women’s rights organizations to reach, support and empower a larger number of women.⁴² Grantees also noted that the LFSF funds increased their ability to reach new areas (such as rural and remote communities) and work with diverse groups, including indigenous women, LGBTQI, and youth groups. For example, 49.4% of respondents reported that they were able to focus on new groups to a great extent, 51.1 % reported that they were able to launch new initiatives, and 52.1 % reported that they were able to increase the participation of younger women activists in their organisation to a great extent.

The LFSF grants have been critical to the survival of women’s rights organization in the current context. Most importantly, over 80%⁴³ of grantees reported that the grant allowed them to survive in challenging contexts. Many organisations described the fund as being critical to their survival in hostile contexts, such as the shrinking space for civil society, backlash towards women’s rights issues, increasing conservatism and the roll-back of women’s rights funding. As one LFS grantee mentioned, “Women are still standing their ground and fighting for their rights despite the attacks against their organizations and communities.”

Finding 2: LFSF grantees are addressing multiple dimensions of change that are necessary for deep structural transformations. The LFS grants have enabled grantees to create significant shifts in individual consciousness and awareness of women’s rights. Less considerable, but still significant, shifts were also reported around changes in social norms and formal laws/policies.

Respondents reported a variety of changes they had seen due to the grant. These have been measured along Gender @Work’s analytical framework, including contribution towards changes in laws and policies, changes in individual awareness and consciousness, changes and shifts in cultural norms, and changes in individual access to resources and decision-making.

Overall, the fund disbursements show a balance across the four quadrants in each focus area. This indicates that LFSF grantees are addressing multiple dimensions of change that is necessary for deep structural transformation. This reaffirms previous research that women’s rights organizations play a critical role in bringing about holistic and transformative changes for gender equality and women’s empowerment.

The nature of grantmaking aligns with a feminist vision for change that underscores the need for a change in consciousness and changes in social norms. As Andrea Cornwall notes,

“to be transformative, to address the root causes of poverty and the deep structural basis of gender inequality, calls for more than facilitating women’s access to assets or creating enabling institutions, laws and policies. Two vital levers are needed. The first is processes that produce shifts in consciousness. This includes overturning limiting normative beliefs and expectations that keep women locked into situations of subordination and dependency, challenging restrictive cultural and social norms and contesting the institutions of everyday life that sustain inequity. The second is

42 Nearly 60% of the survey respondents noted that the funds have to the “greatest extent” allowed them to reach a larger number of women.

43 To a moderate or great extent

engagement with culturally embedded normative beliefs, understandings and ideas about gender, power and change.⁴⁴

The majority of the grantees reported the largest impact at the level of individual consciousness and capabilities. 89.8% of grantees reported that they had seen significant shifts towards individual awareness of rights. Grantees reported that they are building individual women's awareness of their rights and mobilizing them collectively to advocate for change. As one grantee mentioned, *"The young women trained under the project have developed broader understanding of rights, moving beyond girls' rights. They have also influenced many community members' attitude and awareness on girls' rights and broader gender issues."* (see example in Box 1 below)

Box 1: Examples of LFSF Grantee Contribution to Changes in Individual Awareness, Consciousness and Capabilities

Example 1:

Almost all women from indigenous and religious communities who attended the basic training provided by a WFA grantee had never been introduced to issues and aspects of human rights, women's rights, freedom of religion or belief. Due to the lack of knowledge and understanding of their own rights, women from these communities have been extremely vulnerable and have easily become victims of the government's violation measures. Particularly, indigenous women who are residing in areas that are geographically distant from or almost disconnected from the urban setting have been even more vulnerable because the government's violation against human rights in these communities are not reported by the media. By attending the basic training, these women have gradually developed their understanding of their rights and freedom and skills in writing report on human rights violation. In regard to their low socio-economic and low educational background, knowledge and experience these women gained from the training are their powerful tools which contribute to the changes at individual level.

- WFA Grantee

Example 2:

We trained various stakeholders including tea estate workers, union workers officials, local community leaders, paralegals, women rights advocates and economic support groups on women's labour and economic rights in the tea zones. Our reviews revealed that the beneficiaries of our training became aware of their labour and economic rights and in turn disseminated this information to their colleagues, household members, church members and economic support group members. There were reports on how some beneficiaries directly intervened at the workplaces in situations where there were cases of rights violations, and testimonies of how some workers union leaders used the knowledge and information gained to sensitize their colleagues on their labour and general rights.

- AWDF Grantee

Example 3:

Through the Self-Care workshops, women managed to heal or reflect on the emotional and physical impacts that activism has for sexual rights and reproductive rights and for being women and caring for other women. Additionally, they incorporated daily self-care practices individually and collectively.

- FMS Grantee

Example 4:

XXX (aged 46) is a woman, head-load fish vendor from a village of XXX district. The participation in the project helped her improve her leadership qualities and managerial skills. It also helped her to get to

44 Cornwall, A. (2016). Women's empowerment: What works? *Journal of International Development*, 28(3), 342-359.

know other women in the same occupation. Hence, she was able to contest for and win the Fisher-woman Cooperative elections and is now serving as its President.

- FIMI Grantee

Note: Names of grantee, community partners are hidden to protect the identity of the grantees
See other examples in Annex 2.

Changes in social norms:

Similarly, 71.7% reported that they have begun to see shifts in community norms and practices during the grant. Many of the examples reflected on increased acceptance of the role of women in the public sphere as well as within households. Grantees reported increased respect for women within the households which led them to make joint decisions with their partners. Women's leadership was also more accepted in society. One grantee mentioned that women were coming out as role models to other women and girls and breaking the gender stereotype that women's role is in the house. For more examples see Box 2 below and Annex 2.

Box 2: Examples of LFSF grantee contribution to shifts in social norms

Example 1:

"Thanks to the work of advocacy and visibility of what it means to be a domestic worker, some state institutions and society in general begin to recognize this work as a fundamental one, which should enjoy labour rights like any other."

- FMS Grantee

Example 2: Public perception of women workers

In response to the advocacy work by LFS grantee, sex work and basic social services for women sex workers had become a public discussion across social media and was also brought to the attention of government institutions.

A WFA partner reported that sex workers in a couple of South Asian cities and one South East Asian city reported some changes in norms and the behaviours of clients, police and lawyers. More lawyers are willing to represent sex workers in courts, and some clients, pimps, and policemen are less violent and aggressive towards them (those who are aware about the Safety First programme that is being carried out).

The intervention by another WFA partner in a district of a South Asian country is progressively enabling supportive spaces for women auto drivers in that district to challenge male domination in this area of work. Some male drivers have come forward to support the women, which is a small change in the norms of this society with its very distinct gendered roles.

- WFA grantees

Example 3: Working with religious and community leaders to change customary norms

The funding allowed the grantee to work with traditional, religious and community leaders that played a key role as guardians and perpetuated traditional norms, mainly those related to child marriage (marabou, wedding grooms, aunties etc.) Through the efforts of the grantee, religious and community leaders agreed upon concrete strategies that they will use in their community to change harmful traditional practices. In a West African country, religious and traditional leaders and influential people involved in the celebration of child marriages have mobilized against customary practices and made the two following commitments : i) to respect the legal provisions of the Family Code which allows

marriage at the age of 16 (to reduce the age of marriage) and ii) to ensure consultation with women (mothers of girls) before any marriage. According to the results of studies on child marriage, women do not have the right to decide on the marriage of their daughters; the decision to marry a girl belongs to her uncles or fathers. In another West African country, at the community level, following the recommendations of the forum, the traditional and religious leaders pledged to change their customary recommendation that the girl must spend her third menstrual period with her husband, which resulted in many cases of child marriage. The imams understood through the project that this recommendation has serious consequences on the lives of girls.

- AWDF grantee

Example 4: acceptance of women in civic and governance processes

Indigenous women are grateful for the opportunity to work with FIMI on gender equality. The advocacy visits, training support and sensitization on gender equality have reduced the discrimination and perception of womanhood by men in our community. "The partnership with FIMI has brought a positive change to our community; our capacity is built to advocate for change, women now participate in civic and local governance which used to be for men alone. We now do those things that only men used to do in our community.

- FIMI Grantee

Formal rules, laws and policies: The LFSF grants are creating an enabling environment for women to claim their rights by contributing to shifts in changes in laws, policies, resource allocation and by preventing the rollback of past gender equality gains. While only 45.8 % of respondents reported a significant change in laws, policies, or resource allocation during the grant, an additional 36.7% of respondents reported that their activities were not focused on changing formal policies/laws, so reporting on this change was not applicable to them. Changes in laws and policies take time and that may be another reason why many grantees have not yet seen any evidence of changes at this level. At the same time, 41.7 % reported that they were able to significantly prevent the rollback of past gender equality gains. Grantees reported that there were several key areas where they were able to prevent reversals and rollbacks, including violence against women (55.9% of respondents), civil and political rights (42.4%), and sexual and reproductive health rights (30.5%). See example in Box 3 below.

Box 3: Examples of LFSF grantee contribution to shifts in formal policies/laws/schemes

Example 1:

The support received from the FMS was very significant for our organization to continue working for the de-stigmatization of abortion in our society, and this was reflected in the number of people who demonstrated throughout the country while Congress debated the bill for the first time. In addition, during 2018 we experienced a historic event such as the approval by the Chamber of Deputies of the bill presented by the National Campaign for the Right to Abortion. Although the Senate finally did not advance in this direction, this marked a record never before achieved in Argentina, called the green wave that began to spread throughout the continent.

- LFS Grantee (FMS)

Example 2:

A significant budget was allocated for training related to human trafficking because of the sustained engagement of woman's right organisation, based in a country in East Asia, with their relevant local ministry

- LFS Grantee (WFA)

Example 3

The District Service Commission in one of the target districts changed the structure of the advertisement to include a non-discriminatory statement that encourages women and girls with disabilities to apply for public jobs.

- LFS Grantee (AWDF)

Example 4

In a South Asian country, an indigenous women's group advocated with local government officials who were convinced with the women's petition for water access due to their agitation and provided immediate solutions to water problem in area. The Drinking Water department issued a notice stating the name of the official to head level Committee for solving the problem of drinking water in case of any problem related to drinking water and any information relating to repair of hand pumps, water tower and water supply could be forwarded to the above no. via phone/SMS/WhatsApp or one could personally visit the office. 1000 villages approximately benefitted for water access in through this project.

- LFS Grantee (FIMI)

Access to resources and opportunities: To a lesser extent than the above shifts, 67.2 % of grantees reported seeing changes that allowed individual women, girls or transpeople to access greater resources, services, or public decision-making. Most of the grantees who responded in the affirmative stated that there was enhanced women's access to leadership and decision-making in different spheres – within political spaces, within unions and other forms of organizations and in advocacy or policy forums. Very few grantees mentioned contribution to changes in resources, such as better Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) services. This is partly because the grants were focused on supporting advocacy and applications that primarily targeted services provision were ineligible for the LFS grants. See Box 4 below.

Box 4: Examples of how LFSF grants are providing opportunities for women to access and influence key policy spaces, access to leadership roles and in some cases better access to services

Example 1:

The project carried out with the grant has allowed (and continues to do so) women to demand and have access to better justice services based on the training and information received on their rights. Many of them have taken on the role of referents in terms of women's rights in their own localities. They now occupy better positions in the organizations in which they work, and they lead the process of building networks or forming civil society organizations in their territories.

- FMS Grantee

Example 2:

A WFA partner based in one of the South Asian countries has been engaging closely with a group of women leaders from a challenging province for a long time to mobilize around women's socio-

economic rights. In 2018 they held a ‘Women’s Forum on Women and Poverty’ over two days with selected women’s rights groups, networks and individuals from that Province. Conducting a Women’s Forum created a space to bring together women’s testimonies of their experiences and recommendations around concerns of poverty, social security and their rights. For most of these women, their experiences of poverty have been shaped and impacted by war-time losses and related conflict that continues even in a post-war context. This reality is often not recognized and factored into prevailing social security or poverty-alleviation programmes. This Women’s Forum took place in a context of debates around legislation to set up an Office of Reparations and the subsequent passing of legislation for the same in 2018. The views of the women at this forum are also particularly relevant given ongoing conversations over the past two years at least, of constitutional reform and debates over the inclusion of socio-economic rights in a new constitution. The views of the women who participated in this forum seeks to inform these conversations, and hopefully also advocate and push for policy reform around poverty alleviation – both conceptually and in practice as well as reforms of social security to make it more relevant to the needs of people. Submissions came from 55 women activists, community groups, organisations, researchers and state officials, while 132 women, primarily from that province, attended the Forum.

- WFA Grantee

Through dialogues and meetings with authorities, some of them have started to integrate women into certain social protection programs. There are now 4 women who have benefitted from the program ‘one cow for vulnerable families’; 64 women who have benefitted from health cards; 2 women one woman who was elected to be a member of the National Committee for Mediators at the cell level; 41 women who benefitted from work in the government program that offers paid work to vulnerable families; and 35 women who were invited to participate in the ceremony for International Women’s Day. Whereas, in the past years no women have been invited by authorities to participate in this ceremony.

- LFS Grantee (FIMI)

4.3. To what extent is LFS contributing to cross-movement alliance-building, collaboration and ownership between women’s rights organisations and movements?

Finding 3: The LFS grants have enabled the grantees to build alliances with other women’s rights organizations to a considerable extent but have been less successful in building cross-movement collaborations.

One of the key strengths of WROs and trans-led organizations supported by LFSF has been the strong intersectional lens they have taken in working with communities and policymakers. For example, organizations working with indigenous communities, irrespective of the funding source,⁴⁵ sensitized the communities to the issues affecting women but also encouraged them to respect the environment. They brought a holistic lens to the work on gender equality that combined respect for the environment, the earth, natural resources such as water with respect for the rights and participation of women in the

⁴⁵ Grantees from all 4 funds reported this holistic outlook to self, community and advancement of women’s rights.

community. Similarly, WROs have brought in issues of transgender rights and disability rights to the conversations with community members or in their advocacy with government. For example, one grantee noted that in their discussion on diversity with the municipality, they were also able to involve trans people. They don't necessarily see this as being cross-movement collaboration but instead envisioned this as part of the women's rights agenda that needs to be moved ahead.

Building alliances with other women's rights organizations: A large majority of grantees reported that the grant allowed them to build alliances with other women's rights organizations, with 55.5 % of grantees reporting that they were able to build these alliances to a great extent and 25.5% reporting that they were able to achieve this to a moderate extent. As noted by the 4 WFs and the grantees, the work supported by LFSF builds on and contributes to the ongoing movement building work undertaken by the grantees and includes actions such as strengthening coalitions, building partnerships with other organisations and building thematic platforms, with many grantees describing how this greatly increased their collective advocacy power and was a key strategy for changes in policies, law, and their external context. Of the respondents, 47 % to a great extent and 33.9 % to a moderate extent reported that they were able to bring women and women's organizations together across different divides in order to strengthen their collective power and identity. There are many examples of alliance-building among grantees. For example, one grantee mentioned, *"The regional convenings we organized with support from WFA through this project enabled us to develop a deeper understanding of the context in which our work is taking place. The reflexivity and flexibility of the grant helped us to co-create platforms such as the Global South Women's Forum."* Another WFA grant to a South Asian group working on Dalit women's rights supported the organization of the first ever National level Dalit women's convergence in 2017.

Similarly, through funds provided by FMS as part of the LFS window, a regional WRO established partnerships with organizations working on child marriage such as Equality Now, CONGO LAC and Girls not Brides; an Argentinean grantee was able to broaden its work with other religious and feminist organizations and bolstered its relationship with the feminist movement. Among small grassroots organizations, a group located in El Salvador joined Social Coordination for the Care Economy to advocate for care policies at the local level in that country and specific LGBTQI formed alliances with LGBTQI Equality, Sexual and Reproductive Health Promotion and Mental Health Awareness, which created better linkages with other organization from the region as well as with local organizations. In Africa, the LFS funds allowed grantees to strengthen the fight against child marriage by building a coalition between the WILDAF network, which advocates for women's rights and partners working on sexual and reproductive health.

Influencing other movements and fostering cross-movement collaboration: In addition to strengthening collective partnerships and alliance building, 22 % and 16% of respondents reported that they were able to foster cross-movement collaboration to a moderate extent and great extent respectively. The fact that only 38 % of respondents felt that they were able to foster cross-movement collaboration to either a moderate or great extent, in comparison to a large majority of grantees reporting that they were able to build strong alliances with WROs (as noted above) is quite interesting. It could mean that many grantees, because of their intersectional lens, see this as part of their core women's movement building activities rather than as a cross-movement initiative. It could also signify that the grantees have been more successful in alliance building within the women's movement but have been less successful in establishing partnerships and cooperation outside of this. However, we also acknowledge that given the limited resources, cross-movement building would not have been the intended focus of most grants. On the other hand, the efforts by the women's funds to support grantees' participation in regional and international advocacy events constitutes an important opportunity for cross-movement collaboration.

Nonetheless, there are some noteworthy examples of cross-movement collaborations that have emerged from the funding provided by the LFS window. For example, a network formed by afro-descendant/black women from Paraná (Brasil) has established alliances with movements on health and against religious intolerance. Similarly, grantees in Africa were able to build a strong pastoralist movement that advocated for the security of land tenure for women.⁴⁶ Likewise, WFA has been fostering linkages across organizations that are part of their labour movement portfolio: organizations working with sex workers, domestic workers and garment workers. Along with the example provided in Box 5 below, a further example is an LGBTQI group that is building cross movement relations with organizations working on labour rights.

Box 5: Example of alliance building and fostering cross movement collaboration

An Indigenous Women's group working in East Africa

An intersectional approach that promotes the rights of indigenous women's groups within the climate justice movement has been of particular interest of FIMI grantees. The FIMI partner in Africa along with its other allies, demonstrated the importance of indigenous women's participation and engagement with local, national and international decision-making bodies to influence the climate change adaptation and mitigation agenda in these institutions. The awareness raising actions accomplished among the groups of Maasai, Samburu, Ogiek, Rendille and Boarana women started in an East African country, which were translated into a deeper understanding of the effects of the climate change and gender. There has been noted an increased understanding of climate change and gender related issues. The women have been able to engage with key environmental actors at local and national level and participated in Africa Regional Conference on Community Conservation. FIMI's partners also engaged with local authorities from gender office and county offices and dialogue is planned during the year. 200 Indigenous women representing 23 indigenous women groups were sensitized and now engaging in the current process of county integrated development planning to influence agenda on climate change and other gender concerns. At local level within counties, indigenous women groups have created joint advocacy platforms and are now networking through their structured engagement. More recently, the indigenous women were also able to map out key climate change priorities for adaptation and mitigation actions for their regions.

Source: Leading from the South Annual Report, FIMI (2018)

4.4. What has been the key value-added by LFS fund members?

Across all four funds, there are several key areas where grantees saw the value-add of the LFS funds and the grants.

⁴⁶ Most Africans consider that people inhabiting Africa before the colonization should be treated as indigenous. Since it is not possible to come up with one unifying definition of indigenous communities, pastoralists and certain hunter gatherer communities in Africa are accorded the same rights as indigenous communities in other parts of the world.

Finding 4: A key value-added of the LFSF grants has been the feminist funding principles applied by the funds to their grantmaking that is driven by the needs and priorities of the feminist movement and includes fewer conditionalities as well as flexibility to accommodate emergent needs and changing contexts.

The current funding landscape reflects or reproduces a patriarchal system where women's rights organizations are not able to pursue their own goals but are rather driven by donor priorities. Most funders have very specific lines of funding and expect the grantees to fit into their thematic priorities and conceptualization of change. As the OECD DAC report notes, very little of bilateral aid is funding CSOs as core support; instead, most of it is intended to implement specific projects. This indicates that women's rights organizations are being incentivised to act primarily as implementing agencies rather than to pursue their own agendas.⁴⁷

One of the key value-adds of the LFSF grants has been the fact that the four women's funds have kept their call for proposals broad enough to allow for a range of women's rights organizations to apply. Even though the call for proposals corresponds to or prioritizes specific thematic areas (such as economic or labour rights, or violence against women), the sub-themes under each area is quite wide-ranging. For example, AWDF's focus on women's rights organizations that "Expand democratic space; sustain inclusive governance and equal political participation of women" would cover the majority of the women's rights organizations in Africa that are involved in movement building or advocacy work of some nature⁴⁸. In our interviews with the LFSF members, they asserted that as feminist funders they do not want to replicate a model where "donors know best"; instead, they would like to be guided by the direction and priorities of the feminist movement and this is reflected in their grant making modality.⁴⁹ In a way, this rebalances the power relationship between women's rights donors and grantees, with the grantees being in charge of their organization's agenda and its execution. The four women's funds have reposed trust in their grantees to pursue a feminist agenda that is grounded in the local contexts and not limited by the constraints of a donor-driven project objective.

LFSF grants also allowed women's rights organizations to use a significant portion of the funds received for administrative or operational costs or core support. For example, LFSF grants provided small organizations with 40% of the total budgets and medium or large organizations with 25-30% of the total budgets for operational costs. Core funding that supports investments in organizational capacity building, strengthening institutional resilience and sustainability is a hallmark of feminist funding. One of the key challenges of current global grant making is that women's rights organizations are playing the role of the firefighter, constantly dousing the flames that threaten the lives of women human rights defenders and their constituencies. They do not have the time and the resources to build their own organizations and a new cadre of feminist organizers. This is often the difference between resisting patriarchy and oppression and creating new feminist realities.

47 OECD Report (2016), Donor support to southern women's rights organisations, OECD Findings. <https://www.oecd.org/dac/gender-development/OECD-report-on-womens-rights-organisations.pdf>

48 The sub-criteria listed out include : i) Help increase the participation of diverse women in policy and decision-making processes at all levels and in diverse settings; ii) Create uninhibited operating space for women's rights organisations and defenders; iii) Ensure stronger and better implementation of laws and policies regarding women's political rights and participation; iv) Strengthen the evidence base around needs, methods and effective approaches.

49 Drawn from reflection session with LFSF members in the Hague, July 2019

Grantees have greatly appreciated the feminist approach to grant making adopted by the LFSF partners. Many interview participants also mentioned the flexibility of the funds as a key element of the LFS advantage as compared to other funding modalities. For instance, 52.4 % of respondents felt to a great extent and 25 % to a moderate extent that the fund was flexible in terms of adjusting their procedures to fit with organisational needs during the project. As one grantee noted, “ [...] *the flexibility in terms of resourcing helped us to be responsive to extremely challenging contexts, such as postponing meetings at short notice due to impending political crisis in a specific country.*”⁵⁰ 46.7% of respondents also reported that they appreciated that the LFS fund had fewer conditions attached to it than other grants.

Unlike other development projects, LFS flexible funding enabled us to strengthen the feminist movement in the region without putting too much stress on number of women reached.
– LFSF grantee

It is important to note that there were differences between the way that FIMI grantees consider the value-add of the LFS grants as compared to the three regional funds. Grantees from WFA, AWDF and FMS reported that having multi-year support was a key advantage (FMS at 83.3 % of respondents, AWDF at 61.8 % of respondents, and WFA at 58.3 % of respondents). However, FIMI grantees did not consider this to be a key value-add (only 2 out of 50 survey respondents this as an advantage). On the other hand, a

higher number of FIMI grantees reported enhanced satisfaction (44%) with the fact that the LFSF grants supported core work in addition to project-based activities, compared to the global average across all four funds (39.2%). Flexibility is essential so that groups can continue doing their work on the ground and continue to build capacities.

Finding 5: The LFS grants have provided funds in the hands of women’s rights organizations that often get ignored because of their thematic focus or their geographical location or their size.

The LFSF grants reached women’s rights organizations in 52 countries⁵¹:



In recent years, the emphasis on priority countries by donors means that WROs in countries that have been de-prioritised from the global aid agenda are left without any financial support and are battling for survival. Three-quarters of the world’s poor now live in countries classified as middle-income and this is where civil society is increasingly under threat.⁵² Furthermore, bilateral ODA to least developed countries has also decreased (in real terms), leading to even less funding for CSOs in general.⁵³ In many of these countries, the condition for women has in fact worsened. **LFSF fills a crucial gap by providing funding to**

⁵⁰ WFA grantee

⁵¹ The actual number of countries might be more because many of the grantees are consortia that operate in multiple countries

⁵² 2019 State of Civil Society Report, Civicus

⁵³ Bilateral ODA fell by 3.9% in real terms in 2016.

women's rights organizations in such countries where women continue to face multiple forms of discrimination. The funds have prioritized countries that are facing hostile contexts for women's rights defenders and in some cases facing conflict situations. In addition, the LFSF addresses a critical gap of resources available to WROs and trans-led organizations in middle income countries where most international donors are no longer present.

Finding 6: The LFSF grants have brought women's rights organizations together, enabling them to learn from each other, and have amplified their voices by allowing them to be part of national, regional and global events /forums.

Grantees felt that shared learning and engagement with other women's rights organizations was an important value-add of the LFS funds. Over 66 % of grantees reported that a main advantage of the grant was that it allowed them to reflect and learn from their work and the work of others. 58.3% of grantees reported that the grant allowed them to engage with other women's rights organizations from the region. In addition, 49.2% of respondents agreed that a key advantage of the grant was that it allowed them to have a voice in spaces, such as events and forums, where they previously did not.

Although LFSF grants have allowed women's rights organizations to access these spaces, it has not necessarily resulted in increased visibility or resources for the grantees. Only, 30.2% of respondents felt that the fund provided them with greater visibility for their work, and 27.6% of grantees reported that the fund helped them secure funding from other sources.

Finding 7: Increased organizational capacity has been the major non-financial value add of the LFS funds.

With regards to the type of non-monetary assistance that the grantees received, the majority of respondents (57.8 %) indicated that they had received and appreciated capacity building for their staff. Most of the grantees that were interviewed described capacity building as primarily taking place through training for their staff including special capacity strengthening events, as well as ongoing technical support provided by the fund staff throughout the grant.

The LFS grants have significantly strengthened the internal capacity of grantees. Overall, 86.4% of grantees noted significant shifts or changes within their organizations, the details of which can be found in the analysis of individual funds. The grants have not only helped the organizations to increase their capacity to develop long-term strategic plans, but they were also able to strengthen learning and reflection in their own institutional practices.

Organizations reported more moderate increases in organizational capacity with respect to financial management (43%) and monitoring and evaluation (57%). This is partly explained by the fact that only those grantees who already had sound financial practices were eligible to receive grants in the first place. Some grantees reported that LFSFs supported the strengthening of their governance (22.4%) and assisted them with financial issues such as banking (22.4 %). Very few grantees reported assistance in the areas of information technology (10.3%).

Unfortunately, they were less effective in using the LFS funds in leveraging additional resources. Only 18.1% of the survey respondents mentioned that they were able to leverage additional resources to the greatest extent using the LFSF grants. In fact, resource mobilization has already been identified by the WFs as a key capacity constraint of their grantees. For instance, *sustainability* and financial resource management were areas prioritized by grantees in a capacity assessment conducted by FMS in September 2017.⁵⁴

Finally, grantees noted that they were able to increase their legitimacy with other actors such as with donors, government officials and policymakers (58.9 % to a great extent) as well as with other women's rights organisations, CSOs and NGOs (61.2 % to a great extent). Since the grant period has been short, it is not possible to gauge the impact of this increased recognition and credibility of WROs among stakeholders.

Finding 8: The technical support and engagement provided by LFSF partners was seen to be a significant value add by grantees.

Throughout the interviews and survey responses, we sensed the high regard that grantees have for LFSF fund staff in terms of their professional skills and the way they engage with grantees. Generally, a large majority of grantees reported a high level of satisfaction with communication, transparency, their ability to approach the fund if there were any problems, feedback and the technical support they have received throughout the duration of the grant. For example, 77.2% of respondents felt comfortable approaching the fund member if a problem arose, 76% felt that their fund was transparent in their relationship, 75.3 % felt that they were treated fairly, and 66.7% felt that the fund was able to clearly communicate its goals and strategy to them. Over 79% of respondents also felt that the LFS fund members were very involved in the grant.

4.5. What is the added value of the collaboration between the four LFS women's funds and between the four women's funds and the MFA?

Finding 9: The LFSF has disrupted the current funding model by creating more equal access to financial flows for WROs in the global south.

The primary goal of the LFSF mechanism was to reach southern-based organizations, including smaller ones, and offer both financial and nonfinancial support while fulfilling the rigorous accountability requirements of a bilateral donor agency. In its design and implementation, LFSF has disrupted the current funding models that have thus far largely favoured large professionalised CSOs that have the capacity to meet the due diligence processes (logframes, monitoring, financial management systems, etc.) of the donors but are usually much less effective in raising the political questions and challenging power hierarchies without which it is not possible to break down the status quo on inequality and poverty. The current funding regimes put WROs at a great disadvantage as the fund disbursement modalities are not

⁵⁴ See Second Annual Narrative Report to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, January-December 2018, pg. 23.

designed to take into account their agendas, ways of working and viewpoints (Apusigah et al, 2011⁵⁵, Mukhopadhyay and Eyben, 2011).⁵⁶ WROs find themselves in unfair competition with larger organisations to access funding disbursed through modalities that simply have not been designed to take their agendas, ways of working and perspectives into account. Not only do WROs have to compete with INGOs for funds, often INGOs secure funding from international sources and then sub-contract local organizations to deliver the work, in effect treating them as contractors for service delivery and ignoring their local knowledge and expertise and potential contribution to programme design.⁵⁷ The LFSF model overturns this dominant model by putting WROs in the global south at the centre of their grant making agenda, taking into account the challenges faced by them in accessing international funds.

LFS is especially advantageous to small WROs

In particular, the LFSF model has been hugely beneficial for small grassroots organizations. The four WFs have been remarkably sensitive to the needs of the smaller WROs. For instance, they have found alternative ways of ensuring funds reach small WROs that may not have a bank or do not have permission to receive funds directly from foreign sources (by finding fiscal sponsors). They have provided additional support to these organizations by connecting them with other networks and organizations, funding their participation in events, developing special exchange programmes or providing small capacity building grants. We know that advocacy spaces for influencing public policy are often occupied by more “elite” NGOs that may or may not have direct links with or accountability to the constituencies affected by such policy— and often have distinctly different perceptions of the nature of the problem (Batliwala, 2002).⁵⁸ By creating opportunities for the small WROs to access and participate in these key advocacy spaces, the LFS grants have brought their voices and agendas to the forefront, equalising to some extent the unequal power that is centred around larger WROs and CSOs, especially those located in the global north. Furthermore, the linking and learning events have been an opportunity for small grassroots organizations to interact with large and mid-sized organizations funded by the WROs, generating a discussion and reflection space that enriches all participants’ understanding of varying contexts and ways of working. To a lesser extent, the WFs are also assisting these small organizations to think about long term sustainability.

Finding 10: The LFS has changed perceptions regarding the capacity of women’s funds in the global south to receive and manage large grants.

One of the key contributions that LFS has made is its influence over the perception around providing direct funding for women’s rights organization in the south. **It has successfully showcased how women’s funds that are in the global south have the capacity to receive and manage large grants from bilateral organizations and directly support organizations that are led by women, girls and trans people.** As noted by Marinka Wijngaard from the Dutch MFA, “It has changed our way of thinking on direct financing.” Her sentiments have been echoed in our conversations with other key informants.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Apusigah, A. A., Tsikata, D., & Mukhopadhyay, M. M. (2011). *Women’s Rights Organizations and Funding Regimes in Ghana*. Pathways of Women’s Empowerment RPC (West Africa Hub) and the Centre for Gender Equality and Advocacy (CEGENSA).

⁵⁶ Mukhopadhyay, M. and Eyben, R. 2011. Rights and Resources: the Effects of External Financing on Organising for Women’s Rights, Royal Tropical Institute and Pathways of Women’s Empowerment, 2011: 42

⁵⁷ <https://www.womankind.org.uk/policy-and-campaigns/women's-rights/women's-rights-organisations>

⁵⁸ Batliwala, S. (2002). Grassroots movements as transnational actors: Implications for global civil society. *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 13(4), 393-409.

⁵⁹ Interviews with members from Mama Cash, Prospera Network

Moreover, the effectiveness of these grants has reaffirmed the feminist notion that putting money in the hands of women's rights organizations is one of the best means of bringing about transformative changes that advance gender equality and women's rights. Past research shows that funders that are more connected to their grantees—those that have an ear to the ground—are more likely to provide the support that non-profits need to be successful; they are five times as likely to offer capacity building support and two times as likely to offer multi year support.⁶⁰ Because WFs are themselves located in the global south, they are in a vantage position to channel funds from bilateral donors to women's rights organizations at the grassroots level. The location of the four funds within the feminist or the indigenous people's movement and knowledge of emerging challenges enables them to support the women's rights organizations that are at the forefront of bringing about transformative changes, as well as new and non-mainstream groups, connecting the grassroots level to the national and the regional.

As the latest AWID report note, “We believe a balanced ecosystem is one in which feminist activists themselves have the power to define funding priorities iteratively and in dialogue with funders (AWID 2019).⁶¹ The partnership with MFA has helped the four WFA funds shift this power dynamics to a small extent and create a more balanced ecosystem where decisions on who and what gets funded is in the hands of organizations in the global south.

Finding 11: The four funds have taken an intersectional approach to their grantmaking.

Through the LFSF, the four WFs have actively promoted an intersectional approach to grant making to address the needs of a range of women: indigenous women, domestic workers, sex workers, LGBTQI, migrants, rural women, young women ethnic and religious minorities, and others.

For example, the grant making strategy of the women's funds recognizes that reaching indigenous women is critical to the achievement of gender equality globally as they continue to face disproportionate levels of discrimination, exclusion and violence. Therefore, all three regional women's funds also targeted or included indigenous women through their grant making, even though it was FIMI's primary focus.⁶² Similarly, the WFs have also supported women's rights organizations that are advancing LGBTQI rights and disability rights. By supporting women's rights organizations that are fighting for LGBTQI rights, the women's funds are building stronger coalitions to combat all forms of discrimination. This is an important step towards fostering solidarity across movements and providing support to groups that are most under-resourced - only 9% of trans groups⁶³ and 18% of intersex groups⁶⁴ received women's rights funding in 2014-2016. Similarly, in 2014 only 1.5% of funding for women and girls' rights focused on women and girls with disabilities.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ <https://ssir.org/putting-grantees-at-the-center-of-philanthropy#>

⁶¹ Toward A Feminist Funding Ecosystem, AWID Report (2019).

⁶² For example, LFSF grants from FMS benefited at least 13 organizations that specifically targeted or included indigenous women in their projects, AWDF also granted funds to rural and pastoralist women to claim their land and agricultural rights, WFA provided grants to organizations that explicitly took an intersectional approach.

⁶³ American Jewish World Service, Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice & Global Action for Trans* Equality. (2017). The State of Trans Organizing (2nd Edition), page 27. Retrieved from <https://s3.amazonaws.com/astraea.production/app/asset/uploads/2017/10/TransREPORT-for-the-web-Updated.pdf>

⁶⁴ American Jewish World Service, Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice & Global Action for Trans* Equality. (2017). State of Intersex Organizing (2nd Edition), page 7. Retrieved from <https://s3.amazonaws.com/astraea.production/app/asset/uploads/2017/10/Intersex-REPORT-For-theWeb-updated.pdf>

⁶⁵ Supporting Inclusive Movements: Funding the Rights of Women with Disabilities, http://disabilityrightsfund.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Supporting_inclusive_movements_web.pdf. The study revealed that in 2014, foundations gave 181 grants totalling a meagre \$8 Million in support of the rights of women and girls with disabilities.

By supporting organizations to advance the rights of women with disabilities, the women's funds are bringing together movements that are traditionally viewed as isolated from each other. They are addressing a gap in funding strategies that operate in silos and overlook women who face multiple forms of discrimination.

However, it is also not easy to gather the data from the women's funds on how much money in aggregate is going to support such groups (indigenous women, LGBTQI, disability rights). It would be great if the WFs can also add a thematic marker in their grant making data so that is easier to disaggregate the data on funding that is going to some of the most marginalized groups.

4.6. What are the strategies and main results of the linking and learning processes and in what way does the linking and learning process contribute to the overall achievements of the programme?

Finding 12: At the level of the grantees, the linking and learning processes have contributed towards movement building by bringing women's organizations together, enabling women activists to be part of larger convenings that lay emphasis on processes of collective reflection and strategizing.

At one level, the linking and learning events⁶⁶ have been an opportunity for grantees of a particular fund to build capacity on particular issues (such as monitoring and learning) and at another level, these have been spaces that have brought together grantees across and funds with the aim of strengthening alliance and coalition building across women's rights organizations.⁶⁷ We know that building these relations and connections is critical to the movement-building process. The LFSF funds have created spaces for women's groups to collaborate, strategize, and build coalitions, without which women's movements may remain fragmented and unable to effectively mobilize for change. As one grantee noted, *"We have learned a lot by sharing experiences with other organizations and movements thanks to the exchanges in which we have been able to participate in LFS. We now know that our struggles are not isolated and that we can share information, learn and find solutions to similar difficulties in other latitudes"* (FMS Grantee).⁶⁸

There have been some interesting themes around which linking and learning events have been organized by the four women's funds.

- **Self-Care:** We know that women human rights defenders, especially those on the frontlines, continue to face safety and security threats (physical, emotional and psychosocial) as they challenge entrenched power hierarchies. With the advent of the internet and social media, women's activists face new sources of violence and abuse online. The marginalization, oppression and constant pressure to bring about change make women activists more vulnerable to burnout and trauma than any other groups. It is not surprising that the issue of self-care is an emerging area that is gaining a lot of traction among women's activists. It is therefore noteworthy that FMS

⁶⁶ Details of such convenings are provided in the WFs' reports and the report for FIMI.

⁶⁷ At the level of grantees: On November 27 and 28, the First Regional Meeting of LFS Partner Organizations of Latin America and the Caribbean was held in the city of Lima, Peru. The event was co-organized by the Women's Fund of the South (FMS) and the International Forum of Indigenous Women (FIMI / AYNÍ) with the aim of strengthening their alliance.

⁶⁸ FMS 2018 Annual Report.

addressed issues of self-care during the Second Regional Meeting of LFS organizations in Cartagena in 2018.

- Risk Assessment and Security Threats: Women's rights activists are at a higher security risk compared to other non-profit staff. Moreover, technology is bringing new forms of violence against women, including cyberbullying and online sexual harassment of activists. The WFs are proactively addressing these and other issues during the linking and learning events. For example, WFA included a full-days session on risk assessment and security training in its annual learning event in June 2019 and FMS was planning to include in their third regional meeting.⁶⁹

It should be noted, however, that while these linking and learning events have certainly connected women's rights organizations with each other and have offered grantees a space to learn from each other, the changes or actual coalition-building effects are yet to be fully realised.

Finding 13: Various linking and learning processes between the women's funds have resulted in strengthening the consortium by building an environment of trust and mutual respect; increased understanding of the different contexts and use of language and; improved processes and systems and speaking in a single voice (as LFS) in public forums.

The exchange of information and collaboration together with all the funds has been a valuable learning process for all the four WFs. The funds have taken turns to organize various linking and learning events, including meetings for different working groups, meeting of all staff members that are connected with LFS (including the Executive Directors) and periodic online meetings.

- a) The first Linking and Learning Process held in Sri Lanka (October 2017) and was organized by WFA and was attended by allies such as the Global Fund for Women, Mama Cash and Prospera International Network.
- b) a face-to-face meeting of the MEL Working group held in Amsterdam in February 2018 to finalize the joint indicators and training on the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI).
- c) The second Linking and Learning Process at the fund level took place in Buenos Aires, Argentina in November 2018 together with the sister Women's Funds of the Consortium. This event was organized by FMS also included representatives the MFA, and other important allies like Mama Cash and Prospera International Network. The communications and MEL working group met for two days along with the finance working group which met for half a day.

The setting up of three working groups (Monitoring and Evaluation Working Group, Administration and Finance Working Group and the Communication Working Group) has greatly facilitated linking and learning across the four funds. The Monitoring and Evaluation Working Group was instrumental in creating a consensus around the common indicators and facilitating the adoption of IATI standards across all four funds. The active participation of the MEL staff members in these fora permitted the exchange of knowledge and practices to improve M&E systems and frameworks (i.e. FIMI founds the use of Survey Monkey for the submission of the first interim narrative report by partner organizations to be very useful). The Communications Group was key to the creation of a common website and branding and *creation of a collective identity for LFS*.⁷⁰ It has also started identifying opportunities for joint advocacy. There have been some virtual meetings that have taken place between the finance teams of the different funds as well. The Programmes Working group is yet to be set up.

⁶⁹ This was to have taken place in October 2019 in Uruguay.

⁷⁰ The launch of the joint website and collaterals took place during the HRFN in Mexico City.

Concrete results for the 2018 include:

Monitoring Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Working Group	Communications Working Group
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MEL Strategy. • Set of common indicators defined. • First draft of the joint report (Year 1). • Common scheme to report on IATI. • Data systematization for HRFN 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brand development and management. • Communications Strategy. • Launch of Website. • Joint brochure. • Communications support for HRFN, Mexico.

The Finance working group was created because of the commonality of queries that the four funds had on financial reporting and the audit, which formed part of the agreement with the MFA. The head of finance at the four funds started communicating with each other in 2017 and then met with the Controller, Social Development from the MFA in Netherlands and over virtual meetings to discuss issues that needed clarity before the audit of year 1. Although the finance staff in the four WFs were in constant communication with other from 2017, the group was officially set up at the linking and learning meeting held in Argentina in November 2018. The finance working groups usually has two virtual meetings a year and one meeting in person at one of linking and learning events. The participation of MFA has been hugely beneficial to the functioning of this group. The Controller, Social Development from the MFA in Netherlands has joined the in-person meetings.

The WG members are able to seek solutions to common issues that have an impact on the four funds when it comes to reporting, audits and the applicability of the MFA policy requirements to the LFS process. Having gone through two rounds of audits now we find that process is working well. In addition, the finance staff across the four funds have also started sharing challenges faced in dealing with regulatory restrictions vis-à-vis grant making and resource mobilisation, due diligence processes and risk management practices that each fund adopts. They have found similarities in the challenges faced by the women's funds.

Findings also reflected that the working groups have greatly facilitated the flow of information across the four funds.⁷¹ For example, it has allowed them to plan the launches of the calls for proposals in a coordinated manner. The linking and learning processes have greatly facilitated the understanding of each other's contexts. This sharing of knowledge is likely to help in finding solutions to grant making challenges for the four funds that extends beyond the LFS. There is a real openness to learn from the experience of each other, which is a key success of the LFS programme. For example, many of the women's funds staff members that were interviewed mentioned that they were enriched by FIMI-AYNI's global understanding of the context of indigenous people.

Over the last few years, LFSF have increasingly participated in global forums representing the consortium with a **coordinated position and a single voice**. For example, AWDF, FMS, FIMI and WFA presented the Leading from the South Experience to other donors in a panel collectively at the Human Rights Founders Network Meeting (HRFN) held in Mexico City (October 13-17, 2018).⁷² In addition, post-HRFN, WFA, AWDF and FIMI also had a closed-door meeting with Philanthropy Advancing Women's Human Rights

71 Source: Annual Reports and Notes from the second linking and learning meeting.

72 The panel was called "Shifting the Power: Southern Women's Funds in Action".

(PAWHR) members who are funding the accompaniment initiative. This united front opens up the possibilities for leveraging more funds for women's rights causes.

4.7. Challenges and lessons learned

Various challenges and lessons learned for WFs, the MFA and other donors emerged from our review and are outlined herein.

WFs need to be constantly be responsive to the challenges faced by grantees. Although most grantees were able to complete all activities, overall, 27.7% of the grantees who responded to survey expressed that they faced challenges in reaching their objectives. Some key constraints that grantees described included time limitations, cultural barriers and stigma toward some activities, the growing context of fundamentalism and reversal in women's rights, safety and security of women's rights activists, exhaustion of women's organisations, a lack of political will and the growing climate justice issue. The growing illiberalism has created additional challenges in terms of participation of grantee partners in key spaces. Earlier, the civil society and feminist activities had a space to influence policy processes even when right-wing governments held power. However, those spaces are now closed to women's rights organizations and activities. This has emerged as a major challenge to the ability of women's rights organizations to influence and shift changes in laws and policies.⁷³ The unfavourable external environment has emerged as a major challenge to the way in which LFS funds can provide support to their grantees, especially in terms of accompaniment and capacity building support.

A flexible approach to funding is required to support women's rights organizations, especially small grassroots organizations and those who face severe security challenge/threats. The four funds used flexible approaches towards dealing with their grantees; often using a different process depending on the size, region and the context of the grantee. The four WFs permitted the small grassroots organizations⁷⁴ to use up to 40 percent of the fund for operational expenses as compared to 25-30 percent for large or medium organizations. Similarly, both WFA and AWDF have extended the duration of grants in cases where there have been delays in grant transfer because of regulatory reasons. The funds have also accommodated requests to deviate from the activities outlined in the proposal submitted at the time of grant making based on the changing needs of the grantees.

Greater resources are required to understand the local context and to effectively support the grantees, especially in new locations that the WFs have expanded to. As the WFs have moved to new geographical areas of operation, staff need to have more in-depth knowledge of the context in which the grantees function. This has meant being able to spend more time and financial resources to physically visit these grantees or undertake more extensive research or convenings that allow them to learn from their grantees. The WF staff note that the field visits have been an excellent process to get to know the organisation and the funded project in-depth. It has allowed the WF staff and the partners to jointly explore and strengthen the interventions in some cases and identify linkages with other LFSF grantees. However, it is difficult for LFS staff to physically visit their partners, both because of resource constraints (time, money) as well as security concerns.

⁷³ The hostile environment faced by WROs has been explained in great detail in an earlier section.

⁷⁴ The name for the grant window is different for different funds. For example, for WFA the small grants were renamed as frontline defenders grant in keeping with its objective.

The hostile external environment for the grantees has constrained LFS funds' ability to externally communicate the work of the grantees and advocate for more resources for southern WROs. It sometimes becomes difficult to share success stories of the grantees without putting partners at risk. At the same time, because of security reasons the grantee partners are unable to share sensitive data on community organizing and action. Grantees are not able to openly discuss issues or challenges in social media and in front of government officials, and often have to hide their own identities in such situations. In such a context, it becomes extremely difficult for the Fund to highlight the excellent work that the grantee maybe doing without putting them at risk.

Financing mechanisms are a challenge. In some cases, LFS partners are finding it difficult to transfer funds to women-led and trans led civil society organizations that are doing transformative work on the ground because of regulatory requirements imposed by different countries. One of the advantages of the women's funds has been that they have been able to leverage their excellent network and knowledge of the situation on the ground to find mechanisms to put resources in the hands of the organizations that they cannot fund directly. The WFs have managed to subvert such regulatory constraints by finding solutions that are grounded in their local knowledge of the funding landscape and their networks. For example, AWDF tries to identify fiscal sponsors for organizations in those countries in which it cannot transfer funds directly (Sudan/South Sudan). However, LFS partners expressed the need to further develop alternative financing mechanisms in order to fund women's groups on the ground that are involved in groundbreaking work that challenges social norms and harmful practices. AWDF is also trying to better understand the context in the Middle East so that they can figure out different ways of resourcing women's rights organizations whose situation can be made more vulnerable or precarious through the receipt of foreign funding.

The legitimacy of women's rights organizations and women's funds faces heightened public scrutiny. Women's rights organizations are also affected by fake news and public scrutiny. Misinformation of the kinds of organization and causes that they are funding puts the LFS funds at risk and increases scrutiny by the State and the public.

Women's funds are unable to meet the needs that are further fuelled by increased demand because of the effectiveness of the outreach undertaken by the fund team. While the LFS funding has increased the level of funding available to a larger number of women's rights organizations in all three continents, it has also generated considerable demand - reflecting the large unmet needs of women's rights financing. As examples, FMS was able to fund only 34 organizations out of over 1000 applications received, and AWDF was able to fund only 27 out of the 1000 applications received. It is important to note, however, that the number of eligible organizations was much smaller; only 122 organizations were actually eligible to apply to the LFS grants in the case of AWDF (typically because LFS does not allow for service delivery, which may be a missed opportunity to support a holistic strategy that advances women's rights).⁷⁵ In another example, FMS' original plan was to fund only 19 organizations (2 large ones, 5 middle-sized and 12 grassroots organizations). However, FMS decided to rework its strategy following the overwhelming response to the call for proposal. They ended up reducing the grant size in order to reach a larger number of organizations and were able to support almost double the number of organizations they had originally planned to. FIMI chose to fund a much larger number of organizations and provide them with small grants. WFA, on the other hand, opted to increase the size of the grant per organization so that they could better fulfil their mission. Women's funds are constantly faced with this dilemma: whether to fund more groups through small grants or whether to fund fewer groups but with larger grant sizes that can allow for more stability and growth.

⁷⁵ Interview with AWDF staff.

The four funds have embraced new processes and systems as they have learnt to adapt to the scale of work that was brought about by the influx of the LFS funds: The LFS funds have led to the four funds managing a period of rapid growth and at the same time maintaining their existing programmes/ grant making. This has required all four funds to strengthen their institutional capacities and upgrade their systems and processes in order to effectively implement the LFS programme and provide adequate support to their grantees.⁷⁶ This has also included hiring additional staff and updating internal procedures related to administration, finance and MEL. One of the key learnings has been the integration of the IATI for results management. As shared by all the MEL team members, this required a significant investment of time, but at the same time, this shared learning created a sense of solidarity among the fund staff members. The development of the common indicators was a key element of this shared learning process.

Learning to work as a consortium: The last few years has been a process of building trust and understanding each other's specific contexts. The funds note "Knowing that the other women's funds were facing similar challenges, opportunities and questions created an environment in which they could be more direct, confident, and purposeful in their requests for and sharing of expertise and ideas."⁷⁷ Another LFSF staff member notes, *"Executive Directors as well as team members from different countries on different continents and working for organizations with distinct cultures needed to collaborate and work together immediately, effectively, and continuously. This process involved addressing issues related to distance and time zones, as well as conceptual differences, and diverse approaches to participating in and managing working groups. In addition, the partners had to handle their joint partnership with the MFA, decide how to communicate as a consortium, and ensure consultation with each other for important decisions along the way. All of this required steep learning for each fund and necessitated sometimes difficult conversations, as well as the creation of strategies to support each other and ensure consultation"*.⁷⁸

Nonetheless, coordination across the four women's funds is still a challenge. There has to be substantive coordination across the four funds that leads to a coherent advocacy, communication strategy that strengthens LFS positioning within the funding ecosystem. This has to go beyond organizing events and coming together around tasks such as reporting. There needs to be an increased understanding and coherence among the four funds around key issues. The WFs have also noted that coordination and learning from each other takes a lot of time. Additional resources need to be allocated so that LFS can work more effectively as a group to leverage the opportunities provided by their coming together.

These are new opportunities for joint resource mobilization

The coming together of the four funds as part of the LFS has been an opportunity for the women's funds to raise awareness around the politics of funding for women's rights in the global South. One of the key outcomes of this process has been that the four funds not only canvass for funds within the LFS consortium but also for funds for women's rights organizations in the south in general. Along with other women's funds that are members of the Prospera Network, the four funds are developing and advocating for feminist funding. The WFs are now in a place where they participate in public forums in a unified voice that represents women's funds in the global south. One of the collective successes of the WFs has been the funding received through the Accompaniment Initiative (AI). The four WFs recognized that in addition to the funds received for grant making, they needed dedicated resources to build their own capacity to work as a consortium and to support the learning, networking and additional infrastructure required for

⁷⁶ Some of the funds have also invested in additional software for their MEL Activities. E.g. FMS has acquired the Impact Mapper Software.

⁷⁷ Leading from the South Fund, Key Learning from Phase 1, Prospera Report, p 4.

⁷⁸ ibid

the success of LFS. Through support from Mama Cash and Prospera, the four WFs were able to secure funding from the PAWHR network. The AI has assisted the WFs to make institutional investments such as adding new staff positions, bringing in external expertise for M&E, as well as branding and communications and enabling representatives from the funds to take advantage of key advocacy opportunities. The AI also provided support for LFSF staff to meet, interact and work with their counterparts in other funds.

Working with MFA has strengthened WF's resource mobilisation efforts: The four women's funds have

"At the beginning we at FMS considered them as donors. We were used to those relationships; we were also a small fund. As the time has passed and as we have met more in person, we realised we can be real partners. The MFA has demonstrated this to us. For example, they participate at our linking and learning meetings – they show us that they are really interested, not just in reading our reports but they are really concerned about LFS."

Programs team, FMS

started actively showcasing the LFSF as a model in their dialogue with their other funders. At the same time, there is growing interest from other funders ⁷⁹ to find out how LFSF functions and its achievements, leading to a deeper conversation about direct support to women's organizations in the South. The four WFs note that being part of LFS has allowed them to leverage support from other funders and in some instances even negotiate different terms of funding with the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. ⁸⁰

Perceptions and communication between the MFA and the LFS partners are evolving

From the start, the Ministry had a strong idea of what it wanted to accomplish and the types of partners it was looking to work with, and the selection of the four LFS partners was a highly strategic choice. In the evolution of the program, the women's funds played an instrumental role in the development of the LFS policy framework, setting their own related goals and strategies, including a shared learning agenda and collaborative monitoring systems. This power-sharing process remains at the heart of the implementation of the program. "We are in constant conversation, but we leave a lot of decisions up to them," says Marinka Wijngaard at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands. LFS is part of a broader effort by the Dutch Ministry to work with partner organizations in an equitable fashion. ⁸¹ "We accept the fact that we can agree and disagree," says Anke Van Dam, who works alongside Marinka at the Dutch Ministry. "But we see this way of working as respectful of the expertise organizations like these bring to the table, as well as a way to guarantee partnership and ownership by the women's funds."

The approach taken by the MFA highlights how external donors can work with strong, credible, locally-based funding organizations as partners and collaborators. The MFA has effectively devolved decision-making to those who are on the ground, immersed in local context and best-placed to make decisions about how to best use these funds. As a result of this partnership, two key lessons have been learned at the mid-term point:

- **Changed perception of the capability of Women's Funds:** The LFS funding mechanism has had a great influence on the grant making strategy of the MFA. It has altered the perception of the MFA on the capability of women's funds based in the global south to manage large grants.
- **Communication with the Women's Funds:** Given the location of the 4 women's funds, MFA staff have significantly less in-person interaction compared to other funds /grantees that are based in Europe or the USA. It has been a learning experience for the MFA to find new ways of

⁷⁹ Based on interviews with other funders and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

⁸⁰ E.g. being able to negotiate for a higher allocation to small grassroots organizations in the second round of funding.

⁸¹ http://grantcraft.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2018/12/Community_Philanthropy_paper.pdf

communicating with the four women's funds. At the same time, MFA staff feel that they would be able to support the women's funds better if there is more frequent communication between them. The four women's funds could consider scheduling periodic information sessions with MFA to share goals, progress, concerns and any other issues that it might need support on.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

LFS is a strong example of how funding mechanisms that put money in the hands of women's rights organizations can have a real impact. Although we are only at the mid-term point, grantee partners have shown significant results in challenging discriminatory norms, increasing awareness and changing formal laws, policies and access to resources for women and transgender people. LFS partners have been particularly successful in building the strategic capabilities of women's rights organizations in accelerating achievements on women's rights in different parts of the world.

LFS has also illustrated the critical role that WFs play in enhancing access to bilateral funding at levels that smaller organizations can use effectively while cushioning grassroots organizations from the technical requirements that would normally prohibit them from accessing bilateral funding.

The three-pronged approach taken by LFS has resulted in building organizational capacities of women's rights organizations to influence stakeholders, build partnerships and expand their reach at sub-national, national and regional levels. This increased capacity has contributed to grantees' ability to address issues of equality and discrimination across multiple spheres including violence against women, trafficking, sex worker rights and women's political participation, among others.

The LFS funding modality has also been a lifeline for many WROs that are looking for core support to resource their movement building work. As opposed to the resourcing from most donors, which remains predominantly project-based, LFS had provided core and accompanying support to WROs to strengthen their organizations, learn from their peers and pursue coalition building activities. This has provided WROs the freedom to pursue a feminist agenda to strategise, resist, dissent and challenge unequal power.

Given the progress to date and the importance of sharing recommendations that can guide the work of both LFS partners and the MFA, we have grouped our recommendations for both groups into the following categories: Overall coordination and strategizing, resource mobilization, advocacy, MEL, and communications.

5.1. Recommendations for LFS Partners

5.1.1. Overall coordination and strategizing

Recommendation 1: Expand the learning and linking initiative to promote learning among grantee partners across regions and across movements.

So far, the linking and learning efforts at cross-regional levels have remained at the level of the funds. All the 4 LFS funds feel that it is necessary to extend the linking and learning initiative to their grantee partners in order to maximise the impact of their work. If there is a deeper implementation of the linking and learning at the national, regional, cross-regional and global levels, then the strategies used by grantee partners to challenge discrimination and inequality will be even more effective. Learning and reflection

activities should include face to face forums, workshops or events to bring grantees together. They should prioritize the exchange of skills, not just between LFS partner and grantees but between organizations. Some of the ways in which the linking and learning initiative could be expanded are:

- Use the accompaniment initiative /capacity-building grants for movement building across all 4 partners around particular issues or thematic areas: All the LFS partners have provided some form of capacity building grant for their partner. However, these capacity-building grants do not emerge from a centrally (at the LFS level) thought out vision on cross-movement building across regions (e.g. linking climate justice movement organizations to feminist movements) or around movement building on specific issues (e.g. rights of environmental defenders, sex workers rights). By virtue of being situated within the women's movement, the WFs are well-positioned to identify gaps in the movement – perhaps a collaboration that ought to exist but does not.
- Use ICT to increase linking and learning across grantee partners: Notwithstanding security concerns, it is worth investing in some information and communication tools that would allow grantees to learn from each other. This could include webinars and knowledge platforms that allow grantees to share information with each other.
- Environmental/Climate Justice: Climate justice remains a growing issue for WOs, and there are opportunities to undertake cross-movement building across regions (such as linking the climate justice movement organizations to feminist movements). FIMI's intersectional approach to promoting the rights of indigenous women's groups within the climate justice movement has demonstrated success in terms of joint advocacy platforms and networking through structured engagement, and there are opportunities for the WFs to proactively address climate justice issues through linking and learning events.
- Use small grants for joint advocacy among organizations working on the same issues across the region for greater synergies and impact. To some extent, the WFs are already doing it be supporting coalitions and consortiums. We are recommending that such investments for collaboration efforts and coalition building be enhanced.

5.1.2. Resource mobilization

Recommendation 2: Undertake thematic reviews and consider diversification of grantee portfolio based on the reviews

As we review the grantee portfolio across the funds, we find that there are certain areas that remain underfunded. This varies for different funds. For example, other than FIMI, very few of the grantees of the three WFs indicated that they are working on environmental justice or climate change adaptation, although nothing in the eligibility guidelines precludes grantees from this thematic area to apply to these funds. A recent study showed that just 1% of 2014 foundation grants for environmental issues addressed “women and the environment.”⁸² This is a missed opportunity for LFS, which we recognize to be committed to ensuring an equitable and just society. WFs should undertake a review of their grants portfolio and assess if they are leaving core constituencies out through inadequate outreach or the wording in their call for proposals. Each fund would do well to clarify and be transparent about the issues that it is prioritising.

Strengthen or expand investments in grants that provide holistic security to women's rights organizations: Women and transgender groups are facing multiple forms of oppression, working in hostile contexts and dealing with physical and emotional trauma. Both individual women's activists and

82 Our Voices, Our Environment: The State of Funding for Women's Environmental Action (20180, Global Greengrants Fund and Prospera International Network of Women's Funds, https://www.greengrants.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/GGF_Gender-Mapping-Report_HighRes-Singles.pdf

WROs are in need of healing and holistic security. Holistic security is an approach that integrates physical and digital security with self/collective care and well-being. These frameworks are deeply rooted in practices of indigenous communities across the world and also links with feminist disability justice politics that values the safety and security of all bodies. Women's funds can provide access to tools and resources (both financial and non-financial) that strengthens the capacity of women's and transgender groups on healing justice practice practices.

Recommendation 3: Support grantees to develop exit strategies.

As universally acknowledged, it is impossible to complete the work of movement-building in the short time span offered by the LFS grants windows. Shortness of time periods for programme implementation has been raised by a number of grantees. It is therefore important to work with the grantee partners in a way that they can sustain their work beyond the grants window. While it is understood that LFS partners are themselves working within constraints of a funding window, it is important to develop an exit strategy for their grantees. Some suggestions include:

- Long term relationships with some grantees: In addition to allowing organizations with an ongoing project to apply for new funding, LFS partners could consider entering into long term grant agreement (for say 4 years) with some grantees based on their past performance.
- Strengthen resource mobilization capacities and planning among grantees to address sustainability issues. In the event of a second phase, capacity building on resource development should be incorporated as an integral part of the programme during the design phase.
- Develop a formal exit strategy for the programme that is clear at the outset for everyone in order to allow a soft landing for grantees allows them to be involved in a reflection process.
- Consider extending the time between the finalization of activities and the requirement to submit final reports to allow room for reflection and better recording of results
- Explore ways in which to leverage the knowledge and experience of grantees beyond the grant duration through web-based learning and networking mechanisms, for example grantees can be part of a network of "LFS graduates".

Recommendation 4: Collaborate to explore new funding mechanisms for women's rights:

There has been the emergence of new UN and EU initiatives, such as Spotlight with UN Women, that aim to work with women's rights organizations, albeit in a limited manner. Grantee partners might be able to access some of this funding if they are supported by the accompaniment/capacity building initiatives of the LFS partners.

5.1.3. Advocacy

Recommendation 5: Develop a joint advocacy strategy for LFS.

The LFS partners will be more effective in shifting power imbalances globally if they are able to develop a robust joint advocacy strategy. As women's rights funders, the four LFS funders can be present in places /forums that are inaccessible to their partners. It is important that LFS funds come together to not only advocate on these issues but to use these spaces to mobilize additional funds for the women's rights agenda. Each fund is aiming to use its influence to direct more funds towards women's rights organizations. However, these efforts remain uncoordinated across the four LFS funds. A coordinated strategy is likely to not only provide more visibility to the LFS but might also be more effective in increasing the reach of individual consortium member in the philanthropic community. Given how little attention there has been historically to the issue of funding for women's rights, there is a need for LFS to bring

attention to the issue by holding convenings, speaking publicly and writing about this issue. Despite signs of progress, mobilizing adequate financing remains a major challenge in implementing the women's rights agenda espoused by LFS grantee partners. Some of the considerations that should be taken into account while developing the advocacy strategy include:

- Develop coherence across four LFS funds on key issues: Currently, all the funds have diverse propositions and articulations in different advocacy platforms and policy forums. It might be strategic to identify commonalities across the policy positions of the four funds and come together for joint advocacy on these key issues (e.g. on economic rights of women and transgender people). Establishing a clear collective advocacy strategy and messaging across certain issues is required for influencing global policymakers.
- Leverage each other's networks for advocacy: Different funds have access to different kinds of networks and if all the funds could come together and strategize on how to leverage their networks for the benefit of all LFS grantees. For example, one fund might have better access to particular spaces and networks (AWDF with the Green Climate Fund). The advocacy strategy at the LFS level needs to account for each partners' strength such that one partner can lead the advocacy on behalf of all the partners at a particular forum.
- Include a well thought out approach and plan to influence the global philanthropic system:
- One of the key assumptions of LFS is that funding women's rights organizations directly is most effective in advancing women's rights and gender equality.

Recommendation 6: Grantmaking (and linking and learning) that connect LFS grantees with other social movements.

Respondents noted that it was particularly important to connect grantee partners to organizations from other social movements. As the LFS women's funds themselves acknowledged, if grantee partners are supported in building radical and cross-issue partnerships then there is potential for even bigger changes, especially by maximising the impact of changes in social norms on other "deep structures" that keep power inequality in check. As the recent AWID report (2019) notes, "One of the key challenges for potential funding is that funding is often done in silos, with money allocated to distinct issues, and does not match the richness and diversity of cross-issue organizing that characterizes modern social movements. These resources are moving in the ecosystem but missing our movements."⁸³

5.1.4. Communications

Recommendation 7: Use communications tools more strategically, in addition to the communication material that has already been produced.⁸⁴

All four LFS funds could be more strategic in their use of various modes of communication (e.g. op-eds, use of social media, presence in advocacy platforms) to amplify each other's voice. At present, the LFS has a fairly light footprint on social media.⁸⁵ We recommend that the funds use multiple modes of communications, such as infographics, social media, video distribution, podcasts, webinars, academic articles and op-eds, as tools to further the message of funding for women's rights. Moreover, the WFs can be more effective in documenting their impact and showcasing this within the philanthropic ecosystem. One way of doing this would be by crafting clear, compelling stories that capture the impact of their grantees and then disseminating them for a wider impact. The four funds are very conscious of

⁸³ "Toward a feminist funding ecosystem" (PDF), AWID Research Reports 30 September 2019.

⁸⁴ e.g. the communications strategy, the microsite, a film on LFS that has been prepared, a report by Prospera.

⁸⁵ Even using a common hashtag #leadingfromthesouth consistently would communicate the unity of voice and message from the four WFs. We found very little use of it by any of the women's funds.

the fact that they should not be claiming the work of their grantee partner. As was noted in our discussions with the women's funds, "We have only provided funding, the intellectual copyright is theirs."⁸⁶ While we appreciate the feminist approach of the four funds in not appropriating the results achieved by its grants, we feel that it can significantly amplify the work of its grantees through more sustained communication. LFSF should also develop indicators that monitor the performance of communication investments.

Recommendation 8: Strengthen communication with donors, MFA in particular.

There is a need for more trust-building between both MFA and the Women's Funds. Both parties should view each other as strategic allies in the move towards strengthening women's rights financing. If there is more sustained and frequent interaction between the two parties, there could be more strategic sharing of information with respect to the funding landscape. The WFs should also consider the local Dutch Embassy, in countries in which their grantees operate, as strategic allies and enhance their involvement in the LFS. This can be done by proactively sharing information about the grantees and jointly convening events to influence the donor community and other influencers.

5.1.5. Monitoring, evaluation and learning

Recommendation 9: If LFS gets renewed, consider developing a common theory of change and articulate outputs and indicators that capture changes at the LFS consortium level, at the fund level and better capture the movement-building process of their grantees.

Currently, there is no unifying theory of change at the LFS level although there are several commonalities as was highlighted in the re-constructed theory of change. A common theory of change will allow greater coordination across the four funds and at the same time allow for articulation of changes at each fund level.

- It would also be important to assess the effectiveness of the grants to contribute to movement building by developing a set of common indicators.
- The indicators could consider how the LFS consortium is changing the funding ecology by supporting capacity building of grantees, such as whether or not the LFS grantees are able to access additional funds from traditional and non-traditional sources as a result of the capacity building grants, or whether other funders have been influenced to change their grant making priorities in a way that allows them to support under-funded areas that are worked on by LFS grantees.
- Consider the inclusion of some intermediate outcomes in the next phase of LFS that are more realistically achievable by grantees within the course of the programme.

5.2. Recommendations to MFA

5.2.1. Overall coordination and strategizing

Recommendation 1: Consider the funds allocated to grantees for linking and learning as grant funding and not as a separate capacity building grant.

One of the constraints for supporting more cross-learning activities for grantees is that it comes under the 15% allocation for LFS funds and not seen as part of a direct grant to the partners. Grantee partners have really valued the opportunities for learning afforded by the LFS grants. As the fund staff have indicated, for the funding to be truly transformative and contribute to transnational feminist movements, a lot more

⁸⁶ Discussion with the women's fund at the reflection workshop in the Hague, July 2019

needs to be done in terms of linking grantee partners from one region with another. Such fund allocation should not be seen as divorced from the funds allocated for project implementation.

Recommendation 2: LFSF should consider the recruitment of a coordinator that supports and maintains the flow of communication across the four WFs.

Our limited experience with the MTR has shown that communication across the four funds remains a challenge, with existing staff trying to perform this role in addition to their current jobs. As the LFSF moves into more active joint advocacy, it will need more continuous communication across the four funds.

5.2.2. Resource mobilization

Recommendation 3: Make additional investments into building capacity of these funds by leveraging other funding resources.

The LFS funding significantly increased funds in the hands of the 4 WFs and managing it placed heavy demands on the LFS staff capacities. As was reported in the 2017 evaluation report, all the 4 funds established robust capacities to receive and manage the LFS funds; the 4 WFs recognized the need to raise additional resources to support the expansion process partly through Accompaniment Initiative from PAWHR, and partly at individual fund level from other donors. However, it is important to acknowledge that the funds themselves require space to grow and build their capacities, which require additional investments, especially in light of the expansion of the LFS funds and their focus on bringing greater donor attention to direct support for organizations in the global south. While there is no rigorous benchmarking data available for overheads, a recent evaluation of the Fund for Gender Equality estimates that 27% of the budget should go towards support for staff and administrative costs.⁸⁷

Recommendation 4: Provide more time between disbursement of the LFS funds and call for applications from prospective grantees.

It was noted that the LFS Window was resource-intensive and stretched staff capacity within the time horizon. It would be better if additional time is provided for a transition for the funds between one phase and another.

Recommendation 5: Provide flexible, long term funding.

We suggest that the MFA should let the WFs decide the number of calls for proposals that they want to have based on their needs and this could be different for different funds. Having multiple calls for proposals can put significant stress on an already stretched administrative system. Allowing options to have long term funding (say, for four years) for some organizations will enable the consolidation of gains and strengthen movement building work. Furthermore, the focus on formalised projects with registered organisations maybe missing out on the informal collectives that are essential for movement building. Flexible and long-term funding for women's movements remains essential, especially when some aspects of movement building are harder to measure and quantify such as sharing knowledge, building awareness and organising.

⁸⁷ Independent Evaluation of the Fund for Gender Equality (2018), pg 53.

<https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2018/fge-evaluation-2009-2017-en.pdf?la=en&vs=5345>

5.2.3. Monitoring, evaluation and learning

Recommendation 6: Undertake long term evaluation of LFS programmes

As grantees are working on complex issues that usually take a long time for impacts to be visible, the MFA could include follow up support or funding to evaluate longer-term results after the close of project activities, perhaps one year after the grant has ended. This would enable LFS grantees to look for unintended results as well as more effectively monitor specific pathways for longer-term change.

5.2.4. Communications

Recommendation 7: Continue to showcase the LFS programme.

The LFS is an example of an innovative funding mechanism that places funds with southern women's rights organizations. It also aptly demonstrates that southern funding organizations (the 4 LFS partners) are able to manage large grant portfolios. Effectively communicating this message and the programme's successes will require investments in documenting the diverse experiences of the LFS grantees through various means such as videos, audio, infographics and other visual communication tools that highlight the work of these grantees.

Overall, we hope that this review will allow LFS to reflect on its theory of change, evidence and conclusions, and challenge them to explore it further, given existing contextual, organisational and resource constraints.

2. ANNEX 1: OUTCOMES MAPPED ONTO G@W FRAMEWORK

	Individual		
	Consciousness and capability	Access to and control over resources and opportunities	
Informal	<p>Women and are aware of their rights (labour and economic, social and political) and can exercise their rights to bodily integrity and freedom from violence</p> <p>Civil society and donors more aware of gendered challenges, and support strategies around operating space for women's rights organisations and defenders</p>	<p>More women and girls access necessary support and services that respect their diverse needs and identities</p> <p>More women from diverse groups participate in policy and decision-making processes at all levels, including in contexts of conflict/peace-building</p>	Formal
	<p>Women's groups undertaking knowledge and evidence-based advocacy</p>	<p>Increase resources for women's groups working on WHR and more donors implement feminist grantmaking strategies</p> <p>Robust movements contribute to critical work to hold stakeholders (communities, state, CSOs and media)</p> <p>Strong feminist alliances and platforms at national, sub-regional and regional levels.</p>	
	<p>Indigenous women's organizations strengthen their leadership</p> <p>Indigenous women's networks strengthen their coordination and linkages</p> <p>Indigenous (young) women use their rights and influence in decision making spaces that affect or promote indigenous women's rights</p> <p>Donors increase understanding of their role in supporting indigenous women and their organization and promote actions on a reciprocal basis and with an indigenous people's human rights-based approach</p>	<p>Regional networks reduce the gaps between local realities and spaces of national and international level</p> <p>Multilateral spaces include individual and collective rights of indigenous women in political agendas and resolutions</p> <p>Multilateral institutions and decision-making spaces increase their commitment towards indigenous women's fights, develop, invest and implement inclusive policies for the improvement of indigenous women's rights</p>	

	Organizations have bigger reach and a more active and effective participation in national processes		
	<p>Strong women's human rights (WHR) institutions operating in and resisting hostile contexts.</p> <p>Implementation of Rights Based feminist interventions for realization of Women's Human Rights at various levels.</p> <p>Women's groups undertaking knowledge and evidence-based advocacy.</p>	<p>Strong women's human rights (WHR) institutions operating in and resisting hostile contexts.</p> <p>Increased resources for women's groups working on WHR and more donors implement feminist grant-making strategies.</p> <p>Strong feminist alliances and platforms at national, sub-regional, and regional levels.</p> <p>Robust movements continue undertaking critical work to hold stakeholders accountable (communities, state, CSOs, media).</p>	
	Social norms/ Organizational culture	Formal rules and policies	
	Public (including policy and decision-makers) increasingly supports ending VAW, recognises women's economic contributions and rights	Duty-bearers strengthen and implement laws and policies regarding women's political rights and participation, women's economic rights and to prevent and respond to violence against women	
Systemic			

3. ANNEX 2: ADDITIONAL STORIES OF CHANGE

Shifts in Individual Consciousness and Capabilities

I worked for the project –Enhancing Meaningful Participation of Indigenous Women through Feminist Participatory Action Research from July 2017 to June 2018 as a field researcher, implemented by an Indigenous women’s rights organisation and was supported by Women's Fund Asia. Before joining the project, I did not know about women’s rights or the rights of indigenous people. I was able to build my capacity through training, workshops and orientations about the rights of indigenous women, the value of the culture, and access to local government. After joining the project, I organized the women into the Indigenous Women Group. They are able to work collectively, claim funds from the local authority which are allocated to them, and raise their voices collectively. I am very happy to work with the organisation. Thanks to all for giving me a chance to serve my community and for building my capacity in many ways.

- LFS grant beneficiary (WFA)

The women have improved individual and collective knowledge on rights, they are more confident, are demanding for better working conditions and are more organised through cooperatives for strengthened voice and collective action. The women have better negotiation skills to engage with the local authorities for example are negotiating a reduction in fees for operating on the streets. Through the leadership training, the women are starting to take up more leadership roles at the various levels among others.

- LFS Grantee (AWDF)

The Spanish-Q'qechi 'bilingual radio program "The ABC of sexuality" was create and broadcast on a private radio. The program targeted women and adolescents from the Protestant Christian religion, and increased their awareness on Sexual and Reproductive Rights, gender equality and violence prevention. This has allowed the beginning of changes in attitudes and paradigms in the target population and win key allies in the promotion and defence of women's Human Rights and gender equality.

- LFS Grantee (FMS)

Shifts in formal policies/law

Thw “Charter-Prevenir con educación 2016-2020” was promoted, which establishes that the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health must formulate initiatives for the prevention of pregnancies and violence in girls and adolescents that have a multisectoral accompaniment. This has contributed to a 62% decrease in sexual violence among girls under the age of 14 in a specific town.

- LFS Grantee (FMS)

Shifts in social norms

Through the mass demonstrations of young feminists in Argentina in 2018, the issue of abortion has ceased to be a taboo and there is now a debate that occupies different spaces such as schools, families and workplaces. The green handkerchief, symbol of legal, safe and free abortion, is present in the backpacks, wallets and purses of millions of people, making visible the high support that this issue has today.

- LFS grantee (FMS)

The significant achievement has been the changes in attitudes and behaviours of religious and cultural leaders whose norms and laws discriminate against women and girls. Women and girls are now accorded inheritance of properties (fathers' will); participation of women in public spaces has also improved in the communities in which the project is being implemented.

- **LFS Grantee (FIMI)**

Please note: This is not a comprehensive list of stories collected

4. ANNEX 3: THEORY OF CHANGE (LARGER VERSION)

